United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation 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, Gray-Brownlow-Willcox House  

and/or common  LaVallee

### 2. Location

street & number  west side NC 58  1 mile south of Brinkleyville  

___ not for publication

city, town  Brinkleyville  

___ vicinity of  congressional district  Second

state  North Carolina  

code  037  county  Halifax  

code  083

### 3. Classification

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<th>Category</th>
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<td>in process</td>
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Accessible: ___ yes: restricted  

___ yes: unrestricted  

___ no

### 4. Owner of Property

name  Col. & Mrs. John Collison

street & number  Route 3 Box 228

city, town  Enfield  

___ vicinity of  

state  North Carolina  

city, town  Halifax  

state  North Carolina  

count  27823

### 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.  
Halifax County Courthouse

street & number

city, town  Halifax  

state  North Carolina

### 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title  none  

has this property been determined eligible?  ___ yes  ___ no

date  

___ federal  ___ state  ___ county  ___ local

depository for survey records  N/A

city, town  

state
Situated on a knoll at the end of a one-third mile long drive, which enters N. C. 48 one mile south of Brinkleyville, is the Gray-Brownlow-Willcox house, La Vallee, circa 1820. Federal temple-form in style with a transverse front hall, it resembles other early planters' houses of Warren and Halifax counties, especially Dalkeith, Elgin, and Oakland. This house is notable in that it is a purer, less ornate rendering of the temple-form house. The restraint of its decorative elements, the generosity of its proportions, and its fine grounds with many mid-nineteenth century plantings intact make the Gray-Brownlow Willcox house one of the most important Federal structures in the state. When Brownlow operated his female academy here, circa 1833-1851, a simple Federal-style structure, which may predate the 1820 house, was moved to its present location directly behind the main block and functioned as the school room. Landscaping and plantings in the immediate area of the house survive from the time of the academy and consist of a carefully planned and executed system of shaped raised beds. The Rev. Sidney Weller of nearby Halifax, known to have been an expert in trees and plants, was a trustee of La Vallee and may have designed the landscaping here, using hardy cedars, hollies, crape myrtles, and boxwood.

Now restored sympathetically, the house has been continuously inhabited and carefully maintained, for the longest time by descendants of Thomas Willcox, who purchased the house in 1853. Willcoxes lived in this house until the 1970s. The exterior of the house embodies stylistic features popular in the new Republic which had been adopted from the classical tradition of Greece and Rome. Symmetry, balance and spaciousness dominate. The pedimented gable and flush-sheathed pedimented portico are symmetrical, strong, and unornamented. Three bays wide, two rooms deep, and two-and-a-half stories tall, the overall shape of the house is pure, unbroken by additions. Immediately behind the main block, separated formerly by a breezeway, is a one-and-a-half story extension that was once a school building.

Strong, restrained design elements distinguish the exterior. Three-part moldings trim the windows and doors. Cornerboards are plain recessed panels, ending in a deep molded cornice with return in the rear, pediment in the front. There is consistent diminution of fenestration, from 9 over 9 sash on the first floor to 9 over 6 on the second, to 6 over 6 in the generous pediment. Until circa 1900 dormers existed on the north and south sides; due to rafter deterioration, they were removed. Ghost marks on the rafters being clear, the present owners have replaced the dormers in a manner consistent with the stylistic detail of the house.

Two double and paved shoulder Flemish bond chimneys are placed symmetrically on the rear gable wall. The free-standing stacks replace the originals which were knocked down by Hurricaine-Hazel.
The school room behind the house is a one-and-a-half story building, also with east-west gable orientation. So called the school room, from the days when it was part of Brownlow's Female Academy 1833 to 1850, Willcox family tradition states that it predates the main house and was originally located behind the well, where another outbuilding now stands. The bricks from its fireplace could be seen until the mid-1920s, but over the years they are said to have been used for other building purposes.

In plan, this temple-form house has a large transverse front hall pierced by exterior doors at the center front and either end, and interior doors to each of the two spacious heated rooms behind. In a house notable for the restraint and quality of its decoration, the hallway features an unusual and lovely feature—an elliptical arch rises from the wall above the door and crosses the hall to the interior wall; the soffit has a carved diamond pattern and "keystone." This arch is duplicated in the north room. An open stringer stair rises to the north on the front wall, cutting across the window with awkwardness uncharacteristic of this well-planned house. Simple square-section balusters support a graceful, slender, rounded handrail which extends from the simple tapered newel to a steep upward sweep at the turn. Fashioned of a single piece of wood, as are its corresponding pieces on each turn all the way to the attic, the handrail demonstrates the plentfulness of labor and construction materials; the upward sweep required that the piece from which it was carved be at least 12 inches thick, even though most of it was cut away. Below the stairs by the north door is a large built-in closet called the spice closet by Mrs. Willcox. It is said to be where the costly, hard-to-come-by food items like spices, sugar, flour were distributed to the slaves.

Two large rooms open from the transverse hall. Like the hall, they have a high paneled wainscot, heavy molded chair rail continuing as window sill and three-part window and door architraves. A door connects the two rooms. Tall Federal mantel pieces in these rooms are tripartite, the center portion of the shelf slightly bowed between the square pilaster capitals. The pilasters are recessed colonettes on bases formed by a continuation of the baseboard. The south room has excellent wood graining on both doors.

The north room is slightly smaller than its south counterpart because the areas on either side of the door are pulled forward. The area on the north side contains an original closet; that on the interior wall side is a recessed open bay with another of the graceful elliptical arches embellished by diamond-patterned soffit, as in the hall. This arch, however, is supported by well-executed reeded and gouged pilasters. The original purpose of the niche is unknown, but it is ample for the display of sculpture, painting, or furniture. A two-panel Greek Revival style door is by the fireplace, possibly indicating that the door was altered from an original window. If so, it is a very early change, probably dating from the removal of the school building to its present location in the 1830s.
The second floor plan is the same, with transverse hall and two large rooms behind it. On the second floor opposite the stairs, the south hallway is enclosed as a small room, now a bath. The two heated rooms on the second floor have moldings, doors, and trim like those downstairs but simpler Federal mantels, one with recessed panel pilasters, and one with reeded pilasters. There are closets to each side of the door in the west room. The corresponding finished attic rooms were plastered and have simple trim. It is reasonable to speculate that this attic is where the La Vallee students were housed.

The school building is separated from the main block of the house by a breezeway, now rebuilt as the kitchen and laundry. There are doors in all sides of the school room, except the west side where the large replacement chimney is. The interior has a wide board sheathed wainscot, chair rail and baseboard beneath plaster walls. Window and door architraves are simply molded and beaded with mitered corners. On the east wall near the door, a large recessed open book case with molded shelves bespeaks the building's original purpose. The bookcase extends from the chair rail almost to the ceiling. The airy room has large windows on the north and west walls, and heart pine floors remain. The plain Federal mantel in the school room has a tripartite frieze with plain molded panels; the pilasters have recessed panels. In the gable is a low room which was formerly reached by an exterior stair on the east end, behind the main house. That door and two small windows opposite on either side of the fireplace stack are still framed unchanged from the interior, but replacement weatherboard now obscures all traces of them on the exterior. The half-story is also wainscoted.

The grounds of the Brownlow-Willcox house deserve great attention because so much remains of early nineteenth century plantings, pathways, and symmetrical landscaping which further reflect the classical style of the period. Much of what remains today indicates past values, aesthetic design, and function of space outside the house. Those planting which today obscure a clear view of the facade of the house are thought by the Willcox family to pre-date Willcox ownership, therefore pre-1853. These include tall cedars, crape myrtles, a holly tree, and the oldest white ash in North Carolina.

The layout of the plantation is said by Willcox family tradition, to have been arranged in three one-acre segments surrounded by the reminder of the estate. One acre held the house, dependencies, and formal plantings. The adjacent acre to the south contained the house garden, and the acre below that was a vineyard. No trace remains of the vineyard and vegetable garden, those areas being now in pasturage, but a grape arbor built from the stock of the original vineyards is in the southeast corner of the yard.
The acre around the house retains enough of its original elements that one can infer the original arrangement, as described by Mrs. Willcox. Picture the house centered in the acre, with paths perpendicular to the main block from each side door of the transverse hall. On the north, a pedimented portico called the ”water porch” for its washing-up facilities, led to the path to the kitchen building, a 20' x 20' one-and-a-half story structure with huge chimneys and exterior stair. Crape myrtles and cedars still line that path. If one left the house by the hall door to the south, one used an identical imagined portico, followed a path which still has most of its crape myrtles intact; they have grown to such height as to create a tunnel effect. The garden gate lay at the end of this path. Thus, access from the house to its major dependency, the kitchen, was quite convenient, although the garden’s location, seemingly for the sake of symmetry, seems unfortunate for those who had to prepare food from it in the kitchen on the other side of the house.

The front yard is a showplace of early landscaping. In front of the house and cut in the center by a path to the front door is a raised semi-circular bed, which remains from an original full raised circle. This sunken path is lined with large crape myrtles, but they are said to have replaced an original planting of English boxwood. To either side of the circle, beyond the corners of the house, are two heart-shaped raised beds, today still distinct even though the edges are softened by time. Some of the cedar and myrtles which at one time accented the hearts still remain and are quite large. The Champion white ash stands in the south part of the yard. Other homes in the area, such as the Greek Revival plantation Magnolia with grounds designed by Joseph Blount Cheshire have documentary evidence of influence by Andrew Jackson Downing. No such documentation exists for the Gray-Brownlow-Willcox grounds, which are probably of an earlier date. The plantings demonstrate the affection of the owner for attractive plantings to compliment a fine house.

Outbuildings and support features other than the kitchen were scattered around the rear of the house, and did not interfere with the view of the house facade. Outbuildings included barns and stables; an ice house which was dug into the earth behind the house and kept ice through the summer; and a cotton storage shed of half-dovetailed logs which remains among other newer outbuildings southwest of the house. The original stone-lined 40' deep well is still the house water supply and stands north west of the house. The Willcox family cemetery lies in a small grove several hundred feet north east of the house. With its well-kept late-nineteenth century stones, it is an important feature, but it remains in Willcox ownership.

The well-planned symmetrical arrangement of the grounds around the house, itself a symmetrical model of order and classical values, is expressive of a well-off planter class which sought and expressed its stability in the examples of classical Greece and Rome. Using a Federal temple-form design popular in Halifax and Warren counties, an unknown craftsman, probably from the area, created a beautiful, stylish, sturdy structure with local materials. The appearance of the house is pure, clean. It is of value for its intactness and its associations with the region’s history as well as its architectural merit.
FOOTNOTES --

1. Interview with Mrs. A. G. Willcox III by Eliza S. Robertson, Nov. 5, 1981 at La Vallee, Halifax County, N. C.

2. The North Carolina Division of Forest Resources has made this designation, "Champion" meaning that it is the largest white ash in the state, age unknown.
## 8. Significance

### Period

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### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

In the rolling hills one mile south of Brinkleyville in Halifax County stands the Gray-Brownlow-Willcox house, circa 1820. A pure, unadorned example of Federal temple-form style, with transverse front hall, it resembles, and is somewhat earlier than, and perhaps a prototype for the well-known planter’s houses Elgin, Dalkeith, and Oakland in Warren and Halifax counties. It exhibits a truer classicism than the others in its restrained decoration and its large, carefully executed proportions. The interior design elements include well-crafted wainscot and other woodwork, wood-graining on some doors, and fine Federal mantels. The most notable decorative feature are two wood elliptical arches with diamond-pattern soffits and "keystones;" one of these arches is located in the front hall, the other in the north parlor, where it frames a shallow niche. During its use as a female academy called La Vallee, 1833-1851, a simple Federal-style building was moved to its present location directly behind the main house to function as a school room. The grounds exemplify the style and good taste of an early planner, and are unusual survivals of the mid-nineteenth century. Raised beds in circle and heart shapes and paths from the transverse hall doors form symmetrical, well-balanced landscape plan. Many of the original crape myrtles and cedars which accented those beds and paths survive, and there are also very old hollies and boxwood, and the largest white ash in the state. This combination of stately house, its association with the planter class and education, and its mid-nineteenth century grounds make La Vallee one of the most important Federal houses in the state.

### Criteria for Assessment

A. Associated with the development, growth and decline of antebellum plantation economy and culture in North Carolina’s Roanoke Valley; and with the system of private academies which were opened for the tutelage of planter-class children, here a female academy.

B. Associated with members of the locally prominent Brownlow and Willcox families, and with the Baptist Church in the area.

C. Embodies distinctive characteristics of Federal domestic architecture as adapted by local builders; and embodies distinctive characteristics of landscape design.
The Brownlow-Willcox House was built around 1820 by the Reverend Joseph J. Gray in the Halifax County community of Brinkleyville. Little is known about Gray, who sold the house to Tippoo S. Brownlow and Martha Brownlow in 1833.

Brownlow, who was listed in contemporary newspapers as Dr. Brownlow was best known as an educator. As early as 1829 he was superintendent of a female academy called La Vallee, which was located in northern Halifax County. In January of 1833 Brownlow announced by way of newspaper, that he had "purchased that large and commodious house, formerly the property of the Reverend Joseph J. Gray, 20 miles west of the town of Halifax, a situation as regards health, inferior to none in the state." The school was moved to the new location and the house served as the main building. Brownlow and his wife paid $2,500 for the house and 604 acres.

The academy was typical of a number of other such academies in the area. An 1837 newspaper advertisement gives the curriculum, which included reading, writing, spelling, history, geography, rhetoric, logic, philosophy, theology, Latin, French, drawing, painting, and music. Some science was taught to the young ladies, including algebra, astronomy, botany, and chemistry. Trustees for the school included David Outlaw of Bertie, Samuel Arrington of Nash, J. J. Daniel of Raleigh, Isaac Hilliard of Halifax, the Reverend Sidney Weller of Halifax, and Mason L. Wiggins of Halifax. Daniel was a Halifax native who was serving in the North Carolina Supreme Court at the time, while Weller was the former proprietor of the Brinkleyville Academy. Weller, a neighbor of Brownlow's, was also an expert in trees and plants and may be responsible for the large boxwoods and crepe myrtle which dot the land.

In spite of the support of this distinguished group of men, the school was not a financial success and closed by 1850 with Brownlow deeply in debt. Brownlow apparently farmed the property, as evidenced by his ownership of 31 slaves in 1840. Nonetheless he was forced to sell the property in 1851 to Joseph B. Batchelor. Two years later Thomas Willcox purchased the property, by now reduced to 599 acres, for $1,750.

Thomas Willcox was born on March 2, 1804 in Halifax County. In 1830 he was ordained as a Baptist minister and spent a number of years as an itinerant minister in the Tar River region. In 1843 for example he reported that he traveled 1,684 miles, visited 14 churches, baptized 36, and received $109.22 from the various churches. In 1850 he reported that he had traveled 1,260 miles in six months in the field and had received only $65.52 for his services. He "declined to serve longer on these terms," and shortly thereafter purchased the Brownlow property and became a full time farmer.

By all accounts Thomas Willcox was "an intelligent, industrious, and successful farmer." The 1860 census shows that he had real estate valued at $2,995 and a personal estate of $13,342. He grew 4,400 pounds of cotton, 1,200 pounds of tobacco, 575 bushels of corn, and 5 tons of hay. He also owned livestock valued at $865. Willcox owned 13 slaves. The 1870 census shows that Willcox grew 4,500 pounds of cotton, but no tobacco. His real estate was valued $1,797 and his livestock at $290. This decline was similar to that suffered by many North Carolina farmers in the difficult years following the Civil War.

Willcox died March 8, 1877. He and his wife, the former Martha Alston, had four children. His will left the "dwelling house" to Albert G. Willcox.
1845, A. G. Willcox was the third of the four Willcox children. In August of 1879 he was ordained as a Baptist minister. He remained in this calling until his death on April 16, 1921. He was one of the Tar River Baptist Association's busiest and best loved ministers.

Albert G. Willcox first served as minister of the Bear Swamp church. He also served as minister of Harris Chapel, Turkey Branch, Reedy Creek, Fishing Creek, Enterprise, Qunakie, Bethlehem, Antioch, Roanoke Rapids, Spring Hope, Stanhope, Peach Tree, Samaria, Conoconnara, Red Bud, Wakefield, Robinsonville, Halifax, Sulphur Springs, Tillery, and several mission points. He was instrumental in founding several of these churches and at a number of others new buildings were built during his tenure. Willcox was particularly effective during evangelistic meetings and was a popular choice to serve at weddings and funerals. In 1878 he was elected clerk of the Tar River Association. In 1881 he was elected clerk and treasurer and was re-elected to these positions at every meeting until his death. Thus he served as clerk and treasurer for forty consecutive years.

Willcox and his wife, the former Josephine Mason of Northampton County, had seven children, five daughters and two sons. Albert G. Willcox, Jr. farmed the land until recently when it was taken over by his son Albert G. Willcox, III. A variety of crops have been grown on the farm in this century, including cotton, corn, and tobacco. In 1980 the house and 28 acres were sold to Mr. and Mrs. John Collison.

The Brownlow-Willcox House, still occasionally called La Vallee, has had a varied and distinguished history. Its role in education, religion, and agriculture make it one of Halifax County's most interesting and important early nineteenth century houses.
Footnotes

1 Halifax Minerva, October 15, 1829.

2 Roanoke Advocate, January 17, 1833.

3 Halifax County Deed Book 28, p. 483.


5 Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Halifax County, North Carolina, Population Schedule.

6 Halifax County Deed Book 33, p. 167; Book 33, p. 309.


8 Taylor, Tar River Association, 25.


10 Taylor, Tar River Association, 328.


14 Taylor, Tar River Association, 185-188. The same obituary was printed in The Biblical Recorder, May 25, 1921.

15 Taylor, Tar River Association, 185-188.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 28.21
Quadrangle name Aurelian Springs Quadrangle

UMT References

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See enclosed plat map outlined in red.

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

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11. Form Prepared By

History prepared by Jim Sumner, Research Branch

Name/title Description prepared by Eliza S. Robertson, Survey Branch

Organization N.C. Dept. of Archives and History

Date 2-25-82

Street & number 109 Jones Street

Telephone (919) 733-6545

City or town Raleigh

State North Carolina

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

[ ] national [ ] state [x] 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Title State Historic Preservation Officer

Date April 8, 1982

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration


Halifax Minerva. October 15, 1829.

Roanoke Advocate. January 17, 1833; February 19, 1840.


Willcox, III, Mrs. A. G. Telephone interview. May 19, 1981. Notes in file at Survey and Planning Branch, Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History.
Gray-Brownlow-Willcox House
Brinkleyville, N. C. vic.
Aurelian Springs Quadrangle
Zone 17
Zone 1:24 000

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B 243300/4016440
C 243200/4016440
D 242660/4016380
E 242680/4016160
F 242680/4016160
G 243460/4016240

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, and USGS
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1972. Field checked 1973
Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: North Carolina coordinate system (Lambert conformal conic)
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 18, shown in blue. 1927 North American datum
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked