

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED  
DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Robert Lee Humber House

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

SE corner Fifth and Washington St.

STREET & NUMBER  
117 West Fifth Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Greenville

VICINITY OF

First

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

North Carolina

CODE

037

COUNTY

Pitt

CODE

147

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

City of Greenville c/o City Manager

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 1905

CITY, TOWN

Greenville

VICINITY OF

STATE

North Carolina

27834

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Pitt County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Greenville

STATE

North Carolina

27834

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

Determined eligible - NO

TITLE

Architectural Resources of the Tar-Neuse River Basin

DATE

1977

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Survey and Planning Branch  
N.C. Division of Archives and History

CITY, TOWN

Raleigh

STATE

North Carolina 27611

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" 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		

---

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

Occupying a large corner lot east of the Greenville Municipal Office Building, the Robert Lee Humber House was built in 1895 for Robert Lee Humber, Sr. and served as the home of Robert Lee Humber, Jr. during his illustrious career in public service. A substantial two-and-a-half-story frame house with Queen Anne and Colonial Revival details, the house sits on a lot with mature plantings and a tall vertical board and latticework fence separating its side and rear grounds from a paved municipal parking lot.

The house consists of two two-and-a-half-story pedimented gable roof sections arranged in a T-plan set with the stem of the T parallel to the street. A one-story Colonial Revival porch with Ionic columns and a pedimented gable marking the entrance bay wraps around the north (front) and part of the west elevations. It was probably added during the first quarter of the twentieth century. A one-story gable roof kitchen ell is attached to the rear of the house as an extension of the crossbar of the T. A diminutive pedimented gable version of the front porch has been reproduced on the ell's western (streetside) elevation to shelter an entrance bay with Colonial Revival details. The steps of the porch also have gracefully curved and decorated wrought-iron balustrades. Set in the rear of the "L" formed by the intersection of the main sections of the house is a later two-story addition which provides a bathroom for the second story master bedroom and a one-story sunporch which has never been finished on the interior.

Although twelve-over-twelve sash is used throughout and the placement of windows within an elevation is symmetrical, their arrangement varies on each elevation. Along the front stem of the T, double windows are centered on the first and second levels with a single gable roof dormer above them, but on the front projecting gable end a double window is centered in the gable and single bays are set towards each edge of the elevation on the first and second levels. The northwest corner of the house is clipped and a single window is set into this oblique angle at each level. Sawn scrollwork lines the overhanging squared eaves. On the western elevation a gable dormer is set above single windows on each level at the northern end and above a double window on the second level and a large bay window on the first level at the southern end. Across the back elevation two dormers are set above single windows. On the eastern elevation a single six-over-six sash is centered in the pediment; two single windows are on the second level and a double window is centered on the first. The entrance which was probably changed at the time the porch was added is composed of a single six-panel door surrounded by sidelights, cornerlights, and transom with lozenge shaped panes.

The interior of the Humber House follows a central hall with two rooms on the west and a large single room on the east. The finish on the first floor which dates from major renovations during the 1940s and 1950s is extremely elaborate with a variety of Georgian Revival motifs used throughout. The door surrounds which have an Adamesque quality are tall slender pilasters with sunbursts in the capitals supporting a dentil cornice. In the hall the stair which rises from front to back with a quarter turn has delicately scrolled brackets, turned balusters, and a heavy square newel. Here, in addition to the panels formed by the application of decorative moldings, a Federal-type

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received JUN 9 1981

date entered JUL - 9 1981

Continuation sheet

Description

Item number 7

Page 1

paneled wainscot with dentil-work below the chair rail has also been installed. The mantels in the parlor and northwest corner sitting room were imported from France and are of intricately carved marble. Perhaps the most remarkable room in the house, the small sitting room is completely paneled in walnut which according to family tradition took six years to locate. Along with the Georgian Revival wood-work the room also features niches with scallop shell devices lining the arches. While the second floor is simply finished, the attic library and basement storage area have been completely paneled with "hidden" storage space created behind some of the panels.

Set in the fence at the rear of the property is a small stuccoed brick building with a terra-cotta tile pyramidal roof. This probably served as a gardener's shed and playhouse. It has been adapted by the city as a small office.

# 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES                      1895 construction                      BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Built in 1895, the Robert Lee Humber House was the birthplace and home of Robert Lee Humber, Jr. (1898-1970) whose illustrious career as an international lawyer, intellectual, and servant of the people of North Carolina spanned the decades of the 1940s through the 1960s. During this period the house in Greenville served as the base from which he worked to establish and develop the North Carolina Museum of Art and its core collection, and to promote the cause of international peace and cooperation through a world federation and later the United Nations. The house, a typical late nineteenth century residence built for Humber's father, has been altered over the years, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s when the interiors were enriched with a variety of moldings, imported mantels, and an especially fine walnut paneled sitting-room. The house with minor renovations is scheduled to become the eastern field office for the North Carolina Division of Archives and History.

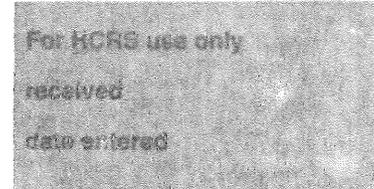
Criteria assessment:

- B. The Robert Lee Humber House was the birthplace and home of Robert Lee Humber, Jr., prominent Greenville attorney, state legislator, driving force behind the establishment and development of the North Carolina Museum of Art, and an internationally recognized figure for his work to insure peace and cooperation through a world federation.
- C. The Humber House is a representative example of a late 19th century urban residence which has been the home of the same family for more than eighty years and has been altered to reflect the changing tastes and lifestyles of the occupants.

NOTE: The house is more than fifty years old, having been built in the 1890s. It has local significance as the home of a locally prominent family. However, its chief significance, on a statewide level, has arisen in the last fifty years from its association with Robert Lee Humber, Jr., who gained transcendent importance in North Carolina for his role in establishing the State Museum of Art and for his work toward world peace.

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form



In 1895 Robert Lee Humber, Sr., a machine shop owner, built a house on a newly acquired lot at what is now 117 West Fifth Street in Greenville.<sup>1</sup> Until recently that house has been occupied by members of the Humber family and has earned special fame as the residence of the internationally known Robert Lee Humber, Jr.

Robert Lee Humber, Jr., was born in 1898, only about three years after his father is said to have built the West Fifth Street house. He was at that time one of two sons of Robert L. and Lena Humber. His brother John Humber had been born in 1895. The Humbers subsequently had a third child, a daughter who became Mrs. Lindley Smith. (Both brother and sister later moved to California.)<sup>2</sup>

After graduating from high school in Greenville at the age of fifteen Humber attended Wake Forest College where he received the B.A. and LLB. degrees. During World War I he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the army and was stationed at Camp Taylor, Kentucky, when the war ended. He then attended Harvard University where he received an M.A. degree. In the 1920s he became a Rhodes Scholar and studied at New College, Oxford, where he obtained a Bachelor of Literature degree and traveled extensively in Europe. He then became a student at the Sorbonne in Paris for two years. There he did comprehensive research into the history of law and met and married Lucie Berthier in 1929.

He continued to live in Paris as an international attorney and an oil executive. His business investments brought him financial success, but World War II soon brought his European career to an end. In 1940 he came home to Greenville, having fled Paris just hours ahead of the invading German Army. He lived in the house built by his father who subsequently died in 1952. Humber's mother had died in 1936.<sup>3</sup>

The rise of Nazism and the catastrophic war in Europe kindled in Humber a strong desire to secure future world peace. He had been significantly influenced by former President Woodrow Wilson's attempt following World War I to establish a world organization, the League of Nations, to prevent violent confrontations between countries. Humber wanted to go further than the concept of the League and create a world federation in which all nations would be subject to the laws of a single world government. Drawing on his experience in international law he developed a plan by which such a government could be established and maintained. He stipulated that in the United States the Congress should amend the Constitution to allow the legal authority for the United States to join a world federation. He strongly felt that "we have outgrown nationalism," and only a worldwide central government, which enacted and enforced world law binding on all nations, could achieve lasting world peace. Diplomacy, he insisted, would never succeed in preventing war:

Order can be maintained only by law. . . . All history proves the same.

. . . .  
Diplomacy can never produce peace because it relies for its enforcement upon war . . . .The virtue of law is that it is enforced upon the 'culprit' without implicating the innocent. . . .Diplomacy [on the other hand] must be applied collectively to a whole nation without regard for individual innocence or guilt.<sup>4</sup>

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet      HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE      Item number 8

Page 2

In 1941 North Carolina became the first state to endorse Humber's resolution for a Federal Constitutional amendment allowing national participation in a world federation. Following World War II Humber traveled throughout the United States and Europe to promote his plan for world peace. A number of states endorsed his resolution for a constitutional amendment, and he earned the support of a number of prominent American intellectuals including the scientist Albert Einstein. In 1948 he was awarded the World Government News medal for the most outstanding service by an individual to the World Federation. The American War Dads also gave him their award for the greatest single contribution to world peace. Along with his wife he was active in the United Nations, although he thought the organization had not gone far enough toward becoming a central world authority. In 1967 the American Freedom Association gave him its World Peace Award for his untiring efforts to bring about cooperation among nations.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to his service to the international community, Robert Lee Humber rendered considerable service to his state and local community. He served in the state senate, 1959-1963, where he was a hard worker for education in North Carolina, especially vocational education. He was founder and chairman of the board of trustees for the Pitt County Technical Institute. He also gave several terms as a trustee of Wake Forest University and received honorary doctoral degrees from Wake Forest, Duke University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For twelve years he was a member and vice chairman of the Pitt County Industrial Development Commission. He belonged to the Memorial Baptist Church of Greenville, and was an active member of many of the clubs and causes of his county and community.<sup>6</sup>

North Carolinians especially remember Humber for his efforts in establishing the North Carolina Museum of Art. He possessed a great interest in the arts and had gained considerable knowledge of painting and other forms during his years in Paris when he "found time from his large business interests to familiarize himself with the great art of the European countries." One of his chief goals was to secure an outstanding collection of art for his state and improve the cultural life of its citizens. "I believe," he once wrote, "that North Carolina is capable of conferring upon this nation a cultural leadership that will not only enrich the life of this generation but will quicken the pulse-beats of civilization, itself. The vision is here, the resources are here; what we need is to co-ordinate our energies and to make articulate a determined will to realize our potentialities."<sup>7</sup>

Humber's appreciation for art and other cultural aspects was evident in his Fifth Street house. A friend, C. Sylvester Green, recalls that "his home became a treasure trove of the rare and the beautiful" and was filled with ". . . great works of art, paintings, china, furniture, bric-a-brac and many miscellaneous and related items." The house also became a depository for a large library. "On many occasions," writes Green, "it was my privilege to visit his attic library area, first when his books were stacked around the walls on the floor and later when they were shelved according to his own system." Beginning in the 1940s his wife Lucie made considerable changes to the interior of the house. She added new woodwork and carved paneling and even a marble Empire mantel brought over from her native France.<sup>8</sup>

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NCRS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet      HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE      Item number      8      Page      3

Humber put his knowledge and love of art to work for the North Carolina State Art Society (formed in 1924) in the 1940s when he became interested in the organization's work toward establishing a state art museum. He served as the president of the society for a number of years. Largely as a result of his persistent labors the General Assembly appropriated \$1,000,000 for the purchase of an art collection contingent upon the society securing a matching amount. According to historian Hugh T. Lefler, "This marked the first instance in the nation's history that a state allocated such a sum for the purchase of art objects."<sup>9</sup>

Humber managed to obtain the additional \$1,000,000 from the Kress Foundation of New York. He persuaded the foundation to give North Carolina paintings worth that amount instead of cash. He was a prime mover in buying paintings and achieving the removal of the state's art collection from the State Education Building (where it had been since 1943) to the renovated Highway Building on Morgan Street in Raleigh. There the new State Art Museum opened in April, 1956, containing one of the most outstanding collections of paintings in the South.

Humber continued to be active in the museum and other affairs and organizations in the state until his death in 1970. Ironically, in light of his views on world harmony, he died while attending a movie entitled War and Peace. He was survived by his wife, two sons, and his brother and sister. The town of Greenville now owns the Humber House.<sup>10</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Pitt County Deed Books (microfilm), Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, T6 p.525, U6 p.248, Z6 p.501.

<sup>2</sup>The News and Observer (Raleigh), February 5, 1950; The Daily Reflector (Greenville), November 11, 1970; Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Pitt County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, 14.

<sup>3</sup>The News and Observer (Raleigh), September 13, 1936, February 5, 1950; Pitt County Death Notices, Office of Register of Deeds, Greenville, North Carolina.

<sup>4</sup>The News and Observer (Raleigh), April 20, 1941, February 5, 1950.

<sup>5</sup>The Daily Reflector (Greenville), November 11, 1970; The News and Observer (Raleigh), April 23, 1948, June 8, 1950, October 29, 1967.

<sup>6</sup>The Daily Reflector (Greenville), November 11, 1970; John L. Cheney, Jr., (ed.), North Carolina Government, 1585-1974: A Narrative and Statistical History (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of the Secretary of State, 1975), 530, 533.

<sup>7</sup>Court Affidavit by Clarence Poe and Robert Lee Humber to Dr. Clarence Poe, August 11, 1944, Clarence Poe Papers, Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only  
received  
date entered

Continuation sheet      HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE      Item number 8

Page 4

<sup>8</sup>C. Sylvester Green, Vignettes: Robert Lee Humber (Greenville: Green Mark Press, 1976), 9, 23; Russell Wright, AIP, "Memorandum: The Humber House, Greenville, North Carolina," an unpublished memorandum at Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1-2.

<sup>9</sup>The News and Observer (Raleigh), April 6, 1956; Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, North Carolina: The History of a Southern State (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 665-666.

<sup>10</sup>The Daily Reflector (Greenville), November 11, 1970; Lucy Cherry Crisp, "History of the North Carolina State Art Society," an unpublished manuscript in the Clarence Poe Papers, 1-5; The News and Observer (Raleigh), April 6, 1956.

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Winterville Quad

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approx. 1 acre

1:62500 -- Quad scale

UTM REFERENCES

Lat. 36° 01' 40"

Long. 20° 02' 28"

A	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

B	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION This nomination includes the Humber House and the large lot on which it sits. The lot is bounded on the North by Fifth Street, on the West by Washington Street and on the East and South by a vertical board fence which separates the property from a municipal parking area.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE Renee Gledhill-Earley, Survey Specialist  
Joe A. Mobley, Researcher

ORGANIZATION Survey and Planning Branch  
Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section

DATE December, 1980

STREET & NUMBER N.C. Division of Archives and History  
109 E. Jones Street

TELEPHONE (919) 733-6545

CITY OR TOWN Raleigh

STATE North Carolina 27611

**12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*William J. Pica*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE April 9, 1981

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*Selma Byer*

Entered in the National Register

DATE 7/9/81

ATTEST: DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Item number 9

Page 1

Cheney, John L., Jr. (ed.). North Carolina Government, 1585-1974: A Narrative and Statistical History. Raleigh: North Carolina Department of the Secretary of State, 1975.

Clarence Poe Papers. Archives, Division of Archives and History. Raleigh, North Carolina.

The Daily Reflector (Greenville), 1970.

Green, C. Sylvester. Vignettes: Robert Lee Humber. Greenville: Green Mark Press, 1976.

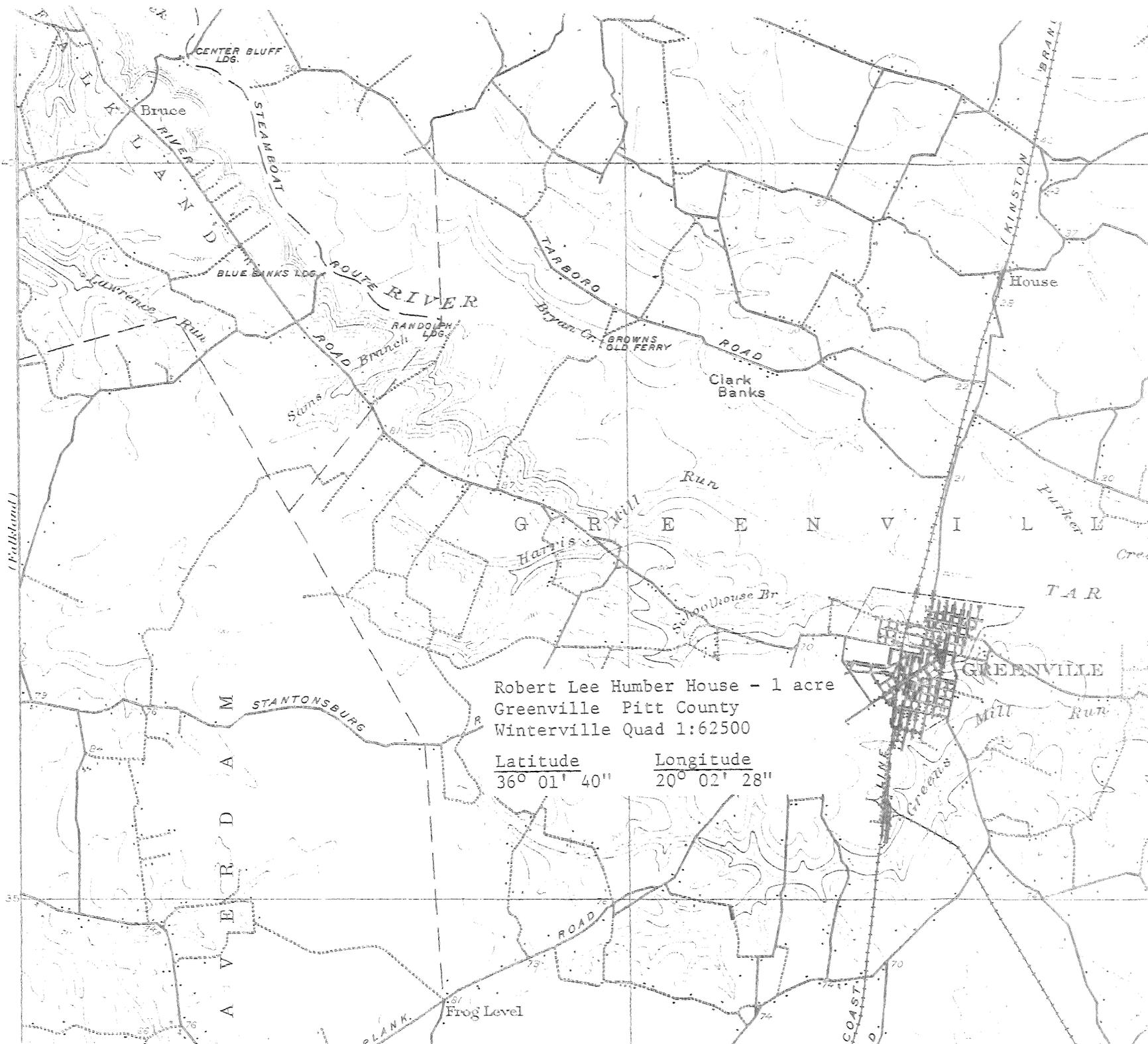
Lefler, Hugh Talmage and Newsome, Albert Ray. North Carolina: The History of a Southern State. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973.

The News and Observer (Raleigh), 1936-1956.

Pitt County Records (microfilm). Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina (subgroup: Deeds).

Pitt County Records. Office of Register of Deeds, Greenville, North Carolina (subgroup: death notices).

United States Bureau of the Census. Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Pitt County, North Carolina. Population Schedule.



Robert Lee Humber House - 1 acre  
 Greenville Pitt County  
 Winterville Quad 1:62500

<u>Latitude</u>	<u>Longitude</u>
36° 01' 40"	20° 02' 28"

(Folkland)

