Natchez Trace Parkway

THE JOHN GORDON HOUSE

Historic Structures Report

by

Edward L. Trout
Historian

August 19, 1969.

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History Data Section

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Completion of
Resource Study Proposal NATR-H-20
Natchez Trace Parkway
August 19, 1969

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No exterior pics of house and grounds in rpt.

No discussion of bldg of house, or date of its completion except reference to 1815, p. 7. I know data on this in book's article

No mention of history of house in report 1819 - 1969

I

INTRODUCTION

In preparing a Historic Structures Report one is confronted with both priorities and options. He is somewhat at liberty in terms of his approach, yet the report must convey the significance of the building with balance and perspective. Such is especially true with the John Gordon House (1818), located where the old Natchez Trace crosses the Duck River in Tennessee. As with most historic buildings for which the National Park Service is responsible, its importance must be defined for the benefit of service personnel and ultimately--the park visitor. The logical criteria for this task would be as follows: historical import of its owner, John Gordon; intrinsic architectural merit of the house itself; and, significance of the social function it performed.

Regarding the first, John Gordon was a man of considerable note on the regional scene. It is not the purpose of this report to treat him in extensive biographical fashion, as this has already been done by Douglas Edward Leach, on whose work the entire second section of this report is based. Yet the writer shall indulge in a few lines concerning his life, for without Gordon the home loses much of its value. The architectural value of the house poses something of a problem. By no stretch of the imagination can it be called the "finest example" of such-and-such a style. It is no "Hampton" or

"Devereaux." Although a sort of "frontier Georgian" structure, it is not the product of conscious application of stylistic rules. In fact, Gordon was warring against the Seminoles during its construction, and showed little concern for its design. Nonetheless, Gordon House IS an example of SOMETHING. It does represent an architectural pattern that was evolving in Middle Tennessee at the time, and herein lies a measure of its worth. As for the third criterion, we again encounter a certain qualified merit surrounding the dwelling. Gordon House is situated on the historic site of the family "stand" and ferry operations, but undoubtedly played a small, if any, role in these enterprises. Therefore, for our purposes, its social function was negligible.

Thus, Gordon House must not be viewed through blinders. One must be careful to see it as a monument to a notable family, the token of an era in American frontier history, and an interesting page in the story of regional architecture. With all of these elements in mind, it has meaning; without them, none.

Before continuing, brief mention of the author's credentials is in order. He is primarily a historian, and does not presume to be an authority in the field of architecture. Admittedly, the Mother Art is one object of his affections, but all statements about the house itself are subject to challenge and change upon professional inspection. Measurements are approximate, since working drawings will have to be executed anyway. No trim was removed for scrutiny

from the rear (through the temptation was sweet). Nor was any paint removed to allow wood identification. All data then, was derived from exposed surfaces. The intent of the author is to provide a body of facts, observations, background, and ideas to be used by the restoration team as a point of departure. Hopefully this will add a measure of efficiency to the task ahead.

The author attempted to exhaust all documentary sources which might have bearing on the structure. Unfortunately, these were scarce and hid few secrets. Probably the greatest single loss of evidence occurred in the Hickman County Courthouse fire during the Civil War, and the dearth of contemporary newspapers further clouded the atmosphere. It is now the author's belief that should subsequent information concerning the house come to light, it will do so by sheer accident.

II

THE BIG PICTURE

On few occasions in his long history has man had the opportunity of starting from scratch. But that is what the Natchez Trace story is all about.[1] Indeed, it is the story of our Nation. Without belaboring the point, stone age man arrived on this continent and found its hospitality slightly overwhelming. With a few regional exceptions, materials with which to fulfill his physical and spiritual needs were available in quanity, and he was free to make what he would of his situation. So, he hunted and traded, and made love and war. By and by, in search of food and elbow room, he found himself in the southeastern hardwood forests. He had plenty of water to drink, hides to wear, and merely followed the animal trails to his next meal. Via his animistic religion, bargaining with the gods assured him of these good things in perpetuity. Such was the nature of his idyllic existence.

But the Indian was not to enjoy his "splendid isolation" for long. A stranger appeared. He had white skin, a beard and carried a stick that sounded like thunder. He came searching, always searching, for something to fill his pockets or his belly. Gold, furs, and other such valuables drew his kind into Indian country in ever increasing numbers.

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[1]This footnote does not "footnote" anything. It serves merely to inform the reader that there will be little, if any, further documentation in this section. Because of the general nature of the material, which is well known by all Natchez Trace historians, such would be time-comsuming and superfluous.

By the early eighteenth century whites were clambering all over the eastern half of this land. Toward the end of that century, a flatboat floated down the Mississippi River from the Northeast. The pilot nosed her into the dock at Spanish-held Natchez, and prepared to dump the merchandise carried therein. He was, perhaps unwittingly (perhaps not unwittingly), setting a precedent to be followed by thousands for the next three decades. Enter the old Natchez Trace.

Until then a series of animal and Indian trails, the soon-to-be national road underwent a drastic alteration of form and function. As Fate would have it, rivers run only one way. The formidable current of the Mississippi made it impossible for pre-steampowered vessels to return to the Ohio valley and other points north and east of Natchez. Boatmen were forced to sell craft and goods, and return home on solid ground. The shortest and most practical route to Nashville was through Choctaw and Chickasaw country. Why Nashville? This new frontier town was the jumping off point for Pittsburgh, Louisville and other assorted northeastern places. At first only a few, then thousands, of "Kaintucks" (as all flatboatmen were called) slogged up the fast-developing road. But that was only the beginning.

In 1798, Spain ceded to the United States what became the Mississippi Territory. Opportunity beckoned in the present states of Alabama and Mississippi. Opportunity for the clergyman, planter, trapper, professional Indian fighter--and bandit. The so called

road was not exactly a hinderance to travel; but it wasn't much help either. In 1801, the United States Government decided to improve it, largely for the benefit of postriders. Sound postal connections with the rest of the country were deemed necessary for the general welfare of the Territory. In a few years the overall development of the Old Southwest and increased travel dictated even further improvement. In 1806, President Jefferson ordered it cleared again, widened and some streams bridged. In each case pressure was exerted on the Indians to allow road construction through their lands. The War of 1812 brought military traffic, and its aftermath drew more settlers, businessmen, and land speculators. Around 1815, travel reached a plateau, on which it remained for several years before declining.

The reader might wonder where all of these grimy trekkers ate and slept, and what protection they were afforded in transit. And well he might, for setting out on a five hundred-mile jaunt through the southeastern swamps and forests presented the traveler with a grim prospect. In the late eighteenth century travel accommodations between Natchez and Nashville were all but nil. By 1802, after the road was improved by the government, inns or "stands" began to appear. A few settlers with foresight, seeing travel on the upswing, decided to capitalize on it by offering goods and services to people and horses. John Gordon was such a person, and maintained one of the earlier stands in conjunction with his ferry operation. In spite of this trend, a variety of sources indicates that good inns were always in short supply. More often one's bones found respite on the

dirt floor of an Indian hut--or under the stars. Actually, it was considered wise to carry sufficient food for man and horse--just in case. As for protection, there was none. A man carried his own in his knife sheath or shot bag.

If one managed to feed and shelter himself, he still had to contend with fatigue, fractures, and fever. First aid as we know it, probably was a standard skill on the frontier, although undoubtedly less sophisticated than today's. And ignorance of veterinary medicine could lead a horseman to blisters and shin splints. Such were the hardships of travel on the Natchez Trace.

From roughly 1820, the road entered the death agony as travel declined. New towns and mail routes diluted its former utility. Peace with Britain and the Indians halted military traffic. And most important, the steamboat was now carrying formerly pedestrian boatmen back up the Mississippi. With the exception of short stretches through hamlets, the old road died of disuse. For years it had played host to an incredible procession of human misery and mirth. Of this, John Gordon of Tennessee was a part.

III

THE BUILDER

He was "rather below than above medium height, dark of complexion . . . with piercing eyes and hair of raven hue. His movements were quick with energy and prompt decision." Such was the appearance of John Gordon, not a truly great man of his day, but one who did play a significant role in the development of Middle Tennessee. He came to the area as a pioneering settler, making his way with mind and muscle, as trader, innkeeper, farmer, and Indian fighter.

Born into a family of Scottish descent, on July 15, 1763, he spent his early years near Fredericksburg, Virginia. During, or shortly after the American Revolution he headed west, which then was the sparsely settled frontier between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River. Bringing his widowed mother along, he settled in Nashville in the 1780's, when the "town" barely deserved the name. After purchasing property and setting himself up as a merchant, he married Dolly Cross in 1794.

Gordon's public life commenced on July 11, 1795, when Governor Blount named him Justice of the Peace in Davidson County. On the heels of that appointment he was also designated the first postmaster of Nashville in 1796. The town was losing its frontier

character by the late 1790's, and it looked as though Gordon was too. From the registration of a stockmark, purchase of land, and acquisition of five sons by 1803, it would appear that he had always intended to lead the life of a gentleman farmer. Not so.

Regardless of what the white community might have thought of him, the Indian viewed him with utter terror, if local lore is accepted. In spite of Dolly Gordon's alleged descent from Pocahontas, her husband acquired a well justified reputation for "whupping up" on the red population, which plagued the transmontane area. In the mid-1790's hostile Cherokees at Nickajack and Running Water posed a threat to all of Middle Tennessee, so Captain John Gordon headed up a company of "spies" to reconnoiter this menacing Indian activity. Ill feeling between the parties came to a head in the summer of 1794, with an expedition which reduced the Indian towns to whimpering submission. Gordon was there. Later he participated in the Creek campaigns leading up to, and including the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814, which subdued that nation. Between these two engagements, he intermittently but relentlessly applied his skill in the field of Indian fighting for twenty years.

As a businessman, Gordon did well. Arriving in Nashville with little more than the shirt on his back, he stalked boldly and adroitly into the mercantile fray. His first known venture was called "John Gordon and Company," a trading concern, followed closely by an army

ration/forage operation in the early 1790's. Meanwhile, the volume of traffic on the Natchez Trace was increasing to such an extent, that the United States Government felt it wise to utilize troops in the road's improvement in 1801. Gordon, with disgustingly accurate prescience, leapt at the opportunity to establish a business where the trace crossed the Duck River. Terms of the ensuing contract provided for the operation of a ferry, inn, and trading post, in partnership with William Colbert, a half-blood Chickasaw chief. This arrangement was necessary because a treaty with the Government gave Indians a monopoly on ferry operations in that area. The readymade clientele were served by readymade government buildings and boats (army surplus in those days too?). Other Gordon enterprises included land speculation and farming, and he allegedly maintained commercial connections all the way from Philadelphia to Natchez.

By the second decade of the nineteenth century Fate, his old consort, turned on him. It was now the day of the steamboat, and commercial traffic increased UP the Mississippi, as it shrank on the Natchez Trace. With peace in most quarters, troops gradually ceased their scurrying up and down the road. And by 1814, postriders now passed through Columbia, fifteen miles to the east. Gordon's ferry was left high and dry.

In perfect tragedian form, Black John, intimate of Andrew Jackson, James Robertson, and other giants, returned home from the Seminole campaigns in 1818, to a now-quiet Duck River estate.

Awaiting him were his family and a new brick house. Built as the capstone of his kaleidoscopic career, it sheltered him for only a few months. Pneumonia, too much for his fifty-five years, snatched him on June 16, 1819.

IV

THE SETTING

To both evaluate and appreciate the significance of Gordon House, one must be mindful of the general architectural and building trades environment in which it was constructed. Therefore, brief discussion of that subject is in order at this point.

Although still a frontier in a sense, the Duck River area in 1818 was being settled rapidly, Indians were no longer a threat to life and property, and the rudiments of "culture" were beginning to appear. Columbia, 15 miles east of Gordon House and 50 miles south of Nashville, was the largest and closest town of any size. Founded in 1807, it was an expression of pioneer expansion outward from older Nashville. The town grew rapidly, attracted a considerable number and variety of craftsmen, and became the economic hub of Maury County (in which lay most of the Gordon property).

With respect to formal architecture, Columbia and environs were rather undistinguished, the log cabin being standard housing for most of the population. There were important exceptions, however. Evidence of these is supplied by the Pepysian memoir of Nathan Vaught, master builder in Columbia from 1809, to 1871. During this period, "he built and assisted in building more houses in around [sic] Columbia than any other man in the county."[2]

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[2]William Stuart Fleming, Historical Sketch of Maury County, Tennessee (Columbia: Excelsior Printing Office, 1876), p. 51. Reprinted by the Columbia Historical Society, 1967.

Through Vaught's eyes we discover that private residences of brick appeared as early as 1806-07,[3] thus dispatching local tradition that Gordon's was the first of such homes in a thirty-mile radius. Nor was its style unusual in time and place. The Jonathan Webster House (1807-26), in nearby Mount Pleasant, antedates it by several years,[4] and is a much more refined dwelling of the same type. Though outwardly similar to Gordon House, its appearance is enhanced by an original fanlight, wide central hall opening into rooms on either side, scrolled stair stringers, and other refinements. These, in addition to wainscoted walls and very large mantels, place it in a class beyond that of Gordon House. Skipwith Hall (1810-20), a frame structure, is another contemporary home that surpasses it in size and sophistication of design.

Thus Gordon House was neither first nor finest of its ilk. Yet it is, for interpretive purposes, a good example of transitional architecture of the region. Standing midway between log cabin and white-pillared mansion, it is a "glorified pioneer house," as J. Frazer Smith describes them.[5] It was a home of primitive elegance, adapted to the needs and tastes of a recently-prosperous frontier family.

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[3]Nathan Vaught, "Youth and Old Age" (Unpublished memoir in manuscript form, Maury County Library), p. 41. (Hereinafter cited as Vaught, Memoir.) Similar citations throughout the MS indicate nearly a dozen "substantial brick homes" in Columbia to 1818.

[4]Author's interview with Mrs. G. A. Osborne, present owner, July 31, 1969.

[5]J. Frazer Smith, White Pillars (New York: Bramhall House, 1941), p. 28 and passim.

By whom it was built, we do not know. An exhaustive search in public and family records, along with a hopeful inspection of joists, undersides of shelves and other secreted places, failed to give up his name. Labor utilized could have been of one or more varieties. Vaught lists many self-employed carpenters, masons, and other craftsmen living in Columbia at the time,[6] any of whom could have lent a hand. At least one nearby planter (one Greenfield) tendered his slave-craftsmen to the public on a rental basis.[7] Vaught eliminated himself as a candidate. He not only failed to mention the Gordon place at all, but enumerated other projects which would have made him unavailable besides. The possibility that Gordon's slaves built the house was considered. However, as Leach portrays Gordon as more businessman than planter, it is unlikely that his few domestics would have been so-utilized.

Of the bricks and sticks little is known. To date there has been no extensive "dig" conducted in search of a kiln. Moreover, the consistent shape and size of the brick suggested to the author that they were indeed commercially produced. Although many of the wooden components were obviously handmade, the flooring and mantels do appear to have been machine-milled. Certainty in the case of the latter is difficult to achieve, as those pieces are thickly-coated with paint, and irregularities were nearly impossible to evaluate.

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[6]Vaught, Memoir, p. 64 and passim.

[7]Author's interview with Mrs. Jill K. Garrett, Secretary, Columbia Historical Society, June 25, 1969.

One facility, conspicuous by its absence from the Vaught papers, was a planing mill. The first one in the area, owned by the above, was opened in the 1850's.[8] Centerville, the only other town likely to boast such a luxury, did not have one. Mr. Ed Dotson, Hickman County Clerk of Court and county historian, attests that 1818 "was a little early for planing mills in these parts."[9] Thus any millwork in the house probably was hauled from Nashville, and Gordon's old business connections there further support this thesis. Another source shedding light on the availability of building materials were the Zion Church Records. These indicated that brick, rock, lime, plank, and shingles were sold on the open market, and quoted the unit price for each as of 1813.[10]

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[8]Mayor and Board of Aldermen, 1805-1905 Centennial Review of Columbia (Columbia: 1905), p. 115.

[9]Author's interview with Mr. Ed Dotson, June 26, 1969.

[10]Theodore Stephenson, "Historical Sketch from Zion Church Records, 1805-1938," in William Bruce Turner, History of Maury County, Tennessee (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1955), p. 150. (Hereinafter cited as Stephenson, "Zion Church Records.")

V

THE HOUSE

Gordon House is very simple in elevation, plan, and construction. The twentieth century frame addition on the rear will be excluded from discussion since it probably will be stripped away during restoration. The original portion is a two-story rectangular brick structure, whose height is accentuated by its one-room depth and gabled ends. The 2-on-2 arrangement includes a fireplace in each room, so that the partially protruding chimney on each end wall relieves the otherwise plain expanse of brick. Three regularly-spaced windows on each floor (the center one upstairs has been enlarged to accommodate a door) and two doors give balance and symmetry to the front elevation. The present second story front porch roof, supported by four square wooden columns, is a recent (1947-48) modification, and to date the original design remains unknown. The rear wall is broken only by two irregularly-spaced downstairs doors, while one first floor window on the west, and one on each floor on the east, relieve the rear of the end walls. On the whole, the builder incorporated symmetry into the front elevation as instructed by Gordon,[11] and threw it to the winds in the remainder of the house. Aside from an ogee-dentil cornice under front and rear

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[11]John Gordon to Dolly Gordon, March 2, 1818, Fort Jackson, Ala. in Octavia Zollicoffer Bond, The Family Chronicle and Kinship Book (Nashville: ca. 1928), p. 171 (Hereinafter cited as Bond, Family Chronicle.)

eaves, and a plain fascia with molding on the gables, the exterior is devoid of ornamentation. The house thus emerges in a late Georgian style, somewhat diluted by exigencies of the frontier. Gordon was off fighting the Seminoles during its construction, and a letter from him to his wife indicates that she and the builder were primarily responsible for its design.[12]

The red brick walls rise from a rusticated limestone block foundation (approximately 2 feet high), which continues downward to form the walls of the unfinished basement. The front wall is laid in Flemish bond, while American or common bond with headers every sixth course, was used in the remaining three. Inside, the one partition between large and small rooms is 13 inches of solid masonry like the outer walls, and rises from its stone foundation through both floors.

Chimneys project from the gable walls approximately 9 inches, have stepped shoulders at eave level, and are devoid of decorative bond. Moreover, the header courses which correspond with those of the walls, are abandoned about two-thirds of the way up (an economy measure?). Although the original caps probably had a slight flare, subsequent repairs resulted in straight ones.

The brick used in construction are slightly oversize, measuring 8 1/4 X 3 7/8 X 2 3/8 inches, and are laid with a 3/8-inch flush cut

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[12] Bond, Family Chronicle, p. 171.

and pencilled joint. Their origin, commercially or plantation-made, is unknown. Whatever the case, brick was available at that time for $6.00 per thousand.[13]

In plan the house is straightforward and simple. One enters the living room from its primary (south) door, which is not original, but some of the reveal paneling appears to be. Above the seven-foot door there is an additional 18 inches of boxing, painted red and pencilled in imitation of a soldier course. Apparently this space originally housed a glazed transom or genuine soldier. Its mate, only a few feet to the right, opens into the east room and is identical in every detail. It is doubtful that pediment and pilasters were used because: inspection of the masonry showed no evidence to that effect; the house is not refined to that degree; and, dual entrances of that type would have appeared quite awkward on this particular house.

Upon entering one is confronted by a stair on the opposite wall of the 18 X 18-foot room. To the left is a fireplace (30 X 30 inches) in the six-foot-wide chimney breast. It has been partially filled in, fitted with a modern grate, and is surrounded by the original mantel. The mantel itself is a combination of simply designed pilasters and panels (photo). At the foot of the stairs on the rear wall is a 4-panel door which once led to the outside (now, into the annex).

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[13]Stephenson, "Zion Church Records," p. 150.

Reveals are covered with wide handplaned boards, and the sill is severely dished. This wear would suggest that most of the outbuildings, such as the kitchen, were on this side of the house.[14]

The stairs consist of two flights supported by hewn stringers. Nosed treads are joined at the risers by a narrow molding; and the lower part of the stair is guarded by a molded rail, resting on square 1 X 1-inch banisters and square, knob-topped newel. The latter is mortised into the floor and keyed underneath. The remainder of the first flight is enclosed from about midpoint to the top, whereupon the second turns 90 degrees to the front. An original door on the first flight thus seals off the upper portion of the house. Paneling extends from stringer to floor, forming a closet under the stairs, sealed by a 6-panel door. This poplar door is one of the more interesting parts of the house, its obverse fitted with wrought hook and staple, and reverse with a wood-and-iron lock (photo). Inside the closet are shelves whose undersides are smudged from years of groping among their contents with a candle.

Around the entire room are wide chair rail and baseboard, both original in appearance. There is no cornice molding. Walls consist of a scratch coat applied directly to the brick, overlaid with a white

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[14]The rear door sill in the east room shows much less wear; moreover, such traffic from the outside through this smaller room would have been unnatural. An archaeological investigation of the grounds would surely clear up the matter.

finish coat. A laboratory analysis would be necessary to separate the many layers of paint and wallpaper to determine the appearance of the original.

Covering the floor (and the adjoining one to the east) are 5-inch ash, tongue and groove boards, notched and face-nailed directly to the joists. The latter are of hewn poplar, roughly 4 X 9 inches in size, and are joined by mortised headers and tailpieces where appropriate.

This larger room is ventilated by three windows identical in size and design to the ones in the adjacent room. They are single hung sash type, and fitted with a pivoted wooden stop to hold the lower sash in raised position. Although the original sashes have been replaced by modern ones, the pegged casings themselves were left undisturbed, and thus hint at original sash size and design. It appears that original glazing was of a 12-over-9, or similar pattern, and reveals are paneled with plain wide boards. Outside trim is minimal, consisting of ogee molding around the casing, crowned by a soldier course. Fenestration on the second floor is identical in construction technique, but the upper windows are a few inches shorter.

One passes from the west room to the smaller (12 X 18-foot) east one via a 6-panel door (photo), whose reveals continue the motif. It is mortised and pegged at joins, and fitted with a porcelain knob, but the hidden hinges are not original. Immediately opposite is a fireplace-mantel ensemble (photo), akin in size and design to its counterpart in

the west room. And, similar alterations including a thick layer of grout on the hearth, have been executed here. The room is ventilated on the front and end walls, and is accessible through two additional doors in the front (not original) and rear (original) walls. It is a severe room, whose only decorative devices besides the mantel are the chair rail and baseboard. Of interest to the restorer is the modern flooring laid over the original. Inspection of the latter from underneath the house showed it to be in good condition--at least on the bottom.

The second floor plan repeats that of the first. Opposite the head of the stairs, the former window is now occupied by a doorway. Farther to the right is another window corresponding to the one below. Decorative treatment consists only of chair rail, baseboard and wooden mantel (photo). The stair well is guarded by 1 X 1-inch banisters and 3 X 3-inch newels, supporting a molded rail (photo). Flooring is of varying, though not random, width.

Oddly enough, the most decorous door in the house leads into the smaller room on the second floor. Reveals are paneled, and the door itself is executed in six raised panels, whose corners are scalloped (photo). It extended false hopes to the writer, who plunged through it into the ordinariness of this, the last room. Here one finds the oft-repeated chair rail, baseboard and mantel trim. Windows in front and rear walls correspond to those below, and flooring is like that in the adjacent room.

The above is a reasonably detailed description of the John Gordon house as the author found it in the summer of 1969. After 151 years of sheltering many dozens of human beings, it stands empty. The bare floors, walls and doors exhibit the careless abuses inflicted upon it by adults, youth--and time. Chamfered stair treads, much-altered facade and bricked-in fireplaces; all of these bear witness to wear, fickleness toward the original design and a changing mode of life. But the home survives, and does it well. There were no arabesques--to drop off the ceiling; no frescoes--to molder in the dampness; no crystal chandeliers--to shatter in a lifeless heap. Its simplicity is its strength, and like its frontier inhabitants, it is stubborn, plain and enduring.

The exterior state of repair is fair-to-good, exclusive of the frame addition and front porch components (which should be removed anyway). However, one matter needing attention soon is the upper west portion of the rear wall. Vertical cracks, each several feet long, have developed there and allow daylight to enter. Perhaps stabilization of this wall should be effected prior to restoration procedures. The interior is sound from a structural standpoint. There is little evidence of insect damage and rot, and it would seem that the need for replacement of original materials is minimal.

VI

FURNISHINGS

Any discussion of the house naturally brings to mind the furnishings. Though their nature is largely conjectural, we stand on reasonably solid footing. Gordon's sophistication, moderate wealth, and family structure which would dictate needs to an extent, are known factors. Thus the variables are reduced simply to aesthetic preferences for the furnishings within the family's means. Further assistance is lent by local memoirs and histories, one of which described the home thusly:

> This . . . building was for years the most elegant home in Hickman County. Here lived the most aristocratic family of the county . . . . The old home is almost in ruins, and where once was grandeur, gloom now is.[15]

Surprisingly, no one bothered to go into detail.

Some of the original furnishings are known to exist today. Certain records refer to a very fine walnut desk, which belonged to Gordon,[16] and that piece is being searched out at this writing. Leach cited three oil portraits of members of the family, and a fourth subsequently has been

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[15]W. Jerome D. Spence and David L. Spence, A History of Hickman County (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Publishing Co., 1900), p. 25. Reprinted by University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, 1964.

[16]Bond, Family Cronicle, p. 174, and Maury County "Democrat," May 1, 1890.

found. The subjects are as follows: Dolly (John Gordon's wife), painted ca. 1812; Bolling Gordon (son); Mrs. Bolling Gordon (daughter-in-law); and, William Gordon (son), in the uniform of an officer of the United States Dragoons, painted ca. 1827. These are owned by Mr. and Mrs. Hunter McDonald of Nashville, and have been offered to the National Park Service upon fulfillment of certain conditions.[17]

Given the above factors, any Furnishing Plan which might be contemplated in the future could legitimately include pieces from the more formal styles of the period. That would apply also to rugs, draperies, and other accessories.

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[17]Hunter McDonald to the author, July 22, 1969. The two women, upon completion of Gordon House restoration; the two men, upon death of the McDonalds.

VII. APPENDIX A, CORRESPONDENCE RELATIVE TO THE GORDON HOUSE

(1)

Windward Island
Hartley Bay, via Rutter
Ontario, Canada

22 July 1969

Mr. Edward L. Trout
Natchez Trace Parkway
R.R #5 NT- 143
Tupelo, Miss. 38801

Dear Mr. Trout:-

Your letter of 10 July regarding the walnut desk that once belonged to John Forden was forwarded to me at our cottage in Northern Ontario, which accounts for

the informality of my reply.

The desk, which I remember from childhood, was given to Richard H. Gordon by my aunt Mrs. Hinton Friesen, who was the daughter of Richard Cross Gordon, who was the grandson of John Gordon. I am sure he acquired the desk by inheritance.

I believe that Richard H. Gordon, whose last address available to me, is the one that you

Windward Island
Hartley Bay, via Rutter
Ontario, Canada

how, has recently died. He
was a very well known
New York stock broker, and
I am sure you will have
no trouble locating his
children, who I presume
will know the present location
of the desk. On being shown
the importance of the desk
being at the original
Gordon House, I am sure
you will have no trouble

in obtaining it.

You perhaps will be interested in the fact that I have an oil portrait of Dolly Gorden, wife of John Gorden, painted circa 1812.

My wife and I will be delighted to give the National Park Service, if you so desire, this portrait on completion of the Gorden House. Also we would give a portrait of John Gorden daughter in-law, Mrs Rollins Gorden

(5)

Windward Island
Hartley Bay, via Rutter
Ontario, Canada

under the same conditions.

I additions we own
oil portraits of John Gorden's
sons, William Gorden and
Bolling Gorden. The former
was painted circa 1827 in
the uniform of a captain of
United States Dragoons and
is a very handsome work.

If you so wish, Mrs
McDaniel and I will

pb + others, if any, not here.
kwd

Natchez Trace Parkway
Rural Route 5, NT-143
Tupelo, Mississippi 38801

H22

July 10, 1969

Mr. and Mrs. Hunter McDonald
414 Ellendale Avenue
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

Dear Mr. and Mrs. McDonald:

In writing a Historic Structures Report on the John Gordon house at Duck River, I stumbled across a reference to a walnut desk which reputedly belonged to said Gordon. The house will no doubt be one of our prime attractions in the future, and original furnishings (if procurable) would add immeasurably to its exhibit value.

In hopes that I might obtain information about it, and other original furnishings from decendant families, I secured your name from Dr. Douglas Leach, Professor of History at Vanderbilt. You may recall that he wrote a biography of John Gordon some years ago. According to Dr. Leach the desk was in the possession of Mr. Richard H. Gordon, whose last know address was c/o Merrill Lynch . . ., 70 Pine Street, New York. Could you supply me with Mr. Gordon's current address, and/or any information concerning the builders and furnishings? Answers to the above questions and any other leads in this connection would be immensely appreciated.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely yours,

Edward L. Trout
Historian

Received July 9, 1969 E.L.T.

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37203

Department of History

July 8, 1969

Mr. Edward L. Trout, Historian
Natchez Trace Parkway
Rural Route 5, NT-143
Tupelo, Mississippi 38801

Dear Mr. Trout:

I have checked into my file of Gordon research and find that according to my letter of May 11, 1959 to Dawson Phelps the walnut desk or secretary [which may have belonged to John Gordon] was given to Richard H. Gordon about 1958. This information was obtained from another descendant family, Mr. and Mrs. Hunter McDonald whose present address is 414 Ellendale Avenue, Nashville, Tennessee. The only address I have for Richard H. Gordon, and it is now ten years old, is care of Merrill Lynch--Pierce--Fenner and Smith, 70 Pine Street, New York, New York. I hope that this information will be of some help to you and am glad that the work on the Gordon site is progressing.

Sincerely yours,

Douglas E. Leach

Douglas E. Leach
Professor of History

DEL:lcs

Natchez Trace Parkway
Rural Route 5, NT-143
Tupelo, Mississippi 38801

H22

July 3, 1969

Dr. Douglas Edward Leach
Associate Professor of History
Vanderbilt University
21st Avenue, South
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

Dear Dr. Leach:

I am in the process of writing a Historic Structures Report on the John Gordon House at Duck River, Tennessee. In reading your fine biography of said Gordon, I noticed that Richard H. Gordon of New York was in possession of his ancestor's walnut desk. Could you please send me his last known address so that I may correspond with him about this and other furnishings that might have been in the house?

On the other hand, there is the possibility that you have already checked this out, or that R. H. Gordon is deceased. If you think that I am traveling up a "dead end street" in this respect, please do not hesitate to advise me.

Your assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Edward L. Trout
Historian

VIII. APPENDIX B, PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE GORDON HOUSE



GORDON HOUSE:
Obverse of door into east room, first floor.

Note: Paneled reveals.

Modern flooring over old.



GORDON HOUSE:

Rear door in east room, first floor (outer side).

Note: Paneled outside reveals.



GORDON HOUSE:

Reverse of stair closet door.

Note: Wood-and-metal lock.

Brown and white plaster over masonry, typical of all wall construction.

Handplaned shelves.



GORDON HOUSE:
Obverse of door, NW (rear) porch into annex hallway.

Note: Relocation of knob to opposite side, possibly came from original part of house.

Joints mortised and pegged.



GORDON HOUSE:

Mantel, west room, first floor.

Note: Fireplace alterations, as in all rooms.



GORDON HOUSE:
Mantel, east room, first floor.



GORDON HOUSE:
Stair wall.

Note: Paneled wall.

Tread molding.

Simple treatment of rail and banister.

Obverse of closet door.

Altered lock.

Hook and eye (probably original).



GORDON HOUSE:
Stair railing, upstairs.

Note: Simple treatment of banisters and posts.



GORDON HOUSE:

Mantel, west room second floor.

Note: Alteration of fireplace.



GORDON HOUSE:

Mantel, east room, second floor.



GORDON HOUSE:

Door into east room, second floor.

Note: Scalloped panel corners.

Paneled reveals.



GORDON HOUSE:

Alteration of original front door, with boxing over lintel.



GORDON HOUSE:

Pegged window casings, soldier, and simple molding.



GORDON HOUSE:
Inside of window, typical of all.

Note: Single hung sash and deep reveal.



GORDON HOUSE:

Limestone foundation, hewn joists, notched flooring.



WEBSTER HOUSE:
Front elevation, porch replaced original portico.



WEBSTER HOUSE:
Original front door and decoration.



WEBSTER HOUSE:
View to rear (original) portion through central hall of 1826 (front) portion.

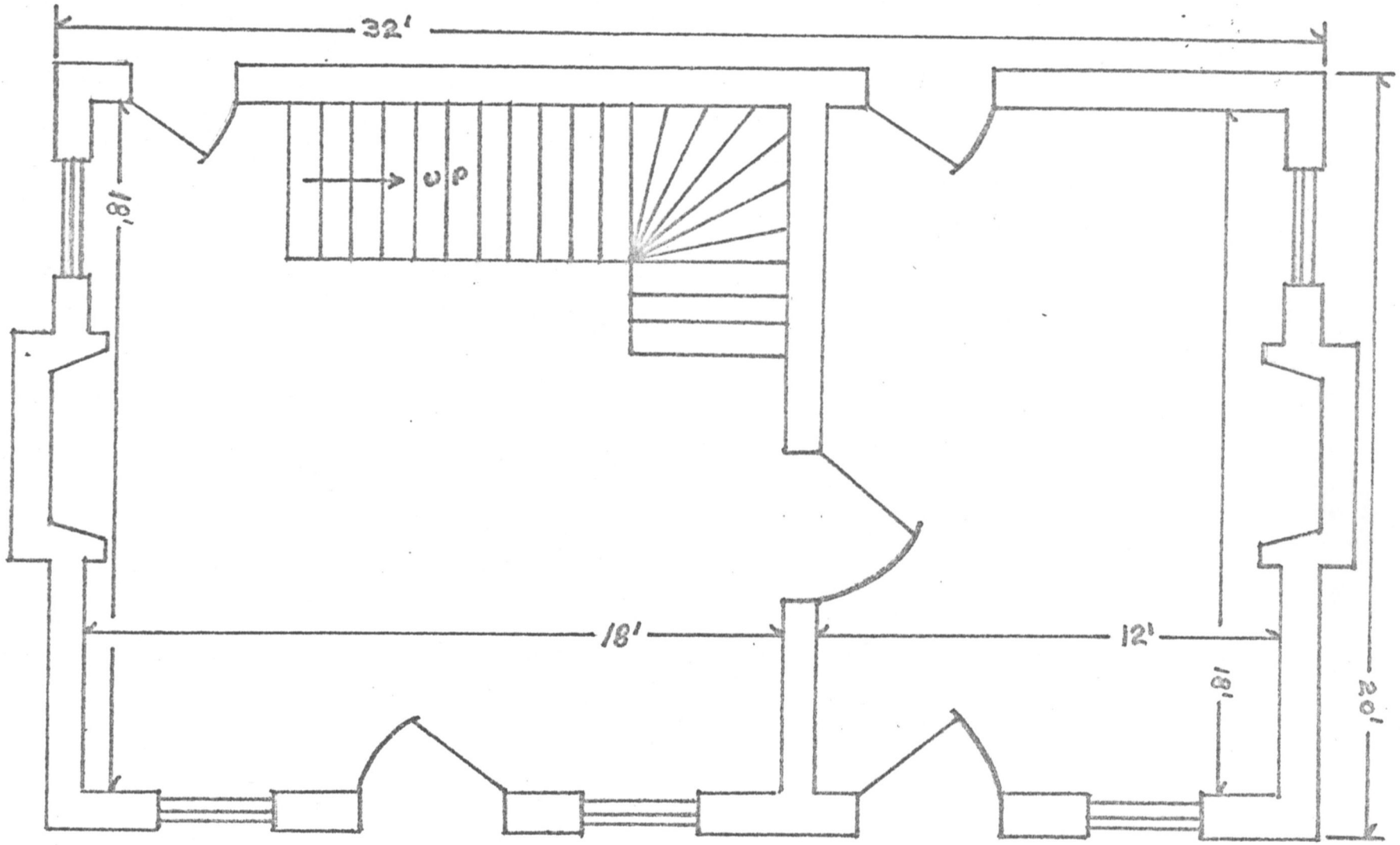


WEBSTER HOUSE:
Parlor w/original mantel, wainscot, etc.



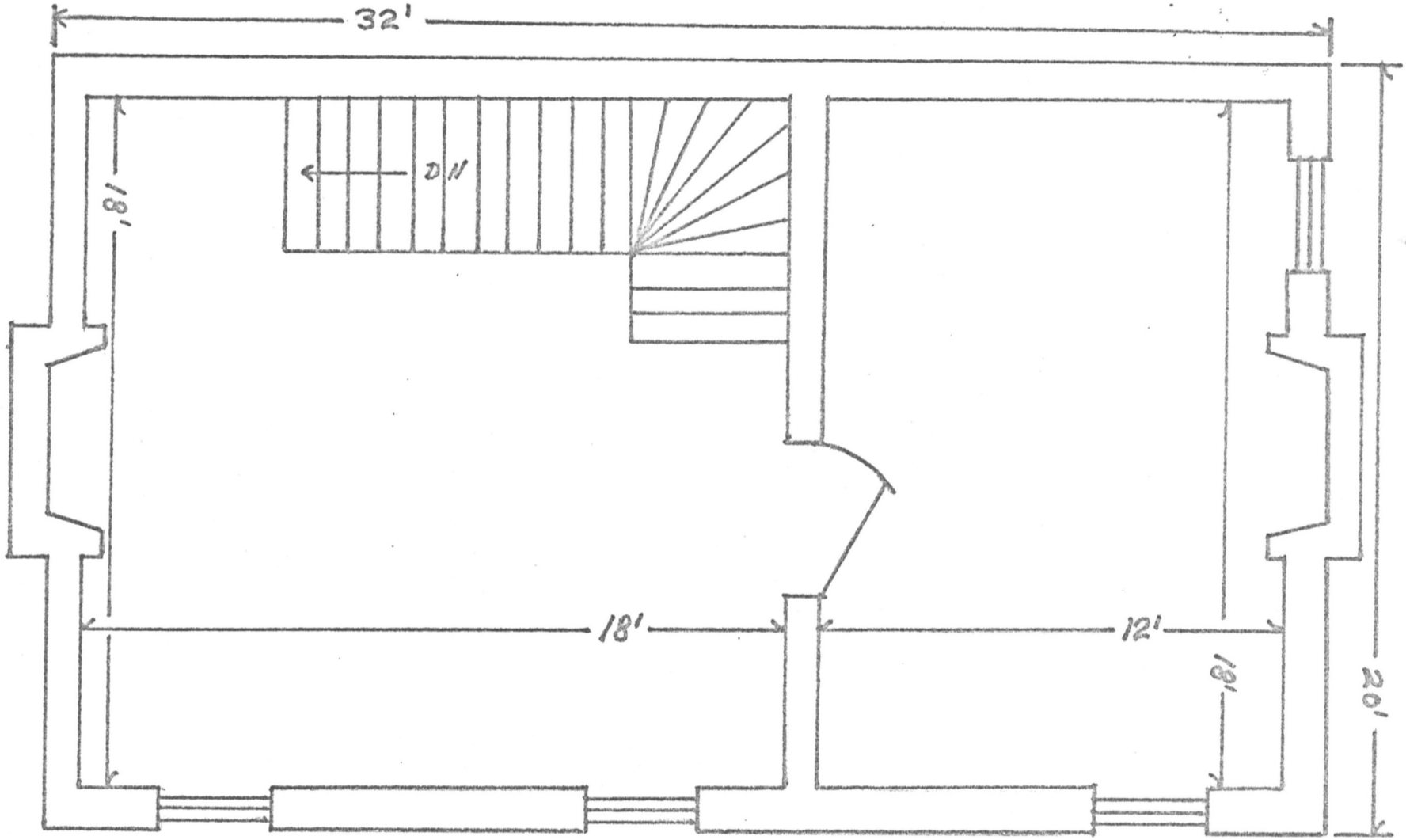
WEBSTER HOUSE:
Parlor w/original mantel, wainscot, etc.

IX. APPENDIX C, FLOOR PLANS



FIRST FLOOR JOHN GORDON HOUSE

ET '69



SECOND FLOOR JOHN GORDON HOUSE

ET '69

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Primary Sources

Author's interview with Mr. Ed Dotson, Clerk of Court, Hickman County and county historian, June 26, 1969, in Centerville, TN.

Author's interview with Mrs. Jill K. Garrett, Secretary of Columbia Historical Society, June 25, 1969, in Columbia, TN. Mrs. Garrett is probably the most active, published and knowledgeable historian in the area. She assited the author in exhausting all material which might have been of value.

Author's interview with Mrs. G. A. Osborne, present owner of the Jonathan Webster House, July 31, 1969, in Mt. Pleasant, TN. Mrs. Osborne, relict of a builder, followed very closely the restoration of the house, executed by her late husband. She offered much technical information on it, and other houses in the area.

Author's inspection of Skipwith Hall, August 1, 1969, near Columbia, TN. The author was admitted by the caretaker, who knew little about the house.

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