

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:
Mississippi

COUNTY:
Amite

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY DATE
APR 9 1974

1. NAME

COMMON:
Amite County Courthouse

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
Main Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Liberty

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:
Third

STATE
Mississippi 39645

CODE
28

COUNTY:
Amite

CODE
005

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
☐ District ☒ Building	☒ Public	☒ Occupied	Yes:
☐ Site ☐ Structure	☐ Private	☐ Unoccupied	☐ Restricted
☐ Object	☐ Both	☐ Preservation work in progress	☒ Unrestricted
			☐ No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Agricultural	☒ Government	☐ Park	☐ Transportation	☐ Comments
☐ Commercial	☐ Industrial	☐ Private Residence	☐ Other (Specify)	
☐ Educational	☐ Military	☐ Religious		
☐ Entertainment	☐ Museum	☐ Scientific		

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Amite County

STREET AND NUMBER:
Main Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Liberty

STATE:
Mississippi 39645

CODE
28

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
Office of the Chancery Clerk, Amite County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:
Main Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Liberty

STATE:
Mississippi 39645

CODE
28

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
NONE

DATE OF SURVEY:
[] Federal [] State [] County [] Local

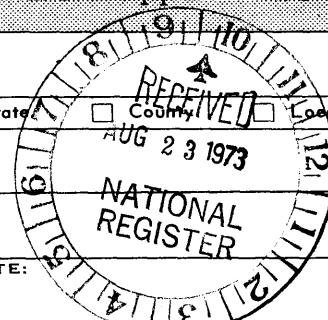
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:
Liberty

STATE:
Mississippi 39645

CODE
28



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Mississippi

COUNTY: Amite

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	☐ Excellent	☒ Good	☐ Fair	☐ Deteriorated	☐ Ruins	☐ Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	☒ Altered	☐ Unaltered	☐ Moved	☒ Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

As originally designed, the Amite County Courthouse was a gable-roofed, two-story structure, its common-bond brick walls painted and penciled. Measuring fifty-four feet by forty feet, it was constructed on a slight rise in the center of the court square with matching entrances on the north (presently the front) and south sides and on the west gable end. The east gable end was divided into four bays, each bay containing windows on both levels. These windows, like those on the other sides, were composed of twelve-over-twelve sash set in rectangular openings beneath flat arches with radiating brick voussoirs. The window openings were closed by louvered shutters. The other elevations were divided into five bays, with matching doorways in the center bays on both levels. The upper doorways, lacking balcony or porch, were guarded by triple rails let into the paneled embrasures. Each doorway featured a pair of paneled doors and a fanlight set beneath the radiating brick voussoirs of a semi-elliptical arch. Another arched opening, matching the size and shape of the doorway heads, was centered in each gable. Though louvers were originally planned for the gable openings, a late nineteenth century photograph shows that the west opening contained a fanlight matching those of the doors. The cornice on the front and back sides was formed by three courses of molded brick. The hollow serpentine profile of the cornice was repeated on the gable ends by wooden raking trim. Two chimneys ascended the interior face of each gable wall, emerged symmetrically on each side of the roof ridge, and terminated in three corbeled courses of brick. Centered on the ridge of the wood-shingle roof was an octagonal cupola, its eight rectangular openings flanked by pilasters and closed by louvers and its pyramidal roof surmounted by a spire.

On the interior of the first floor, a "T" shaped passageway connected the three exterior doors. In the north-south passage four symmetrically placed doors gave access to the four rooms on this floor; two rooms to the west flanking the west passage and two rooms to the east. A fifth doorway, matching the others in its simple architrave and its single-leaf, paneled door, was located in the center of the partition between the two eastern rooms. Each of the four rooms was equipped with a fireplace on the end wall. The walls were finished with plaster over brick, the ceilings with matched boards about six inches wide, and the floors either with the brick pavement called for in the original contract or with the wood floors of which a portion existed until the late 1960s. A straight flight of stairs in the west passage led to a second floor stairhall set between two rooms at the west end. These two rooms, although specified in the contract, may never have been built; the original courtroom may have occupied the entire second floor, as it does now.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- ☐ Pre-Columbian ☐ 16th Century ☐ 18th Century ☒ 20th Century
☐ 15th Century ☐ 17th Century ☒ 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1840-1841

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| ☐ Aboriginal | ☐ Education | ☒ Political | ☐ Urban Planning |
| ☐ Prehistoric | ☐ Engineering | ☐ Religion/Philosophy | ☐ Other (Specify) _____ |
| ☒ Historic | ☐ Industry | ☐ Science | _____ |
| ☐ Agriculture | ☐ Invention | ☐ Sculpture | _____ |
| ☒ Architecture | ☐ Landscape | ☐ Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| ☐ Art | ☐ Architecture | ☐ Theater | _____ |
| ☐ Commerce | ☐ Literature | ☐ Transportation | _____ |
| ☐ Communications | ☐ Military | | |
| ☐ Conservation | ☐ Music | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Since its completion in May, 1841, the diminutive courthouse in Liberty, Mississippi, has been the center of political activity in Amite County, and the town square on which it is located has served as a hub of much of the county's social and commercial life. The building, a product of local design and construction, combines the exuberance of vernacular architecture with the elegance of the late Federal style to achieve a purely native expression.

When Amite County was formed from the eastern portion of Wilkinson County in February, 1809, and Liberty was chosen as the new county's seat of government, the first courthouse was built in 1812 near the site of the present structure. The building, however, soon proved insufficient for the increasing governmental activities of the county.

The board of police (the predecessor of the modern-day board of supervisors), therefore, levied a special tax on Amite Countians in April, 1838, and, early in 1839, appointed William C. Harrell and two others to draft plans for the new courthouse building. Harrell was evidently the dominant figure among the three commissioners, and his plan was adopted by the board of police. While not an architect--available records indicate interests in agriculture, manufacturing, and general merchandizing--an earlier appointment to superintend repairs to the county jail and the subsequent appointment to supervise the construction of the new courthouse, indicate that Harrell was familiar with the building trade.

Whatever the case, Harrell placed an advertisement in the local Liberty Advocate and Piney Woods Planter, announcing June 3, 1839, as the day on which the commission would accept bids. Robert Stewart, Jr., who had built the county jail in 1833 and a county bridge in 1839, was awarded the contract with his low bid of \$11,949.00. The annual payments, derived from the special levy, amounted to \$1,800.00. Stewart's role in the

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Amite County. Chancery Court Records, Records of the Board of Police, Bk. 1, pp. 335, 359, 398-399, 400-401.

Historical Committee of the Sesqui-Centennial of Amite County, Mississippi. Liberty and Amite County Sesqui-Centennial, 1809-1959 (n.p., 1959).

Jackson Daily News, July 9, 1950; May 15, 1966.

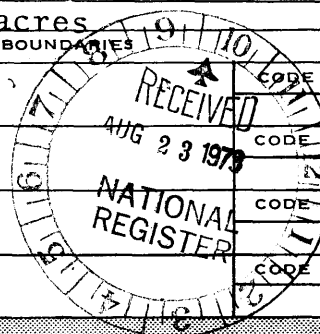
10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		31° 09' 27"	90° 48' 38"	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: One and one-half acres

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Robert J. Bailey, Historian Ronald W. Miller, Architectural Historian		DATE
ORGANIZATION Mississippi Department of Archives & History		7/13/73
STREET AND NUMBER: Post Office Box 571		
CITY OR TOWN: Jackson	STATE Mississippi 39205	CODE 28

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☐ Local ☒

Name Elbert Hilliard
Elbert Hilliard

Title Director, Miss. Dept. of Archives and History

Date July 13, 1973

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

AP Mortenson
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date 4/9/74

ATTEST: George T. Emery
Keeper of The National Register

Date April 8, 1974

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

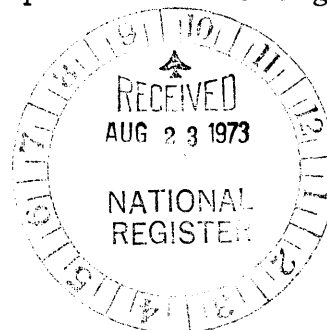
(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Mississippi	
COUNTY	
Amite	
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(Number all entries)

7.

Past renovations and additions have greatly changed the exterior of the courthouse but have had less effect on the interior. Chief among the alterations were those done in the 1930s by a Works Progress Administration sponsored project. At that time, two-story porches were placed across the front and back elevations and two-story brick wings were attached to the end walls. Each porch has a flat roof, four giant-order square columns and upper level railings of heavy spindles. Each wing is two bays wide and three bays deep, with a gable roof. The wings are differentiated from the main structure by their lesser depth and height. Since the 1930s, the upper level and one bay on the lower level of the back porch have been enclosed and one-story, shed-roofed rooms have been attached to the back of the wings. In 1969, following the plans of architect Ragland Watkins of McComb, Mississippi, a one-story, brick structure was erected to the southwest. It is set back from the east wing of the courthouse and is connected to it by a short passage. Alterations made at unknown dates include the removal of the cupola and the shutters, and the replacement of the first floor sash, the exterior doors, and the roof covering. Except for the present asbestos shingles on the roof, the entire exterior is painted white. On the first floor interior of the original courthouse, the mantelpieces have been removed and an earlier wood floor has been replaced by concrete. The original stairway has been replaced by one in the hall of the west wing and the lower west doorway has been removed. On the second floor, the windows in the end walls have been covered over and two doorways have been added on the east wall. New wood ceilings and floors have been installed. The railing of the judge's platform at the east end and two mantelpieces on the west wall may be original, although the 1839 contract specified fireplaces for the ground floor only.



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(Continuation Sheet)

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actual design of the building is unknown, but it is probable that his designing talents are reflected in such details as the cupola, the exterior cornice, and the mantelpieces.

Despite the commissioners' desire to have the courthouse operational by October, 1840, the building was not formally accepted by the board until May, 1841. The two-story structure originally housed the county clerk's offices, the courtroom, the judge of probate's office, and two jury rooms.

The town square on which the courthouse is situated was, prior to the building's construction, a scene of much activity. It has been reported that the property served as a ball field for the prehistoric Indians in the area. At a later date, it was a junction point on the Mobile to Natchez road and the road leading to Bayou Sara, Louisiana--two important travel arteries in the old Southwest. After the courthouse's completion, it became the stage for many typically antebellum activities; slave auctions and slave marriages were common sights. Soon after the outbreak of the Civil War, the "Amite Rifles," Company C, Seventh Infantry, and the "Liberty Guards," Company E, Twenty-second Infantry, were mustered on the courthouse green. Also, it has been suggested that at various times during the War, both Confederate and Union troops utilized the courthouse as a headquarters. While the suggestion cannot be documented, it is certain that both armies headquartered somewhere in Liberty, and the courthouse seems a logical choice.

Plans for the renovation and enlargement of the courthouse have been formulated but not yet implemented. To fund the project, the Amite County Board of Supervisors, in December, 1972, issued general obligation bonds, the sum of which, after the expense of the issue, amounted to slightly over \$250,000.00. The plans, formulated by architect Ragland Watkins of McComb, Mississippi, recognize the historic value of the courthouse and are designed to alter the building as little as possible. Although a limited amount of restoration, including the installation of mantelpieces, the replacement of later window sash, and the refinishing of original woodwork, is to be part of the general renovation, the plans call for dropping the ceilings to accomodate air conditioning ductwork. Enlargement will be in the form of a detached south (rear) wing.

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(Continuation Sheet)

STATE Mississippi	
COUNTY Amite	
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ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	APR 9 1974

(Number all entries)

9.

Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Amite County
"Subject File."

Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Works Progress
Administration typescript, Amite County, "Formation and
Early History."

Personal Inspection by Ronald W. Miller, Architectural Historian,
March, 1973.

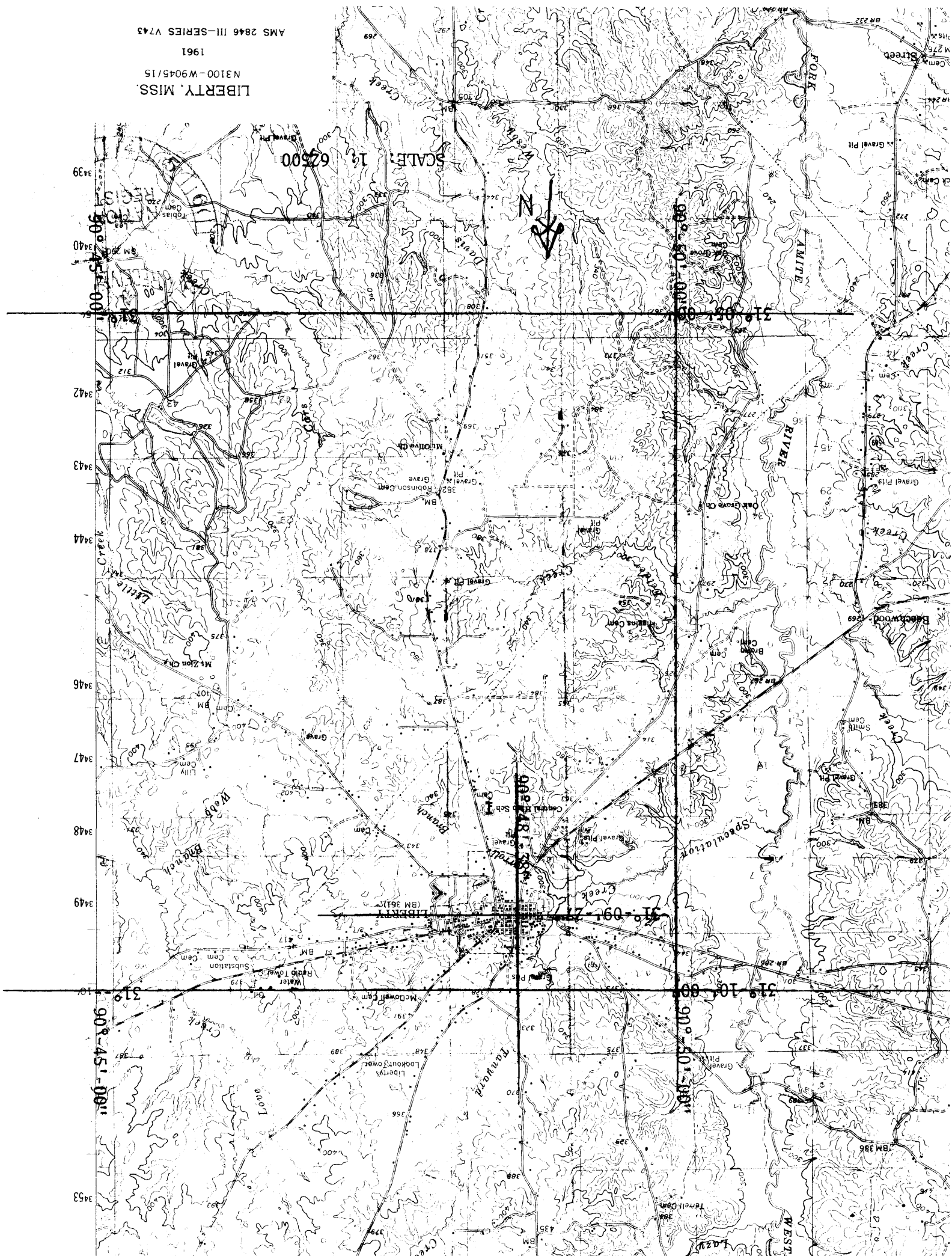
Personal Interview with Ragland Watkins, project architect,
Liberty, Mississippi, February 8, 1973.

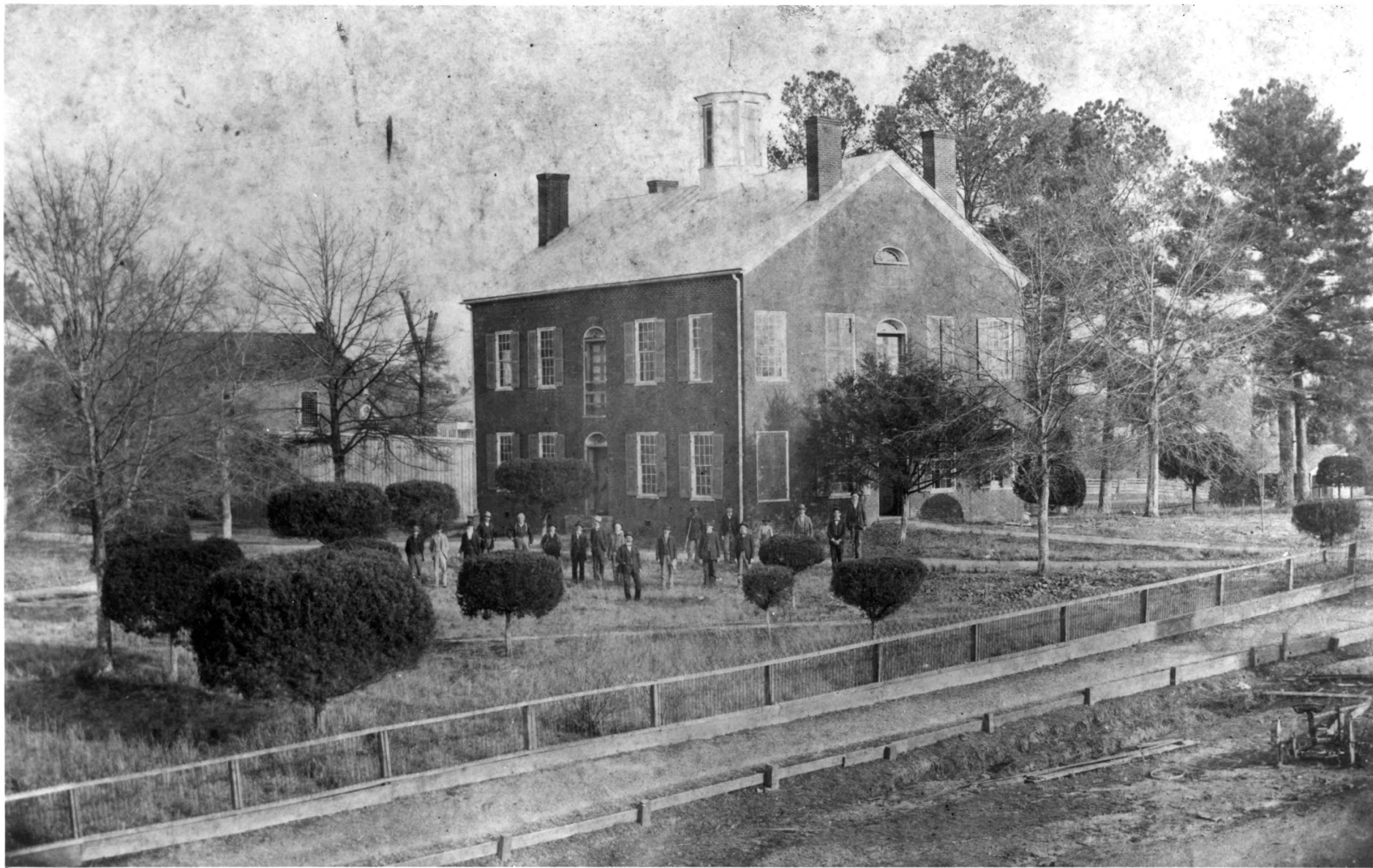
Personal Inspection by Robert J. Bailey, Historian, February 8,
1973.

Rowland, Dunbar (ed.). Official and Statistical Register of the
State of Mississippi, 1908. Nashville: Brandon Printing
Company, 1908, pp. 567, 628.

The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records
of the Union and Confederate Armies. Washington: Government
Printing Office, 1892. Ser. 1, Vol. 39, Pt. 1, pp. 836-839.







UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with photograph)

1. NAME

COMMON

AND/OR HISTORIC

NUMERIC CODE (Assigned by NPS)

APR 9 1974

Amite County Courthouse

2. LOCATION

STATE

COUNTY

TOWN

Mississippi 39645

Amite

Liberty

STREET AND NUMBER

Main Street

3. PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT

DATE

NEGATIVE FILED AT

Mrs. Mary Ratcliff
Liberty, Mississippi

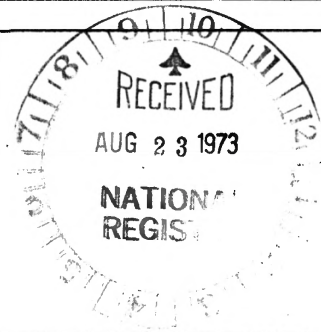
ca. 1900

Miss. Dept. of Archives
and History

4. IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.

northwest (facade) elevation looking southeast



1 of 2



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with photograph)

1. NAME		
COMMON	AND/OR HISTORIC	NUMERIC CODE (Assigned by NPS)
Amite County Courthouse		APR 9 1974
2. LOCATION		
STATE Mississippi 39645	COUNTY Amite	TOWN Liberty
STREET AND NUMBER		
Main Street		
3. PHOTO REFERENCE		
PHOTO CREDIT Miss. Dept. of Archives and History	DATE February 8, 1973	NEGATIVE FILED AT Miss. Dept. of Archives and History
4. IDENTIFICATION		
DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.		

Northeast (facade) elevation looking southwest.

2 of 2

