

Ezra Searcy House
Several ft. W of the Prentiss-
Tishomingo County line, 7.8 mi.
E of the intersection of State
Rte. 4 and 371
New Site Vicinity
Prentiss County
Mississippi

HABS No. MS-172

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HABS
MISS
59-NESIV

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. MS-172

EZRA SEARCY HOUSE

Location: A few feet west of the Prentiss-Tishomingo County line, 7.8 miles east of the intersection of State Routes 4, and 371, 5 miles east of New Site, New Site Vicinity, Prentiss County, Mississippi.

USGS Paden SE 7 1/2' Quadrangle, UTM Coordinates: 16.377895.3825400.

Present Owner: Dalton Ward (August 1978).

Present Occupant: Vacant.

Significance: The Ezra Searcy House was designed and built in 1906 by Daniel Searcy, Ezra's schoolteacher brother. The L-shaped plan of this frame house reflects the care and precision with which Daniel Searcy laid out the rooms and porches.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The house was constructed during the summer of 1906, when Dalton Ward was four years old. Ward remembers this date since his uncle, Daniel Searcy, would bring him to the construction site. (Interview with Dalton Ward)
2. Architect: Daniel Searcy, Ezra Searcy's brother, taught school, and he designed and built the house over the summer when he was not working. This dwelling was the only structure he built. Dalton Ward stated that Daniel "figured it out himself" and that the house when completed was "one of the best." Daniel Searcy later moved to Fort Worth, Texas where he also taught school. (Interview with Dalton Ward)
3. Original and subsequent owners:

The Ezra Searcy House is located in the northeast corner of the northeast quarter of Section 15, Township 6 South, Range 9 East in Prentiss County, Mississippi. The amount of land in Prentiss County associated with the house has diminished over the years from a full quarter section to 68 acres. The house stayed in the family until 1919. It was once again in the Searcy Family in 1950 when Dalton Ward, nephew of the original owner, bought the property. Abstracts of the title to the property show that its owners customarily mortgaged it for short periods to obtain farm loans.

Pertinent information from trust deeds is included below. References to the title of this land are found in the Office of Chancery Clerk, Prentiss County Courthouse, Booneville, Mississippi.

- 1900 Warranty Deed. W.N. Searcy to Ezra Searcy, December 20, 1900. Recorded in Deed Book 20, page 186. W. N. Searcy sold "ten acres in the northeast corner of the northeast quarter of Section 15, Township 6, Range 9 East also 20 acres off of the south side of the southeast quarter of Section 10, Township 6, Range 9 East twenty acres wide" to his son Ezra for \$100. W. N. Searcy had acquired this land in 1891 through a quit claim deed from G. T. Millican et al. (Deed Book 17, pages 263-264) On March 26, 1903, W. N. Searcy and E. R. Searcy mortgaged this land to the Bank of Booneville, for \$335, due November 1, 1903. In addition to their land and crops the Searcys also secured the loan with "one black horse mule 12 years old called Tug, one sorrel mare mule 13 years old called Olly, one chestnut sorrel horse mule 8 years old called Buck, 1 black mare mule 4 years old called Jill, 1 black horse mule 12 years old called Jack, one yoke of Brindle steers about six years old..." (Trust Deed Book 9, page 527)
- 1905 Warranty Deed. J. W. Denson to Ezra Searcy, March 11, 1905. Recorded in Deed Book 21, page 563. Ezra Searcy increased his land holdings by acquiring the remaining 150 acres of the northeast quarter of Section 15, for \$290.93.
- 1914 Warranty Deed. Ezra Searcy to Oscar Searcy, January 21, 1914. Recorded in Deed Book 28, page 513. Ezra Searcy and his wife sold the following property to their son Oscar for \$750: "a part of the NE 1/4 of Section 15 Township 6 of Range 9 East commencing 79 rods East of the S.W. corner at the Marietta road [on which the house is located]. Thence in a north easterly direction with said road to a point 33 rods west of the east boundary line of said quarter to a certain ditch. Thence with said ditch in a north westerly direction 58 rods. Thence north to the north boundary line of said quarter.

Thence south with east line to the S.E. corner. Thence west to point of beginning containing 80 acres more or less." Also included were 10 acres in the southeast corner of the southeast quarter of Section 10, Township 6 South, Range 9 East.

- 1918 Warranty Deed. O. N. Searcy to W. A. McCreary, October 18, 1918. Recorded in Deed Book 32, page 58. Searcy and wife sold the 90 acres described above for \$600. Mrs. McCreary was Ezra's daughter, Mat. (Interview with Dalton Ward)
- 1919 Warranty Deed. W. A. McCreary to W. T. Brown, September 10, 1919. Recorded in Deed Book 34, page 440. 35 acres for \$1200.
- 1922 Warranty Deed. Sheriff's Sale, August 11, 1932. Recorded in Deed Book 42, pages 551-556. The Federal Land Bank bought the 85 acres in Prentiss County and 48 acres in adjacent Tishomingo County for \$175. The land was sold to secure the indebtedness of Alice and W. R. Henry, recorded in Trust Deed Book 23, page 215. The sale was announced in the Booneville Independent, August 12, 1932. The advertisement gives a legal description of the lands only and does not include improvements.
- 1940 Warranty Deed with Vendor's Lien. Federal Land Bank of New Orleans to W. T. Coats. Recorded March 22, 1940 in Deed Book 50, pages 331-332. 68 acres in the northeast quarter of Section 15 and 5 acres in the southeast quarter of Section 10, for \$400. W. T. Coats had probably been on the land since 1935, since title abstracts show that he mortgaged this land to the Federal Land Bank in February of 1935 (Trust Deed Book 34, page 307).
- 1940 Warranty Deed. W. T. Coates and Belle Coats to J. and Delsia King. Recorded October 31, 1940 in Deed Book 50, pages 529-530. 68 acres in the northeast quarter of Section 15 in exchange for other lands and the assumption of indebtedness.

- 1943 Warranty Deed. J. King and wife Delsia King to Dr. J. M. Bynum the following acreage, for \$2000: Recorded December 15, 1943 in Deed Book 55, page 77. 80 acres more or less in the Northeast quarter of Section 15; 57 1/2 acres more or less in the southeast quarter of Section 10; 5 acres more or less in the southeast quarter of Section 10; 58 acres more or less in the northeast quarter of Section 15 (land on which house is located).
- 1948 Warranty Deed. Dr. J. M. Bynum to W. C. Brewer. Recorded January 7, 1948 in Deed Book 60, page 573. The following land, for \$4500:
- 62 1/2 acres more or less in the southeast quarter of Section 10; 160 acres more or less in the northeast quarter of Section 15.
- 1948 Warranty Deed. W. C. Brewer to D. W. Franklin, Recorded May 4, 1948 in Deed Book 61, page 140. Same land, sold for \$1.00 and exchange of other land, which probably consisted of part of Block 2 of the Williams, Boone and Curlee Survey of the Town of Booneville, Mississippi. (D. W. Franklin et ux. to W. C. Brewer, Deed Book 61, page 141) The deed from Brewer to Franklin stated that "certain timber now being cut from the above land is hereby reserved by W. C. Brewer for six months from this date."
- 1943 Warranty Deed. D. W. Franklin and wife, Lorena Franklin to Floyd and Louise Smith, December 13, 1943 in Deed Book 59, page 402. The following land, for \$3400:
- Part of the southeast quarter of Section 10, containing 62 1/2 acres more or less;
- Northeast quarter of Section 15, containing 160 acres more or less;
- Part of the northwest quarter of Section 15, containing 80 acres more or less.

1950 Warrantly Deed. Floyd and Louise Smith to Dalton Ward, October 19, 1950. Recorded in Deed Book 63, page 66. The above described land, for \$3000. Two days later Ward mortgaged this land and the following livestock to the Bank of Belmont for \$3500:

8 Jersey colored Jersey Cows

20 White Face Cows and Heifers

3 Holstein Cows

4 Black Mully Cows

1 White Face Polled Herford Bull

10 Dark colored Cows and Heifers

4 Brindle Colored Cows

(Trust Deed Book 48, page 550) In 1978 Ward signed an agreement to sell a portion of this property, including the land on which the Ezra Searcy House stands, to the United States of America, for the construction of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Daniel Searcy built the house using timber cut from the property. The timber was prepared at Hernry Hunt's sawmill located nearby. Hunt also operated a cotton gin. The bricks were probably made at Arch Simmons' Kiln in Booneville, the only brick kiln in the area. (Interview with Dalton Ward)
5. Original construction: All major elements of the house as it appears today were integral to the original plan of the building. The L-shaped house, which faces south, was constructed with two front rooms on either side of a central chimney. The west room was used as a parlor and the east as a bedroom. Both are exactly 15'6" square. The base of the ell extended north from these rooms. It comprised the dining room to the south and the kitchen to the north (rear). A 5'-wide porch runs along the west side of the dining room and kitchen from the northern end of the parlor to the northern wall of the house. There is an L-shaped porch along the east wall of the kitchen and dining room and the north wall of the bedroom.

This porch served as both a passage and as a sleeping porch. A front porch extends along the south side of the dwelling. The interrelationships between the porches and the house are particularly interesting and suggest that the house was probably designed on paper before it was built, an assumption supported by the exact dimensions of the rooms. Although the house itself is L-shaped, the axis of the ell at the north of the house has been shifted to the east to allow for the northwest rear porch. Dalton Ward has stated that the closets in each of the two front rooms, between the south face of the central chimney and the front of the house, were original, as was the third closed on the north side of the chimney. (See floor plan, included with Part II. Architectural Information.)

The house originally had vertical plank siding, with novelty siding used for the ceilings of the two front rooms. The original roof consisted of pine shingles. The chimney and hearth underneath the house appear to be overengineered. The explanation for this apparent excess probably lies in the lack of experience with central chimneys in this area. (Interview with Dalton Ward and examination of physical evidence. The fitting of floor joists into the sill running the length of the north walls of the two front rooms as well as ridge poles visible from the closet north of the chimney support Ward's statement that the two northern rooms and porches are integral to the house.)

6. Alterations and additions: Although there have been numerous changes to the interior finish of the house, the building has had no major alterations. The present asphalt roof was placed on the house by W. T. Coats, who owned the dwelling during the late 1930s. When the Tennessee Valley Authority brought power lines into the area during that decade, the house was wired for electricity. The clapboard siding was in place on the west side of the dwelling by the time Dalton Ward acquired it in 1950. Ward replaced the front porch, supporting it with the present brick piers. His tenant James Arthur Wilson, who lived in the house from about 1951 to 1963, screened in the L-shaped porch. Ward also bricked in the two fireplaces of the central chimney around 1966.

The two barns on the property were both built by Dalton Ward during the 1950s. A small barn measures 26' x 12' and a larger one, 26' x 35'. The larger barn has stalls on the lower level with the upper level being used for storage. A storm cellar was added to the property by Wilson with lumber provided by Ward, who remarked that Wilson was, "pretty afraid of clouds." (Interview with Dalton Ward)

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Structure:

1. The Searcy family were early settlers in Old Tishomingo County, which included the present counties of Alcorn, Prentiss, and Tishomingo. William Searcy (1843-1921) was a Civil War veteran. Among his children were Ezra Rufus (1868-1937), Daniel, and Willie Belle Searcy Ward, mother of Dalton Ward. (Interview with Dalton Ward, dates from Piney Grove Cemetery)

2. Ezra's wife was Rosie C. Searcy (1869-1918). They had eleven surviving children: Oscar, Lawrence, and Barney were the boys, Mat, Ruth, Minnie, Eller, Rose, Lessie, and the twins Cora and Ora were the girls. Ezra farmed the land growing cotton and corn. He also helped to survey and re-establish the Prentiss-Tishomingo County line which runs alongside the eastern edge of the house. There was considerable conflicts between farmers in the two counties during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, because Prentiss County had a stock law requiring all livestock to be fenced. Tishomingo County followed the older practice of fencing crops. A solution to this problem was finally developed by erecting a seven-string barbed wire fence along the county line. Gates were constructed at intervals and there were fines for those who left gates open. Ezra helped to erect this fence, cutting many of the posts himself. (Interview with Dalton Ward)

3. Most of the subsequent owners farmed the property. W. T. Brown, to whom the land was sold in 1919 when it left the Searcy family, also operated store stocked with groceries and necessities 20 to 30 feet southeast of the house in Tishomingo County. It lasted only about a year, and Brown sold the property to W. R. Henry in 1922. Henry, W. T. Coats, Judge King, W. C. Brewer, and D. W. Franklin all lived in the house. The only owner who did not occupy it was Dr. J. M. Bynum who owned the house from 1943 to 1948. (Interview with Dalton Ward)

4. Dalton Ward, a nephew of Ezra and Daniel Searcy, bought the property in 1950. After leasing the land to James Wilson for ten or twelve years, Ward and his wife, Grace McGee Ward (1902-1967), moved into the house around 1962. Ward has been a farmer and has lived in this area all his life. (His more recent residence appears in the HABS Tenn-Tom Inventory as Bay Springs Tract 601). He has grown cotton and corn and remembers picking cotton when the pay was 33 1/3 cents per 100 pounds. Ward stated that he couldn't even make \$1.00 per day. Mechanized farming was slow to come to the Bay Springs area in the southwestern part of Tishomingo County. Ward was the first person in that area to plough his land with a tractor, which he purchased in Corinth, Mississippi, in 1932. Grace McGee Ward taught school in Prentiss and Tishomingo Counties for most of her life, at the Dennis, Cotton Springs, East Prentiss, and Allen Line Schools. (Interview with Dalton Ward and Betty Ward Smith)

C. Sources of information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books: Office of Chancery Clerk, Prentiss County Courthouse, Booneville, Mississippi.

Interviews with Dalton Ward, Route 6, Booneville, Mississippi, August 22 and 24, 1978. Dalton Ward was born in 1902 and is the nephew of the original owner of the house. Ward has lived in the area along the southern part of the county line between Prentiss and Tishomingo Counties all his life. Ward provided information about the Searcy family, the physical history of the house, and other owners of the property. Betty Ward Smith, the daughter of Dalton and Grace McGee Ward, lives at the same address. She helped to clarify much of this information.

Piney Grove Cemetery, Piney Grove Church, one quarter mile west of the Old Natchez Trace near the Prentiss-Tishomingo County line in Section 11, Township 6, Range 9 East, Tishomingo County. All birth and death dates were taken from Piney Grove Cemetery.

2. Secondary and published sources: None consulted.

Prepared by Betty K. Bird
Project Historian
Historic American Buildings
Survey
August 1978

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This structure is an example of a central-chimney house with rear ell.
2. Condition of fabric: The house has not been maintained. Some portions are deteriorated.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This one-story house is approximately 37'-4" (two-bay front) by 45'-10". The plan is L-shaped, with a two-room front section and a two-room ell, 28'-9" x 22'. In the exterior spaces formed at the rear on either side of the rooms of the ell, there are porches. There is a front porch across the entire south facade. (See floor plan, below.)
2. Foundations: The house is raised on piers above grade level by a few inches at the southeast corner and as high as 2' at the northwest corner.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Exterior wall construction is simple frame construction with clapboard siding, the studs averaging 2'-1" on center and the clapboards averaging 4 1/2" in width. The protected portions of the house suggest that its walls were at one time painted white with the trim light green.
4. Structural system, framing: The framing system is of a simple wood stud type.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: Porches occur along the south facade, along the eastern end of the north facade and along the northern end of the west facade. Each porch has a ceiling of plain boards averaging 5 1/2" in width. These ceilings were painted light green at one time. Each porch also has wood flooring which might have once been painted, but is currently weathered gray. Steps lead up to the center of the south porch and appear to have led up to the easternmost side of the L-shaped porch at the northeast corner of the house. The northwest porch appears to have had steps leading up to its west side just to the north of center. The two rear porches were screened above a framed wall roughly 2' high.

6. Chimneys: The house has one central chimney serving two back-to-back fireplaces. The chimney is built of reddish-brown brick and extends approximately 18" above the roof ridge.
 7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are five exterior doorways, all measuring approximately 2'-6" in width and 6'-0" in height. On the south (front), one door leads into each of the two principal rooms. From the southeast room, a door leads onto the northeast porch. From the northernmost rear room one door opens onto the northwest porch and another onto the northeast porch.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The southeast room has one double hung window on the east elevation measuring 2'-5" wide and 5'-1" high with lights arranged four-over-four. The SW room has one double hung window on the west elevation measuring 2'4" wide by 5'4" tall with lights arranged four-over-four. The south rear room has a double window on the east with two openings and measures 2'-1" wide by 4'-6" high. This same room has a single window on the west measuring 2'-0" by 4'-3". The sashes in both these windows is missing. The northernmost rear room has a double hung window on the north measuring 2'-3" wide by 5'-4" high with lights arranged four-over-four.
 8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The roof consists of two gabled roofs perpendicular to each other. The pitch of each roof changes to a shallower pitch approximately 10' from the ridge line. The roofing material is galvanized corrugated metal sheeting.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: The eaves have fascia boards approximately 4" wide and plain soffit boards. The roof overhangs the wall line by approximately 1' on all sides.
- C. Description of Interior:
1. Floor plans: The interior consists of two rooms on the south and a two-room ell on the northwest. The two front rooms are separated by a chimney with back-to-back fireplaces and closets to either side. The two rooms are joined by a vestibule north of the chimney/closet arrangement. A door from this vestibule leads to the rear ell. (See floor plan, below.)

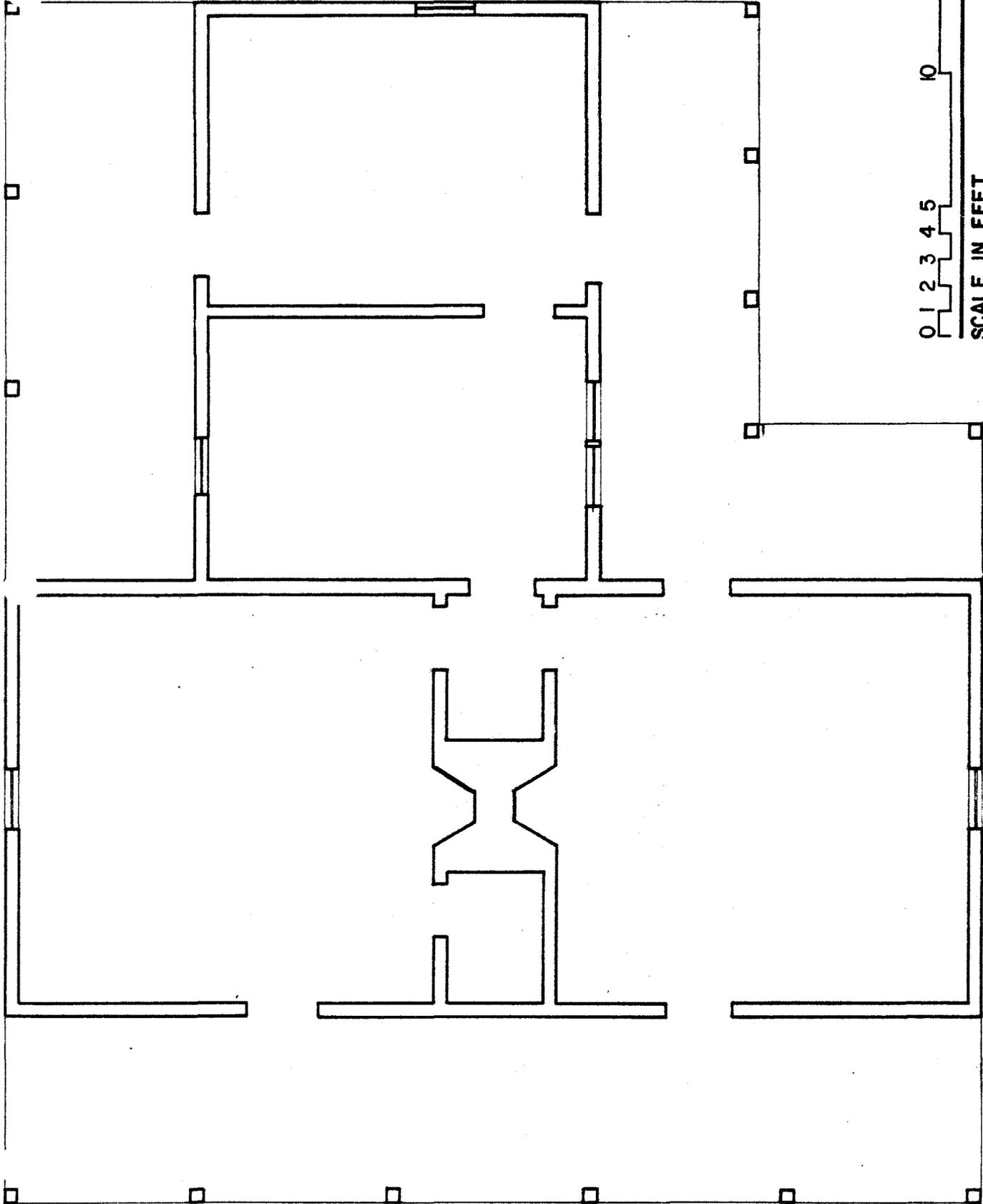
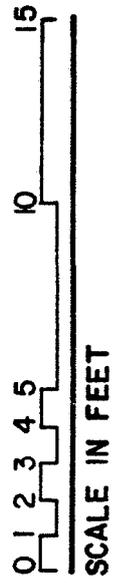
2. Stairways: None. A ladder in the north closet provides access to the attic space.
3. Flooring: Floors consist of wood boards laid either north-south or east-west, ranging in size from 3" tongue-and-groove boards to 3 1/2" or 5" plain planking.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls consist of horizontal boards, ranging in width from 3 1/2" to 12". On many surfaces corrugated cardboard has been nailed to the wall and then covered with patterned wallpaper. Ceilings are of wood as well. In the two south rooms the ceiling boards are 3 1/2" wide and carved to simulate 1 1/4" boards separated by half-round beading. In the two rear rooms there are plain boards, 5" wide. In the southeast room, painted corrugated cardboard covers the boards. In the southeast room, the boards are painted light blue. In the two rear rooms remnants of patterned paper remain nailed to the boarding.
5. Doorways and doors: Of the five interior doorways, only two have doors: those between the two front rooms and the vestibule. These openings have four-panel wood doors measuring approximately 2'-6" wide by 6'-0" high. Doors, are hung on recessed concealed metal hinges, and one once had a surface-mounted metal lockset. The rear rooms have cased openings measuring approximately 2'-5" by 6'-0" and 2'-10" by 6'-0". A crudely cut doorway opens into the closet south of the chimney.
6. Decorative features, trim and cabinet work: Mantels have been removed. Baseboards, averaging 12" in height, are found on most walls.
7. Mechanical equipment: Electrical service for lighting purposes has been installed. There are no plumbing facilities.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The house faces south, toward a road approximately 30' away from the house and some 15' below porch level.

2. Outbuildings: Outbuildings consist of a large barn, approximately 26' wide and 35' long, located roughly 200 feet west of the house; a storm cellar built into the earth just across the road to the south; and a metal-covered wooden storage shed, approximately 12' wide and 26' deep, located roughly 20 feet from the northwest corner of the house. The barns were built during the 1950s to replace the two original barns built by Ezra Searcy, which burned during the 1920s.

Prepared by: James Murray Howard
Project Supervisor
Historic American Buildings
Survey
August 1978



PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation done during the 1978 Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Project, undertaken by HABS in cooperation with the Interagency Archeological Services, Atlanta, and cosponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile and Nashville Districts, in compliance with Executive Order 11593, as a mitigative effort in the construction of the waterway. Records were made of eighteen historic sites and structures in the region between Gainesville, Alabama, and Iuka, Mississippi.

The project was executed under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief, and Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect, of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Supervisor was James Murray Howard of the University of Illinois. Project Historian was Betty K. Bird of the University of Virginia. The Assistant Historian was Michael Ann Williams (University of Pennsylvania). Foreman was Ruthie D. Wiley of the University of Florida. Student Architects who prepared measured drawings for the project were Carol J. Crandall (Carnegie-Mellon University), Richard J. Cronenberger (University of Miami), Peter G. Darlow (McGill University), Daniel M. Gaines (University of Tennessee), and R. Bradley Mellor (Rice University). The inventory of sites within the project area was carried out by Inventory Supervisor J. A. Chewning of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Assistant Historian for the inventory was Pamela J. Wolf (George Washington University). One structure was recorded during the winter of 1979 by project supervisor Peter G. Darlow (McGill University), Sally K. Tompkins, Project Historian, and Staff Architects Bethanie C. Grashof, Rudy Massengill, and Janet Hochuli (The Cooper Union). Architects Peter G. Darlow, Janet Hochuli, James F. Speake and Reginald A. Berry (Howard University). Photographs were taken by David J. Kaminisky in the summer of 1978 and by Gil Ford in the spring of 1979.