United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 Dixon-Leftwich-Murphy House

and/or common Leftwich House

2. Location

street & number 507 Church Street

city, town Greensboro

county Guilford

3. Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Present Use</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>occupied</td>
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<tr>
<td>building(s)</td>
<td>private</td>
<td>unoccupied</td>
<td>commercial</td>
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<tr>
<td>structure</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>work in progress</td>
<td>educational</td>
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<tr>
<td>site</td>
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4. Owner of Property

name Carl and Anne Carlson

street & number 5015 Carlson Dairy Road

city, town Greensboro

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Guilford County Courthouse

street & number 201 S. Eugene Street

city, town Greensboro

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic Architecture of Greensboro

has this property been determined eligible? yes

date 1976

depository for survey records Survey and Planning Branch, NC Division of Archives and History

city, town Raleigh

state North Carolina
7. Description

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Set on a knoll with downtown Greensboro visible several blocks to the south, the Dixon-Leftwich-Murphy House is a Gothic Revival enclave in the midst of an early twentieth century neighborhood. Built sometime prior to 1879 (probably between 1870 and 1875) near what were then corporate limits of the small town, the house was divided into apartments in 1954, and is currently undergoing a renovation for business use that will return it to its late-nineteenth century configuration. Shaded by several large old trees, the two-story brick structure consists of three major sections: an original brick two-story, three-bay main block with an inset rear portion; a later two-story, one bay brick addition that adjoins the northern end of the main section; and a gabled two-story frame addition abutting the rear of the main section at the southwest corner.

Originally built in a symmetrical configuration, the main block of the house was surmounted by a complex pyramidal hipped roof with steep cross gables running end to end and front to back, in cruciform, intersecting at the termination. The brick addition is covered with a truncated hipped roof that was incorporated into the aforementioned roof by removing the north gable, and joining the new roof to the ridge of the gable running front to back. A clipped gable caps the projecting front bay of the addition. Portions of the roof are sheathed in standing seam metal; however, the majority of it is covered with a rolled metal roofing material. The roof may originally have been sheathed entirely in standing seam metal. Decorative metal cresting tops the two front gables.

Laid up in modified common bond, the main block has five courses of stretchers, and a course of alternating headers and stretchers; brickwork in the addition is laid up in common bond with a one-to-six ratio. Set on shallow projecting foundations with a water table, the house and its brick addition feature paneled corner pilaster strips. A bay window on the south gable end of the main section of the house has a paneled apron of brick below each window. Its eaves are embellished with modillions and consoles. An interior chimney rises through the main block; brickwork on the stack has been redone. The addition has a semi-engaged chimney on the north wall with a corbeled stack.

Windows across the front of the house, the north side of the brick addition, and in the south gable end are tall, narrow one-over-one sash, occurring either singly or in pairs, with paired windows predominating. First floor windows on the front of the main section have paneled aprons of wood. Paired second floor windows in the gable ends (front, south end, and addition) have a square transom above each sash; windows in the gable end of the brick addition are probably from the north gable end of the main (original) section, which was removed at the time of the addition. The windows in the rear portion of the main section, and in the rear wall of the brick addition, are two-over-two sash. Gothic, or pointed arch windows appear in all gable ends at the attic level. Three types occur: One-over-one in the main section; two-over-two in the brick addition; and a three-light window in the rear gable end. A gabled dormer sits on the rear (west) slope of the brick addition. Lintels in the main section are of wood, with sills of both stone and of wood; lintels and sills in the brick addition are of stone.

The front entrance has a tall two-leaf, four-panel door of Italianate flavor, with long, narrow round arch panels filled with glass, applied moldings and rondels. A paneled and molded reveal is set within the doorway. The wide multi-paned glass door at the rear entrance is a later replacement, and may originally have had a two-leaf corresponding to the front entrance. Exterior window and door surrounds have simple applied moldings.
A brick porch, ca. 1920, stretching across the front of the main section of the house, has been recently removed, and will be replaced with a wood porch compatible with the original design and period of the house. Immediately below the entrance is a window-opening at the basement level; a retaining wall extending perpendicular from the house is to the right or south of the window-opening. The area in front of the window-opening, to the left of the wall, is excavated so that the window is above grade. An enclosed two-tier porch of wood, set on a brick foundation, stretching across the rear of the main section has been removed, due to poor condition. The first level of the porch may have been original to the house and was covered with a shallow hipped roof. The second level of the porch was constructed prior to 1913; it appears on the Sanborn map for that year. The enclosures were made later. This porch will be replaced with a one-story shed-roofed porch enclosed on the south end and abutting the north side of the frame addition.

The interior originally followed a side-hall plan, two rooms deep, with the parlor and the dining room opening off the left side of the hall; rooms on the second floor correspond with those on the first. There is a partial basement under the hall section of the house. The brick addition has two rooms on both stories, with a corner fireplace in each room. When the addition was constructed, doorways were cut through the north wall of the main block, opening into the addition, changing the configuration of the interior to a center-hall plan.

Interior finish is robust, with heavy, fully developed Gothic Revival and Italianate moldings with mitred corners, and wide baseboards topped with applied molding, occurring consistently throughout the house. Two types of doors are employed: tall, two-leaf, eight-panel "parlor" doors, similar to the front doors, opening into the rooms on either side of the entrance hall and into the rear portion of the hall, as well as between the first floor rooms of the brick addition; and four-panel doors with applied molding are employed throughout the rest of the house. In the parlor all windows, including those in the bay, are set on a paneled apron with applied molding. The opening into the bay has a paneled and molded reveal; similar reveals are set in the doorways into the brick addition. The entrance hall, parlor and dining room have the most decorative finish, with a molded cornice extending onto the outer edge of the ceiling in these rooms; there is no cornice in the other rooms. The dining room also has a round ceiling medallion of applied molding. The original woodwork is intact throughout most of the house, except for the mantelpieces which were removed when the house was converted to apartments.

The stair in the rear hall is probably not in its original location; it was probably moved there when the brick addition was made. A long initial flight rises from to back, intersecting a shorter transverse flight at a landing just above the rear entrance. The open string is adorned with curvilinear brackets, heavy turned balusters, and a large turned and carved newel post. The railing and the newel post are of walnut.

The basement is a long narrow room, finished in plaster with baseboards and moldings similar to those used throughout the house. There are three window openings, two on the north wall, below grade, and the aforementioned opening on the east wall. The floor may originally have been of wood.

Abutting a corner between the rear of the brick addition and the north wall of the original section, a small two-story brick enclosure was added, probably at the turn-of-the-century, to house bathrooms, one on each floor. An exterior entrance
into the basement is located beneath this enclosure.

The rear frame addition, ca. 1900, may have been built as a kitchen, with a room above it; the original kitchen may have been in the room later used as a dining room, as indicated by the larger, deeper fireplace opening. Simple curved brackets adorn the eaves of this addition. It has a one-story hipped addition to the rear of it. A one-story shed addition adjoins the northern end of these additions, abutting the rear porch. All are sheathed in asbestos shingles which are being replaced with weatherboarding, with composition shingles covering the roof.

Heavily altered on the interior, the structure has been adapted as an apartment, with much replacement woodwork. Windows in the frame additions are for the most part six-over-six sash. The east wall of the two-story section now has a large multi-paned "picture" window.
8. Significance

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Specific dates 1870-1879

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Dixon-Leftwich-Murphy House, one of three important early postbellum brick structures surviving in Greensboro, was built during the decade of the 1870's, prior to 1879. Executed in the Gothic Revival idiom with Italianate details, the house is a rare North Carolina example of this style. Surviving with a few major alterations, the house is currently undergoing renovation and restoration for an adaptive reuse. Built for Martin C. Dixon (1839-1886), a prosperous merchant, to accommodate his growing family, the house was later owned by entrepreneur Col. Alexander H. Leftwich (1847-1903). His daughter Annie and her husband Thomas J. Murphy (1870-1940), a prominent attorney, businessman and civic leader in Greensboro, owned the house until the 1950's when it was converted into apartments. Thomas Murphy served as Greensboro mayor from 1905 to 1907 and from 1911 to 1917. He was also elected to the state legislature and served as city manager of High Point.

Criteria Assessment:

A. Associated with the postbellum development of the town of Greensboro and with the increasing prosperity and growth of the town during the last quarter of the nineteenth century; associated with evolving postbellum residential and social patterns in the South.

B. Associated with Martin Dixon, a prosperous merchant and nurseryman in postbellum Greensboro, and his wife; associated with Col. Alexander Leftwich, an entrepreneur from Virginia, and his family; associated with Thomas J. Murphy, a prominent figure in Greensboro during the first half of the twentieth century, and his wife Annie Leftwich Murphy. T.J. Murphy served four terms as town mayor during the early part of the century.

C. The house embodies characteristics of late nineteenth century brick construction and design, reflecting a nationally popular architectural style, the Gothic Revival, that is relatively rare in this state. The house represents a period in the development of Greensboro of which few examples of architecture and construction methods have survived.
Martin C. and Mary A. Dixon moved to Greensboro prior to 1867, possibly in 1865 or 1866. Mary Dixon was a devout Baptist, originally from Virginia.  

Martin Dixon (1839-1886) was a North Carolinian; however, his father was born in England. He (Martin) owned a mercantile store in Lawspenville in Rockingham County, dealing in dry goods, groceries and confectionaries. By 1875 Dixon had established himself as a gentleman's clothier, his business located in "the Benbow block" on Elm Street in Greensboro.

He later operated a nursery on what was known as the Donnell property north of Greensboro near the Buffalo Presbyterian Church. The Messrs. Fields and Causey of Greensboro agreed in 1879 to furnish Dixon with provisions, supplies and money to operate a nursery for the purpose of growing fruit trees. This enterprise, known as the Piedmont Nursery, was owned by his wife Mary Dixon. She purchased the 8½ acre tract from Donnell in 1880.

During 1869 and 1870 Mary Dixon purchased several adjacent two acre tracts in north Greensboro near the town limits, located on the west side of Church Street, the main stage road leading from Greensboro to Milton in Caswell County. An additional quarter-acre tract was purchased in 1873. This area, north of the Presbyterian Church, was one of three areas in Greensboro that developed during the 1870's and the 1880's with a concentration of upper socio-economic groups. Residential properties in this area ranged in size from one to ten acres. Many business and professional people built substantial dwellings along both sides of Church Street; large holdings of undeveloped or agricultural land ranging from 30 to 150 acres lay behind these properties.

The period from 1870 to 1910 was "decisive in the historical development of Greensboro" both economically and physically, according to a study by Johnathan Baylin. The population of the town in 1880 was a mere 2100 and the corporate limits encompassed only one square mile. Post-war residential patterns that evolved differed from those before the war in that development shifted from concentrations near the center of town to the outlying areas. In general, the size of properties increased during the early part of this period.

Martin and Mary Dixon built their fine brick dwelling after 1870 and before 1879 to accommodate their growing family. The exact date of construction is uncertain and the builder is unknown. The house may well be the second residence that the Dixon's built on Church Street during the decade.

Stylistically, the house has similarities to the few remaining early brick residences built in Greensboro during the same period. The main (original) section of the house may have been patterned after the revivalist designs of architect A. J. Davis and others, and incorporates elements of the Gothic Revival style, as well as some Italianate features. The brick addition also reflects these idioms.

Mary Dixon purchased the tract of land that the house stands on in July 1869 for $325. 10 In November of 1870 she effected a mortgage deed with the Greensboro Building and Loan Association for $1930. 11 Almost two years later, in October of 1872, Mary Dixon sold a tract of land that she had purchased in September 1870 for $500 to Bettie Cunningham (the wife of James C. Cunningham) for $2500. The instrument stated:

.... containing two acres this being the lot
on which said Dixon now lives ....

Another mortgage, this one with the North Carolina State Life Insurance Company for $3000, was effected in February 1875.
In December 1879 the Dixons borrowed $5400 from the Wachovia National Bank of Winston, North Carolina "for the use in and about the separate property of said Mary A. Dixon . . . ." One might surmise from these mortgages and other instruments that the Dixons may have built a house between 1870 and 1872, which they sold in 1872, built another house in 1875 or before which they made major improvements or additions to or built a new structure during or after 1879.  

The Dixons had a large family. By 1880, Martin and Mary Dixon had at least seven children ranging in age from ten months to fifteen years old that lived at home. In addition to the family, the Dixons had a cook, a young black woman, who lived with them along with her infant daughter, as well as four hired hands, two black and two white, who resided on the premises. Three of the hired hands were employed on the Dixons' farm, and one was employed at the nursery.

According to the provisions in a deed of trust effected in 1879 concerning sureties for the loan of $5400 from Wachovia Bank (December 1879), the equity of redemption in the Dixons' property mortgaged to the North Carolina Life Insurance Company was conveyed to Robert R. King, acting as trustee for his co-sureties, in March of 1881 when the Dixons were unable to pay off their debt. Robert King, et al paid $2200 on the debt to Wachovia Bank to fulfill the provisions of the deed of trust.

The Dixons continued to live in the house until 1885 or 1886 when Martin Dixon apparently died. Robert King, acting as trustee for the others, transferred the old Dixon place to the Virginia Home Insurance Company of Richmond, Virginia in December 1886. For a short time, until her death in December 1889, Mary Dixon operated a boarding house on North Elm Street in Greensboro. The nursery property was sold in January 1889.

Annie S. Leftwich formerly of Lynchburg, Virginia purchased the old Dixon place in May 1887 for $4000. Her husband Col. Alexander H. Leftwich (1847-1903) was president of Greensboro Gas Light Company, located on Forbes Street (now part of Church Street). Col. Leftwich purchased the lands, equipment and franchise of the Greensboro Gas Light Company in 1880. He transferred the deed back to the Greensboro Gas Light Company in September 1883 for $30,000. The Leftwiches still resided in Lynchburg at this time, not moving to Greensboro until 1887 or 1888.

Annie Leftwich was originally from Alabama. She and her husband had five children, four of whom were still living at home in 1900. A black woman servant also lived in the home. By this time Col. Leftwich had ventured into the leaf tobacco business. The Leftwiches may have maintained a residence in Baltimore as well as in Greensboro. Annie Leftwich died in March 1900.

Leftwich's daughter Annie married Thomas J. Murphy (1870-1940) in 1902. Murphy was reared in Sampson County. His father was Dr. W. B. Murphy, a dentist by profession, who also had large mercantile and farming interests. Thomas Murphy received his education at the Clinton Male Academy and at Davidson College. After leaving college his first employment was a civil engineer on railway construction. He was involved in the mercantile business until 1893. During 1893 Murphy entered the U.S. railway mail service, with headquarters in Washington, D.C. While there he read law at Columbia University (now George Washington University) graduating in 1899. He was admitted to the North Carolina bar in 1900 and began practicing law in Greensboro in 1901.

In 1903, A. H. Leftwich defaulted on a mortgage and the house was sold at
public auction. The Leftwich children were the last and highest bidders at $2800. T. J. Murphy served as their agent for the sale. Each of the five children, Annie Leftwich Murphy, Eli Shorter Leftwich and Clem Leftwich all of Greensboro, who lived in the house, and Retta Leftwich Young of Baltimore and Elizabeth Leftwich Robinson of Hanover, Pennsylvania each owned a one-fifth undivided interest in the house along with their spouses. The children were allowed to retain the equity in the house. Later that year Thomas Murphy was appointed legal guardian of Clem Leftwich who was then eighteen years old. Col. Leftwich died a short time later.

Murphy organized the Gate City Building and Loan Association in 1903, becoming secretary-treasurer of the association. He was reading clerk of the North Carolina Senate in 1903 and in 1905 was elected mayor of Greensboro, serving two years. In 1908 he was elected to the State Legislature from Guilford County.

From 1904 to 1911 the house was rented out. Thomas Murphy and his family lived on Summit Avenue during this time in a house that he had purchased there. During 1910 and 1911, Thomas and Annie Murphy purchased the one-fifth undivided interest in the house from the other Leftwich children. Eli S. Leftwich was living in Urbana, Virginia by this time and Elizabeth Leftwich Robinson was in South Bend, Indiana. Each received $1400. Clem Leftwich and Retta Leftwich Young resided in Baltimore. Each received $1420 for their share.

The Murphys moved back into the Church Street residence in 1911. Greensboro adopted the commission form of government that year and Thomas Murphy was elected mayor of the commission. He stayed in office three terms, retiring in 1917. In that year he accepted the position of city manager of High Point, just fifteen miles from Greensboro. The Murphys resided in High Point until 1919 or 1920, during which time the Church Street house was rented, except for 1917 when it was vacant.

Thomas Murphy continued to practice law throughout this period. From 1923 until 1927 he was owner/editor of the Patriot Publishing Company that put out the semi-weekly newspaper the Greensboro Patriot. By this time the Murphys had three children. Greensboro adopted the managerial form of government in 1921 and in 1931 T. J. Murphy was elected as a member of the council. He was the only person who had served the city as an elected officer under the three plans by which the city had been governed.

In 1923 the house was auctioned according to a deed of trust with the City of Greensboro in order to satisfy a debt with the city. The City of Greensboro was the highest bidder at $9500. The Murphys continued to live in the house. In 1936 Thomas Murphy worked as a clerk for the W.P.A.. Annie Murphy began selling real estate by 1938, and by this time Thomas Murphy's health began to fail. In May 1940 Thomas J. Murphy died.

In November 1943 Annie Murphy purchased the house back from the city for $3000. The house was conveyed to M.C. Crawford in 1952 to satisfy a deed of trust with him. Annie Murphy continued to live there until 1953 when due to failing health she moved to Schenectady, New York to live with one of her daughters. She died in 1954. The Crawfords converted the house into seven apartments. The house was maintained as an apartment building from Mrs. Murphy's death in 1954 until 1981 when Carl I. Carlson, Jr. and wife bought the house. The Carlson's are currently undertaking a sensitive renovation and restoration to convert the house for use as a business.
Footnotes---

1 First recorded transaction is a deed of trust in 1867 with James M. Wharton for $1,867 to satisfy a debt to D.W.C. Benbow, a prominent nineteenth century figure in Greensboro, of $8,887. See Guilford County Deed Books, Office of the Register of Deeds, Guilford County Courthouse, Greensboro, Deed Book 40, p. 65, herein after cited as Guilford County Deed Books; Pamphlet entitled "In Memoriam" in North Carolina Individual Biography file for Mary A. Dixon, Greensboro Public Library, eulogizing Mrs. Dixon, hereinafter cited as pamphlet, Greensboro Public Library; also Ninth Census, 1870.

2 Ninth Census, 1870 and Tenth Census, 1880. The census of 1870 lists Martin Dixon's occupation as "retired merchant;" see reference to store in Guilford County Deed Book 40, p. 65.

3 See reference to this business in two mortgage deeds conveyed in 1875, including bills of sale from several Philadelphia clothiers. Guilford County Deed Book 52, pp. 205-230.

4 See agreement, Guilford County Deed Book 58, pp. 269. Also see p. 310; Deed book 57, p. 440; see also deed to perfect title, 1888, Deed Book 77, p. 124.

5 Guilford County Deed Book 51, p. 269 (7-28-69); Deed Book 55, p. 146 (3-22-70); Deed Book 43, p. 401 (9-21-70); and Deed Book 51, p. 488 (5-9-73).


7 Ibid, pp. 30, 41.

8 C. M. Ward's Map of Greensboro, 1879, Office of the Register of Deeds, Guilford County Courthouse, Greensboro; see Guilford County Deed Book 43, p. 401; and Deed Book 46, p. 51. The second deed may refer to an earlier house. See also Deed Book 51, pp. 269, 488; Deed Book 55, p. 146 (cited in note 5).


10 Guilford County Deed Book 51, p. 269.

11 Guilford County Deed Book 40, p. 470. Mary Dixon was a member of the Greensboro Building and Loan Association, owning fifteen (15) shares of capital stock that were redeemed as a condition of the mortgage instrument. The mortgage was satisfied in 1884; D.W.C. Benbow was president of the Greensboro Building and Loan Association. See note 1.
Footnote cont.---

12 Guilford County Deed Book 43, p. 401; Deed Book 46, p. 51.

13 Guilford County Deed Book 50, p. 328.

14 Reference made to loan with Wachovia Bank in an 1881 deed. See Guilford County Deed Book 59, p. 290; see also 1879 deed of trust in Deed Book 58, p. 310.

15 Ninth Census, 1870; Tenth Census, 1880.

16 Guilford County Deed Book 58, p. 310; Deed Book 58, p. 310; Deed Book 59, p. 290.

17 Greensboro City Directory, 1884; Guilford County Deed Book 73, p. 182.

18 Greensboro City Directory, 1887; pamphlet, Greensboro Public Library; Guilford County Deed Book 77, p. 126.

19 Guilford County Deed Book 73, p. 482; Deed Book 57, p. 457, 459; and Deed Book 59, p. 329; The three transactions involving the Greensboro Gas Light Company were for $20, $10 and $1,000, respectively. A. H. Leftwich was listed as the president of Greensboro Gas Light Company in the 1884 and 1887 Greensboro City Directories.

20 Guilford County Deed Book 65, p. 373.

21 Twelfth Census, 1900; Greensboro City Directory, 1899-1900. No listing of A. H. Leftwich in the 1896-1897 City Directory; see Greensboro Daily News, 20 June 1943, sec. 2, p. 7. Mention made of the Leftwich family as residents of Greensboro and Baltimore. Annie Leftwich Murphy was listed as a resident of Baltimore at the time of her marriage to T. J. Murphy.


23 See Guilford County Deed Book 112, p. 157; also Deed Book 127, p. 544; Deed Book 154, pp. 1, 37.

24 Guilford County Estates Book 1, p. 146.
Footnotes cont.


28 T.J. Murphy is listed as an attorney in the Greensboro City Directories, 1903-1935; Greensboro Daily News, 20 June 1943; History of North Carolina, p. 339.

29 Guilford County Deed Book 692, p. 329; see deed of trust, Deed Book 596, p. 161; Greensboro City Directories, 1932-1940; Greensboro Daily News, 20 June 1943.

30 Guilford County Deed Book 1022, p. 308; Deed Book 1468, p. 476. See deed of trust, Deed Book 1391, p. 364; Greensboro City Directories, 1943-1954; obituary in the Greensboro Record, 29 November 1954; Deed Book 2544, p. 556; Deed Book 3186, p. 780.
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property: Approximately ½ acre
Quadrangle name: Greensboro
UMT References

Zone Easting Northing
A 17 609226 393250
C
E
G
B
D
F
H

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification
See continuation sheet, and city tax map, property is outlined in red.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Paul E. Fomberg (Greensboro) consultant to Mr. and Mrs. Carlson
organization: 
date: May 26, 1982
street & number: 4712 Middleton Road
telephone: (919) 674-0026

city or town: Greensboro
county: 
state: NC

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:
date: August 12, 1982

For NPS use only
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register
date

Keeper of the National Register
Attest:
Chief of Registration

Major Bibliographical Reference---


Greensboro City Directories, 1884, 1887, 1890-91, 1899-1954.


Greensboro **Record**, 29 November 1954.


High Point City Directories, 1917-1920.


Legal Boundary Description-----

Beginning at a new iron pipe in the southwest corner of intersection of Church Street (as widened) and Leftwich Street and running thence with the south margin of Leftwich Street North 65° 36' West 170.60 feet to an existing iron pipe, a corner with Estelle Baughn; thence with Baughn's line South 22° 19' West 154.32 feet to an existing iron pipe; thence South 67° 02' 30" East 11.42 feet to an existing iron pipe; thence South 69° 28' 40" East 179.32 feet to an existing iron pipe in the west margin of Church Street (as widened); thence with the west margin of said Church Street North 14° 16' 10" East 144.06 feet to the beginning, according to a survey by Jerry C. Callicutt and Associates, Inc. dated 2/17/71. The property being nominated comprises the urban lot on which the house presently stands.