

! Keep!

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## NAME

HISTORIC William Riley Abbott House

AND/OR COMMON

## LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

side SR 1224, 0.2 mi. S of jct. with SR 1223

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

South Mills

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1st

STATE

North Carolina

CODE

37

COUNTY

Camden

CODE

29

## CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input checked="" 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

## OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME House: H. T. Mullen Field: Floyd Albertson

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

South Mills

VICINITY OF

STATE

North Carolina 27976

## LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Camden County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Camden

STATE

North Carolina

## REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE HABS (No. NC-56)

DATE 9-11-40

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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

The William Riley Abbott House, sited in a field in rural Camden County, is a distinctively detailed and, by the standards of the region, an unusually large Greek Revival plantation house. Its imperfectly crafted, vernacular trim concentrated on window surrounds, entrance, and an interior mantel are based on patterns created by manipulating the Greek key motif combined with typical Greek Revival trim and pattern bookish motifs reminiscent of Asher Benjamin.

The house, somewhat unusual in plan, is a truncated L-shaped structure with pedimented gables on each end and on the rear extension, and a patterned tin roof pierced by interior end brick chimneys. The house is raised on replacement brick piers and, like others in the low-lying region, has no excavated basement. The five-bay facade, which is entirely flush-sheathed recalling what is thought to have been a full width, two-tier porch, has a central entrance with pairs of flanking windows. The vernacular Colonial Revival style portico dates from the 1920s. Two pairs of Doric type columns on bases support a pediment and full entablature, the molded cornice and plain frieze of which tie into the main block of the house. A bulls-eye window pierces the tympanum.

The entrance, the focal point of the facade, is a typical pattern book arrangement of a single leaf door framed by sidelights, corner lights, and transom with geometric patterns of muntins. The whole is surrounded by wide, plain bands ornamented with Greek keys and designs abstracted from this motif. At the corners are square blocks with simple foliated decoration in frames. Over the entrance is an enlarged panel decorated with diagonal bands of plain wood trim. Above the entrance a similarly treated door, with plain sidelights but without transom or cornerlights, opens onto a balcony supported by plain brackets.

Detail consistent with that of the entrance embellishes all the window surrounds of the house. Resting on plain sills are pilaster-like frames rising above the upper sash with Greek key detail at top and bottom. Over the windows are unadorned block panels in frames set off between the side pilaster strips by symmetrically placed keys.

The interior plan is unusual and asymmetrical. On the first floor the central entrance opens off-center into a transverse stair hall with two rooms opening through the wall opposite. To the right is an additional chamber. Upstairs the plan is similar but contains a secondary hall with enclosed stair leading to the attic and a modern bath inserted at the end of the transverse hall.

The main stair is an L-shaped open string design, terminating at the bottom in a scrolled rail and rounded step, with a rounded handrail and plain, square-in-section balusters. Surrounding the space and running up the stair is a wide baseboard with molded trim similar to that found in the other rooms. Doors with four-panel leaves leading to individual rooms have simply detailed tapered surrounds with shouldered and slightly pedimented caps. At the ceiling are small but elaborate plaster medallions, probably original, from which hang art-deco style light fixtures, dating from the late 1930s and brought from Trinity United Methodist Church in South Mills about 1974.

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Opening from the hall is the present living room dominated by a large and well detailed vernacular mantel possibly adapted from Asher Benjamin's Greek Revival pattern books. Narrow pilaster-like panels decorated with thin strips of wood arranged in stylized key patterns flank the fire opening. These support a wide frieze ornamented with a repeating row of keys. Blocky brackets support a plain shelf. Window surrounds repeat the design of the doors and feature molded panels at floor level with a raised center section. A built-in firebox, one of three in the house, appears to be original. The adjacent room, now used as a kitchen, has been somewhat remodelled but has similar window and door treatment and a severely plain Greek Revival type mantel. The third room has also been altered but contains some original fabric, such as door and window surrounds. The fireplace has been redesigned in recent years.

The upstairs rooms have little of the decoration employed below. Door and window surrounds, trim, and mantels are plain. One of the bedrooms, however, has ornamental plaster ceiling detail consisting of molded strips forming a large panel and additional molded detail framing the chimney breast at ceiling height. The attic is finished in plaster and has a slightly coved ceiling.

Outbuildings on the property are modern and in use. One, however, is said to have been a smokehouse dating from some point in the nineteenth century.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

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 checked="" 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"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The William Riley Abbott House is a large frame plantation house of vigorous and highly vernacular Greek Revival character, featuring a variety of decorative patterns based on the popular Greek key motif. One of the most pretentious of the relatively few mid-nineteenth century plantation houses in Camden County, the house is believed to have been built for William Riley Abbott and was later owned by the Gordon family. During the Civil War the battle of Sawyer's Lane (South Mills) took place a short distance south of the house.

Assessment of criteria: On a local basis, this house meets National Register criteria C, for it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type or period of construction as a vernacular Greek Revival plantation house; it meets criteria A, as contributing to the broad patterns of our history as a representative of the agrarian antebellum plantation economy important to North Carolina and the South.

The land on which the William Riley Abbott house, known locally as the Mullen house, stands was purchased by Abbott on September 1, 1845. Abbott was a speculator and has been described as ". . . a somewhat plunging type of financier who at one time amassed a fortune before the Civil War."<sup>2</sup> In the Census of 1850 his real estate was valued at \$20,000 possibly indicating that his fine antebellum home was built between 1845 and 1850.<sup>3</sup> Abbott was listed in the census as a farmer,<sup>3A</sup> but no crop was grown in sufficient quantities to constitute a major source of income.<sup>3B</sup> He owned forty slaves and nearly 500 acres of workable farmland. By 1860 his real property was valued at \$40,000;<sup>3C</sup> his personal property at \$20,000; and the number of slaves remained constant. It seems likely that Abbott was living in his new house while building his fortune during the 1850s. The structure most certainly had been erected by 1858 when Abbott sold the property to Joseph P. Gordon for \$12,500.<sup>4</sup>

Gordon, his wife Mary, and several of their eight children moved into the home shortly after purchase, but Gordon did not long enjoy his new estate. He was dead by March 14, 1859, at the age of fifty-six or fifty-seven.<sup>5</sup> A year later the house was occupied<sup>6</sup> by his widow Mary and four of their children: Willis, Francis, Emily, and Morgan.

The widow Gordon and her youngest children were living in the house when the Civil War erupted. The battle of Sawyer's Lane (South Mills) was fought a short distance south of the structure. Local tradition firmly maintains that the Gordon home was used as a Confederate hospital during the battle of April 19, 1862. Nearby homes were sometimes commandeered as hospitals (i. e. Harper House at Bentonville), but if the Gordon home were used as such, no entries were made in the official records. The story may well be true, but like many other traditions, it is not a documented fact.

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Mary L. Gordon had been granted a life estate in the property in 1859 and she continued to reside in the house until her death.<sup>10</sup> In the meantime, title to the land changed hands several times, always subject to the widow's dower. On December 7, 1874, Joseph A. Spencer, Mary Gordon's son-in-law and administrator of the Gordon estate, sold the property to David L. Pritchard for \$3,990.<sup>11</sup> The Civil War had stripped the Gordon family of their slaves and destroyed much of their farmland, reducing the value of the estate by nearly \$9,000.<sup>12</sup> The sale had been ordered to cover debts and costs of administration.

Pritchard never lived in the Abbott/Gordon house for he preceded Mary Gordon in death. Pritchard died in possession of a reversionary interest in the land subject to the life estate of Mary L. Gordon. By 1887 the original 500 acre tract had been reduced to 300 acres.<sup>13</sup> D. L. Pritchard, who died at age seventy-seven, apparently left no surviving children. His will provided for nieces and nephews and one of his nephews, David T. Pritchard, was named executor.<sup>14</sup> The debts of Pritchard's estate surpassed the assets and the court ordered David T. Pritchard to sell the lands of the deceased.<sup>15</sup> At a public auction held on March 7, 1887, John L. Hinton of Pasquotank County purchased 250 acres of the Gordon tract, subject to the life estate of Mary L. Gordon.<sup>16</sup>

Hinton owned the property for twenty-two years during which time Mary L. Gordon died, thus giving Hinton an unencumbered title. His son, John C. Hinton, moved into the house but died before September, 1902. Mrs. John C. Hinton and her four children continued to live in the house at least until John L. Hinton's death in January, 1910.<sup>17</sup> The property was left jointly to Hinton's six children and presumably members of the Hinton family, resided in the house until the mid-1920s when the heirs decided to sell the property.<sup>18</sup>

The next owner of the house was Henry Nosay who acquired it from the Hinton heirs.<sup>19</sup> Nosay died in possession of the property, and the current owners, H. T. and Annie Mullen, purchased it from the Nosay estate in the early 1970s.<sup>20</sup> The house is now occupied by tenants who have kept the structure in good shape, which has aided the Mullen efforts in preservation.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The 500 acre tract was sold to Abbott by William and Maria Old for \$7,000. Camden County Deed Books, Office of the Register of Deeds, Camden County Courthouse, Camden, Deed Book Y, p. 54, hereinafter cited as Camden County Deed Book.

<sup>2</sup>Jesse F. Pugh, Three Hundred Years Along the Pasquotank: A Biographical History of Camden County (Old Trap, 1957), p. 166.

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<sup>3</sup> Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Population Schedule: North Carolina-Camden County, hereinafter cited as Seventh Census, 1850.

<sup>3A</sup> Seventh Census, 1850, Population and Slave Schedule.

<sup>3B</sup> Seventh Census, 1850, Slave Schedule.

<sup>3C</sup> Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: North Carolina-Camden County, Population and Slave Schedules, hereinafter cited as Eighth Census, 1860.

<sup>4</sup> Camden County Deed Book AA, p. 476.

<sup>5</sup> Seventh Census, 1850; and Camden County Estate Papers, State Archives, Raleigh, J. P. Gordon, hereinafter cited as Gordon Estate Papers.

<sup>6</sup> Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Population Schedule: North Carolina-Camden County. See also Joseph A. Spencer to D. L. Pritchard, Camden County Deed Book HH, p. 378.

<sup>7</sup> R. N. Scott and others (eds.), The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington: Government Printing Office, 70 volumes, 1880-1901), Series I, IX, p. 330; W. W. Forehand to Jerry C. Cashion, October 28, 1975, and Jesse F. Pugh to Jerry C. Cashion, November 3, 1975, in research file for Battle of Sawyer's Lane, Research Branch, Archeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Pugh and Forehand correspondence.

<sup>8</sup> Pugh and Forehand correspondence.

<sup>9</sup> See Jerry L. Cross, "Historic Research Report for the Harper House, Bentonville, North Carolina" (August 11, 1975), pp. 4-5, in Historic Sites Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon Estate Papers; and Camden County Deed Book 3, p. 370.

<sup>11</sup> Camden County Deed Book HH, p. 378.

<sup>12</sup> Compare evaluation in 1860 with selling price in 1874. Eighth Census, 1860, and Camden County Deed Book HH, p. 378.

<sup>13</sup> Camden County Superior Court Records, State Archives, Raleigh, Orders and Decrees 1880-1897, pp. 91-93, hereinafter cited as Orders and Decrees.

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<sup>14</sup>Camden County Wills, originals in State Archives, Raleigh, will of D. L. Pritchard.

<sup>15</sup>Orders and Decrees, pp. 92-93.

<sup>16</sup>Camden County Deed Book 3, p. 370.

<sup>17</sup>See copy of John L. Hinton's will in Camden County Will Books, Office of the Clerk of Superior Court, Camden County Courthouse, Camden, Will Book E, p. 475, hereinafter cited as Hinton Will.

<sup>18</sup>Hinton will; and H. T. Mullen to H. McKelden Smith III (telephone interview), October 28, 1975 (notes in Survey and Planning Branch, Archeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Mullen interview.

<sup>19</sup>Mullen interview.

<sup>20</sup>Mullen interview.



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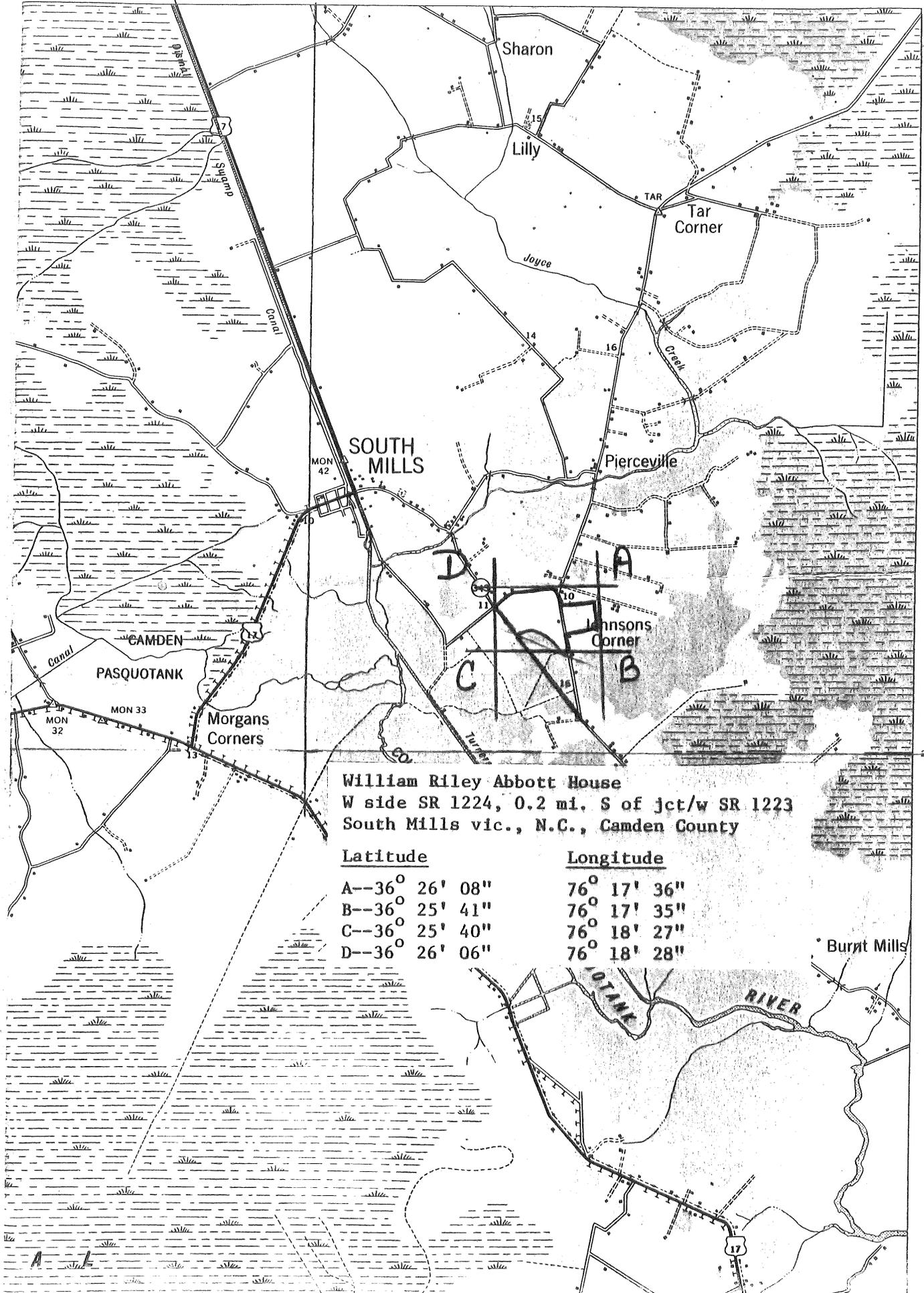
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Pugh, Jesse F. Three Hundred Years Along the Pasquotank: A Biographical History of Camden County. Old Trap, 1957.

Scott, R. N., and others (eds.). The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. Washington: Government Printing Office, 70 volumes, 1880-1901. Series I, IX.

Smith, H. McKelden, III. Interview with H. T. Mullen, October 28, 1977.

United States Census Records: 1850, 1860, 1870.



**William Riley Abbott House**  
 W side SR 1224, 0.2 mi. S of jct/w SR 1223  
 South Mills vic., N.C., Camden County

Latitude

Longitude

A--36° 26' 08"	76° 17' 36"
B--36° 25' 41"	76° 17' 35"
C--36° 25' 40"	76° 18' 27"
D--36° 26' 06"	76° 18' 28"

