

INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR

MULTIPLE RESOURCE OR  THEMATIC NOMINATION

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

DeGraffenreidt-Johnson House  
AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER North side of SR 1346, .9 of a mile east of its junction  
with SR 1506

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Silk Hope

VICINITY OF

Fourth

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

N. C.

037

Chatham

037

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

**ACCESSIBLE**

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES - RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES - UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

OTHER

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Mrs. Margaret Elsee

STREET & NUMBER

Rt. 2 Box 51

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Pittsboro, NC 27312

VICINITY OF

N. C.

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Chatham County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Pittsboro

N. C.

**6 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

Ray Manieri

July 1, 1983

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Urban Research Associates

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1301 Cornwallis Drive

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Greensboro

N. C.

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The DeGraffenreidt-Johnson House, once the center of a large Chatham County plantation is one of the finest examples of vernacular Greek Revival domestic architecture in Chatham County. In the thoroughness of its approach to that style, and in the use of specific exterior and interior architectural elements, it is almost an identical twin to the contemporary William P. Hadley House in nearby Hickory Mountain Township, which is listed on the National Register.

Dominated by a handsome one-story porch, the three-bay two-story frame house displays a number of typically Greek Revival features, such as a low hipped roof, pilastered corner posts resembling square columns, symmetrically molded door and window surrounds, and plain corner blocks. The unusual octagonal posts, which support the front porch, define the house's elegant main entrance. The side lights and transom, which flank its heavy double-leaf paneled doors combine with molded surrounds and plain corner blocks to produce a formal Greek Revival entry.

A deep frieze with molded band, and unique wedge-shaped modillions distinguish the roofline, and enhance the individual identity of the DeGraffenreidt-Johnson House. The Greek Revival exterior motif is completed by double-hung windows with six-over-six sash and two brick exterior chimneys, whose bond is obscured by a stuccoed surface.

Sympathetic additions to the rear and western sides of the house have altered original porches, characterized by the same robust octagonal posts which still adorn the front porch, but have not compromised its Greek Revival character. A rear ell, which replaced the original detached kitchen with an interior one, features the pilastered corner boards, low hip roof, and window surrounds that accentuate the original portion of the house. A rear section, created by the enclosure of the rear porch, repeats the wedge-shaped modillions which decorate the cornice on other parts of the structure.

The Greek Revival character of the DeGraffenreidt-Johnson house is maintained by its central-hall, single-pile interior plan. Once the focal point of the house, the central hall is elaborately treated. Heavy paneled double-leaf front and rear doors, a ceiling medallion and paneled open-well combine with the enclosed-string stair accentuated by a robust octagonal newel and scalloped stair brackets to form an elegant reception area. Bold vernacular mantels with fluted pilasters and wide frieze continue the house's Greek Revival character in each room of its original section. The repetition of identical features such as wedge-shaped modillions, pilastered corner boards, the octagonal newel and heavy pilastered mantels, indicate that the DeGraffenreidt-Johnson House and the William P. Hadley House were most likely the work of the same craftsman.

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Several outbuildings are located just to the west of the DeGraffenreidt-Johnson House along a dirt lane. A board-and-batten barn and small board-and-batten cabin are probably nineteenth century structures and are all that remain of the various outbuildings that once surrounded the house. Two other structures, a tractor shed and dairy barn, are more modern mid-twentieth century buildings.

**8 SIGNIFICANCE**

\_\_\_\_\_ NATIONAL \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ X LOCAL

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POETICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

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SPECIFIC DATES ca. 1850 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Unknown

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The DeGraffenreidt-Johnson House, significant in its thorough-going approach to vernacular Greek Revival domestic architecture, was built for John Baker DeGraffenreidt, a descendant of the Baron Christophe DeGraffenreidt, founder of New Bern, North Carolina. In both its exterior and interior finish it is almost an identical twin to the contemporary William P. Hadley House in nearby Hickory Mountain Township. The use of identical features such as bold wedge-shaped modillions, door and window surrounds, pilastered corner boards, robust octagonal newel and enclosed-string stair, and interior mantels indicate that these two contemporary houses were probably built by the same craftsman. In this respect, the DeGraffenreidt-Johnson House provides an excellent example of how certain building forms and practices developed within a specific locale.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

- A. Associated with the establishment of the large plantation system of agriculture in central North Carolina.
- B. Associated with the DeGraffenreidt family, one of nineteenth century Chatham County's wealthiest planter families and descendant of Baron Christophe DeGraffenreidt, founder of New Bern, North Carolina.
- C. Embodies the form and characteristics of vernacular Greek Revival domestic architecture.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the two decades before the Civil War, John Baker DeGraffenreidt became a prominent member of the wealthy, planter society in Chatham County. Through marriage, he became closely related to the influential Alston family and was able to build one of the largest estates in Chatham County during the nineteenth century. Although he did experience financial difficulties during the period of reconstruction following the Civil War, DeGraffenreidt was able to recover and maintain his status as a wealthy land owner.

The DeGraffenreidt family was already prominent in Chatham County at the time of John Baker DeGraffenreidt's birth in 1824.<sup>1</sup> His father John, a descendant of Baron Christophe DeGraffenreidt, founder of New Bern,<sup>2</sup> North Carolina, built a large estate before he died suddenly in 1824.<sup>2</sup> Although little is known of the death of John DeGraffenreidt, Sr., it is clear that John Baker DeGraffenreidt and his sister Pamela inherited portions of a large estate. Pamela DeGraffenreidt, who inherited fifteen slaves from her father in 1824,<sup>3</sup> married Joseph J. Alston, Jr., one of wealthy local planter "Chatham Jack" Alston's sons in 1836 and helped strengthen the prominent social and economic position of the DeGraffenreidt family in Chatham County society.

Because of the untimely death of his father and his young age, John Baker DeGraffenreidt's inherited estate was placed under the management of court appointed administrators. The exact size of his inheritance is not known, but estate records show that he received nine slaves in 1824.<sup>5</sup> By 1838 when he was fourteen, DeGraffenreidt's estate was of such value that his guardians who managed the estate were required to post a bond of \$10,000.<sup>6</sup>

DeGraffenreidt probably assumed control of his estate about 1845<sup>7</sup> and over the next several years solidified his position as a prominent Chatham County planter. He married Delia Alston (1829-1914), granddaughter of "Chatham Jack" Alston, about 1847.<sup>8</sup> DeGraffenreidt's impressive plantation house was probably built about this time. In general style and in specific architectural details, it is almost an identical twin of the William P. Hadley House in nearby Hickory Mountain Township. The use of certain identical architectural elements in both structures make it clear that the DeGraffenreidt House was

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES** ... continued on additional page

Alston-DeGraffenreidt House National Register Nomination, Survey and Planning Branch, North Carolina Division of Archives and History.

Chatham County Records, (subgroups: Deeds, Wills Estate Papers, Tax Records).

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**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Approx. 54 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	17	653040	3960680	B	17	653580	3960640
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	17	653540	3960000	D	17	6530000	3960040
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property consists of approximately fifty-four acres bounded as shown on Chatham County Tax Map #9703.

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built by the same craftsman who built the Hadley House c. 1850. Although it is not possible to determine the exact date of construction of the DeGraffenreidt House, the knowledge that DeGraffenreidt does not appear in local census records until 1860 indicates that it was built during the period 1850-1860.

DeGraffenreidt clearly engaged in farming activities on a much larger scale than most farmers in Chatham County and in other sections of North Carolina. In 1860, when according to census records he owned over 100 slaves, only thirty per cent of North Carolina's families owned slaves and most of those owned no more than ten slaves. Local tradition, which preserves the belief that DeGraffenreidt treated his slaves more harshly than other local slave owners, states that a number of slave houses were located just west of the DeGraffenreidt house.<sup>12</sup>

Although much of his personal wealth was lost as a result of the Civil War and the following period of reconstruction, evidence indicates that John Baker DeGraffenreidt was able to maintain a comfortable life-style by adjusting to the changing post-war economic conditions. At thirty-seven years of age in 1861 he would not have been too old to participate in the Civil War, but no information relating to his participation in the war has yet been found. Family tradition states that confederate troops were often allowed to sleep in the house's entrance hall, but were not given access to other sections of the residence.<sup>13</sup> Although a prosperous planter prior to the war, local deed records indicate that DeGraffenreidt experienced financial problems during reconstruction. To satisfy DeGraffenreidt's debts to a William Crump, the property, "...embracing the lands upon which said DeGraffenreidt resides...", was offered at public sale in December in 1869.<sup>14</sup> Fortunately, DeGraffenreidt's property was purchased for \$2,000 by his only daughter, who had married Thomas L. Peay.<sup>15</sup>

Despite financial difficulties, DeGraffenreidt was able to resume his position as a landowner and farmer during the latter part of the nineteenth century. In 1870, Ramsey's Map of Chatham County shows him residing at this former home,<sup>16</sup> which may have been given or sold back to DeGraffenreidt by his daughter.<sup>17</sup> At the age of fifty-six, in 1880 DeGraffenreidt owned 330 acres of land valued at \$1,200 and possessed a total estate valued at almost \$1,800.<sup>18</sup>

Evidence indicates that DeGraffenreidt died during the period 1886-1891. He transferred property as late as December, 1885,<sup>19</sup> but is not listed in the county tax list for 1892.<sup>20</sup> Following his death, DeGraffenreidt's house was occupied by several families. Mrs. Edna Johnson, a former owner, states that Chapin, Cuninghame, Smith and Webster families all occupied the house before the Johnson family

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took possession of it during the final years of the nineteenth century. The house remained in the Johnson family until 1974 when it was purchased by Margaret Elsee, the current owner.<sup>21</sup>

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NOTES

1. By subtracting DeGraffenreidt's age at the time of a specific census from the date of that census, his birth year can be determined.
2. Various records found in DeGraffenreidt's estate papers (Box 17 Chatham County Estate Papers, North Carolina Archives) show that he died intestate in 1824, the year of his son's birth.
3. Ibid, Administrator's Bond, November, 1824.
4. Chatham County Marriage Bonds, 1771-1853.
5. Chatham County Estate Papers, Administrator's Bond, November, 1824, Box 17, North Carolina Archives.
6. Ibid, Guardian's Bond, November, 1838.
7. The exact year in which he assumed control of the management of his estate is not know, but he would have been twenty-one in 1845.
8. Alston-DeGraffenreidt House National Register Nomination, Survey and Planning Branch, North Carolina Division of Arhcives and History. The exact date of this marriage is not known, but the 1850 census shows that the DeGraffenreidt's daughter Martha was born in 1848.
9. Eighth Census of the United States, 1860. Population Schedule.
10. Eighty Census of the United States, 1860. Slave Schedule.
11. C. O. Cathey, Agricultural Development in North Carolina, 1783-1860, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), p. 52-53.
12. Mrs. Edna Johnson, March 6, 1983.
13. Ibid.
14. Chatham County Deeds, Book A0. p. 322.
15. Ibid.
16. Map of Chatham County, 1870, Captain N. A. Ramsey.
17. Chatham County Deeds, Book BG, p. 524. This 1874 deed transfers 200 acres of land formerly owned by DeGraffenreidt's mother from his daughter to him.

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18. Chatham County Tax List, 1880.
19. Chatham County Deeds, Book BP, p. 331.
20. Chatham County Tax List, 1892.
21. Mrs. Edna Johnson, March 6, 1983.

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Cathey, C. O. Agricultural Developments in North Carolina, 1783-1860.  
Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956.

Eighth Census of the United States, 1860.

Elsee, Mrs. Margaret. Interviewed March 3, 1983.

Hadley, Wade H. Jr., et al. Chatham County 1771-1971.

Johnson, Mrs. Edna. Interviewed March 6, 1983.

Lefler, Hugh T. and Albert R. Newsome. The History of a Southern State  
North Carolina. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,  
1973.

Seventh Census of the United States, 1850.

