

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only

received MAR 9 1984  
date entered

## 1. Name

historic GRIFFIN-SPRAGINS HOUSE

and/or common REFUGE PLANTATION HOUSE

## 2. Location

SW of Greenville off 4582

street & number ~~Route 2, Box 335~~

N/A not for publication

city, town Greenville ~~Via~~, ☒ vicinity of

state Mississippi

code 28

county Washington

code 151

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name Mrs. C. A. Spragins

street &amp; number Route 2, Box 335

city, town Greenville ☒ vicinity of

state Mississippi

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Office of the Chancery Clerk  
Washington County Courthouse

street &amp; number 900 Washington Avenue

city, town Greenville

state Mississippi

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Deerfield Berm Cultural Resource Survey has this property been determined eligible? ☒ yes ☐ no

date February-March, 1981

☒ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District

city, town Vicksburg

state Mississippi

## 7. Description

### Condition

☒ excellent  
☒ good  
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☐ unaltered  
☒ altered

### Check one

☐ original site  
☒ moved date unknown

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Situated in a grove of ancient oaks within a stone's throw of the Mississippi River levee, which dominates the immediate landscape, the Refuge Plantation house is a one-story, frame, enlarged cottage structure build in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The building, though altered somewhat during at least one move from its original site due to the encroaching river, bears a strong stylistic relationship to the Greek Revival period of architecture which was at the apex of its popularity at that time in northern Mississippi.

The main body of the house is basically rectangular in plan with a hipped roof and sits on a four foot high brick pier foundation with intervening lattice panels. A large ell projects off the rear to one side and an L-shaped porch connects it with the main house. The five-bay principal (west) facade features a low hipped roof porch across its length supported on attenuated, chamfered post columns. The balustrade has a full-round handrail and square balusters. Wide wooden steps front the central bay leading to the main entrance which consists of paired, paneled doors with sidelights and transom. Two floor-length windows to each side of the entry have unusually deep frames and exterior louvered shutters. The windows, with very large lights, are in a two-over-six glazing configuration which permitted them, when raised, to provide maximum ventilation benefits. Additionally, both the windows and door assembly here feature robust molding surrounds which project a full three inches measured at the backband. Though the remainder of the exterior is clad in clapboard, the principal facade is in horizontal flushboard. Two pedimented dormers and a pair of interior chimneys with corbeled caps pierce the roofline. The minimal Queen Anne influence detected in the exterior is thought to result from the final relocation of the house late in the century, which would have necessitated the rebuilding of the porches, chimneys, and possibly minor alterations to the roofline and dormers.

The south elevation of the main block features four short windows while the corresponding north elevation originally had two floor-length windows in the center bays, probably indicative of a side porch, now removed. The rear ell is gable-roofed and a chimney is positioned at about the midpoint of its length. A large end wall working fireplace was originally located in the kitchen at the extreme end of the wing. Several doors and windows opening into the rear porch from the main house and ell are original; a few openings have been blocked when the area was made into an interior space by the present owner. A covered cistern attached to the house by a latticed breezeway extends from the southeast corner.

The interior of the Refuge Plantation house features a typical central hall, eleven feet wide, with two 15 by 17 foot rooms to either side, each having its own door to the central hall. Fireplaces are in a back-to-back arrangement with one chimney between each pair of rooms. Mantel pieces have simple paneled areas and unadorned pilasters. A door, transom and sidelight assembly identical and opposite the main entry opens onto the rear porch. The wall between the right front parlor and central hall has been removed but otherwise the floor plan is unaltered with the exception of small bathrooms constructed in the corners of existing rooms. The rear wing, originally containing the dining room, has now been modified by the insertion of a middle room which connected it with the originally detached kitchen.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates Ca. 1850 Builder/Architect N/A

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Refuge Plantation is significant as an example of a mid-nineteenth-century plantation house in Washington County exhibiting a strong alliance to the emerging formal Greek Revival style, and as the nineteenth-century home of Francis Griffin and his son, John Griffin, influential Washington County residents.

When Mississippi joined the Union in 1817, the lands in northwest Mississippi were an unproductive, unsettled area, due largely to swamps and inability to control the course of the rivers. From 1827, with the formation of Washington County, until 1858, and the establishment of the Levee Districts, the agricultural promise of the rich alluvial soil was largely unharnessed. A few ambitious speculators, such as Francis Griffin, established plantations on the few high ridges bordering the Mississippi River, and for those planters who could survive the vicissitudes of the river, or construct their own levees, farming in the Mississippi Delta was immensely profitable (Economic Survey of Greenville and Washington County 1944 [Greenville, Miss: Washington County Chamber of Commerce, 1944], no pagination).

As a youngster, Francis Griffin, first master of Refuge Plantation, emigrated from South Carolina to Mississippi with his parents in the first decade of the nineteenth-century. The Griffins settled in territorial lands in present day Warren County, and elder Griffin established Magnolia Plantation. Francis Griffin returned east to school in Kentucky, but during the War of 1812, enlisted in the army. Following his military services, he completed his education. Upon returning to Magnolia Plantation, Francis Griffin married Patsy Downs, who died within the first years of marriage. Later Francis Griffin married Leonora Scarlett, a cousin of his first wife. Their first child, John, was born at Magnolia Plantation in 1826. Soon after, the family sojourned to Florida to alleviate Leonora Griffin's health problems. Griffin's financial investments were poorly managed during their absence, and when the family returned, they faced a major financial setback. With the bulk of his fortune gone, Griffin sold Magnolia Plantation, moved up river with his family and slaves, and on May 23, 1831, purchased government land in Washington County. Because of the ill fortunes he had recently survived, Griffin named his new home Griffin's Refuge (William D. McCain and Charlotte Capers, eds. Memoirs of Henry Tillinghast Ireys, Papers of the Washington County Historical Society 1910-1915 [Jackson, Miss: Mississippi Department of Archives and History and the Mississippi Historical Society, 1954], pp. 158-159; Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi 2 vols [Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1891], 1:822).

Within a few years of establishing Refuge Plantation, as it was called, Griffin constructed a plantation house. Protected by the plantation's levee system and shaded by oak trees, the plantation house was constructed within view of the Mississippi River. Preceding the construction of Belmont and Mount Holly, two of Washington County's high style plantation houses, both constructed in the 1850's, Refuge Plantation was clearly built as the nucleus of a working plantation. In form the house can be described as an enlarged cottage structure employing Greek Revival detailing, massing, and construction methods interpreted in a simple, vernacular mode, perhaps as a result of the rather early date for this style in the region.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi, 2 vols. (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co.), 18  
Economic Survey of Greenville and Washington County 1944 (Greenville, Miss: Washington County  
Chamber of Commerce), 1944.

McCain, William D., & Capers, Charlotte, Eds. Memoirs of Henry Tillinghast Ireys, Papers of the  
Washington County Historical Society, 1910-1915 (Jackson, MS: MS Dept. of Archives & History & th  
Mississippi Historical Society), 1954

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name Red Leaf, Arkansas-Mississippi

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

1	5	6	7	3	6	7	0	3	6	8	5	5	1	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

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D 

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property, encompassing the Refuge Plantation House and one acre of land,  
is drawn to place the House in the middle of the one-acre plot, with each side of the  
square measuring approximately 208.8 feet.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	code
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state	N/A	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Tomás R. Blackwell, Architectural Historian and Ana Gordon, Historian

organization Mississippi Dept. of Archives & History date January, 1984

street & number P. O. Box 571 telephone 601-354-7326

city or town Jackson state Mississippi 39205

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

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

Deputy

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Kenneth H. P. Pool*

title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

date MARCH 2, 1984

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*Shelores Byer*  
Entered in the  
National Register

date 4/5/84

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
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received
date entered

Griffin-Spragins House, Washington County, Mississippi

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 1

**8-SIGNIFICANCE**

At the height of his prosperity Francis Griffin owned Refuge and Hollywood Plantations in Mississippi, the Point Chicot, Tecumseh, and Leland establishments in Arkansas, and a sugar plantation at Point Celest, Louisiana. Local historians record that Griffin was a major slaveholder and one of the largest cotton producers in the world. During his residency at Refuge, and following the death of his wife in 1837, Francis Griffin also served in the Mississippi legislature and as a judge of the County Court (McCain, ed., p. 159; Biographical and Historical Memoirs, 1:822).

After a childhood on Refuge Plantation, John Griffin began his education at Holly Springs and later attended schools in Tennessee and Kentucky. He studied at the University of Virginia, graduated from the University of Louisville law school in 1857, and was admitted to the Bar. Griffin returned to Mississippi and assisted his father in the operation of Refuge Plantation. During this period, and throughout his lifetime, John Griffin experimented with refining Sea Island Cotton and inventing a cotton picking machine. He is credited by local sources with inventing the original roller skate (McCain, ed., pp. 160-162; Biographical and Historical Memoirs, 1:822).

While Francis Griffin, who died in 1865, believed in secession, his son John did not, and it is unknown how John Griffin spent the war years. Like most southern cotton plantations, Refuge suffered tremendously through the war. Eventually the political and economic uncertainties of reconstruction forced Griffin to relinquish Refuge Plantation and in 1879 he moved with his family to Greenville. John Griffin died in 1903 (McCain, ed., pp. 162-164).

Refuge Plantation passed through several owners during the next decades, and with the shift in agricultural markets and methods, its fields lay fallow for many years. Through all these years, the house appears to have been well maintained and protected. At least twice during the late-nineteenth century the house was moved back from its vantage point overlooking the Mississippi River to secure high ground. With each move, the building remained intact, and the placement of the original kitchen was carefully retained. Other architectural changes during the late-nineteenth century, such as chamfered columns and embellished chimney caps, reflect the owners' desire to keep the plantation house somewhat in the mainstream of the contemporary architectural styles.

In the early 1960's, Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Spragins purchased Refuge Plantation, and using modern equipment and technology, it once again became a profitable agricultural business. The plantation house was restored with care, and except for the removal of one major wall, the changes have been few. With its original kitchen, now attached, and in its excellent condition, Refuge Plantation House is one of the best examples of an mid-nineteenth-century plantation house in Washington County.





REFUGE PLANTATION HOUSE

Greenville, Washington County, Mississippi

View to the Southeast.

Tomás R. Blackwell, Dept. of Archives and  
History

December, 1983

Photo 1 of 3





# REFUGE PLANTATION HOUSE

Greenville, Washington County, Mississippi

View to northeast of porch.

Tomás R. Blackwell, Dept. of Archives and  
History  
December, 1983

Photo 2 of 3



# REFUGE PLANTATION HOUSE

Greenville, Washington County, Mississippi

View of window and porch details

Tomás R. Blackwell, Dept. Archives and  
History

December, 1983

Photo 3 of 3