JONES & HERRIN

August 4, 1997

Dr. Gordon Davis, Executive Director The University of Alabama Museums Box. 870340 Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0340

Re:

1829 Gorgas House Museum, The University of Alabama

Dear Dr. Davis:

On August 1 about four hours were spent at the Gorgas House to become generally familiar with the house and its technical and historical condition. A tour of the complete interior, exterior, attic and roof was made and about one-hundred and thirty systematic black/white photographs were made for in-office reference and record. The 1934 Historic American Buildings Survey drawings were annotated to show the 1953 exposed ducts, grilles, mechanical closets and chases, rest room, and exposed piping. The northwest wing was approximately measured and sketched.

Photographic copies were made of the several historic photographs in the museum office that show the 1853 narrow two-column portico and several views of the interior that perhaps date from the circa 1896 period when the portico was enlarged to its present three-bay four-column configuration. Professional copies should be made of these original historic photographs and the originals should be properly archived (they are presently in a desk drawer in the museum office). If any restoration is done good photographic copies of these historic views will be invaluable since they may show the house and its furnishings at or about the time of its last significant change (the construction of the three-bay portico).

It was gratifying to see that the interior of this rare and important 1829 work of the architect William Nichols was substantially unaltered since its 1847 conversion from a dining hall/post office/steward's quarters into a professor's residence. It appears that all mantels are of the 1829 Federal Period. All doors and most locks and hinges are also of the Federal Period with the exception of the three Greek Revival (1847) two-panel doors added on the ground floor. Door evidences confirm that the ground-floor heartpine flooring was apparently laid over the original ground-floor brick floor in the 1847 Greek Revival period remodeling, for the Federal Period doors on the ground floor are all chopped off about three inches at the bottom rail to fit the 1847 raised wood floor whereas the Greek Revival doors are their proper proportion at the bottom rail. Since the main-stair bottom riser is at its proper height, this stair may date from the 1847 remodeling since there would have been no use for it when the 1829 main floor was a residence separate from the large downstairs dining hall, and adequate access was available via the 1829 back stair.

If any restoration is contemplated the most difficult question is always "restore to what period"? To avoid anomalies a restoration should be consistent and not have some portions taken back to an earlier period than others. Since the present three-bay portico was built in 1896 it would be most consistent to also restore the interior to circa 1896. In this case it would be unthinkable to restore the portico to its 1853 onebay configuration in order to be able to restore the interior to a consistent post-1853 - pre 1896 condition. If the historic photographs prove to be of circa 1896, this would enable a quite accurate circa 1896 restoration to be accomplished. A professional paint-color analysis could add to this accuracy. Such an analysis was done at the 1859 Jemison House and several others we have worked on. Mrs. Frances Robb of Huntsville is an expert on dating historic photographs by their processing, matting and other technical clues and could help establish the probable approximate date of the photographs.

A few of the technical and preservation items observed on this brief tour that should be addressed are:

- Mechanical system (c.1961, exposed pipes and ducts):
 Better hiding, adequately sized. Eliminate exposed ducts and radiator pipes.
- Plumbing: (c. 1964):
 Get rest room out of ground floor southwest bedroom, perhaps put in northwest service area. Address handicapped-access question.
- Electrical:
 Better concealed, technical safety and upgrading, provide outlets and fixtures <u>only</u> where needed for museum needs and eliminate others. Better site lighting (security, and outdoor evening activities in expanded east lawn).
- Catering Kitchen:
 Improvements as needed. Consult with caterers. Meet Health Department specifications.
- Roof and flashing: (1982):
 Chimney leaks, better choice of shingles and flashings Two north chimneys are rebuilt in porous "salmon" bricks and Portland cement mortar. 1982 shingles are near the end of their life. Galvanized flashings are rusty.
- 6. Grounds: Poor drainage. Perhaps enlarge enclosed east lawn for receptions, etc. Planting to go along with the period of restoration (George Stritikus is most knowledgeable of this aspect). The brick walks are improperly laid (wide mortar joints, basket weave pattern, etc.) and would best be re-laid in the nineteenth century manner (tight joints, no mortar, pattern = herringbone or half-bond running bond etc.). Lighting (security and evening activities). One early nineteenth century carved sandstone splash block was seen discarded in the northwest corner of the yard. A proper use of this should be made.
- 7. Northwest frame service wing (date not established but is shown on 1887 view. Probably c.1866-1870):
 Site evidence and the 1887 "Perspective Map of Tuskaloosa" show that the original west clapboard gable has been butchered into its present strange partly-shed shape for an unapparent reason. It would be good to restore it (see attached 1887 view).
- Bird control at portico column caps and upper entry transom:
 Can be done less obtrusively.
- 1953 brick pavers at lower entry and at one re-laid hearth:
 Grid pattern is incorrect. Should be half-bond as evidenced by several intact 1829 hearths inside, and other nineteenth century Alabama examples.
- 10. Protection of irreplaceable heart-pine floors from spike heels:

 Many American and most European museums do not allow these destructive devices which can exert up to 2,000 pounds per square inch pressure on the wood floors when a 120 pound woman puts most of her weight on one heel in the process of walking. Historic wood floors should not be sanded, as each sanding greatly shortens their life as the wood flanges get thin and begin to split off. These floors were sanded in about 1983 and are already heavily pock-

marked with heel dents. Stiletto heels seem to come into fashion about every twenty years, so they are sure to recur. Consider allowing only heels of a reasonable diameter, perhaps 3/4".

11. Proper masonry repointing and cleaning

Harsh and harmful sandblasting has already occurred. It cannot be corrected for the faces of the bricks are blasted off and pocked as much as 1/4 inch deep, exposing the softer inner core of the bricks to moisture, freeze-thaw spalling and accelerated soiling.

Repointing in areas has been done, using hard modern Portland cement mortar, sloppily applied. At best this may be only partially reversed. Hard modern mortar subjects the soft 1829 bricks to temperature-stress cracking and spalling, and water entrapment and consequent freeze-thaw spalling. Hydrated-lime and sand mortar should be used, tooled like the unweathered neat 1829 joints.

This problem has occurred on other campus buildings in the past. The maintenance staff should be trained in proper work on historic masonry, and long-term standards should be established in the maintenance office for future work on all buildings.

12. Code and ADA considerations:

No 1829 house meets modern code and ADA rules for a public building. There are various ways that house museums can use to compensate and comply as well as practicable without seriously harming the historic integrity of the building (this integrity is its reason for being a museum). These ways should be explored and discussed. Jones & Herrin can offer possibilities.

13. Ground floor southeast room mantel, and other interior finishes:

This mantel has a circa 1953 stripped-and-pickled finish, popular in the mid twentieth century but not in the nineteenth century. Prior to the Civil War, mantels were painted, typically glossy black and sometimes marbleized black. Doors were usually grained, and sometimes trim was grained as well. Evidences of these early nineteenth century finishes were observed at several paint-nicks in the Gorgas House. Depending on the chosen period of restoration, modern finishes should be removed.

The idea of painting rooms and trim off-white is modern. Wall colors (or papers) should be consistent with the chosen period of the restoration.

Floor finishes, rugs or carpets should be consistent with the chosen period of the restoration.

14. Archaeology:

Any work involving digging should be observed by an archaeologist (Items 6 and 9).

15. Asbestos testing and abatement:

To be performed by a qualified test and abatement firm.

16. A more detailed examination will produce many more items of interest and for consideration in a technical, preservation, and restoration sense. Dr. Robert Mellown of the University Art Department has done a large amount of detailed research on various University buildings and can probably shed light on the Gorgas House and its architectural history. Robert Gamble of the Alabama Historical Commission in Montgomery has also done research on the Gorgas House for the Historic American Buildings Survey and should also be consulted. Jack Stell of the Alabama Historical Commission has considerable knowledge of historic furnishings and wallpapers.

Any work chosen to be done on the Gorgas House could vary widely. The first phase could include only the most pressing technical items (1,2,3,5). This phase might cost between \$100,000 - \$125,000. To do the entire list (and other items not yet discovered or considered) might cost \$300,000 - \$500,000. The architectural cost would, per the State of Alabama Building Commission fee schedule, be 12-1/2% of the construction cost. Such specialties as a professional paint analysis, furnishings research, acquisition and restoration, wallpaper research and acquisition and asbestos testing and abatement, would be separate.

Respectfully,

Harvie P. Jones, FAIA

HPJ/tm

copy: HJ

attachments

The Sale Section of the State. Wowered County of Maland Vous, 18%.

Tuscalorsa County

Tavern, Old (erroneously called Duffie's Tavern) (AL-224), 2800 Twenty-eighth Ave. (in Capitol Park w of Twenty-eighth Ave. intersection with Broad St.); originally located at 2512 Broad St. (N side Broad St. approx. 50' w of Twentyfifth Ave.). Museum. Brick (formerly covered with stucco and scored to simulate ashlar), rectangular (4-bay front) with 3-bay wing on w side at original site, 2 stories (wing 1 story), gable roof with raked parapets, 1 interior end chimney and chimneys on rear slope of main block and wing, covered wooden balcony with scroll-cut balustrade across second-floor front, 1story shed porch with trellis supports formerly at rear and on E side; side-hall plan with adjacent keeping room, smaller chambers at rear, simple Federal period woodwork, kitchen and service area in basement. Early history obscure; reputedly built ca. 1827 for William Dunton, innkeeper (wing possibly later than main block); balcony probably late-19th-C. replacement of earlier one. Building originally adjoined by "Brick Row" (range of additional guest chambers extending depth of lot). Hostelry for many notables while Tuscaloosa was state capital. Masonry exterior walls dismantled and side wing demolished in 1966 when frame substructure of tavern moved to Capitol Park site by Tuscaloosa County Preservation Society; modifications in reconstructed edifice include elimination of original basement kitchen and side wing, rear porches, exterior stucco wall-covering (interior restored). Opened as museum on 13 Oct. 1968. 4 ext. photos (1934, 1936). 7 int. photos (1936); 2 data pages (1936). See also FBJ (J7-ALA-1136 and 1137).

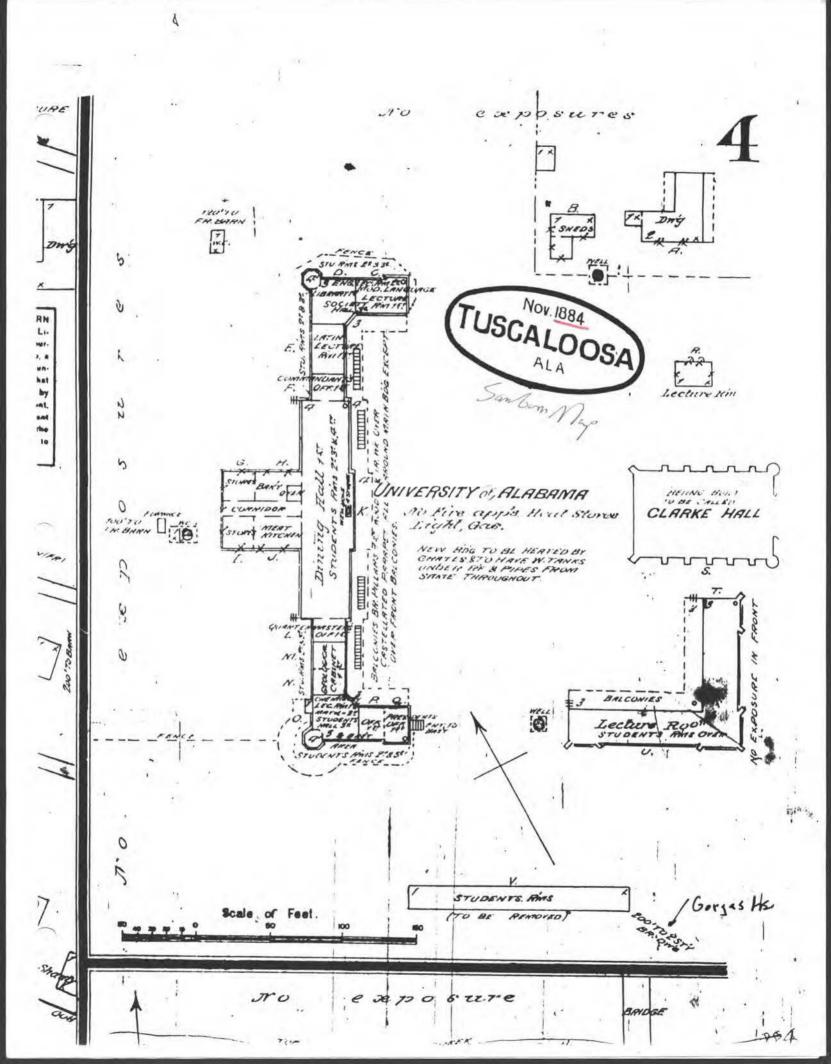
University Club. See James Dearing House (AL-230), 421 Queen City

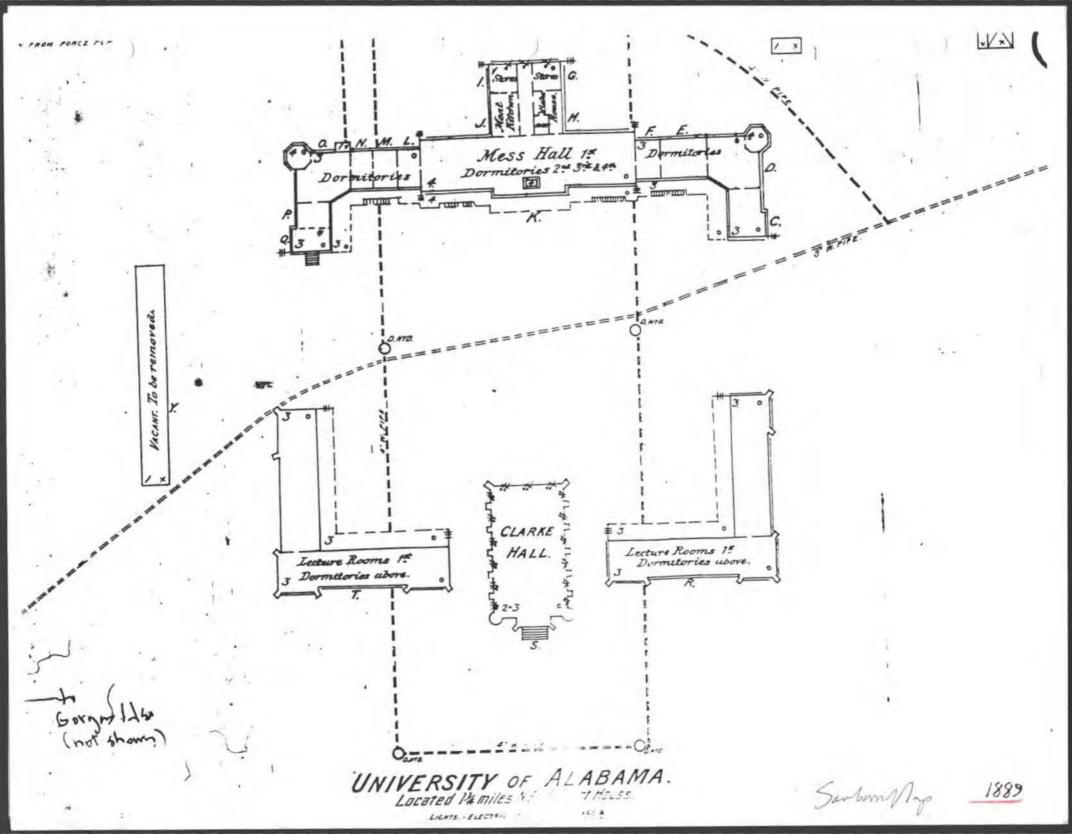
University of Alabama, Gorgas House (Gorgas House) (AL-203), NW of intersection of Ninth Ave. and Capstone Dr. on University of Alabama campus. Raised cottage, brick (front and sides Flemish bond), 53'0" (5-bay front) X 42'1" plus frame wing at rear, 1 story over ground floor, hipped roof, 4 interior end chimneys, raised 3-bay tetrastyle Doric portico on arcuated base with twin flights of curving steps, cast-iron balustrade; centerhall plan, simple Federal period interior woodwork and chair-rail. Two-story brick dependency formerly at rear. Built 1829 as University of Alabama dining hall and steward's residence (ground floor originally contained large dining room and pantry, steward's quarters upstairs); William Nichols, architect. Discontinued as steward's hall in 1847 and remodeled as a professor's residence, including partitioning of ground floor; center bay of portico added 1853 (date of curving steps uncertain); portico extended 1 bay to each side in 1896 (Watkins and Hardaway, contractors), with curved steps being moved at that time and additions made to cast-iron balustrade. House restored 1953 as museum, with subsequent landscaping and enclosure of grounds. Prototype for several mid-20th-C. Alabama residences. 4 sheets (1934, including plot plan, plans, elevations, details); 4 ext. photos (1932, 1936), 5 int. photos (1934); 3 data pages (1936). NR. See also FBJ (J7-ALA-1141 through 1143); Tebbs (T3-ALA-339177 and 339178).

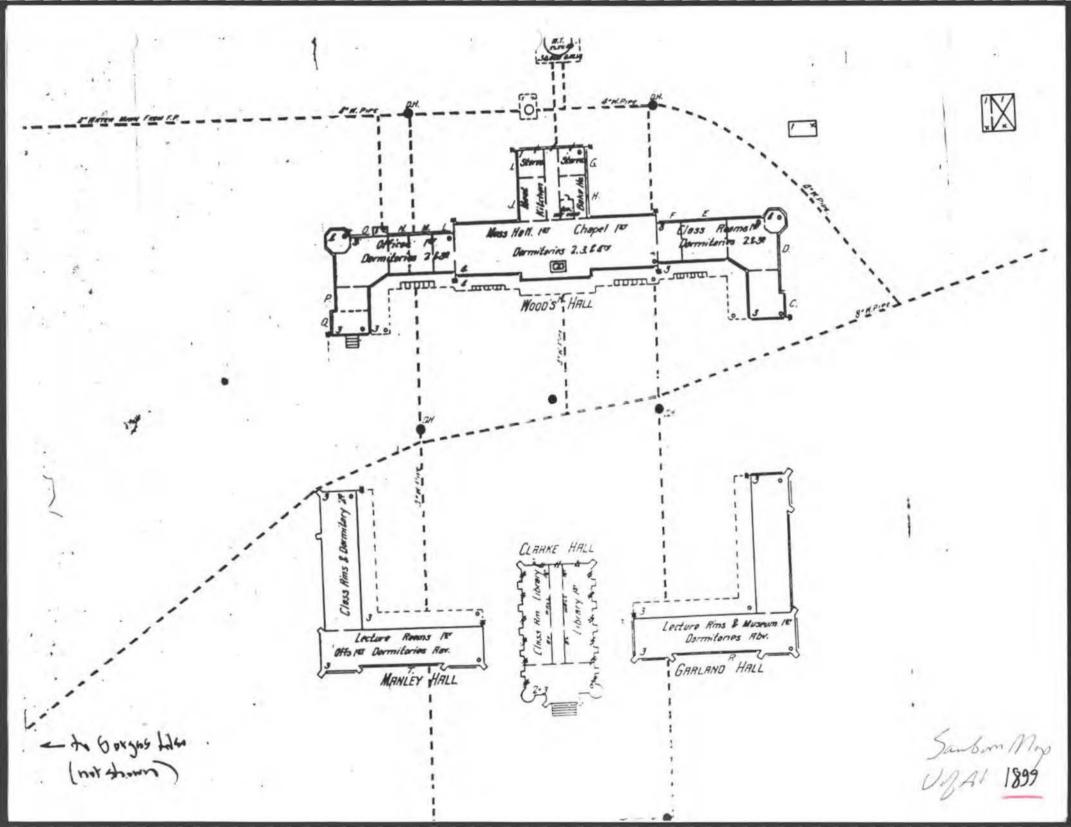
University of Alabama, Observatory (AL-231), NW corner Stadium Dr. and Fifth St. on University of Alabama campus. Brick, basically T-shaped (5-bay front) with rear wing forming stem, 1 story, pilastered front section has gable roof with entablature and pedimented gable ends, brick architraves with corbeled cornices; rear wing (original section) composed of domed center block housing telescopic equipment, with flanking hyphens (E hyphen forms link to later front section). Built 1844, largely at instigation of Prof. Frederick A. P. Barnard (later president of Columbia University and founder of Barnard College), who provided plan and specifications; pilastered front section added in 1858; interior heavily remodeled during 20th C. 2 ext. photos (1934, 1936), 1 int. photo (1934, showing telescope and dome); 2 data pages (1936).

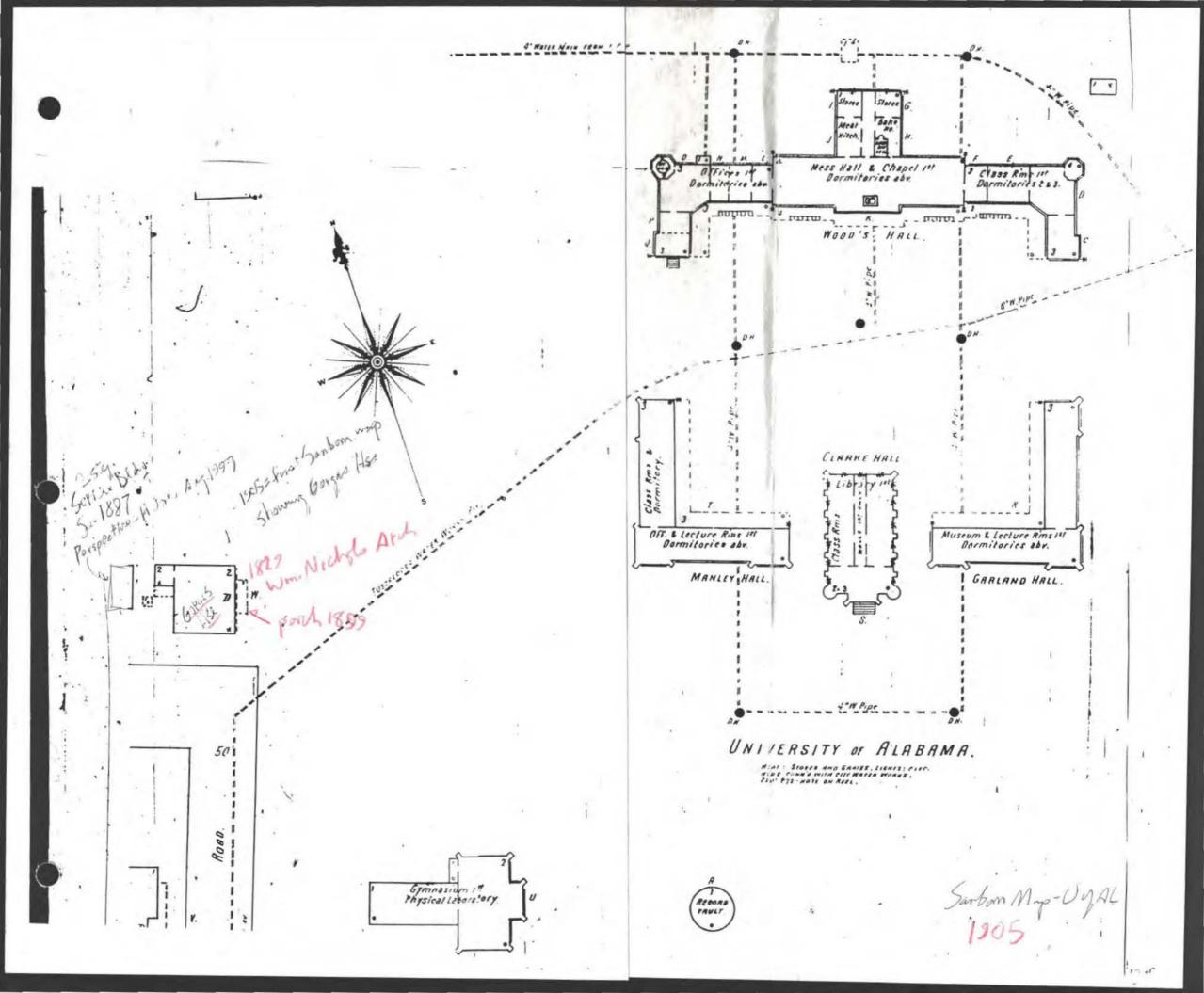
University of Alabama, President's House (AL-207), S side of University Blvd. between Sixth and Ninth aves. on University of Alabama campus. Brick covered with stucco to simulate ashlar, 65'3" (5bay front) X 57'4" excluding rear porch, 2 stories over full ground floor, slightly raked tlat roof, raised full-length hexastyle Ionic portico on elliptically arched base with twin flight of curving steps to center bay, notable doorway framed by engaged Doric colonnettes, 3-bay balcony above, entablature of portico has unusual pulvinated frieze with modillioned cornice originally surmounted by balustraded parapet, raised 2-tiered 3-bay porch on arcuated base at rear, center-hall plan, spiral stairway, elaborate interior plasterwork, silver-plated hardware. Built 1839-41 according "to the

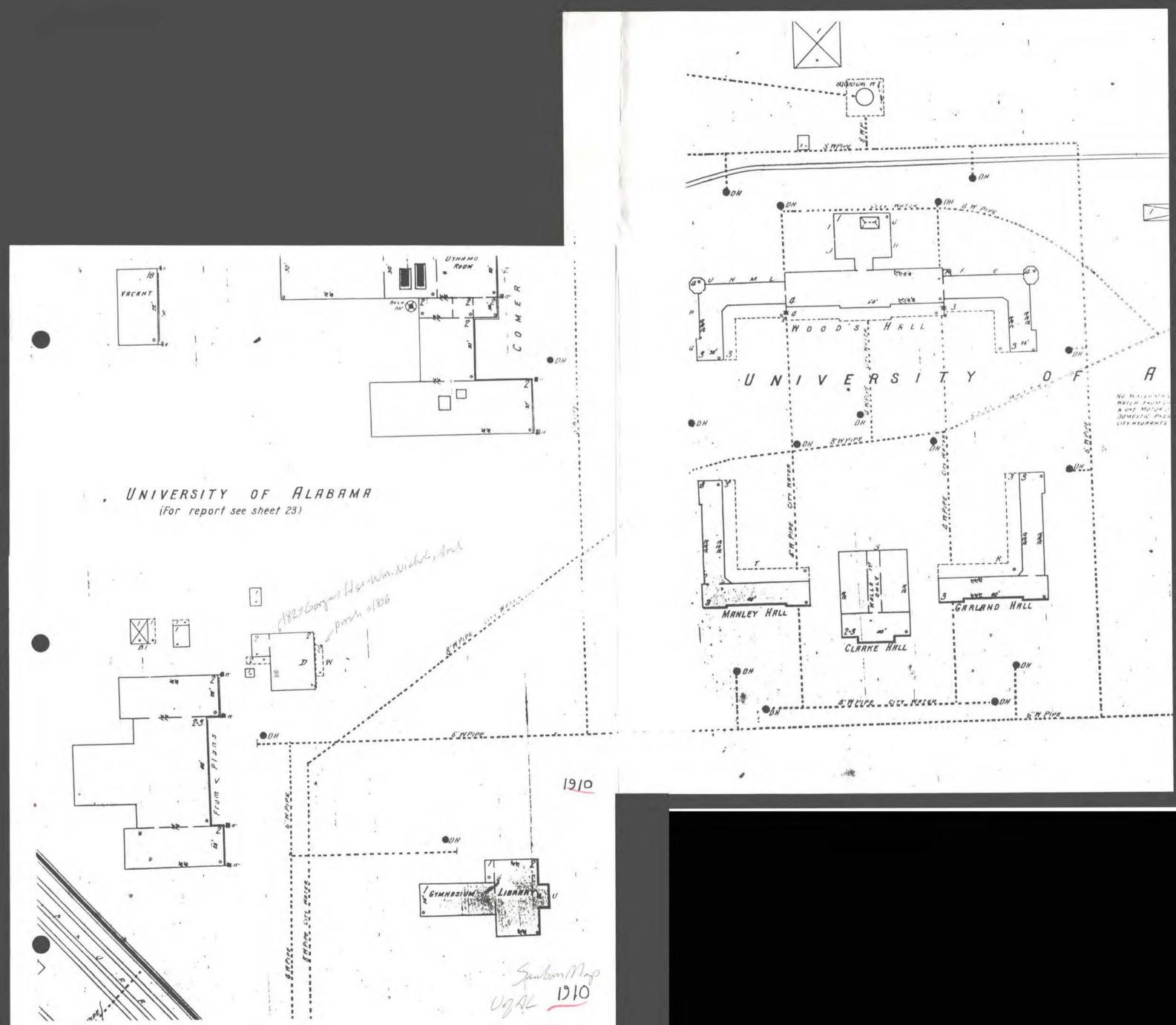
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1887 " Perspective View of Tuskeloosa, Alabama" NORTH SIDE OF BROAD STREET



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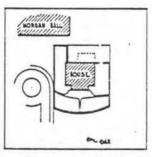
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WILLIAM MICHOLS, ARCHITECT

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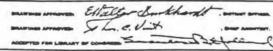
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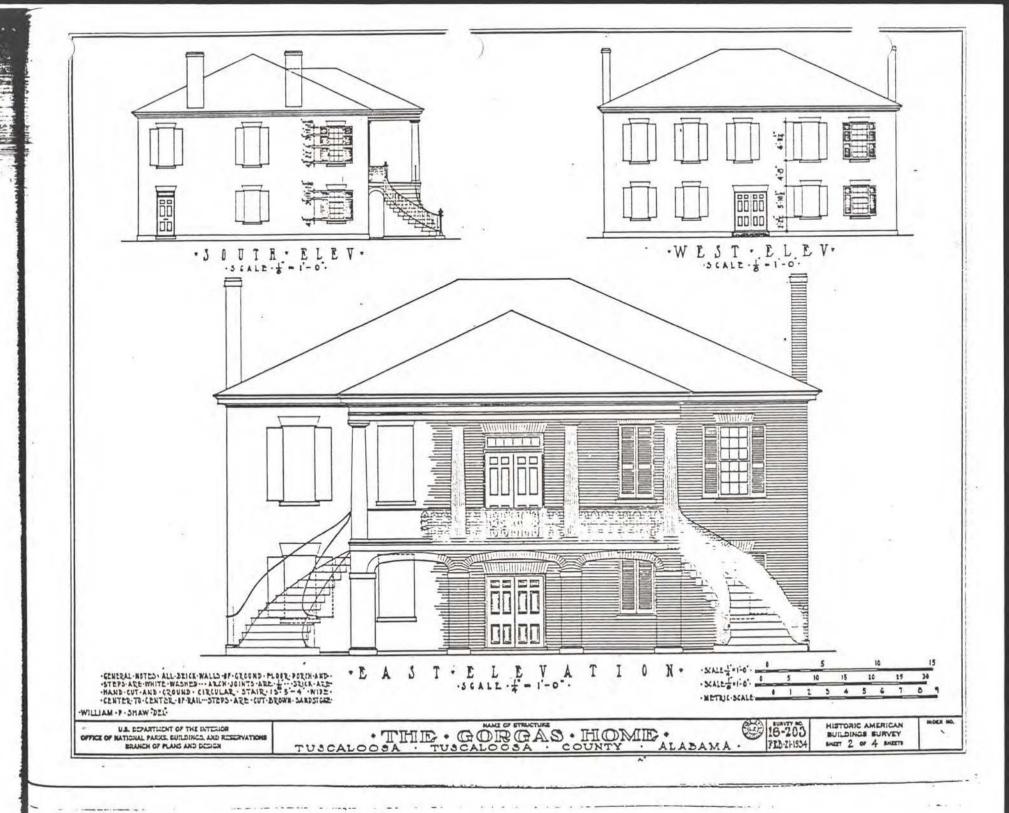


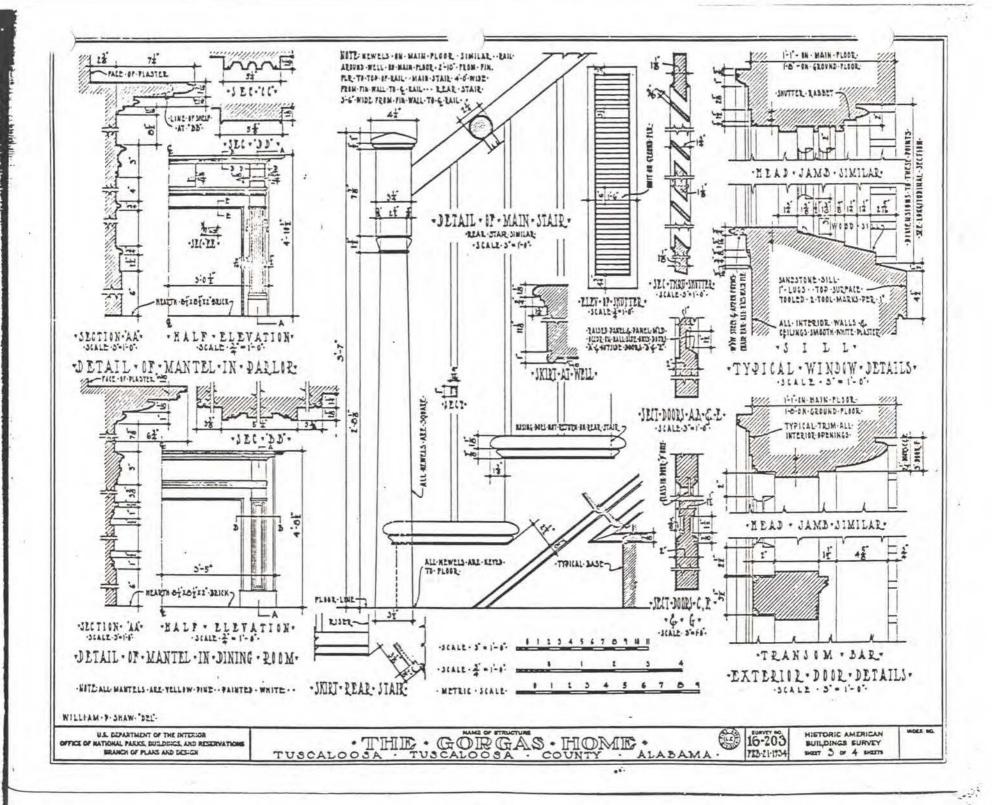


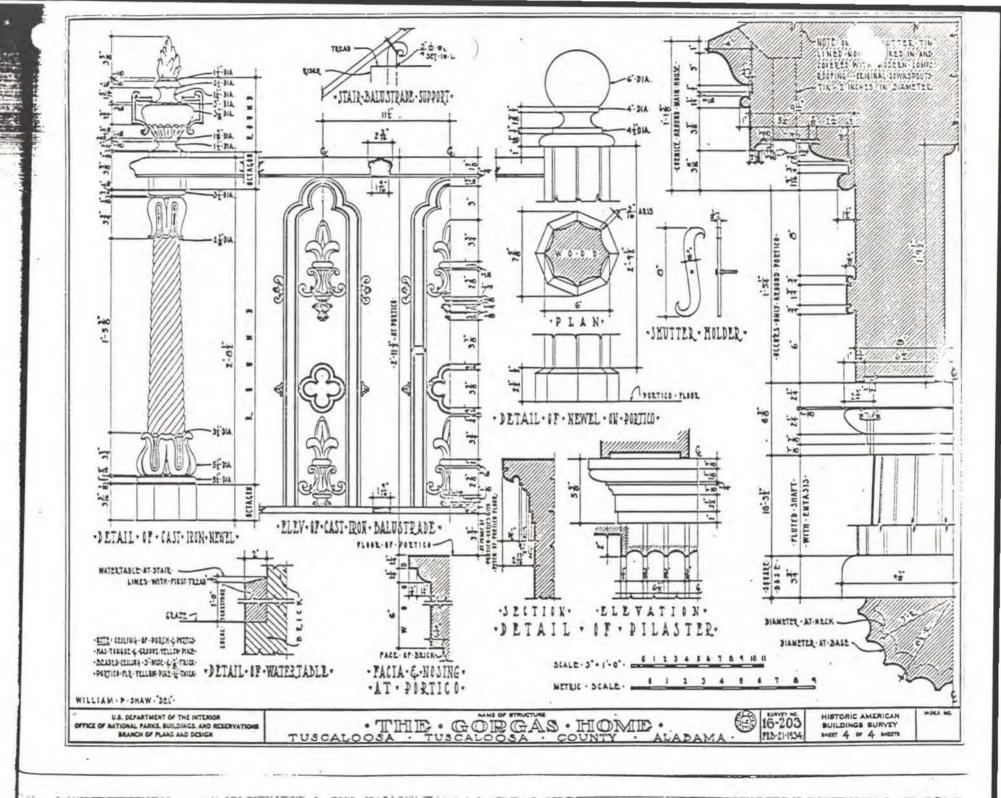


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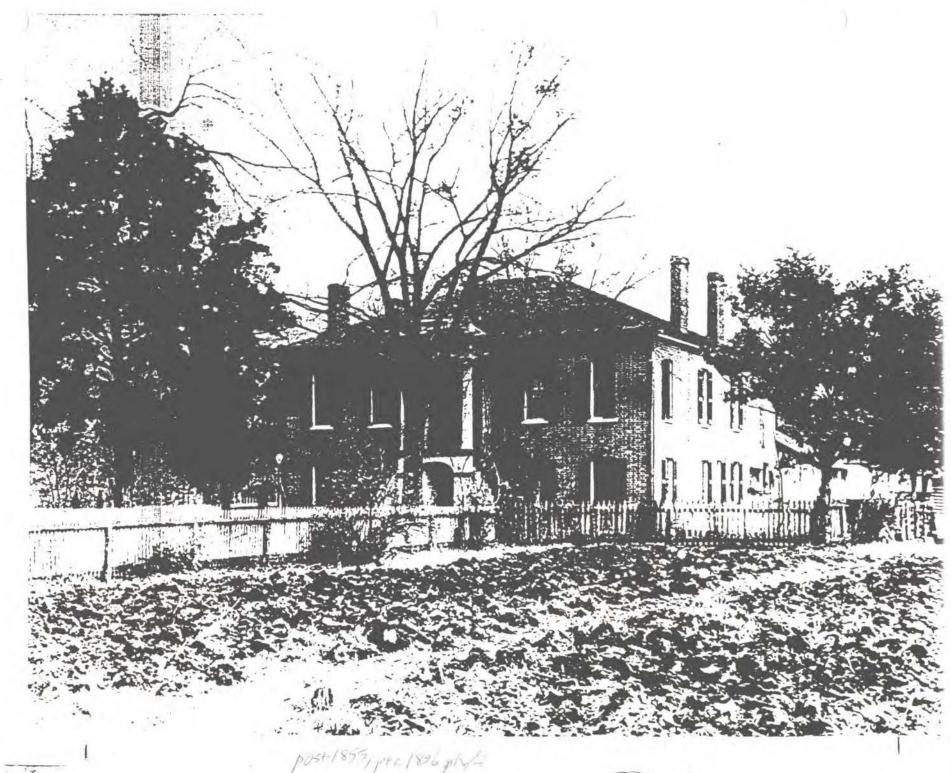
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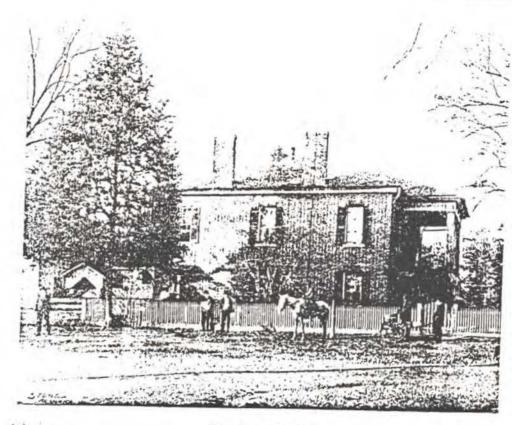






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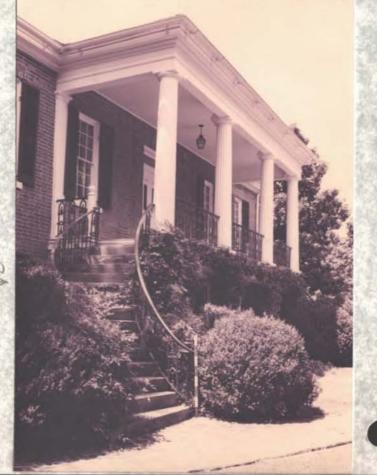


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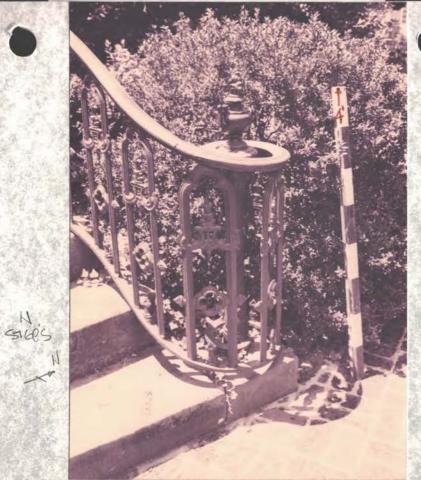




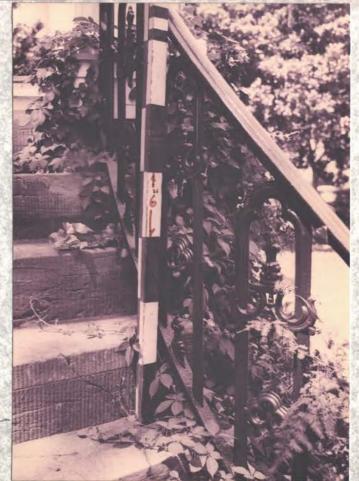
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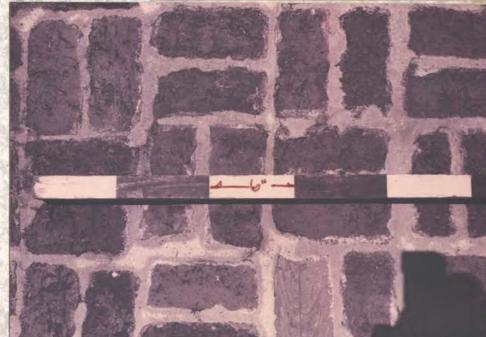
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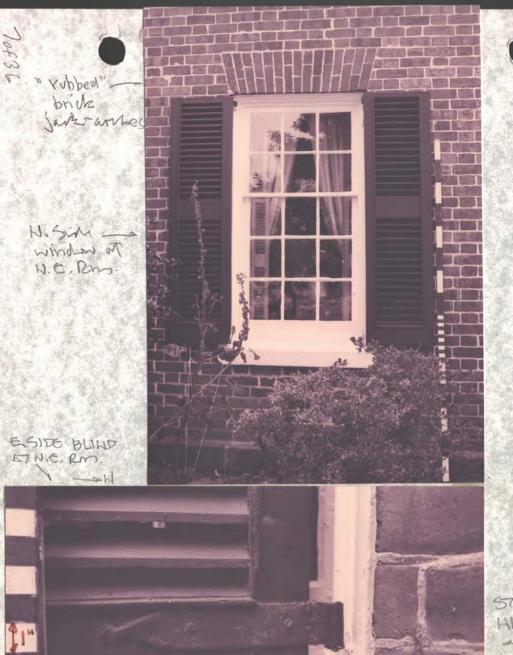


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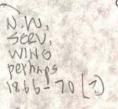


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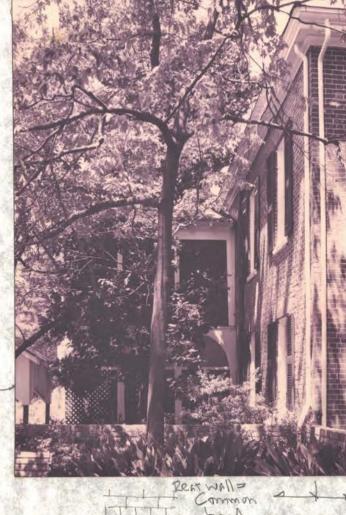
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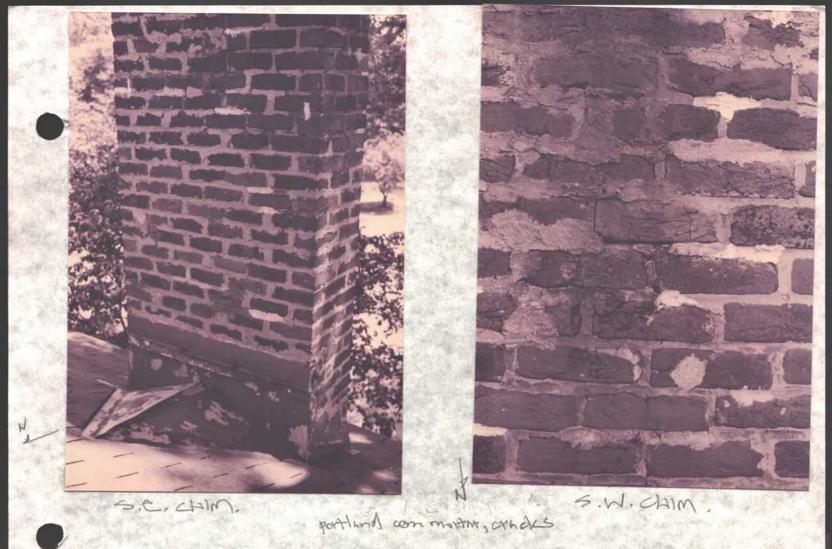
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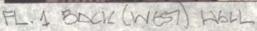
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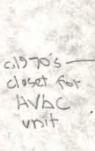
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C.1895(?) photo



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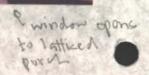


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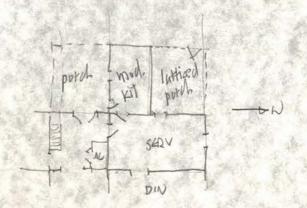
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c, 1895 (3) photo

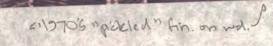


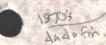
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- Say bk. Wenth (some still present) = 8" \$









FL. 2 N. G. RM - Fed period mantel & chair rail





A.2 H.E. 200.

to front hall



A2 N.W. RM

Vic. coal grate

oring 8th bride hotel band hearth.



Fel. montel

29



Him sich



typical Feal muntin

Felli South & chlindry slass
typical Fell PLZ N.W. ZM



Fed. mante)

shing black paint shows in chip. See 1930's
1485 photo
on p. 26







