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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

JAN 24 1995

SEP 16 1994

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

Ala. Historical Commission

INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION

This form is for use in nominating or requesting recognition for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Tait-Ervin House

other names/site number Tait, Robert, House; Ervin, Robert Hugh, Dr., House; Countryside

2. Location

street & number 205 County Road 33  not for publication

city or town Camden (Opossum Bend Community)  vicinity

state Alabama code AL county Wilcox code 131 zip code 36726

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
[Signature] 1/19/95  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)  
State of 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 certifying official/Title Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that the 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): \_\_\_\_\_

for  
Edson H. Beall Signature of the Keeper Date of Action  
Entered in the National Register 2/24/95

Tait-Ervin House  
Name of Property

Wilcox County, Alabama  
County and State

**5. Classification**

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

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

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

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
3		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
3		Total

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

N/A

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

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

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

Domestic: single dwelling

Agriculture/Subsistence

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

Domestic: single dwelling

**7. Description**

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

Greek Revival Style

Other: Carolina Vernacular

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

walls wood

roof synthetic - fiberglass shingle

other wood

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

see continuation sheet

Tait-Ervin House  
Name of Property

Wilcox County, Alabama  
County and State

### 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.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or 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.

#### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

### 9. Major Bibliographical References

#### Bibliography

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

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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 # 139
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

#### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

#### Period of Significance

c. 1855

#### Significant Dates

c. 1855

#### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

#### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

#### Architect/Builder

unknown

#### Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

Tait-Ervin House  
Name of Property

Wilcox County, Alabama  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property c. 42 acres

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 | 16 | 464230 | 3537530 |  
Zone Easting Northing  
2 | 16 | 464690 | 3537360 |

3 | 16 | 464545 | 3537010 |  
Zone Easting Northing  
4 | 16 | 464240 | 3537010 |

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title W. Edward Hooker, III, Private Consultant

organization N/A date January 25, 1994

street & number 700 Dallas Road 142 telephone 205-872-0455

city or town Selma state Alabama zip code 36701

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Dr. William Robertson Phillippi and Mrs. Wyllynn Gilmore-Phillippi

street & number 340 Earl Street telephone 205-

city or town Camden state Alabama zip code 36726

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**RECEIVED**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**RECEIVED 413** JAN 5 1995**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

JAN 24 1995

Ala. Historical Commission  
Tait-Ervin House  
Wilcox County, AlabamaSection number 7 Page            INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION**

The Tait-Ervin House, Countryside, is located at the southernmost end of Wilcox County Road 33 about 8 miles outside of Camden in the Opossum Bend community. The private drive to the house passes through an ancient pecan grove. To the left of the drive is a pond; to the right the pecan grove continues. The yard is landscaped with hollies, camellias, nandina and azalea bushes. There are two wooden frame dependencies with tin roofs located behind the main house. Dates of their construction coincide with that of the main house. Those buildings were used as a smoke house and tool shed.

The main house consists of a two story main block measuring 60 feet by 23 feet and a massive 1 1/2 story rear wing. Both portions appear to have been constructed at the same time. A deep three sided porch whose wooden columns rest on brick piers which rise directly from the ground level and stand free in front of the porch itself (i.e., the Carolina porch), wraps around the front and two sides of the house. The square wooden columns rest on brick pillars which terminate just below the porch height. A gingerbread balustrade encompasses the porch, also. A double gate, whose years of constant use have worn grooves in the porch floor boards, blocks off the porch from the steps. The front door is a typical Greek Revival double leaf door, flanked by sidelights and topped with a transom. The six over six floor length jib windows have operable wooden blinds.

Inside the house, the main hall, measuring an impressive 78 feet in length, is flanked by a pair of formal parlors. Floors throughout are 6" wide heart pine boards. The ceilings are 14 feet high. The 9 foot wide door openings have transoms and shouldered pedimented surrounds with heavy mouldings. The three-paneled sliding doors still retain the original graining, as do all of the doors throughout the house. The left parlor serves as the formal living room for the current owners. An interior fireplace with an intricately carved marble mantle is located on the south wall flanked by operable jib windows. The woodwork is plain, a typical Greek Revival interior feature. The right parlor, now used as the children's room, has a unique stencilling design above the unusually wide plaster picture rail. The ceiling is also stencilled. There is an interior fireplace on the north wall with an intricately carved marble mantle. The stencilling is thought to have been added after the 1870 acquisition by Dr. and Mrs. R. H. Ervin (1).

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Wilcox County, AlabamaSection number 7 Page 2

The long hall is intersected by a shorter transverse hall which runs the width of the main portion of the house. At the intersection of the halls there are four elliptical arches which spring from scrolled plaster consoles. A large plaster medallion is centered in the ceiling of the space created by the intersection of the halls. To the left at the end of the transverse hall there is a double door flanked by two sidelights and topped with a transom, identical to the front and rear exterior doors. To the right of the intersection is the stair hall, and another set of double doors identical in configuration to the front, rear and side doors.

Three of the remaining four rooms on the main level have been adapted for modern living. The new kitchen is behind the living room across the transverse hall, and beyond the kitchen is the laundry/mud room and pantry. Both rooms have back to back interior fireplaces, which are no longer in use. Behind the right parlor/children's bedroom across the stair hall is the new master bathroom. Free-standing wet walls were constructed in the center of the room allowing fixtures and storage space to be added without compromising the room's original walls and ceiling. The master bedroom adjoins the bathroom. Part of the back porch was at some time enclosed to create a closet for the master bedroom. This closet has a window and a door to the rear porch. The master bedroom and bathroom have back to back interior fireplaces, which are no longer in use. All doors opening onto the main hall from these rooms have transoms in the shouldered architrave. At the rear of the main hall is located a set of double doors which open from the rear of the central hall to a porch that runs the full length of the rear wing of the house.

Upstairs there are two rooms in the main portion. These rooms have windows on three walls, an excellent ventilation technique. Both rooms have interior end fireplaces with simple Greek Revival mantles. The upstairs hall is similar in length to the downstairs hall. However, the rear end is closed off by a pair of double doors flanked by stationary single doors. Originally, the wall stopped just above the door frame and moulding, but a later addition carried the partition wall to the ceiling. The double doors at the rear end of the hall open into a large space thought to have been used as a playroom for the Ervin children and grandchildren (1). Doors off this room provide access to attic storage.

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Tait-Ervin House  
Wilcox County, Alabama

Section number 8 Page 3

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## CRITERION C: ARCHITECTURE

The Tait-Ervin House is a fine and intact example of the Carolina Vernacular type, characterized by the two story main portion containing two rooms flanking a central hall on each floor, and the deep three sided porch whose wooden columns rest on brick pillars which rise directly from the ground level and stand free in front of the porch itself (i.e., the Carolina porch) (2). The design of the house is unique in that it is a variation of a popular earlier South Carolina Vernacular form, which was first implemented as early as the mid to late eighteenth century (3). The floorplan has been adapted for the warmer climate of central Alabama. The cross hall plan downstairs and the ventilation generated by the windows on three sides of the upstairs bedrooms makes the house pleasant in the warm months. Examples of houses built in the Carolina Vernacular include a pre-revolutionary war house at Mosgrove's Mill in South Carolina, the Coker House, circa 1817, in Darlington County, South Carolina, and the Chicora Wood Plantation in South Carolina (4). Constructed in 1855 on land willed to Robert Tait by his father James Asbury Tait, the house is in excellent structural condition and is "one of the finest and least altered of area plantation houses" (2). The house was the center of Robert Tait's farming endeavors. Today, it serves as the residence of decendants of the original owners. The interior remains in the same condition, with the thoughtful addition of modern amenities that do not compromise the integrity of the house.

The design of the house has been attributed to architect Alexander Bragg, whose work can be found in abundance in the area. His buildings include White Columns, the Tait-Starr House, built for Felix Tait, brother of Robert, the Wilcox County Courthouse, St. Mary's Episcopal Church and Liberty Hall. Other sources mention possible design by contractor Citizen Cook, who is credited with the design of the Bagby-Liddell home in Camden. Perhaps the Tait-Ervin House could be the result of collaboration between the two men. Robert Tait, with his knowledge of the Carolina low country/northwest Georgia architectural style, could have created such a home for himself and his family. Whichever the scenario, the architect/builder is at this date still undetermined (3). The property is also significant because it retains two of the original dependencies--the smoke house and tool shed.

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Tait-Ervin House  
Wilcox County, Alabama

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## HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The Tait family of Wilcox County, Alabama was one of the wealthiest and most influential in central Alabama. Planter James Asbury Tait came to Alabama in 1817 from Elberta County, Georgia. He moved his family to the area in 1823. James A. Tait made his home in the Coy Vicinity of Wilcox County. From 1819 to 1853, Tait purchased approximately twenty thousand acres from various sources, including public land sales at St. Stephens, property from tax sales, mortgaged property, and from other land owners in the area (5). At the time of his death in 1854, he owned plantations and lands in Alabama and Mississippi, and approximately 360 slaves. Upon his death, he provided his eight children with the means to live as royalty. Robert Tait inherited approximately 3,250 acres and part of his father's stock in the Wilcox Female Institute. With this inheritance, son Robert Tait built the Tait-Ervin House in 1854 (6).

Originally, the land upon which the Tait-Ervin House was built was purchased by James Asbury Tait from L. D. McConnico in September 1851 (5). The house served as the operations for Robert Tait's farming endeavors. One of eight children, Tait was born in Monroe County, Alabama in 1824. He was educated at home on his father's plantation, where he also learned how to manage his own farming operation. In 1842 Tait attended the University of Alabama, the same year that his father was elected to the Board of Trustees. Robert remained at the University for two years, and in 1850 returned to his father's plantation in Wilcox County. That same year he married Mary Jane Irvin of Mobile. The house was completed in 1855, and Tait farmed the plantation left to him by his father. At the outbreak of the war in 1861, Robert Tait enlisted for twelve months. He formed his own unit called the Camden Rifles, which was intended to be a 90 day temporary unit. Tait's unit consisted of about 100 men from around the Camden area. He personally financed the outfitting of his troops and wore the rank of Captain. The unit travelled to Mobile where they served past the expected 90 day mark (7). At the dissolution of his unit in 1862, Tait joined the 13th Alabama Infantry and assumed the rank of private. By the time his unit disbanded in 1864, he had moved up in rank to Second Lieutenant (7). After he returned home from war, Tait was in financial trouble. He borrowed a few thousand dollars from his sister, Sarah Asbury Tait, and her husband, Robert Hugh Ervin. About 1870, the Ervins' home burned and Mrs. Ervin took Robert Tait's house as payment in full for her brother's indebtedness. Robert felt at this time that his life was ready for a change so he and his wife, Mary Jane, moved to Mobile (1).



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Tait-Ervin House  
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Dr. Robert Hugh Ervin (1822-1875) and his wife, Sarah Asbury Tait (1826-1905), sister of Robert Tait, lived in the house with their children until their deaths. Dr. Ervin was born at Coal Bluff on the Alabama River. He was educated in private schools, and attended Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 1845 he graduated from Transylvania College in Lexington, Kentucky with a degree in medicine. In 1853 he left his practice to pursue a career in politics. That same year he was elected to the Alabama Legislature (8). During the war, he served in the state Senate from 1863-1865. After the war, Ervin and other Wilcox County politicians set forth to rebuild Alabama's crumbled system of government. Ervin was elected acting President of the Senate Democratic Party. He played an active role in Alabama politics until his death in 1875 (9). Both Dr. and Mrs. Ervin are buried along with Robert Tait and his wife in the Tait family cemetery adjacent to the Tait-Ervin House.

In 1902, widow Sarah Asbury Tait Ervin deeded to her son, Samuel J. Ervin, and his wife, the house and property, and continued to live there until her death in 1905 (10). The house and property was then passed on from Samuel J. Ervin to his son, Samuel J., junior, and his wife Anne W. Ervin. In 1991, Anne W. Ervin sold the property to Dr. and Mrs. William Robertson Phillippi, Jr. The property consists of 42 acres (11).

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National Register of Historic Places  
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Tait-Ervin House  
Wilcox County, Alabama

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Interview with Ouida Starr Woodson, local historian and Tait family descendant, January 3, 1994.
2. Gamble, Robert S. The Alabama Catalog: A Guide to the Early Architecture of the State. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1987.
3. Interview with Robert S. Gamble, State Architectural Historian, January 5, 1994.
4. Milling, Champan J. and Carl Julien. Beneath So Kind a Sky: The Scenic and Architectural Beauty of South Carolina. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1947.
5. Cochran, John Perry. James Asbury Tait and his Plantations. Thesis dissertation. University of Alabama, 1951.
6. Wilcox County Deed Book G.
7. Alabama State Militia Records 1861-1865, Alabama Department of Archives and History (microfilm).
8. Marks, Henry S., Compiler. Who Was Who in Alabama. Huntsville: Strode Publishers, 1972.
9. DuBose, John W. Alabama's Tragic Decade: Ten Years of Alabama 1865-1874. Birmingham: Webb Book Company, 1940.
10. Deed Book BB, page 163-64, Wilcox County Courthouse.
11. Deed Book 9C, page 334-35, Wilcox County Courthouse.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Tait-Ervin House  
Wilcox County, Alabama

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## LEGAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning with the southwest corner N/2-SW/4-NW/4; Then N 1640' S; Then SELY 1020' S to W R/W unnamed road; Then SELY along SD R/W to EL NW/4; Then S 500' S to N R/W County Road # 35; Then SWLY along SD R/W 300'; Then SWLY 30' S; Then W 150' S; Then SWLY 521.5'; Then W 900' S to P. O. B. lying in E/2 - NW/4.

## BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary conforms to the present legal description of the property.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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Tait-Ervin House  
Wilcox County, Alabama

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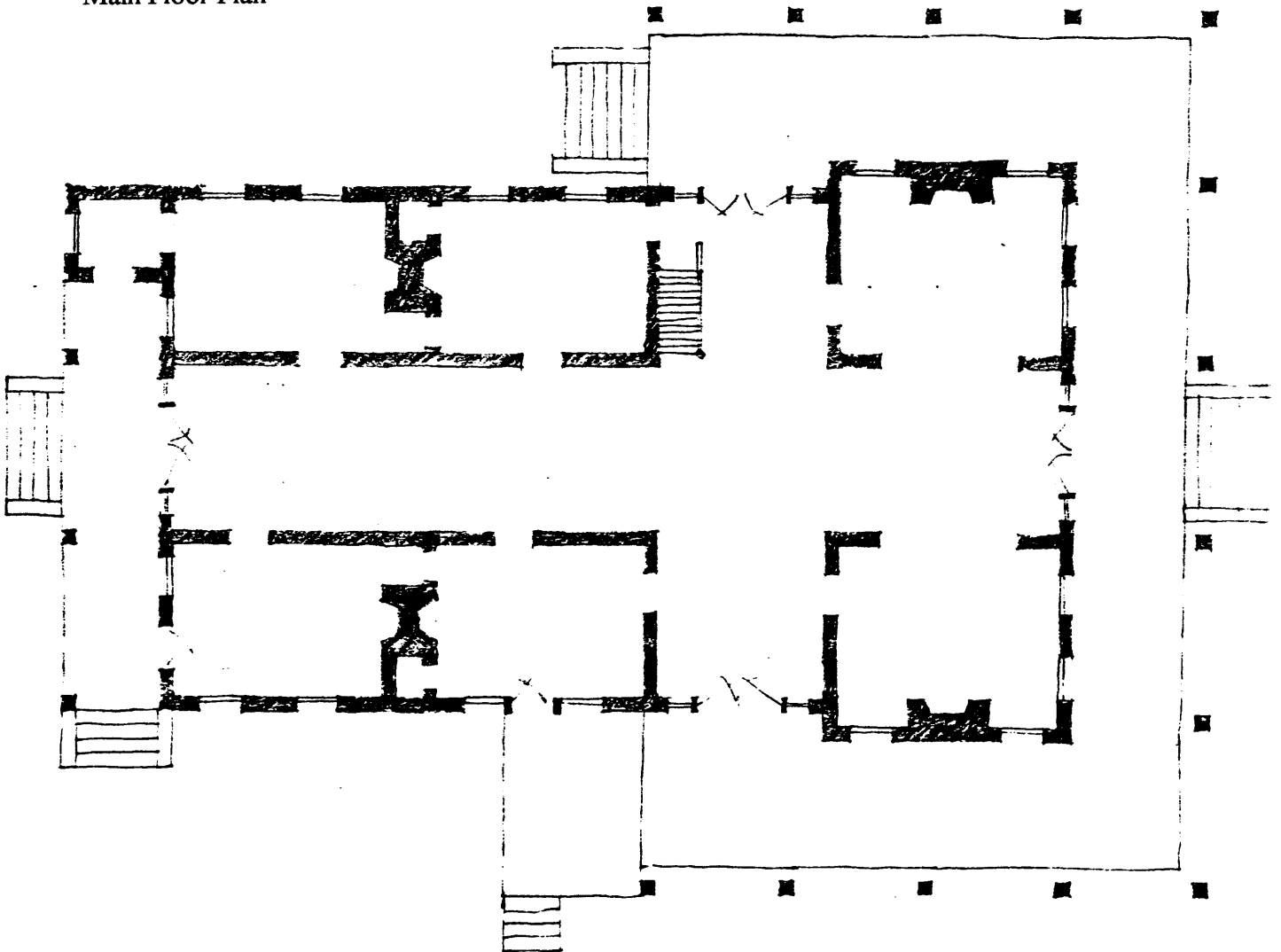
NAME: Tait-Ervin House  
ADDRESS: Opossum Bend Community, Camden Vicinity  
Wilcox County, Alabama  
PHOTOGRAPHER: Edward Hooker, III  
DATE: January 5, 1994  
NEGATIVES: Alabama Historical Commission

- Photo
1. view of house, camera facing W
  2. front facade, camera facing W
  3. north facade, camera facing S
  4. rear facade, camera facing E
  5. south facade, camera facing N
  6. front & side elevations, camera facing NW
  7. view of steps & main entrance, camera facing W
  8. detail of porch balustrade, camera facing W
  9. front porch showing jib windows and shutters, camera facing NW
  10. Carolina porch, camera facing S
  11. first floor hall looking towards rear door, camera facing W
  12. first floor hall looking towards front door, camera facing E
  13. first floor hall looking towards south entrance, camera facing S
  14. first floor hall with north entrance & stair hall, camera facing N
  15. plaster ceiling medallion
  16. stencilling in front parlor/nursery
  17. typical door surround with shouldered architrave & transom, camera facing E
  18. partition wall in upstairs hall, camera facing W

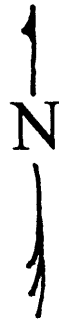
Tait-Ervin House  
Opossum Bend, Camden Vicinity  
Wilcox County, Alabama  
Built: 1855



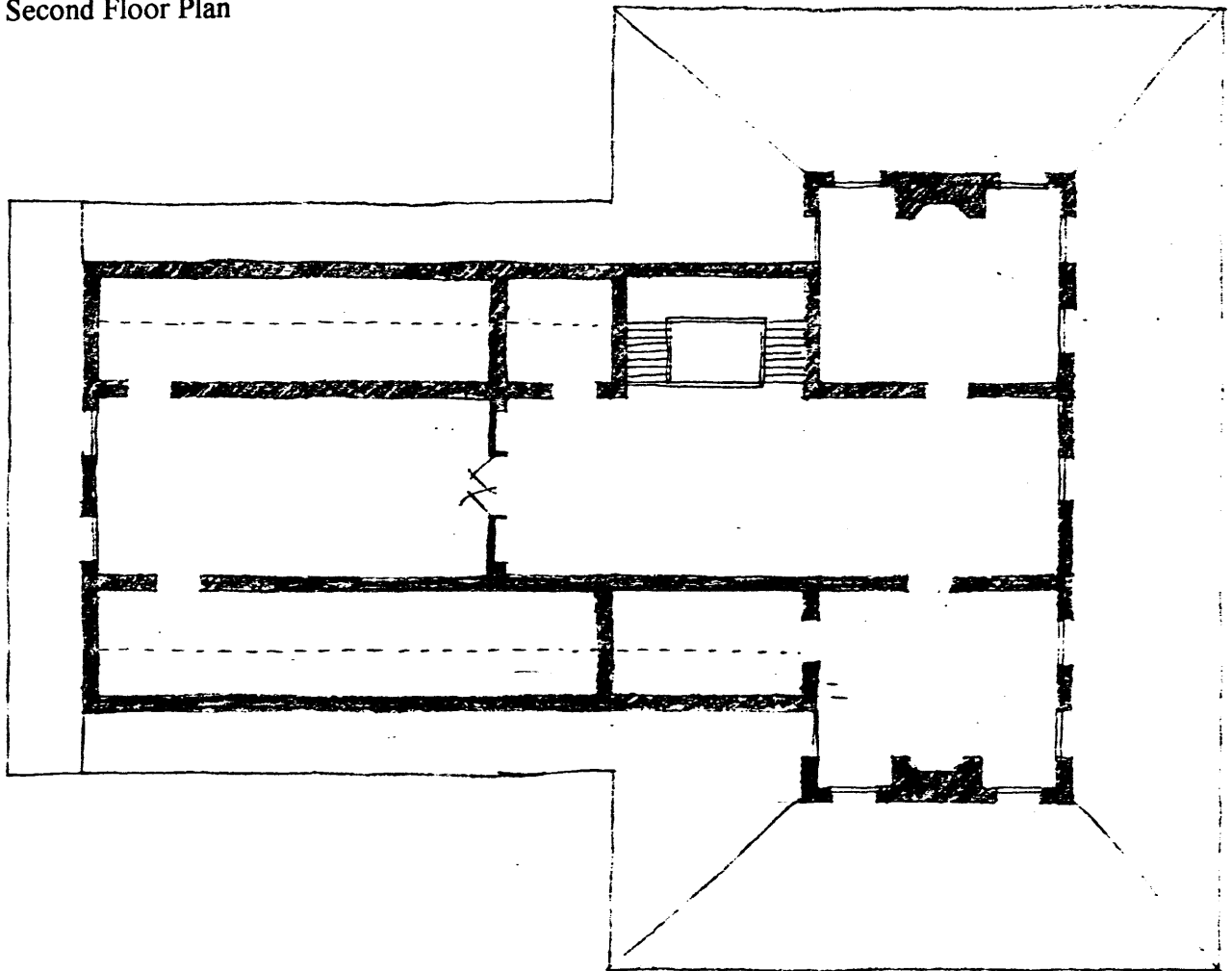
Main Floor Plan



Tait-Ervin House  
Opossum Bend, Camden Vicinity  
Wilcox County, Alabama  
Built: 1855



Second Floor Plan

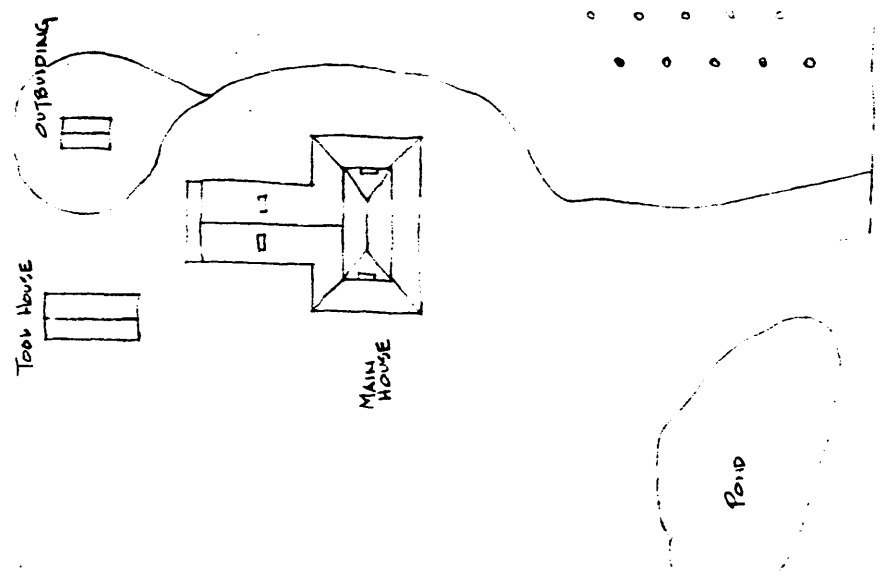
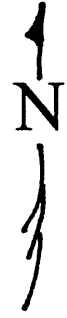


Tait-Ervin House  
Opossum Bend, Camden Vicinity  
Wilcox County, Alabama  
Built: 1855

Site Plan

TAIT  
FAMILY  
CEMETERY

FENCE



COUNTY ROAD 33