



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Oak Hill Historic District  
other names/site number N/A

**2. Location**

street & number N/A not for publication N/A  
city or town Oak Hill vicinity N/A  
state Alabama code AL county Wilcox code 131 zip code 36766

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant    nationally    statewide X locally. (   See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 5/22/98  
Signature of certifying official 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): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] 6/26/98  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

USDI/NPS Registration Form

Property Name Oak Hill Historic District

County and State Wilcox County, Alabama

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check only one box.)

Category of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-Federal

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>56</u>	<u>10</u> buildings
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>7</u>	<u>1</u> structures
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>67</u>	<u>11</u> Total

Number of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Sub:
<u>Domestic</u>	<u>Single dwelling</u>
<u>Domestic</u>	<u>Secondary structure</u>
<u>Commerce/Trade</u>	<u>General store</u>
<u>Funerary</u>	<u>Cemetery</u>
<u>Religion</u>	<u>Church</u>
<u>Education</u>	<u>School</u>

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:	Sub:
<u>Domestic</u>	<u>Single dwelling</u>
<u>Domestic</u>	<u>Secondary structure</u>
<u>Vacant/not in use</u>	
<u>Commerce/Trade</u>	<u>General store</u>
<u>Commerce/Trade</u>	<u>Specialty store</u>
<u>Funerary</u>	<u>Cemetery</u>
<u>Religion</u>	<u>Church</u>
<u>Social</u>	<u>Community center</u>

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

<u>Mid-19th Century: Greek Revival</u>	<u>Other: double pile hipped roof</u>
<u>Late Victorian</u>	<u>Other: bungalow</u>
<u>Other: coastal cottage</u>	<u>Other: I-house</u>

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick, stone, concrete

roof asphalt, metal: tin

walls wood: weatherboard

other \_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition on continuation sheet/s.)

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.) N/A

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

- Architecture
- Settlement
- Development

Period of Significance c. 1836-c. 1940

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 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 # AL-148, AL-108
- 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

USDI/NPS Registration Form

Property Name Oak Hill Historic District  
County and State Wilcox County, Alabama

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**10. Geographical Data**  
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Acreage of Property approx. 675 acres

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

Zone Easting Northing    Zone Easting Northing  
1 16 490890 3532680    3 16 493420 3530200  
2 16 493350 3532740    4 16 490920 3530150  
         See continuation sheet.

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

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

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**11. Form Prepared By**  
=====

name/title Johnathan A. Farris/Survey Coordinator & Trina Binkley/AHC Reviewer  
organization Alabama Historical Commission date 2/4/98  
street & number 468 South Perry Street telephone (334)242-3184  
city or town Montgomery state Alabama zip code 36130-0900

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**Additional Documentation**  
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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)

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

name Multiple Ownership  
street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Oak Hill state Alabama zip code 36766

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

Narrative Description

The village of Oak Hill is located in eastern Wilcox County, Alabama, on the top of a hill which has the occasional vista to the surrounding countryside, characterized by forest and some cultivated creek bottoms. The top of the hill itself is wooded and organized along two roads, county road 21, running from north to south, and county road 10, running southeast to northwest. At the intersection of the two roads and along county road 21 south of the intersection is the small commercial core of the community. Houses dating primarily to the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century sit on large lots and are spaced rhythmically along the two roads. The house lots and intermediary lots in Oak Hill give primarily a forested impression, which while limiting scenic views, has the happy effect of providing plentiful shade during the long, sultry Wilcox County summers. Small outbuildings dot the back yards of the house lots, generally representing a range of house-related storage and utility functions. A few barns are also present, perhaps recalling the days when horses were a primary mode of transportation and cultivation in rural south central Alabama. Front yards are often surrounded by wooden picket fences. The decorative, white painted fences represent a past need to keep animals (both wild and domestic) out of what were presumably once yards verdured with decorative plantings. Many of the fences have boards nailed horizontally at their bases (a "snake board" in the vernacular), which is characteristic of the region. Trees (magnolias, oaks, and cedars) clearly planted for practical and decorative uses in the historical era remain in several yards.

Commercial buildings in Oak Hill sort into two different basic types associated with two different periods. The first type of commercial building to appear in the community was the one story frame front gabled building group which embodies the popular image of the "country store" in the Deep South. In Oak Hill these are associated largely with the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Three of this building type (inventory #s 7, 11, & 12) are located in Oak Hill, two of which have an integral recessed porch resting on rectangular piers, and one of which has a facade flush with the front gable and the later addition of a suspended shed porch. These structures generally have few side windows as the side walls on the interior were reserved for shelf space. The front facade of the structures commonly has two display windows flanking a central door which is the main entrance. The second type of commercial building is the masonry one-story one part commercial block. This type is characteristic of the mid-20th century in Oak Hill. The two examples in the district (inventory #s 11 and 12) have concrete block walls with stepped parapets on the side walls, a building type which is known to occur in the county beginning in the mid-1930s and continuing about a decade and a half thereafter.

Historic domestic buildings fit into three basic time periods: the mid-nineteenth century, the turn-of-the-century, and the 1920s and 1930s. With the exception of the A.C. Ramsey House (inv. #23), first period structures universally possess one main full story with perhaps an additional half story under their eaves and are double pile central passage plan houses. The Ramsey House is an I-house (two full story central passage house, 1 pile deep). All first period houses have service appendages to their main blocks (usually in the form of rear ells). The one or one and a half story double pile houses vary in appearance mainly in their roof type. Of these, six possess a "coastal cottage" type of roof, that is, a side gabled roof which extends, unbroken, over the front porch, making the porch an integral part of the structure and allowing more usable space in the top 1/2 story. There is also one hipped roof house (a post-bellum structure—inv. #3), and one spraddle roofed house (the spraddle roof clearly making the porch integral to the structure but possessing an articulated break in the roofline which makes the end gables look "splayed"—inv. #18). With the exception of the hipped roof house (inv. #3), all first period houses have front porches that extend the full width of the facade. All first period houses possess "carolina" porches. This means that their supports (piers generally but sometimes just posts) rest on a masonry base which in turn rests directly on the ground usually a foot or two in front of the foundation of the porch floor. This is a distinctive regional characteristic.

During the second phase of building, c. 1890-c.1920, Oak Hill obtained, of houses still extant, two cross gabled "L-cottages", three hipped roof houses, three double pen "tenant"-type houses, and an unusual front gabled house. All are one story tall except one of the hipped roof houses (inv. #20), which has a doubled front gable with windows, which gives it an additional half story. The double-pen "tenant type"-houses have generally only two rooms, with two exterior doors and an interior chimney between the two pens. The other houses of this era are more substantial, usually being two or more rooms in depth with sometimes elaborate rear ell extensions and rear sheds. Porches of this period are of the attached shed type, in contrast to the earlier local predilection for integral porches. Architectural details, when present, are generally of the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 2

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

mass-produced variety, including turned porch posts, porch brackets, and decorative shingles. The turn-of-the-century buildings do retain several of the features of traditional buildings of the first period of construction. This includes doors with sidelights and/or transoms, brick pier foundations, and (with the exception of the tenant type) central passage plans. Three of the structures (inv. #s 14, 20, & 33) possess more innovative spatial features in protruding polygonal bays that form major elements of their front facade.

The third phase of domestic building in Oak Hill, dating c. 1920-1940, is illustrated by two simply detailed front gabled bungalows, one hipped roof house with a front gabled porch and a slight Craftsman stylistic influence, and two end-gabled houses with front gabled porches. The two front gabled bungalows (inv. #s 8 & 24) are significantly the only historic structures possessing a massed plan in the community. The hipped roof house (inv. #5) and one of the end-gabled houses (inv. # 26) maintain the conservative central passage plan, while the other end-gabled house (inv. #22) is an elaboration of a double pen plan. Conservative elements such as transoms, sidelights, and brick pier foundations are to be found among the houses of this period, although with declining frequency. Craftsman stylistic details do appear on some of the buildings, particularly battered porch piers or clustered porch posts and exposed eave rafters.

Only two religious structures at a time ever existed on Oak Hill, and only one church stands today. Bethel Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (inv. #2—constructed 1895) is perhaps the most ornamented structure in the vicinity. A large frame structure with a smaller front gabled wing connected by a breezeway, it possesses large stained glass semicircular windows over the central windows and main door of the structure as well as substantial brackets under its pedimented pyramidal steeple. This structure clearly proclaims its function as a center of community life in the town through its scale and elaboration.

Two cemeteries are included within the limits of Oak Hill, one accompanying Bethel Church and the other, dubbed Ebenezer Cemetery, near the site where first Ebenezer Methodist Church and later Oak Hill Baptist Church were once situated. Presumably serving as a repository for the deceased of the respective denominations, these cemeteries are both typified by slab-type grave stones and some more elaborately carved monuments, all laid neatly in rows. The Bethel Cemetery is more densely packed and larger, while the Ebenezer cemetery is characterized by detached familial clumps spaced a certain distance from each other. A single grave site can also be found within the district associated with inventory number 21.

Finally, the Oak Hill School (inv. #25), c. 1926, is a large frame structure with a T-shaped plan and large banks of sash windows. Some Craftsman influences can be seen in the exposed eave rafters and brackets supporting the door hoods. It is the only educational building remaining on Oak Hill.

Four major structures do not contribute to the Oak Hill National Register District. Two of these buildings are early 20th-century structures that have undergone substantial alterations so that their original appearance is no longer apparent (inv. #s 15 & 27). One of the structures (inv. #19) was somewhat reconfigured and moved to its present location in 1951, and so does not maintain integrity of location. Finally, the Oak Hill Post Office (inv. #13) is an unremarkable building of recent vintage.

Small transverse barns, storage sheds, well structures, and other outbuildings inhabit many of the yards of historic structures in Oak Hill. These continue to attest to the outdoor nature of work in the community and, therefore, if historic are viewed as contributing elements of the district.

The Oak Hill Historic District contains a total of 67 contributing and 11 noncontributing resources. Of the contributing resources, 56 are buildings, 3 are sites, 7 are structures, and 1 is an object. Of the noncontributing resources, 10 are buildings and 1 is a structure.

Although no archaeological survey has been conducted in Oak Hill, the potential for substantial historical archaeological remains which could significantly contribute to our knowledge of middling planters in the early to mid-19th century is high. Notably, also, 19th-century African American archaeological resources, if located, would greatly aid the understanding of this element of antebellum society, which is not represented by extant standing structures.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 3

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District  
County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

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**Inventory of Structures**

(addresses not available; buildings referenced on accompanying map by inventory number)

**1. Fox-Harris-Jones House**—c. 1845; Greek Revival style/Victorian updated frame central passage of the coastal cottage type with double pen wing on the south side, original integral recessed porch filled in late 19th century, wing retains its original recessed porch configuration, main block possesses wraparound attached porch with turned posts and jigsaw work brackets, three decorative late 19th-century gables on main block, the center decorative gable retains original decorative shingle work and louvered vent, the bulk of the house is clad in synthetic shingles, the front porch retains exposed flush board cladding with a beaded board dado, front double door on main block with sidelights, transom, and bull's-eye moldings, main front doors possess round headed Italianate influenced doors, two single leaf front doors flank main entrance and lead to rooms flanking the central passage, rear ell and rear shed, the ell is novelty board sided, main block of house is two rooms deep, two brick chimneys (one of which is stuccoed) occupy front room width, brick pier foundation (some piers stuccoed) with concrete block infill, south wing possesses a truncated exterior chimney on south face, two doors opening onto recessed porch on piers, wing possesses louvered wooden shutters, windows on the front of the main block are two over two pane sashes, while nine over nine pane sashes typify most of the rest of the building, tin clad roof. (C)

**Outbuilding—**

a) 19th century (cut nail era) frame side gabled outbuilding with weatherboard cladding and a small door possessing iron strap hinges.(C)

**2. Bethel Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and Cemetery**—1895, late Victorian frame front gabled church with tower in southwest corner and detached wing with breezeway, decorative shingling in gables and weatherboard below (detached wing is currently vinyl sided), a central bank of four one over one sash windows in both main block and wing, above both windows in the gable are semicircular windows with multiple square stained glass panes of diverse colors, tower is two storied with pyramidal steeple and four decorative pediments supported by brackets and containing oculus-type louvered vents, tower front entrance is surmounted by a round headed multiple clear paned window and a door hood supported by brackets, the other front entrance is indicated by a projecting pediment on the breezeway north of the sanctuary and is itself recessed, paired one over one sash windows on building sides, two narrow stove type brick chimneys flank sanctuary after second fenestration rows from the front, brick pier foundation with concrete block infill, cast concrete steps for entrances with concrete newels surmounted by concrete globes once covered in white glass, polygonal apse on east end with two one over one sash windows two sides flanking blank central bay, tin shingled roof. (C)

a) Bethel ARP Church Cemetery—This site is situated on a moderate slope directly behind the church. Stone lich wall (built 1942) with steel pipe rails and stone posts surmounted by concrete globes once clad in white glass separates church and cemetery in rear of building. Cemetery contains a variety of mainly late-19th- and early-20th-century grave markers of congregation members, aligned in more or less orderly rows.(C)

**3. Eugene McBryde House**—c. 1860-1875, one-story frame hipped roof house two piles in depth with two interior brick chimneys separating front and rear rooms, asbestos shingle siding, front single bay wide pedimented porch with elaborate jigsaw work supports and railings, four faceted polygonal bay windows on bay north of main entrance, brick pier foundation, breezeway and detached single pen wing to north of house with recessed porch on posts with less elaborate jigsaw work ornament resting on brick pier bases detached from house in "carolina porch" fashion, windows uniformly six over six pane sashes. (C)

**Outbuildings—**

a) 20th-century frame weatherboarded front gabled barn-like garage with separate pen to rear.(C)

b) 19th-century front gabled saddle notched log crib on stone foundation with a corrugated metal roof. (C)

c) c. 1900 shed roofed frame animal pen with two structural bays, flush board cladding, corrugated metal roof; one pen possesses two stalls, the other pen, of separate but attached build, has only a single spatial unit. (C)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 4

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District  
County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

4. **Newberry-Miller House**—c. 1847, one-and-a-half-story central passage frame house of the “coastal cottage” type, rear ell, main block is two rooms in depth with four stuccoed brick exterior end chimneys (one for each ground floor room in the main block), rear ell, integral recessed porch on battered piers resting on brick piers resting directly on the ground in “carolina porch” fashion, wooden porch deck has jigsaw work railing, flush board cladding on front facade (i.e. under porch) with weatherboard cladding on other elevations except rear ell which is novelty board sided, tin shingled roof, brick pier foundation with concrete block infill, double front door with sidelights and transom both with multiple double tiered panes, nine over nine pane sash windows throughout except for six over six sash windows in rear ell and diminutive six over six sashes in the angles of the eaves. Traditionally the construction of the house utilized an earlier log structure as a core. Front yard defined by notable picket fence with plank base (known colloquially as a snake board). Notable row of historic evergreens in the front yard space. (C)

5. **J. Carlisle Dale House**—c. 1920, one-story frame hipped roof house with some vernacularized Craftsman style influence in the details, three rooms in depth including ells, large pedimented front porch with thin clustered piers on brick bases and a plain railing on rectangular ballusters, two rear ells (one of which has a wing sticking out slightly from the east elevation) with shed porches and enclosed rear porch room, brick pier foundation, exposed rafters under eaves, two decorative gables on east and west elevations, two interior brick chimneys, paired two over two sash windows on front facade, single two over two sash windows elsewhere, single leaf front door with narrow sidelights and transom. (C)

Outbuildings:

- a) c. 1920 stuccoed well housing approximately three feet in height. (C)
- b) c. 1920 frame end gabled double pen, possibly cook’s house, with two front doors. (C)

6. **McBryde-Perryman House**—c. 1900, late Victorian one-story frame cross gabled L-cottage with two early-to-mid-20th-century-Colonial Revival influenced wings on side elevations, two sequential rear ells terminating in a shed porch, wraparound enclosed shed porch on rear and eastern ell, front hipped shed porch with turned posts, weatherboard clad except horizontal beaded board with vertical beaded board dado under porch, brick pier foundation with concrete block infill, one brick end chimney now enclosed by eastern wing addition, one brick interior chimney in original projecting section, seam metal roof, vertical wood slats distinguishing cornice line, returned cornices and decorative shingling in gables of original block, single leaf front door with sidelights and transom with bull’s-eye molding surrounds, secondary single leaf front door leading off porch into original projecting bay with bull’s eye molding surrounds, west wing composed of hyphen and front gabled pavilion with side door under small projecting pedimented stoop, nine over nine windows in original block, six over six windows in wing additions. Front yard is enclosed by notable wooden picket fence with plank base (snake board) and brick foundation, front gate, and two pyramid-tipped gateposts. (C)

7. **Dale Brothers General Merchandise Store complex**—c. 1890, one-story, frame front gabled commercial building with side shed flush with front facade and ell flush with rear elevation both projecting northeastward from the main block, recessed porch on piers which rest on concrete porch with multiple cast concrete steps extending the entire width of the facade, corrugated metal clad roof, weatherboard clad walls, foundation of main block is loosely mortared unhewn stone over which is laid several courses of brick in order to level the sills, stone pier and substituted concrete block pier foundation under side shed, stone and wood pier foundations under side ell, in most places the foundations are in fact hidden by wide wood planks, six paneled front double doors on main block, single leaf six paneled front door on side shed, front windows covered by closed wooden shutters secured by diagonal iron bars, four over four sash windows on side shed, six over six sash windows in side ell, loading doors on side elevations of main block and on rear elevation of side ell, small interior central brick stove-type chimney in main block. (C)

Outbuildings:

- a) early-to-mid-twentieth-century frame transverse barn with loose mortared unhewn stone foundation and corrugated metal exterior cladding. (C)
- b) late-twentieth-century diminutive front gabled concrete block building with single leaf door. (NC)
- c) early-to-mid-twentieth-century frame transverse barn with sheds on loose mortared unhewn stone foundation and corrugated metal exterior cladding. (C)



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 5

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

d) early-to-mid-twentieth-century frame front gabled building with loose mortared unhewn stone foundation and corrugated metal cladding which addresses the road but does not currently appear to have any means of entrance. (C)

**8. Dale-Leonard House**—c. 1920, one-and-a-half-story frame front gabled house with hipped roof porch on battered piers with cast concrete bases, vinyl siding on front, aluminum siding elsewhere, corrugated metal roof, shed/ell on southwest elevation, small hipped roof addition to east face, two over two sash windows throughout, single leaf front door with transom, two small four paned windows in gable. (C)

**9. Store/Garage**—c. 1940, one-story concrete block commercial building with parapet roof, multipaned metal front windows with brick sills, double front door, garage door on western elevation, two small “over shelf” windows on west elevation. (C)

**10. Williamson Mercantile**—c. 1940, one-story detached concrete block commercial block with brick facade, single leaf door with narrow transom, two large plate glass windows on front facade, parapet roof, concrete sills and cornice line. (C)

**11. Bonner & Carothers Store**—c. 1885, one-story frame front gabled commercial building, novelty board siding except on front under porch where flush board siding is used, recessed integral porch on piers with brick bases (which probably originally rested directly on the ground), porch floor composed of later concrete block and cast concrete, stone pier foundation, small central interior brick chimney, corrugated metal roof, double front door with transom of two exceptionally large panes, two polygonal bay windows flanking front entrance covered with multiple jointed paneled wooden shutters, polygonal apse in rear, loading door on west elevation. (C)

Outbuildings:

a) early 20th c. frame shed. (C)

b) early 20th c. frame shed. (C)

**12. Store**—c. 1900, one-story front gabled novelty board sided commercial building, basement story under rear half of building, loading door on east side of basement, substantial brick pier foundation, metal roof, aluminum siding in gable, large mid-20th-century plate glass windows and double door on front facade. (C)

**13. Oak Hill Post Office**—c. 1970, one-story side gabled concrete block building on poured concrete slab foundation, metal and glass single leaf door, large plate glass window, asphalt shingle roof. (NC)

Outbuilding:

a) early 20th-century small front gabled frame shed with novelty board siding, exposed rafters under the eaves, and corrugated metal roof. (C)

**14. Joe B. McWilliams, Sr., House**—c. 1890, one-story frame hipped roof house with decorative front gable (which contains elaborate shingling, a central diamond shaped figure, and turned work bargeboards), wraparound attached shed porch with turned posts, turned brackets, and turned baluster railings, two rear ells, two interior brick chimneys between front and second pile rooms, interior brick chimneys in both ells, brick pier foundation, rear shed porch with turned baluster railings, turned posts, and turned brackets, with a secondary shed porch extending off the initial porch to cover the ascent of a staircase to ground level, double front doors with bull's-eye moldings and transom, early 20th-century screen doors over them, polygonal bay window on west side of facade, two over two sash windows throughout, double back door. (C)

Outbuilding:

a) c. 1930, one-story frame front gabled garage with exposed rafters under the eaves. (C)

**15. Joe B. McWilliams, Jr., House**—second quarter of 20th c., one-story frame side gabled house with wraparound recessed integral porch on piers, weatherboard siding, brick pier foundation with stone infill, rear ell with its own transverse rear ell, nine over nine sash windows, large late-20th-century brick exterior end chimney, late-20th-century neo-Colonial Revival details

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 6

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

including broken pediment door surround and decorative front gable with dentils and fan light. Apparently, originally the structure was built from recycled materials from a store building and has been ornamented in recent years with mass produced detail. (NC)

**16. McWilliams-Harper House**—c. 1900, one-story frame hipped roof house, weatherboard sided except for horizontal beaded board siding on front elevation (porch), exceptionally long rear ell, small wing on north side, attached front shed porch on piers resting on a low weatherboarded wall, brick pier foundation, poured concrete front walk and front steps, one brick exterior end chimney, seam metal roof, exposed rafters under eaves, front door with sidelights, transom, and bull's-eye moldings, two over two over two sash windows predominate, but six over six sash windows are present in northern wing, front yard notable for historic trees flanking front walk and chimney fall in south side yard. (C)

Outbuildings:

- a) early-20th-century frame side gabled board and batten sided shed, undergoing structural failure. (NC)
- b) early-20th-century frame side gabled building (work shed?) on high stone piers, single leaf front door, windows with wood shutters on gable ends, seam metal roof. (C)
- c) early-20th-century frame shed roofed board and batten sided chicken house, two small stacked square animal sized entrances, corrugated metal roof. (C)
- d) early-20th-century frame transverse barn, flush board sided, stone pier foundation, 8 pens total in interior. (C)
- e) early-20th-century small front gabled frame shed, metal clad, stone pier foundation. (C)

**17. House**—c.1900, one-story front gabled frame house with attached shed front porch on plain posts, porch posts appear to rest on stone bases set directly into the ground while the wood frame porch floor is recessed behind them, weatherboarded, stone pier foundation, central passage plan, two rooms deep plus a one room rear ell on north side, stone pier foundation, two interior brick chimneys between front and back rooms, vertical two paneled front double doors with sidelights, nine over nine sash windows. (C)

**18. S.L. Jones-Young House**—c. 1845, one-story frame spraddle roofed central passage plan house, weatherboarded except on front facade (porch) where flush board siding is used, recessed "carolina porch" on wooden piers with stuccoed brick bases with base and top ornamental brick courses, rear shed, rear "T"-shaped hipped roof wing connected via breezeway, tin shingled roof, two exterior brick end chimneys, no chimney apparent in rear wing, rear wing has recessed porch that continues the breezeway around front portion of wing, brick pier foundation, wooden front and side steps, double front and rear doors with sidelights and transoms (two tiered panes in front door lights), nine over nine sash windows on front facade with louvered wooden shutters, nine over nine sash windows elsewhere except in hyphen on breezeway, which possesses six over six sash windows. (C)

Outbuildings:

- a) early-to-mid-20th-century small frame novelty board sided shed roofed building in front yard. (C)
- b) early to mid-20th century frame flat roofed building with a miscellany of siding techniques. (C)

**19. McConnico-Harper House**—c. 1845/1951 one-and-a-half-story frame side gabled central passage plan weatherboarded house, initially a Greek Revival cottage which was altered and moved from an outlying rural area in the vicinity in 1951, front pedimented porch with four fluted piers on brick bases, brick and concrete front steps, flush board siding on front porch bays, poured concrete pier foundation with concrete block infill, rear enclosed shed porch, porte cochere on south side of house on battered wooden Greek Revival piers on brick bases, two brick exterior end chimneys in front pile, side gables decorated with returned cornices, double front doors with sidelights and transom, six over six sash windows throughout. (NC)  
(Contributing status should be reassessed when the date of the move reaches 50 years ago.)

**20. Dr. Tennant McWilliams House**—1904, one-and-a-half-story frame weatherboarded pyramidal roof house, double overlapping front gables wrap around shed porch on turned posts with brackets, approximately three rooms deep plus a modern rear shed on north side and a historic one-room rear ell on south side, central passage plan, two interior brick end

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 7

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

chimneys springing from decorative gables on side elevations, brick pier foundation with brick infill, original Eastlake influenced single leaf front door with transom, two over two sash windows characterize the main block of the house, the rear ell possesses four over four sash windows, the rear shed has six over six sash windows, the windows on the porch are three sashes of two paned windows which can be lifted for interior/exterior access, on the interior, bull's-eye moldings and transoms over doors onto central passage are characteristic, in the front of the central passage an elevated spindlework decoration with central lyre motif. Side yard is defined with a picket fence with a plank base (snake board). (C)

Outbuildings:

- a) mid-20th-century frame playhouse. (NC)
- b) frame gazebo. (NC)

**21. Dr. William Dale House**— c. 1845, one-and-a-half-story frame central passage house of the coastal cottage type with Greek Revival stylistic elements, integral recessed porch on octagonal columns resting on stuccoed brick piers ("carolina porch" style), rear shed and rear ell, weatherboarded except front facade which is novelty board sided, brick pier foundation with concrete block infill, three brick exterior end chimneys (a front pile chimney is missing and the rear pile chimneys are truncated, corrugated metal roof, double front door with sidelights and transom, triangular topped Greek Revival door surround, nine over nine sash windows. (C)

Outbuildings:

- a) modern frame tractor shed. (NC)
- b) early-20th-century front gabled frame board and batten sided building with side sheds. (C)
- c) modern frame shed open on three sides for protection of a machine of some sort. (NC)
- d) grave site and 1885 stone of Mrs. M. Ella, wife of A.J. Dale (one of the builder's sons). (C)

**22. Bill Griffin House**— c.1940, one-story frame end gabled weatherboarded house with a double pen main block and two side wings and a c. 1965 porte cochere to the south, pedimented front porch on piers with curvilinear brackets, poured concrete front steps with curvilinear decorations on sides, concrete pier foundation, one exterior brick end chimney with a bit of decorative diaperwork, six over six sash windows, asphalt shingled roof, exposed eave rafters, two front doors with what appear to be original screen doors. (C)

**23. A.C. Ramsey House**—1836, two-story end gabled frame central passage plan I-house, two one-story rear ells, brick pier foundation, two exterior stuccoed brick end chimneys, main block is one room deep with ells that are two rooms deep, corrugated metal roof, integral one-story shed porch on battered piers with brick bases resting directly on the ground ("carolina porch" style), weatherboarded except first story of front facade (underneath the porch) which is clad in flush board, rear wings have integral recessed porches facing inward and creating an atrium-like space which has been roofed, corrugated metal roof, main block of house is five fenestration bays wide, central bay in front and rear taken up completely by four leaf doors which make the first floor essentially an enclosed dogtrot, front and rear doors possess sidelights and transom with two tiers of panes, nine over nine sash windows with louvered wooden shutters throughout. Front yard is defined by wooden picket fence with plank base (snake board) and contains notable historic magnolia tree and cedar tree.(C)

Outbuildings:

- a) early-20th-century frame shed, weatherboarded, with corrugated metal shed roof. (C)
- b) early-20th-century frame front gabled outbuilding with regular sized door, weatherboarded, seam metal roof. (C)
- c) early-20th-century frame front gabled transverse barn, weatherboarded, corrugated metal roof. (C)
- d) early-20th-century frame front gabled drive-in outbuilding (garage?) weatherboarded with corrugated metal roof. (C)

**24. James Newberry Bonner House**—1930, one-story front gabled frame bungalow, integral recessed screened in porch on two piers with brick bases, brick pier foundation with concrete block infill, asphalt shingle roof, exposed eave rafters, approximately three rooms deep, rear shed porch with modern enclosed room and modern deck, rectangular vent in front gable, four vertical pane over one pane sash windows, single leaf front door with four vertical panes in upper half. (C)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 8

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

**25. Oak Hill School**—c.1926, one-story frame "T"-shaped school building, novelty board sided, brick pier foundation with concrete block infill under approximately half the building, one interior slender stove-type brick chimney, one larger brick interior chimney flush with rear wall and in the center of rear elevation, seam metal roof, exposed rafters under the eaves, bracketed hoods over two front doors which flank front protruding wing, nine over nine sash windows arranged in banks on front and rear elevations, rectangular vents in gables, cast concrete steps, row of pine trees divides front yard from street. (C)

Outbuildings:

- a) early-20th-century cast concrete well housing in front yard. (C)
- b) early-20th-century cylindrical metal water tank just north of building. (C)
- c) Oak Hill Fire Dept—early-to-mid-20th-century frame structure, shed roof, insulbrick siding, two large metal double doors. (C)
- d) early-20th-century tennis courts with pavement, nets, and net barriers to prevent escaping tennis balls. (C)

**26. Dr. William Calvin Jones—James Dale House**—c. 1920, one-story frame end gabled house with front gabled screened in porch on piers with brick bases, aluminum sided, cast concrete piers with concrete block infill foundation, corrugated metal roof, rear shed, small one-room addition on north elevation, corrugated metal roof, six over six sash windows, cast concrete front steps, modern deck on north elevation of house. (C)

Outbuilding:

- a) early-20th-century double pen frame end gabled tenant house type building, central chimney, rear shed, shed porch on steel supports. (C)

**27. Mrs. Evelyn Dale Kennedy House**—c. 1920 one-story frame house with low pitched hipped roof, recessed porch on modern replacement wooden piers, brick foundation, two interior brick chimneys, new north side wing, new south side bay window and attached porch, asphalt shingled roof, two modern dormers on front facade, initially a vernacular building with Craftsman influences, the building has been Colonial Revivalized in recent years enough to significantly compromise its integrity. (NC)

Outbuilding:

- a) early-20th-century transverse frame barn, weatherboarded except front which is flush board sided, corrugated metal roof, modern rear exterior staircase, modern slit window in northern half of east elevation. (NC)

**28. Ebenezer Cemetery**—mid-19th century through early 20th century, adjacent the sites of Ebenezer Methodist Church and Oak Hill Baptist Churches near the summit of Oak Hill, this was the burial place for non-ARP citizens of the Oak Hill area, stones are predominantly late 19th century, they generally have an east/west orientation and are grouped in familial "clumps," some family plots are designated by cast iron fences, a range of grave stone types are present including slabs, obelisks, and notably a small angel sculpture dedicated to "Our Little Darling Little Clara Lucile" McWilliams dated 1898. (C)

**29. James Harvey and Martha Jones House**—late 1840s, one-and-a-half-story frame side gabled central passage plan coastal cottage type dwelling, integral recessed porch on paneled piers on stuccoed brick bases resting directly on the ground in "carolina porch" fashion, rear ell, stuccoed brick pier foundation with concrete block infill, two brick interior chimneys (one stuccoed) between front rooms and shed rooms, tin shingle roofing on front facade, corrugated metal roofing on rear, two rooms deep with two room deep ell, ell was initially separated from main house by small breezeway which has now been enclosed, weatherboarded except for front facade (under porch) which is clad in flush board with a paneled dado, wooden front steps, plain balustered railings on front porch, front double door with late 19th-century leafs and double tiered panes in sidelights and transom, rear ell has shed porch on south elevation, exterior door to rear ell has a three light transom, nine over nine sash windows throughout except on second story, which has nine over six sash windows. (C)

Outbuilding:

- a) early-20th-century, double pen one-story end gabled frame central chimney tenant type house with insulbrick siding, two front doors, corrugated metal roof, rear shed, stone pier foundation, windows are boarded up. (C)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 9

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

=====

**30. House**—early-20th-century, one-story frame end gabled double pen tenant type house, central brick interior chimney, weatherboarded with front facade replaced with plywood, stone pier foundation, corrugated metal roof, six over six sash windows. (C)

**31. Isaac Newberry House**—1840s, one-and-a-half-story frame side gabled central passage plan coastal cottage type house, recessed integral porch on piers with stuccoed brick bases resting directly on the ground in “carolina porch” fashion, corrugated tin roof, front central gable with two over two sash window and jigsaw work in peak, four stuccoed brick exterior end chimneys, one modern brick exterior chimney on rear elevation, rear ell, rear shed, full stuccoed brick foundation, large front double doors with sidelights and two tiered pane segmentally arched fanlight, weatherboarded except in front gable where vertical beaded board is used and on front porch where flush board cladding is used, nine over nine sash windows throughout, rear ell has been expanded by enclosing porch on west side and removing original wall, ell maintains porch on east side as well as enclosed room on porch, interior exhibits reverse straight flight of stairs, late-nineteenth-century mirrored mantelpieces, front yard is defined by picket fence with plank base (snake board). (C)

Outbuildings:

- a) c. 1900 stuccoed brick flower pit. (C)
- b) early-20th-century diminutive frame transverse barn with sheds, weatherboarded, with no foundations, corrugated metal roof, rear shed, and chicken yard or other animal pen constructed at rear. (C)
- c) early-to-mid-20th-century small frame board and batten building, possibly originally a chicken coop now converted into a play house with a corrugated metal shed roof, shed porch with Tuscan columns and balustrade, brick pier foundation, four paned windows on side elevations. (C)
- d) early-to-mid-20th-century stone cistern. (C)
- e) early-to-mid-20th-century frame weatherboarded front gabled outbuilding on wooden pier foundation with corrugated metal roof. (C)
- f) early-20th-century cast iron water pump.(C)

**32. Joseph and Julia Jones House**—c. 1900, one-story frame ell cottage, weatherboarded, front gable with returned cornices over polygonal bay, decorative shingle work in gables, rear ell with modern shed additions, modern side wing, attached shed front porch on steel replacement supports, solid brick foundation, two over two sash windows. (C)

**33. Bonner-Dale House**—c. 1875, one-and-a-half-story frame central passage plan coastal cottage type side gabled house, integral recessed porch on piers with brick bases directly on ground in carolina porch fashion, weatherboarded except on porch where horizontal beaded board is used, rebuilt brick pier foundation, east side wing, rear ell that has been substantially rebuilt, rebuilt exterior brick end chimneys on west elevation and east wing, double front doors with sidelights and transom and bull’s-eye moldings, two over two sash windows on front facade, nine over nine sash windows elsewhere, wooden louvered shutters, vertical beaded board “cornice” under porch eaves, corrugated metal roof, late-nineteenth-century mantles with mirrors, flush board cladding on central passage (making it read more or less like a dogtrot as far as finish goes) while front rooms are clad in vertical beaded board with a dado of diagonally oriented beaded board, bull’s-eye molding window surrounds on the interior. Though the masonry elements and rear wing of the house are currently undergoing a massive rebuilding and partial replacement, the house maintains its original form and its distinctive late-19th-century decorative details which set it apart from the other, earlier houses of its type in Oak Hill. It is, therefore, a contributing element. (C)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 10

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

VIII. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

**Criterion A—Settlement/Development**

The Oak Hill Historic District is significant under criterion A for its early settlement and developmental history. The community of Oak Hill is a small, rural village which solidified as a neighborhood in the 1850s and was incorporated as a town in 1938. It is a good example of the inland "planter village" settlement type which is characteristic of the eastern end of Wilcox County. This is contrasted to the "riverine plantations" characteristic of the western end of the county. The riverine planters were characterized by monocrop agriculture, dispersed settlement patterns, and largely Methodist religious leanings. The inland planters were characterized by more diversified agriculture, settlement in towns or villages, and more diverse religious leanings (Presbyterians and Baptists being more common in the eastern parts of the county).

Oak Hill Historic District contains two distinct phases of early settlement in the area. The district includes the A.C. Ramsey House and the Ebenezer Cemetery, which date from the 1830s, placing them firmly within the earliest period in Wilcox County history to have any substantial structural remains extant today. They represent the initial use of the hill as a religious center for Methodists in the region, led by Rev. Ramsey, and centered upon the Ebenezer Methodist Church and campground. The second phase of settlement, represented by the bulk of the antebellum resources of Oak Hill, however, date to c. 1850, when a community affiliated with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church moved to the hill from the low-lying village of Hamburg, to the north. Though representing a second phase of settlement for this part of Wilcox County, this movement into the area would concretize the community so it weathered the tides of history into the twentieth century. The capacity of the village to survive more than a generation or two was not a foregone conclusion—nearby Hamburg and Allenton (once the major commercial center in the area) were but shadows of towns by the early 20th century.

The resettlement of this tightly-knit ARP religious community on Oak Hill was apparently for reasons of comfort and health associated with its elevation, breeze-catching qualities, and comparative distance from disease-breeding swampy areas characteristic of lower-lying areas of the region. Bethel ARP Church quickly became the center and focus of the community, and the buildings on Oak Hill after the Civil War largely represent the continued presence of families associated with the 1850s settlement of the hill and the ARP-associated inhabitants that would arrive at later points in time. The development of the Oak Hill community from a rural agricultural neighborhood through most of the 19th century to a town with a mixed agricultural/retail economy in the first half of the 20th century is also represented by the emergence of the still intact cluster of commercial buildings in the midst of the community, in addition to the houses of that vintage. The period of significance extends from circa 1836 (the date of the earliest extant resource) to circa 1940 (the last date of buildings constructed more than fifty years ago) and encompasses Oak Hill's early settlement patterns, evolving developmental history, and period of architectural growth.

**Criterion C—Architecture**

The Oak Hill Historic District is significant under criterion C for Architecture. The district includes exceptionally intact examples of early vernacular building typologies, as well as later examples of buildings which exemplify the blending of early 20th-century forms with traditional building practices. Oak Hill contains an exceptional concentration of the "coastal cottage" building type, a double-pile one-and-a-half-story central passage structure with an integral recessed porch capped by an unbroken roof line. The community also contains good, intact, examples of the I-house, spraddle roof, and hipped roof central passage forms, all early building typologies which characterize the central Alabama region. Also, the distinct regional characteristic of a "carolina porch," that is, a porch on posts which rests on the ground in front of the porch floor rather than on top of the porch floor, distinguishes the early architecture of Oak Hill as particularly significant.

From well-defined regional Deep South architectural forms and features arises a turn-of-the-century architecture which acknowledges national building forms such as the cross gabled L-cottage, the hipped roof house, and the bungalow, but maintains traditional building features (mostly originating in climatic adaptations) like central passages, deep porches, high brick pier foundations, and even some very late examples of sidelights and transoms. Not until c. 1930 do two good examples of the more nationally known form of the massed plan bungalow appear. Oak Hill also contains several commercial buildings that typify small-town early-20th-century business enterprises in the region, in particular the front gabled frame "country store" type and two one-part commercial blocks. Institutional buildings such as the Oak Hill School and Bethel ARP Church are also exceptional intact examples of turn-of-the-century to c. 1925 building types. In summary, Oak Hill is composed of many good, intact, examples of architectural types which make its architecture exceptionally characteristic of small towns in the central Alabama region.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 11

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

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Historical Summary

Three main phases of construction characterize the historical architectural landscape of Oak Hill. The first phase dates to the mid-nineteenth-century and represents the initial period of European-American construction in the area (including the first two eras of settlement). The second phase is clustered around the turn-of-the-century and represents a changing agricultural and commercial landscape dependent on tenant farming and greater accessibility to outside mass-produced goods and construction techniques via improved transportation (particularly rail travel). The third phase of construction dates primarily to the 1920s and 1930s and partially illustrates the influence of the advent of automobile transportation. The last phase, the modern era (after World War II), is perhaps least evident and is primarily represented by the use of synthetic materials used to repair and maintain older houses and some rare examples of modern construction (i.e., the plate glass windows and concrete block walls of the post office).

The first, antebellum, phase of construction on Oak Hill is represented entirely by domestic architecture. Oak Hill in its early days was largely a residential neighborhood probably settled for reasons of health and climatic adjustment (the elevation of the town provides breezes and a dryer environment than low-lying areas of the surrounding countryside). From what evidence can be gathered on the subject, it seems like the major commercial center in the eastern part of Wilcox County in the antebellum period was the nearby town of Allenton. Oak Hill's inhabitants were largely of the "middling" planter class in Wilcox County, although on the statewide level they likely would be considered fairly wealthy. As a result, the community contains an exceptional concentration of small plantation houses characteristic of the region. All residences but that of the Methodist minister A.C. Ramsey were one- to one-and-a-half stories in height. Ramsey occupied a still-extant I-house with two rear ells-- a more monumental-seeming residence which, however, did not actually encompass much more space than the more substantial coastal cottages. The coastal cottage house type was clearly the favorite "big house" form for the community's planters (for example, the Newberry-Miller House, inv. #4). The coastal cottage, so called because of its origins in the coastal plain of the Carolinas, is a central passage double pile one-and-a-half-story house with a recessed porch under an unbroken roofline. The unbroken roofline over the porch presumably allowed more space in the upper half story of these houses. This roofline is also shared with the Creole cottage house type that emerged on the Gulf Coast; however, Creole cottages have a massed plan of French or Iberian origins, whereas the coastal cottage possesses the traditional central passage of British origins. It is notable that variants of the coastal cottage occasionally occur, and that the Dr. Daniel Fox House reputedly had originally two wings with recessed porches extending from the front of the house, one of which still remains.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note the presence in all the first period houses of the central passage. The central passage besides being a device to further cross-ventilation during long, hot summers, also served the planter since the 18th century as a social boundary.<sup>2</sup> The central passage served as a room where people who were not family or friends (strangers, slaves, less familiar neighbors) were received and addressed. The "boundary space" of the central passage meant that people were not admitted directly into private familial space or formal reception rooms like a parlor or dining room without having earned the right to that level of intimacy with the host.<sup>3</sup> All antebellum structures on Oak Hill also have a porch of some sort. Like the central passage, the porch was a living space adapted for a warm climate. The room-like status of porches in the region can be reflected in details like the paneled dados on the front facade of the J.H. and Martha Jones House (inv. #29). Like the central passage, the porch was also a space which functioned as a social boundary. Some people, perhaps field slaves with business-related

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<sup>1</sup>Jones, William Junius and Joyce Carothers. Bethel ARP Church: Oak Hill, Alabama: Its Houses and People 1856-1978. (privately published, 1978). p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Wenger, Mark R. "The Central Passage in Virginia: Evolution of an Eighteenth Century Living Space". In Wells, Camille. ed. Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture II. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1986).

<sup>3</sup>ibid.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 12

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

communications or itinerant peddlers, might not have even been admitted into the central passage to begin with, but rather dealt with on (or even from) the porch. Also notably, many of the early houses are also raised on high pier foundations. The distance of the porch from the ground places the visitor in an almost supplicant position. The layering of social buffer zones in the community also perhaps included the hill itself, the planter village, set apart from the field quarters actual fields which the slaves worked to support their physically elevated masters and mistresses.

Oak Hill's status as a simple, agriculturally based, residential neighborhood explains the lack of early commercial architecture in the community. Some early religious architecture, specifically Ebenezer Methodist Church and the first incarnation of Bethel ARP Church did in fact exist on Oak Hill before the Civil War, but no evidence remains of these structures today. The original building of Bethel ARP Church, constructed in 1857, is traditionally held to have been a two-story tall Greek Revival structure complete with monumental columns in the front, white paint, and a slave gallery on the interior. This church type would have fit well within the general trends of ecclesiastical architecture in the county at that time, as born out by other better known examples in the Wilcox County towns of Furman and Camden. Ebenezer Methodist Church once also stood on the hill, in fact it predated Bethel, but little is known of the form it took. The Oak Hill Academy, the first educational facility in the neighborhood, is no longer extant but was apparently a large two-story frame structure with a prominent Greek Revival portico. The Greek Revival, interpreted in the wood frame medium, seems to have provided what monumentality required by inhabitants of the hill for public structures.

Oak Hill initially was settled around Ebenezer Methodist Church and campground in the 1830s, and many of the early landowners (notably the Armstrong family) in the immediate vicinity were Reverend Ramsey's parishioners. During the course of the late 1840s and early 1850s, however, a group of Associate Reformed Presbyterians (including the prominent families of the Dales, Bonners, Jones, and McBrydes) from the Hamburg community north of Oak Hill (and ultimately from piedmont of South Carolina, particularly the Abbeville district) bought out many of the landholdings and built their houses there. Ramsey, whose wife was from the same geographic area as many of this second generation of landholders on the hill, stayed on the hill until he died, bankrupt, shortly after the Civil War. The settlers associated with the ARP Church were by and large middling planters, owning from twenty to thirty-five slaves per head of household by 1860 (Dr. Fox and Rev. Ramsey were the largest slaveholders on the hill, with 51 and 56 slaves respectively).<sup>4</sup> Primary crops raised by the inhabitants included cotton, Indian corn, and sweet potatoes.<sup>5</sup> Livestock kept by Oak Hill property owners included horses, mules, oxen, cattle, swine, and occasionally sheep.<sup>6</sup> More experimental agriculturalists, like Dr. Fox, might also raise a variety of other grains, including even a few pounds of rice, and keep bees for honey.<sup>7</sup> In the early- and mid-19th century, Oak Hill was in the Allenton voting beat along with that, then larger, town, so it is difficult to discover the exact political leanings of the inhabitants of the community. Some sense of the political attitudes of people in the general area, however, is reflected in the 1860 election when almost two-thirds of voters in the beat cast their ballot for Secessionist Democrat Breckenridge, approximately one-third of voters for Constitutional Unionist Bell, and only two votes total for Northern Democrat Douglas (no votes were cast for Lincoln).<sup>8</sup>

Many of the annals of Oak Hill center upon the affiliation of the community with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>1860 Alabama Federal Census.

<sup>5</sup>1855 Alabama State Agricultural Census.

<sup>6</sup>ibid.

<sup>7</sup>ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Woodson, Ouida Starr. Within the Bend: Stories of Wilcox County. (privately pub., 1988). p. 17.

<sup>9</sup>For in-depth recounting of church history, see Jones, Joyce Carothers. Bethel's Shadow: Bethel Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Oak Hill, Alabama. (privately published, 1979).



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 13

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

=====

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian denomination is a conservative branch of the Presbyterian Church which favors a literal interpretation of scripture, traditionally only includes the unaccompanied singing of psalms during worship, and tends to take socially conservative positions. Many of the inhabitants of Oak Hill went to Erskine College or Due West Women's Academy in piedmont South Carolina, both of which are schools associated with the ARP Church. Bethel ARP church seems always to have been a major center of community activity and philanthropy.

The ARP settlers of the late 1840s and early 1850s laid the foundations for the twentieth-century town of Oak Hill. Bethel ARP Church would become the center of much of community life and the families of the ARP settlers would weave extensive genealogical connections between themselves and also outsiders (many with ARP connections) who were drawn to settle down from the turn of the century. It is no wonder then, that even in the early 1970s, when interviewed for a photo essay entitled Down Home, an inhabitant of Oak Hill would claim, "Here in Oak Hill we're all just one big family. Nearly everyone is related to everyone else. We're a one religion town, with one or two exceptions, we all go to the same church."<sup>10</sup>

The Civil War disrupted the plans of Oak Hill's planters not long after the first building of Bethel ARP Church was constructed. Shortly after the war began, Company B of the 1st Alabama Regiment—Infantry, the Wilcox "True Blues," was recruited from the community. The regiment apparently incorporated many of the area's young men (in their late teens and twenties) and it was stationed at Isle No. 10 near Pensacola, Florida, until captured by Union troops in 1862.<sup>11</sup> Subsequent to the Civil War, the plantation labor force was reorganized into a tenant farming system.

During the Civil War period or in the decade or so thereafter, two Oak Hill houses, the Eugene McBryde House (inv. # 3) and the Bonner-Dale House (inv. #33), were apparently built. Both houses are conservative in form and can be determined to be of a later date through details and trim. The central passage, hipped roof McBryde House has a jigsaw-work porch of a type that marks a building in Wilcox County as being of the 1860s or 1870s generally. The Bonner-Dale House has interior trim that incorporates Victorian era beaded board that is apparently original, despite its location in a typical early coastal cottage type with generous "early" proportions. Essentially these buildings belong in a category with the antebellum architecture of the area and do not intrinsically represent a widely different social or architectural order than their antecedents.

The reorganization of the plantation workforce combined with the sluggish economy of the post-bellum South apparently explains the overall lack of building activities in the 1870s and 1880s. At the turn-of-the-century, however, the next major phase of building would hit Oak Hill, as the 210-person community became a small commercial center. By 1906, Oak Hill possessed several entrepreneurs and professionals, including Bonner & Carothers (druggists), J.I. Bonner (physician), Dale Brothers (general merchants), J. H. Jones (physician), J. H. Jones & Co. (general merchants), E.I. McBryde (general merchant), E.C. McWilliams (physician), and J.H. McWilliams & Bro. (general merchants).<sup>12</sup> This boom in business was perhaps a result of having tenant farmers, who were (albeit via credit) independent consumers, providing a market where their enslaved fathers and grandfathers did not. Additionally, the fact that the population of Oak Hill had grown considerably since the mid-19th century through simple multiplication of families already in place augmented by some in migration from South Carolina and other parts of Alabama, meant simply that more services could be offered in the neighborhood. Finally, the decline and virtual disappearance of the nearby antebellum commercial center of Allenton meant that there was an economic void to be filled in the region.

This small commercial boom in turn-of-the-century Oak Hill produced a cluster of buildings northeast of the crossroads in the

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<sup>10</sup>Kennedy, Mrs. Erskine. in Adelman, Bob. Down Home: Camden, Alabama. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1972). p. 46.

<sup>11</sup>Jones, Joyce Carothers. Bethel's Shadow. pp. 22-24.

<sup>12</sup>Young & Co. Young & Co.'s Business and Professional Directory. (Atlanta: Young & Co., 1905-6). p. 347.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 14

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

center of town (southwest of the crossroads, residences occupied the available lots). Until the 1930s, commercial buildings in Oak Hill, as in much of the rural Deep South, were single-story, frame, front gabled structures. Three examples of this building type remain in Oak Hill. Two (inv. #s 11 & 12) are rather standard forms, though of these the Bonner & Carothers store (inv. #11) is more elaborate, with protruding polygonal display windows and a rear, apse-like niche. The Dale Brothers Store (inv. #7) has a front gabled core with a two wings to the east, the front wing being shed roofed and the rear wing being gabled. At this point, however, the use of these wings is not apparent. The Dale Brothers store notably also has a full foundation under the core, which consists of a layer of loosely mortared stone surmounted by several courses of brick, which are presumably inserted as a level surface on which to rest the sills. All of these buildings have display windows on their narrow front facades but no fenestration on the sides since that space would be occupied by shelves for merchandise.

Turn-of-the-century domestic architecture on Oak Hill shows a popularization of the hipped roof form, sometimes with decorative or even functional gables (i.e. the Tennant McWilliams House, inv. #20), and the introduction of the cross-gabled L-cottage form (i.e. the McBryde-Perryman House, inv. #6). In the instance of the Isaac Newberry House, an old coastal cottage type of house was given a large central gable which gave more light and space to its upper half story with a decorative flourish. In the new houses of this era, however, some design conservatism is notable. The retention of the central passage and porch, perhaps still important as social buffer zones, is notable in all of the c. 1900 structures, as well as the continued use of elements such as sidelights and transoms. Use of some materials (like using brick piers for foundations) continues to follow traditional building patterns. In contrasts, however, the beginning of the twentieth century pervasively brought mass-produced architectural elements to Oak Hill, probably via nearby towns serviced by the train (perhaps Pine Apple or Snow Hill). Turned porch posts, decorative shingles, door knobs, and other mass-produced hardware were brought in from outside the community both to build new structures and to remodel old ones.

In 1895, through the fundraising efforts of young female parishioners, a new church building was constructed to house Bethel ARP.<sup>13</sup> This church building remains today and its construction exemplifies the use of the newly available decorative architectural elements from outside Oak Hill's immediate environs. Decorative shingling, brackets, and square panels of stained glass all were brought from outside to decorate the new church. Use of decorative elements and complex massing in the new Bethel Church and the domestic architecture of the turn-of-the-century likely brought inhabitants of Oak Hill aesthetic relief from the self-contained rigors of the Greek Revival, which had dominated the community since its founding.

The 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s brought little change to the overall character of Oak Hill. Perhaps the most important change to occur during this time period was the introduction of the automobile. Directly resulting from this event, some barns were either replaced or refitted as garages, and a new automobile repair shop (inv. # 9) was constructed near the center of town. The continued importance of the automobile as a mode of transportation continues to spell the end of many of Oak Hill's now abandoned outbuildings which once housed the livestock once used as transportation and the "motors" for farm machinery.<sup>14</sup> The auto shop and another commercial building across the street from it bear witness to the introduction of concrete block construction in the area. From other parts of the county, the introduction of concrete block construction can be traced to the mid-1930s. From their forms, these buildings could safely date from the 1930s or 1940s. Concrete block construction in Wilcox County is almost solely used for utilitarian buildings, and the Williamson Mercantile (inv. #10), with its brick veneered facade and decorative lintel course, is one of the more decorative interpretations of the construction technique in the county.

The few new houses constructed in the decades nearing the mid-twentieth century continue to show the influence of outside hardware as well as a break with tradition that resulted from the national popularization of the bungalow house form. Two front gabled bungalows (inv. #s 8 & 27) introduce the first massed plans to be seen in the area. The J. Carlisle Dale House (inv. #5)

<sup>13</sup>Jones, William Junius and Joyce Carothers. Bethel ARP Church, Oak Hill, Alabama. p. 3.

<sup>14</sup>It is interesting to note that Oak Hill outbuildings are frequently on a rather small scale. Partially, this must be because large-scale agriculture was not conducted so much on the hill itself, but rather on outlying creek bottomlands and in other, more fertile areas.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8.9.10 Page 15

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

on the other hand, maintains a hipped roof, a door with sidelights and transom, and apparently a commodious plan although it is roughly contemporary to the other two structures. All houses of the 1920s through c. 1940 in Oak Hill show some level of Craftsman-influenced detail, often in the form of exposed eave rafters and/or clustered or battered porch piers. This probably results, however, not so much from a conscious decision on the part of the builders to use particular stylistic references, but more probably, from the availability of certain stock pieces of hardware and other pre-produced building elements.

The Oak Hill School, constructed c. 1926, also shows a vague Craftsman influence in its details, probably for much the same reasons. The school, since it was a public institution, created a secondary social center for the community. The fire department equipment is housed on this property, and a tennis court stands as a witness to the recreation trends of the area in the mid-20th century. It was consolidated into Moore Academy in Pine Apple, and has since been used as a community center.

Oak Hill notably was not incorporated into a town until 1938, apparently so that an ordinance could be passed that stores could not be open on Sundays. Instigated by the actions of a dissenting store owner in the community, the definition of the town by incorporation finally gave a legal status to a close, religious community. To this day, Oak Hill remains an interesting Deep South extrapolation of the Calvinist "city on a hill" model. In its historic resources, the town bears witness to a sort of religious and cultural colony with its roots in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and in piedmont South Carolina and its climatic and social adaptation to central Alabama.

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#### X. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

##### Verbal Boundary Description

The Oak Hill Historic District in Wilcox County, Alabama, is represented on the accompanying base map with a 1"=400' scale. A 1"=200' or less map was not available.

##### Boundary Justification

The boundaries of Oak Hill Historic District were drawn to include all historic properties (standing structures) associated with the history and development of the community of Oak Hill. The large lots encompass the current legal boundaries of the historic properties of the town and reflect the historic divisions of property on the hill.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section photos Page 16

Name of Property: Oak Hill Historic District

County and State: Wilcox County, Alabama

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Oak Hill Historic District, Oak Hill, Wilcox County, Alabama  
Johnathan Farris, photographer  
September 1997  
Negatives maintained at the Alabama Historical Commission

1. Fox-Harris-Jones House (inv. #1) facing southeast
2. Fox-Harris Jones House (inv. #1)—detail—facing southeast
3. Bethel ARP Church (inv. #2) facing east
4. Bethel ARP Church (inv. #2) facing north
5. Bethel ARP Church and Cemetery (inv. #2) facing west
6. Bethel ARP Cemetery—Mary Stewart grave (inv. #2) facing west
7. Eugene McBryde House (inv. #3) facing east
8. Newberry-Miller House (inv. #4) facing east
9. Newberry-Miller House (inv. #4) facing northeast
10. McBryde-Perryman House (inv. #6) facing south
11. Dale Bros. General Merchandise Store complex (inv. #7) facing west
12. Dale Bros. General Merchandise Store complex (inv. #7) foundation detail
13. Dale-Leonard House (inv. #8) facing southeast
14. Store/Garage (inv. #9) facing south
15. Bonner & Carothers Store (inv. #11) facing west
16. Joe B. McWilliams, Sr., House (inv. #14) facing southwest
17. McWilliams-Harper House (inv. #16) facing east
18. McWilliams-Harper House outbuilding (inv. #16b) facing southeast
19. McWilliams-Harper House chicken coop (inv. #16c) facing east
20. McWilliams-Harper House barn (inv. #16d) facing north
21. S.L. Jones House (inv. #18) facing east
22. S.L. Jones House (inv. #18) facing south
23. S.L. Jones House (inv. #18) facing south
24. Dr. Tennant McWilliams House (inv. #20) facing west
25. Bill Griffin House (inv. #22) facing east
26. A.C. Ramsey House (inv. #23) facing south
27. A.C. Ramsey House barn (inv. #23c) facing east
28. A.C. Ramsey House outbuilding (inv. #23 b) facing south
29. Oak Hill School (inv. #25) facing east
30. Ebenezer Cemetery (inv. #28) facing northwest
31. Ebenezer Cemetery detail (inv. #28) facing east
32. James Harvey and Martha Jones House (inv. #29) facing west
33. James Harvey and Martha Jones House "carolina porch" detail (inv. #29) facing northeast
34. James Harvey and Martha Jones House porch detail (inv. #29) facing south
35. Isaac Newberry House (inv. #31) facing north
36. Isaac Newberry House (inv. #31) facing west
37. Isaac Newberry House outbuilding (inv. #31b) facing north
38. Isaac Newberry House outbuilding (inv. #31e) facing northwest
39. Isaac Newberry House water pump (inv. #31f) facing west
40. Isaac Newberry House flower pit (inv. #31a) facing northwest