

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

1. Name

historic

and/or common Folk and Vernacular Thematic Resources of Lawrence County

2. Location

street & number

___ not for publication

city, town

___ vicinity of

congressional district

Third

state Mississippi

code 28

county Lawrence

code 77

3. Classification

Category

___ district
___ building(s)
___ structure
___ site
___ object
___ thematic

Ownership

___ public
 private
___ both
Public Acquisition
___ in process
___ being considered

Status

occupied
 unoccupied
 work in progress
Accessible
___ yes: restricted
___ yes: unrestricted
___ no

Present Use

agriculture
___ commercial
___ educational
___ entertainment
___ government
___ industrial
___ military
___ museum
___ park
 private residence
___ religious
___ scientific
___ transportation
___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name

Multiple Ownership

street & number

city, town

___ vicinity of

state

5. Location of Legal Description

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

street & number

city, town Monticello

state Mississippi 39854

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Statewide Survey of Historic Sites has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes ___ no

date April, 1980

___ federal state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

city, town Jackson

state Mississippi

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The folk and vernacular architecture of Lawrence County comprises a significant group of house types that document Lawrence's development during the 19th century. These 21 residences are scattered throughout the county, and can generally be categorized according to their geographical location. The Pearl River divides Lawrence from north to south, and surrounding the river's flat bottom land is the hill country of the Piney Woods. The folk houses lie in this hilly region, while the vernacular structures, some bordering on the Greek Revival, are found on the more expensive land along the Pearl.

One-room log houses were the predominant type initially constructed by Lawrence County settlers, but additionally the group includes examples of the dogtrot, coastal cottage, and I-house types. Vernacular residences, constructed by the cotton planters in the fertile bottomlands, are 1-½ story frame structures with center halls and undercut galleries. In form they echo the Greek Revival, but exhibit little or none of the style's characteristic details. The Cannon (no. 9) and Smith (no. 17) houses employ flush board facades and square columns along their front galleries, as does the Rogers house (no. 8). The Rogers house can be considered a simple Greek Revival residence, additional features including double-leaf panelled entrance doors, framed by transom and sidelights, and panelled wainscoting in the center hall and along the front gallery. The Greek Revival is expressed rather fully by a single example, the Fox house (no. 18). The Hilliard house (no. 19) is the thematic group's only 2-story residence, a log I-house. All of the residences are raised one to three feet, the folk structures rest on large fieldstones and/or pine blocks, and the vernacular on brick piers. All have frame or log construction, with some log houses being weatherboarded at a later date, and the majority of houses showing combination of construction methods and materials. Quality of workmanship ranges from fair to superior. The diamond-shaped corner notches of the Buckley house (no. 3) are remarkable because of the rarity of this joining method in eastern Mississippi. The clapboarding of log houses generally conceals the structure, but the solid construction of the Hilliard house (no. 19), with its carefully hewn and joined logs, is visible on the interior.

Cultural resources of Lawrence County were surveyed by Jody Cook, architectural historian and author of this nomination, with considerable assistance from the Lawrence County Historical Society. All National Register eligible houses of 19th century folk/vernacular architecture have been included. Several houses considered a part of the thematic group were excluded due to loss of integrity, principally through structural changes and deterioration. Although the integrity of some of the nomination's properties as photographed might appear questionable, all houses herein are of sound structural condition and possess a sufficient degree of stylistic form and detail to be representative of their type.

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/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates

Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Lawrence County played an important part in the development of the Mississippi Territory and early statehood, although the significance of Lawrence and other interior counties has long been overshadowed by the Mississippi River's old Natchez District. The remaining record of the county's early role is found in the collection of folk and vernacular house types scattered throughout the county. These structures are significant because of the information they provide about individuals, settlement patterns, and folkways of Lawrence County, and architecturally as examples of folk house types found on the developing nation's inner frontier.

The Treaty of Mount Dexter in 1805 opened the area ceded by the Choctaws to settlement and followed acquisition of the Natchez District by the United States by only four years. Lawrence County's northern boundary formed the treaty line. However, the county was not officially delineated from the original territorial county of Marion until December 1814. Migration to the Lawrence County area began before the territory was officially opened, and consisted of herdsmen occupied with a grazing and hunting economy. Opening of the Old Federal Road in 1806, also known as the Three Chopped Way, slowly increased settlement by the pioneer herdsmen. In 1809 land surveyed by the Territorial government became available for purchase, but Indian trouble kept migration from escalating. The Creek War of 1813 caused numbers of settlers to vacate the frontier. "Only a few hardy souls were left in the Pearl River settlements, and both Natchez and Mobile were overflowing with settlers fleeing the exposed frontier." (Richard McLemore, ed. A History of Mississippi, Vol. I, Hattiesburg: University and College Press of Mississippi (1973), p. 231).

Following these early hardships, Lawrence County experienced its first wave of migration during the 1813-1819 period, along with the rest of the territory of the Lower South. The route of the Old Federal Road influenced the pattern of settlement in the county. Passing near Lawrence's northern boundary, the road linking the eastern seaboard with the Louisiana Purchase intersected the Pearl River at Lawrence County and provided a route to an area rich in natural resources. Agriculturalists claimed the rich flat bottomland along the Pearl for their cotton plantations, while the herdsmen settled in the hilly piney woods region where their grazing economy prospered.

The political and commercial interests of Lawrence County advanced rapidly during the decade following the Creek War and set the pace for the area until the Civil War. As early as December, 1812, the Mississippi Legislature had authorized Harmon Runnels to lay off a town on his Pearl River land. Monticello was designated the county seat in 1815, and became a center for the surrounding region. Competition for the state capitol seat in 1821 focused on Monticello, but the town was never actually designated the capitol as had been mistakenly believed in the area for many years. A sectional battle over location of the State Supreme Court resulted in its meeting at Monticello in 1826 for one session, although it was subsequently returned to Natchez because of the inadequacy of facilities (McLemore, ed., p. 279). A contemporary description of Monticello in the early nineteenth century was written by J. F. H. Claiborne in a letter to the Jackson Clarion:

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I saw Monticello for the first time in 1821. . . . Monticello was then a political and commercial metropolis of southwestern Mississippi. It is a well-built and handsome town on the banks of the Pearl River; obtained its merchandise from New Orleans by way of Covington and the lake; enjoyed a large trade with the Choctaws, who then owned the whole country between the Pearl and Tombigbee rivers.

The Supreme Court sat in Monticello, which desired to be the seat of government. It was always the residence of half a dozen or more of the most aspiring men of the State, who were either candidates themselves or had to be filling up the state slate. During the week I spent there in 1821, it was particularly lively, because the Legislature had been called to meet in Columbia to consider the Poindexter Code and most of the members and many prominent outsiders halted in Monticello.

(Source Material for Mississippi History. Lawrence County, Vol. 39, pp. 4-5)

The political history of Lawrence County additionally includes the county's representation at the Pearl River Convention in 1816 and the 1817 Constitutional Convention, and the contribution of three local men as governors: Hiram G. Runnels, 1833-1835, Charles D. Lynch, 1836-1838, and Andrew H. Longino, 1900-1904. The area ceded by the 1805 Treaty of Mount Dexter was developing during the 1820's, encouraged by the 1820 Treaty of Doak's Stand which opened the area north and west of Lawrence County to pioneers. By 1830 the rapidly growing Piney Woods composed 28% of Mississippi's population, (Edwin A. Miles, Jacksonian Democracy in Mississippi, N.Y.: Dacapo Press (1970) p. 19), and Lawrence County provided large numbers of settlers for the Doak's Stand territory.

The Pearl River constituted the county's principle natural resource before the Civil War, providing water transportation for goods in a region where roads were practically non-existent. An 1823 traveller to Jackson described the Pearl as "navigable for steamboats six months in the year and for smaller craft all the year." (William D. McCain, The Story of Jackson, Jackson: J. F. Hyer Publishing Co. (1953) p. 21). However, the earliest recorded steamboat trip downriver from Jackson was in 1834, and the Steamer Choctaw was the first to reach Jackson from the south in December 1835. (Edythe W. McCraw, "River Transportation on the Mighty Pearl," Miss. News and Views, XXIII, p. 14). Flatboats and barges were undoubtedly on the Pearl soon after settlement of the surrounding region began and contributed to Monticello's status as a "commercial metropolis" in 1821.

A sectional conflict arose between the Pearl's Piney Woods counties and those of the Old Natchez District almost immediately following the Treaty of Mount Dexter. Fearing their trade and political supremacy would be diverted by Piney Woods development, Natchez politicians successfully blocked all attempts to improve navigation of the Pearl River.

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"Why do members of the legislature from the West so uniformly oppose, either directly or indirectly, every measure which is brought forward, calculated to benefit us?" (Pearl River Advocate quoted in "Natchez" May 22, 1830). Efforts to improve navigation continued throughout the 19th century, but the issue lost its momentum after completion of the railroad from Vicksburg to Jackson in 1836. "It is a well-known fact that several steamboats were running on this river before the railroad was completed to Jackson. After that was completed, what was the result? The result is that it drove the steamboats from the river." (1846 account quoted in McCain, p. 57). At this time the railroad was viewed as an auxiliary to the Mississippi River, rather than a main line of transportation. Even so, the focus of Pearl River goods became their transportation to Jackson's rail terminal as demand disappeared for steamers down the twisting Pearl. The Pearl's function as the region's major source of transportation ended in 1857 with the arrival of the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern Railroad at Brookhaven (15 miles west of Monticello), although there were occasional reports of steamboats on the Pearl until the 20th century. The river continued to be used by flatboats to transport lumber and was also traveled by a "floating grocery;" the Geneva towed a barge, the Leman, and carried coffee, salt, whiskey, molasses, sugar, gunpowder and shot. (McCain, p. 57).

Lawrence County belongs to the group of ten counties ceded by the Choctaws in 1805 known as the Piney Woods. The Piney Woods had a different society and economy than the Old Natchez District, and between the sections "there was little communication and less sympathy." (William H. Sparks, The Memories of 50 Years, Macon, Ga.: J. W. Burke and Co. (1870) p. 332). Accounts by contemporary travellers such as William Sparks, who rode a judicial circuit, tended to document the conception of Piney Woods settlers as poor whites on poor soil, eking out an existence as subsistence farmers, herdsmen, and lumbermen.

Some of these pioneers had been in the country many years, were surrounded with descendants, men and women, the growth of the country, rude, illiterate and independent. Along the margins of the streams they found small strips of land of better quality than the pineforests afforded. Here they grew sufficient corn for bread and a few of the coarser vegetables, and in blissful ignorance enjoyed life after the manner they loved. The country gave character to the people: both were wild and poor . . . " (Sparks, p. 332).

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In Lawrence County this was not the case. People of the hill country were judged by cotton economy standards and assumed to be agriculturalists, when in reality their economy rested on large herds of swine and cattle grazing the Piney Woods and not visible to the occasional traveller. In addition, this narrow view of Piney Woods existence disregarded the fertile river bottomland of the Pearl River. A number of wealthy families owned large plantations in the flatlands of Lawrence County including Stephen A. Douglas, Abraham Lincoln's opponent in the Lincoln - Douglas debates. The combination of hill and river economies maintained Monticello and Lawrence County's commercial status until the railroad reached Brookhaven in 1857, followed by the Civil War.

Folk and vernacular houses reflect the lifestyles that existed prior to the Civil War in Lawrence County and post-war folk houses record the county's condition following the Civil War. These houses provide information about individuals and families, and their origins, migration, settlement, and lifestyle by illustrating the manner in which they lived. Of considerable interest is the fact that over 60% of the houses are still owned by descendants of original land grantees, and/or have remained within the same family for over 100 years. This extended habitation has in many cases wrought changes in house form and materials. Although the original design has been adapted to meet changing circumstances, these adaptations are found to reflect the continuity of tradition and the evolution of the folk/vernacular residence over time. They are also evidence of the permanence of construction of this house type when maintained.

The architectural significance of the folk and vernacular residences is found in the range of house types that comprise the largest county collection of this type within Mississippi as currently surveyed. A survey by the WPA recorded seventeen such houses, 53% which no longer exist. Based on WPA information, many of these houses represented Lawrence's territorial history. Four additional houses, considered part of this thematic group, were determined ineligible because of structural changes and deterioration, resulting in loss of integrity. The remaining twenty-one houses represent the variety of house types constructed during the development of 19th century Lawrence County. Of exceptional significance architecturally and historically are the out-buildings still associated with the residences. Types included are: smoke houses, kitchen, log stables, cotton house, potato house and barn.

The majority of the houses (11) began as one-room log houses, indicating the frontier character of the county prior to and following the Civil War. Over time, as circumstances warranted, all of these houses were enlarged. The evolution took one of two forms; the houses became dogtrots (4) with the addition of an open center hall and second room, or they became double-pen houses (7). These additions were always frame and frequently the log section of the house was sided at the time of enlargement.

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Another common change of form upon expansion was alteration of the roofline to have a higher and wider pitch. This change included an undercut gallery where corners could be enclosed when additional living space was necessary. The dogtrot, so common in other regions of Mississippi and the South, is not so strongly represented in Lawrence County as an initial house type. Only two were constructed before the Civil War, the Cothorn (no. 11) and Johnson (no. 21) houses, and the Gunnell House (no. 14) is the single post-war example. Of particular interest is the Hilliard House (no. 19), a 2-story log I-house. It is in the unique position of being the nomination's single 2-story house, single I-house, and the only known 2-story log house in eastern Mississippi. Houses combining the folk and vernacular are the Cannon (no. 9), a 1-room log house expanded to a dogtrot and vernacularized with the addition of an undercut gallery supported by square columns, and the Armstrong (no. 10), a frame house with undercut gallery that originally had an open dogtrot. The Newsom-Lane and Newsom-Smith houses (nos. 1 and 4), are the county's only examples of the coastal cottage. The Greek Revival Style is represented by the Rogers (no. 8), Smith (no. 17), and Fox (no. 18) residences, although they must be viewed as vernacularizations of the style they undertook to portray.

The Lawrence County Historical Society annually sponsors a spring pioneer pilgrimage and is preparing plans for a publication of properties surveyed for this nomination. Copies of the nomination will also be provided to the Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District and the Mississippi Agriculture and Industrial Board.

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