

RALEIGH HISTORIC PROPERTY RE-DESIGNATION REPORT

1. NAME OF DESIGNATED PROPERTY:

Andrew Johnson House

2. LOCATION ON WHICH DESIGNATED: Pullen Park, E side of Pullen Road

3. NEW LOCATION (If applicable): Mordecai Historic Park

4. LEGAL OWNER: Name City of Raleigh day phone 890-3070

Mr. Dempsey E. Benton, Jr., City Manager
Address P.O. Box 590, Raleigh, NC 27602

5. APPLICANT/CONTACT PERSON: Name _____ day phone _____

Address _____

6. REASON FOR REQUEST: Building has been legally moved.

7. DESIGNATION ORDINANCE NUMBER (Year and Number): 1972 No. 315
Attach copy of Designation Ordinance. Check here

8. SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT: Raleigh Historic Properties Commission, Inc. date March 13,
Post Office Box 829 1990
Century Station

Raleigh, North Carolina 27602

03/14/90

ANDREW JOHNSON BIRTHPLACE

Location and Circumstances of Moving

Strong circumstantial evidence supports the traditional contention that the building now designated as The Birthplace of Andrew Johnson, Seventeenth President of the United States originally stood on the property on the east side of Fayetteville Street and just south of Capitol Square where Peter Casso's Inn was located. (This property was Lot 162 on the Plan of the City of Raleigh.) The building apparently served as a kitchen for Casso's Inn which was a well-known Raleigh hostelry. It remained at that location until after the Civil War although the inn building had been destroyed earlier. Sometime in the late nineteenth century - most likely in the early or mid-1880's - the building was moved to a location at 118 East Cabarrus Street where it was placed on property owned by the family of William Shaw who had purchased the Johnson birthplace. (The East Cabarrus Street property was Lot 33 on the Raleigh City Plan.) The move to Cabarrus Street possibly was done to prevent the destruction of the house coincident to new construction in the vicinity of Capitol Square. The building was next moved to Pullen Park in the early twentieth century. This move was done by the City of Raleigh which had been given the house by the Wake County Chapter of the North Carolina Society of the Colonial Dames of America. The Colonial Dames had acquired it from Julius Lewis who, with his partner N. W. West, had purchased the Cabarrus Street property at a public sale to settle the estate of a descendant of William Shaw.

When the building was moved to Pullen Park it was first placed near the railroad tracks which run through the park. However, that location proved to be hazardous. Sparks from the railroad and frequenting of the building by vagrants both constituted threats to the building. In order to protect it from destruction by fire or by deterioration, the North Carolina General Assembly in 1927 created an Andrew Johnson Memorial Commission to secure funds to enclose the house in a durable building which would house also a museum and library depicting the period of the Civil War and Reconstruction. It was this Commission which the next year had a granite monument with bronze tablet erected on the east side of Fayetteville Street to mark the original site of Johnson's birthplace. The Commission appointed Mrs. S. W. Brewer custodian of the building, but progress on its main enterprise was stalled by the effects of the national economic depression of the late 1920's and early 1930's. An unsuccessful attempt was made in 1935 to secure funds from the Works Progress Administration for this purpose, but in 1937 the W.P.A. announced plans to move the building to another location in Pullen Park removed from the railroad. This was accomplished in October, 1937; furnishings reflective of the period were acquired through the auspices of the North Carolina Society for the Preservation of Antiquities; and the house was opened to the public in 1940 only to be closed five years later upon the death of the custodian, Joe H. Weathers.

Deterioration and tourist abuse again threatened the structure. In 1947 a group of citizens asked the Raleigh City Council to reopen the house to the public and to provide funds for a curator. Such funds were appropriated in July, 1948, Miss Frances Burkhead was appointed curator, and the building reopened in October of that year. Miss Burkhead continued as curator until September, 1954 when she retired and was succeeded by Mrs. Mary N. Brooks who still continues in that capacity. Meanwhile, in May, 1954, the City Council created another Andrew Johnson Memorial Commission which undertook a complete renovation of the house. In the late 1960's the Raleigh Historic Properties Commission, in conjunction with

the Memorial Commission, took steps to have the Johnson birthplace moved from Pullen Park and relocated in Mordecai Square. The Square had been acquired by the City as the site of buildings which would constitute a complex reflecting the history of the City and this site was deemed a more fitting location for a building having connections with Raleigh's most historic personage. The City Council approved this move in May, 1969. Subsequently, in 1972, as part of the implementation of the relocation project, the Memorial Commission was merged with the Raleigh Historic Sites Commission which was renamed the Raleigh Historic Properties Commission the following year. The move to Mordecai Historic Park was completed in July, 1975. A formal dedication and opening of the relocated house was held on October 26, 1977.

History and Claim of Title

There exists a long-held traditional belief that President Andrew Johnson was born in the building designated as "The Birthplace of Andrew Johnson, Seventeenth President of the United States", when it was an outbuilding to Peter Casso's Inn across Morgan Street from the Capitol Square in Raleigh, North Carolina. The tradition also asserts that at the time of Johnson's birth his parents, Jacob and Mary (Polly) Johnson, lived in a building on the lot of the inn, where his father worked as a hostler and his mother as a weaver. Included in the tradition also is the belief that the structure now located at Mordecai Historic Park is the building which was moved from Casso's Inn lot to a location on East Cabarrus Street and thence to Pullen Park before its final location at Mordecai Square. There does not appear to be any contemporary documentary evidence extant linking the building to Johnson's birth or to its location on Peter Casso's Inn property. However, there are numerous items of later circumstantial evidence that point to the authenticity of the tradition - evidence sufficiently strong to justify its acceptance as correct. The main, and apparently earliest, source linking Johnson's birth to a kitchen building at Casso's Inn on Lot 162 is a statement by Miss Hannah Coley, great-granddaughter of Peter Casso's wife, made in an interview with Fred A. Olds that Johnson was born in the loft of her great-grandmother's kitchen. Miss Coley identified the house then standing on East Cabarrus Street as the building in which Johnson was born when it was located at the corner of the square near the entrance to the Capitol grounds. Olds published the interview in an article in the News and Observer, April 24, 1904. Corroboration of Miss Coley's story is found in a number of other sources, among which are architectural analysis of the building by historical preservation experts identifying it as a late eighteenth-century kitchen, a 1799 advertisement by Peter Casso for sale of Lot 162 listing two kitchens among the eight buildings on the lot, a letter from William Thompson to Johnson while the latter was President stating he was Johnson's neighbor in 1819 at the Lot 162 location, reference to the property on Cabarrus Street on which the building stood as "the Andrew Johnson lot" in an 1897 deed, and statements by Miss Daisy Waite in the News and Observer, May 12, 1940 and by Robert Winston in his biography of Johnson that they had seen the building at its original location.

The first owner of the Casso's Inn lot, Lot 162, appears to have been Warren Alford who sold it to Peter Casso. After Casso's death a lengthy, involved litigation ensued over the lot resulting from Casso's failure to get a clear title and from the fact that he died intestate. Finally the court in 1825 ordered it sold at public sale, at which time it was divided into seven parcels. Later in the century the birthplace building was acquired by William Shaw who moved it to his property (Lot 33) on East Cabarrus Street. His wife inherited life interest in the property and, at her death, title passed to her niece Mary Ann Callum. Mary Ann Callum married James Towles who gave a mortgage on the property to Catherine Pool, a niece of William Shaw, to secure a loan. Catherine Pool took

possession of the property, October 1, 1859, on default of the mortgage. Catherine Pool died intestate in 1885 and her property was disposed of by a court-appointed commissioner. In 1887 the lot on which the Johnson house was located was purchased by A. D. James, an agent for the partnership of John Lewis and N. W. West. The partnership was dissolved in 1897 at which time John Lewis became the sole owner of the property. The Wake County Chapter of the North Carolina Society of Colonial Dames of America purchased it from Lewis, July 1, 1904, and offered it to the City of Raleigh which accepted the gift, December 2, 1904.

The historical significance of the building arises from its association with Andrew Johnson, who was born in humble circumstances in Raleigh, North Carolina, December 29, 1808 and rose to occupy the Office of the Presidency as the Seventeenth President of the United States. After a boyhood of poverty in Raleigh, which included an apprenticeship to a tailor and being advertised as a runaway, Johnson moved to Tennessee in 1826 and settled in Greeneville. There he established what proved to be a successful tailoring business and acquired a small estate. He married Eliza McCardle in 1827 and she aided him in continuing and improving the self-education he had begun before leaving North Carolina. His natural abilities particularly oratorical, and his liking for argumentation and debate early led him into local politics where he achieved success. He was elected several times as town alderman and eventually as mayor, each time as the champion of the cause of the working men of the town against the aristocratic class. He was member of the Tennessee legislature in 1835 and 1839, was a Democratic elector for Van Buren in 1840, and was elected to the State Senate in 1841. Two years later he was elected to the United States House of Representatives and served there for ten years, after which he was elected for the first of two terms as governor. As governor he secured the first state appropriation for education and established a board of agriculture and a state library. In 1857 he was elected to the United States Senate. In political affairs he had become identified with the regular Jacksonian Democratic party and regularly supported the party. However he early exhibited independent views which led to quarrels with party leaders, and his successful political climb was based primarily on his demonstrated political abilities. Politically he was a self constituted friend of the working class and was often considered radical in his views. The latter resulted chiefly from the fact that, reflecting the feelings of his constituents of East Tennessee where slavery was largely non-existent, he had frequently opposed the slave-owning planters of central and west Tennessee, even advocating at one time that a separate state be created from East Tennessee and neighboring non-slave areas. However, as a member of the Senate he opposed abolitionism and supported the right of slaveholders to have the protection of the federal government in taking slaves into the Territories of the United States. He favored choosing federal judges by election rather than appointment, popular election of United States Senators, and direct election of the president. But his chief interest was securing the passage of a Homestead law which would provide free public lands in small parcels to actual settlers. In espousing the homestead cause, Johnson identified himself with the interests of the western frontier farmer and the eastern wage earner.

Johnson's independence in political matters was outstandingly illustrated at the time of the secession crisis in 1861. In spite of the action of Tennessee in seceding, he took a strong position in the Senate in support of the Constitution and the Union. And after the secession of Tennessee, unlike the other Southern Senators from the seceding states, he continued to occupy his seat in the Senate. This action antagonized the extremists in the South but gained favor for him in the North. It was a factor leading President Lincoln to appoint him in March 1862

as Military Governor of Tennessee as Confederate military forces collapsed in central and western Tennessee. As Military Governor he re-established Loyal civil government in the state in spite of opposition from his former political enemies, the planters, and occasional intervention by United States military officials. In 1864 the Convention of the National Union Party, seeking to appeal to unionist sentiment and to lessen the sectional character that the Republican Party had acquired, nominated Johnson its candidate for Vice-President on the Lincoln ticket. Elected that year, he succeeded to the presidency on the assassination of President Lincoln in April, 1865.

Johnson's term as President was marked primarily by his unsuccessful fight with Congress over the program of Reconstruction of the South. Attempting to follow a moderate Reconstruction similar to that already begun by Lincoln, Johnson was increasingly opposed by the majority in Congress under the leadership of the Radical Republican faction which favored a more extreme and drastic program. In this contest the Redical Republican element was aided by the strong emotions carried over from the Civil War in the North, by some unwise actions by some of the Southern states, and by some tactless political actions by Johnson himself. As a result of the Congressional elections of 1866, the anti-Johnson element in Congress secured the two-thirds majority needed to override his veto of Congressional Reconstruction legislation. From that time on, the Reconstruction program was in the hands of Congress. The Johnson-Congress dispute culminated in the impeachment of the President by the House of Representatives in February, 1868. The Senate acquitted Johnson of the impeachment charges but his usefulness as a public and political leader was ended. Control of public affairs lay with Congress.

After the expiration of his term as President in 1869 Johnson returned to Tennessee and reentered state politics. He was an unsuccessful candidate for the House of Representatives in 1872 but was again elected to the United States Senate in 1874. He occupied a seat in the Senate in a special session in 1875 called by President Grant but further service was terminated by his death from a paralytic attack, July 31, 1875.

L. W. Seegers
January, 1980

ANDREW JOHNSON BIRTHPLACE

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

This sketch is based primarily on the following two typescript research reports found in the office files of Mordecai Historic Park:

James A. Hagerty, Jr.: "Historical Research Report. Andrew Johnson Birthplace. Raleigh, N. C. revised by Jerry L. Cross." (1975)
(Jerry L. Cross): "Historical Research Report for the Andrew Johnson Birthplace."

The latter report prepared by Jerry L. Cross is considerably more comprehensive and greater detailed than the one by Hagerty and chief reliance has been placed on it. The footnotes in that report contain citations to the main sources of information about the Andrew Johnson Birthplace structure.

In addition to these two sources, use has also been made of the biographical sketch of Andrew Johnson written by St. George L. Sioussat and published in the Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. X ed. by Dumas Malone (N.Y. 1933. Charles Scriber's Sons). Additional use was made of the following pieces of material in the office files of Mordecai Historic Park.

Letters from Mary D. Lassiter, City Clerk and Treasurer, City of Raleigh, to Robert L. McMillan, Jr., Chairman, Raleigh Historic Sites Commission, May 26, 1969.

"The Birthplace of Andrew Johnson, Seventeenth President of the United States." Brochure published by Department of Archives and History. Raleigh, N. C. 1968.

"Grand opening. October 26, 1977 The Restored Birthplace of Andrew Johnson. Seventeenth President of the United States". Typed Program.

L. W. Seegers
January, 1980

RESTORATION OF THE ANDREW JOHNSON BIRTHPLACE

On September 7, 1977 at Mordecai House Mr. Al Honeycutt, restoration specialist of the Department of Archives and History; presented a lecture on the Andrew Johnson Birthplace. His remarks were illustrated by slides. Later he led docents on a walking tour in and around the Birthplace. These notes by Dot Perry give a running summary of the presentation. A 30-minute tape of the lecture is available in the office. The Jerry Cross report on the House is available in the docent study bookcase.

The earliest sketch of the Johnson House appeared in 1865 in Harper's Weekly and shows a gable roof. It is probably the wrong building. An 1887 sketch in Harper's Weekly depicts a gambrel-roofed house located at 118 East Cabarrus Street. At that time the house was rented to a black family. We don't know when the house was moved to East Cabarrus. There is some question as to whether this little house is the actual birthplace. There is a strong oral tradition but no actual documents. The strongest witness came from Hannah Coley who in 1904 told Col. Fred Olds that Andrew Johnson was born in the loft of her great-grandmother Margaret Casso's kitchen. Hannah Stewart was a daughter of Margaret Casso and grandmother of Miss Coley. (See Jerry Cross report).

In 1904 the Colonial Dames acquired title to the house for \$100.00 and transferred the title to the City of Raleigh. There is available a deed reference to the Andrew Johnson lot on Cabarrus Street indicating that it was known as the Johnson lot after 1887. Mr. Honeycutt accepts this house as the birthplace. The house was moved to Pullen Park and later moved again to a site near the armory. In 1972 the decision was made to move the house to Mordecai Historic Park. This is probably North Carolina's earliest preservation project. The slave market at Fayetteville set aside in 1907 is the second oldest.

The appearance of the house at its Pullen Park site was somewhat different from that today. (See scrapbook in docent study room for pictures of move to Mordecai Park.) There was a 19th century Wake County style stone chimney with a brick stack - probably a reconstruction. The house was not known to be a kitchen circa 1800 until the plaster was removed. The ceiling joists showed traces of smoke and grease. Clancy and Theys, contractors did the restoration work and Brannon the architectural drawings. Sometime after 1867 the house was moved apparently piece by piece to East Cabarrus Street. That some new material was used is indicated by circular saw marks for this kind of saw was not used in Wake County until after 1869. Some material from another old building was used. The cypress boards now on the exterior were cut in the recent restoration to match the size of the original pine siding. The first floor was not plastered when used as a kitchen but plastered twice later. The upstairs was always plastered as indicated by the nails in the laths. The kitchen became so hot it was typical to have only siding. Examples of such kitchens still stand at Hayes, Edenton with just superstructure and siding, an 1830 kitchen in Bertie County, and a 1790 kitchen in Warren County. The present restored kitchen has a wide fireplace with straight sides, oak lintel and trammel in place (trammel - an adjustable pothook for the fireplace crane) and unsheathed walls. The heavy corner brace visible on the southeast interior is original. All materials in the structure were of pine. Notches cut in timbers showed the window size, six panes over sash. The heavy south plate between first and second story is original. The structure was used for about 75 years as a kitchen. Much original flooring remains including the second floor and part of the first by the stair.

Restoration of the Andrew Johnson Birthplace

A 19th century corner stair dated from the reassembling. A 4x4 stair newell indicated the present reconstructed stairway which is similar to the first. Fred Sorrell, master craftsman did carpentry work.

The house has two windows below and four at the second level with shed dormers. The original rafters were pit sawed, mortised and tendoned with pegs. The cooking fireplace was reconstructed from examples of such late 18th century fireplaces in Wake County as Haywood Hall. The chimney brickwork is Flemish Bond, a header surrounded by stretchers with one quarter brick queen closure. An oak or poplar lintel was used over the fireplace to resist fire. The upstairs mantel is based on one in Joel Lane House. The chimney is double-shouldered. The scalloped cypress shingles were made by an 80-year old black man of Warsaw. They are an authentic 18th century type, scalloped to resist curling. The 15 original boards showed that the exterior was first painted olive green and it is now that color. There were two coats of ochre paint and three of Spanish brown. The chimney stack rises four feet above the roof. Heating equipment now is under the house. The rose headed nails were made by a man from Garner. The new window glass from Blenko is too imperfect. There are a few glazed headers in the chimney copied from the Vinson House in Northhampton County. The windows are double hung below and casement upstairs.

(Honeycutt continued his remarks on walking tour. Above information is on tape.)

The chimney is constructed from new handmade brick from Salisbury. Note the grapevine joint and the one quarter brick closure. In the 18th century brickmakers used burned oyster shells mixed with clay, then added more lime and sand for mortar. Using hard cement would destroy such old brick. The only original siding is on the north side.

The cooking fireplace tapers little. Tapered sides throw the heat out. The hearth is of bricks on brushed sand. Notice the joint left of the chimney and the original siding. A butterfly joint shows the stair width. The south plate (between 1st and 2nd story) is original as is the floor by the stair and the south end brace, stud and corner post. By 1887 the house had been moved from the original location and reassembled. The present stair is based on a Casewell County store stairway. Notice piece of wood by west door showing random marks made by a circular saw. Hope Plantation has a ship ladder stair from the winter kitchen to the first floor.

Upstairs an 18th century brushed court finish plaster is used as in the Joel Lane House. The green paint also is copied from that house. The upstairs floor is original, not tongue and grooved but edges planed. Look up from first floor. The dormer shed windows are not known to be original. Observe the butterfly hinges on the casement windows.

The Andrew Johnson Birthplace, North Carolina's earliest preservation project has now been restored with a reconstructed chimney.