

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Added to AR 5/18/98

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

1. Name of Property

historic name Nation, Thomas, House

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number approx. 3 mi. NE of Blountsville on US 231 not for publication N/A
city or town Blountsville vicinity x
state Alabama code AL county Blount code 009 zip code 35031

3. 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. 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

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Property Name Nation, Thomas, House
County and State Blount County, Alabama

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check only one box.)

Category of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u> buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u> Total

Number of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

 N/A

 N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: Single dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Vacant/not in use Sub: _____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

No Style—two story hall/parlor (hall/chamber) type

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete, brick, limestone

roof asphalt

walls brick

other _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition on continuation sheet/s.)

Property Name Nation, Thomas, House

County and State Blount County, Alabama

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- x A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
x C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.) N/A

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Settlement
Architecture

Period of Significance c. 1835- c. 1855

Significant Dates

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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

- Primary location of additional data: N/A
[] State Historic Preservation Office
[] Other state agency
[] Federal agency
[] Local government
[] University
[] Other
Name of repository

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing	Zone Easting Northing
1 _____	3 _____
2 _____	4 _____
____ See continuation sheet.	

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Johnathan A. Farris/Survey Coordinator

organization Alabama Historical Commission date 5/97

street & number 468 South Perry Street telephone (334)242-3184

city or town Montgomery state Alabama zip code 36130-0900

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Mr. Royce King

street & number P.O. Box 1229 telephone (205)429-4300

city or town Blountsville state Alabama zip code 35031

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County and state: **Blount County, Alabama**

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VII. Description

The Thomas Nation house sits on a narrow rise at the edge of level agricultural fields to the north of U.S. highway 231 approximately three miles northeast of Blountsville, Blount County, Alabama. To the west of the house lie fields, then Blue Springs Creek, and finally a low ridge. Immediately to the east of the house is a small knoll. A modern house occupies the top of the knoll but is largely obscured by trees when viewed from the Nation House.

The Nation House is a two story brick house with a medium-pitched end gabled roof and two interior end chimneys (the tops of which have been partially rebuilt). The brickwork is mainly laid in a common bond variant with one row of headers to every five rows of stretchers. The house is two structural bays wide and one pile deep. The house rests on a graduated foundation of long, flat, cut limestone blocks. On top of the foundation, two graduated courses of bricks form a water table. The details of the foundation can only be seen on the west elevation, as the foundation is covered on the other three elevations by cast concrete.

The east elevation, originally the front facade, currently has three fenestration openings on each floor. The openings are unevenly spaced, with two in the northern structural bay and one in the southern structural bay. That the space occupied by all the fenestration openings were where openings were originally is indicated by the jack arches above each. Currently the openings on the first story are two windows and a door with the door the furthest north. Originally, the front door occupied the space of the middle opening, but was converted to a window most likely in the early twentieth century, leaving behind a visible brick patch to indicate its one-time presence. The second story openings are all currently windows, though at one point in time the central bay was a door as is indicated by the presence of brick patching.

The north elevation features three windows, two flanking the chimney on the first story and one west of the chimney on the second story. Of these, none currently have jack arches, so their presence in the structure originally is dubious. The more western window on the first story may once have been a door, as indicated by brick patching.

The west elevation currently possesses two doors on the first story (one in each structural bay), two full sized windows on the second story immediately above each of the doors, and a small four paned window in the center of the second story (probably indicating a twentieth century interior modification as a closet of some sort). Jack arches over the openings on the first floor indicate that they are original, though the more southern opening was originally a window, as indicated by brick patch work. Substantial brick patching exists around the other opening as well, but it runs all the way to the floor and it is on the whole logical that a door should be opposite the original front door, as is characteristic of the house type, for circulation and cross-ventilation purposes. There are no arches present above the second story windows, so their exact historic nature must remain under suspicion.

The south elevation features one second story window south of the chimney and one first story door south of the chimney that was probably cut for circulation into a recently removed early twentieth century frame addition. Neither of these openings possess jack arches and their originality must remain under question.

The interior of the house is very spare and unornamented. The walls were plastered and what plaster remains helps to indicate where the interior partition and staircase were originally. There are no interior partitions on the first floor at this time. Some presumably original window frames and baseboards do remain. These elements of trim are simple planed boards with no moldings.¹ The floors consist of wood planking on rough-hewn pine log floor joists set on corbeled footings. The shallow

¹ This makes some amount of sense as there was probably not much of a market for ornamental architectural detail in early Blount County to attract skilled joiners. The county was primarily occupied by subsistence farmers with a moderate number of households that could be considered "middle class" by state standards. There were very few families which could be considered "planter elite", and even they had

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chimney boxes protrude from each of the end walls. The current mantles are simple boards that have been braced into the masonry of the chimney box, and are of unknown vintage. Probable original features of the chimney, iron bar braces mark the tops of both fireplace openings.

The second floor joists are hewn beams mortised into the brick walls. The second story flooring appears to be twentieth century in origin. The second story of the structure is not structurally sound enough to be viewed in full at this time. The roof structure consists of butt rafters meeting at a slender ridge pole.

The future plans exist for the Blount County Historical Society to obtain and mothball the building while gathering funds for a slow and careful restoration. They assure that structural evidence will be given utmost attention in the restoration.

limited means compared to planters in other parts of the state. Therefore the primary form of architectural display in the county probably was not in the aristocratic trait of elaborate decorative detail, but rather in the integrity and durability of materials, a more middle-class virtue.

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VIII. Statement of Significance

The Thomas Nation House is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A for settlement. The builder, Thomas Nation (b. October 31, 1800-d. February 4, 1896), was an early settler of Blount County, Alabama (and for that matter the entire mountain region of Alabama) and his house is one of the most significant relics of the first phase of settlement of the Appalachian Mountain Range in Alabama. Nation was a member of the county's "upper-middle class" and his house is therefore representative of a significant aspect of regional social organization.

The Thomas Nation House is also eligible under criterion C for architecture as a representative of a rare Alabama house type. The two story brick hall/chamber plan house is the most intact survival of antebellum brick architecture in Blount County (in addition to seven or eight neighboring counties that share with it the geography of the southern termination of the Appalachian Mountain Range). Traditionally thought to have been built around 1835, the house represents the first phase of architecture in the region not completely defined by log construction.

Historic Summary

The stage on which Thomas Nation would act out his life was remarkably different from what is typically associated with antebellum Alabama society. Blount County, like many of the other counties in Appalachian Alabama, provided a notable contrast to the Black Belt and Tennessee Valley regions in agriculture, social structure, and to some extent built environment. In 1850, Blount County was somewhat sparsely settled for Alabama, having an aggregate population of 7,367.² Of this number, only 426, or about 6%, were enslaved.³ The small scale of slaveholding in Blount County obviously diverges from the patterns of the plantation counties.⁴ The agricultural production of the county varied in accordance with the absence of a large plantation economy. Cotton played a very minor role in Blount County farming. A broad diversity of crops prevailed in Blount County farming methods, which incorporated grain based agriculture (corn, wheat, and oats), tobacco farming, some vegetable cultivation (peas, beans, sweet potatoes, and Irish potatoes), and extensive raising of livestock (dairy and beef cattle, sheep, and swine).⁵

Social class in antebellum Blount County broke down into several groups: the very few elite who owned over ten slaves, smaller slaveholders and larger non-slaveholding farmers, subsistence farmers, white farm hands, and finally slaves. The economic resources of Thomas Nation that allowed him to build the house resulted from a somewhat privileged niche in the agricultural organization of the region. In 1850, Nation was one of three men owning the most valuable real estate in the county.⁶ His acreage and livestock set him apart from the majority of the population of the county, which consisted of small

²Powell, George. "A Description and History of Blount County". in Alabama Historical Quarterly. (Published by Alabama Dept. of Archives and History) Vol. 27, Nos. 1 & 2, Spring & Summer 1965. pp. 121-122.

³ibid.

⁴For example, in the Tennessee River Valley, Limestone County in 1850 had an aggregate population of 16,483, of which just under 50% were slaves. In the Black Belt, Wilcox County had an aggregate population of 17,352, of which nearly 70% were enslaved. Source: Brewer, Willis. Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record, and Public Men. (Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1975, orig. pub. in 1872).

⁵Powell, George. "A Description and History of Blount County". pp. 121-122., and Alabama Agricultural Census for 1850.

⁶1850 Alabama Federal Census. Nation's real estate was valued at \$5000. South Carolina born A.W. Arnold also owned \$5000 of real estate. Kentucky-born James Canns owned \$7000 in real estate.

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subistence farmers. Nation, who had been born in about 1800 in Tennessee (probably Claiborne Co.), had reached his economic maturity by 1850. His farm carried a value of \$5000 in that year, consisting of 200 acres of improved land and 140 acres of unimproved land.⁷ Nation's livestock included horses, mules, milch cows, and working oxen, and substantial numbers of beef cattle, sheep, and swine.⁸ His farm additionally yielded two thousand bushels of Indian corn, a few bushels of peas or beans and irish potatoes, thirty bushels of sweet potatoes, a hundred pounds of butter, and fifty pounds of beeswax and honey.⁹ He owned five slaves in 1850 and fourteen slaves in 1860 (eight of whom were under ten years of age).¹⁰ Nation had additional help on the farm from white laborers, a class generally in their late teens to early thirties, who at least occasionally lived in the same house as Nation's family.¹¹ By 1860, Nation's status in the community of Blount County changed a bit. Though still near the top of the social ladder, several families owned both more valuable real estate and more valuable personal estate than he did. This seems to indicate a shift in the 1850's, from an environment that was still a frontier and where the most agricultural profit could be gleaned from the most conveniently farmable land, to an environment where harnessing larger amounts of labor to clear more land for cultivation became a way of staying on top of things. Nation's farm was chosen well for the initial stages of settlement in the county--it was centered on flat and fertile land of a creek bottom and also close enough to the then county seat of Blountsville to glean all the legal and economic conveniences of such a proximity. Nation owned a moderate amount of rather good quality land; the farmers who began to prosper in the next phase of agricultural development would own greater quantities of lesser quality land, which was made exploitable by the increasing slave population of the county through the Civil War.¹² Nation was always relatively well-off in Blount County terms, but it is worth also noting that he would certainly have been considered "middling" in state-wide terms.

Nation's economic means, however, clearly enabled him to build a house that would remain standing into the late 20th century as a testimony to the aspirations of his class of men. The fact that the house is both two story and brick sets it into a rare class of structures in the mountain regions of Alabama. It is one of two known antebellum brick structures that remain in the county. Brick construction is even very rare when the whole region is taken in to consideration. Even many of the most wealthy planters in the entire state chose to build their massive plantation houses in frame. Nation, in contrast, clearly had his eyes on permanence and durability when he built his house. Other than the Nation house, the only two story hall/chamber house to remain standing is the near contemporary ashlar construction James McCollum House (Eastis House) near Harpersville in Shelby County.¹³ The finest example of the house type in Alabama, the Jacob Green House in St. Clair County,

⁷Alabama Agricultural Census for 1850.

⁸ibid.

⁹ibid.

¹⁰Alabama Slave Schedules for 1850 and 1860.

¹¹1850 and 1860 Alabama Federal Census.

¹²There seem to be two major land buying phases in antebellum Blount County. The greatest quantity of land patents seem to initially date to the 1830s. Very little land was acquired during the 1840s, and land acquisition in large quantities appears to have begun again in the early 1850s. Nation's primary acquisitions date from the 1830s, and though not to the same extent as several others, he expanded his holdings somewhat in the 1850s, following the typical pattern of the county.

¹³See Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage Form for "Rock House (Eastis House)" in Shelby County, added 12/4/92.

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was dated c. 1828 and contained fine Federal style woodwork, but was demolished in the early 1980's.¹⁴ The hall/chamber plan house had its cultural roots in post-medieval England and became the primary house form for the Virginia elite by the early 18th century.¹⁵ By the late 18th century the house type in a two story form was commonly being built by prosperous settlers of the Valley of Virginia (frequently by those of Scots-Irish descent). From the late 18th through the early 19th centuries the two story hall/chamber house would spread into parts of Kentucky and East Tennessee as well as to a more limited extent the Appalachian areas of other states, including Alabama.

The two story hall/chamber house type was based on a two-room arrangement wherein one room, the hall, was used as a communal "family" room where many functions of household work would be carried out, and the other room, the chamber was frequently a more formal "withdrawing" room for more formal and intimate social interaction as well as frequently fulfilling the function of the master bedroom. The two rooms on the second story of houses of this type were typically used as bedchambers for other members of the family (as well as, in the instance of the Nation House, hired help). Nation's brick house containing rooms of segregated functions would have stood out as symbol of wealth and social prestige in a landscape of one room log dwellings.

Besides census data and the material legacy of the house, little else is known about Nation. He was born in Tennessee and was a devout Methodist who remained loyal to the main branch of the denomination after the separation of the Methodist Episcopal Church South.¹⁶ He lived to see all of his children buried and had three marriages, his last wife surviving him. His son to live to adulthood, David Crockett Nation, married Angeline Copeland, daughter of Thomas Nation's neighbor and social equivalents in the Copeland family, who built the other surviving antebellum brick residence in the county, a central passage one story house. Nation was also one of the assistant marshal census takers for Blount County in 1870.¹⁷ Though we know little else about the man, his personality, and his aspirations, Thomas Nation built a house that to this day stands as one of the sole surviving testaments to a particular antebellum "Appalachian" regional conception of prosperity.

¹⁴Personal Communication from Robert Gamble. 2/26/97.

¹⁵See Upton, Dell. "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia". in Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986). p. 317.

¹⁶Surname File, Alabama Department of Archives and History. Information accompanies a transcription of the family Bible.

¹⁷ibid.

