

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**



1. Name of Property

historic name Stuart, Henry, House
other names/site number The Hermit House

2. Location

street & number 22787 Highway 98 not for publication N/A
city or town Montrose vicinity _____
state Alabama code AL county Baldwin code 003 zip code 36559

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.)

Jan A. N. [Signature] / SHPO 26 SEP 06
Signature of certifying official/Title 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): _____

Daniel J. Viscia
10/27/06

for _____
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> 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)

Cat: Domestic Sub: Single Dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: Vacant

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: concrete

roof: brick/mortar

walls: concrete block

other: _____

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

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.)

- 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 _____

Period of Significance 1925-1944

Significant Dates 1926

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) _____

Cultural Affiliation _____

Architect/Builder Stuart, Henry _____

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the 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):

- 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: Mobile Historic Development Commission

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than 1

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>16</u>	<u>414260</u>	<u>3380610</u>	4	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	5	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____	6	_____	_____

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 Shaun Wilson/ Preservation Consultant

organization _____ date _____

street & number 8101 Fordham Road telephone 251-633-7598

city or town Mobile state AL zip code 36619

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name Kenneth E. Neimeyer

street & number P.O. Box 888 telephone 251-928-9265

city or town Montrose state AL zip code 36559

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7. Narrative Description

The Henry Stuart House, also known as the "Hermit House", is situated on the property of Niemeyer Realty, which is located off of U.S. Highway 98 near the city of Montrose in Baldwin County, Alabama. The building is located in the parking lot between two modern commercial buildings. The property is located on hilly ground and is surrounded by numerous pine and oak trees. A lone, mature oak tree stands next to the building. The tree is contemporaneous with the building and is the only remaining portion of the original setting. The house was constructed between 1925 and 1926 by Mr. Henry Stuart. This small parcel, approximately 32'x 32', is the lone surviving portion of the 10-acre plot of land that Mr. Stuart named "Tolstoy Park".

The "Hermit House" is a circular building, approximately 14 feet in diameter and constructed of concrete blocks and brick. It is set two feet into the ground with approximately 12 feet above ground. The total height is 14 feet. Two steps, fashioned from hand-poured concrete blocks, lead down to the entrance, which is oriented to the West. A small drain, now non-functioning, served to prevent the accumulation of rainwater. The foundation, which also serves as the floor, is concrete. Likewise, the walls are concrete blocks. The blocks were hand-poured by Henry Stuart and set in place. The blocks weigh approximately 60lbs. apiece. Stuart inscribed each block with the date of manufacture; thus, the entire construction process can be documented as having occurred between November 11th, 1925 to September 27th, 1926. The domed roof is constructed from a combination of brick and small hand-poured concrete blocks. The roof begins at a height of seven feet above the interior floor. The roof blocks were dated as well. A gap of eight days is present in the record that

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corresponds to the devastating 1926 hurricane. After the blocks were set, the roof was covered in mortar.

The building is well illuminated with six windows, which are double paned and appear to be ground level from the exterior. From the interior, they are two feet above the floor. The windows were constructed in such a manner as to swing out and upward. They were kept open by the use of stakes placed in the ground. The windows are modern replacements (circa 2000), based on photographs taken during Henry Stuart's occupancy. The original windows were missing, but the casements remained to which the replacement mahogany windows have been attached. The domed roof features two skylights with glass panes. Originally, the skylights could be opened for ventilation but are now permanently closed to protect from the elements. By opening the windows and skylights the building could be well ventilated. Add to these factors the fact that the hut was set into the ground, which would maintain a constant temperature around 58 degrees Fahrenheit, the building would provide a cool respite from the Gulf Coast's hot summer months. Likewise, the closure of the windows and skylight, the constant floor temperature near 58 degrees, the use of a Franklin stove would provide more than enough warmth during the winter months.

The interior consists of a single room. A smokestack and block chimney allows for a Franklin stove, while a bread oven was located on the exterior of the building. The oven shared the same chimney but with a separate flue from that of the interior stove. A replacement stove has been placed inside (circa 2000) and the original bread oven has not been replaced. A sleeping cot was suspended from the ceiling by hooks that are still present at approximately seven feet above the floor. The furnishings, which consist of a table, writing desk, and bookcase, are replacements (Circa 2000). They are; however, period furnishings from the 1920's and 1930's and correspond to historical evidence provided by contemporary news articles on Mr. Henry Stuart.

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As the only structure of its kind on the Gulf Coast, the "Hermit House" represents a unique design. It is also the only physical reminder of Henry Stuart, who was known in newspaper articles and local lore as "The Hermit of Montrose".

Archaeological Component

Although no formal archaeological survey has been made of this area, the potential for subsurface remains is good. Buried portions may contain significant information that may be useful in interpreting the entire area.

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8. Statement of Significance

Criterion C (Architecture)

The Henry Stuart House is significant under criterion "C" for architecture because of its unique design that runs counter to the prevailing architectural principles of the late 19th and early 20th century, particularly those adapted for hot, humid summers along Alabama's Gulf Coast. The small, circular concrete block building was constructed in the space of a year during 1925-1926. Mr. Stuart built his home of solid, concrete blocks weighing approximately 60 lbs. apiece. He used solid blocks so that the structure would be hurricane proof. He poured and set the blocks himself. This is documented by newspaper articles on Henry Stuart. Additionally, the building is set two feet into the ground, rather than raised off the ground like most contemporary coastal residences. With the ground maintaining a near constant 58 degrees Fahrenheit and its skylight and windows open to provide an updraft and cross ventilation, the skillfully constructed building proved to be comfortable and practical. Similar in shape but not overall construction were the pottery kilns in Fairhope. These structures would have been contemporary with Stuart's house, but whether or not they inspired a house design is unknown.

From what is known about Mr. Stuart and his activities, the overall simplicity of design for both the exterior execution and use of interior space is an expression of living simply through ones' own means. This self-sustaining lifestyle is evidenced through the hand poured block, the photographs of Mr. Stuart standing by his raised garden beds, and the large loom that occupied the interior of the house. Mr. Stuart also capitalized on the volume of space by suspending a bed from the ceiling.

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Henry Stuart's house is further significant as the only testament to the man known as "the modern Thoreau", whose simplistic life has endeared him to the residents of the area.

Although the building has survived and all missing elements have been restored as close as possible to their original condition, the setting has not survived. "Tolstoy Park", which was the name given by Henry Stuart to his property, has been compromised by commercial development. The 32' x 32" parcel where the house stands with a lone surviving oak tree is all that remains of the original 10 acres. In spite of the close proximity of new development, a visitor quickly becomes aware of two things, the low slung modern commercial building immediately to the west is unobtrusive, painted a dark gray and shaded by a canopy of trees along the periphery of the lot. The first thing one notices, however, is the Hut itself, standing under the shade of a mature oak tree. The eye is immediately drawn to this unusual building in its shady setting, and by accident of design, everything else fades into the background.

Historical Summary

From 1923 to 1944, a barefoot old man lived in the small, concrete building located just off U.S. Highway 98 near the towns of Fairhope and Montrose. He was called both "the hermit of Montrose" and "a modern Thoreau". As evidenced by his nicknames, his philosophy was one of individualism and of "getting back to nature". When he left to return with his son to Oregon in 1944, he would leave behind an enduring legacy and one of the more unusual buildings on the Gulf Coast.

Henry James Stuart was born in 1858 in Hampshire, England. His parents came to the United States and settled in Ohio. He received a Bachelor's Degree in Divinity from Mt. Union College, located in Ohio, and later studied telegraphy at Oberline. Newspaper accounts state that

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Mr. Stuart's first job was working as an assistant to his father, who was also a telegrapher (*Eastern Shore Courier*, 15 August 1974).

Henry Stuart married and with two small sons moved to Washington D.C., where it is reported that he worked at a hotel. The Stuart family eventually moved to Denver, Colorado (*Eastern Shore Courier*, 15 August 1974). His last stop was Nampa, Idaho (Brewer 2005, 269). He lived in Nampa for 20 years (*Eastern Shore Courier*, 15 August 1974), but on advice from his doctor he was advised to move to a warmer climate because of health problems. After considering southern California, Henry Stuart eventually decided on Fairhope, Alabama. By this time his wife had passed away, and his two sons were grown. This was in 1923 (*Baldwin Register*, 10 February 1998). He purchased 10 acres of land from P.A. Parker for \$150 dollars (*Birmingham News*, 03 October 2004). The land was located just outside the Fairhope city limits near Montrose.

It was his life in Fairhope that earned him the titles of "the hermit of Montrose" and "a modern day Thoreau". Speculation on why he chose to live near Fairhope range from his attraction to the Single Tax Colony's concept of individualism (*Birmingham News*, 03 October 2004) to the city's connection with the great sociologist, Henry George, who proposed the theory of the Single Tax and who had ties to Leo Tolstoy. The great Russian writer was a favorite of Henry Stuart, and Tolstoy mentioned Henry George on several occasions in his writings (Brewer 2005, 261). Stuart named his ten-acre parcel, "Tolstoy Park".

In 1925, Stuart began the construction of the concrete, circular building that would be his home for the next 20 years. He dated each hand-poured cement block with the day, date, and year. By examining the dates, it can be determined that he started construction on November 11th, 1925 and finished construction on September 27th, 1926. By all accounts, Stuart built the house by himself. It is stated in newspaper accounts that he decided on the small, concrete building because

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it would be hurricane proof (*Eastern Shore Courier*, 01 November 1979). No information survives as to why he decided to set the building into the ground, or to make it round. However, the building did survive the devastating hurricane of 1926 and has since survived many more, including Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

In a lengthy newspaper article from 1929, Stuart gave a brief account of his daily activities, which consisted mainly of tending his vegetable gardens and reading. He was a vegetarian, and maintained his small gardens in raised concrete terraces. He did this in order to prevent bending over to tend his vegetables. His library was quite extensive with Tolstoy occupying the place of honor on his bookshelves. Other favorite authors included Thoreau, Whitman, and Wilde. Of particular note are his copies of the works of the anarchist, Emma Goldman. In the same article Stuart even declared himself an anarchist but not of the violent type (*Birmingham News*, 03 March 1929). Henry Stuart's other activities involved weaving, which he learned in Idaho (Ibid) and keeping a daily diary, its whereabouts now unknown (*Eastern Shore Courier*, 01 November 1979). He wrote to many people but often used bits of scrap paper. No examples survive; perhaps due to the fact that he used any bits of paper he could find, mostly from old newspapers (Ibid).

Henry Stuart did keep a log of visitor's signatures that has survived. People would visit him and speak with him on various topics. No records of the conversations exist. The only record we do have is the aforementioned signatures in his guest book and the reminiscences of those who visited him. He was not only approached by the local inhabitants, but also by people of some fame. Clarence Darrow's signature appears six times in the record (*Eastern Shore Courier*, 15 August 1974).

Mr. Stuart lived in Fairhope from 1923-1944. He had originally left his home in Nampa, Idaho for health reasons. His health improved, but this would not last. In his eighties and in

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declining health, one of his sons convinced Henry Stuart to return with him to his home in Oregon. He lived for another two years, dying in 1946 (*Baldwin Register*, 10 February 1998). His philosophy of life is best summed up in a newspaper article from 1979. Stuart felt that God's true temples were in the woods, and nature writes the laws of God before our eyes (*Eastern Shore Courier*, 01 November 1979). An earlier article expressed the sentiment in his own words,

“For orthodox churches I have little use; I worship
God in His own temples; I see Him in every bush
And every shrub when I walk through the woods.”

Henry James Stuart

Although Henry Stuart left no books that expressed his philosophy of life, it is recalled in the collective memory of the long time residents of Fairhope. Today, the only remaining artifacts of Stuart are a few photographs, the register of names, and the small, concrete building that he built with his own hands.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Baldwin Register, 10 February 1998.

Birmingham News, 03 March 1929.

Birmingham News, 03 October 2004.

Brewer, Sonny. *The Poet of Tolstoy Park*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2005.

Eastern Shore Courier, 15 August 1974.

Eastern Shore Courier, 01 November 1979.

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10. Verbal Boundary Description

The Henry Stuart House is located on the Northwest corner of the intersection of U.S. Highway 98 and Parker Road. The property under consideration for nomination is shown on the accompanying sketch map, entitled "The Henry Stuart House".

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the Henry Stuart House were drawn to include the 32'x 32' parcel upon which the house is situated. It is the only remaining portion of the property known as "Tolstoy Park", which was so named by the builder of the house, Henry Stuart.

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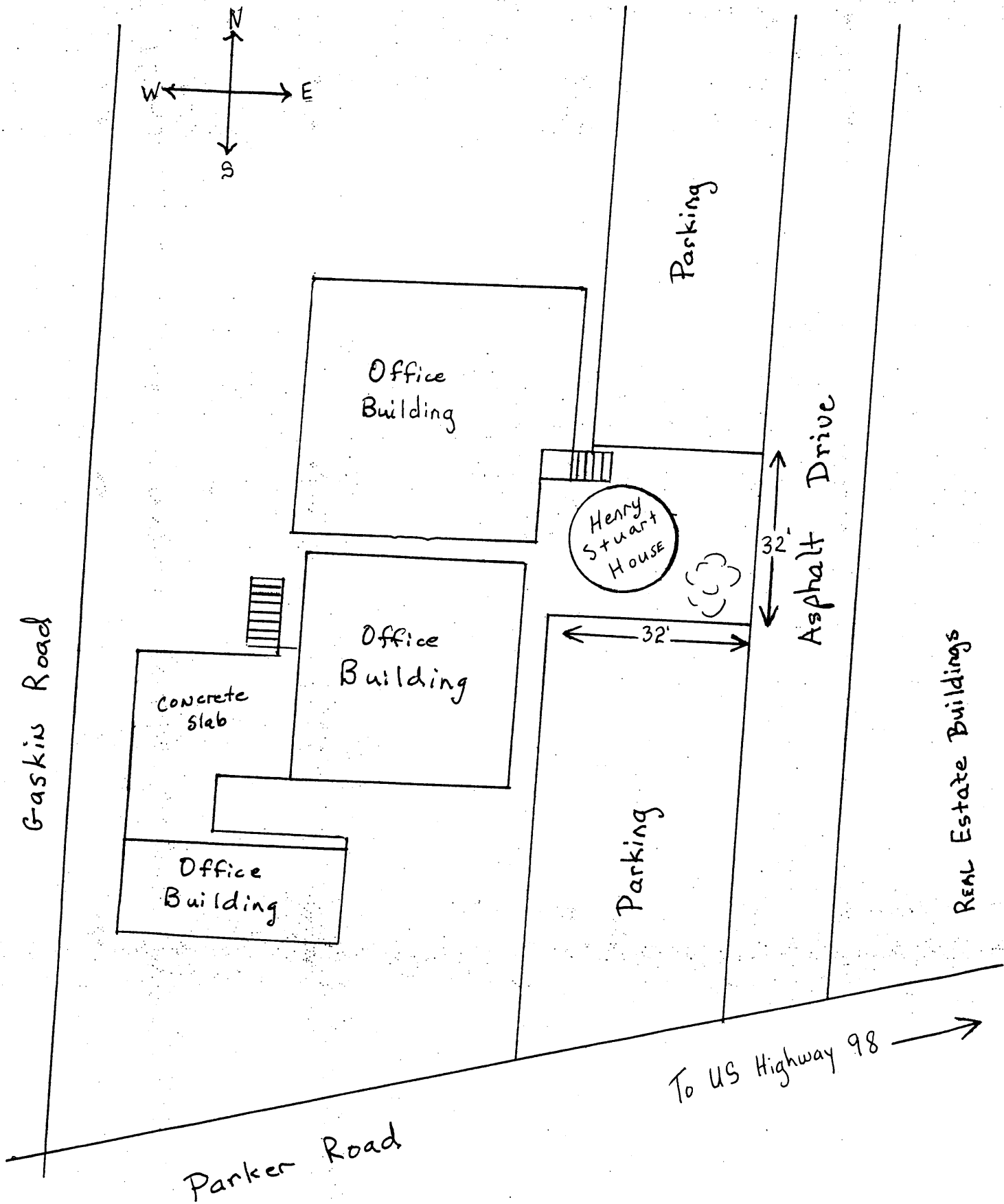
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Photographic Key

Stuart, Henry, House
Montrose, Baldwin County, Alabama
Christy Anderson, photographer
November 2004
Alabama Historical Commission Negative File - The Henry Stuart House/ Rolls 1 and 2

Photo#	Description
1.	Interior view of domed ceiling featuring twin skylights.
2.	Interior, camera facing northwest.
3.	Interior, camera facing east.
4.	Interior, view of domed ceiling.
5.	Interior, view of steps leading to doorway, camera facing southwest.
6.	Interior, view of lintel above doorway with inscribed date.
7.	Exterior, view of steps leading down to doorway.
8.	Exterior, camera facing southwest.
9.	Exterior, camera facing north.
10.	Exterior, camera facing north.
11.	Exterior, camera facing west-northwest.
12.	Photograph of Henry Stuart standing outside his house, circa 1929. Photographer unknown.



THE HENRY STUART HOUSE