

Senator Robert Jamison House  
Greensboro Avenue, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

*Tuscaloosa Co.*

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HABS No. 16-205

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
District No. 16

Historic American Buildings Survey  
E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer  
Ala. Polytechnic Inst., Auburn, Ala.

SENATOR ROBERT JEMISON HOUSE  
1305 Greensboro Avenue  
Tuscaloosa, Tuscaloosa County, Alabama.

Ownership:

Present Owner: Mrs. A. S. Van de Graaf (daughter of Senator Jemison)

Previous Owners: Senator Robert Jemison.

Date of Erection: 1860 - 1862.

Architect: Lewis, (Philadelphia Architect)

Builder: Senator Robert Jemison Sr.

Present Condition: Excellent.

Number of Stories: Two.

Materials of Construction: Brick; stucco and heart of pine; masonry;  
interesting from an architectural standpoint.

Other Existing Records:

See: "HISTORIC HOMES OF ALABAMA AND THEIR TRADITIONS"  
By Alabama members of National League of  
American Pen Women.

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Additional Data: This house was designed by Lewis, Philadelphia architect who assisted the Senator in the development of his own plans. Built in 1862, the design contrasts with the usual trend of this period, and is the Italian villa type with cupola and Italian blinds. Brick, stucco and heart of pine, all were produced on the property, the work being done by slaves. The house escaped destruction at the hands of Federal troops during the War between the States by a ruse of two youths who passed at a gallop on horse back yelling, "Forrest is coming", as the raiding squad prepared the torches. They fled. Interesting features of the building are, octagonal observatory, stairways - six in number, and wide heavily carved doors which extend from floor to ceiling with novel glass transom lights. Within are original and antique furnishings. The house has remained - continuously in the possession of the family, being at present owned and occupied by Mrs. A. S. Van de Graaf, daughter of Senator Jemison.

Cherokee Place across the Warrior River from Tuscaloosa, almost from the State's very beginning was a factor in the making of Alabama history, and is now the holder of some of its most precious and tragic memories. Its history involves the story of the State's first effort at mining, lumbering, road building, iron making, stage coach operation, and railroad - construction, as well as the history of its social and political development.

Robert Jemison, the master of Cherokee and of the home on Greensboro Avenue, was largely responsible for the establishment of the Hospital for the Insane at Tuscaloosa. It was at his suggestion that Dorothea Dix came from the North to advocate such a hospital, and remained as a guest in his home until definite plans were made. His position on the State Board of Finance enabled him to plan and work for the passage of a bill to provide for a permanent fund for the insane in Alabama, and to build an institution to reflect credit to the state.

Source of Material:

Historic Homes of Alabama and their Traditions.

Compiled by:

Katherine Floyd.  
Auburn, Alabama.

Approved:

E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer, HABS  
Auburn, Alabama.

Date: 10-5-1936.

ew. Dec. 4 '36 TFW

ADDENDUM TO  
JEMISON-VAN DE GRAAF-BURCHFIELD HOUSE  
(Sen. Robert Jemison House)  
Birmingham Industrial District  
1305 Greensboro Ave.  
Tuscaloosa  
Tuscaloosa County  
Alabama

HABS No. AL-205

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PHOTOGRAPHS

XEROGRAPHIC COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

ADDENDUM TO  
JEMISON-VAN DE GRAAF-BURCHFIELD  
(Senator Robert Jemison House)  
1305 Greensboro Ave.  
Tuscaloosa  
Tuscaloosa County  
Alabama

HABS No. AL-205

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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ADDENDUM TO  
JEMISON-VAN DE GRAAF-BURCHFIELD HOUSE  
(Senator Robert Jemison House)  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JEMISON-VAN DE GRAAF-BURCHFIELD HOUSE  
(Senator Robert Jemison House)

This report is an addendum to a 2 page report previously transmitted to the Library of Congress.

Location: 1305 Greensboro Avenue, Tuscaloosa, Tuscaloosa County, Alabama. The house is located on Greensboro Avenue, a major traffic artery in Tuscaloosa, which leads from I 20/59 to the city center and the riverfront.

Ownership: City of Tuscaloosa

Date of Construction: 1860-1862

Builder/Architect/Engineer: John Stewart (architect), formerly of the Philadelphia firm of Sloan and Stewart

Project Information: This report is based on written documentation donated by the Birmingham Historical Society, reformatted to HABS/HAER guidelines.

Description: This 26-room Italianate style brick (originally scored to look like stone) house is basically rectangular with a slightly advanced central pavilion and one story demioctagonal side bays, decorative open porches, and hipped roof surmounted with a large cupola. A service wing is at the rear. A servants' house and remains of a private coal-fired gas illuminating and cooking system are also located on the property. The interior features a center hall plan, 18' ceilings, inlay woodwork (walnut, oak and chinaberry) from Jemison's plantations and a rare survival of a mid-19th century bathroom.

Significance: The house is significant as the home of Robert Jemison, a major Tuscaloosa area planter who developed early coal and ore mines in the District and financed the development of

JEMISON-VAN DE GRAAF-BURCHFIELD HOUSE  
HABS No. AL-205  
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transportation systems. Jemison reflects the divergent economic outlook of the planter class in Alabama. The primary remaining structure associated with Jemison, this house contained some of the earliest examples in the state of domestic technologies --interior plumbing and a coal-fired gas illuminating system. Extensive papers document Jemison's activities.

Date of  
Significance:

1862-1871

Condition:

The house is currently under restoration. Harvie Jones, AIA, Huntsville, is directing the restoration efforts, working with the Tuscaloosa County Preservation Society headquartered on the property. Robert Mellown, University of Alabama professor of art, is currently researching the Jemison family papers for documentation to assist restoration efforts.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Builder of this palatial residence was Robert Jemison (1802-1871), a major plantation owner who had far flung interests in railroads, an iron foundry, coal and ore mining, and also served as a legislator in the Alabama house and senate and the Confederate State Senate. Jemison also owned the Jemison Flickin Stage Line, one of the first stage coach lines in the state which ran to Montgomery and into Mississippi. He also erected a plank road from his surface coal mines at Brookwood to Tuscaloosa.

In 1860, at 58, Jemison decided to build a "city" house, moving his residence to Tuscaloosa from his many plantations, including "Cherokee" to the northwest of Tuscaloosa at Northport. The 26-room Italianate house topped with domed cupola was designed by a Philadelphia architect and constructed with lumber from Jemison's mills. The house was lighted by gas. The property contained machinery which manufactured gas from coal. There was also a water system and deep well to act as refrigeration. Jemison took an active role in developing these systems and attempted to sell these services to other city residents.

The Jemison House passed to Robert Jemison's granddaughter, Minnie Cherokee Jemison Vandergraaff, who raised five children in the house including Robert Jemison Vandergraaff, an MIT professor who invented a generator used in splitting the atom.

In 1945 J. P. Burchfield purchased and restored the much deteriorated property that had been rented out to many individuals. In 1955, Hugh Friedman purchased the house and gave it to the City of Tuscaloosa as a library. The City has recently worked out arrangements with local historical groups to restore the property to a new use.

**Sources Consulted**

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