

RICHMOND HILL PLANTATION, Ford Mansion  
East of Richmond Hill on Ford Neck Road  
Richmond Hill Vicinity  
Bryan County  
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2348-F  
HAB 2  
10-12-1971

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historical American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Southeast Region  
Department of the Interior  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RICHMOND HILL PLANTATION, Ford Mansion

HABS No. GA-2348-F

**Location:** East of Richmond Hill on Ford Neck Road, Richmond Hill vicinity, Bryan County, Georgia.

**Significance:** The Ford Mansion was completed in 1937 as Henry and Clara Ford's "Southern style" winter residence. Mrs. Ford wanted a home featuring wide porches, columns, and spacious rooms like the Greek Revival style homes they had visited in such Georgia towns as Athens, Washington, and Savannah. They appreciated the beauty and privacy the surrounding Ways Station area had to offer.

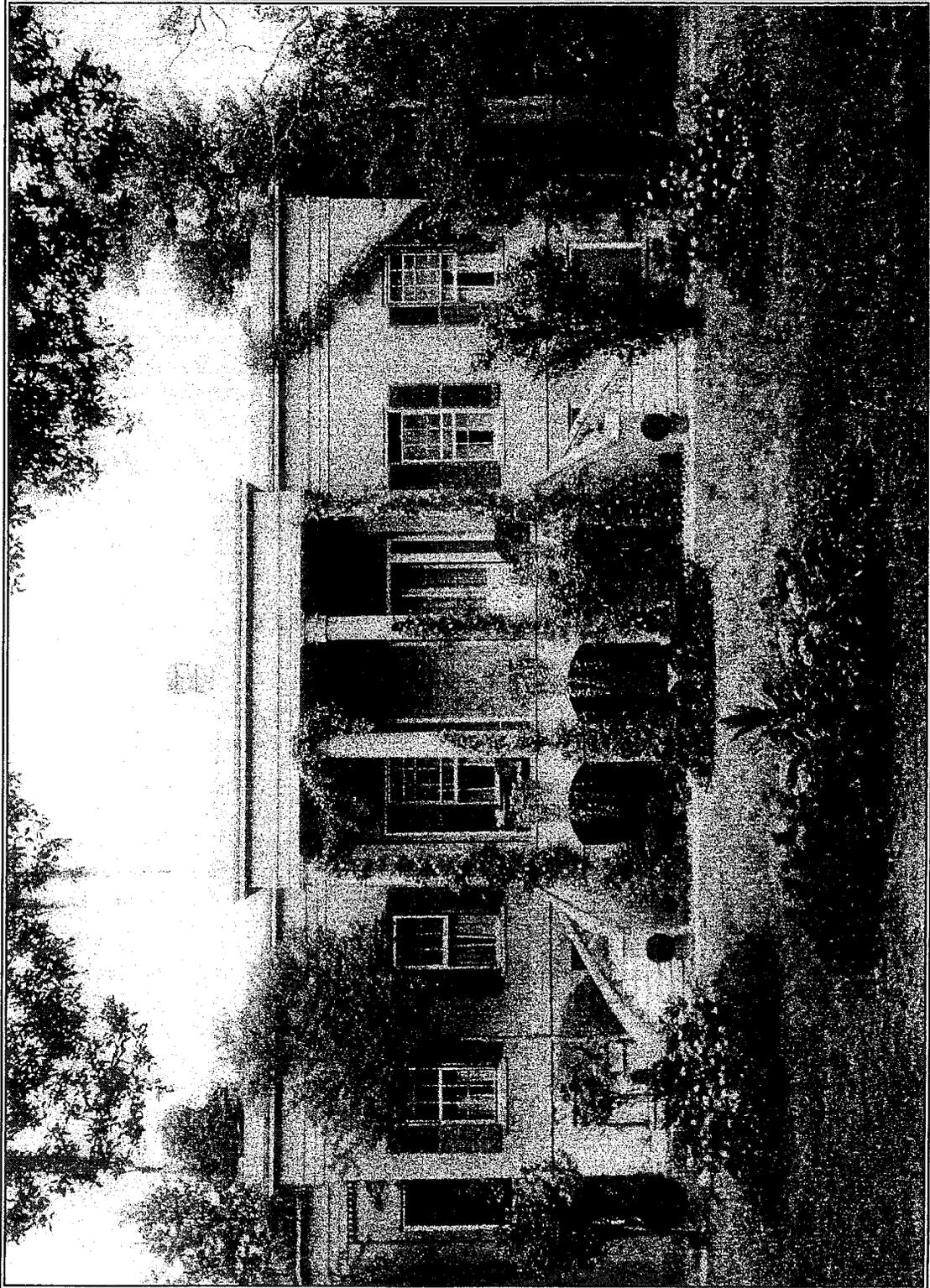
**Description:** The Ford Mansion is a two-story wood frame building with a "Savannah Gray" brick exterior. Savannah Gray brick was (and remains) a much sought after building material. The Fords purchased the Hermitage, an antebellum Greek Revival House on the Savannah River. They had the home torn down and hauled the salvaged brick about 20 miles for use in their residence. The first floor has about 3600 square feet and included a living room, dining room, library, kitchen, hallway, storage closets, and ladies and mens restrooms. The central hallway is about 10' wide and extends from the front door to the back door. The living room is on the left of the hallway and extended from front to back of the house. On the right of hallway is the library containing about 400 square feet. The dining room is further on the right and is about 19' x 25' wide. The kitchen is on the extreme right and rear. The second floor contains about 3300 square feet and also has a central hallway. The upper floor included a master bedroom and five other bedrooms. The master bedroom had two baths and each of the other bedroom had a private bath. Large first and second story porches are on the front and rear of the house. The Ford Mansion is surrounded by 200 year old live oak trees; the grounds are generously landscaped with azaleas, camellias, and other ornamental shrubs.

**History:** Henry and Clara Ford chose to build their residence on the site of "Richmond-on-the-Ogeechee," a Clay family antebellum plantation house burned by Federal troops in 1864. They consequently referred to their house as "Richmond" or "Richmond Hill," after its historic antecedent. Most everyone else, however, called the house the "Ford Mansion." Edward J. Cutler, chief draftsman at the Dearborn Ford plant, made the initial drawings for the mansion. A Savannah architect, Cletus W. Bergen, was hired to prepare detailed construction blueprints. The Fords apparently spent a great deal of time planning their home, as Mrs. Ford had a scale model of it constructed complete with custom furniture to study its proportions. This model is on display at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

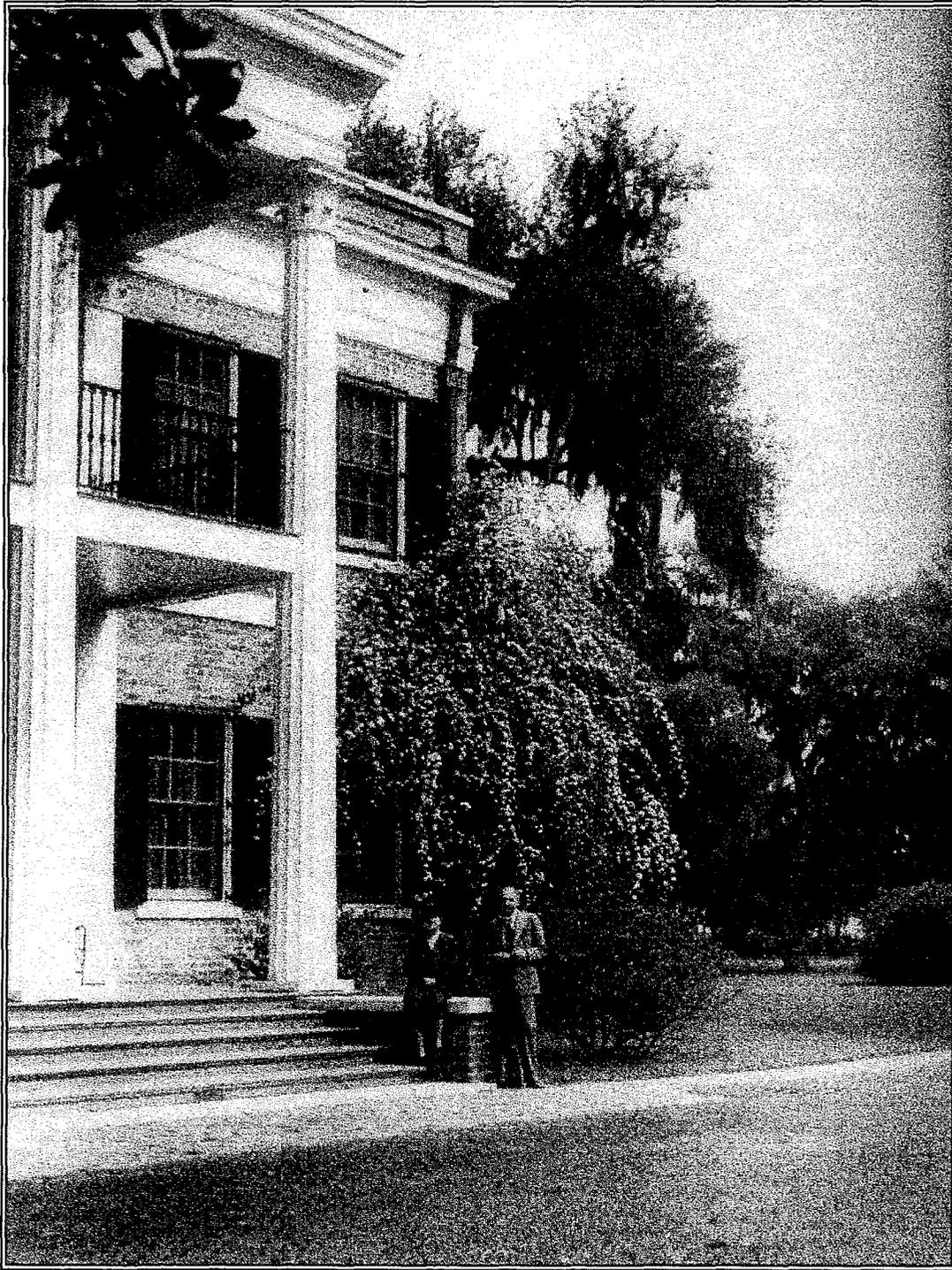
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The Fords primarily used the mansion during the years 1937-1941. They most often used it for one to two months during the late winter/early spring of those years. Henry and Clara loved entertaining and often held lavish parties for the social elite. After Clara Ford's death in 1950, the Ford Mansion remained unused for almost a decade. In 1959, the house and 1200 acres was sold to a New Hampshire industrialist. The property changed hands several times over the next 20 years with various schemes to utilize the impressive estate. At one point in 1978, the mansion was used as a restaurant, but failed after only one year of operation. About 1980, the condition of the Ford House had deteriorated to a dilapidated condition when it was used to store hay.

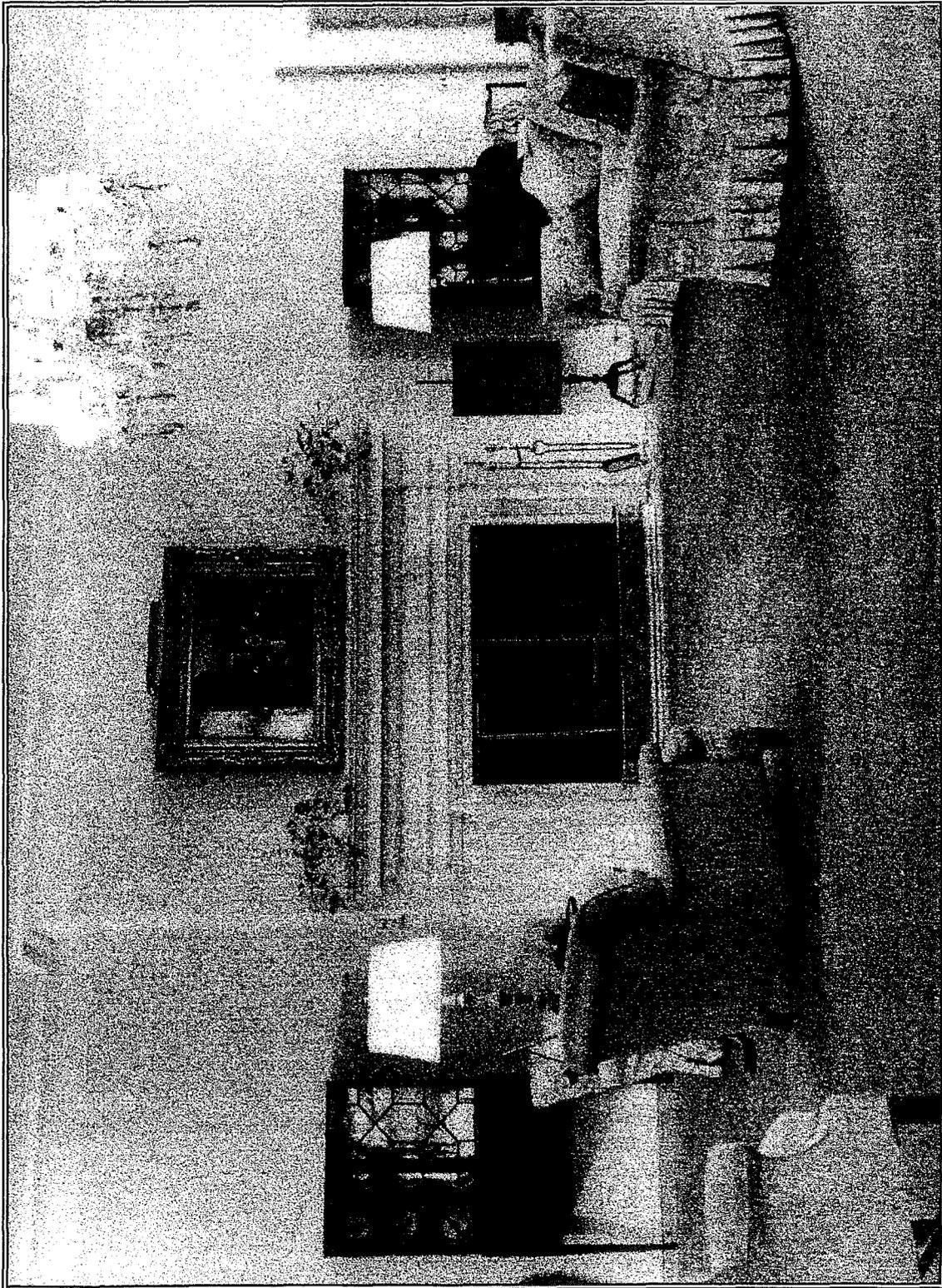
- Sources:** Bryan, Ford R.  
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6611 Bay Circle, Suite 220, Norcross, Georgia 30071 August 2001



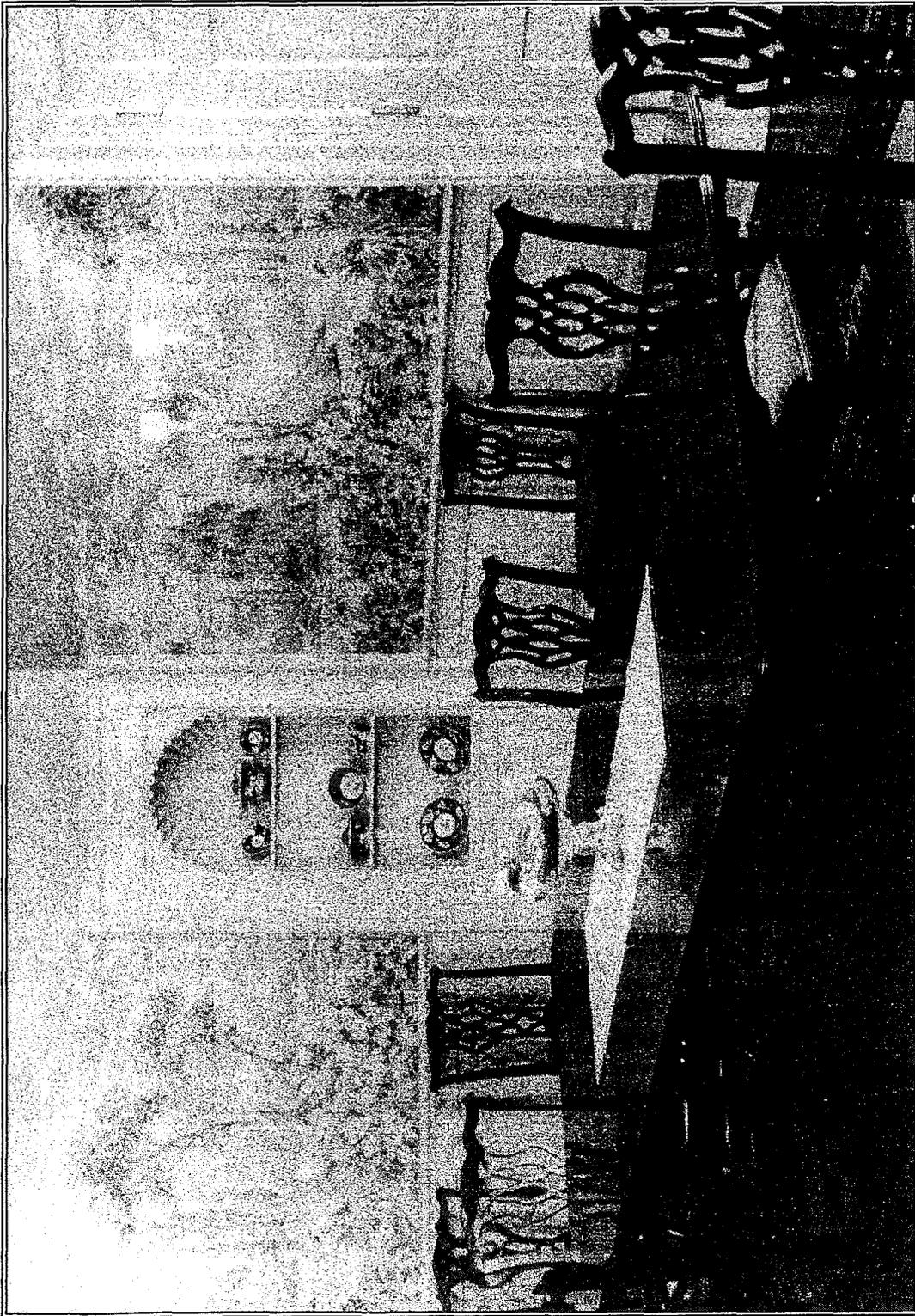
Ca. 1935 photograph of "The Hermitage" located on the Savannah River. Henry Ford had this house demolished for its "Savannah Grey" brick, and the material was used for construction of the Richmond Hill Mansion (Long and Long 1998:16).



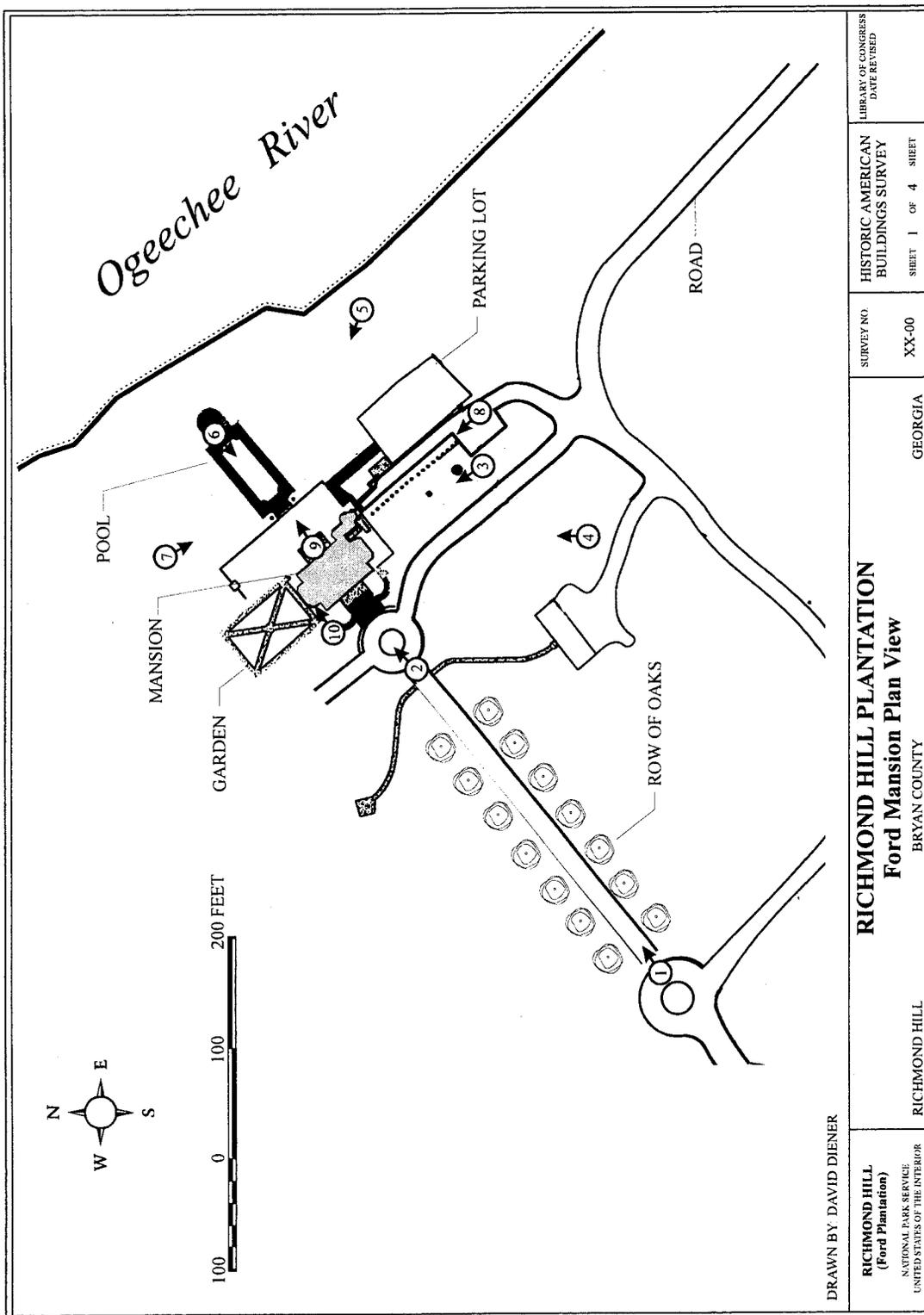
Ca. 1940 photograph of Henry and Clara Ford in front of their Richmond Hill residence (Long and Long 1998:18).



Ca. 1940 photograph of the Ford Mansion interior living room (Long and Long 1998:20).



Ca. 1940 photograph of the Ford Mansion interior dining room (Long and Long 1998:22).



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**RICHMOND HILL PLANTATION**  
**Ford Mansion Plan View**

RICHMOND HILL

BRYAN COUNTY

GEORGIA

SURVEY NO.

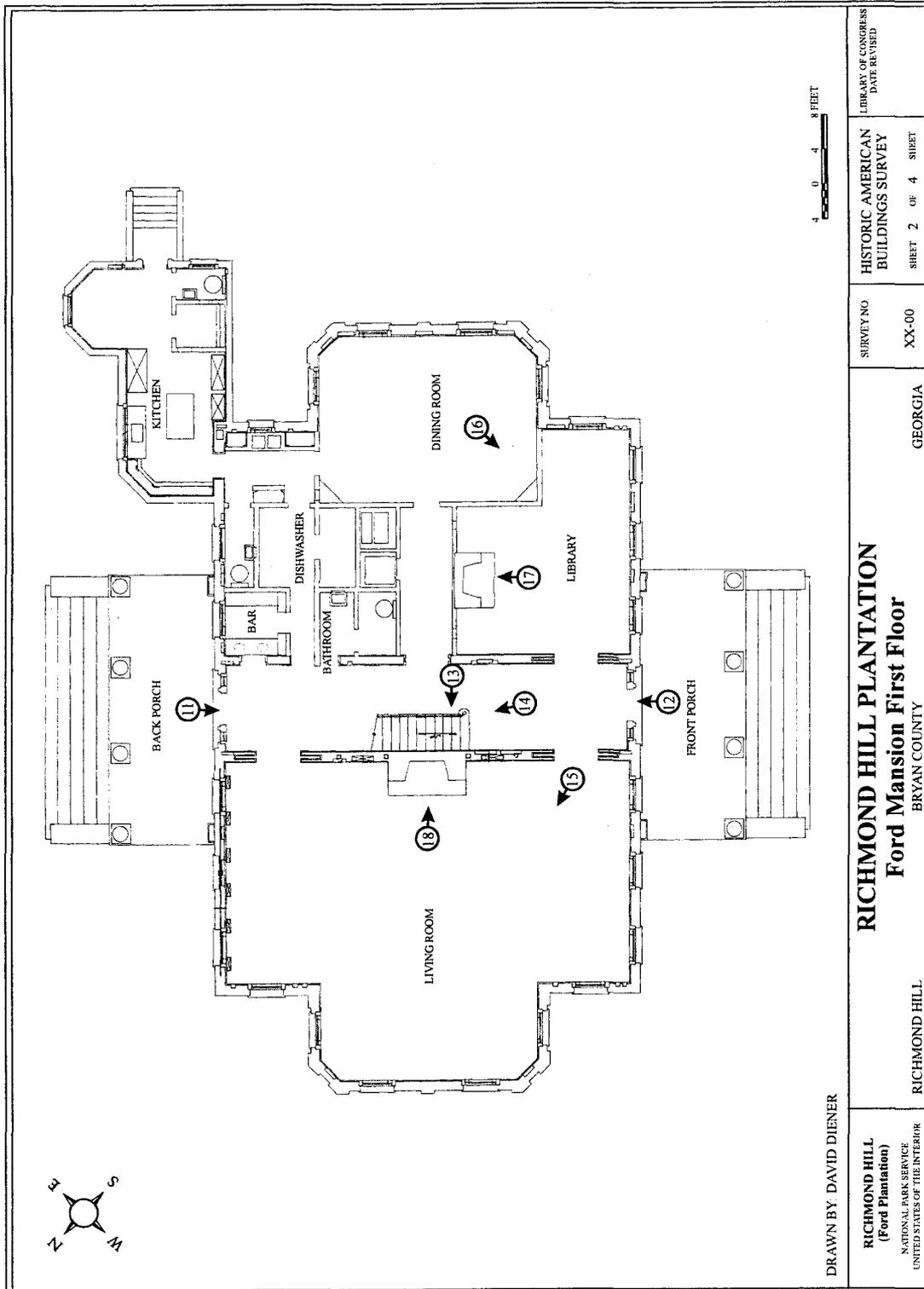
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BUILDINGS SURVEY

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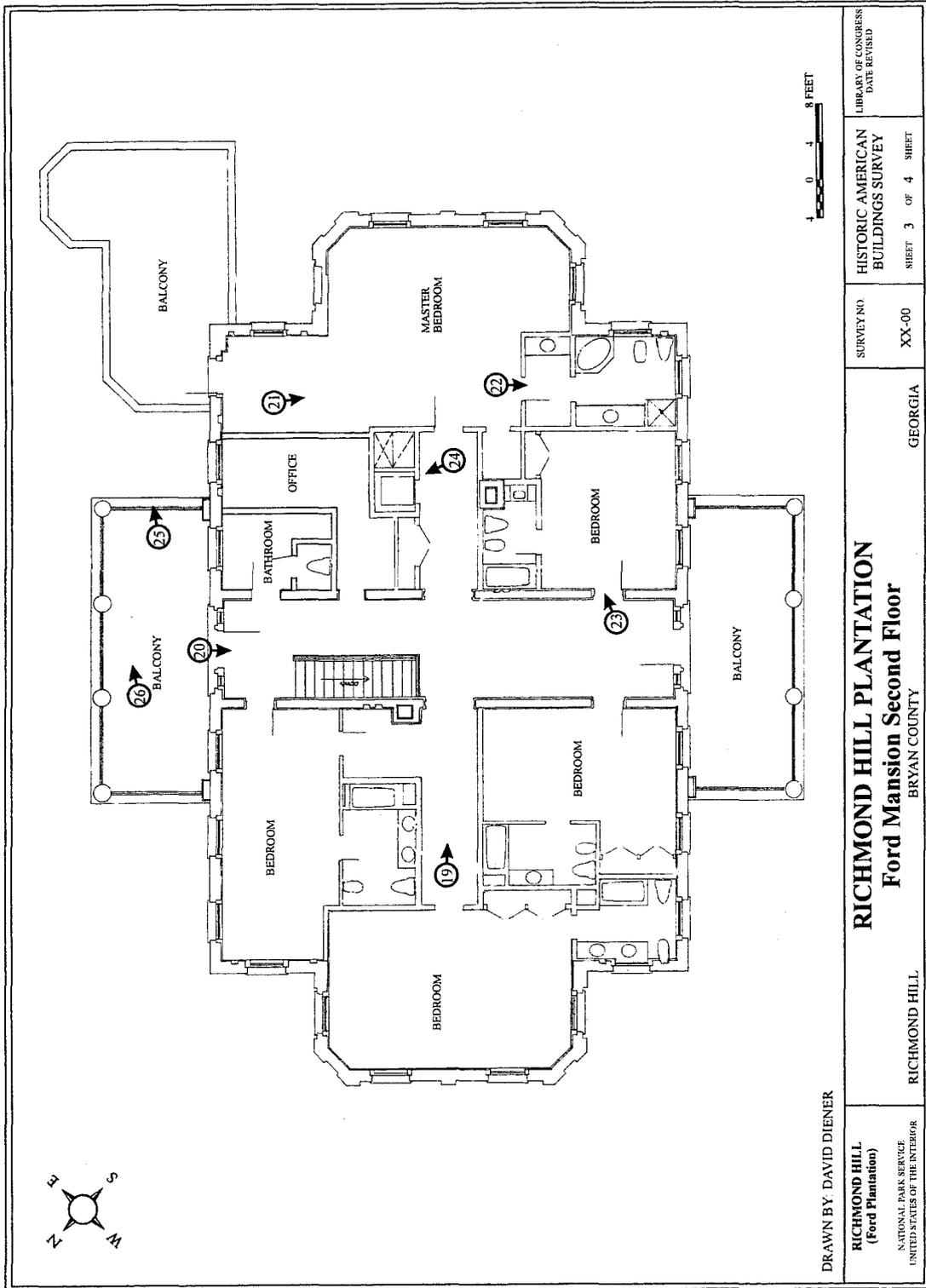
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RICHMOND HILL PLANTATION  
Ford Mansion Second Floor

RICHMOND HILL

BRYAN COUNTY

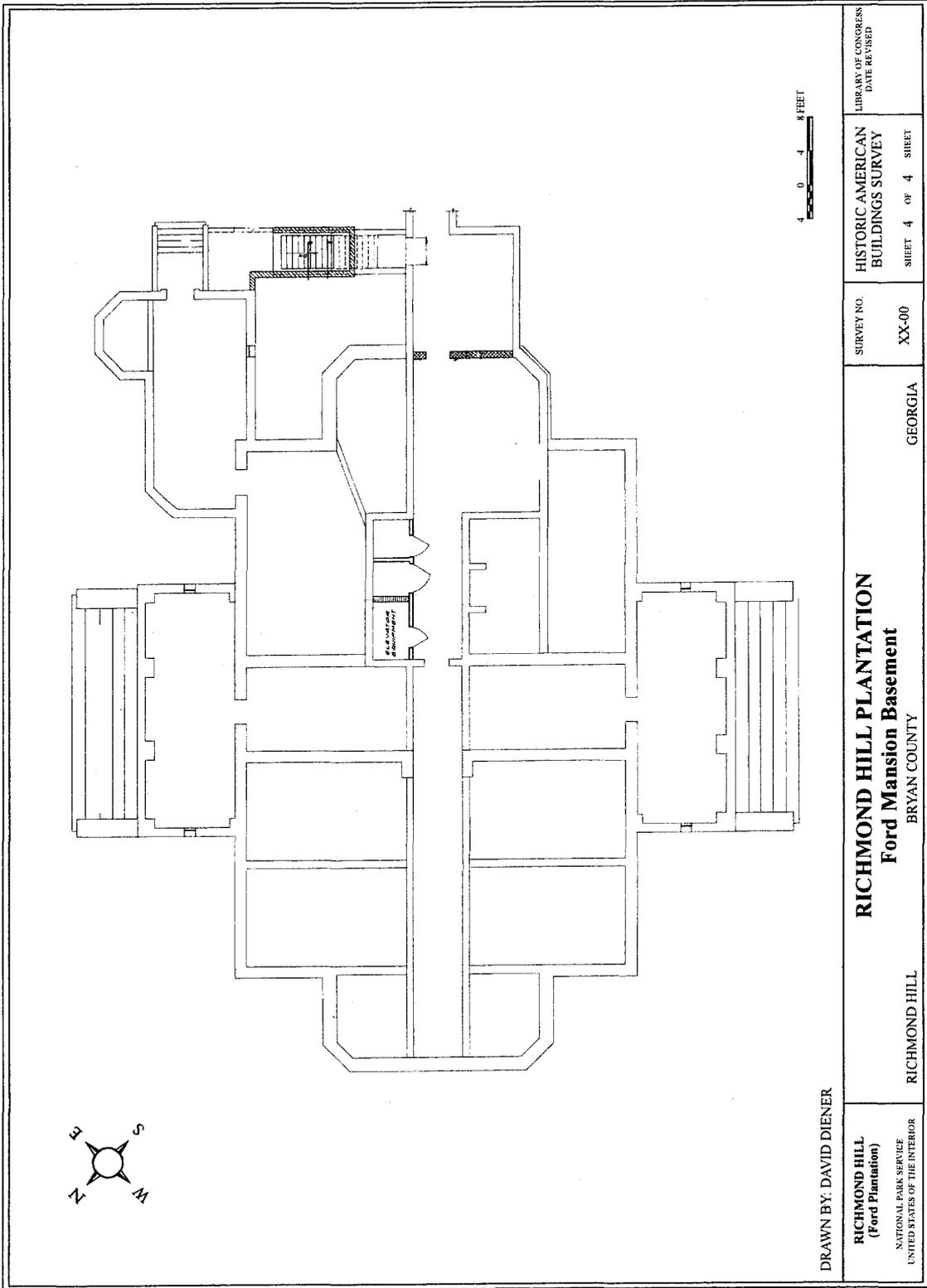
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RICHMOND HILL

RICHMOND HILL PLANTATION  
Ford Mansion Basement  
BRYAN COUNTY

GEORGIA

SURVEY NO.  
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BUILDINGS SURVEY  
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