

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name John Johnston House

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street & number west side NC HWY 62 North at jct. w/SR 1595 N/A not for publication  
(1325 NC Highway 62 North)

city or town Yanceyville  vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Caswell code 033 zip code 27212

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  
 request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of  
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  
 meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  
 nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey J. Crow - SHPD 1/21/97  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State of Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional  
comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the  
National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the  
National Register.
- removed from the National  
Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

John Johnston House  
Name of Property

Caswell, NC  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	2	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	2	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

-0-

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling  
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/outbuilding  
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/processing  
   
   
   
   
 

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling  
   
   
   
   
   
   
   
 

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Federal  
   
 

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE  
walls WOOD/weatherboard  
   
roof METAL/tin  
other WOOD  
STONE

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

second quarter of the nineteenth century

Significant Dates

second quarter of the nineteenth century

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Name of Property

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.59

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 17 653910 4033440
Zone Easting Northing

3 Zone Easting Northing

4 Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kaye Graybeal and Michael Southern

organization DS ATLANTIC and NCSHPO date January 3, 1997

street & number 7820 North Point Blvd & 109 East Jones St. telephone 910-759-7400 & 910-733-7342

city or town Winston-Salem and Raleigh state NC zip code 27106 & 27602-2807

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Joseph Gatewood, D.D.S.

street & number Post Office Box 457 telephone 919-723-9306

city or town Hillsborough state NC zip code 27278

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1John Johnston House  
Caswell County, North CarolinaThe Setting and Exterior

The John Johnston House is an academically-restored early nineteenth-century rural house-type that has almost disappeared from the North Carolina landscape. The house is set in a pristine section of this rolling Northern Piedmont rural county and evokes the feeling of the antebellum tobacco culture which gave rise to a plantation economy that supported several notable plantation seats. Although a number of the county's great plantation houses are maintained in good condition, many of the modest, well-crafted Federal-inspired dwellings that once housed early nineteenth-century small planters have followed a typical progression of conversion to tenant houses, then to produce or equipment shelters, and finally, to abandonment and neglect.

An 1857 map locates the house on a tract on the east side of an eighteenth-century stage coach road that runs between the county seat of Yanceyville and the market town of Milton. A simple house symbol on Johnston lands shows the site that is the original location of the one-and-one-half story, side-gabled, hall-and-parlor house. Around 1921, the house was moved southwest about 150 yards to its present location on the southern boundary of the nineteenth-century Johnston property on the west side of the Yanceyville-to-Milton Road. The original house site is now occupied by an early-twentieth-century Craftsman bungalow and a nineteenth-century smokehouse thought to have been a dependency of the Johnston House. The original and present settings of the house command views of the rolling agricultural fields, many of which are planted in tobacco, and of well-watered livestock pastures shaded by deciduous trees.

The house is an excellent example of an early-nineteenth-century hall-and-parlor house form with local interpretations of Federal architectural details. The house faces east and is situated about forty feet from the road, shaded by a few mature cedar trees. The two-and-one-half acre lot slopes gently to the southwest where there is a small, front-gabled frame barn and frame privy that probably pre-date the relocation of the house onto this site.

The overall dimensions of the three-bay wide, two-bay deep pegged, frame house are thirty-three feet long by eighteen feet deep with the summer beam running front to back beneath the interior dividing partition. An eighteen-foot square one-story, gabled frame rear ell housing a contemporary kitchen and bath was added in 1990 perpendicular to the south end of the original structure. The house is sided with beaded lapboard and rests on a coursed fieldstone foundation. The two end chimneys are also of coursed fieldstone with stretcher bond stacks rising above a steeply pitched roof sheathed in standing seam tin. The roofline cornice is molded as are the shallow boxed eaves. The flush gable ends are delineated by narrow and plain rake boards.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 2John Johnston House  
Caswell County, North Carolina

The front and rear window sashes are of nine-over-nine double-hung configuration within molded architrave frames. Four-over-four double-hung windows flank the chimney on each first-level end elevation as do two four-light windows within simpler architraves in each gable. The flat two-paneled entry door is of mortise-and-tenon construction. This central front entry flanked by two windows, along with the end chimneys, create the overall symmetry typical of the style.

The Interior

The hall-and-parlor plan consists of two rooms seventeen feet, five inches deep. The main room is square and the smaller room is thirteen feet, five inches in width. The first floor ceiling height is ten feet. The upper floor, configured as the lower, is partitioned with knee walls creating a depth of thirteen feet, eight inches. The ceiling height is six feet, nine inches.

The modesty and restraint of the facade design is generally reflected in the interior detailing as well, but belies the existence of a vernacular interpretation of a classical tripartite mantelpiece found in the hall. The entablatured pine mantelshelf of this fireplace is supported by flanking engaged colonettes of Tuscan order on high pedestals. The mantelpiece in the parlor, though not as highly designed, nevertheless exhibits an attention to detail. The six-inch high pine fire surround is Federal in style, exhibiting a molded strip and flat paneling beneath the mantelshelf. Further wood detailing includes a plain-paneled wainscot enframed by a simple bead-molded chairrail three feet above the finished floor and a six-inch high baseboard. The walls and ceilings are plaster-like sheetrock. On the floors, five-inch pine boards run the depth of the house. The doors are of batten boards and exhibit wrought iron hardware. An original door of six flat panels provides passage between the hall and the parlor.

The enclosed corner stair in the southeast corner is sheathed with flush horizontal and diagonal pine boards, some measuring eighteen inches in width. The stair risers and wallstring exhibit rather unrefined marbleizing on the face. The stair treads are a narrow seven inches in width. The original pine balustrade is intact with simple square balusters supporting a round top rail with a turned-up "lambstongue" detail.

The upper floor plan, corresponding to that of the ground floor, is divided by a board partition which retains the original batten door in its opening. The plain flush-sheathed wainscot is terminated with simple bead-molded chairrail at a height of two feet and four inches above the floor. A simple molded baseboard lines five-inch wide pine floorboards.

The 1990 one-story rear ell houses a kitchen, bathroom, furnace, water pump and heater, and electrical panel. The floor and wall materials resemble those in the original structure.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

John Johnston House  
Caswell County, North Carolina

### Integrity Statement

In 1990, the John Johnston House, fallen into disrepair and bordering on decay, was rehabilitated with a meticulous academic restoration to its antebellum appearance, and a rear ell was added to render the house suitable for modern residential use. The owner recognized that a rare early house-type was concealed under early twentieth-century shed porch additions and a layer of stucco. As a result of the restoration, all early twentieth-century alterations were reversed, including the removal of the stucco and porches from all facades. The stucco was probably applied during the 1910s or 1920s, reflecting a common treatment of many other Caswell County buildings.<sup>1</sup> The original beaded lapboard siding and window framing, which were deteriorated beyond repair, were replicated and milled to closely resemble the historic.

Fieldstones from the crumbled original end chimneys were used to face the reconstructed end chimneys. Stone from the interior of the original chimneys were also used to fill gaps in the existing stone foundation. The stretcher bond chimney stacks had also deteriorated beyond repair and were reconstructed using as much of the original brick as possible. New standing seam tin roofing alludes to a former tin roof.<sup>2</sup>

All but one of the window sashes had severely rotted and deteriorated; however, the two front and one rear facade replacement window sashes retain many of the original glass panes in the original configuration within replica frames fabricated on-site. The end windows on either side of the chimneys and the central facade entry door also closely replicate the originals. At the east end of the south side of the house, an entry door with six raised panels within a molded and mitered architrave was replaced with a window matching the four-over-four configuration of the other end windows. The original side door is stored in the barn. The only other deviation from the original entry openings and fenestration is the replacement of a window opening with a new batten door leading from the parlor of the original structure to the 1990 ell.<sup>3</sup>

The materials and design details of the new ell match those of the front structure. Wall and attic insulation, central air ducts, floor vents and electrical outlets were carefully integrated into the historic structure at this time.<sup>4</sup>

As on the exterior, much emphasis was placed on retaining or carefully replicating original materials and details on the interior. Narrow horizontal wood sheathing, perhaps of the 1920s era, was removed from the first-floor interior walls along with the greatly deteriorated plaster

<sup>1</sup> Little-Stokes, Ruth. *An Inventory of Historic Architecture of Caswell County, North Carolina*, Caswell County Historical Association, Inc., Yanceyville, NC, 1979, pp. 62 and 178.

<sup>2</sup> Clyde L. Bailey, personal communication, October 31, 1997

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**Section number 7 Page 4John Johnston House  
Caswell County, North Carolina

---

throughout the house. Plaster-like sheetrock was installed over the walls and ceilings. When the wood sheathing was removed from the first level walls, ghostmark evidence of chairrail molding was revealed. The molding profile was reproduced using remnants of chairrail molding that remained on the upper floor as a pattern. The missing sections of chairrail and baseboard on the upper floor were carefully replicated in the same manner. The false fireplace opening at the north end wall of this level has been enclosed; however, the mantelpiece is carefully stored off-site. Although new five-inch-wide pine floor boards were installed perpendicularly over the original boards on the first floor in 1970, the original five-inch-wide pine boards remain intact throughout both levels of the house. The board door at the rear wall of the main room and one at the stair replicate the original batten doors. All the door hardware resembles the original wrought iron hardware with the exception of pinned hinges and was selected based on "ghostmarks" evident on the original doors. The original door hinges were "HL" hinges.

The restoration was undertaken using the principle of preserving original material where possible and replicating missing and non-salvageable materials and details through careful examination of the extant historic fabric. The restoration resulted in the retention of a high degree of integrity given that the form, style and original structural components of the house are intact. Therefore, the structure conveys significance as a rare and excellent example of an early nineteenth-century plantation house.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

8

5

John Johnston House  
Caswell County, North Carolina

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

---

### Summary Paragraph

The John Johnston House is significant under Criterion C for Design/Construction in the category of Architecture and meets Criteria Consideration B: Moved Properties. The house derives local architectural significance as an excellent example of one of the most prevalent house forms in early nineteenth century Caswell County-- the one-and-one-half-story frame Federal style house with hall-and-parlor plan and end chimneys. Today, only about forty examples of this once common house-type survive from the first half of the nineteenth century, though most are considerably altered or deteriorated. The John Johnston House is exemplary among these because it most closely conveys its original form, style, structure and plan. The painstakingly academic restoration of this house was undertaken with great care to retain features that are indicative of the original design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Despite replacement materials, the result is a house that possesses a greater degree of significance and integrity as an early nineteenth century plantation residence than does any other of its type and style in the county. The house in its pristine pastoral setting also evokes the agrarian roots of the Northern Piedmont region of North Carolina. The bright-leaf tobacco curing process was invented in this region where the rural landscape retains several grand antebellum plantation seats, many of which are in a good state of repair. Many of the more humble early nineteenth century Federal style houses of small planters, however, have disappeared from the landscape or have become severely deteriorated. Thus, the restoration of the Johnston House has rendered it a rare example of a rapidly vanishing house-type in the region.

The John Johnston House was probably built early in the second quarter of the nineteenth century on a plantation of 375 acres that Johnston assembled at that time "on the main road leading from Yanceyville to Milton." A member of a prominent Caswell county family, John Johnston (ca. 1778-1860) was a son of Scottish immigrant Dr. Lancelot Johnston, who served with distinction as a surgeon with the American forces during the Revolution. John Johnston's son by his first marriage to Mary Frances Donoho, Thomas Donoho Johnston (1800-1883), rose to prominence as a businessman in the late antebellum period and built Clarendon Hall in Yanceyville, one of the county's finest antebellum residences. Following John Johnston's death in 1860 and the death of his second wife, Nancy, in 1872, the property had a long succession of owners, one of which, probably either G.T. Hubbard or J.E. Zimmerman, moved the house in the first quarter of the twentieth century some 150 yards southwest to a corner of the property where it served as a tenant house. In the late 1980s it was restored by local resident and historian, Hilda Brody, who received a 1995 Award of Merit from the Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina for this project. The John Johnston House now provides the observer with a rare glimpse of rural life in nineteenth-century Caswell County.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

8                      6  
Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

John Johnston House  
Caswell County, North Carolina

---

### Historical Background

The little house on NC 62 between Yanceyville and Milton was the home of a planter whose patterns of domestic life and ownership of land and slaves mirrored that of hundreds of similar small tobacco planters across the northern piedmont of North Carolina through the antebellum period. Though members of the Johnston family were prominent in social and economic affairs in Caswell County from the eighteenth century onward, the significance of the house derives less from the specific historical contributions of its occupants than from its representation of a class of plantation residence that has rarely been preserved.

John Johnston was born in Caswell County in 1778, son of Dr. Lancelot Johnston and Zeria Rice Johnston.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Lancelot Johnston (1748-1832) was born in Fermanagh County, Ireland, to Scottish parents, and immigrated to America by 1770, arriving in Caswell County, North Carolina, by 1774. During the American Revolution, Dr. Johnston served as a surgeon with the American forces and was commended for his care of the wounded following the Battle of Camden. After the war he settled in the Locust Hill section of Caswell County, where he continued to practice medicine and owned a plantation of nearly 500 acres.<sup>2</sup> Several of the ten children of Lancelot and Zeria Johnston left North Carolina for western or deep south states as young adults. Those that remained in North Carolina at his death in 1832 included John, his brother Thomas, and their sisters Mary (Polly), Jane, and Elizabeth (Bettie).

In January, 1800, John Johnston married Mary Frances Donoho, called Frances or Fanny, daughter of planter Thomas Donoho.<sup>3</sup> Their first son, named for his maternal grandfather, was born the following November. Over the next few decades the couple and their growing family appear to have lived on at least two different farms on Country Line Creek. Johnston acquired a 250 acre tract on the creek from Ephriam Noel in 1813, and surviving tax lists and deed records prior to 1827 show him with that 250 acre tract.<sup>4</sup> Thomas Donoho owned over 1300 acres between Yanceyville and Milton, and John and Frances received 261 acres, which included a sawmill, from the Donoho estate in 1827.<sup>5</sup> In that and subsequent years, the tax lists show Johnston with 511 acres (the two tracts combined), though in 1832 the total dropped to 500 acres. The 1838 and 1839 lists show Johnston with the two 250-acre tracts listed separately, one called the "home tract" and valued at \$5.00 per acre, and the other called the "old place," at half that value. The evidence suggests that the "home tract" was the more valuable land that John and Frances received from the Donoho estate in 1827, and they

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan M. DeGroot, "Dr. Lancelot Johnston," a biographical sketch appearing in Jeannine D. Whitlow, Editor, *The Heritage of Caswell County, North Carolina* (1985), pp 312-313; hereinafter cited as *The Heritage of Caswell County*.

<sup>2</sup> Caswell County Tax Lists, NC Division of Archives and History

<sup>3</sup> Caswell County Marriage Bonds

<sup>4</sup> Caswell County Deed Book R, pages 69-70, and Caswell County Tax Lists

<sup>5</sup> Caswell County Deed Book Z, pages 156-158.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 7John Johnston House  
Caswell County, North Carolina

possibly built the hall-parlor plantation house as their new residence at about that time, though they appear to have retained the "old place" -- the Noel tract -- for two decades thereafter.

The tax lists also reveal that like most of their neighbors, the Johnstons owned a small number of slaves to work their properties and tend their tobacco crop. The lists of the 1820s and 1830s show Johnston with an average of eight black "polls," meaning slaves, between the ages of 12 and 50, though the number rose in the 1840s to as many as fifteen, and Johnston owned 20 slaves at his death in 1860.<sup>6</sup>

A map of the Nathaniel Lea property made between 1855 and 1857 shows "John Johnston" as the landowner beyond the north boundary of the Lea property, with the Johnston lands flanking the Yanceyville-Milton road.<sup>7</sup> The map includes a small symbol representing Johnston's house on the east side of the road and a short distance above the Lea boundary. When the property boundaries of the 1855-1857 map are transposed to a modern map, the location of the symbol on the old map corresponds to the original location of the house now standing on the opposite side of NC 62 and slightly to the south. The age and quality of the house leaves little doubt that it was the house most likely built and occupied by the Johnstons, and even by the end of the twentieth century some older residents in the area maintained the tradition that the old house had been a Johnston place.<sup>8</sup>

John and Frances Johnston had at least four children to reach maturity. The eldest had probably already left home before the Johnstons moved to the "home tract." Their son Thomas Donoho Johnston (1800-1883) rose to prominence as a planter, merchant, and banker, and became one of Caswell County's wealthiest citizens; he owned 56 slaves in 1860 and in 1842 built Clarendon Hall in Yanceyville, one of the county's finest antebellum residences.<sup>9</sup> Younger children were daughters Eliza, who married Isaac Currie in 1824, Sarah, who married William Long in 1828, and Frances, who married William Malone in 1829.<sup>10</sup> The 1820 census shows the family with two other male children, and a family history identifies these as David and Lancelot, who were "killed in the Civil War."<sup>11</sup> However, neither is named among the other children in John's 1860 estate papers, and rosters of Confederate soldiers list neither. Both would have been in their 40s by 1860, and it is possible that they died or left the region before the war.

<sup>6</sup> Caswell County Tax Lists

<sup>7</sup> "Diagram of the lands of Nathaniel Lea", Caswell County Historical Museum, Yanceyville

<sup>8</sup> Kaye Graybeal interview with Mark Kinnard, Yanceyville, N.C., 1996

<sup>9</sup> Yanceyville Historic District nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, Survey and Planning Branch, NC Division of Archives and History.

<sup>10</sup> Caswell County Marriage Bonds

<sup>11</sup> Harriet S. Johnston, "Thomas Donoho and Family," in *The Heritage of Caswell County*, pp. 314-315.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 8John Johnston House  
Caswell County, North Carolina

Frances Johnston died between 1842 and 1850, and possibly before 1845.<sup>12</sup> The 1850 census shows Johnston, age 71, with wife Nancy, age 48, and no children living at the home at that time. No marriage bond exists for the union of John and Nancy, and the date of the marriage and Nancy's maiden name are not known.

John Johnston died intestate in the spring of 1860.<sup>13</sup> The following July, the county Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions designated his son Thomas D. Johnston as executor of his estate. At the time of his death, John Johnston owned 375 acres adjoining Thomas Lea and George Williamson "on both sides of the main road leading from Yanceyville to Milton." The inventory of his estate listed crops, livestock, plantation implements, and household furnishings appraised at a total of \$2,401.19. Among the most valued items were a "buggy and harness" at \$84 and three beds appraised at \$56; these and other household furnishings were retained by the widow. The most expensive item at the estate sale was the contents of "4 barns of Tobacco" valued at \$517.25 and purchased by his grandson John Long.

Johnston owned twenty slaves when he died. His estate records provide their names and ages, beginning with Charles, 59, and Hannah, 50, followed by two men and three women aged between 25 and 32, three teenage boys 13 to 17, and ten children (five girls and five boys) eleven and under. Though the record does not establish their relationships, the ages suggest three generations of related families, with Charles and Hannah as grandparents and the youngest being the children of Linn (32), Ann (25), and Rachel (28). One of the most painful realities of the slave-holding south was the disposition of slaves following the death of a slaveowner. As executor of his father's estate, Thomas D. Johnston assigned a value to each slave, ranging from \$1,350 for 25-year-old Samuel to \$200 for the two-year-old children, for a total value of \$13,775 for the twenty slaves. They were then sorted into five groups of roughly equal value with four persons in each group, and the five heirs drew lots to determine which group each received. The groupings might suggest there was some effort to keep family units together as much as possible. For example, Samuel (25) and Ann (25) were grouped with Emmer (5) and Christina (2), but some division of families surely could not be avoided. The inevitable harsh separation of family members may have been delayed or somewhat mitigated since all five heirs occupied or owned adjoining or nearby lands. In any event the impending war and emancipation would soon change the relationships of these black and white families to one another forever.

<sup>12</sup> The 1842 will of Keziah Donoho, Frances's mother, names daughters Betsy Watlington and Fanny Johnston as heirs, and Frances was still living in that year. Papers in her estate records dated 1845 bear the mark of Elizabeth Watlington and the signature of John Johnston as legatees, suggesting that Frances may have died by that time. The Keziah Donoho will is summarized in Katharine Kerr Kendall and Mary Frances Kerr Donaldson, *Caswell County Will Book 1843-1866* (1986), p. 4. Keziah Donoho Estate Records in the N.C. Division of Archives and History.

<sup>13</sup> John Johnston Estate Papers, Caswell County, N.C. Division of Archives and History

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

8

9

John Johnston House  
Caswell County, North Carolina

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

Nancy Johnston was apportioned 128 acres from the plantation as her dower, and Johnston's son-in-law William Long purchased the remainder from the other heirs for \$2,925. The survey description of Nancy's dower reveals that it was the portion bordering the Lea property containing the house site, and Nancy probably occupied the house through the Civil War and until her death in 1872.

Following Nancy Johnston's death, the house and property had a long succession of owners. James O. Peterson acquired Nancy's dower by early 1873, and with an additional purchase of 96 acres that had formerly belonged to John Pinchback, he assembled a farm of 224 acres that he occupied until his death in 1904.<sup>14</sup> Peterson is identified as the owner of what had been the Johnston and Pinchback properties in an 1894 map of the George Williamson property, which comprised the northern portion of the Lea property shown in the 1855-1857 map, and Peterson presumably occupied the old house.<sup>15</sup> In 1904 Peterson's son sold the 224 acres to G.T. Hubbard, who owned an adjacent farm at that time.<sup>16</sup> Hubbard died by the late 1910s. The property was ensnared in a legal dispute among his heirs and had at least two short term owners until J.E. Zimmerman purchased the same 224 acres in 1921.<sup>17</sup> Either Hubbard or Zimmerman -- most likely Zimmerman -- moved the old Johnston House about 150 yards southwest and across the highway near the southern boundary of the property, and built a new bungalow style house at the original site. A smokehouse thought to relate to the older house still stands behind the bungalow. The older house probably received the stucco exterior -- a common early twentieth century modification to small houses and farm outbuildings in the region -- at the time of the move or a few years thereafter, and was adapted as a tenant house, a common transformation for many small early nineteenth century plantation houses.

Zimmerman heirs owned the property until about 1970, selling off various portions at times. The Johnston homeplace became associated with its Zimmerman family ownership -- it is identified as the Zimmerman House in a 1973 historic property survey.<sup>18</sup> Secondary Road 1595 was named Zimmerman Road for the family's long presence where the road intersects NC 62. A small parcel containing the old house saw a couple of short term owners until -- long abandoned and deteriorated -- the house was purchased in the late 1980s by Hilda Brody, a local preservationist who owned nearby Melrose Plantation and recognized the house for what it had been and what it might be again. Her restoration was completed in 1990, and received an

<sup>14</sup> Caswell County Deed Book KK, pages 461 and 495.

<sup>15</sup> "A Map of the Lands of Col. Geo. Williamson's Estate near Yanceyville Caswell Co. N.C." Caswell County Historical Museum, Yanceyville.

<sup>16</sup> Caswell County Deed Book 59, page 515.

<sup>17</sup> Caswell County Deed Book 67, page 499; Book 67, page 516; Book 74, page 334.

<sup>18</sup> Ruth Little-Stokes, *An Inventory of Historic Architecture, Caswell County, North Carolina*. Caswell County Historical Association, 1979.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

8                      10  
Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

John Johnston House  
Caswell County, North Carolina

---

Award of Merit from the Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina in 1995. Dr. Joseph Gatewood purchased the property in 1996.

### Architectural Context

According to *An Inventory of Historic Architecture: Caswell County, North Carolina* by Ruth Little-Stokes, the historical development of Caswell County can be divided into four periods: eighteenth century, early nineteenth century (1800-1840), the Boom Era (1840-1860), and Reconstruction (1865-1920). These periods correspond to trends in national architectural styles: Georgian, Federal, Greek Revival, and Victorian Revival styles. The 1800 to 1840 period, into which the Johnston House falls stylistically, represents the growing prevalence of Federal style architecture in Caswell County. Approximately 115 houses in the Caswell County inventory fall under the Federal style rubric, among which about forty are one-and-one-half story frame and log Federal style houses (Little-Stokes, p. 25). During this period, features such as simple window molds, boxed eaves, molded cornices and facade symmetry were typical of exteriors, while more attention was lavished on interior woodworking exhibiting inventive vernacular interpretations of classical mantelpieces and stair railings. The implementation of Federal Adamesque interior detailing may be a reflection of the popularity of the style book published by the Adams Brothers or those by Asher Benjamin and Owen Biddle (Little-Stokes, p. 27). The historic domestic architecture of Caswell County also reflects the influence of the nearby Virginia Piedmont region in its display of affected gentility. This design trend is true of the county's grand houses as well as its many modest structures.

The development of tobacco farming in Caswell County is manifested in the architecture of the county as historic houses and associated farm buildings. During the nineteenth century, burley and bright-leaf tobacco bolstered the economy of Caswell, making it one of the most prosperous counties in the state. The wealthy planter class erected architecturally sophisticated and distinctive plantation seats, as well as a plethora of dependency buildings including tobacco barns, smokehouses, dairy houses, tenant houses and overseers' houses. After the Civil War, Caswell County suffered economic decline which impeded the replacement of these buildings with more updated structures.<sup>19</sup>

A 1973 county-wide historic resource survey conducted by the Survey and Planning Branch of the State Historic Preservation Office reveals that, of the approximately forty extant one-and-one-half-story Federal style frame houses with end chimneys and symmetrical facades built during the first half of the nineteenth century, ten are highly similar to the Johnston House though most are considerably altered. The Warren-Orbert Place (ca. 1830) and the Samuel Curtis Cobb House (ca. 1820) in Hightowers Township are two of the most similar in exterior form as well as in plan, detail and materials. The Cobb House exterior is now stuccoed as was

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, page 3

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

8

11

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

John Johnston House  
Caswell County, North Carolina

---

the Johnston House before restoration. Another highly comparable house is the relatively intact Newman Place (ca. 1835) in Pelham Township. The ca. 1820 Hambrick House in Leasburg Historic District is also comparable with the exception of its English bond brick foundation. In Locust Hill Township, the Shelton House (also with later-stuccoed exterior) and the George Hodges-Smith House, both dating to the early nineteenth century, are very similar to the Johnston House in all aspects though much altered. Also excellent examples of this form and style, though considerably altered, are the ca. 1830 Cedar Hill Farmhouse and the 1822 Williamson-Stephenson Homeplace in Leasburg Township. The Ernest Fuquay House (ca. 1825) found in Milton Township is also of the genre, although it has substantial additions. In Dan River Township, the early nineteenth century Hodges Homeplace, though significantly altered, retains some ornate interior detail.

Few examples of the early nineteenth century one-and-one-half-story Federal style frame house with end chimneys have been preserved, restored, or listed in the National Register. According to the county-wide historic resource survey conducted in 1972, the ca. 1835 Newman Place in Pelham Township appears to be the only other relatively unaltered and well-preserved example of this important house-type in rural Caswell County. Within the Yanceyville Historic District (NR 1973), the Scarborough Law Office, ca. 1835, presents a well-preserved exterior very similar to that of the Johnston House but its interior is substantially altered.

The restoration of the Johnston House aspires to the same level of quality as several other restored houses in North Carolina listed in the National Register. Among these are Franklin County's late eighteenth-century Federal-style Portridge (NR, 1990) and the Patty Person Taylor House (NR, 1975). Another example of an academic restoration of a very deteriorated house includes Stanly County's Marks House dating to ca. 1847 (NR, 1995). Both Portridge and the Marks House, as was the John Johnston House, were moved a short distance within the boundaries of their associated properties to a site which possessed landscape features similar to the original, thereby evoking the same feeling and retaining the contextual association of the original sites. Given the dearth of well-preserved houses of this type, the restoration of the John Johnston House contributes significantly to the documentation of the architectural history of North Carolina's Northern Piedmont region.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

9-10

12

John Johnston House  
Caswell County, North Carolina

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bailey, Clyde L. Personal communication, October 31, 1996.

Brody, Hilda. Personal communication, October 30, 1996.

Caswell County Deed Books.

Caswell County Marriage Bonds, 1778-1868.

Caswell County Tax Lists.

Caswell County Tax Map, plat book 11, page 546.

Caswell County unrecorded deed maps, 1857, 1858, 1894. (Located in Caswell County Historical Museum, Yanceyville, North Carolina.)

Caswell County Will Book, 1843-1866.

Keziah Donoho Estate Records.

Gatewood, Joseph, D.D.S. Personal communication, October 26, 1996.

Kennard, Mark. Personal communication, October 26, 1996.

Little-Stokes, Ruth. (1979). *An Inventory of Historic Architecture, Caswell County, North Carolina*. (Yanceyville, North Carolina: Caswell County Historical Association and the Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources).

Powell, William S. (1977). *When the Past Refused to Die: a History of Caswell County, 1777-1977*. (Durham: Moore Publishing Company).

Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Caswell County, North Carolina, Agricultural Schedule, Slave Schedule

Whitlow, Jeannine D., Editor. *The Heritage of Caswell County*. Caswell County Historical Society, Yanceyville, NC, 1985.

Williamson, William Bethel and Elizabeth Williamson Dixon. (1956). *Williamson, Bethel, and Allied Families of North Carolina*. (Gastonia: William Gaston Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution).

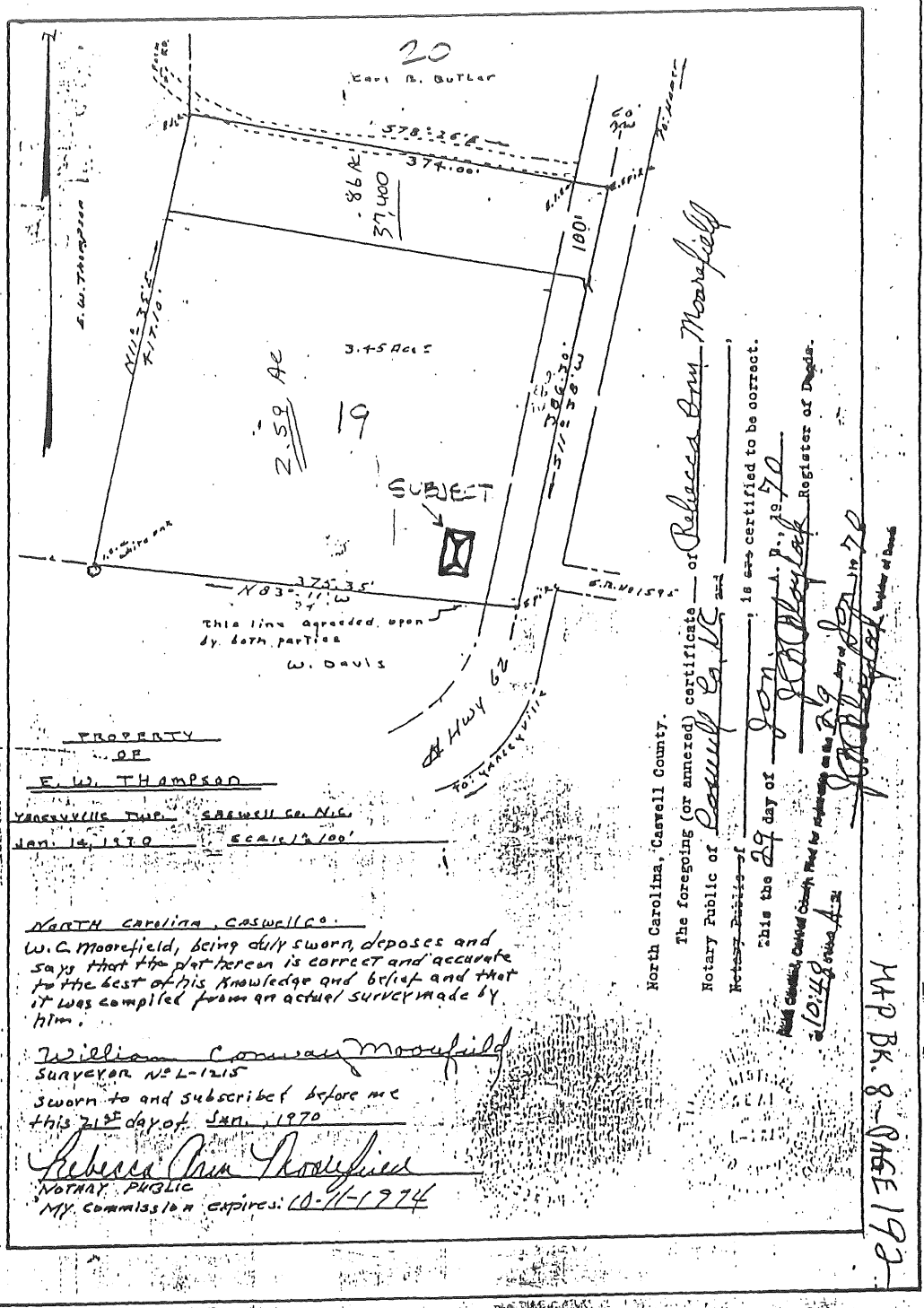
10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATAVerbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the nominated property coincide with the 2.59 acre tract of parcel 19, map 96 as indicated on the accompanying Caswell County Tax Map recorded in plat book 8, page 192.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries coincide with the tax parcel associated with the property since the late 1980s on land onto which the house was moved ca. 1921. The boundaries provide an appropriate setting for the architecture of house and allow it to retain its original rural context.





PROPERTY OF  
E. W. THOMPSON  
 YANCEVILLE TWP. CASWELL CO. N.C.  
 Jan. 14, 1970 SCALE 1/2" = 100'

NORTH CAROLINA, CASWELL CO.  
 W. C. Moorefield, being duly sworn, deposes and says that the plat herein is correct and accurate to the best of his knowledge and belief and that it was compiled from an actual survey made by him.

William C. Moorefield  
 Surveyor No. L-1215  
 Sworn to and subscribed before me  
 this 21<sup>st</sup> day of Jan., 1970

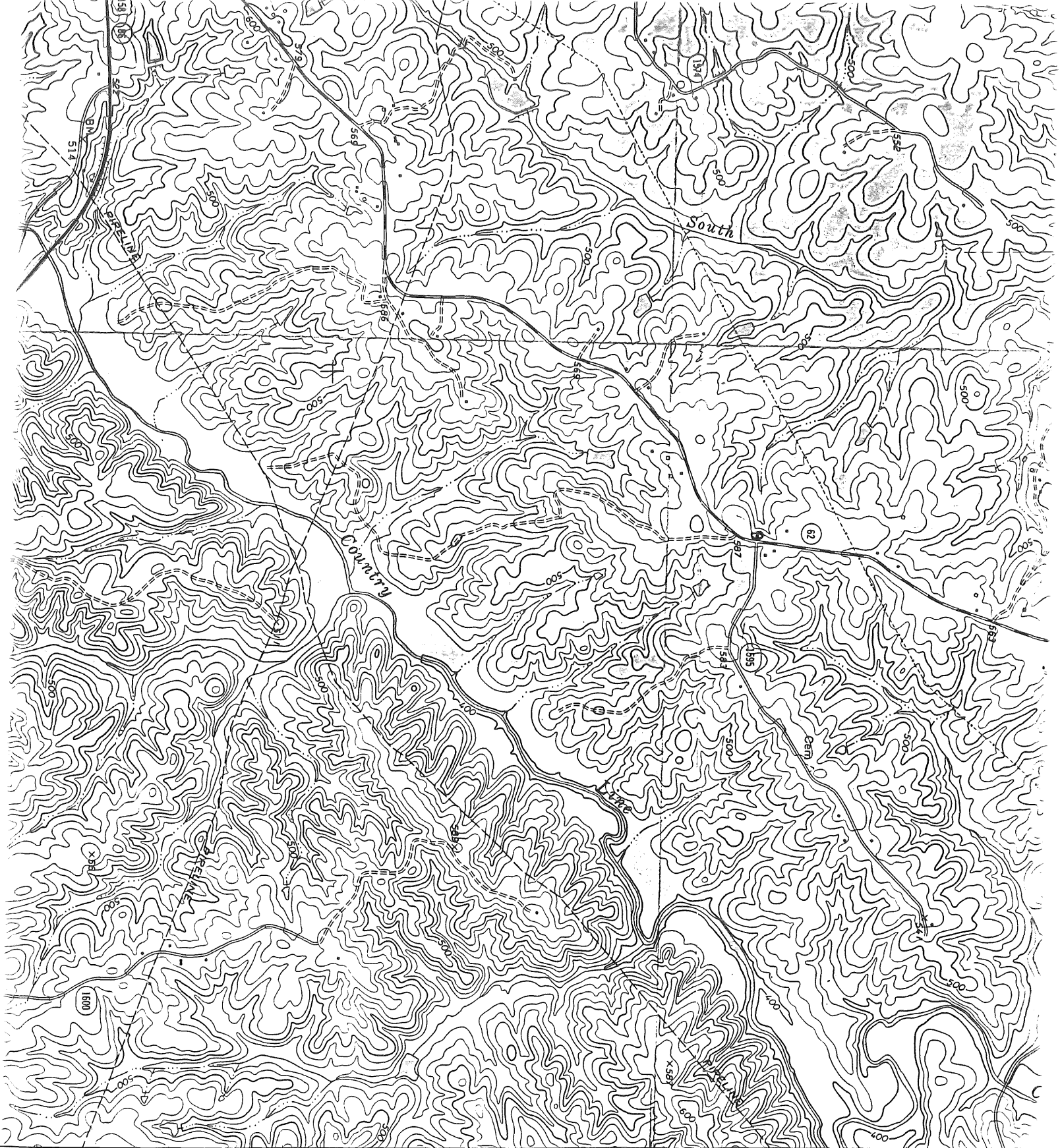
Rebecca Ann Moorefield  
 Notary Public  
 My Commission Expires: 10-11-1974

North Carolina, Caswell County.  
 The foregoing (or annexed) certificate of Rebecca Ann Moorefield  
 Notary Public of Caswell Co. N.C. and  
 Notary Public of \_\_\_\_\_ is certified to be correct.

This the 29 day of Jan, 1970  
John Johnston Register of Deeds  
 North Carolina, Caswell County  
 My Commission Expires: 10-11-1974

MAP BK. 8 PAGE 192

JOHN JOHNSTON HOUSE  
 1325 N.C. 62 N.  
 CASWELL COUNTY, N.C.



4030 4031 25' 4032 4033 4034

(LEASBURG)  
5156 1 NW

JOHN JOHNSTON HOUSE  
 YANCEYVILLE VICINITY  
 YANCEYVILLE Co., N.C.  
 ZONE 17  
 N 4033440  
 E 653910

