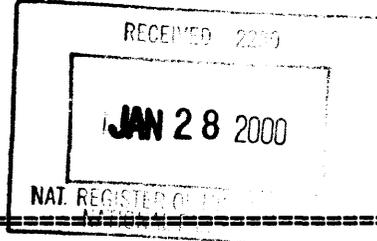


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



143

1. Name of Property

historic name Griffith, Robert G., Sr., House

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1204 County Road 25 not for publication N/A  
city or town Summit vicinity X  
state Alabama code AL county Blount code 09 zip code 35976

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination        request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets        does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant        nationally        statewide X locally. (        See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 1/20/00  
Signature of certifying official Date

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property        meets        does not meet the National Register criteria.  
(        See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that this property is:
- entered in the National Register  
    [ ] See continuation sheet.
  - determined eligible for the National Register  
    [ ] See continuation sheet.
  - determined not eligible for the National Register
  - removed from the National Register
  - other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] 3/14/00  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

[Signature] \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box.)

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

2

4 buildings

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ sites

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ structures

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ objects

2

4 Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: single dwelling  
secondary structure

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: single dwelling  
secondary structure  
Agriculture animal facility  
storage

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)

Other: "I" house

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick, stone  
roof asphalt  
walls wood: weatherboard  
other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current condition on continuation sheet/s.)

=====  
**8. Statement of Significance**  
=====

**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations** (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.) N/A

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture \_\_\_\_\_  
Settlement \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance** circa 1851 circa 1940 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates** N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation** N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder** Britton, Joseph, builder \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Explain significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

=====  
**9. Major Bibliographical References**  
=====

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS)** N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other state agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository \_\_\_\_\_



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Griffith, Robert G., Sr., House  
Blount County, Alabama

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**VII. Narrative Description**

Located in the rural Summit community, the Robert G. Griffith, Sr., House stands near the head of Brown's Valley, which runs from this point northeastward between low Appalachian ridges to the Tennessee River, some ten miles distant. Occupying a low, wooded knoll, the house faces north by northeast toward Blount County Road 25 (the old Browns Valley road between Guntersville and Blountsville). Rich bottomland historically devoted to cultivation and pasturage stretch away to the east and south. Just west of the house, a steep wooded hillside is covered primarily with hardwoods. Beyond the main roadway to the north lie hill pastures fringed with woods that are historically also part of the Griffith farm. Typical of the Tennessee Valley uplands is the cluster of old cedars planted about the front and sides of the house. A white fence encloses the immediate grounds. Just beyond the fence in front of the house, a slight depression indicates the original route of the public road, before it was moved a short distance northward in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Constructed in 1851, the Griffith House consists of a framed, two-story, five-bay main block with a single-story ell extending to the rear and a gable roof system. This "I" house originally rested on fieldstone piers, now supplemented by brick supports. Massive brick chimneys, reconstructed above their stone bases about 1940, buttress either end of the main block. A third chimney, also rebuilt about 1940, serves the ell room.

Centering the five-bay facade is a two-tiered gabled porch, composed of superimposed pairs of simple square supports. The porch shelters doorways above and below. Each doorway consists of a double-leaf entry framed by wide sidelights and transom. The sidelights of the lower doorway are unusually wide however, consisting of a double row of five panes clasping between them the rectangular five-light transom. The upper doorway adheres to the conventional cross-mullion format, with the more usual narrow, three-light panels. The doors themselves, like all original doors throughout the house, are of a simple Greek Revival design, each leaf composed of two long vertical panels.

A secondary entrance, similar to the main doorway and likewise sheltered by a gabled porch, is found on the east side of the house. Originally, the entrance opened into a wide through-hall connecting the main block of the house to the single large room -- formerly the dining room -- occupying the rear wing. The inner half of the hall (west end) is now partitioned off for a bathroom.

At the rear of the house, an L-shaped porch which once ran the length of the main block and ell was enclosed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to create the present dining and kitchen area. Around the same time, the front, west side, and rear of the house were re-sheathed with novelty siding. The east elevation retains its original lapped weatherboarding. During the same period, deteriorated window sashing was replaced throughout much of the house.

The interior of the main block, both upstairs and down, follows the usual center-hall arrangement -- modified only by the insertion of a bathroom at the rear (west end) of the upstairs hallway. On each floor, a single large room lies to either side of the passage. The two floors are connected by a steep, enclosed stairway rising from what was originally the back porch -- now enclosed as a hall between the present kitchen and dining room. A now-removed door secured the foot of the stairway.

The ell room (the original dining room) once opened onto a covered breezeway linking the wing to a two-room "cookhouse," now destroyed, about forty paces farther to the rear. Both cookhouse and breezeway were dismantled in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in the 1970s a small frame ell extension filled part of the intervening space. The extension contains storage space and a small rear service porch.

The interior of the house represents the rare survival in Alabama of 19<sup>th</sup>-century folk *faux* painting: on parlor baseboards and mantelpiece, on doors throughout the house, and concealed by over-painting elsewhere. Graining and marbleizing are executed in hues of ochre and brown. Doors exhibit darkly-grained stiles and rails with lighter *faux bois* panels. Five plain wooden mantelpieces, found in the five original rooms, retain attenuated Federal proportions while referencing a kind of "folk" Greek Revival in detail. Much of the original furniture also remains in the house.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Section 7/8 Page 2

Griffith, Robert G., Sr., House  
Blount County, Alabama

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Behind the main dwelling stands a smokehouse (*contributing*), rebuilt with existing materials over early framework around 1940. The building measures approximately 10 by 12 feet, with a batten door centered on the gabled front. Adjacent to the smokehouse stands a circa 1975 cottage (*non-contributing*) on the site of the original two-room cookhouse razed several decades earlier. The brick-and-stone center chimney of the cookhouse survived until construction of the present cottage. To the east of the house stands a circa 1935 milking barn (*non-contributing*) now heavily rebuilt over the original framework and high stone foundation as a rental cottage; also, to the rear of the former milking barn, a circa 1970 garage (*non-contributing*). A circa 1970 frame transverse barn (*noncontributing*) is located south of the fenced house yard.

East of the immediate domestic complex, along the northern edge of a what is now an open field (historic crop land) once stood a row of slave dwellings -- later, used as tenant houses. This essentially undisturbed area has potential to yield significant archaeological information on upland slave life as well as the subsequent life ways of upland tenancy. The sites of other early though as-yet unidentified farm structures, possibly including the circa 1859 gin, edge the south side of the field. These relatively undisturbed sites offer a singular opportunity for archaeological study.

#### VIII. Statement of Significance

The Major Robert G. Griffith house is significant under Criterion C for architecture. The only surviving early "I" house in Blount County, the dwelling exemplifies the domestic architectural setting of a moderately wealthy upland agricultural family in Appalachian Alabama. The construction materials, frame with cladding, were exceptional in an area where log domestic architecture predominated well into the 20th century. Moreover, the *faux* decorative treatment of the interior represents one of the few survivals of such work, especially in a vernacularized variation, so far discovered anywhere in the state. Finally, the Griffith house is one of the few mid-19th century dwellings of its type with which the name of a particular housewright or "mechanic" can be associated: that of Joseph Britton (sometimes spelled Brittain). Modifications have not obscured the essential character of the house, and are, themselves, indicative of how a highly representational upland house type has been modified and adapted through several generations.

The Griffith house is significant under Criterion A for settlement. Both the migration pattern represented by its original owner, the first Robert Griffin Griffith -- from Pennsylvania down the great Appalachian valley into northeastern Alabama -- as well as the inherent physical character of the house and its natural setting, exemplify important aspects of upland Anglo-American culture as it existed and eventually spread from the Mid-Atlantic region to the edge of the Deep South: a culture altered and acclimatized in numerous ways but fundamentally coherent. The Griffith Homestead is apparently unique in Blount County as an intact upper-echelon house/farm surviving from the earliest period of settlement to the present.

#### Historical Summary

Of Welsh descent, Pennsylvania-born Robert Griffin Griffith (1801-1855) was among the first permanent settlers to enter this mountainous region of Alabama, just south of the Tennessee River, after the Cherokee Removal of 1835-38. Griffith is listed as a single male in the federal Blount County census of 1840, two years before he took up a portion of the rich farmland in Brown's Valley, northeast of "Martin's Stand" (the present-day Summit community). Soon afterward he married Mary E. Vanzant of Franklin County, Tennessee, and in July 1846 assumed the duties of postmaster for Summit. The present dwelling was completed in 1851. As his builder, Griffith engaged a local "mechanic" named Joseph Britton, who accomplished the project with the assistance of a "Mr. Sterling." At least two other similar dwellings, probably likewise built by Britton, survived in the area until about 1940: the Montgomery house near the present Summit Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and the Alfred Hinds house on the old Brooksville road southeast of the Griffith farm.

The 1850 agricultural census reveals that the Griffith farm consisted of 400 acres valued at \$1,600, with some 200 acres actually under cultivation. Corn was the principal crop with wheat, barley, oats, and both Irish and sweet potatoes also being produced. Livestock consisted of 75 head of hogs, 6 horses, 1 mule, 4 milk cows, 4 working oxen, and 8 other cattle.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8/9/10 Page 3

Griffith, Robert G., Sr., House  
Blount County, Alabama

Only in the last few years before the Civil War, with cotton commanding unprecedented prices, did the Deep South's "white gold" become one of the cash crops on the Griffith farm. An invoice in Robert Griffith's estate papers indicates that he purchased a portable cotton gin shortly before his unexpected death in the spring of 1856, while vainly seeking treatment by a Montevallo physician of an unnamed disease. Griffith's body was returned to Summit for burial in the community cemetery, where his box tomb may still be seen.

Left a widow with five children ranging in age from seven to infancy, Mary Vanzant Griffith never remarried, and successfully ran the farm until her death. The federal census on the eve of the Civil War identifies her as a "Farmer," and appraised her holdings in real estate at \$10,000. "Personal property," which included the value of eight slaves, was appraised at \$12,150. Obviously, the Griffiths ranked far above average in a rural upland society characterized by sparsely scattered subsistence farms. A decade later, despite the intervening Civil War, Mary Griffith's real estate was still valued at \$12,000. Her "personal property" worth, however, had declined to \$1,769 -- no doubt representing the end of slavery. At least one former slave, "Coke" Griffith, together with his family, remained on the Griffith farm for many years. Tenants, black as well as white, furnished additional labor. Robert Griffin Griffith, Jr. (born circa 1854), inherited the farm from his mother and eventually bequeathed it to his own son, James Chapman Griffith (1881-1970), father of the present owners, Louise Griffith Alldredge and Dr. James A. Griffith. Mrs. Alldredge lives in the family home today.

**IX. Bibliography**

Blount County Historical Society. Bicentennial Edition of the Heritage of Blount County. Oneonta: n.p., 1977.

Cemetery data, Summit community cemetery.

Griffith, Robert G., Estate Papers. Probate Office, Blount County Courthouse, Oneonta, Alabama (copies of miscellaneous items furnished by Warren Weaver, Secretary, Blount County Historical Society).

Interview with Mrs. Louise Griffith Alldredge, 28 June 1998.

U.S. Census for Blount County, Alabama (1840, 1850, 1860, 1870). Population & agricultural statistics.

**X. Geographical Data**

**Verbal Boundary Description:** That portion of the Northwest 1/4 of Section 31, Township 9 South, Range 2 East, described as follows: the east half of the southwest 1/4 of the northwest 1/4; the southeast 1/4 of the northwest 1/4; and the south half of the south half of the northeast 1/4 of the northwest 1/4, all in Section 31, Township 9 South, Range 2 East, Blount County, Alabama.

**Boundary Justification:** This boundary is drawn to define the intact historical core of a large mid-19th-century farm, originally consisting of several hundred acres, which has remained in the same family since the 1840s. The low-lying area to the west of the house itself extends to a historic north-south tree line along the west side of the old Brooksville Road and encompasses the site of several old slave houses which extended in a line eastwardly from a short distance east of the house. The historic crop land to the south of the slave quarters' site extends to a historic tree line which defines the southern boundary of the nominated area. Hummocks along the northern edge of this boundary suggest the possibility of other early farm building sites that have yet to be identified. The southern boundary extends east-west to the tree-covered hillside against which the house nestles, to a point just southwest of the original domestic complex. From this point the western boundary line extends due northward across the early Browns Valley Road between Guntersville and Blountsville, to a point northwest of the house and from this point is stepped northward to a point just north of the junction of the old Browns Valley and Brooksville Roads. This area north of the house encompasses historic hillside pastureland as well as the site (in the northwest quadrant) of at least one early tenant house, now marked by a large stone chimney.

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National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Section photos Page 4

Griffith, Robert G., Sr., House  
Blount County, Alabama

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Robert G. Griffith, Sr., House  
Blount County, Alabama  
Photographer: Robert Gamble  
Date: September 1999  
Location of Negatives: Alabama Historical Commission

1. Main house looking south by southwest from north.
2. Main house complex looking west from old Brooksville Road, across historic crop land (corn and cotton) now turned into pastureland. Buildings left to right: circa 1970 barn; circa 1970 cottage with circa 1940 smokehouse visible just beyond to the rear; circa 1851 main house; circa 1970 garage in foreground just below chimney of main house; circa 1940 and later milking barn, renovated in the 1970s to be a guest cottage; and the site of circa 1850 slave quarters in the foreground just to the right of the milking barn, at right edge of photo.
3. Rear (south) and east side of main dwelling complex.
4. Main house complex from rear, looking north by northwest.
5. Rear of main house and outbuildings looking east by northeast from hillside to west.
6. Rear of main house looking northeast showing original L-shaped enclosed shed porch and one-story wing. Addition to right dates from circa 1970.
7. Rear of main house looking northwest showing circa 1970 addition to left of chimney and original ell dining room to right of chimney.
8. Smokehouse looking south. Structure is original, though cladding is later, as is shed addition to right.
9. Cottage looking south by southeast.
10. Barn looking west by northwest with dwelling complex to right.
11. Main house, looking west-southwest toward front and east side.
12. Main house (east side), looking west.
13. Main house, looking west showing original shutters and sash.
14. Main house facade (north side), looking south.
15. Main house front door, looking south.
16. Main house (west side), looking east-southeast.
17. Interior front doors from entrance hall.
18. Interior front door detail of faux painting.
19. Parlor, looking northwest.
20. Interior looking, east from parlor into entrance hall.
21. Parlor mantelpiece.
22. Parlor mantelpiece detail showing faux painting.
23. First floor east room with front hall beyond, to right.
24. Upstairs hall from top of stairwell looking north towards second floor porch doors.
25. Rear wing, original dining room, looking northeast toward side hall beyond.

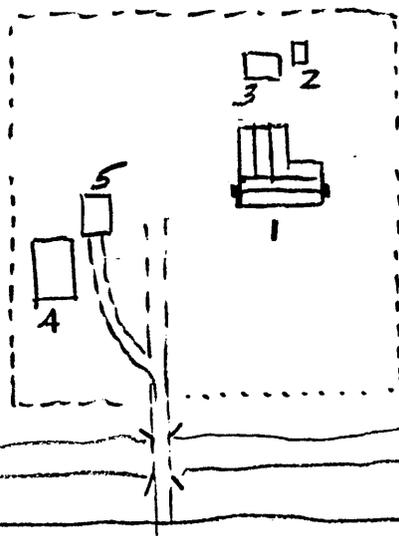
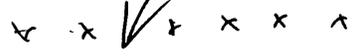
Old Road to Brooksville →

early sites (unidentified)



HISTORIC CROP LAND

slave quarters site



- 1 main house (c)
- 2 smokehouse (c)
- 3 guest cottage (site of old kitchen) (nc)
- 4 cottage (rebuilt from milking barn) (nc)
- 5 garage (nc)
- 6 barn (nc)

COUNTY 45

← Gunterville

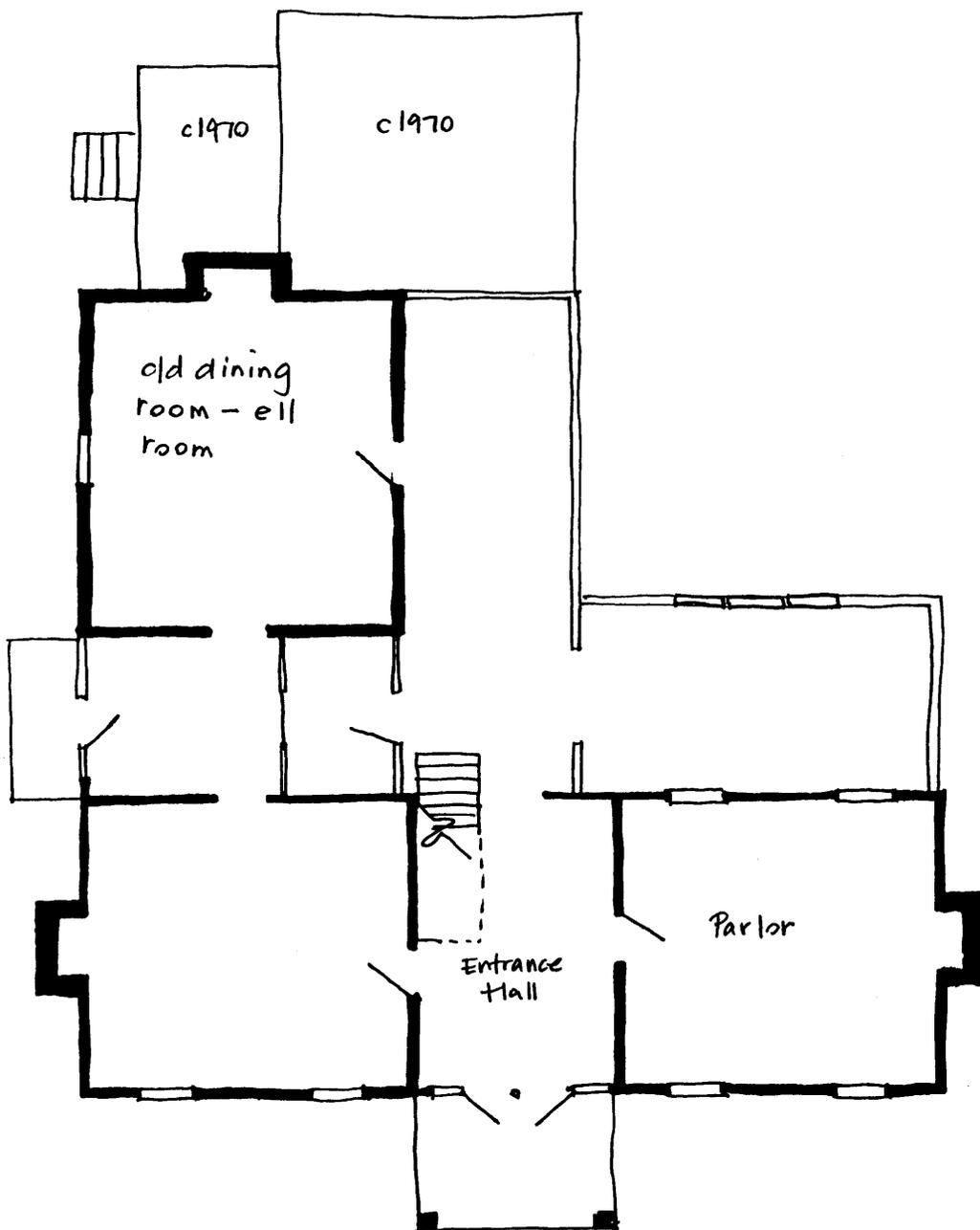
Summit →

historic upland pasture

tenant house site

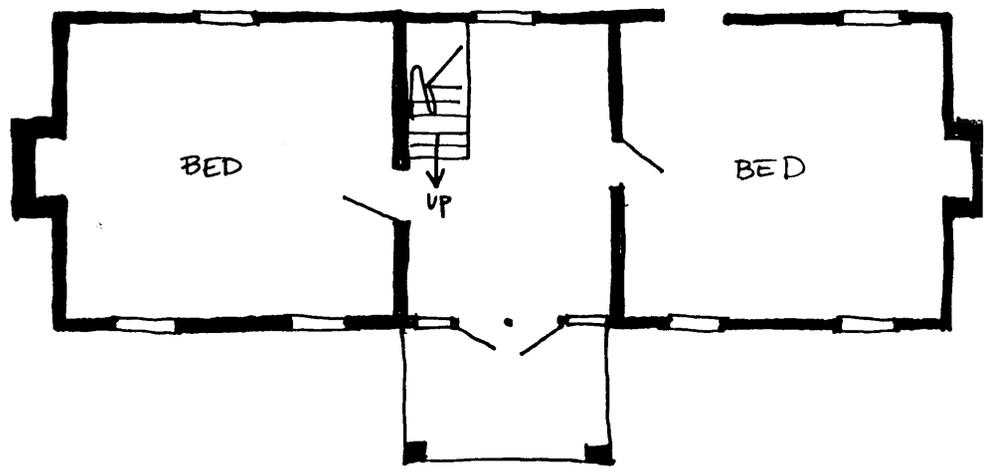
Robert Griffin Griffith, Sr., House  
Summit Community  
Blount County, AL





First Floor

NORTH  
↓



Second Floor