

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received FEB 26 1987
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Desert Plantation

and/or common same as above

2. Location

East of the Pinckneyville-Woodville Rd., about 19 mi. SW
street & number of Woodville and $\frac{1}{2}$ mi. N of Pinckneyville not for publication

city, town Woodville x vicinity of

state Mississippi code 28 county Wilkinson code 157

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
☐ district	☐ public	☒ occupied	☐ agriculture
☒ building(s)	☒ private	☐ unoccupied	☐ commercial
☐ structure	☐ both	☐ work in progress	☐ educational
☐ site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	☐ entertainment
☐ object	☐ in process	☐ yes: restricted	☐ government
	☒ N/A being considered	☐ yes: unrestricted	☐ industrial
		☒ no	☐ military
			☐ museum
			☐ park
			☒ private residence
			☐ religious
			☐ scientific
			☐ transportation
			☐ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mrs. William Wall Brandon

street & number Rt. 2, Box 650

city, town Woodville x vicinity of state Mississippi 39669

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Wilkinson County Courthouse

street & number Courthouse Square

city, town Woodville state Mississippi 39669

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes x no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
☐ excellent	☐ deteriorated	☐ unaltered	☒ original site	
☒ good	☐ ruins	☒ altered	☐ moved	date N/A
☐ fair	☐ unexposed			

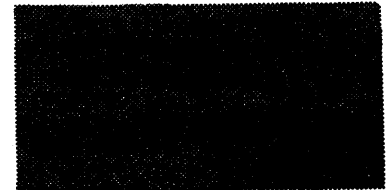
Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Desert, a thousand-acre plantation, lies six miles east of the Mississippi River and a half mile east of the road that leads nineteen miles northeast to Woodville and a half mile south to the center of the Pinckneyville community. The southeasterly facade of the one-and-a-half story plantation house is sheltered by a full-width undercut gallery. The frame building is set upon brick foundation piers and is surmounted by a gable roof with two exterior brick chimneys at each end. The large shingled front dormer and the roof overhangs, decorated with brackets at the sides and with exposed rafter ends at the front, were added about 1920 as part of a major renovation. The renovation included the demolition of a ca. 1845 breezeway and wing to the northeastern side, the reworking of the front gallery supports, and the removal of the three original front dormers, whose gable roofs and arched windows matched those of the three dormers that survive on the rear slope. The original six slender turned-wood columns, echoed at the front corners of the house by surviving original half columns with mortises for a round-section handrail, were cut off above their bases and set on brick piers at the corners of the gallery. Between the corners, similar but heavier columns from the Greek Revival side wing were arranged in four pairs atop brick piers. The five-bay front wall is sheathed in horizontal tongue-and-groove boards and trimmed with a molded base. In the center is the front doorway, the most outstanding exterior feature of the house. Beneath a molded elliptical arch with keystone, radiating muntins form a fanlight. The fanlight and arch are supported by a full entablature which breaks forward at the center and over each of the four molded pilasters which divide the entrance into three bays. In the outer bays are rectangular sidelights set over molded panels. In the center are 20th-century double-leaf doors with glazed upper panels. The original double-leaf doors probably matched those extant at the rear doorway. The front windows are trimmed with symmetrically-molded surrounds and bull's eye corner blocks. The side windows are trimmed with double-fascia architrave surrounds. All original windows of the house are filled with twelve-over-twelve, double-hung sash and are, in most cases, closed by original shutter blinds.

The interior is arranged in a double-pile plan and is elaborately trimmed in the original Federal style. All four downstairs rooms have mantelpieces, molded chair rails, six-panel doors with molded and fielded panels, and molded baseboards. All openings are trimmed with corner blocks. Some have architrave surrounds, others have symmetrical moldings, but only the parlor doors and windows bear reeded and pulvinated casings. An elliptical arch, supported by paneled and molded pilasters, repeats the shape of the front doorway and separates the front entry hall from the rear stair hall. The staircase is open to the stair hall and is decorated with scrolled stair brackets, turned newel posts, and rectangular-sectioned balusters. The northeast wall of the stairhall is offset to allow the dogleg stair, which begins its climb with winders and continues it along an intermediate flight between two landings, to make its return in the center of the house, beneath the back dormer. A narrow hallway at

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Desert Plantation--Mississippi

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the top of the stairs leads to a large center hallway which affords passage to the two original spacious bedrooms and the large front dormer, which functions as an additional bedroom or a sleeping porch. The plainer original Federal style trim of the upper story includes mantelpieces, architrave casings, molded five-panel doors, and beaded baseboards.

Interior alterations have been minimal. Greek Revival doorways replaced two windows to allow entry to a ca. 1845 wing on the northeast side. The wing was demolished earlier in the 20th century, and the doors now open into a side addition bathroom. On the western side of the house, the door between the parlor and dining room was removed and inserted in a window opening in the back wall of the dining room. In its place, a Greek Revival doorway with pocket doors, original to the side wing, was installed. The full-width back gallery was enclosed sympathetically, retaining the original window and door openings in the rear wall of the house. A gable roof kitchen ell was constructed at the back of the gallery, by the west corner.

The integrity of the natural setting is outstanding, but no significant outbuildings survive.

8. Significance

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

Specific dates early 19th century **Builder/Architect** unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Although the Desert Plantation house was altered on the exterior ca. 1920, it is nonetheless one of Mississippi's more significant plantation residences. This significance is based principally on the rarity of Federal style plantation residences in Mississippi, on the high quality and integrity of its architectural detailing, and on the unspoiled natural setting of the house within the 1000-acre tract of land that has been associated with it since before the Civil War.

Desert is a beautifully elaborated Federal style dwelling with an elliptical fanlight above the entrance doorway and molded window trim on both the facade and side elevations. Although the exterior was altered by the removal of the front dormers, the extension of the roof along the eave and at the gable ends, and by the rearrangement of the original gallery columns, all missing original architectural elements could be restored based on the surviving original. The interior integrity of the house is excellent and includes the survival of all original Federal trim. The outstanding interior feature of the house is the dog-leg staircase entered at the rear of an elliptical arch echoing the arch of the elliptical fanlight above the entrance doorway.

Probably no more than two dozen Federal style plantation houses are extant in the state of Mississippi. Most of Mississippi's Federal style buildings are urban and suburban structures found in towns in Adams, Claiborne, Jefferson, and Wilkinson Counties, along the Mississippi River in the southwest corner of the state, and most of these buildings are concentrated in Adams County, principally in Natchez and the old territorial capital of Washington. Only about a dozen Federal plantation houses are dotted throughout rural Adams County. Amite County, which adjoins Adams County and is one of Mississippi's first five counties, has only two recorded buildings in the Federal style.

Desert Plantation was established early in the nineteenth century by wealthy Wilkinson County planter Robert Semple. Stylistically, the house dates from about 1825 to 1835, but local tradition assigns a date of 1808 to 1812. An improvement by Robert Semple is noted in a land description in 1814 (Wilkinson County Deed Book A:355), but, like many Mississippi planters, Semple may have first built a crude, smaller dwelling and erected a grander house as the Mississippi planting economy expanded. He enlarged the present house about 1845 when he constructed a Greek Revival wing to the northeast side. His family owned Desert until 1885, when C. H. Norman acquired it and shortly afterwards sold it to an agricultural partnership formed by the McGehee and Merwin families. D. F. Merwin purchased the house in 1917 (Deed Book WW:561) for his family residence, and Desert is today the home of Merwin's daughter, Mrs. William W. Brandon, and her daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. William S. Perkins.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Miller, Mary, preservation consultant with Miller Preservation Services. Inspection of Desert Plantation, July 28, 1986.

Wilkinson County, Mississippi. Office of the Chancery Clerk. Deed Books A, WW

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 183 acres more or less

Quadrangle name Woodville, Miss.

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

UTM References

A

1	5
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6	4	5	8	0	0
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3	4	3	4	0	5	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

1	5
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6	4	6	1	0	0
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3	4	3	3	0	5	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

1	5
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6	4	5	1	5	0
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3	4	3	2	7	5	0
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D

1	5
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6	4	4	8	5	0
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3	4	3	3	8	0	0
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Verbal boundary description and justification The nominated acreage is bounded on the west by the Pinckneyville-Woodville Road, on the south by Desert Creek, on the east by a line located parallel to the northerly side elevation of the house and 1500 feet distant from it that extends northwesterly from a plantation road that forms the southern portion of the eastern

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

state	code	county	code
N/A			

state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary Warren Miller/preservation consultant

organization Miller Preservation Services

date July 30, 1986

street & number 506 High Street

telephone (601) 442-9786

city or town Natchez

state Mississippi 39120

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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Kenneth H. P. Pool

title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

date February 19, 1987

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

Amy Schlegel

Keeper of the National Register

date April 1, 1987

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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boundary and on the north by the Pinckneyville Creek. The property is described more particularly as beginning at a point on the Pinckneyville-Woodville Road where it is crossed by Pinckneyville Creek and continuing along the eastern side of said road in a southeasterly direction until the road is crossed by Desert Creek; then following Desert Creek as it meanders in a northeasterly direction until its bayou extension is crossed by a plantation road; then following the plantation road in a northwesterly direction until it intersects with a line 1500 feet from, and parallel to, the northerly side elevation of the house; then in a northwesterly direction along said line until it intersects with Pinckneyville Creek; then in a southwesterly direction along Pinckneyville Creek until it intersects with the Pinckneyville-Woodville Road--which is the point of beginning. The nominated acreage encompasses approximately 183 acres of the 1000-acre plantation and includes the plantation drive from the public road to the house and the scenic vistas. The large amount of acreage is necessary primarily to protect the plantation drive and to protect the integrity of setting of one of Mississippi's largest intact antebellum plantations. Desert and Pinckneyville creeks constitute obvious natural boundaries on the north and south, and the public road serves as the western boundary. The eastern boundary is based on the plantation road east of the house. All of the nominated property is located within section 31; Township 1N, Range 4W.

PLAN OF LOWER STORY
DEBERT PLANTATION
PINCKNEYVILLE - WOODVILLE ROAD
WILKINSON CO., MISS.

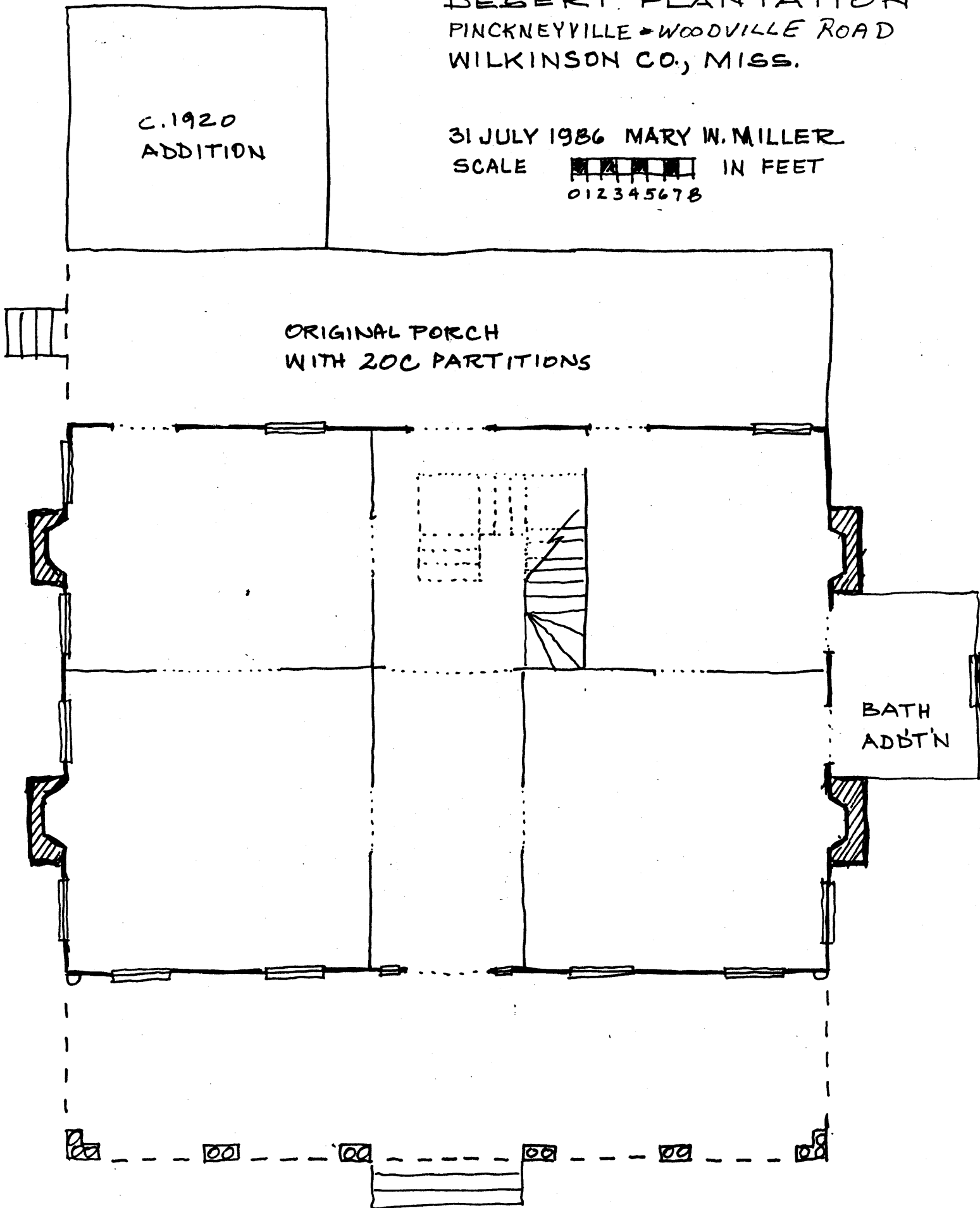
C. 1920
ADDITION

31 JULY 1986 MARY W. MILLER

SCALE  IN FEET
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

ORIGINAL PORCH
WITH 20C PARTITIONS

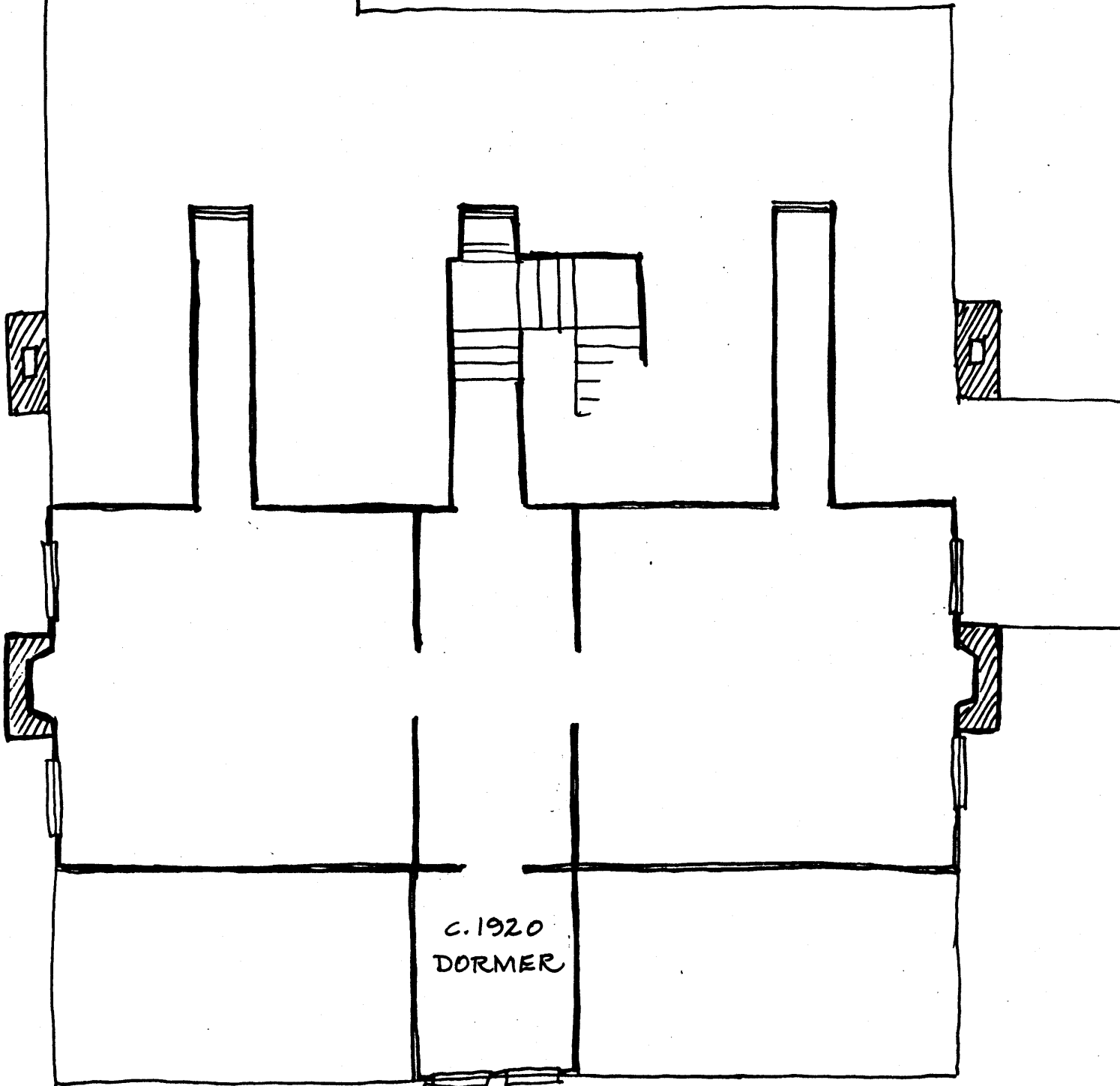
BATH
ADD'TN



PLAN OF UPPER STORY
DESERT PLANTATION
PINCKNEYVILLE - WOODVILLE ROAD
WILKINSON CO., MISS.

31 JULY 1986 MARY W. MILLER

SCALE:  IN FEET
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8





DESERT PLANTATION

Woodville, Wilkinson County, Mississippi

Looking northerly, the southeasterly facade
of Desert.

Mary W. Miller, Historic Natchez Foundation,
July 1986.

Photo 1 of 4



DESERT PLANTATION

Woodville, Wilkinson County, Mississippi

Looking northwesterly, the entrance doorway
of Desert.

Mary W. Miller, Historic Natchez Foundation,
July 1986.

Photo 2 of 4



DESERT PLANTATION

Woodville, Wilkinson County, Mississippi

Looking northerly, the southwesterly side
elevation of Desert.

Mary W. Miller, Historic Natchez Foundation,
July 1986.

Photo 3 of 4



DESERT PLANTATION

Woodville, Wilkinson County, Mississippi

Looking northerly, the staircase in the rear stair hall of Desert.

Mary W. Miller, Historic Natchez Foundation,
July 1986.

Photo 4 of 4