

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

OMB 1024-0018

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Aspen Hall

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER North side of US 64, West of Pittsboro

CITY, TOWN

Pittsboro

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Fourth

STATE

North Carolina

CODE

037

COUNTY

Chatham

CODE

037

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Mr, Floyd M, and Mrs. Mary B. Ellis

STREET & NUMBER Route 3, Box 44

CITY, TOWN

Pittsboro

VICINITY OF

STATE

North Carolina 27312

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Chatham County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Pittsboro

STATE

North Carolina 27312

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE None

Determined eligible: No

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

N/A

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input 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

Sited at the end of a short circular drive behind a stand of old boxwoods, the elegantly detailed Greek Revival facade of Aspen Hall exemplifies the success of a family, in the plantation economy of antebellum North Carolina. This success is even more clearly perceived by an examination of the house.

The tall wood frame, single pile, two-story, weatherboarded gable roofed house with its deep box cornice on modillions, exterior end chimneys, careful harmony of window and door placement and elaborate portico mask a late Georgian single pile, two-story gable roofed house. This building was attached directly to the center of the rear elevation of Aspen Hall and its combination with the later addition, as well as the complexity of interior details in both sections of the house, are evidence of the power of the Alston family's increasing wealth, changing tastes and the vernacular adaptation of high style to Chatham County.

The first house faced east and was three bays wide with a central entry. In its present condition it is not possible to determine its original plan, although it is certain that it had one, if not two exterior end chimneys.¹ When it was attached to the newer house the chimneys were removed and a new one was centrally located on the west wall opposite the entry door. It may have been at this time also that this wing was partitioned as it is today. At the north end of each room a partition was located, adding a smaller room on each floor. An enclosed stair located in the small room on the first floor gives access to the second floor. At present this wing serves as the dining room with master bedroom above. The smaller downstairs room is the kitchen and the upstairs room is storage and a bath.

The major remaining architectural details of this earlier wing are the plain recessed panel wainscot and flat molded chair rail in the dining room and a simple Georgian fireplace surround supporting a triple recessed panel arrangement.² Similar details occur in the upstairs bedroom. The window and door frames appear to have been replaced.

The new wing of Aspen Hall is made up of a curious combination of features which suggest a date ca. 1830-40 because there are both Federal and Greek Revival elements in the building.

The basic feeling of the new wing is height--a characteristic intensified by the nine-over-nine sashes, triple molded window jambs, thin corner posts, and exterior end, Flemish bond, single-shoulder chimneys with free standing stacks. The placement of windows--two to either side of the entry bay--also diminishes the importance of the horizontal character of the wall surfaces. This is countered by the somewhat shallow sloping gable roof and the deep molded box cornice which rests on small prominent modillions which read like a dentil course.

These Greek Revival characteristics are intensified by the plain entablature of the flat roofed portico, once supported by plain fluted Doric columns backed by fluted pilasters on either side of the entry door.³ The first floor door is framed by sidelights and pilasters on bases which rise to molded corner blocks with rosettes and a fairly intricate architrave. Above these elements is a fanlight set in an elaborate

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arch consisting of a plain concave molding, and a bead and reel on either side of a large egg and dart. At the center of this somewhat flattened arch is an elegant keystone. The fan has very thin members joined by delicate swags, somewhat Federal in feeling.

The complex formal sources for this wing are further suggested by the interior. The center hall is very broad. Doors immediately left and right enter the parlor and the library respectively and an arched opening with double doors at the back of the hall enters the earlier wing, now the dining room. But the attention in the hall is focused on the stairway. On the east wall the first run is enclosed in recessed, almost Georgian paneling. It rises to a landing which crosses the opening into the dining room and then rises, with open string to the hall above. The ends of the risers are decorated with a flattened scroll. The face of the great beam which supports the landing is treated as a Doric frieze--heavy rosettes on the metopes alternate with triglyphs whose guttae have become large bell-like or tassel-like forms. The balusters and newels are simple and turned as is the handrail. The effect is complex and delightful.

This woodwork and that throughout the new wing are associated in familiar tradition with the work of Martin Hanks, who is responsible for other work in the Pittsboro area. This should be further studied.

The same mixing of sources occurs in the parlor and library. Both rooms are almost square. Centered on the outside wall is the fireplace. The proportions of the rooms seem tall, with the two windows of the front and those either side of the fireplace (door in the library). A recessed panel wainscot is topped by a triple molded chair rail which provides the base for the window sills and carved and molded jambs. Circular molded corner blocks decorate the tops of doors and windows in these rooms. The plaster walls end at a simple, cove-like cornice. All these details, like the double recessed panel interior doors are Greek Revival in feeling.

The rooms also have identical, elaborate fireplace surrounds which consist of a tripartite entablature on attached Ionic columns on bases. The entablature combines reeding, a pulvinated architrave and a curious curving frieze behind a decorated central panel. The shelf is broad and breaks in and out over the columns and panel. This fireplace type is much more Federal in its origins, or the fireplaces could be very much later.

The library retains a very rich, dark simulated woodgraining on the wainscot, fireplace surround and other wood details.

The upstairs rooms have simplified but similar moldings and mantels.

Additions to the original fabric consist of careful compartmentalizing to gain bathrooms. A new wing to the east for guest space and storage is sympathetic and low in scale.

The most notable outbuildings are stables to the west and what are believed to be remnants of slave quarters to the north of the site. Immediately to the west of the house is an early twentieth century "log" house which was Judge Walter Siler's law library and office. It is clearly meant to be "early twentieth century rustic" rather than suggesting

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it is contemporary with Aspen Hall.

Aspen Hall is an elegant and interesting house. The complex combination of buildings, their forms and details are evidence of the increasing wealth and/or prominence as well as taste of the Alstons. The echoes of Georgian in the earlier house and the combination of Federal and Greek Revival elements in the new wing reflect not only the taste of the Alstons but changing taste and knowledge in North Carolina.

FOOTNOTES

¹The present owner says that a chimney base, comparable to the one that can be seen on the north end of the earlier section, exists under the newer addition to the Hall.

²The overmantel on this fireplace looks like a simple three panel arrangement that has been cut down to fit; i.e., the center panel is a whole rectangle, the panel on either side of that center panel lacks its far stile and the proportions are "off."

³According to the owner, original columns, or those believed to be original to the portico, have been found on the site. It is the intention of the owner to replace the present square posts with columns like those found on the site. Until they are put in situ or carefully measured and compared with the proportions of the portico, it will be difficult to know if they are original.

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/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

Unknown

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Aspen Hall was built in rural Chatham County by "Chatham Jack" Alston in the late 1790s. Alston, a Halifax County native, was one of antebellum Chatham County's most important planters. In the relatively modest farming context of Chatham County he established a plantation that rivaled those of his eastern cousins in size and scope. He served as a member of the General Assembly and was an important social and religious leader in the area. Aspen Hall remained in the hands of his descendants until recently. These descendants included a number of important planters and political figures who maintained the importance of the Alston family name in Chatham County well into the twentieth century.

Aspen Hall's physical development visibly manifests the changing prosperity, tastes and importance of the Alston family in the agricultural economy of Chatham County. The careful combination of the earlier Georgian house with the elegant, but curious detailing of the Greek Revival addition demonstrates both the aspirations and limitations of building in antebellum North Carolina.

Criteria Assessment:

- A. Associated with the antebellum development of the plantation economy in the eastern portion of Piedmont North Carolina.
- B. Associated with the lives of the Alstons, a prominent Chatham County and North Carolina family whose presence made a significant contribution to the political, economic, and social development of the area.
- C. Aspen Hall embodies distinctive characteristics of regional Georgian, Federal and Greek Revival domestic building whose combination have produced an unusually distinctive antebellum house in a county with few such comparable examples.
- D. Is likely to yield information about agricultural practices and plantation life in Piedmont North Carolina during the nineteenth century.

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Aspen Hall, located in rural Chatham County between Pittsboro and Siler City, is one of several Chatham County houses associated with the prominent Alston family. For many years it was the seat of Joseph John "Chatham Jack" Alston's large plantation, and it remained in the hands of his descendants until recently.¹

Alston was born in Halifax County in 1767, the ninth and last child of Joseph John Alston, Sr. (1702-1780). The elder Alston was one of the state's largest land owners. In the early 1770s, about the time Chatham County was formed from Orange County, he made dozens of land purchases in Chatham. At his death Alston left his descendants an estimated 100,000 acres scattered over a number of counties.² "Chatham Jack" inherited land primarily in Chatham. As late as 1790, however, he lived in Halifax County, where the 1790 census lists him as the owner of 11 slaves. In the early 1790s he moved to Chatham County with his wife Martha Kearney Alston, whom he married in 1791. Until his death in 1841 he was one of the county's most distinguished personages.³

Alston evidently built Aspen Hall shortly after his arrival in the county, perhaps connecting it to an older house. Alston was one of Chatham County's largest land owners. In an area dominated by small farms Alston owned a plantation that in size and scope rivaled the larger of those more commonly located in the eastern part of the state. His plantation was one of a number of substantial Alston plantations throughout the state. Half-brother Philip Alston lived on the Deep River in the "House in the Horseshoe," site of a Revolutionary skirmish between Whigs and Tories,⁴ while brother Henry lived on 4,000 acres in Warren County.⁵ Many of Alston's brothers, half-brothers, cousins, and nephews were important men in the state, serving in Congress, the General Assembly, and the Confederate Army.

It is not certain how much land Alston actually owned. He acquired the nickname "40-mile Jack" and reportedly owned as much as 40,000 acres at one time. This may be an exaggeration as an 1815 tax list credits him with the ownership of slightly more than 2,000 acres, valued at \$6,000. However, the 1830 census credits Alston with the ownership of 163 slaves, which implies much larger land holdings than 2,000 acres. Alston was the largest slave holder in the county in that year. In 1840 he owned 104 slaves, making him the second largest slave holder in the county. Alston served two terms, 1802 and 1803, in the General Assembly and was one of the founders of the Mt. Vernon Methodist Church, to which he donated four acres in 1832.⁶

Alston and his wife Martha had eleven children in a period from 1792 until 1814. Gideon Alston, their eighth child and fourth son, inherited the Aspen Hall section of his father's estate upon the latter's death in 1841. Shortly before "Chatham Jack's" death the house was expanded, with some of the work probably done by Martin Hanks. Gideon Alston was born in 1806. He married Evelyn Alston of Warren County, daughter of Philip Guston Alston and Mary Harris Alston. They had four children.⁷ The 1850 census credits Gideon Alston with the ownership of 1,865 acres valued at \$8,265. Five hundred of these acres were improved. Gideon owned a large amount of livestock including 200 swine. His livestock was valued at \$1,585. His farm produced 2,250 bushels of corn, 300 bushels of wheat, 200 bushels of oats, 200 pounds of tobacco, 45 bales of cotton, 12 tons of hay, and 300 pounds of butter. Alston owned 67 slaves.⁸ Although somewhat

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diminished from the size of his father's plantation, Gideon Alston's holdings were still very impressive for antebellum Chatham County.

Gideon Alston died in 1856 leaving his estate to his wife Evelyn. Junius A. Alston, the eldest child of Gideon and Evelyn Alston, inherited the tract from his mother, although with a considerably reduced amount of land.⁹ Chatham County, like the rest of the state, suffered an economic decline immediately after the Civil War, as evidenced by the fact that in 1870 Junius Alston's 800 acres were valued at only \$1,500.¹⁰ By 1880, however, he had increased his holdings to 1,500 acres, which were valued at \$10,500.¹¹ Alston served one term, 1885, in the North Carolina General Assembly, served on the Chatham County Board of Education in 1888 and 1889, and was one of the founders of the Pittsboro Rail Road Company, which was incorporated in 1885.¹²

Junius Alston had eight children, three by his first wife Fannie Hamlin, and five by his second wife Ida Lloyd. Lacy Alston, the seventh of Junius Alston's children, obtained Aspen Hall upon his father's death in 1900.¹³ He married Carrie Speight Edwards, and continued to farm the land until his death in 1958.¹⁴ In the 1920s Walter Siler married Lydia Alston, sister of Lacy Alston. They lived at Aspen Hall for some years, and Siler, later to become one of North Carolina's most prominent judges, built a log cabin which served as his library and study. The building "contained one of the finest private libraries in the state." In the 1940s the books were moved out of the building into Judge Siler's home in Siler City, but the cabin still stands.¹⁵

Aspen Hall has changed hands a number of times in recent years. The present owners are Floyd and Mary Ellis, who have owned the property since 1977.

The structure, of course, is closely related to the surrounding environment. Archaeological remains, such as trash pits, wells, and structural remains, which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the structure. Information concerning use patterns, social standing and mobility, as well as structural details are often only evident in the archaeological record. Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the structure. At this time no investigation has been done to discover these remains, but it is probable that they exist, and this should be considered in any development of the property.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ Alston also built the DeGraffenried House in the county. It is on the National Register of Historic Places, and was lived in for many years by Alston's son Joseph John Alston, III.

² Joseph A. Groves, The Alstons and Alstons of North and South Carolina (Atlanta: Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1901), 75-78, hereinafter cited as Groves, The Alstons. Joseph John Alston, Sr. was a Justice of the Peace in 1732, served on a committee on Grievances in 1754, and served in the General Assembly from 1744 until 1746.

³ First Census of the United States, 1790, Chatham County, North Carolina; Groves, The Alstons, 75, 126.

⁴ Wade Hampton Hadley, Doris Goerch Horton, and Nell Craig Strowd, Chatham County 1771-1971 (Durham: Moore Publishing Company, Second Edition, 1976), 411, hereinafter cited as Hampton, Horton, and Strowd, Chatham County. Groves, The Alston, 99. On July 29, 1781 Alston and a group of 25 Whigs were captured by a Tory band led by David Fanning. Fanning spared the house and paroled the prisoners.

⁵ Groves, The Alstons, 117.

⁶ William Perry Johnson (ed.), 1815 Tax List of Chatham County (N.p., n.p., 1975), 27, 51; Fifth Census of the United States, 1830, Chatham County, North Carolina; Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Chatham County, North Carolina; The Chatham Record, September 20, 1962; Raleigh Register, May 14, 1841; Hadley, Horton, and Strowd, Chatham County, 176, 249, 410, 416, 436.

⁷ Groves, The Alstons, 126, 131; Chatham County Will Book C, p. 120.

⁸ Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Chatham County, North Carolina, Agricultural Schedule, Population Schedule, Slave Schedule.

⁹ Chatham County Will Book C, p. 408; Groves, The Alstons, 131.

¹⁰ Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Chatham County, North Carolina, Agricultural Schedule.

¹¹ Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Chatham County, North Carolina, Agricultural Schedule.

¹² Hadley, Horton, and Strowd, Chatham County, 163, 438, 443.

¹³ Groves, The Alston, 131; Chatham County Will Book F, p. 156.

¹⁴ The Chatham Record, September 20, 1962.

¹⁵ The Chatham News, November 27, 1975.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 26 acres

UTM REFERENCES

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	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1, 7	6, 5, 6, 3, 8, 0	3, 9, 5, 5, 5, 3, 0	D	1, 7	6, 5, 6, 3, 2, 0	3, 9, 5, 5, 4, 5, 0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

D 1 7 6 5 5 9 4 0 3 9 9 5 5 0 0

See plat map outlined in red, Chatham County Plat Book 15, page 73.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	N/A	CODE	COUNTY	N/A	CODE
STATE		CODE	COUNTY		CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Dr. Charlotte V. Brown, Architectural Historian
Jim Sumner, Researcher

ORGANIZATION Survey and Planning Branch DATE April 9, 1981
Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section

STREET & NUMBER North Carolina Division of Archives and History TELEPHONE (919) 733-6545
109 East Jones Street

CITY OR TOWN Raleigh STATE North Carolina 27611

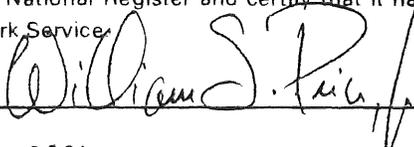
12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE



TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE April 20, 1982

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

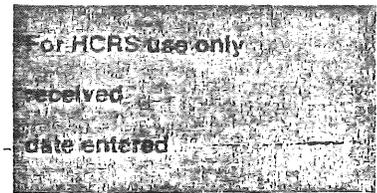
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

United States Department of the Interior
 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Item number 9

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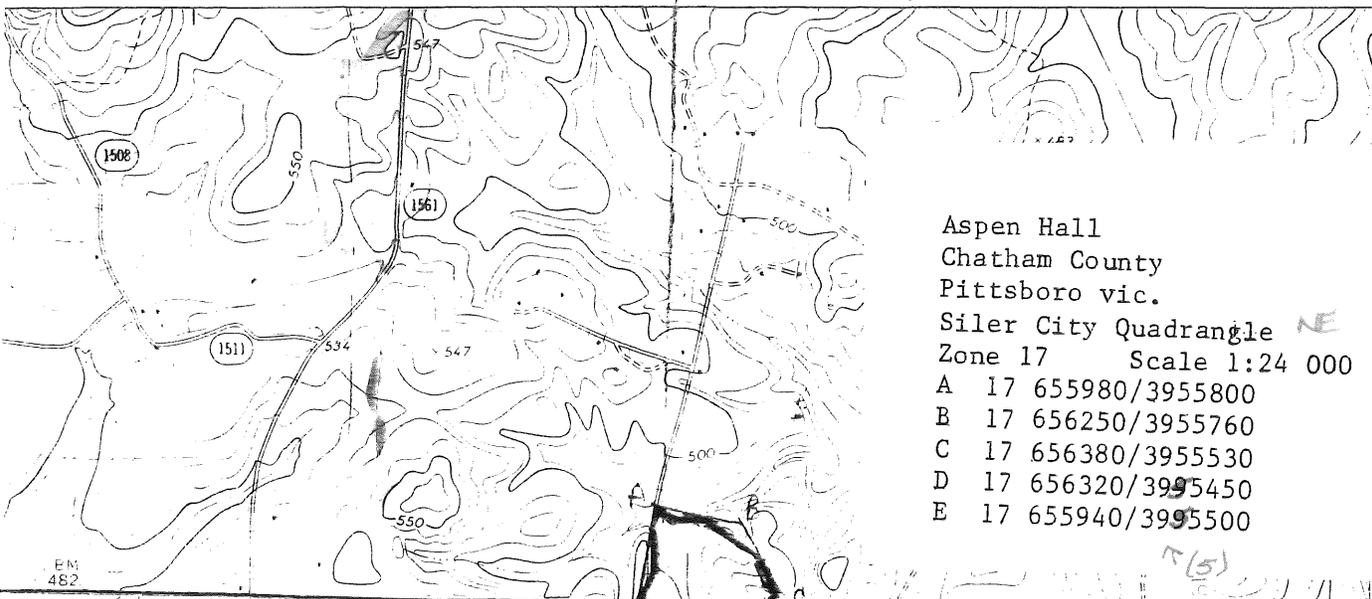
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 North Carolina; Fifth Census of the United States, 1830, Chatham County, North
 Carolina; Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Chatham County, North Carolina;
 Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Chatham County, North Carolina, Agri-
 cultural Schedule, Population Schedule, Slave Schedule; Ninth Census of the United
 States, 1870, Chatham County, North Carolina, Agricultural Schedule, Population
 Schedule; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Chatham County, North Carolina,
 Agricultural Schedule, Population Schedule. Microfilm copies. Raleigh: Division
 of Archives and History.

SILER CITY NE QUADRANGLE
 NORTH CAROLINA-CHATHAM CO.
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

51551 SW
 (BYNUM)

654 17'30" 655 656 1 920 000 FEET 657 658 79° 15' 35' 45"



Aspen Hall
 Chatham County
 Pittsboro vic.
 Siler City Quadrangle NE
 Zone 17 Scale 1:24 000
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 B 17 656250/3955760
 C 17 656380/3955530
 D 17 656320/3955450
 E 17 655940/3955500

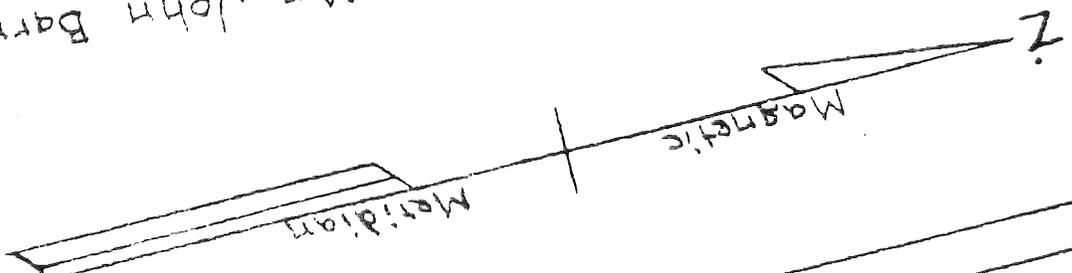
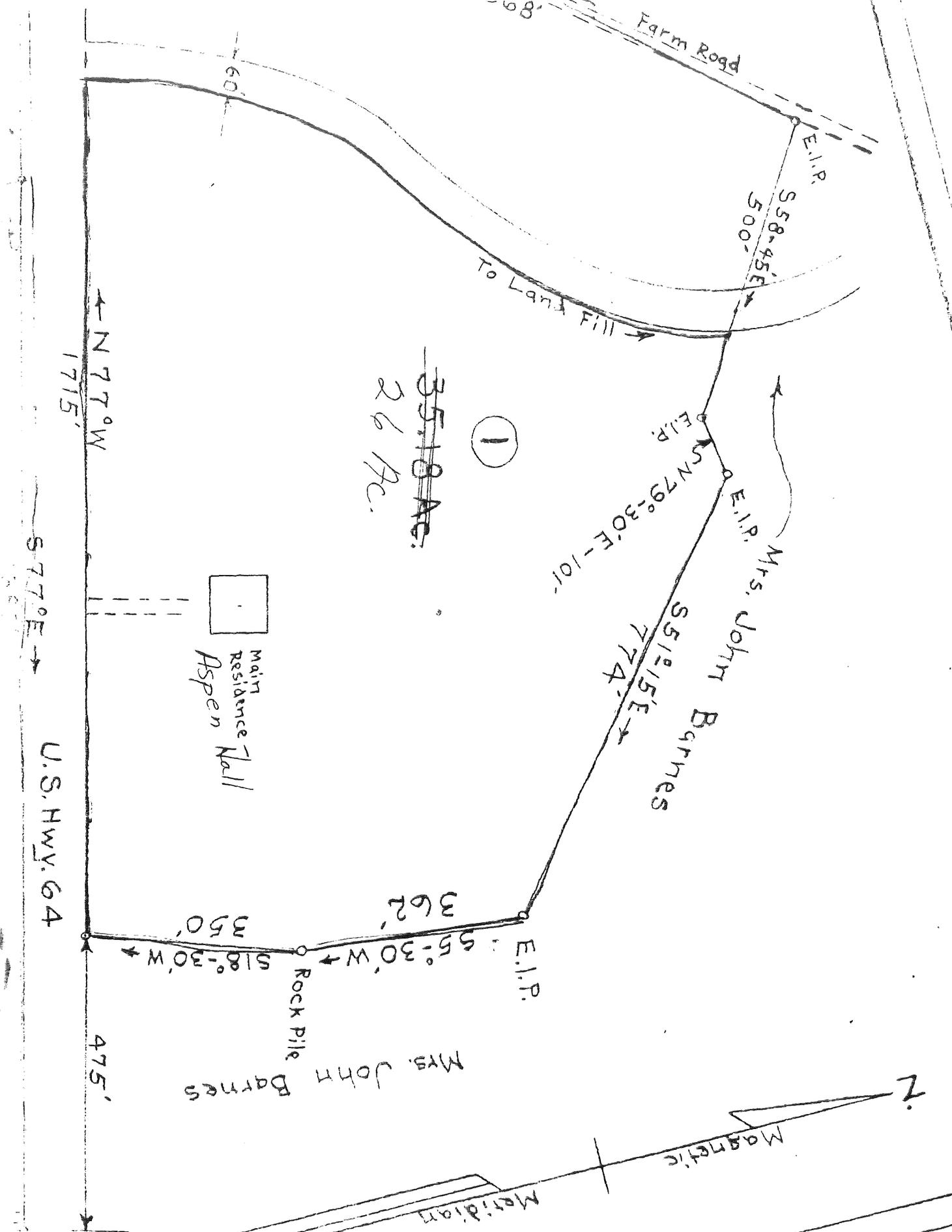


957
 956
 720 000
 FEET
 3954
 3953
 42' 30"
 3952

PITTSBORO 4.3 MI.
 PALEIGH 3.6 MI.

EM
 482

(5)



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