

# ALABAMA REGISTER OF LANDMARKS AND HERITAGE

## Nomination Form

RECEIVED

Added 5/19/98

APR 20 1998

### 1. Name

historic Borders House

Ala. Historical Commission

and/or common Borders-Blackmon House

### 2. Location

street & number 426 Old Choccolocco Road

city, town Anniston

---vicinity of Choccolocco

state AL

county Calhoun

zip 36207

### 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

### 4. Owner of Property

name George and Susan Gibbins

Phone number (256) 237-7350

street & number 426 Old Choccolocco Road

city, town Anniston, AL

---vicinity of Choccolocco

zip 36207

### 5. Floor plan & site plan. Use space below to sketch floor plan and site plan or attach additional sheet.

---

**6. Description** (See attached instructions for specific guidelines.)

---

**Condition**

excellent     deteriorated  
 good             ruins  
 fair               unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved    date \_\_\_\_\_

---

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance.**

Handsomely sited on a generous portion of its original acreage in the semi-rural community known as Choccolocco in Calhoun County, the Borders House is a two story frame extended I-house with weatherboard siding. Constructed circa 1840, the home was sensitively restored in 1990 under the direction of noted Huntsville architect Harvie P. Jones. Nine-over-nine sashes similar to the originals have been reproduced using old glass for panes and succeed inappropriate replacement windows installed during the 1950s. A graceful double-pane height transom and single pane width sidelights surround a double door entrance. The original central one-story portico is comprised of four squared wooden columns and features a simple square-balustered balustrade to each side of the stair landing. Flat-roofed and crested by a continuous balustrade, the balcony is accessed from the second floor by a single door balanced by three-pane sidelights. Two pairs of end chimneys add to the symmetry and balance of the main house.

The interior of the main house is indicative of the aesthetic ideals of the Federal Period as interpreted in a frontier area. Doors throughout the home exhibit the "cross and bible" form popular during the period. Rooms downstairs have ceiling heights of nine feet, while those upstairs are seven feet three inches high. Proceeding through the front entrance of the house the visitor first enters a flushboard-finished central hall with delicate chairrail surmounting paneled wainscoting and baseboard. Turning to the right (south side) one finds the former parlor, its walls finished in plaster, and containing a simple original circular plaster ceiling medallion. The mantelpiece in this room features slender semi-circular columned pilasters to each side of the firebox topped by simplified Ionic-order capitals exhibiting a sunburst motif in place of volutes. This room now serves as a bedroom.

Across the hall from the former parlor is a flushboard-finished sitting room used as an office by the Gibbins family. The beautiful overscaled mantelpiece topped by heavy cornice in this room is a replica of the termite-ravaged original. Proceeding through the room one enters the covered glassed-in walkway. Reconstructed using 1935 H.A.B.S. photos and old pier remnants as guides, the walkway leads to the semidetached brick kitchen/dining room. The brick kitchen features handsome stepped parapet end walls and 6:6 sashes, and the dining room has a fine Federal mantel. A large chimney in poor condition in the kitchen room was re-built by the Gibbins using the old bricks as well as new brick from Old Carolina Brick Company. Exposed rafter beams in the kitchen add to the charm of the building. Turning right before reaching the kitchen/dining room one finds a spacious sympathetic rear addition that blends well with its surroundings while providing the owners with much-needed comfortable space.

Returning to the central hall one finds the staircase on the left side of the hall from the front entrance. The staircase, with simple excurvate bannister and squared newel post and balustrade, is oriented toward the rear entrance to the home. The rear (east) entrance is topped by a nine pane transom and flanked by four sidelights on each side. The northeast room on the first floor is a bathroom, while the southeast room serves as a bedroom.

Proceeding upstairs, one encounters another central hall. To the left is the southwest bedroom, which features a mantel with reeded, diamond-shaped motifs similar to an example found at Andrew Jackson's former home,



**Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage Nomination for Borders House, Choccolocco, Calhoun County**

The Hermitage, near Nashville, Tennessee. The other room on this level serves also as a bedroom. A bath added by the present owners in 1990 is located above the rear entrance porch roof.

---

## 7. Significance (See attached instructions for specific guidelines.)

---

### Period Areas of Significance-Check and justify below

<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

---

Specific dates c. 1840

Builder/Architect Levic and Griffin Borders

---

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph).

Criterion C, Architecture. The Borders House is an outstanding example of an extended I-House, a vernacular form of architecture whose antecedents can be traced back to the British Isles during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the United States, the I-House form appears to have originated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the mid-Atlantic region. With its clean symmetrical lines and exquisite interior Federal Period woodwork, the house offers a superior and early articulation of this comparatively rare style. Present estimates by architectural historians indicate that there are no more than 60 pure extant examples of the I-House form remaining in Alabama. The house was constructed circa 1840 as the residence of John Borders, a native of Tennessee who settled the area with his wife Cynthia Knox Borders and several of their children. At its zenith the home was the center of a 1250 acre plantation complete with gin, blacksmith shop, and a sawmill powered by water diverted from Choccolocco Creek. On August 24, 1846 Dr. Basil Manly, second president of the University of Alabama, was a guest at the Borders home and wrote his wife in Tuscaloosa that the "house and fixtures indicate a man of wealth" (Martin, Lenore, "Borders Counted Blessings," *The Jacksonville News*, December 3, 1975.) On the back of a map of his property (probably done in the 1850s) John Borders reflected "my house, brick storehouse and connecting roof is most convenient... of my 1250 acres of land 300 is now in cultivation, 12 in clover. Lands are well-timbered and said to be valuable" (Robinson, Bessie "Early Settlers of Calhoun County," December 2, 1932, unknown newspaper clipping on file with Gibbins family.) Borders died on October 2, 1873 at the age of 94. The home was sold by the Borders descendants in 1887 and was owned for many years by the Blackmon family. In 1935 the home was documented by the Historic American Buildings Survey (Gamble, Robert, *The Alabama Catalog*, 1987, p. 206.) It was purchased in 1988 by Dr. George and Susan Gibbins.

Criterion B, Association with Persons Significant in State or Locality. The Borders House is significant as a superb representation of African-American craftsmanship and artistry. The residence was built by two highly trained and renowned local carpenters, Levic and Griffin Borders. The slaves of John Borders, local tradition holds that the pair assisted with the construction of many houses in the Choccolocco Valley as well as the nearby Harmony Church in 1855. In 1995, a sideboard built by Levic Borders about 1860 was featured in the "Made in Alabama" exhibit showcasing the state's decorative arts tradition. A receipt in the possession of the Borders descendants with the heading "Griff tools" indicates the sale of carpentry and woodworking tools that had been used by the craftsmen being sold to Griffin Borders on June 15, 1867. (Adams, Bryding et al., *Made in Alabama: A State Legacy*, Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1995.)

The Borders House is also significant for its association with Fred Leonard Blackmon, member of Congress in the United States House of Representatives from 1911 to 1921. An 1894 graduate of the University of Alabama, Blackmon was born in Georgia in 1873 and moved with his parents to Calhoun County at the age of 10. His parents purchased the Borders residence in 1887 when he was 14. Blackmon was a former city attorney for Anniston and was elected to five congressional terms, serving until his death at the age of 47 (*The Alumni Governmental Gallery*, Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama School of Law, no date.)



---

## **8. Major Bibliographical References**

---

Adams, Bryding et al. Made in Alabama: A State Legacy. Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1995.

Author (s) unknown. The Alumni Governmental Gallery. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, no date.

Gamble, Robert. The Alabama Catalog: A Guide to the Early Architecture of the State. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987.

Martin, Lenore. "Borders Counted Blessings" Jacksonville News, December 3, 1975.

Robinson, Bessie. "Early Settlers of Calhoun County," December 2, 1932. Unknown newspaper clipping on file with Gibbins family.

---

## **Geographical Data**

---

Acreage of nominated property 10 (approximate) all in Section 8, Township 16 South, Range 9 East, Calhoun County

Quadrangle name Chocolocco

---

Enclose map showing location of property. (city or county map, state highway department map, or USGS map)

---

## **10. Form Prepared By**

---

name/title Patrick McIntyre

organization Consultant

date April 16, 1998

street & number Rt. 2 Box 638

telephone (334) 288-4340

city or town Ramer

state AL

zip 36069

---

## **11. Please submit color slides of the property with this form.**

---

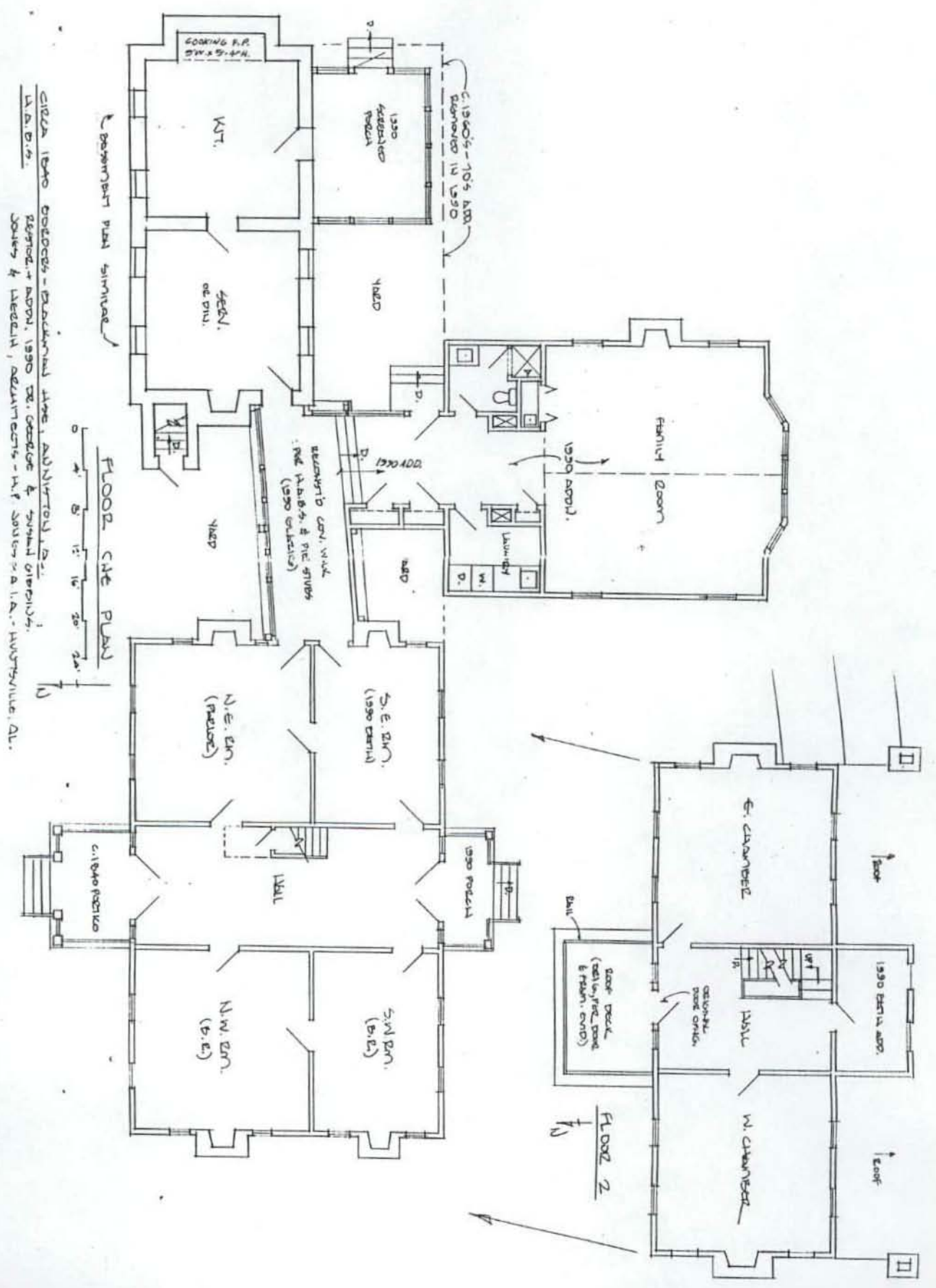
Color slides are essential to the review process.

---

## **12. Please return ALABAMA REGISTER form and documentation to:**

---

Alabama Register Coordinator  
Alabama Historical Commission  
468 South Perry Street  
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-0900



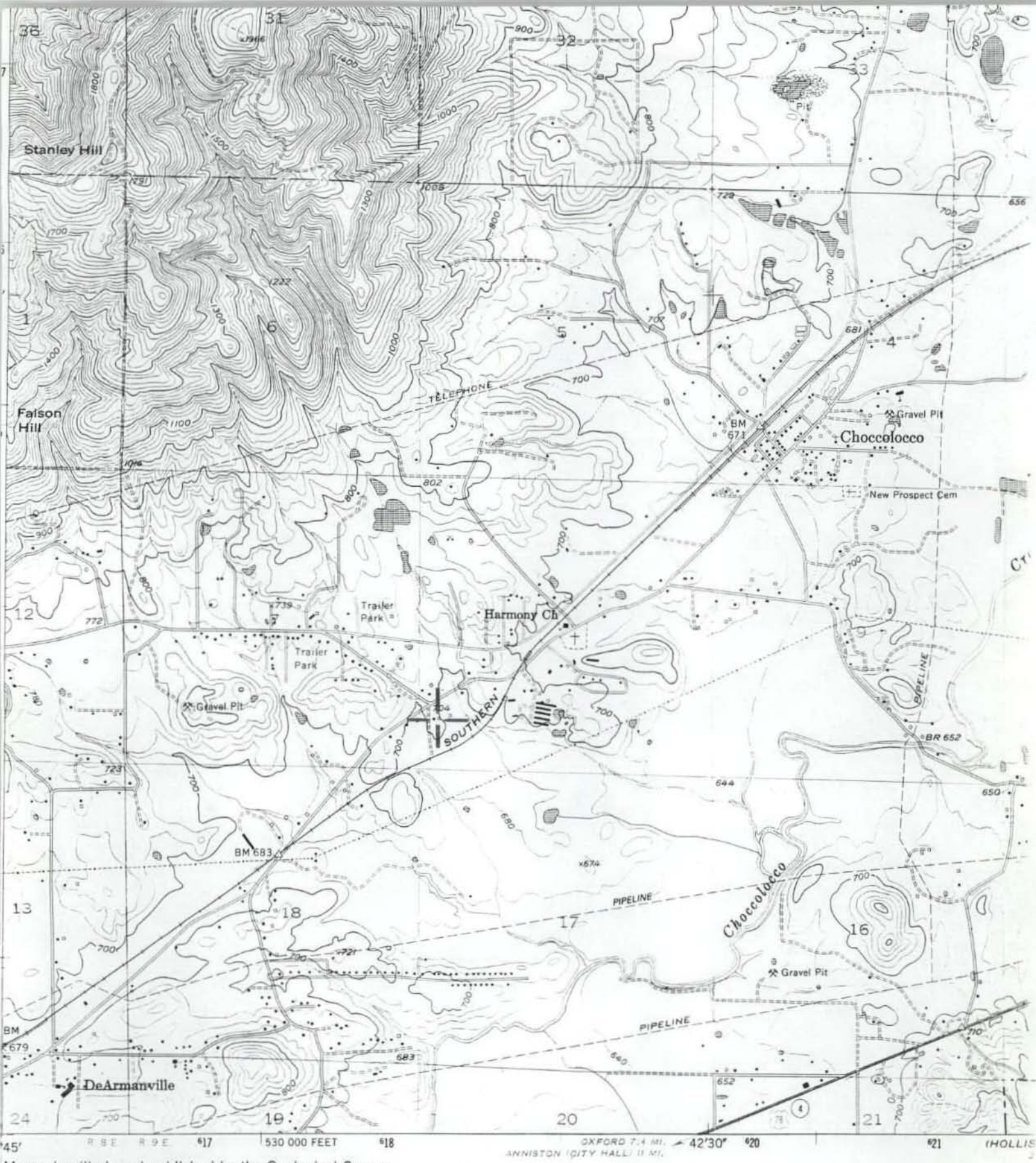
CHECK LATH CODES - BACKWARD LATH, ADVANTAGE LATH  
 I.A.B.P. REPORT + ADD. 1990 DR. GEORGE & SYDNEY CROFTS  
 NOTES & RECORD, ARCHITECTS - H.F. SMITH & I.A. - HUNTSVILLE, AL.

## Borders House Choccolocco, Calhoun County

Constructed between 1835 and 1840, the Borders House in Choccolocco is a superb and significant representation of an extended Federal Period I-House, a vernacular form with Georgian period origins. The frame, two-story residence with center hall plan, side-gable roof and end chimneys also has an unusually well-finished, semidetached brick kitchen with stepped parapet end walls. The I-house form, brought by the first generation of white settlers to migrate to Alabama and once a relatively common style, is now restricted to approximately 50 examples remaining in the state. The Borders house is significant also for its African-American historical importance, as the slave craftsmen who constructed it, Levic and Griffin Borders, were documented and well-known carpenters who built several other homes in Calhoun County.

John Borders, a native of Tennessee who had been living in Georgia, came to Benton (now Calhoun) County about 1835, and the home was built by his slaves Levic and Griffin within a few years of his arrival, according to local records. Borders died in 1873, and the home was later purchased by members of the Blackmon Family. Documented by HABS photographers in 1935, the structure was renovated in the 1950s, at which time the original sashes were removed. In 1988 the Borders residence was bought by Dr. George Gibbins and his wife Susan, and since that time it has been meticulously restored under the direction of noted Huntsville architect Harvie Jones.





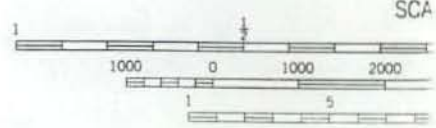
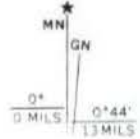
Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA

Topography from aerial photographs by multiplex methods  
 Aerial photographs taken 1954. Field check 1954

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American Datum

OXFORD 7.4 MI. 42°30' 20  
 ANNISTON (CITY HALL) 11 MI.



Borders House  
 Choccolocco Quadrangle  
 Calhoun County, Alabama