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 of eligibility for individuals
for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each it
the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter
N/A for the applicable. For locations, sites, buildings, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets
(Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property
historic name Dickson, Robert, Farm
other names/site number

2. Location
street & number E. side SR 1917, .2 mi. north of intersection SR 1915
city, town Rose Hill Township
state North Carolina code 037 NC county Duplin code 061
zip code 28453

3. Classification
Ownership of Property Category of Property Number of Resources within Property
[X] private building(s) Contributing Noncontributing
[X] public-local district 3 5 buildings
[X] public-State site 1 2 sites
[X] public-Federal
structure 1 1 structures
object 4 8 objects

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A Number of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification
As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this
[X] nomination [X] 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 [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. [X] See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official
State Historic Preservation Officer Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. [X] See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification
I, hereby, certify that this property is:
[X] entered in the National Register. [ ] See continuation sheet.
[X] determined eligible for the National
Register. [ ] See continuation sheet.
[X] determined not eligible for the
National Register.
[X] removed from the National Register.
[X] other, (explain:) ________________

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
Several factors have contributed to the preservation of the Dickson House. These include unbroken Dickson family ownership, ongoing maintenance of the roof and foundation, and minimal physical changes since the c. 1850 remodelling. Probably the most important factor, however, is that the original carpenter/builder and the one who later remodelled the house (both unknown) used quality materials and built with great care and attention to detail. The house appears extremely sturdy and solid, with none of the bows or sags often found in buildings this old. The substantial main timbers are oak and all are in excellent condition. The wood which sheathes the exterior and interior is a very fine grain unpainted pine. The interior sheathing displays notably fine hand planing, and the 3" x 6" ceiling joists are hand beaded. When the c. 1850 addition was built, the carpenter used sympathetic construction techniques, as well as similar trim, exterior siding and interior sheathing.

The house was built, and then expanded, during a transitional period in construction technology; this period spanned the use of traditional hand-crafted building elements and those created by machine. This mixture of building traditions is particularly apparent in the attic and the porch. An examination of the attic framing reveals that when the addition was built the roof was raised slightly to its present 12/2 pitch to provide ample headroom in the pine board-sheathed attic room which extends the entire length of the house. The replacement 2" x 5" attic roof rafters were cut with a circular saw while the original rafters were pit sawn. The Dickson House is dominated by a full-width, deep and shady engaged shed-roof porch carried by substantial square Greek Revival style posts with applied molded capitals. The original tapered, chamfered porch posts (north end) tenoned into an 8" x 8" hewn lintel, survive intact and are encased by the boards which form the present posts. A few of the mortised porch rails with slightly rounded tops survive (date unknown, perhaps original c. 1815). The porch ceiling joists were hand hewn, pit sawn and nailed with machine made nails. The sash sawn and adzed porch floor boards appear to be original. The floor boards rest on the original 8" x 8" hewn beams. On the newer section of the porch (south end), the sills are hand hewn, but the joists show circular saw marks. The older section of the porch is ceiled with wide plain planks; on the newer section, the ceiling is board and batten. The plain weatherboards on the main elevation, protected by the porch, are in excellent condition and may be original.

Windows in the house include nine-over-six sash on the first story, with six-over-six sash lighting the attic and the kitchen building. Windows are set in plain post-and-lintel frames attached with machine made nails. A few old glass panes survive, but most of the sash is in fair to poor condition.

On the interior, the older (north) section of the house originally contained one large room with two smaller rooms extending along the rear (see floor plan sketch). The large room was partitioned with a one-board thick wall at an undetermined early date. The center rear room originally contained a large double-leaf vertical plank door. A recessed interior porch could be formed by opening these doors. During the
1960s the doors were removed and a six-over-six window installed. These doors, which hung on strap hinges with wrought iron pintels, survive in good condition and are stored in the house. The interior walls of the house are sheathed with wide pine boards applied vertically, except in the main room and the rear north room where horizontal boards form simple wainscot. The interior floor boards are in very good condition and appear to be original. The floor boards were power sash sawn and then adzed to make a good fit. The second story floor boards which form the nine-foot high ceiling were hand planed. Open stringer stairs were formerly located along the south side of the partition wall; these stairs were removed when the 1850 section of the house was built and then reused in the corn crib. Well-crafted new stairs with closed stringer and winder of circular sawn wood were constructed in the northwest corner of the main room of the two-room addition. In the rear room of the addition a kitchen and bath were fabricated c. 1920. The mantelpieces in both the original section and the addition are quite simple. The older (north) mantel is composed of simple flat pilasters, a wide flat board frieze and a shallow shelf; the other mantel is the same, except that the shelf is made of corbelled planks.

The detached kitchen was originally a one-room square timber-framed structure with gable roof, a door on the south side, a six-over-six window opposite, and a large stone chimney at the east end. At an undetermined date this chimney was torn down (base still visible under the building) and the kitchen was extended to its present rectangular form by the addition of another room at the east; the door in the original portion was replaced by a six-over-six sash window and a new door was placed on the south elevation of the kitchen addition. The original portion of the kitchen appears to pre-date the c. 1850 wing of the Dickson House.

A few farm outbuildings and structures survive in various states of repair (see site plan). The most significant of these is an intact c. 1850 corn crib (contributing building); this frame building, sheathed with wide flat planks, with a projecting gable roof is located about 90' southwest of the house. Non-contributing outbuildings located just west of the house include a small c. 1920 open garage, a derelict open shed, and a c. 1920 cement well house; on the south side is a derelict cinder block shed; at the east, about 50' from the northeast corner of the house, are the ruins of a small round log building, and a relatively intact vertical plank gable-roof barn probably built about 1920. A small, frame twentieth century tenant house and a family cemetery (both non-contributing) are located in the northwest corner of the property, at some distance from the Dickson House.

The resources are categorized and counted as follows:

Three contributing buildings include the Robert Dickson House, the kitchen building and the corn crib.

Five non-contributing buildings include the garage, open shed, cinder block shed, c. 1920 barn, and tenant house.
One contributing site, the 157-acre property. This land, consisting of cultivated fields and forest, has always been historically associated with the Robert Dickson House.

Two non-contributing sites include the ruins of a log building and the Dickson family cemetery.

One non-contributing structure, c. 1920 cement-covered well house.
Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

- [ ] nationally
- [ ] statewide
- [X] locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: [ ] A [ ] B [ ] C [ ] D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): [ ] A [ ] B [ ] C [ ] D [ ] E [ ] F [ ] G [ ] N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions): Architecture

Period of Significance: c.1815 - c.1850

Significant Dates:
- c.1815 - 1818
- c.1820 - 1830
- c.1850

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Significant Person: N/A

Architect/Builder: Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Robert Dickson House, constructed c. 1815-1818 and enlarged c. 1850, is architecturally significant as one of Duplin County's oldest and least altered examples of a vernacular North Carolina "coastal cottage" style dwelling. This style, characterized by an open foundation, a tall gable roof, and a deep, full-width engaged porch is believed to be derived from seventeenth and eighteenth century West Indian models and is particularly well-suited to the hot and humid climate of the North Carolina coastal plain. The distinctive Dickson House porch is carried by square Greek Revival style posts formed of wide boards which encase the original chamfered, tapered posts. The Dickson House is also significant as a good example of a dwelling constructed and then skillfully enlarged by unknown master carpenters who worked during a transitional period in building technology: the house exhibits both early traditional hand-crafted building elements such as hewn timbers and notably fine hand planing and beading, as well as examples of later mechanically powered circular sawn framing members and machine-made nails. The house is associated with Robert Dickson, grandson of Colonel John Dickson who was an early Duplin settler and patriarch of a large and distinguished family long prominent in the county's military, political, literary and scholastic history. The Robert Dickson House is the only surviving nineteenth century residence associated with the Dickson family. The house continues in Dickson family ownership to the present and is located on a 157-acre tract associated with the family from the mid-eighteenth century.

DISCUSSION OF HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXTS

Geographical context:

Duplin County, formed in 1749 from New Hanover County, is located in southeastern North Carolina on the coastal plain. The first settlements at Sarecta, Goshen and
Golden Grove (near present-day Kenansville, the Duplin County seat) were established by the Scotch-Irish (primarily Presbyterians) who emigrated here to settle on a 60,000-acre grant made in 1735 to London merchant and land agent Henry McColloch. About that time other settlers moved into the rich lands found along the great Goshen Swamp located in the northern part of the county, and along the Northeast Cape Fear River which roughly bisects the county from north to south. The population was overwhelmingly composed of farmers. The county's primary industries were agriculture and forest-related industries such as tar, turpentine and lumber production. During antebellum days, Kenansville was known for its fine schools. One of the earliest and most prominent of these was the Grove Academy established in 1785 by William Dickson (Robert Dickson's great-uncle) and others. Grove Academy continued in operation until 1907 and has an impressive list of graduates who were important in North Carolina's judicial, business and educational history.

The Dickson Family in Duplin County

The Dickson family was established in Duplin County by Colonel John Dickson (1704-1774) who emigrated from Ireland via Pennsylvania to what was then New Hanover County about 1740-1745. John Dickson was a surveyor for Henry McColloch, a large land owner, merchant, militia officer, and Clerk of the Duplin County Court and County Registrar for almost twenty years. Several of Dickson's eight children had long, distinguished military and political careers and were important in early Duplin County history. Among these are William Dickson who, in addition to co-founding Grove Academy, wrote the first history of Duplin County in 1810-1811, served as Clerk of Court for forty-four years, and was a delegate to four Provincial congresses, but is best remembered as the author of "The Dickson Letters." This series of five letters written between 1784 and 1790 (compiled and published in 1901) contain much information about the Dickson family as well as a particularly vivid account of Duplin County during the Revolutionary War. John Dickson's other sons, Robert, Joseph and James (Robert Dickson's father) also held various important civic posts in early Duplin County including Justice of the Peace, Registrar of Deeds, and members of the House of Commons; another son, Alexander, accumulated great wealth and created the "Dickson Charity Fund" (still in existence) which provides money for the education of poor children in the county.

A considerable amount of historical documentation exists concerning Colonel John Dickson and his sons. In the substantial files compiled by various family descendants and genealogists, are a number of excerpted deed references and records of land transactions, dating from 1747 to the mid-1850s, which indicate that the Dicksons owned extensive tracts of crop and swamp land extending the length of central Duplin County. They also owned a large number of slaves who worked their plantations.
John Dickson's plantation seat was located on over 700 acres in south central Duplin County on the west side of the Northeast Branch of the Cape Fear River, on Elder Branch of Maxwell Creek. In 1766 he sold 448 acres of this land to his son Robert, and in 1772 he gave 274 acres (subdivided from Robert's tract) to his favorite and youngest son, James. Two years later James inherited the remainder of his father's estate including "my land and plantation where I now live together with all the lands, house, buildings and improvements." This legacy is confirmed in the first "Dickson Letter" written in 1784 by James' older brother, William, to an Irish cousin. The letter details a number of raids by Tory militia against three of his brothers' nearby plantations. He wrote:

The same day another [raiding] party went to my brother James' house, and, not finding him at home, plundered his house of everything they could find in it, took off two of his slaves and all of his corn, etc., and compelled his wife and a neighborhood woman who was there, to deliver them the rings off their fingers and the buckles off their shoes. . . . James Dickson, the youngest brother inherits his father's plantation, he was very much distressed and plundered by the enemy, he has a very good plantation, some stock, has good slaves, he is a laborious industrious man, a very good hunter, he supports a good honest character, lives plentifully and well.

James Dickson (1750-1812) lived his entire life in Duplin County, in contrast to several of his older brothers who spent part of their careers in Virginia or Tennessee where the Dickson family also owned land. James Dickson married twice and had fifteen children. As a reward for his services in the Revolutionary War, he received large grants of land in Tennessee where three of his eldest sons subsequently settled. James served twenty-eight years as the Duplin County Registrar of Deeds and was a prosperous planter. Like other Duplin County planters, he probably grew cotton and produced and sold lumber and naval stores such as turpentine, tar and pitch from his stands of pine trees. His will, dated May 4, 1812, specifies that most of his property, including some Tennessee tracts, be sold with the proceeds divided among his children. The will directed his executor to sell portions of the remaining property as the necessity arose "to provide schooling and raising" for his younger children. The younger children and his wife also inherited his "household furniture, plantation tools and stock of all kinds," but the dwelling house is not specifically mentioned.

It appears that Robert Dickson (1810-1854), James Dickson's youngest son, inherited a substantial portion of his father's remaining Duplin County land and that he resided there with his wife Mary Catherine Sloan and their three children. It is not clear whether the house where he and his descendants lived, and the object of this nomination, was constructed for him (or perhaps his widowed mother?) or was perhaps his father's old house which he remodelled. No deed which would clarify the matter
survives. There is an old family tradition that the house (north end, the original portion) was moved from another site and is over 200 years old. It is possible, but not probable, that this is true. There is no surviving physical evidence which places the date of the house much before c. 1815. The apparent use of recycled lumber and hardware in the house further confuses the dating. It is thought that Robert and Mary Catherine Dickson were the first generation to live in what is now called the Robert Dickson House. (Their granddaughters, Rossie and Eugenia Dickson, remembered watching their grandmother cook in the fireplace.) Robert and Mary Catherine Dickson were married in 1845 and it seems quite likely that they built the two-bay addition at the south and remodelled the porch in the Greek Revival style about that time. Robert Dickson was probably a farmer, but little, other than his line of descendants, has been recorded about him.

After Robert Dickson's death in 1854 the property passed to his wife Mary Catherine. She willed the property to their youngest son, James David Dickson (1854-1938). James David Dickson was a farmer and, following a long-established family tradition of support for education, a member of the Cook School Committee for many years. James David Dickson and his wife Francenia Robinson Dickson (1860-1909) lived in the house with their nine children, all of whom attended the nearby Cook School. According to his obituary, James David Dickson's funeral service was conducted in the house. Both he and his wife are buried in the small family cemetery located near the north edge of the property. James David's daughters Eugenia, Rossie, and Laura (who lived to ages 87, 92 and 80 respectively) were the last generation to live in the Robert Dickson House. They are all buried in the Dickson Family Cemetery. James David Dickson's youngest son, Abner, inherited the property.

A tenant farmer cultivates the surrounding fields, but the Dickson House has been vacant since about 1971 when Eugenia Dickson died. In 1984 Abner Dickson sold the property to his daughter Linda Jean Dickson Buck. Mrs. Buck currently resides in California. She is proceeding with plans to restore her family home and will live there when the restoration is complete.

Existing Surveys of Duplin County Architecture

No county-wide architectural survey and inventory has been conducted to date in Duplin County, and existing Survey and Planning Branch (Division of Archives & History, Raleigh) files are sparse. Among the few Duplin County survey files extant, the only one recording a house similar in style and age to the Robert Dickson House concerns the Jacob Young House located about eight miles south of the Dickson House. This file contains a 1968 newspaper clipping which describes the c. 1844 one-story frame gable-roof house with full-width engaged porch as "one of the last of the 'pioneer-type' dwellings still standing in Duplin County. . .its importance lies in the fact it has been the early dwelling place of many of our forbearers and can be truly considered the ancestral home of many people in Duplin County and throughout the South."
In 1973 the county's Soil Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture compiled an abbreviated "Inventory of Historic and Natural Areas" for inclusion in a report, An Appraisal of Potential for Outdoor Recreation in Duplin County, N.C. Excluding the fifteen structures located in Kenansville (see Kenansville Historic District, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, November 1974) this inventory lists twenty-one antebellum residences found in the rural areas or small villages of Duplin. Of these residences, six are two-story houses, four are log structures and the remainder appear to be one or one-and-one-half stories. It is not possible to determine if any of these dwellings are similar to the Dickson House since there are no photos in this report and the information cited about the structures is extremely limited. It is not known whether these dwellings survive or retain their integrity.

Since April 1981 the Duplin County Historical Society has published Footnotes, "an occasional publication of the Research Committee." That year the Society began an effort to photograph the county's extant old homes and to collect available photos of the many that have been lost. The February 1985 issue of Footnotes contains a photocopy of a photograph of the Hargett Kornegay Jr. House taken in 1982 shortly after fire had seriously damaged its roof. This house was strikingly similar in appearance to the Dickson House. The houses' forms are virtually indentical, as are the full-width engaged porches carried by square Greek Revival style posts. The accompanying photo caption gives no indication of when the house was built other than to say "The Kornegays were among Duplin County's original settlers." This issue of Footnotes also contains a good background information article on William Dickson, Robert Dickson's great-uncle, whose plantation was located in the Grove settlement. The article reprints a list compiled by William Dickson of his taxable property in February 1814. The list gives an unusually complete picture of his plantation and is perhaps typical of other early nineteenth century Duplin County plantations:

The dwelling house in two apartments joined by a shed between them, one apartment 20' by 16 with shed Room at the end, the House very old--a Clay Chimney, no glazed windows. The other apartment 24 feet by 14 an old house also, with a partition in the middle with a shed room, 2 clay chimneys, one glazed window no cieling (sic) in either of the apartments __?__. One other old framed house 16 ft. by _____ chimney, no glass window nor cieling.

Two old small framed Houses to wit Milk house and lumber house. One old log house used for a meat house.

Four tolerable good log Negro houses.

Two small Barns or Cow houses 16 ft. sq.

Two or three old Corn Cribs and Negro ________ worth nothing.

One old log kitchen for cooking in, 16 ft. sq.
Lands to wit:

Manor Plantation contains about 1,200 acres of about 150 acres in swamp.
About 300 cleared and under farm, half of it worn out.
About 100 oaky land yet to be cleared.
The rest in Piney land lying back between David Wrights and Lewis Dicksons land and back to McCalebs line.
There is also about 450 acres Piney land lying to southside of Persimmon Swamp, the lightwood having been worked off it.

This list of taxable property also includes the ages, but not the names, of thirteen slaves.

Duplin County, North Carolina Vernacular Architecture and the Dickson House

The picturesque and functional full-width engaged porch which dominates the main elevation of the Dickson House is a characteristic feature of the North Carolina vernacular "coastal cottage." There are two primary variations on this North Carolina house style which developed, based on West Indian models, as an architectural response to a shared climatic problem--hot and humid weather. Both variations are one or one-and-one-half stories tall and feature shady, full-width porches; the porch on the first type is engaged beneath a double-pitched gable roof, while the other type, exemplified by the Dickson House, has a taller, single-slope gable roof. The earliest surviving example of the Dickson House type is seen on the c. 1728 Sloop Point House (NR) in neighboring Pender County.

The sizeable double-leaf plank doors originally located on the rear elevation are an interesting, but puzzling, feature of the Dickson House. The purpose of the doors is unknown, but it is possible that when they were opened (inward), a recessed sitting porch was formed. Architectural historian Ruth Little-Stokes discussed this unusual porch type, found in Duplin and neighboring Wayne counties, in her definitive monograph "The North Carolina Porch: A Climatic and Cultural Buffer".

Double and triple leaf doors which could be folded back allowed the interior hall of some antebellum homes to be converted into a recessed porch. One of the best examples of such a double-duty interior hall occurs at the mid-nineteenth century Buckner Hill House in Duplin County. . . . 'Vernon' the Kornegay house built in Wayne County in the mid-nineteenth century, has a triple-leaved front door which can be folded back to open nearly the entire width of the center hall to the exterior.
The double-leaf doors in the Dickson House are much cruder than those which illustrate Little-Stokes' article, and even though the Dickson House does not have a center hall, opening both these doors and the front door would have created good cross-ventilation. The double doors were removed in the twentieth century and replaced by a window; the doors survive virtually intact in a storage area in the house.

Except for the fact that the partition wall in the main (north) room was probably a later alteration, the original portion of the Dickson House fits neatly into the traditional hall-and-parlor type house described by Doug Swaim in his study of "North Carolina Folk Housing" contained in Carolina Dwelling: Towards Preservation of Place: In Celebration of the North Carolina Vernacular Landscape. Swaim wrote of the transplantation of English and Scotch-Irish building traditions in eighteenth and nineteenth century North Carolina vernacular architecture:

The plan is basically two rooms: the square 'hall,' entered directly from outdoors with a fireplace centered in the end wall, was where most domestic activities occurred; sleeping, formal entertaining, or both took place in the smaller 'parlor.' Usually a narrow, boxed-in stairway--of late medieval origin and spirit--ascended in a tight, steep turn from the hall to either a sleeping loft or, especially in the region settled by Scotch-Irish from Pennsylvania, a full second story. In North Carolina, hall-and-parlor houses were regularly built with shed rooms appended to the rear and a large porch either appended to or 'engaged' into the front of the structure.

Swaim notes that shed rooms, like those in the Dickson House, are a standard component of the North Carolina folk building vocabulary and he cites Duplin County as an area where "most nineteenth century dwellings were constructed with rear shed rooms harmoniously incorporated as a part of the original plans. In Duplin these narrow spaces were typically used as sleeping chambers." Originally an open string staircase led to the Dickson House sleeping loft. These stairs were removed (reused in the c.1850 corn crib) and replaced by a boxed-in stairway located in the c. 1850 addition. While this stair type is stylistically late for this addition, it is certainly consistent with the vernacular building tradition found in Duplin County.
Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A
☐ 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

Specify repository:
Dickson family papers in private collection of Linda Dickson Buck, Chino, California.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property ____________________ acres

UTM References

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Verbal Boundary Description
See attached copy of deed from A.R. and Mary Edna Dickson to Linda Jean Dickson Buck, recorded May 22, 1984 in Duplin County Deed Book 928, P. 676.

Boundary Justification
The boundary includes the farmhouse, outbuildings, fields and forest that have historically been associated with The Robert Dickson House.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Patricia S. Dickinson, Consultant
date September 1, 1987
organization
street & number Rt. 2 Box 1034
city or town Hillsborough
date ___
phone ____________________
state N.C. ____________
zip code ________
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Dickson Family Papers. Various copies of obituaries, "Family Record" pages from the Dickson family Bible, family trees, etc. Also included are photocopies of information found in various land grant and deed references. These include Land Grant Book 10, Page 109, File No. 948 and Book 13, Pages 352 and 353, File No. 331; (Note: Duplin County Deeds prior to 1784 are in records at Sampson County Courthouse, Clinton, N.C.) Sampson County Deed Book 1, pp. 136, 167, 329; Book 3, p. 495. In possession of Linda Dickson Buck, Chino, California.


Duplin County Historical Society. *Footnotes*. Issue numbers 1 (April 1981) and 16 (February 1985). Rose Hill, N.C.


North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History. Various files on Duplin County properties. On deposit at the Survey and Planning Branch, Raleigh.


ROBERT DICKSON HOUSE - DUPLIN CO.
NOT TO SCALE  20 MAR 85  JV