

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

5/15/86

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

1. Name

historic Gov. George Smith Houston House

and or common Houston Memorial Library

2. Location

street & number 101 North Houston Street NA not for publication

city, town Athens NA vicinity of congressional district 5

state Alabama code 01 county Limestone code 083

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	NA	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: library

4. Owner of Property

name City of Athens

street & number City Hall, Hobbs Street

city, town Athens NA vicinity of state Alabama

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Limestone County Courthouse

street & number City Square

city, town Athens state Alabama

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Alabama Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1970-present federal state county local

depository for survey records Alabama Historical Commission

city, town Montgomery state Alabama

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 type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Houston Memorial Library is a two-story frame house of beaded clapboard constructed over a brick foundation. Two-by-twelve-foot timbers, spaced a foot apart support the floor; and wide sleepers made of either mortise or tenon support the wood frame wall. It is uncertain as to the building's exact date of construction; however, the concentration of Federal style woodwork incorporated in both the exterior and interior, suggests that it was built in the 1830's.

Pilasters flank the centered front entrance and four square, wooden columns support a two-story portico, which includes a second-story balcony. The pedimented entablature is decorated with block modillions and delicately carved dentil trim which extends along the eaves at the front and sides of the house.

The gable roof is covered with composition shingles and the roof edge is obscured by the gutter system. The sash windows with nine-over-six nine-over-nine lights run primarily in ranges of two's, and both entrances on the lower level are surmounted by ruby-toned vertical lighted transoms. Brick chimneys are on the north and south ends, and a third, obviously rebuilt, is centered on the two-story ell rear wall.

Local traditions maintain that the house in its present form dates from the 1830's and may incorporate an earlier log structure. This is supported by the presence of interior walls that are unusually thick (12 inches) indicating that the present covering may therefore encase logs (Photo 4). The floor plan reveals two unusual features illustrated in the two room plan of the main block with two side-by-side front doors. This treatment is repeated at the second level and incorporates the center hall plan.

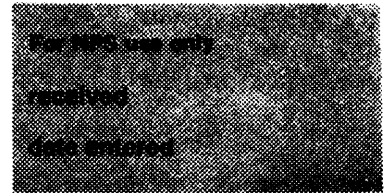
Notable Federal Period woodwork and detailing are fully intact and best depicted in the paneled wainscot (Photo 3), door reveal (Photo 4), cross and Bible door and stairway (Photo 3) with delicate Federal Period scroll cut trim. Additionally, the modillion cornice and window sashing (nine/six above and nine-over-nine below) are characteristic features of the Tennessee valley Federal Period. It is possible, but not confirmed, that the porch pier treatment replaced an original two-tiered porch comprising of superimposed columnettes.

The two-story ell on the back (Photo 2) is contemporary with the presumed 1830's renovation, while a later one-story addition extends from the north side. A second porch and kitchen addition, probably dating from around the turn of the century, occurs in the reentrant angle between the main block and the ell on the south side of the house.

A picture post card, postmarked 1908, shows the house with a one-story porch surmounted by a balustraded deck extending the full length of the facade (see Exhibit A). This ornamentation probably dates from the late 19th century and was incorporated with the addition of the Victorian mantel with decorative grill located at the south end stairs (Photo #5). James A. Smoake in his study of developments during the 19th century in Athens states that Mrs. Ellen I. Houston, who was an invalid before her death in 1909, had the

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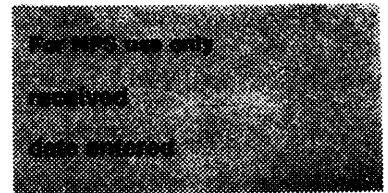
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porch "extended across the front . . . to supply a place along which she could be wheeled in her wheelchair." The picture postcard may have been her way of announcing her home's updated Victorian alterations. Smoake's research also revealed that the Kiwanis Club rented the house in 1923 and "made a change to suit their needs. This alteration may have constituted the removal of the portico extension, with the only present evidence of its existence appearing at the second story (Photo #1).

The house faces east on the northwest corner of Market and West (now Houston) Streets and has a luxurious stand of boxwood and magnolia trees. Historically the lot included a wellhouse, cabin and a rose garden, none of which remain. At the time Houston purchased the property in 1845, it adjoined the town of Athens, was "within the present limits of the present corporation", and within sight of the stagecoach road which ran through Athens from Huntsville to Florence.

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Historical Summary

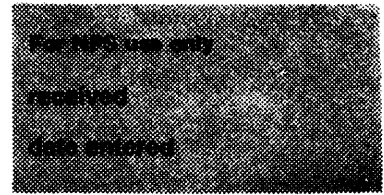
The Houston Memorial Library is located on a plot of land bought at the Huntsville land sales in 1818 by Arthur Henderson. In 1824 the land was purchased jointly by John McKinley of Florence (who later served as a U. S. Supreme Court Justice) and John Martin of Huntsville. Phillip Blessing, a local tailor, purchased the land in 1833 but sold it one year later to Micajah Thomas for one hundred dollars. Thomas (1785-1840) came to Limestone County from the Albermarle district in North Carolina before 1820 and married Louisa Keyes, daughter of Revolutionary War veteran John Wade Keyes. It is believed that Thomas probably built the original 1830 structure. After Thomas' death in 1840, Clinton Jones, executor of his estate, sold the property to B. M. Townsend for \$1620 in December 1843. Congressman George Smith Houston purchased the property October 31, 1845 "with appurtenances there unto belonging."

Houston (1811-1879), a native of Williamson County, Tennessee came to Lauderdale County, Alabama at the age of ten and was educated in Alabama schools. He passed the bar in 1831 and quickly entered state politics, serving in the State Legislature from Lauderdale County in 1832. He was appointed by Governor Gayle to fill a district solicitor vacancy in 1834, but was defeated in his bout for the office in 1835. Later that year, Houston moved to Athens and established a law practice in the city. In 1837 he was elected solicitor and held that position until 1841 when he was elected to the U.S. Congress. Re-elected to Congress four consecutive times, Houston served until 1849, when he voluntarily retired to resume his law practice in Athens. After a two year recess, Houston was again elected to Congress in 1851 and held the position for five consecutive terms ending in 1861 when the state withdrew from the Union. During his 18 years in Congress, Houston served on many committees and chaired committees on ways and means, the judiciary and military affairs. Although opposed to secession, Houston drafted and presented to the speaker the notification of the state's withdrawal.

In 1874 Houston was elected Governor of the State of Alabama marking the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of the "conservative" period. According to John Stewart in The Governors of Alabama (1975), "The tone of state government set by the Houston administration prevailed, almost as an unwritten code, until the 1890's." Advocating a complete reversal of the practices of Reconstruction, Houston during his two terms (1874-78) followed three other main principles set forth in the 1875 Constitution--economy, education, and payment of abrogation of old Reconstruction debts. By the end of his second term, Houston had managed to reduce taxes, bring state expenditures under control, reorganized the public school system and established the first department of public health in the South. In 1878 Houston was elected to the U.S. Senate and served in the extra session of 1879, but did not complete his term due to illness. He died December 31, 1879 at this house.

Houston married twice. In 1835, he married Mary Beaty, daughter of Athens founder, Robert Beaty and fathered eight children, four of which died before 1860. Mary Beaty died in 1856 and in 1861 Houston married Ellen Irvine. In this union Houston fathered two children. During the last years of Ellen Houston's life, she was an invalid and initiated the addition of a dining room on the north end of the house and extended the porch at the front of the building to supply a place along which she could be wheeled in

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her wheelchair. She died in 1909, but lived to see Alabama's youngest county named in her husband's honor.

After Mrs. Houston's death the house was used for a variety of purposes until 1938. In January of 1938 the Houston descendants presented the house to the City of Athens expressly for use as a public library. It was stipulated at that time that if for any reason the house should cease to be used for that purpose, it would revert to the Houston heirs. In spite of severe financial cutbacks in county and city funds the Houston Memorial Library has continued to serve its patrons with an ever-increasing inventory of books. Future plans include expanding the library to the second floor after removal of the Limestone County Historical Society Museum, which was established there about 1970.

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 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/
<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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates c. 1830 & 1845-79 **Builder/Architect** unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Criterion B - Politics and Government

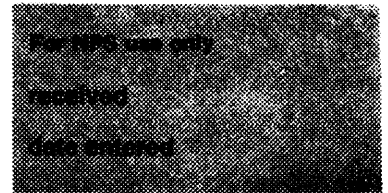
The Houston Memorial Library is significant for its associations with Governor George Smith Houston (1811-79), an influential 19th century politician whose election to the state's governorship in 1874 signaled the end of Reconstruction in Alabama and the beginning of "Bourbon Rule." Beginning in 1841 Houston was elected to the U. S. Congress serving four consecutive terms up to 1849 and five consecutive terms between 1851 and 1861. In 1874 Houston became the first democratic governor of the State of Alabama since the Civil War and served two terms extending through 1878, marking the restoration of democratic home rule. In 1879 Houston was elected to the U. S. Senate and served in the extra session of that year, but did not complete his term. Houston purchased this house in 1845 while serving in Congress and retained it as his home until his death in 1879.

Criterion C - Architecture

The Houston Memorial Library is significant as a good local example of Federal period residential architecture with Greek Revival features and some later Victorian details. It is one of less than a dozen Federal period residences in Athens and provides good representations of Federal Period woodwork in its exterior ornamentation, interior wainscoting, doors and door reveals.

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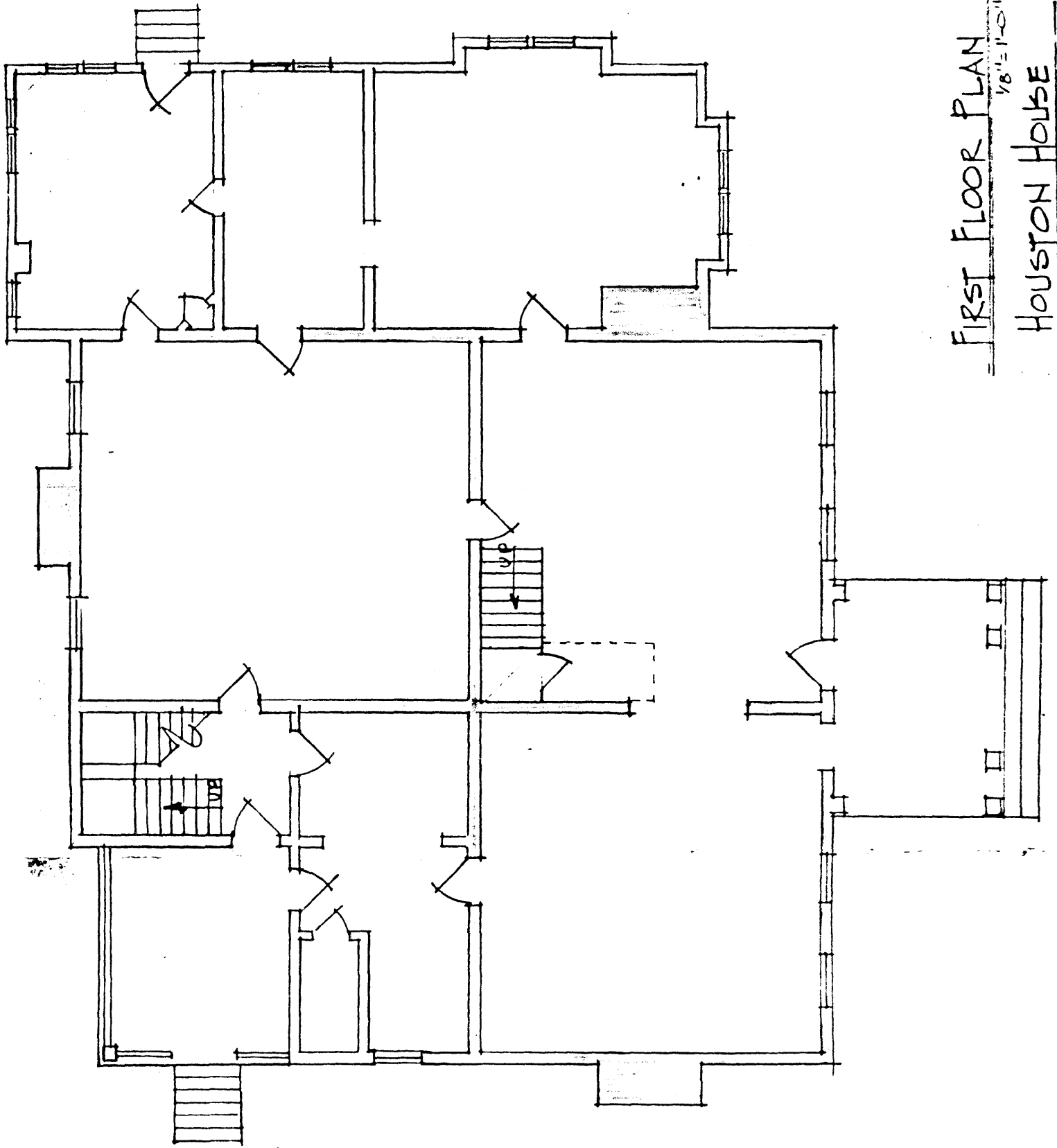
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VBD continued:

the East margin of said alley and parallel with Houston Street 154 feet to the North margin of Market Street; thence East along the North margin of Market Street 190 feet to the point of beginning and includes both the house and lot.

Lot is 140' wide and 190' deep.

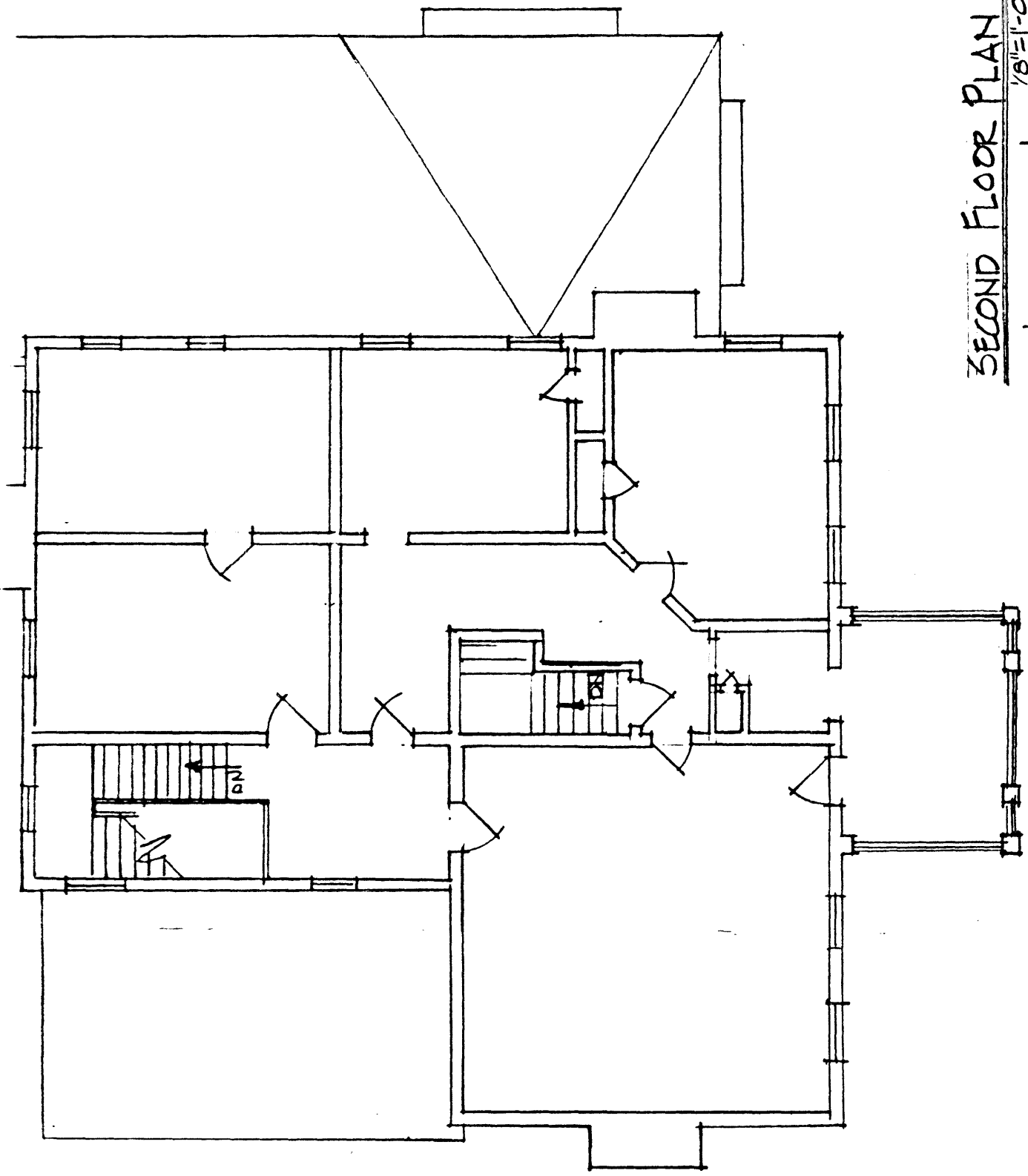


FIRST FLOOR PLAN

1/8" = 1'-0"

HOUSTON HOUSE

ARCHT. BY J. W. ...



SECOND FLOOR PLAN
1/8"=1'-0"

HOUSTON HOUSE
ATHENS, ALABAMA

JUNE 1984 - R. ALLEN