

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in "Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms" (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

## 1. Name of Property

**historic name** Fort-Hammond-Willis House  
**other names/site number** The Hammond Place, The Willis House

## 2. Location

**street & number** 1760 Irwinton Road (U.S. 441 South)  
**city, town** Milledgeville (X) vicinity of  
**county** Baldwin **code** GA 009  
**state** Georgia **code** GA **zip code** 31061

(N/A) not for publication

## 3. Classification

### Ownership of Property:

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-federal

### Category of Property:

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

Number of Resources within Property:	<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>
buildings	3	1
sites	0	0
structures	1	2
objects	0	0
total	4	3

**Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:** N/A

**Name of previous listing:** N/A

**Name of related multiple property listing:** N/A

**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination 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 meets the National Register criteria. ( ) See continuation sheet.

W. Ray Luce  
Signature of certifying official

2-11-03  
Date

for W. Ray Luce  
Historic Preservation Division Director  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

Elson A. Beall 3/25/03

determined eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_\_\_

determined not eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_\_\_

removed from the National Register

\_\_\_\_\_

other, explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

see continuation sheet

\_\_\_\_\_  
Keeper of the National Register      Date

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## 6. Function or Use

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### Historic Functions:

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

### Current Functions:

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

DOMESTIC/hotel

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## 7. Description

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### Architectural Classification:

Mid-19th Century: Greek Revival (style)

Other: Georgia Cottage (house type)

### Materials:

<b>foundation</b>	brick
<b>walls</b>	wooden
<b>roof</b>	asphalt shingles
<b>other</b>	n/a

### Description of present and historic physical appearance:

The Fort-Hammond-Willis House has evolved from a modest-sized four-room, central-hall, one-story frame, antebellum house into a large, rambling, wood-frame house with early and mid-20th century additions and recent front portico. It is painted white with dark shutters. (Photos 1,2, and 3.)

Greek Revival detailing is found around the six-paneled front door. (Photos 8 and 9.) This includes a dentilled cornice on flanking pilasters with Greek fret molding and sidelights over paneled insets. Four Corinthian columns with Corinthian pilasters support the triangular pedimented front porch (c. 1958). The earlier front portico was smaller and more modest. The pediment has an inset decorative triangle. Windows are double-hung 6/6 with workable shutters. The house has a brick underpinned foundation, brick front porch floor, and stuccoed interior chimneys. (Photos 1, 2, and 3.)

The house was built on a center hall plan with two rooms on either side, sharing chimneys. Side rooms were added to the main block beginning in the late 19th century and others as late as 1945. The house has extremely well-done pine faux marbleizing along the baseboards and on one mantel in the living room and music room. (Photo 13.) Walls are plaster. There are Adam-style mantels in these rooms also, all of which appear to be original to the antebellum structure. (Photos 12 and 13.) The house was constructed using heart-pine, mortise-and-tenon heavy timber framing throughout the front part of the house. An original door-bell still works and is in place at the right of the front door. (Photo 9.)

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7--Description

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The mature landscaping includes ancient magnolia trees, cedar trees, camellias, boxwood and a witches ball in the side garden. There is an adjacent pecan orchard as well as pecan trees in the immediate yard of the house. (Photos 4 and 5.) Remaining frame historic outbuildings include a well house (photo 18), a garden cottage, and a barn (photo 17), all three now used for storage. The previous existence of a servant's house is known and shown on the site plan. There is also a modern swimming pool and a gazebo (photo 16). The house is located across a very busy two-lane highway from a public school facility. Houses on either side of the structure are non-historic.

Changes to the house include the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century removal of a wall in the center hall (photo 11), the c.1936 enclosure of a back porch (photo 7), converting the side porches to sun porches (photo 1), the addition of a master bedroom in the 1940s, and the enlargement of the front entrance portico in c. 1958 to its present Greek Revival form. (Photo 1.)

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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**Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:**

nationally       statewide       locally

**Applicable National Register Criteria:**

A       B       C       D

**Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):**  N/A

A       B       C       D       E       F       G

**Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):**

ARCHITECTURE  
SOCIAL HISTORY

**Period of Significance:**

c.1828-1953

**Significant Dates:**

c. 1828-1835.

**Significant Person(s):** N/A

**Cultural Affiliation:** N/A

**Architect(s)/Builder(s):**

attributed to John Marlor (1782-1835)

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

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**Statement of significance (areas of significance)**

The Fort-Hammond-Willis House has a long and rich history at its location just south of Georgia's antebellum capital city of Milledgeville in the Midway community across the highway from the site of the historic Midway Seminary. The house was owned by a number of the city's most prominent families and due to its continued use has been expanded commensurate with this activity. The house is significant in architecture because the oldest portion, the central block, is a good example of a relatively large, early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Georgian Cottage-type house (four rooms with a central hall under a hipped roof) which contains many surviving features of the 1830s including original mantels, doors, floors, and room arrangement. The front doorway with its elaborate Greek Revival detailing is an exceptional feature. This early portion is attributed to John Marlor (1782-1835), the premier antebellum architect/builder in Milledgeville, due to the fact that it has many details that are found in other houses he is known to have built. Later additions do not obscure the original center core of the house and reflect prevailing architectural trends. For example, the partial opening up of one front room into the central hallway reflects early 20th-century Craftsman-style interior design, and the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century flanking sun porches reflect the popularity of this new architectural feature at that time. The new front portico, although larger than the original, is not out of scale or keeping with the overall architecture of the house.

The house is also significant in social history for being the home of a series of prominent and involved citizens of Milledgeville and Baldwin County. Moses Fort (1782-1845), the presumed first owner of this dwelling, was an attorney and a judge as well as being comptroller for the nearby Midway Seminary. Fort had been active in nearby Twiggs County, where he was involved in the forming of the then county seat of Marion in the 1820s. He was also a Superior Court circuit judge for the Southern Circuit from 1825 to 1829 for an area that ran from Twiggs County in central Georgia to Thomas County on the Georgia-Florida line. After his duties ended there, he and his family returned to Baldwin County and to their newly built house where he died in 1845. His widow, Eudocia Moore Fort, was listed as a "hotel keeper" here in 1850, indicating more accurately that she ran a boarding house for students and faculty from the nearby seminary. She lived in the house with her daughter and son-in-law until her death in 1875. Also living in the house with Mrs. Fort in 1850 and later were John Hammond (1811-1885) and his wife Caroline Susannah Fort (d. 1893), daughter of Judge Fort. Hammond served as the Ordinary or Probate Judge for Baldwin County from 1852 to 1868, and also was steward or treasurer of the nearby State Lunatic Asylum. John Hammond's father had been Georgia's Secretary of State. The house and tract, then sixty acres, was owned from 1898 to 1919 by Mrs. Dollie Simpson. It was she who sold the house and some land to J. Dawson Willis, the great-uncle by marriage of the present owner. Mr. Willis, a wholesale grocery salesman, married as his second wife Miss Estelle Baumgartel, a school teacher and principal at Midway School. Mrs. Willis served as postmistress for Hardwick, the post office for the Midway area, from 1922 until her retirement in 1958. They rented part of the house out as an apartment. After Mr. Willis's death in 1941, Mrs. Willis remained in the house her death in 1980 at 92. The house then became the home of her great-niece, the present owner, in 1982. Each of the owners of this house, throughout its history, made significant contributions to public life, welfare, and society in and around

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

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Milledgeville.

**National Register Criteria**

The Fort-Hammond-Willis House meets National Register Criterion A because it was built and owned by Moses Fort, an early lawyer and judge in the community, and later by the Hammonds, equally involved in public service in the community, as the county's only Judge of Probate for many decades, as well as for its association with the seminary nearby as a boarding house for students. Later owner, Mrs. J. D. Willis, served as postmistress for many decades. All of these owners through their public service contributed to the history of the area. The house also meets Criterion C because of its outstanding details from its antebellum construction attributed to local master builder John Marlor with its original mantels, doors, floors and room arrangements, and with later additions of faux marbleizing that has survived. It also remains in its original location within the Midway/Hardwick community.

**Criteria Considerations (if applicable) N/A**

**Period of significance (justification)**

The period of significance begins with the construction of the house in the late 1820s to early 1830s by Moses Fort, a local judge, through a succession of owners until 1953 when Mrs. Willis lived there. During this time it remained a viable residence and was added to and slightly modernized with each change of owner.

**Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)**

Contributing Buildings: 3 (main house, the cottage, and the storage/barn)

Contributing Structures: 1 (the well house)

Noncontributing Buildings: 1 (the garage)

Noncontributing Structures: 2 (the swimming pool, and the gazebo)

**Developmental history/historic context (if appropriate)**

This Historical Narrative is based on a much longer narrative prepared in 1998 by Dorothy M. Collins. It has been edited for the nomination by Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., historian, Historic Preservation Division.

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

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I. The history of the area and settlement:

The area where the Fort-Hammond-Willis House was built was not opened for white settlement until the Land Lottery of 1805 and quickly became a prime area to move to when the state capital was created at a new city named Milledgeville, which also became the county seat. The Georgia General Assembly, the governor, and the state government moved here by 1807. It remained the state capital until 1868 when the capital was moved to Atlanta.

When the legislature was in session all types of persons arrived in town, both prominent and educated, as well as others. Due to some of the more unsavory people and professions that came to the new frontier capital city, many citizens decided to live a few miles away and thus the community of Midway was born.

Midway Community, where the Fort-Hammond-Willis House is located, is and has always been midway between the city of Milledgeville and the Scottsboro community, both in Baldwin County. Midway Community was given its name based solely on its location. Scottsboro, 2 ½ miles south of this house, was the home of Farish Carter, said to be the wealthiest man in antebellum Georgia, and also of Governor John Clark, whose home still survives there and is on the National Register as Woodville.

Midway was prime real estate due to the prosperity of the citizens of the county who could afford the fine homes which remain in the community of Midway, known since around 1922 as Hardwick, Georgia. The ideal site for a house during the antebellum period was thought to be in the middle of a grove of hardwood trees at an appropriate distance from the road and on the crest of a hill. Many citizens owned homes and businesses in the town of Milledgeville and also owned a "second" home and property in Midway. The 1860 Census shows twenty-five such families in Midway.

II. Midway, a profile of the community and other homes

A look at the remaining antebellum homes in the Midway Community will emphasize the social and political connections of the neighbors and provide a context for the owners of the Fort-Hammond-Willis House.

There are six antebellum homes remaining in the Midway Community including the Fort-Hammond-Willis House. The other five include:

Lockerly, built c. 1839 by Judge Daniel Tucker. In 1886 this home became the property of George Wiggins Hollinshead who married Frances (Fannie) Martha Hammond, the daughter of John Hammond and Caroline Susannah Fort, who owned the Fort-Hammond-Willis House--thus the two houses had a family link. The Hatchers bought the home from the Hollinsheads in 1928.

Beauvoir/Rockwell Mansion, completed c. 1834. When Samuel Rockwell came to this area from



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Section 8--Statement of Significance

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Maine in 1834, he brought Joseph Lane, Sr., an architect-builder, to build his Greek Revival mansion. The mansion is built on a high ridge which enabled the owner of Rockwell to see the Oconee River and Milledgeville from the upper windows of his home. Later the home was owned by Herschel V. Johnson, Governor of Georgia from 1853 to 1857. It was later owned by Marshall Bland who was an agent with New York Life Insurance Company. For years the home was owned by the O. M. Ennis family. Mr. Ennis was a farmer and merchant who served on the Baldwin County Board of Education. Some authorities think John Marlor may have contributed to the design of Beauvoir, since both houses were under construction in the 1830s. (National Register: Samuel Rockwell House)

The Stokes Home, where the headmaster of Midway Seminary, Baradel Stubbs, lived. The house was built c. 1820 and is located to the right of the Seminary. It is now owned by the Stokes family, both retired professors.

The Lamar-Veal home, c. 1850, located across Highway 441 South of Lockerly. The house has been owned for more than fifty years by Louie and Nina Veal. Mr. Louie Veal operated a dairy there for many years. Mrs. Nina Veal taught Home Economics in Baldwin County for many years.

The Fish-Andrews home, c. 1832-1834. This home belonged to Thomas Jefferson Fish who lived through the Civil War and returned home to farm in his native county. The home is owned by Ms. J. Marie Andrews and "has John Marlor's fingerprints all over it" according to Betty Sanders Snyder, Director Emeritus of the Milledgeville-Baldwin County Allied Arts, Inc., who is a recognized authority on Marlor and the homes built by him. Ms. Snyder has studied John Marlor and his building styles for more than thirty years. One very distinct Marlor fingerprint is the Marlor block on the mantle of the parlor. Marlor used this design not only on homes he built but also on furniture built by him. The home also has what Snyder calls a "Thomas Elf-like closet" which is an indication of the Charleston influence in Marlor's designs. The interior doors have solid brass hardware approximately six-by-six inches and are embellished with an eagle.

The Rutherford-Barman House, located on Allen Memorial Drive, just a "stone's throw" from the site of old Oglethorpe University. It was built c. 1824. This home was built by Daniel Pratt for John Rutherford at Beckham's Mount some two miles from Milledgeville. It was moved to the Midway Community by Robert Smith in 1859. This home has been mistaken at first glance for a Marlor house. This is probably because Marlor and Pratt worked together a lot and they both used the Asher Benjamin books on architectural design. It is now owned by Dr. and Mrs. E. H. Barman. Dr. Barman is on the faculty of Georgia College & State University. (National Register as the John Rutherford House.)

Prime real estate was only one major attraction for the landed gentry to live in Midway. The interest, support, and desire for quality education was greater in Midway. There was an ordinance in the town of Milledgeville that a county referendum could be held and if it passed would suspend the operation of public schools in the town. Despite the fact that one of Milledgeville's most revered and respected citizens, Dr. Tomlinson Fort, had obtained special legislation in 1823 which established funding for

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the public school system, in 1827 a referendum was held and the public schools were suspended in Milledgeville. In 1828 the Baldwin Academy was operating as a private school.

During this same time the Presbyterian church was concerned that the church lacked educated ministers for their churches. On August 7, 1824, the Georgia Education Society was formed in Athens, Georgia by the church. The fact that the town of Milledgeville had such an unsavory reputation of ungodliness "greatly influenced the Presbyterians" to choose Midway as the site of Midway Seminary, which was built directly across the road from the Fort-Hammond-Willis House in 1835. According to Sarah Frances Ivey's book, *The History of Midway* (no date), the Academy Act was passed by the legislature in December 1833. The passage of the Academy Act made the schools at Midway possible. Farish Carter gave the land for the seminary.

Midway was well situated for the convenience of the students and the staff of the seminary. It is near to Fort Wilkinson, a boat landing on the Oconee River. A stage coach, driven by Mr. Vaughn Hilbun, passed through every morning and evening. The stage coach ran from Milledgeville to Swainsboro twice a day. Midway was located between the Georgia and Central Railroads which gave the students additional transportation to and from the school. There were many social and religious opportunities for the students. Board which included washing, lights and fuel was available with respectable families from \$8 to \$12 per month. All families took in boarders because the schools were so large. Twelve dormitories were also built.

The Seminary opened as a co-ed manual labor school. The manual labor did not work because either the students could not study and work or they would not study and work. The plan was that Midway Seminary would be a female school as soon as Oglethorpe University was built and opened. One of the oldest alumna attended Midway in 1881-82. She remembered there was a two-room frame building heated by an open fireplace. There was no well so water was carried to the school from "the Hammond place" which is the name that the Willis House was known by at that time. This same alumna remembers there were lots of trees around the school building which was built on a stone foundation.

After the seminary closed, the Presbyterian church deeded the school house and one acre of land to the Baldwin County School System.

Strong proof exists that indicates the seminary building was built by John Marlor, an Englishman who was an architect and builder in the county from 1815 to 1835. Mr. Marlor died on October 13, 1835. The inventory of John Marlor's estate, dated January 1836, recorded in Book B, p. 211-14 in the Probate Court of Baldwin County lists Midway Seminary as owing Marlor \$2,202.67 1/2 which is the largest sum listed in this inventory.

Oglethorpe University was located on what is now known as Allen Memorial Drive about a mile from the Seminary and the Fort-Hammond-Willis House. Dr. Samuel K. Talmadge was the president of Oglethorpe when it opened in 1838. He was president for twenty-four years.

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

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III. John Marlor, the supposed architect of the house.

Betty Sanders Snyder, the most informed and knowledgeable person concerning the career of John Marlor (1789-1835), wrote his biographical sketch in *The Dictionary of Georgia Biography (1983)*. According to Snyder's research, John Marlor was born in England on February 11, 1789. He was the son of William and Eliza Marlor. He arrived in Milledgeville, Georgia, the antebellum capital of Georgia from 1807 to 1868, in 1815. The Milledgeville-Baldwin County Allied Arts, Inc., is located in John Marlor's residence which he built for his second wife the former Anne Carlton in 1830. Snyder believes that Marlor came to Milledgeville by way of Charleston, South Carolina. She states "speculation is strong that he either served an apprenticeship in Charleston or taught himself from the most outstanding Georgian and Federal houses found there. Too many decorative motifs from houses in the Charleston area are reproduced in Marlor's Milledgeville buildings constructed between 1815 and 1835 to be explained otherwise." So distinct is the influence of Federal design elements in Marlor's houses that his houses are referred to as Milledgeville-Federal.

As Marlor's experience increased, his designs began to reflect his independence, and his personal signatures or "fingerprints," as Snyder calls them, became more obvious. For example, when he arrived in Milledgeville, his work was a plainer style which is attributed to Jett Thomas who was also from England. As he progressed and became more comfortable with his own originality, he began to utilize the designs of Samuel McIntire and the Adams brothers. The Adams influence was prominent in the first two decades of the Federal period in Charleston. After this period Greek revival began to take on a dominant influence and John Marlor began incorporating the Greek revival architectural style into his building, and by so doing introduced Greek revival to Milledgeville. Snyder says he "even prophesies the bracketed Victorian porches that were later to wrap themselves around every other house in Baldwin County."

During Snyder's research on Marlor's building style she observed that he would often try out a new design on a small scale on a building project and would enlarge on it in a future building. It is evident that he was not afraid to incorporate his interpretation of the Georgian or Federal style into his building and this individual creativity readily explains the admiration for his work which is prevalent throughout the county more than one hundred and fifty years after his death. Snyder's research indicates that Marlor would sometimes use a small area of space for an "unexpected Thomas Elf-like closet."

As was the practice of the day for architects and master builders, Marlor owned several thousand acres of timber and a mill on Town Creek where lumber could be cut and milled to order. An early record reports he had four white builders in his employ, and seven slaves are also listed as carpenters. Daniel Pratt and Elam Alexander were in his employ which may explain the intense collaboration and overlap of design characteristics which are present in the Marlor homes from 1820 to 1835. Even with these characteristics being evident, William Nathaniel Banks (1992) states that not only did Marlor and Pratt collaborate but no doubt both were using ideas which they found in Asher Benjamin's three volumes on architectural design. Banks also states that, of the homes

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

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attributed to Pratt, he had an "allegiance to a single model" while "Marlor was adept in a greater variety of styles."

The Marlor homes in the county are a lasting tribute to his ability and talent as an architect and master builder. However, it will always be said that the three-story Masonic Hall, with its Georgian style front and its spiral staircase, located on the corner of Wayne and Hancock streets, is the finest example of his contribution to the city and his profession. The Masonic Hall was financed by a lottery by the Georgia Legislature of the day, and until it was completed and dedicated June 24, 1834, the business section of Milledgeville was architecturally mediocre and nondescript. The Masonic Hall is still in use.

*The Southern Recorder* reported on October 27, 1835: "On Tuesday, the 13th Instant, at his residence in Milledgeville, John Marlor in the 44th year of his age. Mr. Marlor was an Englishman by birth but emigrated to Georgia nearly 20 years ago, where he became an adopted citizen, and pursued his business as a carpenter with success. He leaves a wife and children." Snyder reports that his fellow masons wore black armbands for thirty days after his death. According to the will of his widow, Ann Marlor, recorded July 14, 1842 (Baldwin Co., GA Will Book B), Marlor's daughter Elizabeth married Benjamin T. Bethune. Descendants of the Bethune family still reside in Baldwin County.

Betty Sanders Snyder says that the Fort-Hammond-Willis House is one of three cottages that John Marlor built while he was building the Masonic Hall c. 1832-1834. The other cottages include the one located at 540 South Wayne Street owned by John Camilla and the Fish House located at 2394 Irwinton Road. The Fish home is owned by J. Marie Andrews and has fireplaces with the Marlor Block as does the Willis House. The staircase is 'dog leg' design and the front door is offset and is of the cross and Bible design. The Camilla home has the Marlor block above the front door as does Marlor's own home located at 201 North Wayne Street.

The Camilla home also has an eight-foot wide hall as does the Fort-Hammond-Willis House and the Fish House. The Camilla house has hand-planed doors. The four fireplaces are alike and have fluted designs down each side. There is a shaped gallery on the back of the mantles like the fireplace mantles in the dining room and Wright room of the Fort-Hammond-Willis House. The floors are of wide pine boards and have the same type of square nails found in the Fish and Fort-Hammond-Willis Houses. The entrance door of the Camilla home is a modified copy of the entrance door of Marlor's home at 201 North Wayne Street with the Marlor blocks and fluting design on either side of the door framing. The design of the Fort-Hammond-Willis House demonstrates that Marlor continued to closely follow the building styles of Charleston. Old family photos taken when the Willis family owned the home show a porch with spindles which indicate that the builder of the home was incorporating the new style of building which included wraparound porches.

During the summer of 1997, Mr. John Freeman of Devoe Paint Company, who is an authority on exterior and interior paint colors in old homes, came to see the fine faux marbling in the Fort-

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

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Hammond-Willis House. When he entered the home, he immediately asked, "Who in Milledgeville could do this exquisite English carving?" Mrs. Latham told him John Marlor, an Englishman who came to the town in 1815, has been given credit for the design and construction of the Fort-Hammond-Willis House. Mr. Freeman's spontaneous excitement and appreciation for the home was very gratifying to witness. His compliments on the design of the home continued for the duration of his visit.

IV. The Owners of the Fort-Hammond-Willis House:

During the first two decades of its history, Milledgeville attracted more than a dozen local attorneys. One of them was Moses Fort whose family came to Baldwin County and nearby Twiggs County from Burke County, Georgia, further to the east. Tomlinson Fort who was a dedicated and beloved physician in Milledgeville was the younger brother of Moses Fort. Dr. Tomlinson Fort was influential in establishing the State Lunatic Asylum in the Midway Community (now known as Hardwick, Georgia)

Moses Fort was born March 17, 1782, and on December 30, 1812, married Eudocia Walton Moore in Baldwin County. Eudocia was the daughter of Thomas Moore and Nancy Walton of Virginia. Moses Fort's record of public service in Georgia is distinguished. He was a Captain and Major in the Militia during the War of 1812. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1819. He was a Magistrate and the first Superior Court Judge in Thomasville (in south Georgia on the Florida line) as a judge in the Southern Circuit from 1825-1828. Prior to his appointment to the bench he practiced law in Baldwin and Twiggs County.

Arthur Fort, the father of Judge Fort, lived and died in Twiggs County. Judge Fort not only practiced law in that county but also owned property there. He was also appointed a trustee of Marion Academy which was located in the Marion Community, for years the county seat of Twiggs County.

Judge Fort was the comptroller for Midway Seminary. The ledger for the Seminary along with personal and business papers which belonged to Judge and Mrs. Moses Fort were found in the attic of the Fort-Hammond-Willis House by the present owner and are in her possession.

It would appear that after he finished serving as a judge in south Georgia, and became associated with Midway Seminary, that he decided to build a house in the Midway community c. 1828-1835.

Due to the fact that all the pre-1861 deeds for Baldwin County have been destroyed in a fire, there is no record of the actual date of purchase for this property.

On December 8, 1845, Judge Moses Fort died. *The Southern Recorder* (Milledgeville, GA) December 9, 1845, reported: "Moses Fort died suddenly (yesterday on Monday) December 8, 1845."

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

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Judge Fort is buried in Memory Hill Cemetery. According to the estate inventory records in the Probate Court of Baldwin County, Georgia, his funeral cost \$27. There was a charge of \$2.00 to send the hearse two miles to Midway to transport his body to the cemetery for burial. This inventory was made on September 11, 1847. Judge Fort died intestate. Mrs. Eudocia Walton Fort was appointed administratrix on March 24, 1846.

There is evidence in the inventory of Judge Fort's estate that he owned a "house and lot in Midway" and some land in other counties.

A. Alling Jones, a descendant of the Fort and Hammond families, says that Eudocia lived with John and Caroline Susannah Fort Hammond after Judge Fort's death. The 1870 population census shows her living with the Hammonds. In the population census of 1850, Mrs. Fort is listed as a "hotel keeper." Her boarders (guests) who are listed are five students and two teachers and their families. Obviously these would be students from the Midway Seminary across the road from the house.

On November 1, 1842, John Hammond, son of Abner Hammond, the third Secretary of State of Georgia, had married Caroline Susannah Fort, daughter of Judge Moses and Mrs. Eudocia Fort. The ceremony took place under the large oak in the yard of the Fort-Hammond-Willis House as reported by A. Alling Jones, a descendant of the Fort-Hammond family. John Hammond was the Ordinary (Probate Judge) of Baldwin County, Georgia, for many years. In the population census of 1880, John Hammond is listed as the Steward (Purchasing Agent) for the Lunatic Asylum. The Hammond family donated land for the State Lunatic Asylum which opened in 1837.

John Hammond and his wife, the daughter of the Forts, were the second family to own and live in this house. John was well-connected due to his father, Abner, being the third Secretary of State of Georgia from 1811 to 1823, well before his son was connected with this house. Family records assert that it was Abner who accompanied the State Treasury and official papers from Louisville (the former Georgia capital) on October 9, 1807. Abner Hammond died in 1829 and is buried on his own plantation land.

After the death of John (1885) and Caroline F. Hammond (December 2, 1893), the house was inherited by their daughter Frances (Fannie) Martha Hammond Hollinshead. Mrs. Hollinshead lived in the home now known as Lockerly Arboretum which was the Hollinshead home at that time. Mrs. Hollinshead sold this house to Mrs. Dollie Brookins Simpson (Mrs. J. F. Simpson) in 1898. It was said to have had 60 acres attached to it at that time. The Simpsons lived in the home for several years. During Mrs. Simpson's ownership she sold off several pieces of the property, reducing the total acreage. After Mr. Simpson's death in 1917, in 1919 Mrs. Simpson sold the home and the remaining land around it to Mr. J. D. Willis, great-uncle by marriage of the present owner.

After hours of interviews with the surviving members of the Brookins-Simpson families who could be located and hours of research in all available records, there is not a substantial amount of information about Dollie B. Simpson. All the interviewees agreed that both Dollie and Mr. Simpson had been

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Section 8--Statement of Significance

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married before and Dollie was reported to be the mother of Dr. Claude Brantley Brookins (c.1884-1933) who practiced medicine in Gordon, Georgia, in the next county. Mr. Simpson had two sons from his first marriage. It appears from interviews that Dollie was a very strong-willed person who was not at all liked by Mr. Simpson's family. It is evident from recorded deeds that she bought the home and sold several pieces of the surrounding land and that she sold the house and the remaining land to Mr. J. Dawson Willis. Her name appears only in three places: her marriage certificate when she married Mr. Simpson on November 10, 1896, the deed to the Fort-Hammond-Willis House, and in the population census of 1900. Mrs. Simpson is buried in an unmarked grave next to Mr. Simpson in Memory Hill Cemetery. There is no will in Baldwin County for Mrs. Simpson.

Mr. John F. Simpson was a Confederate veteran, having served in the infantry during the Civil War. Born in Georgia July 22, 1844 (tombstone says 1846), he enlisted from Bartow County, and later filed for a pension in Baldwin County, Georgia. His grave is marked with a CSA tombstone and the date of death of 1917. A relative of the Simpsons said both Mr. and Mrs. Simpson worked at the "Lunatic Asylum."

Mr. J. D. Willis was a young widower with two small daughters whose first wife Annie Walker Willis had died in 1911. He courted and married Miss Estelle Baumgartel, a school teacher and principal at Midway School. Mr. Willis was a salesman for A. J. Carr Wholesale Grocery Company. Mrs. Willis made a career change in 1922. *The Union-Recorder* (Milledgeville) reported her appointment to the position of Postmistress of Hardwick Georgia. She held this position for many decades until her retirement.

In an interview with Roscoe McDonald, a life long resident of the Baldwin County, he stated that when he was in school at Midway about 1922 the trees were so thick in front of the home that you could barely see the house. The unpaved driveway led straight into the garage and the trees grew right up to the edge of the dirt road known variously as Hollinshead Hill, Midway-Scottsboro Road, Public Road, and Gordon Road. Mr. McDonald also said Mr. Willis' father lived there with the family. He contracted small pox and the house was quarantined.

Old photos of the home depict the two sun porches in existence today as open porches. Bernard Spivey, whose greatest joy each day was to back Mrs. Willis' Cadillac out of the garage for her as she left for the post office, said that the open porches were enclosed about 1934.

The original back porch was an open porch and was as long as the house. Pete Terry, a nephew of Mrs. Willis, said the porch was enclosed and a kitchenette added. According to Mr. Spivey, this remodeling was done about 1941-42. After World War II, Mrs. Willis enclosed the dog trot (breeze way) and remodeled the main kitchen which was and still is connected to the former dog trot. The dog trot was made into the breakfast/family dining room. This remodeling was done by Acie Collins, a local contractor.

Mr. Willis added the room presently used as the master bedroom so that she could make an

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

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efficiency apartment. Several newlywed families and young ministers lived at the Willis House. Among these were Mr. and Mrs. Paul Melton and Mr. and Mrs. Wendell Couch. Mr. Stark and Mr. McEvers, both of whom were the pastor at the Hardwick Christian Church, lived at the home.

In 1958 Mr. John E. Johnson, AIA, a local architect, designed the present front porch with Corinthian columns and brick steps. The original porch had four plain, Doric type columns and a banister around it. The original banisters were reused in the gazebo in the back yard. The garden cottage was the original smokehouse which was where the patio is now located.

Mrs. Willis told an architectural seminar student that the reason the mantle in the living room is painted is because there was "fire damage." The present owner found slight fire damage in the front corner of the living room when she inherited the home from "Aunt Sissy" (Mrs. Willis). Mrs. Willis did not explain the circumstances surrounding the fire damage.

In 1960 Lewis A. Maddox and Alvin Vinson, two cabinet makers, put up the crown molding in the ceiling of the music room and the living room.

On the original back porch there are plain, wide boards which are exactly like the walls in the Fish-Andrews house. All the floors in the Fort-Hammond-Willis House are pine and have square nails in them.

According to the inventory of John Marlor's estate, Book B, pp. 210-211, recorded May 16, 1836, Marlor owned a blacksmith shop and a slave named Jim who was a blacksmith. It is speculated that Jim was making nails and other hardware for the building that Marlor was doing.

During the inspection of the attic by the present owner, it was discovered there is a door in the roof. At the same time a trunk containing the Fort papers was discovered. An empty pistol holster, polmer bag, ladies bustle and hoop skirt, a horse's mane, and Confederate money were also found. There are finished boards in the attic, planed and which measure 18-20 inches in width, which have never been used in construction. The original cypress shingles are underneath the present shingles. All the bricks in the home are sun dried.

Before the death of Mr. Willis in 1941, he had given the home to his wife. She lived to be 92 years young and died in 1980. She made a special provision in her will for her great-niece Mrs. Saralyn Ivey Latham to have the home. Mrs. Latham had loved the home all her life and Mrs. Willis was aware that she would take very good care of the home. The Latham family has lived in the home since 1982.

The Willis House is the type of house that has meant home to many. It is a solidly built and plainly carpenter-built structure which has been remodeled to fulfill different needs. During the years a succession of prosperous and respectable Georgians moved in and out of the home. It was planned and built to reflect the popular taste of the period(s) with select ideas and styles throughout its



National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 8--Statement of Significance

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history.

While the Midway community was prime real estate where the best families sought refuge from the capital, Midway was also believed to have cleaner air which was believed to be protection from malaria (bad air). During the antebellum era, scientists and physicians did not know that mosquitoes, and not stale air, were responsible for this potentially deadly disease.

During the time that the rich planters were seeking refuge from Milledgeville and looking for good schools for their children, Midway was regarded as being in the country. Mrs. Sybil Fowler reports that as late as the early 1900s her father-in-law and mother-in-law were planning to build a house for their growing family. One day Mr. Fowler learned that the Rockwell home was for sale at a very reasonable price. The sale would include a very large plot of land. When he asked his wife about buying the house and land she very distinctly said, "I'll not live in the country!" This illustrates the very real fact that on the north side of Fishing Creek was Milledgeville, the antebellum capital. The south side was the country, complete with Lunatic Asylum, Oglethorpe University, Midway Seminary, homes of wealthy planters, and doctors at the Lunatic Asylum, and professors and students at Midway Seminary and Oglethorpe University. It is reasonable to state that since 1807 Midway relied on Milledgeville just as Milledgeville relied on Midway for its continued existence and each community contributed to the history of the other.

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## 9. Major Bibliographic References

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Ivey, Sarah Frances. HISTORY OF MIDWAY. no publisher, no date.

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National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Section 9--Major Bibliographic References

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Tankersley, Allen P. COLLEGE LIFE AT OLD OGLETHORPE. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1951.

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

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been issued  
date issued:
- 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, Specify Repository:

**Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A**

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## **10. Geographical Data**

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**Acreage of Property**      9.3 acres.

### **UTM References**

A)    Zone 17 Easting 291833    Northing 3659636

### **Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property is marked on the enclosed tax map.

### **Boundary Justification**

The nominated property has been all that has been associated with the house since 1982.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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**State Historic Preservation Office**

**name/title** Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., Historian  
**organization** Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**mailing address** 156 Trinity Avenue, S.W., Suite 101  
**city or town** Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30303  
**telephone** (404) 656-2840 **date** January 22, 2003  
**e-mail** ken\_thomas@dnr.state.ga.us

**Consulting Services/Technical Assistance (if applicable)** ( ) not applicable

**name/title** Dorothy Collins  
**organization** N/A  
**mailing address** 1734 Cedarwood Rd.  
**city or town** Milledgeville **state** Georgia **zip code** 31061  
**telephone** 478-452-9017  
**e-mail** N/A

- ( ) **property owner**
- (X) **consultant**
- ( ) **regional development center preservation planner**
- ( ) **other:**

**Property Owner or Contact Information**

**name (property owner or contact person)** Mrs. Saralyn I. Latham  
**organization (if applicable)** property owner  
**mailing address** 1760 Irwinton Rd.  
**city or town** Milledgeville **state** GA **zip code** 31061  
**e-mail (optional)** Telephone: 478-452-2181

National Register of Historic Places **Continuation Sheet**

Photographs

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**Name of Property:** Fort-Hammond-Willis House  
**City or Vicinity:** Milledgeville  
**County:** Baldwin  
**State:** Georgia  
**Photographer:** James R. Lockhart  
**Negative Filed:** Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**Date Photographed:** April 2000

**Description of Photograph(s):**

1 of 18: Front facade of main house; photographer facing southeast.

2 of 18: Front facade of main house showing more of front portico from the northwest; photographer facing south.

3 of 18: Front facade of main house from the southwest side; photographer facing northeast.

4 of 18: Front facade of main house taken closer to the street; photographer facing northeast.

5 of 18: South side of main house with rear ell in foreground; photographer facing north/northwest.

6 of 18: Looking at rear of rear ell of main house; photographer facing northwest.

7 of 18: North side of main house with rear ell on the left; photographer facing southwest.

8 of 18: Front entrance of main house from the walkway; photographer facing east.

9 of 18: Front portico and front entrance; photographer facing north/northeast.

10 of 18: Interior, central hall facing front door; photographer facing northwest.

11 of 18: Interior, living room to right of front door; photographer facing southeast.

12 of 18: Interior, close up of living room mantel with door on right leading to dining room; photographer facing northeast.

13 of 18: Interior, music room to left of front door; photographer facing northeast.

14 of 18: Interior, dining room to rear of living room; photographer facing northwest.

15 of 18: Interior, Wright Room (on plan) behind the music room; photographer facing northwest.

**National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

Photographs

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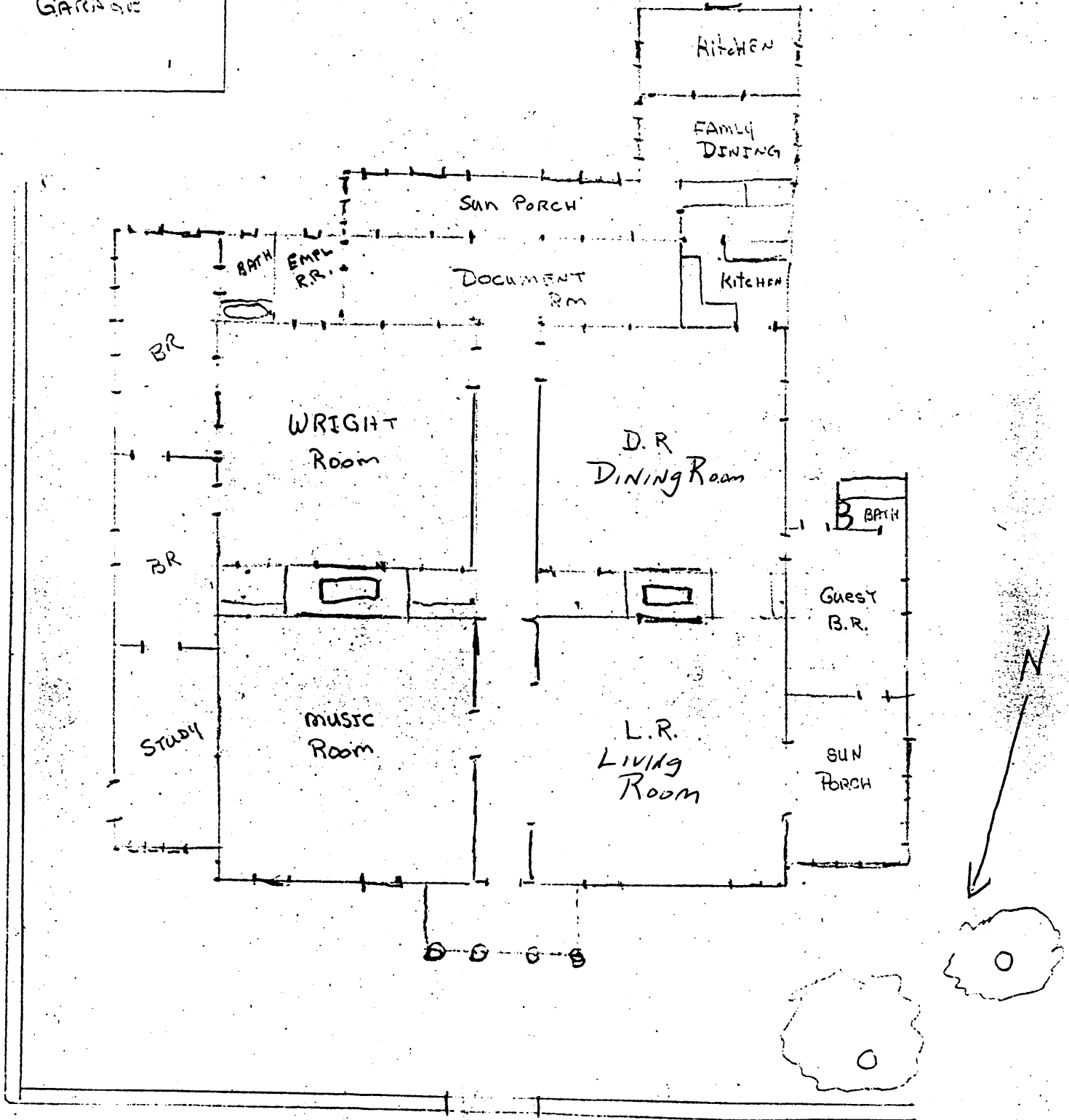
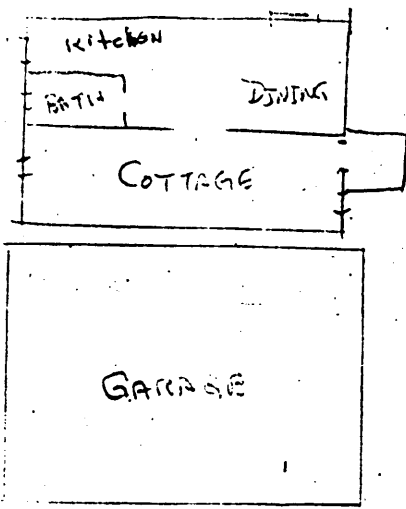
16 of 18: Outside, rear of house, showing gazebo and garage and cottage; photographer facing northeast.

17 of 18: Outside, rear of house, old barn with lean-to sheds; photographer facing northeast.

18 of 18: Outside, rear of house, well house and shed; photographer facing northeast.

(HPD WORDPERFECT form version 11-03-01)

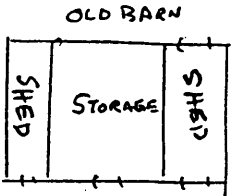
Fort-Hammond-Willis House  
Milledgeville, Baldwin County, Georgia  
Floor Plan  
Not to Scale  
Barnie T. Collins, 1997



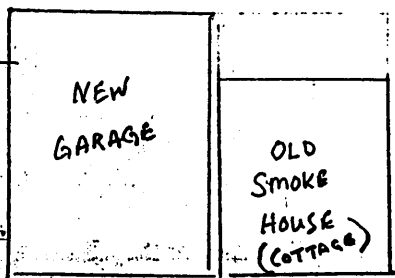
BTC/1997



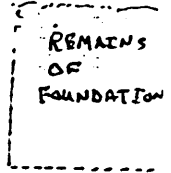
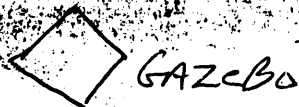
WELL  
HOUSE &  
BRED



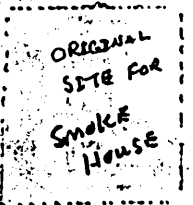
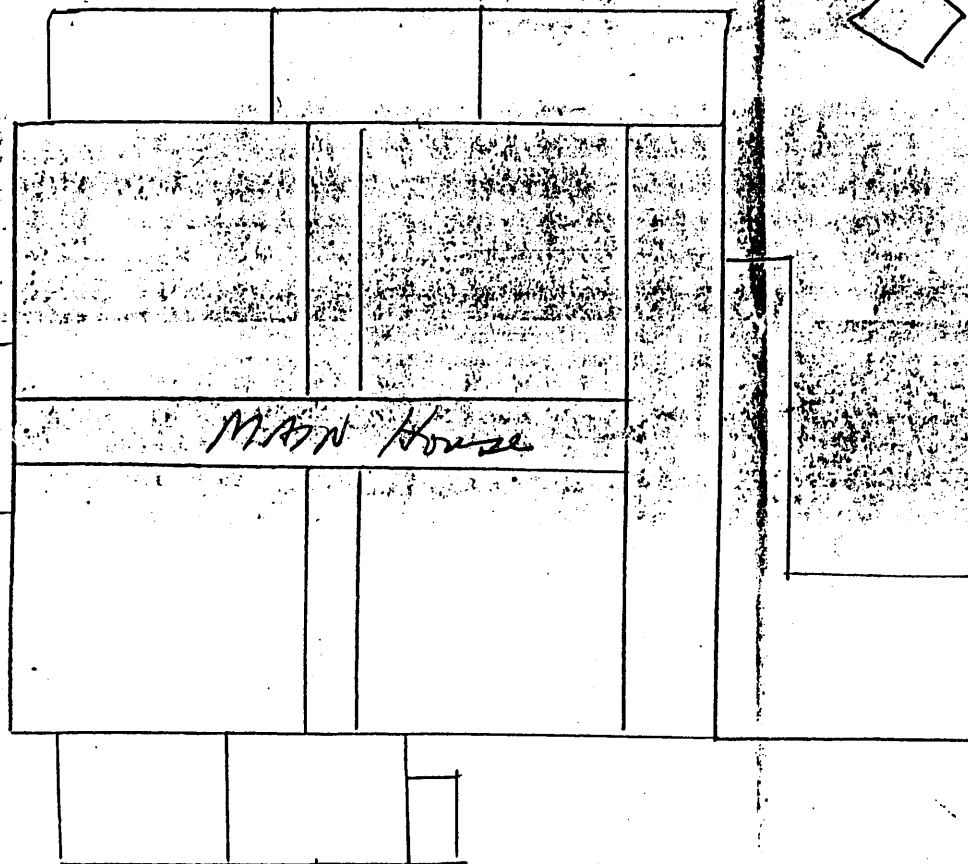
DRIVE  
WAY



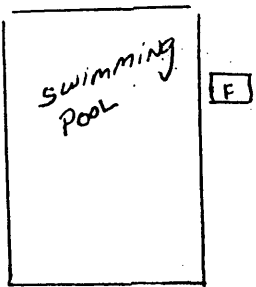
CHAIN LINK FENCE



WILLIS HOUSE OVER LAY

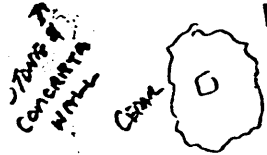
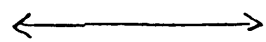


GARDEN




Fort-Hammond-Willis House  
 Milledgeville, Baldwin County, Georgia  
 Sketch Map  
 Not to Scale  
 Barnie T. Collins, 2002

PECAN GROVE



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Fort-Hammond-Willis House  
Milledgeville, Baldwin County, Georgia  
Tax Map  
Baldwin County Tax Assessors Office, c. 1996  
National Register Boundary:   
Scale: 1" = 100'  
North: 