

621 RUBEN STREET (House)
Savannah
Chatham County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2376

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

621 RUBEN STREET

HABS No. GA-2376

Location: 621 Ruben Street
Savannah
Chatham County
Georgia

U.S.G.S. Savannah 7.5' Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: N752,900;
E833,500

Present Owner: S.N.A.P. IV
National Housing Partnership
1225 Eye Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20005

Present Use: Vacant; To be moved to another location in late 1990.

Significance: The structure at 621 Ruben Street is located within the Beach Institute Historic Neighborhood. Once a part of the Fairlawn Plantation, the area has been a significant part of the black community since before the Civil War.

PART I: PHYSICAL CONTEXT

The structure at 621 Ruben Street is set in Mercer Ward, a district located within the Beach Institute Historic Neighborhood which is that part of the Savannah Historic District located between Liberty Street on the north, Price Street on the west, East Gwinnett Street on the south, and East Broad Street on the east.

PART II: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The area known as the Beach Institute Historic Neighborhood was originally part of a parcel of land owned by Thomas Gibbons. In 1785, Gibbons, then a young, wealthy entrepreneur from Savannah, purchased more than 350 acres for a sum of 352 pounds. Over the next few years, Gibbons continued to purchase additional parcels of land until the early 1800s when he converted his rather large landholdings into a rice plantation. He gave his new plantation the name, "Fairlawn". A composite map from 1842 shows that Gibbons built several structures on the grounds of Fairlawn: a stately lodge surrounded by a grove of large oaks, an overseer's cottage and several rows of slave quarters.

Gibbons moved his family north to New Jersey in the early 1830s giving charge of Fairlawn and his personal affairs to a Colonel Maxwell. Gibbons and his family would visit the plantation often, enjoying prolonged vacations during the summer months.

The outbreak of the Civil War brought a cessation to agricultural activities all along the Savannah River, and Fairlawn Plantation was no exception. Gibbons joined the Confederate Army and while he was away his slaves abandoned their work and set ablaze the great structures and rice fields of Fairlawn. Nothing remained but the salvage cottages, the overseer's mansion, and Whitefall lodge.

Following Lee's surrender to Grant, Gibbons not only feed his slaves, but granted 40 acres and a mule to each family. By the early 1870s the plantation lands were subdivided by streets and the area became a fashionable residential community for middle class Negro families.

PART III: SITE DESCRIPTION

The houses in the Beach Institute Historic Neighborhood are architecturally significant as they represent the types of dwellings which existed as early as the 1820s. Many lane cottages were built along the dirt lanes to utilize the long, narrow lots to the fullest extent.

The structure known as 621 Ruben Street was most likely constructed in the late 1860s. The property on which it is located changed hands more than ten times from the 1860s to the 1890's and there is no record as to when the structure was actually built.

The dwelling is a four room clapboard house with a covered porch in front and an addition in the rear. The front door opens into a central hallway with two rooms on either side. Each room contains a fireplace on the west wall. At the end of the hall is an enclosed porch with a kitchen and bathroom on either side.

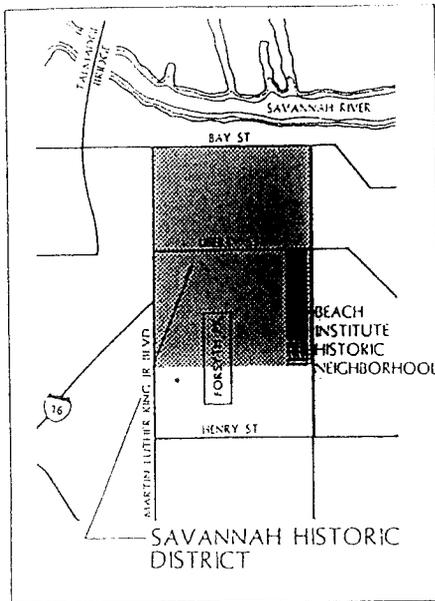
In October of 1990, the dwelling was in a state of considerable disrepair. It was to be moved to a new location in the late 1990 and possibly renovated as part of a revitalization project of the Mercer Ward area, providing quality housing for low-income families.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

SAVANNAH RIVER PLANTATIONS; (Original Print)
Savannah Historical Society, 1947. (2nd Print)
Reprint Co., Spartanburg, SC 1972

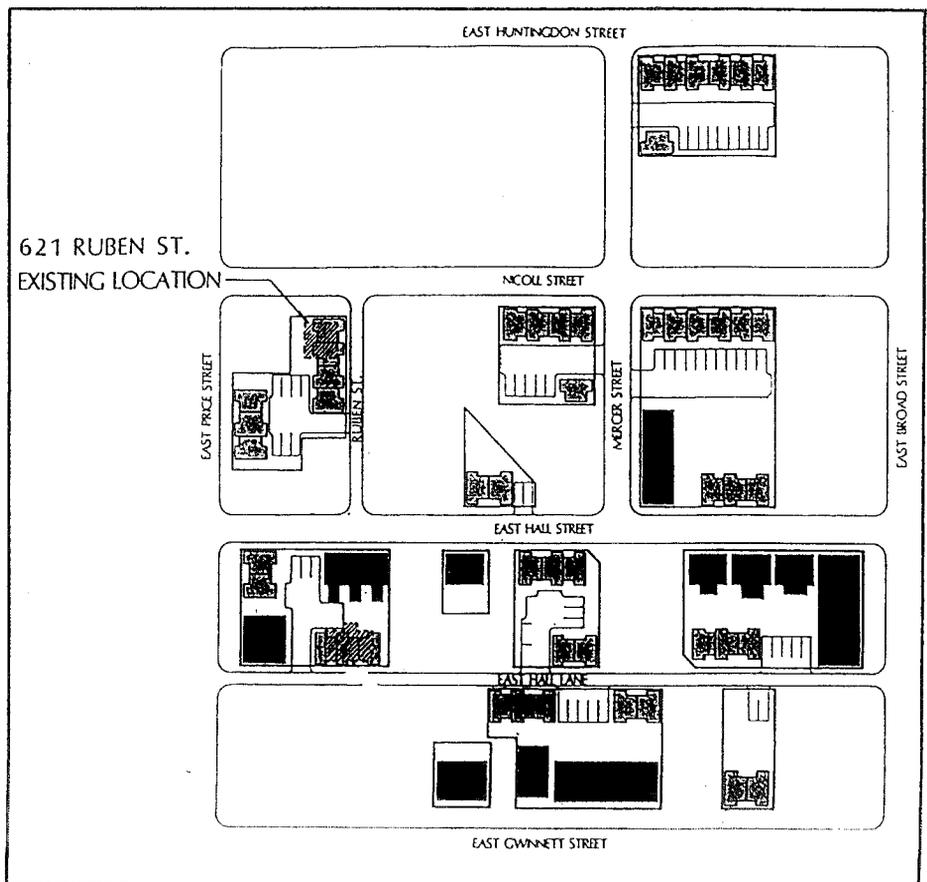
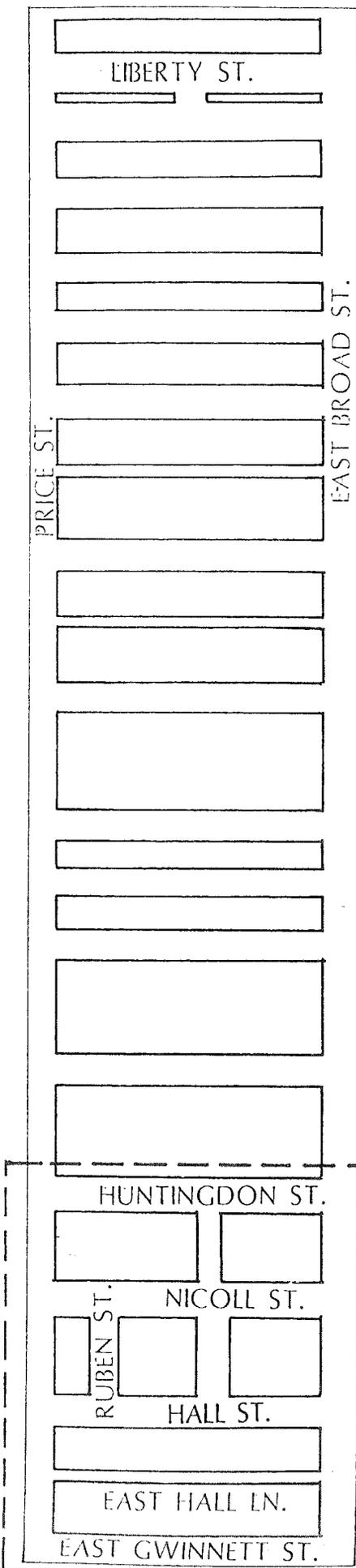
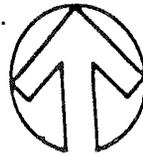
NOTE: Measured drawings and physical description of structure provided by Hansen Architects, P.C., 300 Bull Street, Suite 607, Savannah, Georgia 31401 (October 1990)

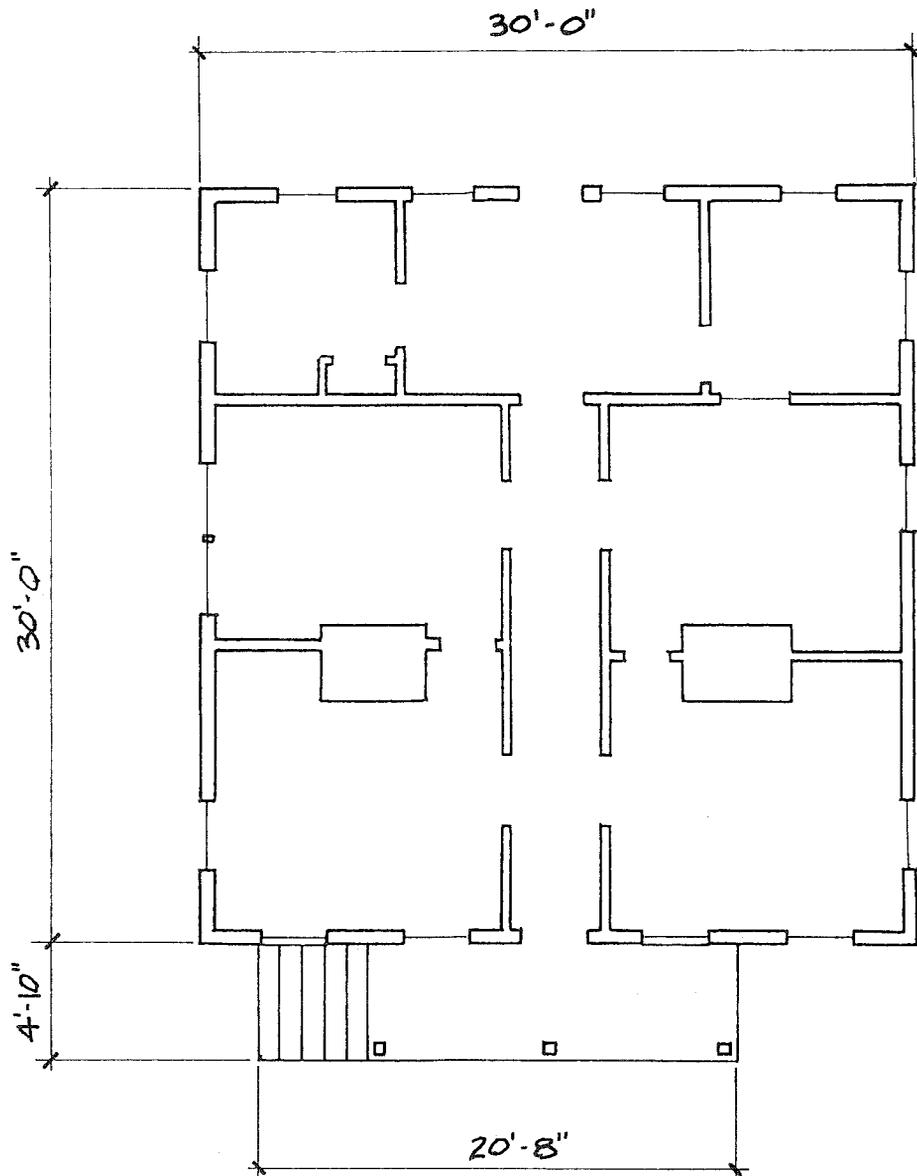
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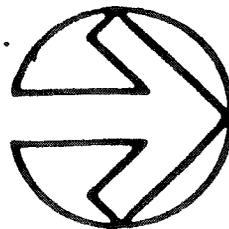
BEACH INSTITUTE HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD

621 RUBEN STREET
CHATHAM CO.
SAVANNAH
GEORGIA





621 RUBEN STREET
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SAVANNAH
GEORGIA



HANSEN ARCHITECTS.

10/04/90