

SUMTER CROSSROADS
State Highway 3/U.S. Highway 19 at Croxton Cross Road
Sumter
Sumter County
Georgia

HABS GA-2383
GA-2383

HABS
GA-2383

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
100 Alabama St. NW
Atlanta, GA 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SUMTER CROSSROADS

HABS No. GA-2383

Location: State Highway 3/U.S. Highway 19 at Croxton Cross Road
Sumter, Sumter County, Georgia
USGS 7.5 minute Smithville West, Georgia quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator coordinates:
16.759403.3538070

Date of Development: 1856-1923

Engineer: None

Builder: Unknown

Present Owner: Charlene Railey Hall
Cobb, Sumter County, Georgia

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: This district comprises the core of the rural crossroads community of Sumter in Sumter County. The district contains five commercial buildings including two stores (HABS No.GA-2384 & HABS No.GA-2385), a filling station (HABS No.GA-2386), a cotton gin (HABS No.GA-2387), and a seed house (HABS No.GA-12) that will be moved or demolished. The commercial buildings are arranged along the east side of U.S. Highway 19 and to the west of Norfolk Southern Railroad tracks surrounded by agricultural fields in southern Sumter County. One house is also included in the district and is located on the west side of U.S. Highway 19. This district is a significant example of a rural community that served the needs of the farming families in this area of Sumter County as well as the traveling public on old Dixie Highway in the early twentieth century.

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Date: January 2006

After World War I, the road would be paved to allow the ever increasing number of automobiles to flock to Florida.⁴ Locals continued to walk or ride on mule-drawn carriages to conduct business in Sumter City.

¹ University of Georgia, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, Historical Atlas of Georgia Counties, available at <http://www.cviog.uga.edu/Projects/gainfo/histcountymaps/ga1864map.htm>, accessed September 12, 2005.

² Cox, Jack F., 1983 History of Sumter County, Georgia, W. H. Wolfe Associates, Roswell, Georgia, 1983, 27.

³ Anderson, Alan, The Sumter County Genealogy Page, available at <http://www.sumtercountyhistory.com/index.html>, accessed October 5, 2005.

⁴ Georgia Department of Transportation, Georgia's Maps through the Years, Atlanta, Georgia, 1983, 3-8.

The 1840 census tells us that the Webb, Israel, Williams and Rodgers families had begun to farm the area and descendants of the families continue to farm it today.⁵ The Webbs and Israels were from Lumberton, Robeson County, North Carolina. Long distance settlers often moved together to settle areas west, becoming a party of neighbors or “old Carolina friends” who would clear land and begin to farm together.⁶ The Williams family migrated to Georgia from Virginia in 1836. Although not related to the Webbs or the Israels, the families were soon engaged with nature and each other. Their family trees were connected by marriages by the following generation.

Buildings in a rural setting tend to focus on action and because of their appearance, it is easy to imagine these buildings as the focus of everyday life in Sumter. Like a smaller version of a county seat town, these buildings were a point of information exchange. Because the surrounding area is virtually flat and these buildings are grouped together with little surrounding vegetation, they are visible from surrounding fields and this adds to their sense of importance. They also appear very symmetrical and ordered.

There are five commercial buildings located in Sumter and these buildings along with Liberty Primitive Baptist Church comprise the core of the crossroads community. These commercial buildings are organized along the railroad tracks on the east side of U.S. Highway 19 and are wood framed. Liberty Primitive Baptist Church is located to the south and on the west side of U.S. Highway 19 and will not be affected by the road widening project.

The two store buildings are constructed of timber and have served multiple business purposes. Buildings can be located on the 1910 map and are identified as “Webb Brothers” a commercial enterprise run by the Webb family which included the gin and stores.⁷

The store building located south of Sumter City Road, Sumter Mercantile Company, was owned and operated by Charles B. Railey from 1922 to 1973. Mr. Railey moved to Sumter from Schley County to run the Chappell Store on the east side of the tracks. After running the store for a time, he purchased the buildings on the west side of the tracks and began to manage those businesses.

He lived in a rear room of one of the store buildings until his marriage to Renna McCoy, a descendant of the Williams family. Renna McCoy was a school teacher and latter principal of the Thompson School in 1928.⁸ Thompson School can be located on a 1933 map of the area but is no longer extant.⁹

Sumter Mercantile served as a general store, train depot, voting precinct and a Trailways Bus stop. During a time when rural and small town America spoke with a more powerful voice, it would have also served as an information exchange and seat of legislative debate. Mr. Railey, who also farmed the land across the road, closed the store in 1973.

⁵ United States Census Data, available on line at www.censussearch.org, accessed October 18, 2005

⁶ Cox, Jack F., 1983 History of Sumter County, Georgia, 75.

⁷ Parsons Brinckerhoff, “Historic Resources Survey Report: Webb Family Farm Avoidance Alternative” (unpublished manuscript on file with the Georgia Department of Transportation’s Office of Environment/Location, Atlanta, Georgia), 2002, 31.

⁸ Interview with Charlene Railey Hall, November 1, 2005.

⁹ Georgia Department of Transportation, Sumter County Map, 1933, on file with the Georgia Department of Transportation’s Office of Environment/Location, Atlanta, Georgia.

A second store building known as the Big Store is located across Sumter City Road from Sumter Merchantile. This timber frame building has a pyramidal shaped roof, board and batten door and window shutters and rests on field stone piers.

The cotton gin at Sumter is constructed of sheet metal which is common to the building type. This is a later version of the structure because sheet metal requires a mill to manufacture and a railroad to move. The gin building is two stories high with a wagon entry or drive through in the center. The gin has not been used since the 1930s. Located close to the gin is a seed house. This small rectangular, timber structure was used to store seed after it was separated from the seed cotton.

In front of the seed house is the filling station which was also owned by Mr. Railey but managed by Rufus Mitchell. The station, constructed in the house with canopy style, opened in the 1920s to serve local needs and automobile travelers along old Dixie Highway.¹⁰ The filling station also served as the post office for a time. Unlike modern stations, the area surrounding the filling station is unpaved.

Located across U.S. Highway 19 on the north east corner of Croxton Cross Road, the Railey House was occupied by Charles and Renna McCoy Railey and their family from the 1920s until the 1980s. The single story clapboard house has had several additions and alterations. A wrap-around front porch with brick piers and collection of outbuildings including a windmill are distinguishing features of the house.

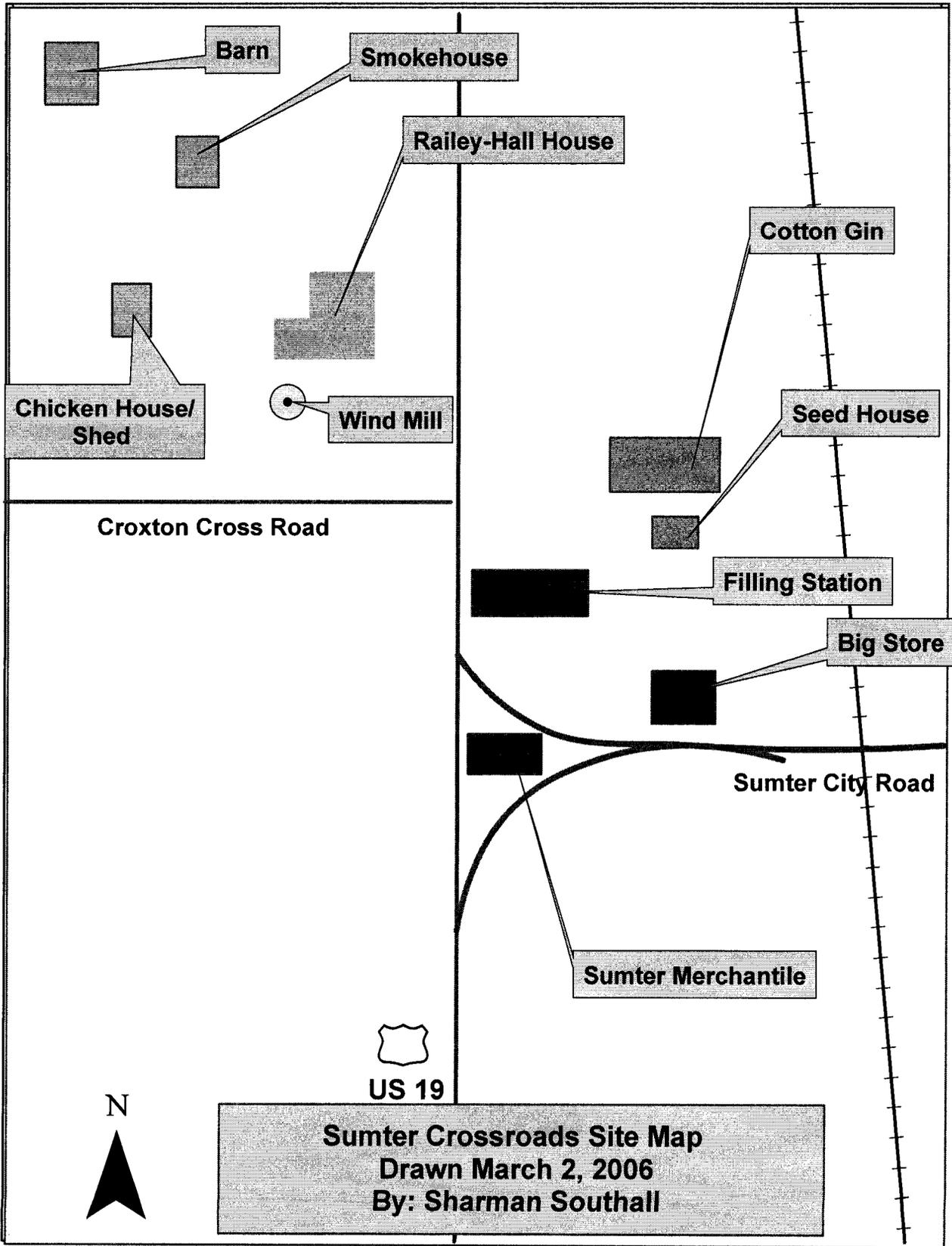
¹⁰ Interview with Charlene Railey Hall, November 1, 2005.

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Aerial Photograph of Sumter City Vicinity
dated May 6, 1957, Georgia Department
of Transportation, Atlanta, Georgia

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Sumter Crossroads Site Map
Drawn March 2, 2006
By: Sharman Southall