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Preliminary Report

THE CHAMBERLAIN HOUSE AND DEPENDENCIES

of

THE MOUND PLANTATION DEVELOPMENT

Jefferson County, Mississippi

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The Chamberlain House and Dependencies

or

The Mound Plantation Development

Jefferson County, Mississippi

The Chamberlain house lies in Jefferson County, Mississippi, about seventeen miles northeast of Natchez, very near an early settlement called Uniontown which has now entirely disappeared. The house is situated on high ground about two hundred yards northwest of the old Trace with an avenue of trees leading from the Trace up to the front porch. It will also be visible from the Parkway. Uniontown was located on the southeast side of the Trace opposite the Chamberlain house. The residence has been previously known as Ferguson's Tavern, Mound Plantation, and the Chamberlain House.

The structure, and property acquired by William Ferguson in the Spanish District of Natchez about 1775, has been the homestead of various descendants of the family from that time up to 1937 when the State of Mississippi bought the house and part of the property for the National Park Service.

The tavern was erected on high ground traditionally believed to be an Indian mound and also the site of a Spanish fortified outpost. At the time William Ferguson built the original one-room tavern, about 1778, the stockade was standing, and a moat is reported to have existed at the base of the mound to which the settlers of Uniontown fled in the event of an Indian attack.

The original building was only a single room 16' X 20' which, with fireplace, was probably used as a tavern for traders and wayfarers traveling along the Natchez Trace. No doubt there were numerous outbuildings, including a kitchen, smoke house, barns, and later on slave quarters, as well as other outbuildings necessary in the operation of a sizable plantation on the grant of land which Ferguson had secured.

To the central room was added an additional room on either end, after which the three back rooms were probably added. It is likely that the additions were not begun until after Ferguson's marriage in 1783 and that later additions may have been made due to increasing travel along the Natchez Trace.

To date, according to the architectural evidence now existing, the center room, or original house, will bear out a date of approximately 1780 with the first addition somewhere around 1800.

In the writer's opinion the Chamberlain house, solely as an outstanding example of architecture of the period, would not justify its restoration by the Service; However, if the historical evidence of its connection with the Natchez Trace and the social and economic history of the old Southwest are considered sufficiently important by the Historical Division, there are now existing details of construction and information sufficient for its restoration as of 1830 or 1840.

In the event that a restoration is considered, a survey should be made in the form of an archaeological investigation to locate, if possible, the outbuildings described by the Chamberlain family. The following structures are reported to have been grouped around the main house:

1. The Kitchen

   Back of and a few feet to the left of the house - a single room structure with a chimney.

2. The Guest House or "Sleepy Hollow"

   Directly back of the main house - a two-story house, four rooms, double chimney, built of logs or brick with brick foundation.

3. The Slave Quarters

   Twelve to sixteen cabins in the bottom north and east of the main house. Single room cabins - built of logs, each probably having a chimney.

4. The Overseer's Quarters

   To the right of and approximately on line with the front of the guest house, probably about midway between the guest house and slave quarters group - a two-room house, double chimney, built of logs probably with a brick foundation.

5. The Brick Walks

   Said to be existing around the main house and are now covered with earth. In all probability the brick walks connected the main house with the kitchen and guest house.

6. The Stockade

Surrounding the main structure at the foot of the mound.

7. The Moat

On the outer side of the stockade.

Archaeological investigation should also verify or disprove the belief that the mound on which the house now stands is an Indian mound artificially made. In the course of such an investigation some indications might be found as to the exact location of the Spanish fort which is said to have occupied the present house site.

Of the features and structures said to have existed at some time during the different stages of habitation, slight visible evidences, other than the existing house, remain to indicate such an extensive development as has been described. At the southwest end of the house a small deposit of broken bricks is the only indication of what may have been the chimney, said to have been in Mrs. Ferguson's room. Back of, and to the left of this brick deposit, or farther southwest are scattered broken bricks which might be the site of the old kitchen (all indications and probable locations will be shown on a topographical map to be prepared by the Bureau of Public Road Engineers on the Parkway project).

At the site indicated for the guest house ("Sleepy Hollow"), said to have been a two story log or brick house with two rooms on each of the two floors, with a double fireplace and central chimney, only a few scattered broken bricks are visible. These scattered pieces of broken bricks have little or no significance as yet, but the site should be investigated. Besides the present topography is suggestive of once having been a building site.

The spot pointed out as having been occupied by the overseer's quarters and the adjoining part of the bottom land where the slave quarters were located now bear no surface evidences whatever of once existing buildings, except that the ground is suitable and conveniently located in relation to the plantation house.

One can only speculate as to the location of the stockade and moat since neither was used after attacks by the Indians were no longer feared. However, if they were once existing, traces could probably be found at the base of the mound.

If the outbuildings were built as described, it would be a fairly simple task to locate the kitchen, "Sleepy Hollow," the overseer's

quarters, the moat, the stockade, and brick walks by digging several narrow trenches to a depth of two or three feet.

On the building sites such trenching should reveal either the remains of the brick chimney and wall foundations or show soil disturbances where they were removed. Mrs. Chamberlain remembers that the bricks from these structures were removed to provide material for more modern structures elsewhere on the property. A series of trenches, (2' or 3' wide) excavated to the undisturbed clay line, dug into the mound at the base, should reveal the profile of the once excavated moat and the filled-in post holes which once held the vertical posts of the stockade.

It is doubtful whether or not any traces of the slave quarters could be found unless the cabin foundations were set in the ground 12" to 18" or unless part or all of them had chimneys. To find indications (filled-in pier or post holes) of the foundation logs or piers, the disturbed top soil would have to be removed in very thin layers until undisturbed soil is reached.

If a restoration of the Chamberlain house and plantation group is justifiable as a historic development in connection with the Natchez Trace, the group when finished to have a definite utility value, such as providing overnight accommodations for visitors, then the following recommendations are made:

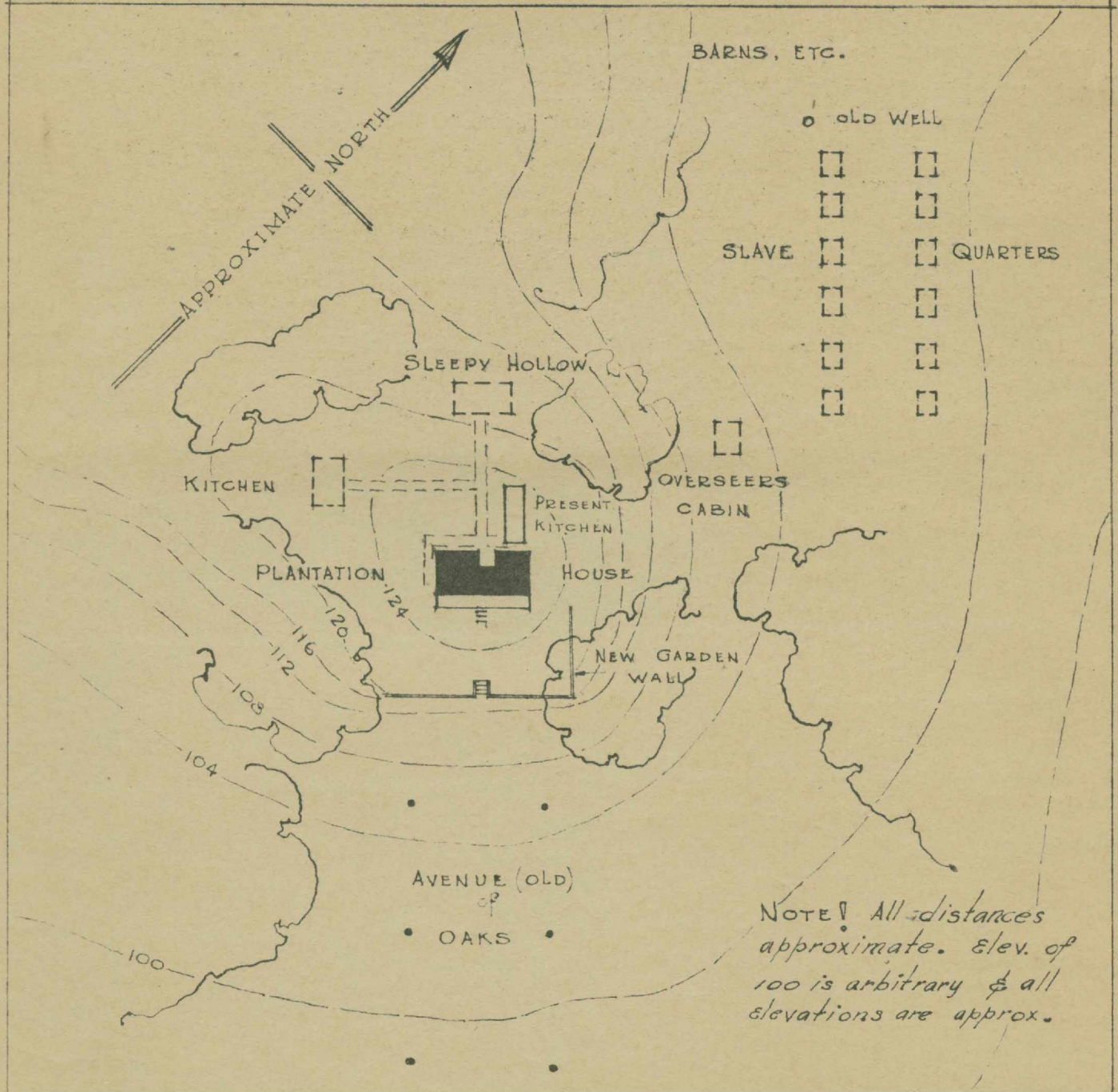
1. That an archaeological survey or investigation be made to determine the exact location of as many of the outbuildings as possible and to verify as well as determine the existance and extent of the moat and stockade. At the same time narrow trenches should be dug into the face of the mound to determine whether or not it is an artificial Indian mound or a natural formation.

   It is recommended that all this investigation be done with CCC labor under the direction of a technician versed in archaeological methods and practices.

2. If archaeological investigation verifies or reveals the location and sizes of the buildings and features of the plantation, it is recommended that an architectural study be made of other contemporary plantation groups now existing, as well as any buildings of the type that may have been recorded.

3. That a complete set of plans and specifications be prepared for the restoration of the Chamberlain house and reproduction of the

outbuildings as of 1830 or 1840. Sufficient modern conveniences should be included to make the buildings adaptable to modern day usage.



DIAGRAMMATIC ARRANGEMENT OF MOUND PLANTATION GROUP.

FROM VERBAL DESCRIPTION BY MRS CHAMBERLAIN.

For purpose of illustration only

OLD NATCHEZ TRACE

Sept. 13, 1937

dr. 2.R.P.



Front of House

Original single room is directly back of porch steps.



Front Wall of House

Note arrows indicating where additions were made to either end of the original single room. Note single window blind or shutter. Porch is a later addition.



Southwest End of House

Note arrow and camera tripod indicating where scattered broken bricks were found. May possibly be location of end chimney.



View Looking Northeast

Arrow indicates possible location of old kitchen. See sketch map.



View Looking East
From Probable Location of Old Kitchen

Present kitchen is partially covered with wood shingles.



View Looking South

Arrow and camera tripod indicate possible location of guest house. Rear of present kitchen is partially visible to the left.



Northeast End of House



Northeast End of House
From About the Base of the Mound

View looking northwest - Note that mound is comparatively flat and could be a natural formation.



View Looking North
From Northeast End of House

View shows approximately where caretaker's house (arrow to left) may have stood and flat ground to right where slave quarters were located.



View Showing
Location of Slave Quarters

View from about the location of caretaker's house.



View of Garden Wall
and
Base of Mound

View looking north - Note that so-called mound has very gradual slope.