

PH0366803

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED MAY 10 1976
DATE ENTERED JUN 16 1976

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC
William Johnson House
 AND/OR COMMON
William Johnson House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
210 State Street
CITY, TOWN
Natchez
STATE
Mississippi

VICINITY OF
Fourth

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Fourth

CODE
28

COUNTY
Adams

CODE
001

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: Vacant

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Mrs. James Miller

STREET & NUMBER
Third Street

CITY, TOWN
Yazoo City

STATE
Mississippi

VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Adams County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER
Courthouse Square, 100 Block South Wall Street

CITY, TOWN
Natchez

STATE
Mississippi

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The William Johnson House is a three-bay, two-and-one-half-story townhouse set directly upon the street at 210 State Street in Natchez, Mississippi. Although altered by remodeling and recent deterioration, the Johnson House survives as a typical example of a nineteenth century middle-class dwelling in the Greek Revival style, built between 1840-1841. It is constructed of brick laid in common bond with the facade stuccoed and scored in imitation of ashlar masonry. Only the pair of pilastered dormers with six-over-six double-hung windows and the raised seam tin roof are thought to be original features of the facade. The entrance frontispiece, with its sidelights and glazed door, appears to have been installed ca. 1910, at which time the windows may have been altered. A two-tiered veranda, with iron supports on the first level and turned wooden columns on the second, was also probably attached to the front (north) elevation at this time. Behind the dwelling is a two-story kitchen comprised of two rooms per floor, each served by fireplaces in a central chimney. Each room has direct access to the outside by means of four-paneled doors painted their original Spanish brown and tan colors. A badly deteriorated catwalk connects the second-floor galleries of each building, and along with the catwalk, a rotting stair gives the only access to the upper level of the dwelling house.

The ca. 1910 remodeling which altered the facade of the William Johnson House also affected the interior trim of the first floor. A living and dining room, divided by a Colonial Revival screen of columns resting on high bookcases, occupied the forward third of the plan. A narrow hall leads from the living room to the back entrance and is flanked by four small chambers with twentieth century woodwork. Interior features of this floor which are approximate to the Greek Revival style are limited to the rear (south) six-paneled door, one window architrave with a typical ogee-and-fillet backband, and a relatively sophisticated wooden mantel designed with fluted Doric columns and a five-part frieze.

In contrast to the first floor, the upper floor retains a great deal of its original trim. Entrance to this floor is gained from the upper rear (south) gallery which is enclosed on the east by a board-and-batten screen and on the west by the addition of a modern bathroom. A small passage connects the gallery with two narrow chambers flanking it and with a spacious room occupying the northwest quarter of this floor. Perhaps used as a parlor, this room contains a fireplace with a simple pilastered mantel and doors with fielded panels. Although plain, the other chambers of this floor retain their original floors, baseboards, doors (at least two of which have their original paint), and architraves. Two spring latches, which were installed on doors to what was called the "closepress [sic]" under the attic stairs, are the most notable hardware to survive.

The structural deterioration of the William Johnson House is progressing at an alarming rate. When the house was being built, the north and south walls were not properly tied into the neighboring party wall. Settling of the house has resulted in a gap between the two structures. Rising damp has weakened the foundations and lower walls of the dwelling, and the rear gallery, stairs, and catwalk are dangerously close to collapse. The entire east wall of the two-story kitchen building has fallen, while the remaining walls are weakened by rising damp and rotten structural members.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES William Johnson (1809-1851) BUILDER/ARCHITECT William Johnson
Residence (1841-1851)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

According to the words of the prolific and internationally acclaimed historian Allan Nevins, William Johnson was "one of the most remarkable and interesting American diarist."¹ He offered the first known complete chronological journals kept by a free black person in the antebellum South. Johnson's diary tells of the life and vitality of a major southern town, Natchez, Mississippi, before the Civil War. The diary illustrates the extraordinary rise of a black man from bondage to freedom, his success in business, and the complimentary respect that he received in his community. It also presents a configuration of the black-white relationships in the South on a day-to-day basis.

Prior to the discovery of Johnson's diary in 1938 and 1948, historians were limited in their knowledge of the life-style, progress and limitations of free blacks during the pre-Civil War era. The significance of William Johnson's diary is that it offers a distinct, first hand perspective of a free black man's life and sets forth another clue in the mystery of what free blacks did in the antebellum South.

BIOGRAPHY

Born a slave in 1809, William Johnson was freed at age eleven and took the name of the man who freed him and who had also freed his mother and sister earlier. During the 1820s, Johnson served as an apprentice in a barber shop belonging to his brother-in-law, James Miller, a prominent barber in Natchez, Mississippi. During the early nineteenth century, many of the leading barber shops in the South were operated by free blacks and the apprenticeship system was the principle means of training for this prestigious occupation in the black community. After completing his apprenticeship in Miller's shop, William Johnson operated his own barber shop at Port Gibson, Mississippi, and later returned to Natchez to buy his brother-in-law's establishment. In addition to purchasing James Miller's barber shop, Johnson's business enterprises soon expanded to include a bathhouse and two smaller barber shops.

William Johnson's businesses were run by both free blacks and slaves working under his direction. He received numerous applications for apprenticeship positions and his selections included children of free blacks who were placed by their parents and slaves who were placed by their masters. The ages of the young boys ranged from 10 to 15 years, and they remained apprentices until the age of 18 when they made arrangements to be journeymen in the barber's trade.

Even though barbering was Johnson's primary business and money-making venture, he was also engaged in money-lending, farming, brokering, real estate rentals and land speculation. A year after he began keeping his diary, Johnson wrote of several new building constructions in which he acted as his own contractor using

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Davis, Edwin Allen and Hogan, William Ransom. The Barber of Natchez. Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1954.

Johnson, William. William Johnson's Natchez: The Antebellum Diary of a Free Negro. edited by William Ransom Hogan and Edwin Adams Davis. New York: Kennikat

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than three .016 acre EDS Press, 1958 and 1961. (continued)

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 5	6, 5, 2, 6, 7, 0	3, 4, 92, 5, 4, 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The William Johnson House at 210 State Street is bounded on the northeast by State Street, on the northwest by a railroad station and terminal, on the southwest by a vacant lot, and on the southeast by a two-story law office building.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

William C. Allen, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

May, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

P. O. Box 571

(601) 354-6218

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Jackson,

Mississippi 39205

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE X

LOCAL

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

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

Elmer R. Williams

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE May, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
<i>W. Smith</i>	DATE <u>4/16/76</u>
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	DATE <u>5.15.76</u>
ATTEST: <i>Charles Adams</i>	
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	

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the labor of his slaves and local white artisans. The first of these structures was built between 1836 and 1837 on property owned by his mother-in-law, Harriet Battles. The property was rented out and managed by Johnson; however, in September, 1839, the building burned down. Johnson then built a two-and-one-half-story structure on the same site between August 1840 and November 1841 which he and his family occupied, and which his present descendants now own at 210 State Street in Natchez, Mississippi.

The holding of slaves by free blacks during the antebellum period has always been an indiscernible study. Because of a lack of evidence, historians have failed to investigate thoroughly the existence of slaveholding by free blacks. Therefore, the significance of William Johnson's diary is that it presents, along with Madame Marie Therese Coin-Coin Metroyer's Yucca plantation in Melrose, Louisiana, and Thomas Day's workshop studio in Milton, North Carolina, a more enlightened picture--physical and written documentation--as to the roles of free black slaveholders in the antebellum South.

Blacks such as Johnson were restricted in their hiring and employment practices. Therefore, the services of other free blacks were secured for skilled jobs, slaves for household functions and unskilled labor, and services secured from unskilled whites who were willing to work for a black man. In the case of William Johnson, thirty-one slaves had been in his possession between the purchase of his first in 1832 until his death in 1851.

Interestingly enough, Johnson's views on slaveholding were typical of those established by white slave masters. He did not challenge the social and economic status quo of southern society and he governed himself accordingly--even in the management of his slaves. Slaves were investments and Johnson believed that reasonable labor returns could be secured by the maintenance of adequate discipline.

The respect which Johnson received from the Natchez community allowed him considerable latitude in his relationship with whites which few free blacks experienced. Johnson was allowed to rent rooms and buildings and to lend money to whites. He was also allowed to employ, and most significantly, to sue whites in court in civil suits. Nonetheless, while his business and financial dealings approached that of equality, his social contacts fell within the bounds of existing unwritten codes of non-social interaction between the races, which applied to all blacks whether free or slave.

In June 1851, a long standing boundary dispute with a man named Baylor Winn resulted in the murder of William Johnson. While on his death bed, Johnson identified Baylor Winn as his assailant, and the people of Natchez and across the state demanded that the prosecution lead to an ultimate conviction. However, under Mississippi law, as it was with most southern states, a black man, slave or free, could not enter into a law suit against or with a white man unless it was by prior legal arrangement. Therefore, after two years of litigation in two different counties, Johnson's murderer was released because the prosecution failed to substantiate the race of the defendant. By law, at this time, no case could be brought against a white man for the murder

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of a black man. In spite of William Johnson's unusual standing, his death by murder "was avenged by the law no more than if he had been a common slave..."²

The diary of William Johnson, found in 1938 with two missing chapters that were not discovered until 1948, recorded his private observations for the years 1835-1851 in Natchez, Mississippi. Its discovery was also accompanied by a ledger and finance documents, letters, account books and four volumes of rare nineteenth century newspaper clippings. Johnson's diary illustrates the rise of a free black man to a respected position and the observations recorded in it were those of a curious and intelligent man. Because of the locale of Johnson's barber shop in the business district, it was "one of the vital institutions through which ebbed much of the everyday life of Natchez."³ In his diary, Johnson's observations and insights reflected his vitality. With curiosity that is reminiscent of that of the eighteenth century English diarists Pepys and Boswell who believed that the keeping of a record was "the most meaningful portion of life itself,"⁴ William Johnson left a much needed legacy to the history of the Afro-Americans' economic role in the antebellum South.

FOOTNOTES

1. Allan Nevins, Ordeal of the Union (New York, 1947), 1., p. 258.
2. William Johnson, William Johnson's Natchez: The Antebellum Diary of a Free Negro (Port Washington, New York, 1968), p. 55.
3. Edwin A. Davis, The Barber of Natchez (Baton Rouge, La., 1954), p. 30.
4. Ibid., p. 5.

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Nevins, Allan. Ordeal of the Union. New York: Scribner, 1947.

ITEM NUMBER 10 (continued)

Lynne Gomez Graves, Historical Projects Director
Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation
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Washington, D. C.

February, 1976
(202) 462-2519