

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED APR 24 1978

DATE ENTERED OCT 2 1978

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

The First James Lee House

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

239 Adams Ave

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Memphis

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

Eighth

STATE

Tennessee

CODE

47

COUNTY

Shelby

CODE

157

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Roscoe A. Feild, Jr.

STREET & NUMBER

722 Valleybrook

CITY, TOWN

Memphis

VICINITY OF

STATE

Tennessee

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Shelby County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

160 North Main

CITY, TOWN

Memphis

STATE

Tennessee

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Tennessee Historical and Architectural Survey

DATE

January 1974

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Tennessee Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Nashville

STATE

Tennessee

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The First James Lee House is located at 239 Adams Avenue, which was an important residential street in Memphis during the last half of the nineteenth century. Located near the busy downtown business district, it attracted residents of wealth and influence in the business affairs of the city.

This structure is a two-story brick detached urban house, located on a fifty foot lot. A cast iron fence in the form of a massive balustrade with cast iron urns topping square iron piers is located at the front of the lot. The piers are panelled, and a hinged letter drop appears on one of the gatepost piers. The gate is now missing.

The house was built using a side hall plan. Unevenly spaced brick pilasters define the single entry bay and a double bay with two segmentally arched windows. The three second-story windows reflect the same spacing within the two bays. The front windows are concentrically curved within segmental arches, while less-important side and rear windows have square heads within segmental openings. The entry-way is topped by a bracket-supported pediment. Each front window is topped by an ornamented pediment. The cornice is supported by paired brackets evenly spaced around the structure. The brackets and cornice are metal. Attic ventilation holes under the cornice are covered with cast iron grilles. Above the roof cornice is a low pitched standing seam metal roof. Chimneys are stuccoed and topped with terra-cotta chimney caps. The base of the building is stone, with stone belt courses marking the first and second story ceiling lines. The latter belt course marks the bottom of the cornice architrave.

The entry door, at the head of a flight of limestone steps with molded and reversed side curbs and low curved newels, has an etched glass panel and transom. The door panel is etched with a figure of Ceres, goddess of the harvest, complete with ears of grain and wheat sheaves. The entry floor is encaustic tile with a stone border. Carved panelling on the door includes carved anchors, reflecting the association of the first owner with steamboating.

The stair curves up the entrance hall to the second floor, with a fluted stair rail. A large handrail originates at a polygonal newel carved with linenfold details.

Interior moldings and casings are original to the house, as are the cast iron fireplace mantels which are grained to simulate marble. Window shutters fold into panelled jambs. Close-grained edge pine floors are in good condition, and the gasoliers and gas wall brackets are still in place.

To the rear of the lot is a cobblestoned alley. Located there also is a herringbone brick paved area.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1869

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Joseph Willis

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

James Lee, Sr., the founder of the famous Lee Line of river steamboats, was born in Stewart County, Tennessee. The Lee family traced its origins to Virginia and Maryland. After moving to Tennessee, they owned and operated an iron works. Captain Lee married and had three sons, Thomas Edgar, Samuel Stacker, and James Lee, Jr., who built the First James Lee House. When the Lees moved to Memphis, they became one of the most prominent families in that city.

James Lee, Jr., was an attorney who practiced maritime law through his firm, Vollentine and Lee, and succeeding partnerships. In 1877 he became superintendent of the elder Lee's river boat business, since Captain Lee was less and less able to manage the steamer line because of failing health. When he retired from active participation in business, he spent his remaining days in the First James Lee House. The younger Lee served on numerous civic and commercial boards, such as the Memphis Merchants Exchange, Board of Public Works, First National Bank, and Board of Fire and Police Commissioners.

The establishment of the Lee Line, with its home port in Memphis, in 1866, marked an important milestone in the growth of commerce in Memphis. The availability of reliable and efficient river transportation helped the cotton trade to flourish and contributed to the prosperity Memphis enjoyed as a wholesale trade center in the late nineteenth century.

The First James Lee House, standing on Adams Avenue, a few blocks from the downtown area, is a significant reminder of the role played by the Lee family in the development of river commerce, which was vitally important to Memphis and the entire Mississippi River valley. Besides being an excellent example of the Italianate detached house, it is one of the few surviving residences of any style or period in the area adjacent to downtown Memphis.

The present owner, who has recently acquired the property, is interested in preserving the structure and adapting it to a compatible use. He has restored the fence across the front of the property.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Appeal-Avalanche Souvenir Edition. December 1890.  
 Cary, William Miles. Genealogy of the Lee Family. Baltimore, 1904.  
 Coppock, Paul R. "Lee Family Struck Gold on the Mississippi," The Commercial Appeal, July 8, 1973.  
 Goodspeed, ed., History of Shelby County.  
 Hallum, John. Diary of an Old Lawyer. 1895.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .25

QUADRANGLE NAME Northwest Memphis, Tenn.-Ark.

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 1, 5 | 7, 6, 8, 9, 8, 0 | 3, 8, 9, 3, 1, 3, 0

B    |    |   

ZONE

EASTING

NORTHING

B ZONE

EASTING

NORTHING

C    |    |   

D    |    |   

E    |    |   

F    |    |   

G    |    |   

H    |    |   

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The First Lee House is located on a 50' x 150' lot located on the south side of Adams Avenue, approximately midway between Third and Fourth streets.

## LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Mrs. Eleanor D. Hughes

ORGANIZATION

Memphis Landmarks Commission

DATE

July 1977

STREET & NUMBER

61 Adams Avenue

TELEPHONE

(901) 528-2860

CITY OR TOWN

Memphis

STATE

Tennessee

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE   

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Herbert L. Hays*

TITLE

Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

DATE

4/14/78

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*W. Smith*

DATE

10/2/78

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

*William Lebovich*

DATE

Sept 25, 1978

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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Keating, History of Memphis. 1888.

McIlwaine, Shields. Memphis Down in Dixie. 1948.

Mooney, C. P. J., Ed. The Mid South and Its Builders. 1920.

Reilly & Thomas. Commercial and Industrial Review. 1883.