

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

JUL 6 1987

date entered

AUG 20 1987

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

1. Name

historic Town of Palo Alto

and or common Palo Alto Townsite

2. Location

street & number [redacted]

N/A not for publication

city, town [redacted]

state [redacted]

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	N/A 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 Multiple private ownership (see continuation sheet)

street & number

city, town _____ vicinity of _____ state _____

5. Location of Legal Description

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

street & number 101 Court Street

city, town West Point state Mississippi

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

title Archaeological Records has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1986 federal state county local

depository for survey records Mississippi Department of Archives and History

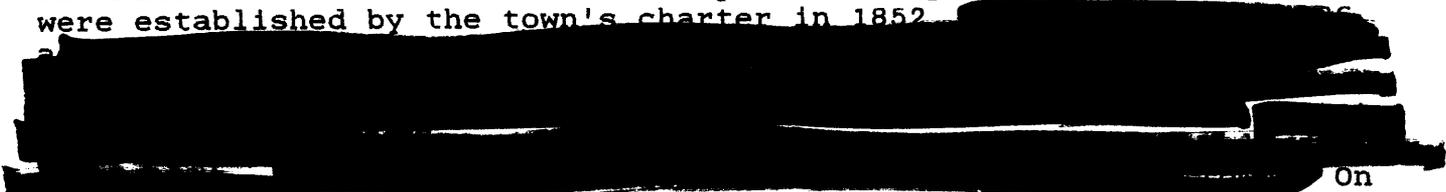
city, town Jackson state Mississippi

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date <u> N/A </u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Palo Alto townsite is defined by the incorporation limits that were established by the town's charter in 1852.



On the townsite there are currently only six residences, primarily occupied by descendents of one of the town's first settlers, and a small country store, which is the oldest business in Clay County. All of these buildings post-date the turn-of-the-century and therefore post-date the period of significance. The town was originally located in Chickasaw County; however, it was in an area that was added to the newly founded Colfax (later renamed Clay) County in 1872.

Today about 90% of the townsite is in pastureland. Although some cultivation has taken place during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was performed only by mule-pulled plows which did not disturb the soil to the great depths that modern plows do. Numerous artifacts have been found scattered over the site, such as cut nails, bricks, ceramics (e.g., plain whiteware, transfer print, shell-edge, mocha, yellowware, doll parts), and glass (window pane and bottle). Several sunken streets are visible. At least fifteen cisterns have been identified, most of which have been filled-in. These cisterns were normally used for garbage disposal after they were abandoned in the mid- to late 19th and early 20th centuries (Personal Communication-Jack D. Elliott, Sr, of Palo Alto), and now serve as "time capsules" of past material culture. Furthermore during the mid-19th century there was a subterranean log ice house associated with the Palo Alto Inn (McClellan and Miller 1934; Personal Communications-Jack D. Elliott, Sr. and Lydwell E. Elliott, Jr.). Many discarded artifacts are undoubtedly buried in this feature.

Numerous sites within Palo Alto have been identified on the basis of documentary and oral sources. These include the sites of: stores, residences, the Palo Alto Inn, the livery stable, the blacksmith shop, and others noted on the attached map. Fieldwork has located artifacts of the types noted above at these sites. A systematic surface survey should reveal clusters of artifacts around such sites. A survey of this nature will be particularly helpful in locating sites of buildings in areas where the documentary and oral record is silent and thus give a consistent overview of the townsite. Furthermore, quantification of artifacts from various areas should reflect past socioeconomic and functional differences and contribute to our knowledge of 19th century Southern culture and material culture.

Contributing elements: one site

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input 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 checked="" 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 1846 - ca. 1890 **Builder/Architect** N/A

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Archaeological Significance

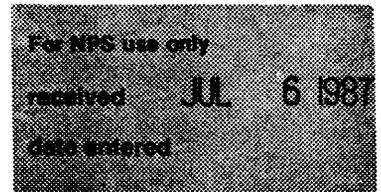
This extinct townsite is significant because it is likely to yield information important to understanding the culture and spatial organization of a frontier town during the mid-19th century and the broader social patterns with which it was associated. This information is in the form of: (1) archaeological deposits both scattered over the site and encapsulated in cisterns and the icehouse, (2) geomorphological features such as relic "sunken" streets and the cisterns per se, and (3) vegetation marking relic property lines, streets, and abandoned yards. This information is particularly important considering that comprehensive sets of data such as Sanborn Insurance Maps and extensive photographic collections are unavailable for these types of small towns, unlike larger towns where they are available.

Over the past 13 years the writer of this nomination has conducted extensive research into the history of Palo Alto using written records and oral sources. He has also closely surveyed the town site for archaeological remains and landscape features. It has become quite apparent that after one has synthesized the available data from written and oral accounts, that information available on the site itself is quite capable of supplementing and adding to the interpretation of the town's history, particularly regarding questions that are either unanswerable or only partially answerable through verbal sources.

Such questions are specifically related to the material culture and spatial organization of the town. Excavations of archaeological deposits scattered over the site and buried in the cisterns and icehouse could be utilized to address the material culture.. The buried remains would be particularly valuable in this regard because they would include a broader range of sizes of artifacts than would be found on or near the surface. For instance, it was recalled that one cistern became the repository for a cheese cutter from an old store, an oven-like device used in cooking on a hearth, and other fairly large artifacts (Personal Communications-Jack D. Elliott, Sr. and Mrs. Catherine Elliott Moore). Such large implements would not very likely have remained on the surface for long.

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Town of Palo Alto, Clay County,

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4 - OWNER OF PROPERTY

Mr. and Mrs. Jack D. Elliott, Jr.
Rt. 1, Box 461-A, Palo Alto
West Point, Mississippi 39773

Mr. and Mrs. Jack D. Elliott, Sr.
Rt. 1, Box 461, Palo Alto
West Point, Mississippi 39773

Mr. and Mrs. James L. Elliott
Rt. 1, Box 463, Palo Alto
West Point, Mississippi 39773

Mr. and Mrs. John S. Elliott
Rt. 1, Box 465, Palo Alto
West Point, Mississippi 39773

Mr. Joseph E. Elliott
Rt. 1, Box 461, Palo Alto
West Point, Mississippi 39773

Mr. and Mrs. Tim Estes
Rt. 1, Box 464, Palo Alto
West Point, Mississippi 39773

Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Rowe
Palo Alto Carpentry
Rt. 1, Box 463-A
West Point, Mississippi 39773

Mrs. Sara Swafford
P.O. Box
West Point, Mississippi 39773

Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth L. Ware
Rt. 1, Box 464-A, Palo Alto
West Point, Mississippi 39773

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8 - SIGNIFICANCE

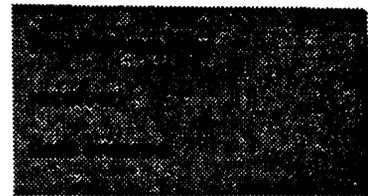
Potential research questions pertaining to material culture are numerous and will vary according to disciplinary paradigms and the particular interests of researchers. Questions applicable to Palo Alto include, but are not confined to, the identification of: (1) refuse disposal patterns, (2) differences in socioeconomic status between house sites within the town, and (3) functional differences between sites. Ceramics have been utilized to distinguish status in the archaeological record. Functional differences might be reflected by increased percentages of certain classes of artifacts, such as unusual quantities of iron fragments would tend to reflect a blacksmith shop, while wine bottle fragments might reflect a tavern. Additionally, excavation of cisterns while providing artifactual data in terms of their contents would also provide insights in cistern architecture.

In regard to understanding the spatial organization of the town, scattered archaeological remains would be of much value. Using a controlled surface collection or a stratified random sampling technique for excavating, spatial patterns could be delineated (e.g. Lewis 1976). This information could be integrated with verbal data pertaining to site layout. Furthermore, a reconstructed town map could be supplemented with relic landscape features. Even the present topography of the site can be considered to contain information that is important to understanding the town organization, in that topography was of importance to the town developers and the inhabitants in their locating of buildings and other functional areas.

Further significance is to be found in the fact there are relatively few extinct Mississippi town sites on the National Register. These few are Barton and Colbert (Clay County), Plymouth (Lowndes County), Cotton Gin Port (Monroe County), Rodney (Jefferson County), and Old Augusta (Perry County). The first four of these are river port towns, while Old Augusta was a county seat town. Palo Alto belongs to a type of town that has been called a trade or crossroads town (Adkins 1972; 1979). This type of extinct town, although ubiquitous throughout Mississippi during the 19th century, has not been represented at all in past nominations of historical archaeological sites to the National Register.

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8 - SIGNIFICANCE

Historical Summary

The town of Palo Alto was established in 1846 with the opening of a store and post office by Dr. Daniel B. Hill. The name of the post office was taken from the Battle of Palo Alto, the opening battle of the Mexican War which had only been fought on May 8 of the same year. Hill also seems to have run the first hotel, which was typical for the time, located in his log dogtrot house.

[Redacted text block]

The area had only been opened to American settlement following the 1832 and 1834 treaties with the Chickasaw Nation.

[Redacted text block]

Settlement on the Palo Alto Prairie did not transpire until the mid-1840s. It was in this milieu that the first store and post office were established.

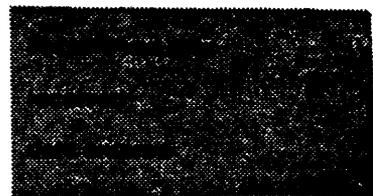
A growing population and a developing economy based on the commercial production of cotton focused its need for a local retail and social center on the Palo Alto site. Shortly after the founding of the store and post office, a town plat consisting of streets, lots, and blocks was surveyed. Businesses based on secondary and tertiary economic activities moved in, while social institutions were founded. The town was chartered in 1852. At the peak of its development in the mid-1850s, it had an estimated population of 100-150 people, 4-6 stores, saloons, blacksmith shops, 2 hotels, 4 doctors, a lawyer, a cabinetmaker, a livery stable, a wagon shop, a carriage shop, harness makers, an academy, and a church with a Masonic Lodge upstairs.

Decline set in during the 1860s as a result of the economic impact of the War between the States and the construction of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad to the nearby town of West Point in December 1857. Stores and other business institutions closed. By 1890 the town could be considered to be extinct. Only a few families have remained to the present day to perpetuate the name "Palo Alto."

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9 - MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Adkins, Howard G.

1972 The historical geography of extinct towns in Mississippi.
Unpublished Ph.d. dissertation, Department of Geography,
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee.

1979 The historical geography of extinct towns in Mississippi.
In Sense of Place: Mississippi, edited by Peggy W.
Prenshaw and Jesse O. McKee, pp. 123-152, University Press
of Mississippi, Jackson, Mississippi.

Chickasaw County Landroll

1851- On microfilm in Special Collections, Mitchell Memorial
1852 Library, Mississippi State University.

Clay County Deed Records

n.d. On file in the Chancery Clerk's Office, West Point,
Mississippi.

Dunn, R.G., & Co. Papers

n.d. On file in the Baker Library of Business, Harvard
University, Boston, Massachusetts.

Elliott, Jack D., Jr.

1977 Clay County post offices through 1971. A typescript in the
Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Franks, Richie Norwood

1982 The history of Clay County. Edited and published by Mary
Collins Landin, Utica, Mississippi.

Laws of Mississippi

1852 Jackson, Mississippi.

Lewis, Kenneth E.

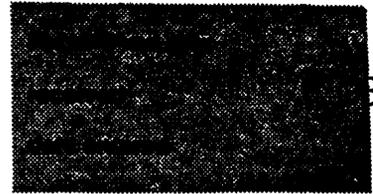
1976 Camden: a frontier town. Anthropological Studies 2,
Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, The University
of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.

McClellan, Iva Higgs, and Allie Everhart Miller

1934 Historical activities of the Horseshoe Robertson Chapter,
D.A.R. Howard Printing Company, West Point, Mississippi.

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9 - MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Personal Communications

n.d. Jack D. Elliott, Sr., Lydwell Ernest Elliott, Jr., and Mrs.
Catherine Elliott Moore.

U.S. Census of Manufacturing

1850 Chickasaw County, Mississippi.
1860

U.S. Census of Population

1850 Chickasaw County, Mississippi
1860
1870

10 - GEOGRAPHICAL DATA (Verbal boundary description and justification)

