

A Report to the Mayor and City Council of Madison,
Georgia on the Designation of the Finney-Land House
as a Historic Property

Submitted by the Madison Historic Preservation Commission

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The purpose of this designation report is to provide pertinent information for the local governing body of Madison, Georgia concerning the proposed designation of the Finney-Land House as a historic property. As outlined in Madison's Historic Preservation Ordinance, "the report will follow the guidelines for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places and shall consist of: (a) a physical description, (b) a statement of significance, (c) a map of the proposed boundary, and (d) representative photographs."

Physical Description

The Finney-Land House is a two-story, L-plan frame dwelling built c.1805. The house was originally the main house for an extensive Antebellum cotton plantation including holdings in excess of 3,500 acres. The parcel has, over time, been reduced to the current two-acre lot with almost all of the surrounding landscape dominated by a monoculture pine farm. The structure is sided with weatherboard and covered with a cross-hip metal roof. One historic outbuilding (c.1910) and a small collection of landscape features ("objects") are extant. The structure clearly reflects its three historic phases: (1) initial development as Piedmont Plain homestead briefly serving as Morgan County's first courthouse, (2) creation of a Greek Revival visage as the center of an extensive farming operation typical of the upland-south building traditions, and (3) subsequent reduction to a small family farmstead and renovations featuring the Craftsman aesthetic.

Exterior

The residence was built as a side-gabled classic I-House. A one-room, one-story ell addition was appended to the right rear elevation to form an "L" plan. The second floor of the ell addition appears to have been added shortly thereafter. A one-story frame shed addition nestled within the "L" contains a kitchen and bathroom. A framed one-story sleeping porch projects from the north elevation of the kitchen addition. The structure rests on a continuous brick foundation. Large fieldstone footings and piers are present under the kitchen addition and are found only in this location, yet are inconsistent in materials and construction methods with interior piers under the main structure. Some of the fieldstone piers were reused when the kitchen/bathroom addition was built. Beneath the kitchen and flanked by a pair of piers, evidence remains of an open cellar entrance.

The façade of the structure is oriented toward the west. The front elevation is three bays wide with a central entrance. The primary entrance is a five-panel oak door with a Greek Revival door surround composed of sidelights and a transom. Paired double-hung windows with a 4/2 light configuration flank the entrance.

The second floor fenestration features 4/2 single-hung windows arranged symmetrically across the façade.

A neatly arranged Italianate bracket course ornaments the shallow boxed eaves above the second floor windows. Monumental pilasters accentuate the corners. A Craftsman style porch wraps around the south (right) corner of the façade and proceeds partially across the south elevation, disrupting the symmetry of the façade. The single story porch has a hipped metal roof and is accented with battered columns on brick piers and a beaded-board ceiling. The south (side) elevation is symmetrical and is four window bays (two rooms) wide. Double-hung, 4/2 windows are typical throughout. The bracket course is continued from the facade and extends along the length of the elevation. The front porch wraps around the corner and continues to a depth of about one room. A single stuccoed brick chimney rises between the front parlor and the ell addition through the roof ridge.

The east (rear) elevation clearly illustrates the L-Plan with the single-story shed-roofed kitchen addition tucked in to the "L". The addition is roofed with standing seam metal. The back of the ell has the only gable-end present on the house and is adorned solely with boxed eaves. (The rear of the house is not treated with a bracket course.) Again, 4/2 single-hung windows are typical. A single-light, three-panel door provides access to the rear of central hall where it extends through the kitchen addition. The door is accessed by a set of poured concrete steps. A single lateral exterior stuccoed brick chimney rises above the right end of the elevation between the main house and the kitchen addition. A large sleeping porch sprawls northward from the side of the kitchen addition and is accessed from the north elevation.

The north (side) elevation likewise is asymmetrical and clearly illustrates the L-Plan with the kitchen addition and screened sleeping porch visible. Single-hung, 4/2 windows are present. The bracket course appears again below the eave line. Access is provided to the kitchen addition from this elevation by a set of poured concrete steps leading through the sleeping porch. The sleeping porch has a low-pitched hipped standing seam metal roof, and is partially enclosed (up to 3 feet) with weatherboard and screening above. A corrugated metal awning traces the perimeter of the sleeping porch.

Information concerning the interior of the home can be found on the Finney-Land House's National Register application.

Statement of Significance

The Finney-Land House is significant at the local level for its unique architectural styles and its contribution to local history in Madison and Morgan County. The home's period of significance ranges from 1805 until the mid-1980s, during which time it went under 2 major architectural renovations and saw multiple ownerships.

Architecture

The Finney-Land House exhibits structural and materials characteristics from three different eras - c.1805, c.1835-1855, and c.1925. The earliest portion was the three bay, four bent, vernacular I-house with full-width hipped roof covered front porch. An early addition - the rear ell - appends the right rear of the main house. The addition exhibits the same style and materials of construction as the main house but material dimensions vary from those of the main house. There are three remaining stone piers under the present kitchen area that originally supported the back porch, and there is an original pier support under the present dining room that still exists.

James T. Finney is credited with the Greek Revival revisions to the house due partly to the arrival of the style in this period but also because he is the first owner of record with the family means to spend money on the luxury of stylization. Changes and additions of this period were primarily cosmetic and included the addition of the bracket course, pilasters, possibly a portico-styled entry instead of the original porch (if Finney did build such an entrance, it was later replaced with a full width hipped roof front porch), mantles in the Greek Revival style (some extant), front tripartite entrance, stair balusters and newels, and the conversion of the gable end to hipped roof configuration.

In 1927, Cincinnati Houston Land bought the house and began an extensive renovation in the Craftsman architectural style. These included an addition of new floor layer, plastering of the ceilings and walls, removal and/or replacement of most of the original woodwork (except the mantles), and modernization of electrical systems and light fixtures and restyling the front porch.

Local History

The property now containing the Finney-Land House was ceded to the State of Georgia by the Creek Indian Cession of 1802 and subsequently redistributed during the first Georgia Land Lottery in 1805 as Land Lot 33 in District 5. James Wilson of then Jefferson County was allowed two draws and his winning draw

for 202 ½ acres was #1159. Wilson accepted the property and was most likely responsible for the earliest portions of the existing structure, structurally indicated to be a three-bay four-bent I-house with a rear ell and a full width porch.

From 1808 to 1809, the home became the interim site of the Inferior and Superior courts for newly formed Morgan County pending the construction of adequate facilities in Madison, which was now the county's seat. Soon after, the property passed through a short series of owners and subdivisions, leading to its purchase by Finney in 1835. The son of a wealthy cotton planter from Greene County, Finney purchased the land to establish his own successful cotton plantation upon the property starting with a wife and two slaves. Given Finney's prosperity during his tenure on the property and the Greek Revival and Italianate elements of the house, it is most likely that the Finneys were responsible for the stylization of the house.

After another string of owners, Land purchased the house in 1927 as a retirement property and to become a gentleman cotton farmer. In addition to renovations to the home in the Craftsman style, Land was also responsible for many of the landscape features significant to the house, such as the quartz retaining wall, mailbox (no longer extant) and birdbath.

Most of the property's land was sold to a land speculator in 1986, leaving the property with only 2 acres. In 1998, Tim and Janice Reilly purchased the two-acre tract for \$80,000 with the historic residence and began a full-scale sensitive renovation.

Boundary Justification and Description

The proposed property will be designated according to the boundaries as laid out by the plat map in the official warranty deed:

“All of that certain lot or parcel of land, together with any improvements located thereon (including a residential dwelling having a current street address of 1750 Bethany Road), situated, lying and being located in Land Lot 33 of the 5th Land District, City (276th) District, G.M., Morgan County, Georgia, containing two and no/100ths (2.00) acres, more or less, and being more particularly described as Tract C on that certain plat of survey prepared by Plat Book 15, at page 353, Clerk’s Office, Morgan County Superior Court, said plat being incorporated herein and made a part hereof by reference. Being a portion of the property conveyed to Brooks Pennington by that certain Warranty Deed, dated September 15, 1986, of record in Deed Book 130, at page 108 in the aforesaid Clerk’s Office.”

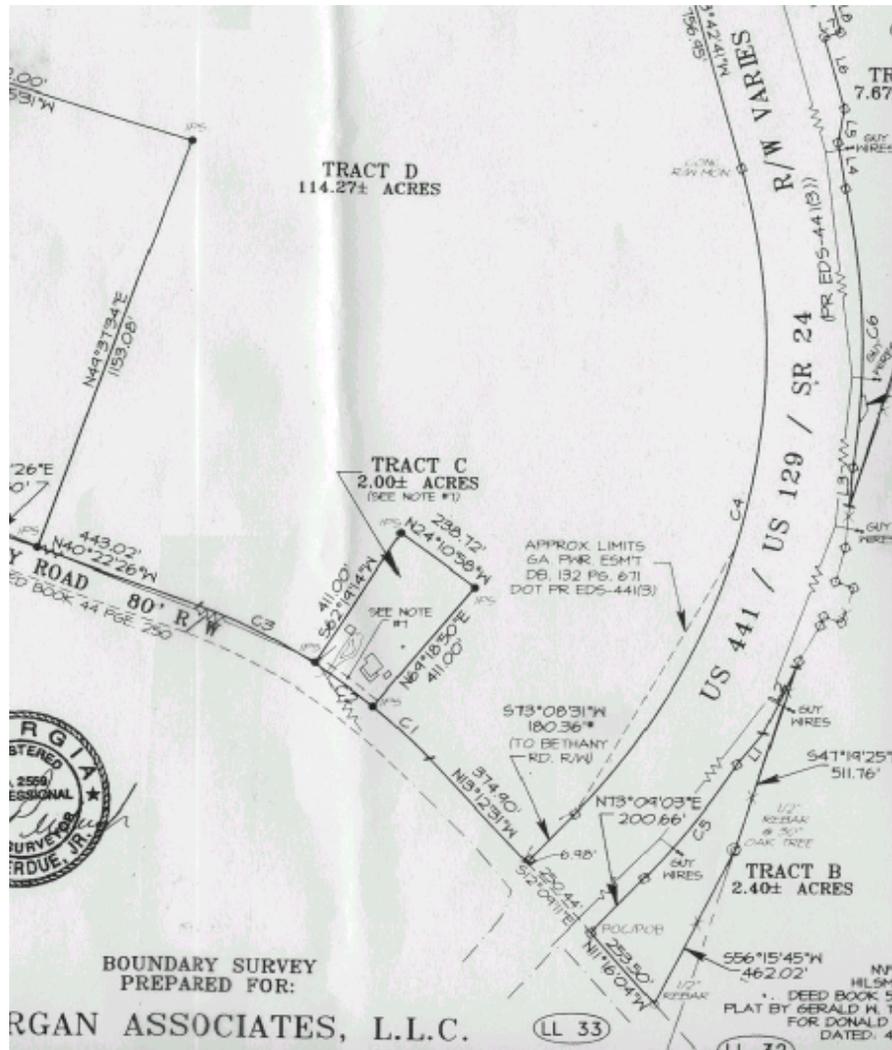




Figure 1: Finney-Land House front facade



Figure 2: Finney-Land House, side (south) elevation



Figure 3: Finney-Land House, rear elevation



Figure 4: Finney-Land House, side (north) elevation



Figure 5: Finney-Land House, historic retaining wall



Figure 6: Finney-Land House, historic birdbath

