

Norwood-Williams House
0.2 mi. E of Carmen Church, 1750 ft.
S of the Tombigbee River

HABS No. MS-171

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Lowndes County
Mississippi

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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
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44-CARCH.V
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. MS-171

NORWOOD-WILLIAMS HOUSE

Location: .2 miles east of Carmen Church, 1750 feet south of the Tombigbee River, ~~near Carmen Church~~ Vicinity Lowndes County, Mississippi.

USGS Columbus 15' Quadrangle, UTM Coordinates:
16.374400.3687050.

Present Owner: Louella Norwood Williams (August 1978).

Present Occupant: Sara Bailey.

Present Use: Dwelling.

Significance: The Norwood-Williams House is a good rural example of a shotgun house, a southern urban and rural dwelling type. A three-room house with a later one-room side addition, the dwelling was built in the 1930s by a local carpenter for two black women, Priscilla Norwood and Louella Norwood Williams, who owned and farmed the property on which it is situated.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1930s. Mrs. Louella Norwood Williams stated that the house was built when she was in her thirties. Mrs. Williams, the owner of the house, was born in 1902.
2. Architect: According to Mrs. Williams, Abraham Moore, the carpenter who built the house, chose the design and made all decisions as to its construction.
3. Original and subsequent owners:

The Norwood-Williams house is situated on a 24.30 acre tract of land to be acquired by the United States Army Corp of Engineers for the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Project. The tract is located in Section 30, Township 17, North, Range 19 East, Choctaw Meridian, Lowndes County, Mississippi.

The following deed records are located in the Office of the Clerk of the Chancery Court of Lowndes County, Columbus, Mississippi:

- 1906 Deed. Arthur and Amanda Brown to Richard Norwood, December 20, 1906. Recorded in Deed Book 89, p. 383. Eighty acres for \$800. Described as "80 acres of the South part of the East 1/2 of the Northwest Quarter of Section 30. Lots numbered one & two in Frac. Southeast Quarter of Frac. Section 19 Township 17 Range 19 East".
- 1975 Affidavit of Heirship. Louella Norwood Williams, January 20, 1975. Recorded in Deed Book 513, pp. 260-261. For the purpose of establishing legal ownership of Mrs. Williams states in the affidavit: "That the above described land was purchased by my father, Richard Norwood, on the 20th day of December 1906, by deed recorded in Deed Book 89, at 383, in the office of Chancery Clerk of Lowndes County, Mississippi and that Richard Norwood died intestate in the year 1910 while occupying the above described property as his homestead, and left as his sole and only heirs at law, his widow, Priscilla Norwood, and his daughter, Louella Norwood (Williams), affiant herein, and that Priscilla Norwood continued to occupy the above described property until her death on the 10th day of June, 1946, when she died intestate while occupying the above property as her homestead, and left as her sole and only heir at law, her daughter Louella Norwood Williams, affiant herein."
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Louella Norwood Williams stated that the house was built for her and her mother, Priscilla Norwood, by Abraham Moore, a local carpenter who built several other houses in the immediate area. Mr. Moore worked with the help of several local people who were available. Materials came from Mrs. Williams' and Mrs. Norwood's former dwelling, which was in poor repair and was torn down by Mr. Moore. This house, built by Mrs. Norwood's husband, after he acquired the property in 1906, was a double-pen house with open central passageway, or "dogtrot" house.

5. Original construction: The original plan of the house consisted of a single-story, three-room house, one-room wide. The front (north) room and the second room are the same width (approximately 14'-6"), and the front room is slightly longer than the second (approximately 14', as compared to 13'). A fireplace stands between the first two rooms, facing the second room. The third (rear) room is approximately 10'-6" by 11'-9", with a rear porch, approximately 3'-10" by 11'-9", in the southeast corner. On the front (north) is another porch, approximately 14'-6" by 6'. (See floor plan, included with Part II., Architectural Information.)

The Norwood-Williams House is an example of a shotgun plan. The shotgun house appears to be primarily a twentieth century form in the central part of Mississippi, and is generally, though not exclusively, associated with black areas, both rural and urban. Unlike the other common folk house types in the rural South, the shotgun house does not have its origins in Anglo-American folk traditions. Eugene Wilson (p. 50) has proposed a non-folk commercial origin (the small commercial structure adopted as a dwelling form), while other scholars, notably John Vlach suggest a Haitian, and ultimately an African origin.

The shotgun house is one of the few American folk house types given a standard name by its occupants. Louella Norwood Williams immediately identified her house as a shotgun, but she did not identify her former dwelling, a "dogtrot" house, by name but only by description. When asked why Abraham Moore, a rural Negro carpenter, built a shotgun house in place of the "dogtrot" house which was torn down to provide materials, Mrs. Williams suggested that perhaps it was the cheapest and easiest thing to build.

6. Additions and alterations: The major addition to the Norwood-Williams house is a room, approximately 10'-6" by 12'-6" attached to the west side of the central room. This room was added when Mrs. Williams' brother-in-law, John Taylor, and his family moved into the house, after the death of Mrs. Williams' mother, Priscilla Norwood, in 1946. (See floor plan.)

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Structure:

The Norwood-Williams House was built in the 1930s for two black women, Priscilla Norwood and her daughter Louella Norwood Williams, on property which had been purchased by Mrs. Norwood's husband in 1910. Mrs. Williams was raised on the property, but moved to Columbus, Mississippi, 12 miles to the north, for several years prior to the building of the house. In the 1930s, Mrs. Williams returned to the Nashville Ferry area, to live with her mother. They had the house built to replace their former dwelling, which was in a poor state of repair. Mrs. Williams, and her mother, when she was in good health, farmed, growing, among other things, corn, cotton, peas, and watermelon. Mrs. Williams stated that all her life she has "plowed and hoed, just like a man".

After the death of Priscilla Norwood in 1946, Mrs. Williams moved to another house nearby, and the Norwood-Williams house was occupied by Mrs. Williams' brother-in-law, John Taylor, and his family. Since that time the house has been rented several times, most recently, for approximately the past ten years, by Sara Bailey. Mrs. Bailey, originally from Noxubee County, moved to the area to be near her only son. Mrs. Williams still lives on her property, in a house about a quarter of a mile to the west of the home she had built in the 1930s.

The Norwood-Williams house is situated in a rural black community centered around Carmen Church in southern Lowndes County, Mississippi. The community is in the vicinity of Nashville Ferry, an important link for transferring cotton between Lowndes and Noxubee County during the nineteenth century. (W.P.A. "Source Material for Mississippi History," pp. 443,462) According to Mrs. Bailey and Mrs. Williams, in recent years the rural population has declined. Many people, particularly the younger ones, have given up farming and moved to town --mostly to nearby Columbus.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Records, Office of the Clerk of the Chancery Court,
Lowndes County Courthouse, Columbus, Mississippi.

Interviews:

Mrs. Louella Norwood Williams, Rte. 1, Columbus, Mississippi
(vicinity of Nashville Ferry), August 17, 1978. Mrs.
Williams, who still lives nearby, had the house built in the
1930s.

Mrs. Sara Bailey, Rte. 1, Columbus, Mississippi (vicinity of Nashville Ferry), August 17, 1978. Mrs. Bailey is the current occupant of the Norwood Williams House.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Vlach, John Michael, "The Shotgun House: An African Architectural Legacy, Part 1," Pioneer America 12 (1975): 46-67.

Vlach, John Michael, "The Shotgun House: An African Architectural Legacy, Part 2," Pioneer America 13 (1975): 57-71.

Wilson, Eugene, Alabama Folk houses (Montgomery, Alabama: Alabama Historical Commission, 1975)

Works Progress Administration for Mississippi, "Source Material for Mississippi History," Vol. 44: Lowndes County (1936-38). Compiled by Statewide Historical Research Project, Susie V. Powell, State Supervisor. Available at the Lowndes County Public Library, Mississippi Collection, Columbus, Mississippi.

Prepared by: Michael Ann Williams
Assistant Historian
Historic American Buildings
Survey
August 1978

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This building is an example of a rural shotgun house.
2. Condition of fabric: Marginally maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The house is 14'-6" (one-bay front) by 45'. It is a one-story shotgun house with an added room, 10'-6" x 12'-6", at the center of the west side. (See floor plan, below)

2. Foundations: The house sits on piers made of wood stumps and concrete blocks.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Exterior walls are primarily of vertical boards. On the east wall battens are applied over portions of the surface. Horizontal clapboards are used on the front and rear porches. Under the front porch, gray asphalt sheet siding covers the top portion of the wall. On the east wall a similar material in yellow covers some upper portions of the wall. On the south and west facades corrugated metal roofing is occasionally used as siding.
4. Structural system, framing: The framing is entirely of light wood members.
5. Porches: A porch extends across the north (front) facade, a second porch is fitted beneath the main roof structure at the southeast corner of the house.
6. Chimneys: One ruinous chimney occurs between the first and second rooms at the ridge line of the roof serving the single interior fireplace. The chimney is of reddish-brown brick.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are three exterior doors, ranging in size from 2'-5" by 5'-9" to 2'-11" by 5'-6", all made of vertical boards.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Windows range in size from 1'-5" by 1'-11" to 1'-9" by 4'-3". In two cases the windows are double hung sashes, with the top sash fixed in place. In the other three cases where glazed openings exist, the windows are single sashes fixed in place. Sash types vary from one- to three- to four- to six-light sashes. Side-hinged shutters made of vertical boards cover two of the window openings. On the south side of the house, one window opening was covered with metal sheeting when the wall was re-sheathed.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The house has a gable roof, hipped over the front porch, with ridge line running north-south. A shed roof covers the west addition. Corrugated metal sheeting is used on all roof surfaces.

b. Cornice, eaves: Roof overhangs range from 6" to 12".

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The single floor consists of three rooms placed end to end in typical "shotgun" fashion, the rooms being connected in series by doorways. An added west room opens off the middle of the three rooms. (See floor plan.)
2. Wall and ceiling finish: Interior walls in the two front rooms are surfaced with gypsum board which has been painted. The rear room has papered walls, the paper being applied to corrugated cardboard applied directly to studs and exterior sheathing. In the west addition, the walls consist of exposed studs and exterior sheathing which have been painted.
3. Doorways and doors: Three doorways connect the rooms. A single doorway covered by a hanging curtain opens into the single closet of the house. Interior doors are of vertical boards or of wood panel construction.

D. Site:

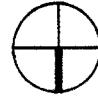
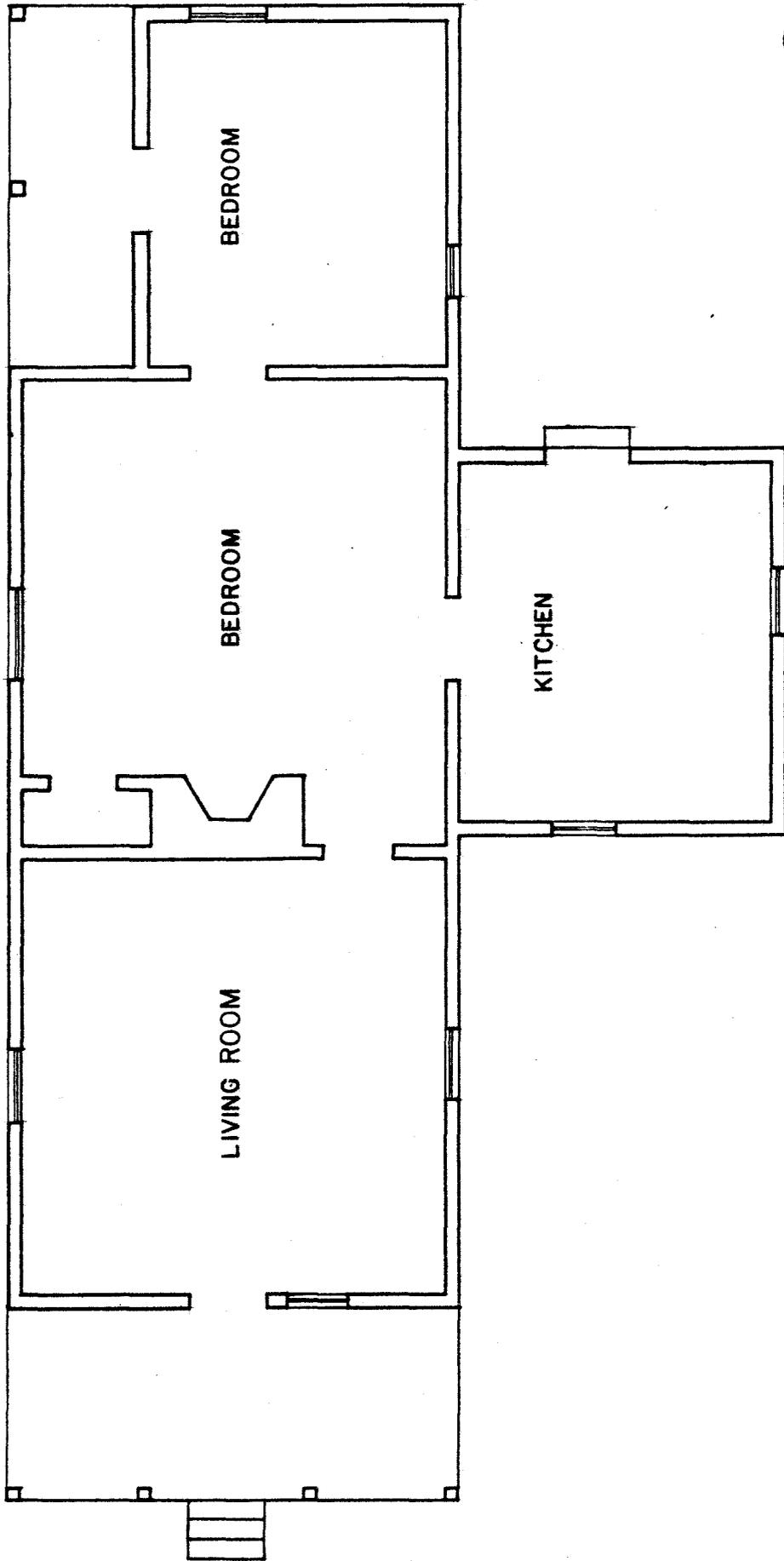
1. General setting: The house faces north directly on axis with a short approach drive that runs perpendicular to the county road serving the community.
2. Outbuildings: The only existing outbuildings are two small chicken pens located at 10' and 18' from the southeast corner of the house and measuring 3'-0" by 2'-10" and 5'-0" by 14'-6", respectively.

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

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SCALE IN FEET

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 Mellon (Rice University). The inventory of sites within the project area was carried out by Inventory Supervisor J. A. Chewing 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). Drawings for this structure were completed during the spring of 1979 by staff Architects Peter G. Darlow, Janet Hochuli, James F. Speake and Reginald A. Berry (Howard University). Photographs were taken by David J. Kaminsky in the summer of 1978 and by Gil Ford in the spring of 1979.