

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Muscle Shoals Sound Studio
other names/site number 3614 Jackson Highway

2. Location

street & number 3614 Jackson Highway
city or town Sheffield
state Alabama code AL county Colbert code 033

not for publication N/A
vicinity N/A
zip code 35660

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.)

Elizabeth Ann Brown
Signature of certifying official/Title

April 11, 2006
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): _____

John W. [Signature]
Signature of Keeper

6/2/06
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	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> 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:
0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Commerce/Trade Sub: Business
Recreation and Culture Music Facility

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Recreation and Culture Sub: Music Facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Other: One story, freestanding commercial building

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Concrete Block
 roof: Composition
 walls: Concrete Block

other: Wood

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)

Performing Arts _____

Period of Significance 1969-1978

Significant Dates N/A

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

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder N/A _____

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: N/A

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>16</u>	<u>438330</u>	<u>3847300</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 Gene A. Ford, Architectural Historian/Christy Anderson, NR Reviewer

organization The Office of Archaeological Research/Alabama Historical Commission date 10/07/2005

street & number 13075 Moundville Archaeological Park/468 S. Perry Street telephone 205.371.8713/334.230.2688

city or town Moundville/Montgomery state AL zip code 35474/36130-0900

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 Noel Webster

street & number 3614 Jackson Highway telephone 256.783.2641

city or town Sheffield state AL zip code 35660

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VII. Narrative Description

The original Muscle Shoals Sound Studio (MSSS) at 3614 Jackson Highway in Sheffield is located in the northwest corner of Alabama. Sheffield is sandwiched between Tusculumbia to the South, Muscle Shoals to the east, and Florence to the North. The area comprising the four cities is collectively known as Muscle Shoals. Built circa 1945-46, the concrete block, stucco and permastone clad MSSS is situated on a small city block amongst residences, commercial buildings, and a cemetery. The original MSSS at 3614 Jackson Highway retains a high degree of integrity.

The Rolling Stones' movie *Gimme Shelter* provides an apt introduction to the setting of 3614 Jackson Highway. In the 1969 rockumentary, the Stones are shown tumbling into a Ford sedan at the Holiday Inn in Florence and shuffling over the O'Neal Bridge. Not shown in the scene are a series of shoals along the Tennessee River, which lie below the bridge and separate Florence from Sheffield. In times past, the shoals were home to mussels, bivalve shellfish, that along with the shallow craggy waters passed on their names to Sheffield's sister city to the east, Muscle Shoals, and the subject recording studio. A short moment later, and the trip is really that short, the Stones arrive at 3614 Jackson Highway and a date with destiny from which wild horses could not drag them away.

Although the Keep Alabama Beautiful sign depicted in the movie no longer stands across the highway from the recording studio, much in the setting is the same as it was 35 years ago. The MSSS is part of a small collection of commercial buildings sparsely situated along this stretch of the Jackson Highway. Several of the buildings, including the recording studio, were built in the decades proceeding World War II. These edifices feature concrete block and hollow tile construction and little to no embellishment. Present in the collection are one half dozen or so buildings built in the 1920s. Streamlined in design and clad in brick and stucco, these buildings and a small number of bungalows scattered throughout the area represent a subdivision that did not come to full fruition before Henry Ford withdrew plans to build a mighty automobile manufacturing center in Muscle Shoals. A recession ensued and killed development projects throughout the Quad Cities of Muscle Shoals, Sheffield, Florence, and Tusculumbia.

Oakwood Cemetery lies across the highway from 3614 Jackson Highway. A mature vegetation screen conceals a number of grave markers from view. This vegetation screen was not present to give these headstones shelter back in 1969; consequently, they got a very minor and silent part in the Stones' movie when the film maker panned across the studio parking lot and took in the Jackson Highway scene.

Gimme Shelter's brief tribute to the parking lot of the MSSS does not include a view to the south. Had the film maker turned his camera southward, he would have encountered an alley. This alley runs between Jackson Highway and Tennessee Street. Tennessee Street intersects the highway at an angle approximately 100 feet to the west. Three commercial buildings stand between Tennessee Street and the alley. Built circa 1945-6, these concrete block and brick clad buildings along with the MSSS served as the Gibson Blind Factory. For a decade, the factory machines kept a rhythmic pace cutting and assembling wood blinds. Gibson closed in the late 1950s. These buildings stood vacant in 1969, as they are now. The current owner of the recording studio also owns these edifices, and is in the process of renovating them. When renovations are complete, the buildings will function as a gift shop, café, and internet bar in conjunction with 3614 Jackson Highway. Because these buildings did not function as part of the studio during the period of significance, 1969 to 1978, and stand on a separate lot from 3614 Jackson Highway, this trio is not included in this nomination.

The original MSSS is located at the end of a block bounded by Jackson Highway to the northwest, State Street to the north, Tennessee Street to the South, and Milner Street to the east. The recording studio lot lies somewhat midway

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between State and Tennessee Streets. Oriented in a northwest/southeast direction, the lot measures 50 feet wide along Jackson Highway, 100 feet deep, and 50 feet along the aforementioned alley.

The 5,000 square foot lot is sparse in its landscape design. The camera man for the Stones found this to be the case in 1969. The sole vegetation cover consists of grass, which blankets the north, east, and south sides of the studio grounds. Ground stones and dirt spread across the slightly rolling parking area on the west side. Cracked possibly from all the foot traffic that once beat a path to the front door, or from all the shake, rattle, and rolling that went on inside, a sidewalk extends from the front of the studio to the Jackson Highway. This sidewalk is the very one on which Cher, Sonny, and a host of musicians stood on in a 1969 photograph taken while Cher was recording an album that came to be aptly titled "3614 Jackson Highway."

Somewhat in the middle of this renowned piece of Sheffield real estate is the original MSSS building. The music studio has a footprint that measures 25 feet wide and 68 feet deep. A 4 feet deep canopy extends across the south end. At the southeast corner, there is a set of stairs that are 6 feet wide and 13 feet deep. The building has two levels: a ground floor and a basement. Characteristic of the mid to late 1940s, the building is built of concrete blocks.

A shed roof crowns the studio. This roof features tar and asphalt sheet composition. A parapet projects slightly above three sides of the roof. On the façade, the parapet is uniform in height while on the two long sides of the building it steps down from the façade to the rear. The current owner recently installed an inconspicuous gutter at the rear of the building to divert water from collecting at the base of the southeast wall where it was leaking into the basement.

The facade of the utilitarian building is not without some stylistic appeal. A veneer of permastone features a somewhat attractive pattern of randomly placed thin and thick and light and darker tone stones. The central bay of the three bay façade has a recessed and open vestibule measuring 5 feet wide at the front and 3 feet wide at the back. An inset, single leaf, solid core, wood door occupies this opening. Voussoirs and a keystone adorn the lintel above the door. Flanking either side of this entrance are plate glass windows, which are set at angles to the door. Above the central bay is another lintel with voussoirs and a keystone. Two permastone studded pylons stand at attention between the three bays. Large plate glass windows fill voids in the other bay walls. Like the central entrance, voussoirs and a keystone crown the tops of the windows.

Resting atop the two pylons is the recording studio's signature signage. Rounded at the ends and measuring approximately 1.5 feet tall and 19 feet long, the metal sign bears the address "3614 Jackson Highway." Although the unassuming sign indicates nothing about music, everyone in the music world from music producers to musicians to fans knows the address is synonymous with the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio.

By comparison, the rest of the exterior is quite simple. Stucco coats the other three sides of the building. Fenestration on the southwest side consists of three basement casement windows, and a single leaf, wood door. Other southwest side characteristics include an opening for an air conditioner wall unit and two central air and heat duct openings. A six foot by 13 foot, concrete block porch with metal, open rail balustrades fronts the door. The porch is currently without a roof. The owner removed the previous roof, which was not original, and plans to build a new one in the likeness of the original. Four windows (three of which have been covered with wood sheets) on the first level and a single leaf, wood door on the basement level comprise the fenestration on the southeast side. Fronting the door is a 4 foot long and 6 foot wide canopy with a shed roof. Seven openings punctuate the northeast wall. Unlike the first level windows on the southeast side, which are in various states of 6/6 double hung sash design, the first level window on the northeast side has a single, fixed, pane of glass. Two air conditioner units occupy rectangles cut into the wall near the façade. Two of the four basement

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windows feature 1/1 casements like the southwest side; the other two basement casements have been removed. Security bars cover the casement windows.

According to Noel Webster, the current studio owner, and a Colbert County Property Record Card, the addition of the side and rear canopies and the air conditioning modifications occurred between 1969 and 1974 (Webster 2004; Colbert County 2000). With the interior and exterior doors and windows closed for sound control, the studio became smoke congested and intolerably hot, especially during the summer; so, the members of the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section added air conditioning for climate control and ventilation. The canopies afforded protection from the elements while loading and unloading gear as well as taking a break from the action inside. The porches were often the site of impromptu jam sessions. During one trip to the studio, Bob Dylan played the blues with Eddie Hinton, one of the house musicians, on the side porch (Webster 2004; Ritz 1993:296). Were it not for these additions, the exterior of the famed tune factory would resemble its pre studio days.

Historic photographs show that the original MSSS has changed very little over the last five decades. The aforementioned 1969 Cher photograph shows the façade of the studio looking very much like it does today; however, there is one noticeable difference: the door consisted of double leafs, each leaf of which had a single pane of glass. Some time between 1969 and 1973, the MSRS replaced this door with the current one for security purposes and in order to mute outside traffic noise and thereby produce better sounds for bands like Traffic inside. Traffic with Stevie Winwood, Jim Capaldi, and Dave Mason recorded there in 1972-1973. In a 1973 photograph of Willie Nelson and Atlantic Records, Vice President Jerry Wexler outside 3614 Jackson Highway trading hits and hats, the present door is barely visible. Quite visible are the distinctive permastone veneer, pylons, and signature signage of the studio facade. Requiring no facelift, these features have aged well.

The layout of the first floor reflects the building's past and present use as a recording studio. A wall approximately 16 feet from the street side separates office space from the studio proper. On either side of a central hall, which coincides with the front entrance, are two offices. The northernmost office measures 10 feet across the front (street side) and 16 feet deep. Due to water damage from a leaking roof, Noel Webster stripped some of the sheetrock walls and ceiling to the studs. Webster is in the process of replacing the sheetrock and will restore the room to its historic appearance (Webster 2005).

From 1969 to 1978, this office served as a reception room. Gold and platinum records testifying to the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio's reputation as a hit maker once lined the walls. These awards for selling 500,000 and 1,000,000 units, respectively, went with the MSRS when it moved to a larger recording studio in Sheffield in 1978. This studio, located at 1000 Alabama Avenue and counted as a contributing resource in the Sheffield Residential District (NRHP listed in 2000), closed in March 2005. The gold and platinum records now reside at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in nearby Tusculmbia. In a recent conversation, Webster indicated that he intends to acquire facsimiles of the award platters and recreate the walls of fame in the former reception office. When Webster opens the studio for tours in the near future, this room will serve as a general office and admissions.

The office across the hall is seven feet shallower than the reception room. Jimmy Johnson, Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section guitarist, conducted business in this office when he was not creating his signature licks and riffs on his Telecaster or working his sound board wizardry in the control booth. Webster is in the process of replacing water damaged sheetrock with new sheetrock. Currently serving as storage space, the office will function as a gallery when restored. The gallery will pay homage to the many musicians who recorded here. Of course, the gallery will feature media articles, film, photographs, albums, and memorabilia dedicated to the Swampers. Originally penned by Leon Russell who thought

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the MSRS played swamp music, Lynyrd Skynyrd immortalized this unofficial nickname for the Muscle Shoals four in their anthem "Sweet Home Alabama" (Moseley 2005).

A room 10 feet long and 7 feet deep occupies the space between Johnson's office and the recording studio proper. When Bob Seger was recording his "Old Time Rock and Roll" at the studio in the 1970s, this room served as an isolation booth for vocals and guitars. For this reason, the booth has acoustic tiles affixed to the walls and ceiling. A wood veneer door between the booth and Jimmy Johnson's office was actually the bathroom door. Due to years of wear and tear, water damage, and vandalism, Webster had to install a new bathroom door. He kept the damaged door because of the nostalgic and historical value of the musicians' autographs and comments on it, and placed it in the isolation booth where it can both be viewed by the public during visiting hours and secured from vandals and thefts at the end of the day behind another locked door. Prior to Webster's purchase of the studio, vandals broke into the building and defaced the door with an incorrectly spelled "Bob Seager [sic] Rules." In addition to the autographed door, the booth contains 1970s era recording equipment. Webster plans to use the room for storage and an isolation booth during recording sessions.

The MSSS's recording room is essentially a large open space measuring 25 feet wide and 37 feet deep. That these and other dimensions associated with this part of the studio are approximate must be noted. The studio defies traditional building principles for there are few, if any plumb lines, right angles, and flat surfaces. In 1969, the MSRS intentionally designed the studio with a great many irregularities in accordance with acoustical laws. Plumb lines, right angles, and flat surfaces promote standing waves, the great menaces of recording. In turn, standing waves produce feedback which adversely affects sound quality. Thus, the Rhythm Section honed the recording tone by embracing sound recording principles and diverging from sound building design.

The floor of the MSSS is no ordinary floor. It has special sound enhancing qualities. By design, the floor slopes inward from the walls to the center to deflect standing waves. To create this effect, the Rhythm Section removed some of the two-by-fours from the built up red oak floor beams in the sub flooring. According to Webster, sound waves from recording sessions induce the red oak beams to vibrate, producing a sound muck like that of a kick drum (2005). The resulting resonance creates a deeper and richer beat and overall enhanced sound. Webster replaced the traffic worn, alcohol stained, cigarette burned, and water damaged carpet in the studio with Marley Concert Flooring in 2000 (Webster 2005). Composed of a thick rubber membrane, this flooring material is acknowledged as the standard in the music and film recording industry and is used on concert stages throughout the world. The material possesses both durability and sound control characteristics. It reflects, rather than absorbs, sound waves, creating dynamic, rather than static sound.

Like the floor of the studio, the walls and ceiling are covered with sound enhancing materials. Burlap panels running the width and length of the recording room hang loosely from the ceiling. The walls also have panels covering them. Spaced at irregular intervals, the panels measure approximately 4 feet wide, 10 feet high, and several inches thick. They consist of 40 acoustic tiles, many of which are 1 foot square. The panels project several inches out from the wall. In between the panels, the concrete walls are bare. The uneven surfaces of the built up panels and burlap fabric prevent standing sound waves.

Unlike the acoustic tile panels, which are original, the burlap is replacement material. Heavily soiled by nicotine stains and water damage from a leaking roof, the original burlap attached to the ceiling was unsalvageable. Noel Webster consulted historic photographs and the Swampers in order to accurately recreate the historic look and materials of the ceiling. Restoration of this aspect of the building is important not only for the role burlap plays in sound proofing but also because the Swampers referred to the studio as the "Burlap Palace" (Webster 2005).

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Within the recording studio proper, there are five small rooms. In the northeast corner, there is a vocal booth measuring approximately 7 ft. by 8 ft. The booth interior has acoustic tile panels, a shed roof, a window on the east side, and a door on the south side. Many musicians have signed the tiles. Along the opposite wall of the studio, there is a bathroom. As legend has it, Mick Jagger locked himself in this bathroom and wrote the lyrics to "Wild Horses" during their 1969 recording session. A drum booth is next to the bathroom. Like the vocal booth, the drum booth has a shed roof, glass, and acoustic tile panels. Roger Hawkins' (the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section drummer) "b #" signage is on one wall. A vestibule and the control booth line the east wall. Constructed of glass and partially covered with acoustic tiles, the walls of the control room are set at angles for sound proofing.

In addition to the booths, the recording area has several stations. Several metal and vinyl covered chairs located next to the vocal booth mark the space where MSRS guitarist, Tommy Johnson, and session guitarists, Pete Carr and Eddie Hinton, sat during recordings. A vinyl covered sofa next to the vocal booth and guitarist chairs is the actual one Keith Richards reclined on in 1969. Joe Cocker and other musicians sat on the sofa while trying to compose their thoughts for their studio time (Webster 2005). Two keyboards stand upright between the control booth and the guitar station. This is where Barry Becket, MSRS keyboardist, painted the ivories from 1969 to 1978. MSRS bass player, David Hood, thumped out his rhythm parts at a makeshift spot over in a corner next to Hawkins' drum booth. This layout is as it was from 1969 to 1978.

While the sofa and chairs represent part of the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio's original furnishings from the studio's heyday, the instruments and recording equipment are vintage but not Swamper property. The guitars and Marshal and Mesa Boogie amplifiers date to the 1970s, or earlier. The amplifiers have tubes rather than solid state circuitry, which became all the rage in the 1980s. Ted Nugent, the "Motor City Madman," belted out plenty of rock and roll through the Mesa Boogie stack in the 1970s. He recently donated the stack to Webster. Bobby Whitlock recently made a gift of the keyboards to the studio. The keyboards own a special place in the pantheon of rock and roll. Whitlock played them while accompanying Derek and the Dominos on "Layla" and "Bell Bottom Blues" and George Harrison on "All Things Must Pass" (Webster 2004). The Gretsch drum set ensconced in Roger Hawkins' drum booth belonged to Mark Herndon of Alabama.

All of the musical instruments and the Altec Lansing speakers throughout the recording room are wired to a 1970s era, 24 channel, MCI JH-416, sound board in the control booth. The recording room also features an MCI mastering machine and MCI, JH-16, 16 and 24 track, tape machines. The sound board and mastering machine once belonged to legendary Capricorn Records while the tape machines came from a studio in Nashville (Webster 2005). Capricorn Records rose to fame on the talents of such bands as The Allman Brothers. The MSSS had the exact makes and models of the MCI soundboard and tape machine in the control booth before the studio relocated to 1000 Alabama Avenue in 1978 (Webster 2004; Borgerson 2004).

The studio's vintage musical instruments and recording equipment are more than just nostalgic museum pieces. They can produce and record music from acoustic blues and folk to zydeco, which incidentally pretty much represents the range of music recorded by the MSRS from 1969 to 1978. Because of the recording room's acoustics and the vintage equipment, the present incarnation of the 3614 Jackson Highway studio can reproduce the sound and vibe for which the Burlap Palace was renowned.

The basement of the building is sparse in design. The floor consists of smooth poured concrete while a major portion of the concrete block walls has a smooth coat of stucco. Overhead, the red oak floor joists and floorboards of the first floor are exposed. Several metal columns and a partial partition support a beam that runs longitudinally down the middle of the

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basement. The partition separates a room that was and continues to be used for storage from the rest of the subterranean space. A makeshift kitchen is located in the northeast corner. The Swampers and visiting musicians often ate meals in this kitchen, especially when recording sessions ran long into the night. The south side of the basement featured two offices from 1969 to 1978. The offices housed the two publishing companies operated by the MSRS members. Unfortunately, part of the bathroom and drum booth floor collapsed from serious water infiltration causing the thin veneer walls demarcating the offices to collapse. Currently, the basement serves as living space for the building owner, Noel Webster.

In resurrecting the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, Webster consulted many sources. Dick Cooper, a photographer who documented many a magical musical moment in the Muscle Shoals during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, provided Webster with numerous snapshots from his photo shoots at 3614 Jackson Highway. Webster viewed and reviewed 3614's appearances in *Gimme Shelter* and a 1977 PBS documentary. The PBS film featured Peter Yarrow (of Peter, Paul, and Mary fame) and a session he was doing with Mary MacGregor. Her single "Torn Between Two Lovers" became a hit in 1976. From these celluloid archives Webster had a good picture of the studio's layout, materials, and vibe. Photographs of the MSSS in Lynyrd Skynyrd's 1978 "First and Last" album provided additional information about the studio interior. During the restoration, Swampers David Hood and Jimmy Johnson occasionally visited and offered expert advice, especially regarding the recording equipment. Webster conducted a lot of research in order to capture the historic essence of the MSSS.

Judging by the timbre of their responses, Webster's restoration efforts scored a platinum hit with the Swampers and their cohorts. Pleased with the rebirth of his favorite haunt, former session guitarist Pete Carr now makes a daily pilgrimage to the studio to recount his contributions to the Muscle Shoals Sound (Palmer 2001). During a 2001 interview, Jimmy Johnson heard some of the MSSS hits played through the Capricorn console in the same control room where Johnson masterfully mixed "Wild Horses" and "Brown Sugar" and said the experience "was eerie-but comfortable. Noel is really doing it right. Not only can he keep the old thing alive, he can do a lot of sessions from all over the world" (Palmer 2001). Jimmy Johnson and David Hood consider the new incarnation of 3614 Jackson Highway to be hauntingly like the original version.

Archaeological Component

Although no archaeological survey has been conducted, there is a potential for subsurface remains.

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Section VIII. Statement of Significance

The original Muscle Shoals Sound Studio at 3614 Jackson Highway in Sheffield, Alabama is a nationally significant recording studio. The MSSS is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) based on Criterion A in the area of American music history. In the pantheon of the music industry, 3614 Jackson Highway resides along side other famous music makers like Sun Records and Stax in Memphis, Chess Records in Chicago, Motown in Detroit, and Capital Records in Los Angeles. From 1969 to 1978, the concrete block, stucco and permastone clad building known as the MSSS housed the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section (MSRS). At this studio, the MSRS orchestrated over 50 gold and platinum hits and hundreds of albums for pop, rock, blues, funk, soul, reggae, and even country music superstars such as Cher, the Rolling Stones, Paul Simon, Art Garfunkle, Willie Nelson, Joe Cocker, Rod Stewart, Bob Seger, and a host of others. Although the MSSS achieved significance within the last 50 years, the legendary studio more than qualifies for listing in the NRHP under Criterion Consideration G. A wealth of pop culture and scholarly documents chronicle the exceptional importance of this temple of sound in the history of the nation's, if not the world's, music history. The MSSS at 3614 Jackson Highway retains a high degree of integrity.

The MSSS's period of significance at 3614 Jackson Highway extends from 1969, the year in which the MSRS opened their recording studio, to 1978, the year the MSRS moved to a studio at 1000 Alabama Avenue in Sheffield. The MSRS only operated this latter studio until 1985 when they sold the business to Malaco of Jackson, Mississippi, which ran the studio for the next 20 years. The move to 1000 Alabama Avenue coincided with a change in the MSRS, as Berry Beckett moved on to Nashville to pursue interests in music production in the early 1980s. While the remaining three members of the MSRS continued to make music with the likes of Bob Dylan and Dire Straits at the second MSSS, 3614 Jackson Highway represents the bulk of their work. A film production company bought the 1000 Alabama Avenue building in 2005 and removed all the recording equipment, awards, and personal effects of Malaco and the MSRS; consequently, the 3614 Jackson Highway studio best represents the storied history of the MSRS.

The national significance of the MSSS at 3614 Jackson Highway registers on many different levels. Although it was a very small, independent studio, the MSSS was a major contributor to the national music industry in terms of production quantity and quality. During the ten year tenure at this address, the Swampers "played three sessions a day, six days a week. "We cut thirty, forty albums a year," according to Jimmy Johnson (Fuqua 1991:65). At times, the MSRS claimed "ten percent of the Hot 100 chart" (Fuqua 1991:52). Of the 400 albums recorded there, 52 went gold and platinum in the 1970s (Webster 2005; RIAA 2005). Millie Jackson, Traffic, Johnnie Taylor, Cat Stevens, Bobby Womack, Wilson Pickett, and Dr. Hook recorded gold and platinum LPs at 3614 as well as the other previously mentioned musicians (RIAA 2005). Thanks to the advent of the compact disc format, Internet, ebay, Baby Boomer surplus income, concert revivals and unending farewell tours, and recent press releases sales of much of the MSSS music continues to this day.

The MSSS earned high critical praise for its success. Peter Guralnick, who is "highly regarded as the nation's preeminent scholar of twentieth-century American vernacular music," assessed the MSSS' place in the pantheon of popular music thus:

For Muscle Shoals Sound was successful beyond anyone's wildest imaginings ... Muscle Shoals became not only the funk factory of the '70s but the source to which countless pop acts repaired for regeneration. Simon and Garfunkle cut hit sessions at Muscle Shoals, both as a duo ("My Little Town") and singly. So did Cher and Willie Nelson, Bob Seger and Rod Stewart, even the Rolling Stones, whose "Brown Sugar" and "Wild Horses" emerged from the studio in the midst of their fateful 1969 tour (Guralnick 1986).

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Dan Forte, whose reputation as a music critic reverberates on the same level as Guralnick's, trumpeted the MSRS' prominence: "they are musical chameleons who can play well in just about any style without imposing their own personality on the session ... they are probably more in demand than any other self contained rhythm section because they can move effortlessly from one genre to the next ... (Forte 1982).

Perhaps the most important indicator of their place in music history is the recognition the MSRS received from their peers. In a September/October *Harp* article entitled "Muscle Men: A Look at the Musicians," former Stax marketing head Al Bell sang a lot of praise for the MSRS:

The chemistry that developed between me and those guys was amazing. I felt really comfortable down there 'cause they welcomed me with open arms. And the chemistry between them and the Staples was just pure magic, man. They felt the Staples so easily, felt what Mavis was trying to do as a singer and the hits just rolled out (Tennille 2005:8).

"Muscle Shoals did the ballads like "Main Street" much better than my band. The wonderful thing about them is the second you started playing the song, it sounded like a record," is what Bob Seger had to say about the MSRS in a February 2005 *Rolling Stone* website article (Keel 2005:2). Jerry Wexler and Bob Dylan cast their ballots for the MSRS as the best soul and r&b rhythm section in their biographies (Ritz 1993:307; McKeen 1993:67). Wexler proved his point in the early 1980s by inviting the Muscle Shoals boys over to Switzerland for a Montreaux Festival Blues night. They backed Luther Allison, Johnny Copeland, Johnny Mars, and B. B. King. "B. B. King loved them; the Alabamans kicked ass; and Switzerland sizzled" (Ritz 1993:307). Last but not least in the accolade cavalcade, which could extend for many more pages, is Lynyrd Skynyrd. Lead guitarist Gary Rossington added to the liner notes of the reissue of Lynyrd Skynyrd's "First and ... Last: The Complete Muscle Shoals Album" this statement of gratitude, "Even though we were from Jacksonville, Florida, the Muscle Shoals Swampers helped us so much that I think Lynyrd Skynyrd's whole career and music really are from Muscle Shoals, Alabama" (O'Brien 1998).

The litmus test for establishing exceptional significance for those properties that have achieved significance within the last 50 years is the existence of scholarly evaluation. The MSSS and MSRS were the subject of much industry press in the 1970s and 1980s. *Guitar Player*, *Rolling Stone*, *News Week*, *Cash Box*, *Billboard*, and other publications sounded out on the MSRS's hip grooves and sweet soul moves and explored the reasons for the MSRS's huge popularity. In the 1970s, Peter Yarrow starred in and narrated a 1970s PBS documentary about the MSSS. The MSRS' vinyl platters even became the subject of congressional matters. In a speech delivered in the United States House of Representatives, the Honorable Ronnie G. Flippo of Alabama praised the contributions of the MSRS to the music industry in northwest Alabama (Flippo 1979).

In recent years, the MSSS and MSRS have been examined at length in myriad media, proving that they are of enduring value. Eminent music scholar Peter Guralnick declared the MSSS *the* funk factory of the 1970s in his definitive text on the subject, *Sweet Soul Music* (1986). Atlantic Recording Vice President, Jerry Wexler, considered the MSRS his favorite musicians in his 1993 autobiography *Rhythm and the Blues*. Published by the University of Indiana Press, Randy McNutt's *Guitar Towns* labeled Muscle Shoals a "mega-icon along with New Orleans and Memphis studios" (2002: 2). Print on the MSRS is currently popping up in presses like *Vintage Guitar*, *Rolling Stone*, *Harp*, and *Mojo*, some of the more popular magazines on newsstands nation wide. The recently opened Stax Museum in Memphis features a photograph display of the MSRS standing in front of the 3614 Jackson Highway Studio. The display acknowledges the cooperative venture between the two legendary studios. Documentaries, like Country Music Television's *American Revolutions: Southern Rock*, are recounting the MSSS role in music history (CMT 2005). And Congress is once again

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getting in on the act, passing the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area Study Act of 2001. The Shoals music heritage is cited as an integral part of the Heritage Area.

The MSSS's music credits are even more exceptional when considered within the context of the 1970s. This was a critical moment in music history when many genres were fighting death by disco. Those musicians, who managed to resist the compulsion to base their music on dance rhythms produced by drum and bass machines, often found themselves crushed by industry giants that were solely interested in cranking out corporate controlled, formulaic, assembly line productions and maximizing profits. Jerry Wexler acknowledged that this climate in New York studios was smothering him, "I was tired...The arrangers were out of ideas, the songwriters out of material, the session players out of licks, and I was out of inspiration" (Ritz 1993:171). Unfortunately, few studios offered alternatives to this approach to music making in the 1970s.

Fortunately for Wexler and many musicians, the MSSS was an oasis in a vast wasteland. The MSRS defied all the industry conventions and regulations of that time. The MSRS gave free reign to creative impulse, encouraging musicians to cut loose and have a good time. Annoyed with stilted limitations found in other studios, Mavis Staples, among many others, welcomed the Shoals experience:

You can get locked in, you can get stagnated, the same old thing, the same old people, but the Muscle Shoals guys were just awesome. Everyone was in the studio, you could feed off each other ... But at Muscle Shoals the music kept going and I kept singing, so that made it really amazing (Brown 2005).

The Staples Singers signature tunes "Respect Yourself" and "I'll Take You There" resulted from this laid back, music for music's sake groove.

Hearing of the Staples' success, Linda Ronstadt, Jimmy Cliff, Albert King, Steve Cropper (of Booker T and the MGs and Stax fame), Cleopatra Jones, Spooky Tooth, Bobby Womack, Canned Heat, Johnny Rivers, Johnnie Taylor, Percy Sledge, John Hammond, Luther Ingram, Del Shannon, Sanford and Townsend, Kim Carnes, Jose Feliciano, Dr. Hook, Dr. John, Leon Russell, and many others beat a path to 3614 Jackson Highway seeking the vitality, vibe, and hypnotic rhythms of the MSRS. The MSSS jump started, regenerated, and sustained the careers of many musicians, who might otherwise have found themselves in unemployment lines or headlining the Holiday Inn Armada Room Disco Swing Party like Murph and the Magictones (of which former Stax musicians Steve Cropper and Donald Duck Dunn were members) in *The Blues Brothers* movie, during the 1970s.

For the time period, and any other in American music history for that matter, the MSRS accomplished a feat that several other highly regarded house bands failed to do. The 3614 group broke out of the specialization niche characterizing other rhythm sections. From the late 1950s to the late 1970s, RCA's A Team at Studio B in Nashville established a reputation as *the* rhythm section for country and early rock and roll, recording the likes of Elvis Presley, the Everly Brothers, Dolly Parton, Chet Atkins, Eddy Arnold, and others. At Motown, a hit factory for soul, funk, and pop, the Funk Brothers backed Mary Wells, the Supremes, Stevie Wonder, Smokey Robinson, and a host of Motown stars in the 1960s and 1970s. Booker T and the MGs made soul, funk, and r&b hits with Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, and Carla and Rufus Thomas, as well as for themselves at Stax. Peter Guralnick and Jerry Wexler were amazed by the fact that MSRS managed to establish themselves as the holy trinity of soul and funk music with Motown and Stax (MSSS recorded 50% of Stax's work during the 1970s) and then stepped out of the soul and funk persona and crossed sonic boundaries into pop, rock, country, reggae, swamp, and even disco. While awesome in their own rights, Booker T and the MGs, RCA's A Team, and the Funk Brothers did not achieve the versatility of the MSSS group.

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Historical Context

In the January 2005 issue of *Vintage Guitar*, author Willie G. Moseley heralded Muscle Shoal's place in music thus: "Muscle Shoals, Florence, Sheffield, and Tuscumbia, is as vital to the history of American music as are Memphis, New Orleans, Nashville, and Macon." Considering New Orleans is the birthplace of jazz and blues, Memphis is the home of rockabilly and rock, and Nashville gave life to country and bluegrass, Moseley holds Muscle Shoals in high regard. The Quad cities are truly a cultural hearth.

The Shoals' musical heritage began on a rather good note. Born in Florence in 1873, W.C. Handy thought of himself as the "Father of Jazz". His compositions "Memphis Blues" and "St. Louis Blues" earned him the distinction "Father of the Blues" (Fuqua 1991:107). Florence native Sam Phillips was not handy at playing instruments, but he knew a good tune when he heard one. The sun rose and set on his recording service in Memphis during the 1950s. Unlike Handy and Phillips, who discovered their fame and fortune outside of Alabama, the next generation of Shoals' musicians, writers, and producers discovered that there was no place like "Sweet Home Alabama" in which to achieve success.

In the context of the Shoals super sonic scene, the MSRS was not the first or the only studio to garner fame. In Iuka, Mississippi, musician, Dexter Johnson, tired of playing the square dance circuit in that state and the honky tonk joints in Detroit, took up domesticity in the Shoals and got a job with the Tennessee Valley Authority, the area's largest supplier of electricity (Fuqua 1991). In 1951, Johnson merged the two major currents in his life, music and electricity, when he wired his garage for sound. Although Johnson's studio did not make waves in the music business, it is credited with jump-starting the recording industry in the Shoals.

Ironically, a fallen star led to the Shoals meteoric rise to acclaim in the music business. In 1956, James Joiner, Kelson Hurston, Walter Stovall, and Marvin Wilson formed Tune Records and Publishing Company (Fuqua 1991:8). Tune set up shop in the waiting room of the Florence bus station, as well as part of the WLAY radio station. While driving a bus one evening, Joiner saw a falling star and decided to write a song about it. The stellar composition, "A Fallen Star" became a Tune hit, receiving a lot of airtime in 1957 (Fuqua 1991:8). A 2005 *Vintage Guitar* interview with MSRS member Jimmy Johnson cites "A Fallen Star" as the origin of the Shoals musical history (Moseley 2005:40). Interestingly enough, the *Vintage Guitar* article revealed that Jimmy Johnson's uncle, Dexter Johnson, who built a recording studio in his garage, also worked occasionally with Tune Records. In the Shoals, music is a family tradition.

Like the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in 1849, "A Fallen Star" precipitated a gold rush in the Shoals. Hearing about Joiner's success and his studio, Rick Hall and Bill Sherrill began visiting Joiner on the weekends to pitch their songs (Guralnick 1986:179). Hall and Sherrill honed their song writing craft in the late 1950s. With Joiner, Hall and Sherrill had some success with some songs recorded by Roy Orbison and Brenda Lee (Fuqua 1971:9). Tom Stafford got wind of the gold dust blowing around Joiner, Hall, and Sherrill and called for a meeting. Safford, whose parents owned the City Drug Store in Florence, wanted to start a publishing company (Guralnick 1986:177). In 1959, Joiner provided some start-up capital and the twosome opened a music business on the second floor of the City Drug Store.

The four chose an apt name for their business: Florence Alabama Music Enterprises. The acronym FAME was a harbinger of the success to come; however, success was not immediate, and the eventual incarnation of the company crashed and burned in a mere year's time. In 1968, the partnership broke up and Rick Hall kept the FAME name (McNutt 2002:131).

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Hall, Sherrill, and Stafford's business venture, albeit short lived as it was, brought together an exceptional group of musicians, songwriters, and promoters. To the FAME studio above the drugstore came Dan Penn, a teenaged soulful singer from nearby Vernon, and local college piano player Spooner Oldham (Guralnick 1986:180-181). They were joined by local musicians David Briggs, Jerry Carrigan, Donnie Fritts, and black Shoals singer Arthur Alexander. Briggs got his start at age 14 doing session work for Tune Records (McNutt 2002:128). Young hopefuls Jimmy Johnson, David Hood, who went to high school in Sheffield with Johnson, and Roger Hawkins soaked up the atmosphere (Fuqua 1991:16). In retrospect, the Florence studio was a fortunate experience for many who hung out there, as they graduated and gravitated to bigger and better circumstances.

Meanwhile back in the Shoals, FAME was little more than a piece of paper. In the breakup, Stafford kept the studio, artists, and recording label, Spar (Fuqua 1991:16). For a dollar, Hall retained title to Florence Alabama Music Enterprises and the associated publishing company. On the face of it, Stafford looked like he got the better part of the deal: he had everything from the business except a name and a "piece of paper; however, Spar slowly disappeared into obscurity, having failed to produce records" (Fuqua 1991:16). On the other hand, FAME's stock was on the verge of becoming worth well more than a dollar.

Given Atlantic Record Company Vice President Jerry Wexler's assessment of Rick Hall, Hall was destined for success. "Rick Hall was the Barry Gordy of Muscle Shoals, a po'boy from the bottom of the agrarian ladder, a white man with a strong feel for black blues. A former musician, a souped-up salesman, and hard-nosed entrepreneur. ..." (Ritz 1993:178). Hall regrouped and reopened FAME in a tobacco warehouse in Muscle Shoals (McNutt 2002:131; Guralnick 1986:191; and Fuqua 1991:19). He composed a house band consisting of local musicians David Briggs, Jerry Carrigan, and Terry Thompson and launched the second incarnation of FAME in 1960/61.

Ironically, Hall's ex-business partner Tom Stafford provided Hall with his first big break. Arthur Alexander, a bellhop at the Sheffield Hotel and one of the writers who stayed on with Spar Records, wrote a song. In the former partnership, Stafford served as a street-wise mentor to the musicians and writers. He did not handle the business; consequently, Stafford was unsure about handling Alexander's "You Better Move On" (Guralnick 1986:191; Fuqua 1991:20). Considering Hall the logical choice to record the song, Stafford sent Alexander across the Tennessee River to FAME. Alexander sang the lead vocals and FAME's rhythm section backed the singing bellhop. Hall hawked the demo tape around a good bit before Dot Records in Los Angeles agreed to publish the song. The song hit #24 on *Billboard's* Hot 100 and the Rolling Stones recorded it several years later (McNutt 2002:131-132). Alexander moved FAME on to the big time.

The success of "You Better Move On" encouraged Hall to expand his operation. The FAME front man reinvested much of the \$10,000.00 profit from the song in the business (Guralnick 1986:192). He built a new studio in Muscle Shoals at 603 East Avalon Avenue. Modeled on the RCA studio at Nashville, Hall built the third and final, FAME building out of concrete blocks with 11 foot high ceilings and 1,890 square feet. He equipped the studio with an echo chamber and a three-track Ampex recorder (McNutt 2002:131; Guralnick 1986:194; and Fuqua 1991:22). Hall of FAME opened the doors of the new studio in 1962.

Through the open doors walked two University of North Alabama college students who played instrumental roles in the development of the Muscle Shoals Sound. In 1962, Rick Hall hired Jimmy Johnson when he was a freshman at UNA to work at FAME. According to Johnson, "I was Rick's first employee. I was just Rick Hall's gopher-secretary, engineer, assistant, janitor, - you name it, - I did it" (Forte 1982:78). Johnson's high school and UNA buddy, David Hood, attracted Hall's attention when Hood and members of the Mystics recorded a demo tape at FAME. Hood said, "Hall liked my

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playing, so he would use me on recordings when he wanted something done and he didn't want to pay" (McNutt 2002:129). At FAME, Johnson and Hood were definitely in the mix of things.

Other than opening, the year of 1962 did not hold any promise or critical success for FAME; however, the following year found Hall spending less time selling used cars at his father-in-law's lot and more time in the recording booth. Unable to build on the 1950s success of songs like "Be-Bop-A-Lula," "Young Love," and "Walk on By," and in the early stages of bankruptcy, Atlanta based Bill Lowry brought his catalog of musicians to the Muscle Shoals in 1963. This stable included Tommy Roe, Joe South, Mac Davis, the Tams, Ray Stevens, and Felton Jarvis (Guralnick 1986:194; Fuqua 1991:24). Roe and the Tams scored hits with FAME recording "Everybody" and "What Kind of Fool Do You Think I AM," respectively. Along with the success of "Steal Away," a hit that had been recorded at the second FAME building in 1962, FAME's circumstances were looking up.

However, FAME had not yet hit the big time. Hall's rhythm section consisting of David Briggs on piano, Norbert Putman on base, Jerry Carrigan on drums, and Terry Thompson on guitar was not exactly enjoying the fruits of their labor. So Briggs, Putnam, and Carrigan left for Nashville in 1964 (Guralnick 1986: 202). They all went on to their own fame and fortune. At that time, guitarist Terry Thompson died, requiring Hall to restock his section. Fortunately, he already had musicians hanging around. Hall promoted Jimmy Johnson to rhythm guitar and David Hood to bass. To them, he added Shoals' veterans Roger Hawkins, drums; Spooner Oldham, keyboards; and Junior Lowe, lead guitar (Topar 1981:62). Although not his intention, Rick Hall was setting the stage for the development of the MSRS with three of the four working in his house band. Barry Beckett joined FAME in 1967 (Forte 1982:78). The MSRS were all together at FAME before moving on to 3614 Jackson Highway.

FAME's second backing band clearly established the Shoal's reputation as a national recording center. In 1966, Hall loaned his rhythm section to a friend, Quin Ivy, who owned a record store, worked as a radio announcer for Shoal's WLAY, and had a studio in his Sheffield home. With Jimmy Johnson engineering the session, the band backed Percy Sledge on "When a Man Loves a Woman." Rick Hall sent the Quin Ivy studio song to Jerry Wexler at Atlantic Records. Hall also called Wexler at home one Sunday, excitedly exclaiming that he had a #1 hit for him (Guralnick 1986:207). Hall's forecast proved true.

"When a Man Loves a Woman" proved to be a flash point for the Shoals. According to one historian:

For Rick Hall and Jimmy Johnson, "When a Man Loves a Woman" signaled a dramatic change in the business of Shoals Music. First, it gave the area world exposure. Second, it brought in Jerry Wexler and Atlantic Records. Good times ahead (Fuqua 1991:36).

A self-proclaimed "aging hipster", Jerry Wexler's interpretation of the breakthrough was slightly hipper:

The song was Percy Sledge's "When a Man Loves a Woman," a transcendent moment in the saga of Muscle Shoals, a holy love hymn that shot to number one and made me realize Galkin was right; I had to get with Hall in a hurry. I did, and I took Wilson (Pickett) with me.... because the magic was in the music and the music was so deeply ingrained in Muscle Shoals-in guitarists like Eddie Hinton, keyboardists like Spooner Oldham, songwriters like Donnie Fritts. Music was in the air you breathed and the water you drank, coming at you so inexorably and naturally that I found myself returning to the place not simply a few more times but on dozens of occasion over the next quarter century. More than any other locale or individual, Muscle Shoals changed my life-musically and every which way (Ritz 1993:180).

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Jerry Wexler might well go down in history as the only northerner to experience a transcendent cultural moment in the South. Wexler's affinity with the Shoals translated into a series of hits at FAME and later with the MSRS.

With Percy Sledge and Jimmy Hughes ("Steal Away") who are cousins, FAME earned respect as an r&b producer, but with Wilson Pickett and Aretha Franklin, FAME topped the r&b charts. Wexler considered the Pickett sessions in the Shoals to be dynamite:

Pickett was in good voice... Tommy (Cogbill on bass) tore it up. So did rhythm guitarist Jimmy Johnson, the sure-footed and naturally inventive Roger Hawkins, especially adept at sound consistency, especially soulful with the sock cymbal and bass drums (Ritz 1993:191).

The 1966 session produced the soul classics, "In the Midnight Hour," "Mustang Sally," and "Funky Broadway," and, of course, the top 10 hit "Land of 1000 Dances."

In 1967, Jerry Wexler liked the laid back feel of the Shoals and thought it the right scene for his latest Atlantic signee, Aretha Franklin. "Aretha was a natural for the Southern style of recording. Once she had the basics-rhythm, groove and vocal patterns- I knew she'd get off on the spontaneity of the studio" (Ritz 1993:208). FAME's spontaneous alchemy seemed to agree with Aretha during the recording of "I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)." All involved in the session seemed pleased with the outcome; however, the chemistry dissolved when an intoxicated, hired horn player made an off-hand comment to Aretha. Franklin, her husband, and Jerry Wexler all returned to New York the next day (Fuqua 1991:138-139; Ritz 1993: 210-211; and McNutt 2002:134). Wexler finished Aretha's recordings in Atlantic's New York studio with the hopes of fixing the growing rift between the two producers.

In the parlance of the music business, Aretha Franklin's first Atlantic album was an unqualified success. Peter Guralnick, author of *Sweet Soul Music*, assessed this success thus:

Her career from the first Atlantic release was like a meteor shower, a burst of explosions that were as dazzling, commercially (her first six singles made the Top 10 in the pop charts all but "Natural Woman" made #1 on the Soul charts, and that made #2) as they were for the ferocity of the talent that was unleashed... Her success swept aside everything in its path (the Civil Rights Summer of 1967 was declared by *Ebony* to be 'the Summer of 'Retha, Rap [Brown], and Revolt')" (Guralnick 1986:345).

Unbeknownst by many in the nation, three Shoals musicians, Roger Hawkins, Jimmy Johnson, and Spooner Oldham, had a lot to do with the success of Aretha Franklin's first Atlantic record.

Wexler had nothing but R-E-S-P-E-C-T for the Southern band that elevated Wilson Pickett and Aretha Franklin to the top of the music charts. The Atlantic front man wanted the red-clay rhythm section "on a permanent basis." By then (1967) the band was fixed at Barry Beckett, David Hood, Roger Hawkins, and Jimmy Johnson (Ritz 1993:227). Wexler's wish did not come true, but not for lack of trying; however the music mogul lured the band away from Rick Hall in 1969. Unhappy about a meager salary offer of \$10,000.00 per member per year, Johnson, Beckett, Hood, and Hawkins parted ways with FAME. Wexler floated his fave four a loan of \$19,000.00 and provided them steady bookings (Moseley 2005:141; Fuqua 1991:42-44; and Guralnick 1986:378). As they say in the music business, the rhythm section was in business.

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The Shoals rhythm section selected a modest concrete block sonic shack at 3614 Jackson Highway for the site of their edification. Sources disagree about the precise construction date of this building. A Colbert County Property Record Card records 1944 as the construction date (Colbert County 2000). This date might reflect property acquisition rather than construction since a moratorium during World War II prohibited construction. Polk City Directories do not have a listing for 3614 Jackson Highway from 1941 to 1945, indicating that the subject building did not exist at that time. For the two year period 1946 to 1947, the Florence Public Library does not have Polk City Directories; however, the 1948 directory records a Gibson Shade Shop at 3614 Jackson Highway. In 1950, the business expanded its title to "Gibson Shade Shop, Venetian Blinds" (R.L. Polk Company 1950). By 1959, the building is vacant (R.L. Polk Company 1959).

The 1960s ushered in a new era of occupation for 3614 Jackson Highway. From 1962 to 1964, the building housed the United Pipe and Supply Company, United Construction Company, specializing in chain link fences (R.L. Polk Company 1962 to 1964). The building was empty for the next four years until 1969, according to Polk City Directories (R.L. Polk Company 1965 to 1968). Other sources indicate that Jimmy Johnson set up a four-track studio in the building for Fred Bevis, who wanted to produce country music, in 1967 (Fuqua 1991:42). The business venture was unproductive, so Bevis asked Johnson and Hawkins to take it off his hands (Moseley 2005:41; Borgerson 2004:3). Johnson and partners upgraded the studio to eight track and made other improvements.

Jokingly, the fearsome foursome tossed "Muscle Shoals Sound Studio" around for a music moniker (Fuqua 1991:49); however, the more they said the name, the more they liked it. The former FAME gang hoped they were not fooling themselves when they opened 3614 Jackson Highway as the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio on April 1, 1969.

The rhythm section's change of address coincided with a change in "the sound." The group that "defined the prototype of soul in the 1960s, according to Jerry Wexler in a 1979 *Rolling Stone* interview, ventured into other genres at the dawn of the 1970s (Forte 1982:76). Initially, Wexler sent the Shoals four a number of pop musicians. Cher was the first to light up the 3614 Jackson Highway Studio with husband Sonny in tow. While the resulting Cher album featuring mostly covers did not exactly produce commercial success for either Cher or the studio rhythm section, it acquired cult status over the years. Bearing the name of the legendary studio "3614 Jackson Highway," Cher's album cover art features a photograph of the studio façade, Cher in Indian dress from head to toe, Sonny in an Alabama T-shirt, and others including Jerry Wexler. Today, the album that inaugurated the Shoals rhythm section's decade long association with 3614 is a collector's item. Recognizing the album's historic value, Rhino Records recently released it in CD format as part of its Handmade Limited edition series (Rhino Records 2005).

The studio earned chart recognition from the next session. In the summer of 1969, Wexler paired the Bama boys with the British lass, Lulu. The combination produced a minor hit with "Oh Me Oh My (I'm a Fool for You Baby)." Wexler however, was underwhelmed by the results (Ritz 1993:231).

Without a big hit and the capital generated by it, circumstances were getting a bit rocky for the Shoals sessionists. Then the Stones showed up and frets melted away. In what can only be considered "such stuff as rock and roll legends are made of," a purported *Rolling Stone* reporter showed up at the permastones of 3614 and wanted to interview Hood, Johnson, Beckett, and Hawkins. Unbeknownst to the MSRS, the reporter was incognito Steve Miller guitarist, Boz Scaggs. Several weeks later, Scaggs returned with *Rolling Stone* editor/publisher, Jann Wenner, who co-produced Scaggs' album (Topar 1981:63; Borgerson 2004:3). Scaggs, the MSRS, and Duane Allman, who played on many FAME and MSRS recordings, combined to produce a memorable 13 minute jam session on "Loan Me a Dime." "Dime" established the MSRS's FM album rock credentials according to music critic Bruce Borgerson (2004). In a 1981 *Musician* article, Leon Topar declared the song a brilliant arrangement (1981:69).

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Many of the Stax acts found the MSSS to their liking. The MSRS had a “raw funky sound on the very edge of tightness and looseness” that was similar to the Memphis Sound (Fuqua 1991: 49-50). In fact, the Shoals section was often compared to Memphis and received awards for playing Memphis-style records (Moseley 2005: 41). Like Jerry Wexler, many of the musicians preferred the spontaneous and laid back approach to recording at 3614 Jackson Highway. Mavis Staples loved the fact that Barry, Jimmy, Roger, and David let her ad-lib, feed off each other, and stretch out in sessions (Brown 2005:70). The MSRS members were true ambassadors for racial harmony. They meshed so well with Albert King, the Staples Singers, Luther Ingram, Wilson Pickett, Percy Sledge, Cleopatra Jones, Johnnie Taylor, Millie Jackson, Bobby Womack and others that only music industry insiders realized that the rhythm section was white (Forte 1982: 76).

The Stax and MSRS music exchange made for some memorable music. Steve Cropper, who crafted tasty guitar licks on “Green Onions” and other Stax hits, had a good time recording with the Shoals gang. Luther Ingram’s “If Loving You is Wrong” scored well in the charts. In 1971, Albert King recorded a funky blues album titled “Lovejoy.” Five of the nine selections feature the MSRS. On the title song “Lovejoy, III,” King praises the MSRS and the Shoals, along with the people of Chicago, Memphis, and Lovejoy, Ill, for making the world a better place because they have love

The Staples Singers and MSRS made some truly stirring music together. “Respect Yourself,” “I’ll Take You There,” “Be What You Are,” and “City in the Sky” are gripping songs with dynamic rhythms and strong social messages. Part gospel, part protest, or what the Staples considered “contemporary gospel,” these songs call for an end to social strife, the development of ethnic pride, the promotion of universal brother and sisterhood, and heavenly transcendence (Brown 2005:70; Palmer 1978 (2005): 2). In “I’ll Take You There” Mavis Staples invites Barry Beckett and David hood to take solos along with Pops. This gesture is the musical equivalent of smoking the peace pipe. The integrated exchange between the Staples and MSRS makes one think that the MSSS is one possibility for the “place where there ain’t no cryin’ and no smilin’ faces lyin’ to the races.” Heaven, of course, is another possible interpretation. The combination of the Staples Singers’ utopian social vision and the rhythmic excitement of the MSRS elevated the Memphis-Muscle Shoals combo to the top of the charts (Brown 2005:70; Palmer 1978 (2005): 2). “I’ll Take You There” was a number one album.

“I’ll Take You There” caught the attention of none other than the poet of pop, rhymin’ Paul Simon. Simon, a connoisseur of exotic sounds, liked the “Jamaican” backing on the Staples record (Borgerson 2004). Simon said he wanted to use the band on “I’ll Take You There” and had his manager call Stax assuming the band had to be from Memphis (Forte 1982:85). Once the MSRS set the record straight, Simon “Says” was on his way to the Muscle Shoals. Because the MSRS cut “Take Me to Mardi Gras” in the first two hours of the session, he asked the rhythm section to consider recording other songs on the album. Fortunately for Simon, they chose “St. Judy’s Comet,” “Loves Me Like a Rock,” “Kodachrome,” and “One Man’s Ceiling is Another Man’s Floor.” The resulting album “There Goes Rhymin’ Simon” and the single “Loves Me Like a Rock” went gold in 1973 (Recording Institute Association of America 2005). For their part, the MSRS earned a Grammy nomination in 1973 (Moseley 2005:122). In appreciation, Rhymin’ Simon placed a photograph of the MSSS above the “Kodachrome” lyrics on the inside of the album cover.

The interaction between the MSRS and Lynyrd Skynyrd can be designated as Legend Making 101. The first meeting between the bands was not especially a blockbuster moment. “Leonard Who? was the puzzled response from Barry Beckett when the Florida band first visited Sheffield to record a demo tape in October 1970” (O’Brien 1998). Recognizing that Skynyrd was just getting started, Jimmy Johnson took Ronnie Van Zant and company under his sage tutelage. Johnson taught the Florida upstarts the importance of “playing tandem baselines with the kick drums, maintaining tempo, and selecting the right key (O’Brien 1998). Johnson rehearsed the band and carefully put together an 11-song album at MSSS.

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In late 1969, Atlantic Records signed the Bad Boys of British rock to its roster. During a whirlwind tour, Wexler and the Stones flew into the Shoals, which Keith Richard dubbed a “little hick town with absolutely nothing going on” (Ritz 1993:233). In contrast, the tape machines at MSRS were spinning as quickly as the hydroelectric turbines at nearby Wilson and Wheeler Dams. By day, the MSRS worked with R. B. Greaves. These sessions yielded the number one hit “Take a Letter Maria” (Fuqua 1991:51). And by night, Jimmy Johnson sat in the control booth while Mick and his mates teamed up for “You Got to Move,” “Brown Sugar,” and “Wild Horses.” The latter two tunes topped the charts and propelled the *Sticky Fingers* album to mega commercial success (Moseley 2005:122). Richards called “Brown Sugar” the best tune they ever made (Fuqua 1991:52).

These sessions sealed the MSRS’s fate. A film crew immortalized the Alabama studio’s association with the Rolling Stones in the classic rockumentary *Gimme Shelter*. In between footage of one of the Stone’s most devilish moments at the infamous Altamont Pass concert, the movie shows the British rockers in some down home Alabama moments at the Florence Holiday Inn, the MSSS parking lot, and the studio interior. Caught on camera for eternity are Richard’s pantomime of Minnie Pearl; the guys listening to a playback of “Wild Horses” with Jimmy Johnson; and Mick and Keith engaged in some sort of jubilant strut back at their Florence motel while listening to a freshly cut track of “Brown Sugar” (Maysles Brothers 1970). The MSSS’s part in *Gimme Shelter* was admittedly brief but nonetheless a breakthrough. After the movie premiered in 1970, the MSSS was no longer the best kept secret in the recording industry.

The R. B. Greaves’ and Stones’ hits brought a world of musicians and others to the MSSS doorstep. A lesser known, but very important, chapter in the history of the studio involved reggae musician, Jimmy Cliff. In 1971, Island Records owner and producer, Chris Blackwell brought Cliff to the Shoals, hoping to imbue the Jamaican’s music with a little MSRS rhythm and blues. Blackwell thought this ingredient might make Cliff’s music more appealing to American and European audiences (Borgerson 2004). The MSRS cut 6 to 10 songs with the Reggae ambassador. “The Harder They Come” was released as a single and as part of the sound track for the reggae cult film of the same title. Starring Cliff as a musician turned gangster, “The Harder They Come” featured “Sitting in Limbo,” which was recorded at MSSS, on the soundtrack (Borgerson 2004).

The Cliff MSSS sessions were mutually beneficial. According to David Hood, “Jimmy brought a bunch of Jamaican records with him—old ska singles, by the Upsetters and groups like that. We were amazed by that sound, and it showed us a few things, like the ways to turn the beat around. It planted a seed with us” (Borgerson 2004). In a 1979 *Rolling Stone* interview, Jimmy Johnson attributed the MSRS’s success to “adaptability” (McLane 1979). The band absorbed a multitude of styles, such as Reggae and Ska and found innovative ways in which to play them. The MSRS created a funky groove out of Cliff’s contributions. This groove formed the foundation of many songs apocryphally attributed to Stax Records in Memphis.

In the early 1970s, Stax was in turmoil. The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 left the integrated Stax family splintered along racial lines. The company’s finances were in dire straits, and the house band, Booker T and the MGs, was no longer together (Guralnick 1986:386). Stax farmed out their acts to the MSSS to the tune of 50% or 80% depending on the source. The Honorable Ronnie G. Flippo of Alabama indicated that the MSSS cut 50% of Stax’s output from 1972 to 1976 during an address to the United States House of Representatives (Flippo 1979). Jimmy Johnson believed the percentage was more like 80% (Moseley 2005:41). Exact numbers aside, Stax kept U.S. Highway 72 between Memphis and the Shoals red hot, sending Luther Ingram, Albert King, Steve Cropper, the Staples Singers, and others to the keepers of the Memphis Sound.

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Although “Skynyrd’s First and Last” was not released until September 1978, the Muscle Shoals recorded album served as a blueprint for the band’s future. From the sessions, Skynyrd developed a multiple lead, slashing guitar attack that defined 1970s rock and roll (O’Brien 1998). One of the albums’ songs, “Free Bird” eventually became a rock and roll anthem. Released in 1978, an abridged nine track version of the Muscle Shoals album immediately went platinum (O’Brien 1998). Well before this release, Lynyrd Skynyrd signed with MCA, the partnership of which resulted in many hits and gold and platinum recordings.

One of the many hits featured a tribute to the Swampers:

Now Muscle Shoals has got the Swampers
and they’ve been known to pick a song or two
Lord they get me off so much, they pick me up
when I’m feelin’ blue!

“Leonard Who?” could not have better expressed their gratitude because “Sweet Home Alabama” became one of the most recognized rock and roll anthems of all time. Because of the song, the Swampers are as well known as Johnny B. Goode.

In 1973, Jerry Wexler did the seemingly improbable. Against the advice of the Nashville crowd, Wexler got on the road again and made some music with friends Willie Nelson and the MSRS. The Nashville cats thought the MSRS sound was too r&b for the red headed guitar ranger (Ritz 1993:275). The wily Wexler thought Willie’s music defied conventional classification. He felt Willie’s blues overtones were compatible with Swamper rhythms, which also defied categorization. According to Wexler, the MSRS was “equally at home in country, blues, and rock and roll” (Forte 1982:76). In Wexler’s way of thinking, the pairing rang true.

The two-day MSSS session (The MSRS rarely wasted time when making music) culminated in “Phases and Stages.” Wrote country music critic John Morthland about the album: “It’s rife with contradictions; its got more jazz inflections than anything Nelson has done, yet it’s also true to his Texas country roots” (Ritz 1993:276). Although “Phases and Stages” did not go gold in record sales, Wexler considered the album a milestone (Ritz 1993:276). Critics like Morthland liked the album and their praise provided Willie with the clout to negotiate a contract with CBS Records. Nelson had a series of “platinum records, beginning with “The Red Headed Stranger,” the logical successor to “Phases and Stages” (Ritz 1993:276). Wexler and the MSRS unleashed the Outlaw Nelson, freeing him from the confining corrals of Nashville country.

Not bound by labels themselves, the MSRS members ranged from soul to country to pop with ease. IN 1972, Barry Beckett and David Hood produced Mel and Tim’s “Starting All Over Again.” The record was a hit (Topar 1981:64). In 1974, at least one of the MSRS, Jimmy Johnson, worked on Paul Simon’s “Still Crazy After All These Years” (Johnson 2005). Simon brought former song mate and oft time sparring partner, Art Garfunkle, to 3614 Jackson Highway where the duo spun the vinyl single “My Little Town.” The pop parade continued with Peter Yarrow, one third of the trio Peter, Paul, and Mary. Barry Beckett co-produced Yarrow’s “Hard Times” in 1975 (Topar 1981:64). Beckett also produced Mary MacGregor’s “Torn Between Two Lovers.” This song was a number one hit for MacGregor and the MSSS.

The MSSS’s reputation for making music spread around the globe. Mary MacGregor’s “Torn Between Two Lovers” topped international pop charts (Webster 2005). Musicians came from Japan, Sweden, Canada, France, and England to record at the MSSS (Fuqua 1991:67). Rod Stewart’s trip across the Big Pond proved worthwhile. Stewart’s aptly titled “Atlantic Crossing” MSSS recorded album went gold in December 1975 (Recording Industry Association of America 2005).

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The year 1972 marked the beginning of a long and profitable relationship between the MSSS and Bob Seger. That year Bob recorded the aptly titled "Back in '72." Seger followed that with the "Beautiful Loser" LP-45 in 1974. "Beautiful Loser" was a winner becoming a staple on FM rock stations nationwide. In the following year, "Katmandu" met with similar success. Given the frequency and the results of the visits to the MSSS, Bob Seger should have titled "Katmandu" "Muscle Shoals" instead.

Seger brought home some serious music industry hardware with "Night Moves" and "Stranger in Town." Recorded at the MSSS in 1977 and 1978, respectively, the LPs went gold and platinum. Simultaneously Seger and the Silver Bullet Band were hot commodities on the stadium concert circuit. Likewise, Lynyrd Skynyrd commanded gold and platinum record sales and sold out football stadium shows nationwide. In the late 1970s, MSSS recorded, or influenced, rock and roll dominated box office and record sales and music awards.

In mid 1978, Bob Seger returned to the Muscle Shoals to record "Old Time Rock and Roll." However, the session took place at 1000 Alabama Avenue in Sheffield. Unable to buy the 3614 Jackson Highway property, the MSSS relocated to the Alabama Avenue address in April 1978. The MSRS converted a building built in 1903 for a power plant into a studio with two recording rooms, control rooms, a lounge, kitchen, tape vault, offices, and a sundeck (Fuqua 1991:67). At this studio, the MSRS continued recording gold and platinum records with the likes of Bob Seger, Bob Dylan, Dire Straits, Dr. Hook, The Oak Ridge Boys, and others. In 1985, the MSSS sold the 1000 Alabama Avenue Studio to Malaco Records of Jackson, Mississippi (Moseley 2005:124). The studio remained open until January 2005.

Meanwhile, the 3614 building spent the better part of the 1980s housing a pro audio business. A 1980 photograph shows the building with a Big Bear Audio and Video sign on the south side of the building and a Big Bear Audio sign on the west side (façade) (Borgerson 2004). Aside from the signage, the building appeared to be making the transition from the era of the hippies to that of yuppies unchanged. Big Bear remained in business until 1987 (Webster 2005). A used appliance store opened in the building in 1989 and washed out in 1997 (Webster 2005). During his journey to the crossroads of rock 'n' roll, author Randy McNutt found 3614 Jackson Highway filled with washing machines and a family living in the basement (McNutt 2002:127). The control room was intact, but sans recording equipment. The Swampers sold the recording equipment when they moved to the other studio in 1978.

The end of the 1990s brought the history of the former recording studio full cycle. The appliance man left in 1997, but the washing machines remained. Several people rented the building for two years, and attempted to run a recording studio. From 1999 to 2000, the building was vacant (Webster 2005). The City of Sheffield condemned it because it was in disrepair (Palmer 2000). Fortunately, Noel Webster purchased the property and saved it from the wrecking ball.

Displeased with the flat and mechanical sound of digital equipment and computer technology, some of today's musicians have found their way to Sheffield seeking retro tone. Tommy York and Thrillbilly recorded 11 tracks at Webster's studio in April 2001. Backed by a wealthy patron, Thrillbilly could have recorded anywhere in the country (Palmer 2001). York, who has worked in Muscle Shoals studios since 1976, considered the sound temple at 3614 Jackson Highway the obvious choice. "After overdubbing a vocal track during the session, York exclaimed 'It's so warm and creamy. You don't hear that on the radio anymore.'" Pleased with the studio's renovation and restoration of its vintage sound qualities, Jimmy Johnson recorded the band King Kharma there in 2004. A number of Shoals area musicians have recorded there since 3614's reopening in April 2001.

The musicians resounding response to the rebirth of 3614 Jackson Highway encouraged Webster to provide the general public with access to the font of so much of the 1970s sound. He created a website featuring a history and discography of the MSSS, photo gallery, and a review of the studio's present vintage recording equipment. He also opened the studio for

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“by appointment” and select “drop in” visits. Archie Bell of the Drells and “Tighten Up” fame stopped by for a chat one day. Tourists from Japan, Norway, Germany, England, and Ireland have beaten a path to the music monument. Based on this amplified interest in the MSSS, Webster’s future plans include offering tours of 3614 Jackson Highway on a regular basis. He envisions operating 3614 as a live recording studio and a museum dedicated to the interpretation of the MSSS’s place in American music history and popular culture. Webster has made several trips to Sun Studios and Stax (which unlike Sun and MSSS is not in its original building) in Memphis to gain some perspective on museum operations. These trips have led to serious discussions amongst the various studio owners of developing a musical heritage corridor from Memphis to the Muscle Shoals and possibly to Nashville. The MSSS will have a prominent part in the promotion of this corridor.

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X. Geographical Data

Verbal Description

The legal description for the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio at 3614 Jackson Highway is defined as Colbert County PR# 20-07-08-27-1-007-029.000. The boundaries for the property are delineated on the accompanying map based on a Colbert County Tax Assessor map, drawn at a scale of 1 inch equals 125 feet.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries for the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio at 3614 Jackson Highway are legally defined by the Colbert County Tax Assessor's Office, and have been associated with the studio from 1969, the year of its inception, to the present.

Photograph Log

The following information is the same for each photograph:

Name of photographers: John Lieb; Gene A. Ford

Date of Photograph: August 2005

Location of Digital Images: The Office of Archaeological Research
13075 Moundville Archaeological Park
Moundville, Alabama 35474
205.371.8713

Photograph 1. Façade, facing southeast

Photograph 2. Façade, facing east

Photograph 3. Façade, facing west

Photograph 4. Studio interior, facing control room

Photograph 5. Studio interior, vocal isolation booth

Photograph 6. Studio interior, facing isolation booths

Photograph 7. Studio interior, facing keyboard and guitar stations from bass booth

Photograph 8. Studio interior, facing drum and bass booths from keyboards

Photograph 9. Studio interior, control booth with sound board

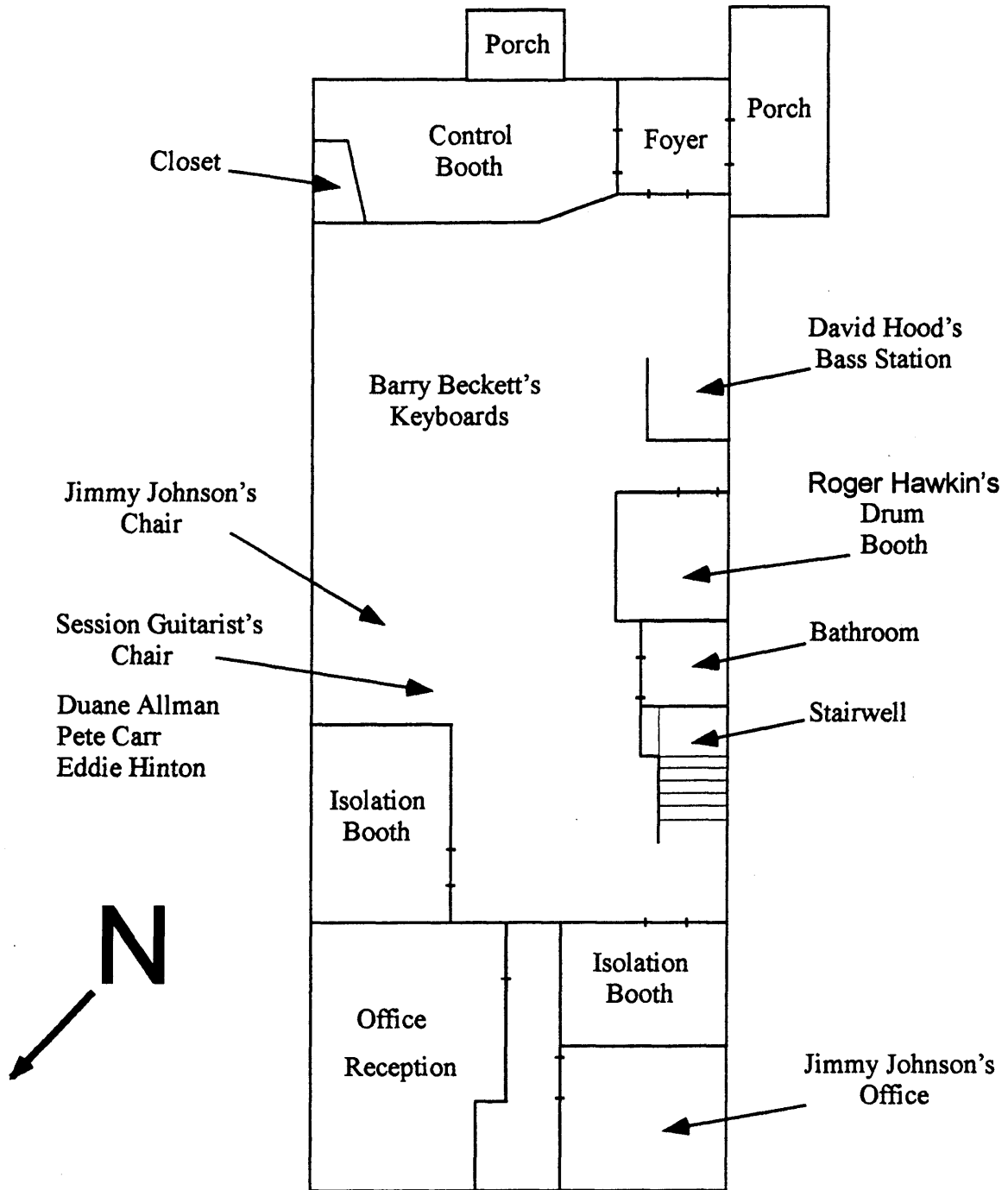
Photograph 10. Studio interior, control booth with 24 inch tape machines

Photograph 11. Basement, facing northwest

Photograph 12. Basement, facing southeast

Photograph 13. Basement, facing east

Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, 3614 Jackson Highway Layout

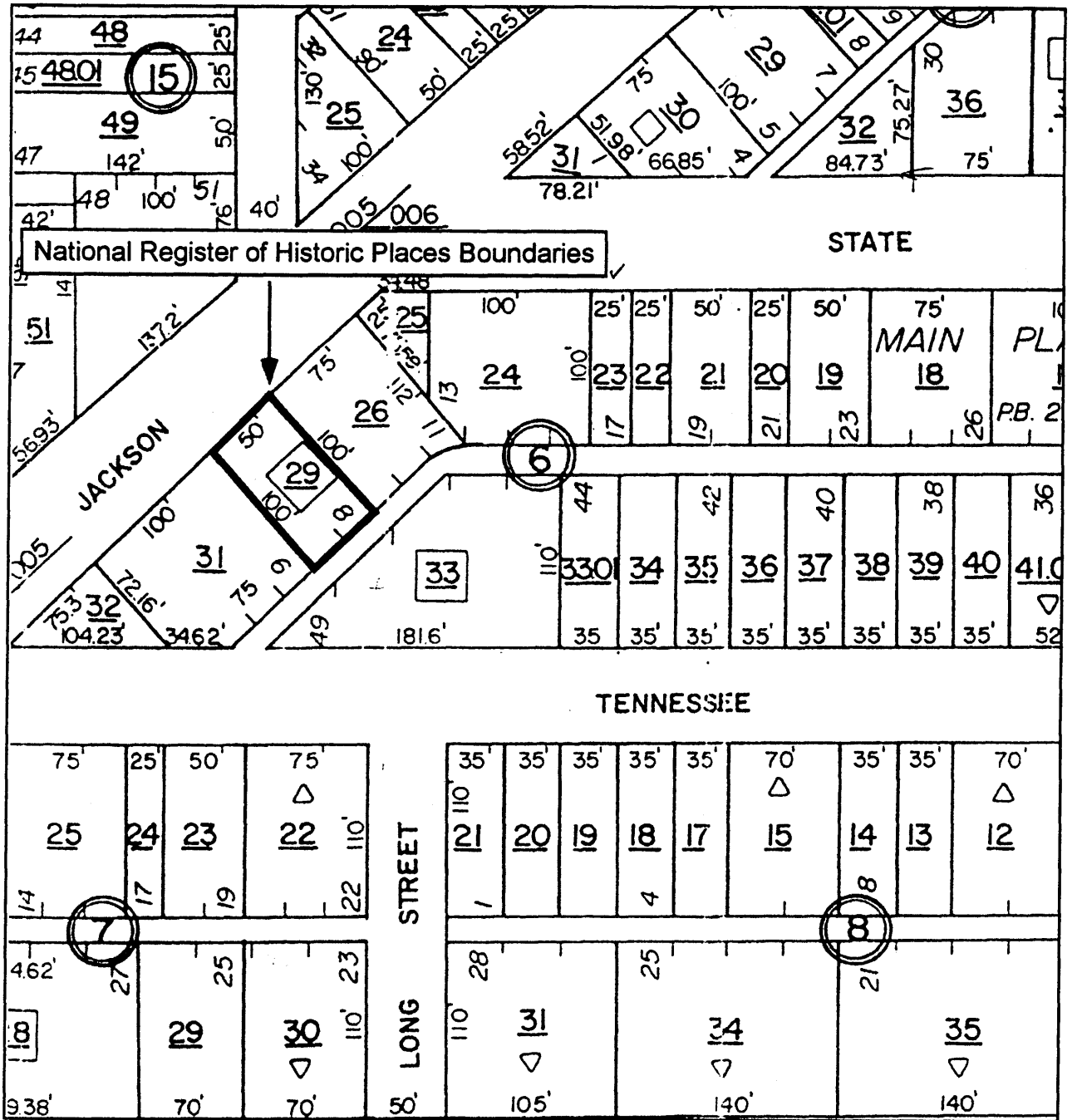


Approximate Scale

0 5 ft.

Based on Colbert County Tax Assessor Map

Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, 3614 Jackson Highway



0 75 125 ft.

1 in. = 125 ft.

Based on Colbert County Tax Assessor Map

