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 individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 18). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, 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 Johnson, J. Beale, House
other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 6321 Johnson Pond Road
N/A not for publication
city, town Fuquay-Varina X vicinity
state North Carolina code NC county Wake code 163 zip code 27526

3. Classification

Ownership of Property Category of Property Number of Resources within Property
private X building(s) Contributing Noncontributing
☐ public-local ☐ district 2 1 buildings
☐ public-State ☐ site     sites
☐ public-Federal ☐ structure structures
☐ public-Federal ☐ object 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 nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

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

Signature of certifying official ____________________________ Date 7-29-91

State or Federal agency and bureau ____________________________

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ 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:
☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.

☐ removed from the National Register.
☐ other (explain) ____________________________

__________________________________________ Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

State or Federal agency and bureau ____________________________
Located on the once main road from Raleigh to Fayetteville, the J. Beale Johnson House is one of the most impressive houses built during the early twentieth century in southern Wake County. The Johnson House is an elegant Neoclassical Revival style structure built circa 1906 on the east side of Johnson Pond Road (State Road 1404) in the vicinity of the town of Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina. With a generous and well-landscaped lawn, the Neoclassical Revival style house is appropriately sited on a hill facing a large pond, which enhances its image of grandeur. The house is situated on a tract of approximately 13.9 acres of land, of which nearly 9.9 acres are wooded. A frame garage building and a small frame cook's house are stationed behind the main house.

The Johnson House is basically a double-pile cubical mass of weatherboarded frame construction rising from a brick foundation two full stories beneath a hipped roof with dormers. Corners are articulated with Doric pilasters and a full entablature surrounds the building at its eave. The hipped roof is pierced by three interior chimneys, which rise astride the walls of the central hallways and display corbeled heads with additional corbeled inset panels. A balustraded widow's walk crowns the roof. A one-story kitchen ell extends from the rear. A one-story porch and second floor balcony outline the ell formed by the rear wing.

The exterior of the house is dominated by the central two-story portico on the main facade. Paired mammoth Doric columns support the portico's pedimented roof, which overlaps the one-story wrap-around porch. On its main facade the central mass of the house is divided into three bays: the central two-story portico and flanking windows with double-hung sashes, one-over-one. A one-story porch runs beneath the portico for the length of the three-bay main facade and extends around to the northeast corner and to the west side porte cochere. A railing with close-set square balusters and an intricately molded handrail circumscribes the first floor porches and second floor balconies. The central portico shelters entrances from the porches on each floor. The main entrance composition is composed of a six-panel handmade solid wooden door flanked by broad diamond-paned sidelights and a transom set within a molded panel frame. The upper entrance composition incorporates diamond-paned double doors and broad diamond-paned sidelights set within a formal Doric pilaster frame.
The west facade of the Johnson House boasts a formal porte cochere supported by heavy Doric columns on brick plinths. The porte cochere shelters entrance into the first floor side hall; the entrance composition is composed of a lighted paneled wooden door with diamond-paned sidelights set within a molded panel frame. A railing and close-set square balusters circumscribe the roof to create a balcony. The porte cochere balcony entrance consists of a lighted paneled wooden door with diamond-paned sidelights and traceried semi-oval fanlight, all of which are set within a molded and paneled frame.

The Johnson House displays a double-pile plan with an unusual T-shaped hall consisting of a wide central front passage in line with a narrower rear passage and intersected by the main stair hall connecting to the porte cochere entrance. Well-developed Colonial Revival detailing decorates the interior, with the hall being the stylistic focal point of the house. There the handsome open staircase rises to a large intermediate-landing that opens onto the balcony over the porte cochere; the second run of the stairway turns 180 degrees and rises a few steps to the second floor central hall. The stairs continue in a single run to a finished third-floor dormer, which shelters the entrance to a large unfinished attic. Turned balusters support an intricately fashioned handmade North Carolina solid walnut handrail. The ends of the steps are embellished with applied scroll-shaped brackets. The back staircase or "servants' stairs" rises in a single flight back to front along the back hall's east wall. The secondary staircase is unusual in that it is identical in materials and design to the main stairs.

Pocket doors open to both front parlors forward of the main stairway. These and all of the original doors feature three-part molded surrounds typical of the period. The hall, parlors, and dining room feature an elaborately fashioned cornice with dentil molding, wainscotting, and chairrail. The cornices are replacements based on fragments of the originals. The mantels, whose high shelves are supported by fluted Doric pilasters and dentil cornice, frame the marble fireplace openings. The original dining room mantel served as a guide for the replication of the parlor mantels. The wainscotting and chairrail were added in the 1965 to 1970 restoration. Most other spaces in the house are finished with plaster walls, simple cornice, chairrail, and wide baseboard moldings. The northeast and southeast second-floor bedrooms feature an interesting half-door and window construction, so as to offer access onto the radiating balconies.

Located southeast of the main house is a carport and garage building, which rises beneath a single hipped roof. This building engulfs the original brick well house and was added in 1969.

Approximately 100 yards south of the main house is a simple, one-story, weatherboarded cook's house with a rear ell and later side addition, circa 1906. The four-bay facade has a pair of entrances flanked by four-over-four windows and sheltered by a shed porch. An interior chimney pierces the gable roof of the main block, which has molded cornice returns at the gable ends. Between the garage and cook's house is a row of holly bushes, which border the present-day garden and grape arbor.
Summary

The J. Beale Johnson House is a grand Neoclassical style house built Circa 1906 in the vicinity of the town of Fuquay-Varina in rural Wake County, North Carolina. The two-story frame house exemplifies the Neoclassical Revival style in its imposing two-story Doric portico and its refined classical architectural appointments throughout the interior and exterior. The residence was designed by prominent Raleigh architect Charles Pearson for J. Beale Johnson, an influential Wake County entrepreneur, at the beginning of the new century. The Johnson House is associated with the productive life of J. Beale Johnson, who made substantial contributions to business, political, and general community life in southern Wake County during the early part of the twentieth century. The interior and exterior integrity of the house remains intact and accurately reflects the gracious lifestyle of the builder and the intention of the architect, and thus exemplifies the main thrust of the Neoclassical influence in the United States during the first decade of the twentieth century.

Historical Background

Just before the turn of the century, Wake County maintained a multi-tiered social strata. Numerically, this society was dominated by rural piedmont farmers, who struggled each year to earn enough cash to pay taxes on their land and to buy essential household necessities. In southern Wake County there lived a handful of well-educated, relatively urbane families who were advocates of progress and spurred economic development of their town, county, and state. The Johnson family, especially J. (James) Beale Johnson, came to exemplify these attributes.

J. Beale Johnson (1872-1931) was the son of John Lewis Johnson (1828-1903) and Mary Jane Lane Johnson (1836-1905); the elder Johnsons were prosperous landowners, merchants, and sawmills. John Lewis Johnson had amassed sizeable land holdings and in
May of 1899, deeded each of his children their portion of family lands. J. Beale Johnson inherited seventy-six acres, Johnson’s Pond, and the family gristmill. Ultimately, he came to own 582 acres encompassing the original seventy-six.

Mr. Johnson learned early that his fortune lay in lumber and commerce. In 1900, he launched his major career in sawmilling by securing the timber rights to vast tracts of virgin longleaf pine in Barclaysville, a small community near the present-day Harnett County town of Angier. He soon won the contract to provide timber for the United States Army camps in North Carolina. As the need for timber increased, so did Johnson’s wealth. As he prospered, Johnson became a director of the Commercial National Bank in Raleigh, a position he held for twenty-five years; co-founder of the Hanover Land and Development Company, Inc. in Fuquay Springs; and investor and shareholder in many companies across the state. He was also a member of Wake Chapel Christian Church of Fuquay Springs, an association which lasted throughout his lifetime; he served as music director of the church for many years. Johnson began courting Miss Della Ragsdale of Cardenas and they married in 1903.

Even before his marriage, Johnson felt that he should build a residence that would accurately reflect his importance within the business and social community. In 1901, he commissioned prominent Raleigh architect Charles Pearson to execute plans for such a home. Pearson completed plans for the mansion with careful attention to every detail. In 1906, at the age of thirty-four, Johnson had earned enough money to build his house free and clear of debt. Once it was completed, the gracious homestead quickly became a local landmark.

The happiness of this new household was unfortunately short-lived, as Mrs. Della Johnson died at childbirth in 1912. Three years later, in 1915, Mr. Johnson married again, to the former Marne Cheek of Durham. The union subsequently produced two sons: James Lewis Johnson, 1917; and Thomas Cheek Johnson, 1919.

Johnson’s prominence grew with his family. Former Governor Charles B. Aycock often visited and enjoyed the fishing and hunting on the property. Even acclaimed evangelist Billy Sunday enjoyed the Johnsons’ hospitality when he was preaching in the area. Johnson also introduced fox hunting to the area, and maintained a stable of fine horses and foxhounds.

The boom of the 1920s brought even more prosperity to Johnson; he speculated in land development across the state, invested in stocks, sold large tracts of land, and then borrowed in order to invest more. With the crash of 1929 and the onslaught of the Great Depression, Johnson’s investments faltered, his stocks became worthless, timber demand ceased, and loans came due.
After Johnson's death from pneumonia in 1931, his family lost the house which had been pledged as collateral in investments that failed. The North Carolina Rural Rehabilitation Corporation purchased the property in 1935. The NCRRC sold much of the land to small farmers at low interest rates with many years to satisfy the mortgage.

The Johnson House itself was used as a home for "wayward" girls and for the elderly during much of the 1930s and 1940s. In 1949 the State of North Carolina and the NCRRC gave the remaining property and the house to American Legion Post 116, Fuquay Springs. This organization used the house as a meeting facility, but allowed it to suffer years of abuse, neglect, and vandalism before selling it at public auction in 1965. At that time it was rescued from almost certain destruction by Mr. and Mrs. L. E. Turner, the current owners of the Johnson House. From 1965 to 1970, the Turners undertook an exhaustive restoration of the house and grounds, returning the Neoclassical Revival structure to its former glory and status as a local landmark.

Architectural Context

The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, which was held in Chicago, was thought to have been the catalyst for the renewed interest in classical architecture, even though earlier interest was expressed as a result of the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876. Planners of the World's Columbian Exposition required a classical theme and many of the best American architects designed grand colonnaded buildings. The main buildings of the exposition were of mammoth scale and greatly influenced public and commercial buildings of following decades, especially those designed by the leading architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White. Each state of the union designed smaller pavilions more domestic in scale and from these can be seen the precedent of most Neoclassical Revival style houses. Full-height, semi-circular entry porches were exemplified by the states of Ohio, Utah, and South Dakota; full-height entry porches with triangular entry pediments, some with full-width lower porches, were evident in the pavilions of Nebraska and Kentucky. A full-height entry porch with a lower full-width porch highlighted the Connecticut pavilion, while Virginia constructed a copy of Mt. Vernon which reflected interest in the Georgian style. All of the pavilions reflected the country's earlier interest in classical Roman and Greek styles. Architectural influences of the Georgian, Classical Revival, and Greek Revival styles became integrated into the Neoclassical movement.

The exposition was widely photographed and reported; visitors were inspired by the structures they saw. Regional and local architects adopted the styles popularized by the exposition and translated it according to local budget and taste. The Neoclassical movement, including both the Neoclassical Revival and Colonial Revival styles, thus became a dominant force in residential architecture during the first half of this century, though
the Neoclassical Revival style was never quite as popular as its closely related Colonial Revival contemporary. 18

The Neoclassical Revival style may be divided into two periods of popularity: 1900 to 1920 and 1925 through the 1950s. The first period emphasized hipped roofs and correct columns, while the second emphasized side-gabled roofs and very slender columns. According to local authorities, the "Golden Age" of the Neoclassical style in North Carolina spanned the years 1900 to 1914, with 1910 being the benchmark year. 19 The Johnson House, constructed in 1906, reflects the movement in North Carolina at its height.

The South appears to have been many years behind the northeast in its acceptance of the Neoclassical Revival style. 20 Classically designed houses were becoming increasingly popular in Northern cities and neighborhoods in the late nineteenth century. At the same time, the Victorian Queen Anne style houses remained popular, especially in many parts of the South. From about 1910 to 1925, the Neoclassical Revival style house appeared to have been accepted in North Carolina and generally in the South. Houses began to exhibit classical details in cities as well as in rural and small town North Carolina. 21 Most Neoclassical houses in rural Wake County were very simple; the structures were basically symmetrical two-story double-pile plans with minimal exterior ornamentation.

The J. Beale Johnson House is an exception to the aforementioned. This house represents a style popular on a national scale, but rare in rural and small town Wake County. The house exhibits outstanding characteristics associated with the Neoclassical movement, such as its imposing portico with mammoth Doric columns and attention to classic proportion and detail. The Survey of Wake County Historic Architectural Resources (1988 to Spring, 1991) has documented over 1500 structures thus far in rural areas and small towns of the county. As of this writing, only four Neoclassical Revival style houses have been recorded: 1. The J. Beale Johnson House, Johnson Pond Road near Fuquay-Varina; 2. The Jones-Johnson House, Sunset Lake Road near Fuquay-Varina (listed in the National Register in January of 1990 as part of the Jones-Johnson-Ballentine Historic District); 3. The Dr. Nathan Blalock House, near State Road 2736; 4. The Powell-Box House in Wake Forest. 22 The first three houses listed above are located in southern Wake County, and two, the J. Beale Johnson House and the Jones-Johnson House, had been in the same family. Remodeling transformed the Jones-Johnson House from a vernacular Greek Revival style I-house into a Neoclassical one in 1908. The renovation was thought to have been influenced by the neighboring J. Beale Johnson House.

Raleigh architect Charles Pearson (1875 - 1966) attended the World's Columbian Exposition as a student and was influenced by what he observed. Pearson, an Asheville native, attended Agriculture and Mechanical College, now North Carolina State University, graduating in 1894 with a degree in civil engineering. He returned to A & M from 1894 to 1895 for graduate study in architectural engineering. Pearson, together with T. M. Ashe, opened an office for the practice of architecture in the Pullen Building, Raleigh, where
J. Beale Johnson House, Fuquay-Varina vicinity, NC

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He practiced architecture from 1895 to 1901. Among his designs in Raleigh were: State Museum Building, North Wing; Chapel, Oakwood Cemetery; Main Building, *Borden Building and Cottages at The Methodist Orphanage; Wiley and Murphy Schools; North Carolina Home Insurance Building; and *First Presbyterian Church, Capitol Square. Furthermore, he designed *Carr Dormitory at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. Pearson concentrated on designing public buildings and the only known domestic dwelling he designed in Wake County was the J. Beale Johnson House. During the same period, Pearson acted as chief engineer for the Raleigh Cape Fear Railroad, building the railroad between Raleigh and Fuquay Springs.

Mr. Pearson was elected the first secretary and treasurer of the Southeastern Architectural League in 1900. That same year he, along with others, attempted unsuccessfully to organize the first chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in North Carolina.

After departing Raleigh in 1901, Pearson maintained an active practice of architecture and civil engineering, working in New York state and across the South constructing bridges, railroads, post offices, and important residences. Mr. Pearson ended his career by designing *Covenant Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, built in 1956. He died in 1966 at the age of ninety-one.

* Denotes that structure remains standing.
Notes

1. Wake County Deed Book 162, p. 167.
4. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
13. Wake County Deed Book 1677, p. 345.
17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.


21. Ibid., p. 112.


Previous documentation on file (NPS):
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings
- recorded by Historic American Engineering

Survey #
Record #

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:
- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 13.923 acres

UTM References

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Verbal Boundary Description

The property being nominated consists of the 13.923 acre tract shown as Parcel 27 on Tax Map 822, Middle Creek Township, Wake County, North Carolina, as illustrated by the heavy black line on the accompanying tax map.

Boundary Justification

The boundary of the nominated property includes the remaining tract historically associated with the J. Beale Johnson House tract. The nominated property retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

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Bibliography


Johnson, J. Beale, Wake County Estates Papers, N. C. State Archives.


Wake County Deed Books, various volumes.
