

HISTORIC STRUCTURE REPORT

PROMISED LAND PLANTATION MAGUIRE-LIVSEY HOUSE

Gwinnett County, Georgia



LORD AECK SARGENT
A KATERRA COMPANY

PROMISED LAND PLANTATION MAGUIRE-LIVSEY HOUSE

Snellville, Gwinnett County, Georgia

HISTORIC STRUCTURE REPORT

Prepared for

Department of Community Services Gwinnett County Government

Prepared by

Charles Lawrence, MSHP

Lord Aeck Sargent, a Katterra Company

OCTOBER 8, 2018

Cover Image: C. 1908 image of the Haney family in front of the Maguire-Livsey House from public images on ancestry.com

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Date of Construction: C. 1830

Architect: Unknown

Contractor: Unknown

Present Owner: Gwinnett County

Historic Use: Residence

Present Use: Vacant

LOCATION DATA

4530 Anderson-Livsey Lane, Snellville, Gwinnett County, Georgia

UTM: 16S / 773494.88 E / 3740793.30 N Lat/Lon: 33°46'19.11"N 84° 2'48.54"W U.S.G.S: Snellville quadrangle

GWINNETT COUNTY PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property ID R4348 018

Alternate ID 274577

Address 4530 ANDERSON-LIVSEY LN

Property Class Residential SFR

Neighborhood 8028

Deed Acres 1.4400

RELATED STUDIES

In association with this project, the firm New South Associates has produced a detailed history of the Promised Land Plantation, of which the Maguire-Livsey House was part. As well, the firm Lose & Associates, the prime contract-holder with Gwinnett County has provided site plan recommendations for the future interpretation of the property.

INTRODUCTION

In October of 2017, Lord Aeck Sargent entered into a contract with Lose & Associates, Inc. to provide a Historic Structure Report on the Maguire Livsey House. Along with this work, the firm New South Associates provided historical research and authorship of a report on the history and development of the Promised Land Plantation, which included among its assets, the Maguire-Livsey House, also known as the “Big House”. Lose & Associates, as prime contract holder with Gwinnett County managed this project and provided site planning recommendations for the property’s future interpretation by the County.

The Promised Land Plantation began around circa 1825 with the purchase of the land by Irish-Catholic immigrant, Thomas Maguire. The Big House was likely built around 1830 but an exact date of construction is not known. Much of the historic information available on the property from this period is available from Maguire’s remaining diaries, which cover the years 1859-66. Beginning around 1886, following Maguire’s death, the property was subdivided and the Big House rented out. In 1926, the property that included the Big House was purchased by the Livsey family and remained in their ownership until Gwinnett County purchased the property in 2017.



Figure 1: Early 20th century photo of the Maguire-Livsey house. Courtesy of Thomas Livsey.

Charles Lawrence, Architectural Conservator with LAS, documented and assessed the conditions of the Maguire-Livsey House in the Spring of 2018. In support of this work, the interior and exterior of the house was captured in a laser scan by sub-consultant RePro Products, and the point cloud used to create floor plans and elevations. An additional structure, a modified small residential building, was also documented and investigated. This modern dwelling occupies the site of a former smoke house and later a garage, but no evidence of an existing historic structure, intact or otherwise, was found.

Despite an abundance of cosmetic alterations, much of the primary structure and historic features remain intact under layers of non-historic or non-contributing material.

Part I of this Historic Structure Report provides a brief historical background and context, with the reader encouraged to consult the New South Associates report which delves into the history of the Promised Land Plantation and its residents in much more detail. Following the brief historical summary is a discussion of the house's chronology and development. Completing this section is a description of the existing conditions organized by building system, creating a parallel organizational structure to standard construction documents. Photographs of the existing condition supplement the narrative in this section.

Part II discusses the property's treatment and use, approached from the understanding that the property will be interpreted around the time that the Livsey family purchased it, but before any major alterations. Treatment recommendations follow National Park Service Standards for Restoration. A cost estimate for the proposed work completes this section.

Included in the appendices are measured drawings showing foundations, floor plans, roof plans, and elevations, as well as additional documents and information related to the proposed scope of work.

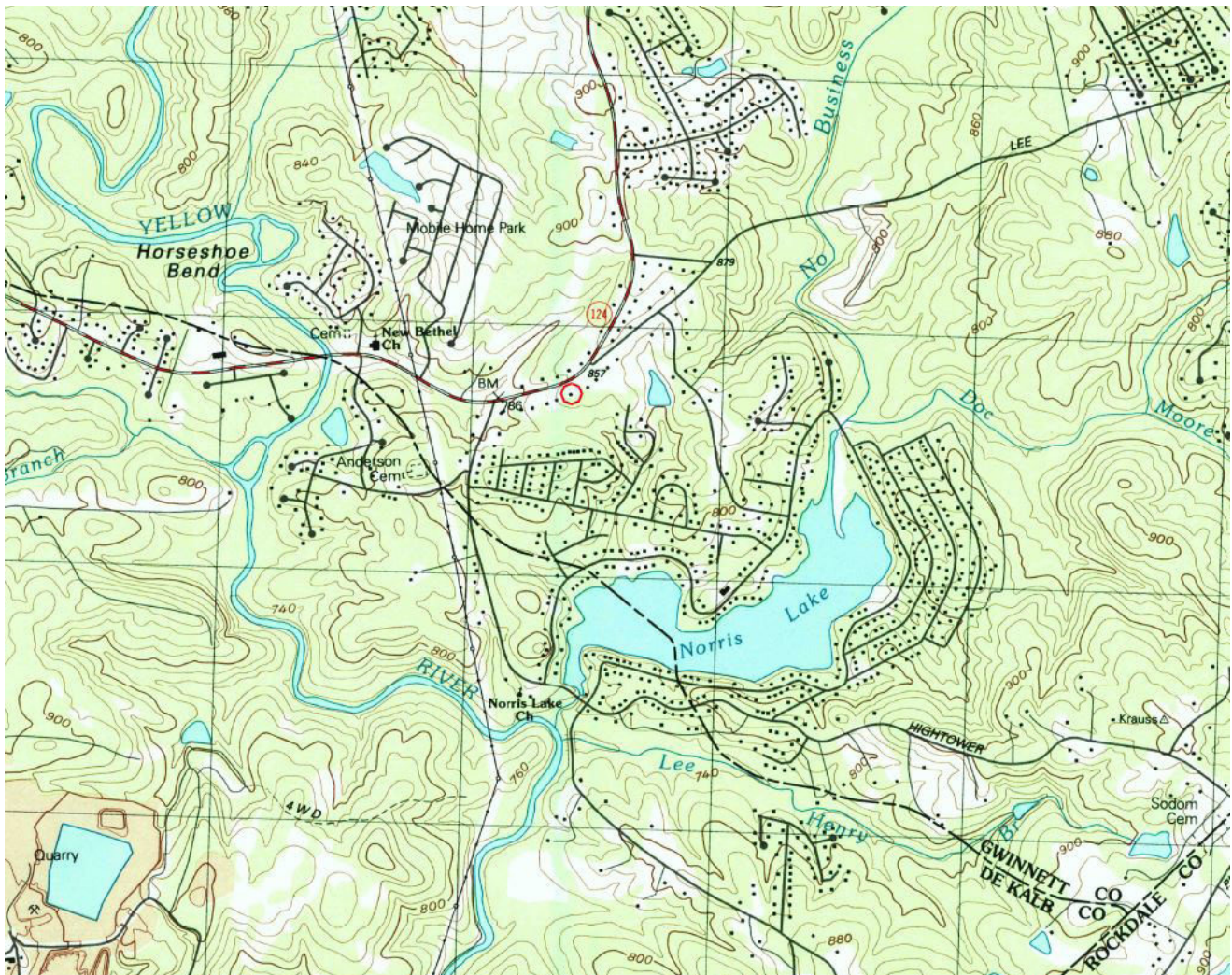


Figure 2: Detail from USGS topographic map, Snellville, GA Quadrangle, 1999. Red circle near center of image identifies location of Maguire-Livsey House.

PART 1

DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In conjunction with this report, New South Associates has produced a historical background and context for the Promised Land Plantation. That document serves as the basis of understanding for this section of the Historic Structure Report.

Thomas Maguire, who founded the Promised Land Plantation and built his namesake house, also called the “big House”, immigrated to Augusta, Georgia in about 1825 and had moved to Rockbridge, Gwinnett County by 1828. By 1834, Maguire’s house is listed as a voting precinct and in 1839 it served as the Rockbridge post office. It is presumed that the original structure was built sometime in the early 1830s, perhaps following an inheritance after the death of Maguire’s parents in 1828.

While only a few scant references to the main house are mentioned in the remaining diaries, Maguire wrote prolifically about his farming operations. By 1863, the Promised Land Plantation included 1,232 acres, with 400-500 acres of farmland. Maguire practiced diversified farming and included among his produce; wheat, corn, oats, rice, cotton, wool, peas, beans, potatoes, sweet potatoes, peaches, apples, and butter. As well, Maguire was a slaveholder, retaining in bondage 26 slaves just prior to their emancipation after the Civil War.

Following Maguire’s death in 1886, the plantation was subdivided and the Big House rented out, first to the Haney family and then to the Lucas Family. In 1926, the Big House and 90-110 acres of associated land was sold to the Livsey family, an African-American family that had lived in the area for several generations. The Livseys continued farming the land but over time reduced their farming practices and subdivided the land for new residential development, especially during the period of suburban growth following World War II.

CHRONOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT AND USE

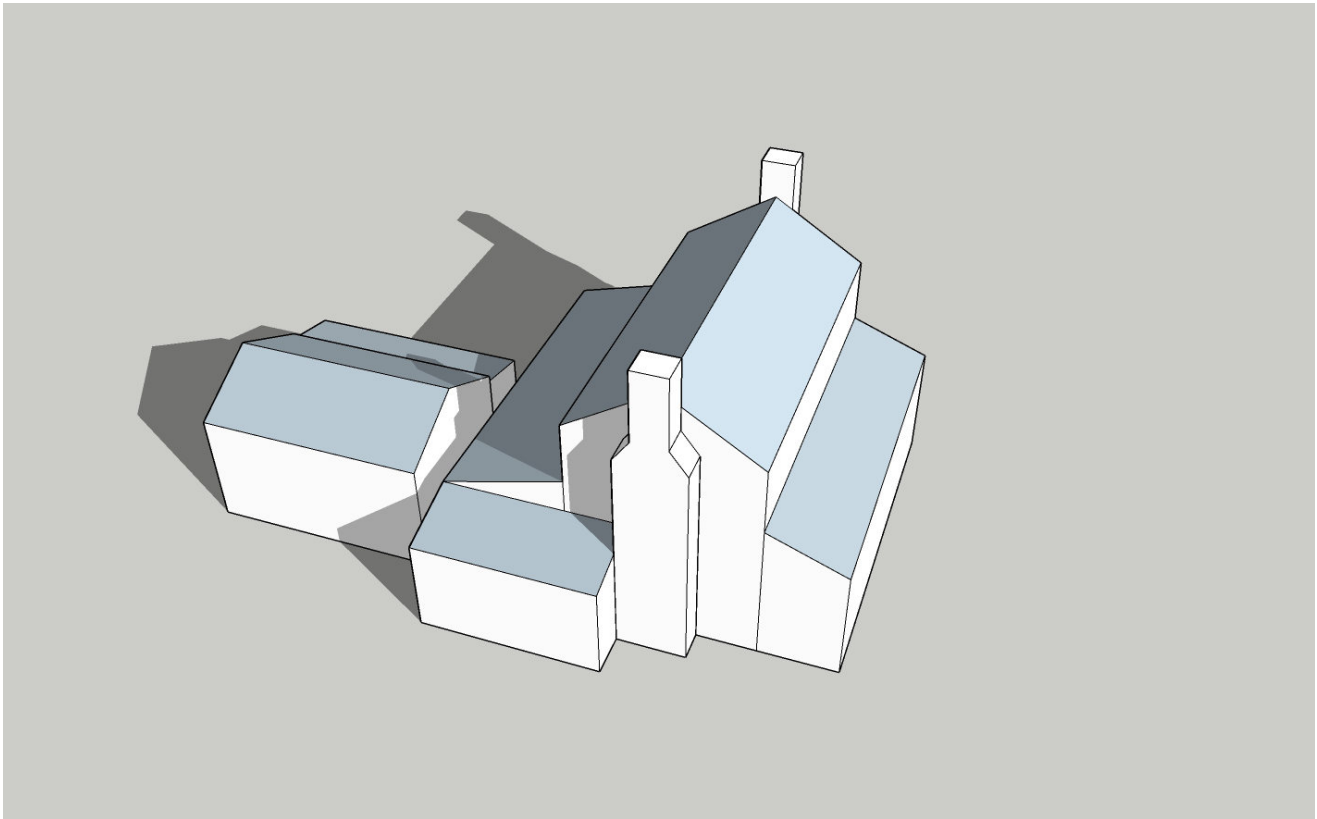
As originally constructed, based on physical evidence and entries from Maguire’s diaries, the 34’ by 15’ Big House was a two story, timber frame house featuring a full-width, single-story front porch and a rear single-story shed, nearly as deep as the main house and likely enclosed or partially enclosed. The two story portion of the house is flanked on its gabled ends by exterior fieldstone chimneys that supported two fireplaces on each floor.

A 16’ by 23’ kitchen, originally separate from the main house by several feet, was later connected by a covered corridor forming an L-shaped footprint with the main house. The kitchen likely had a shed roof porch off of its south elevation joining with the shed portion of the main house.

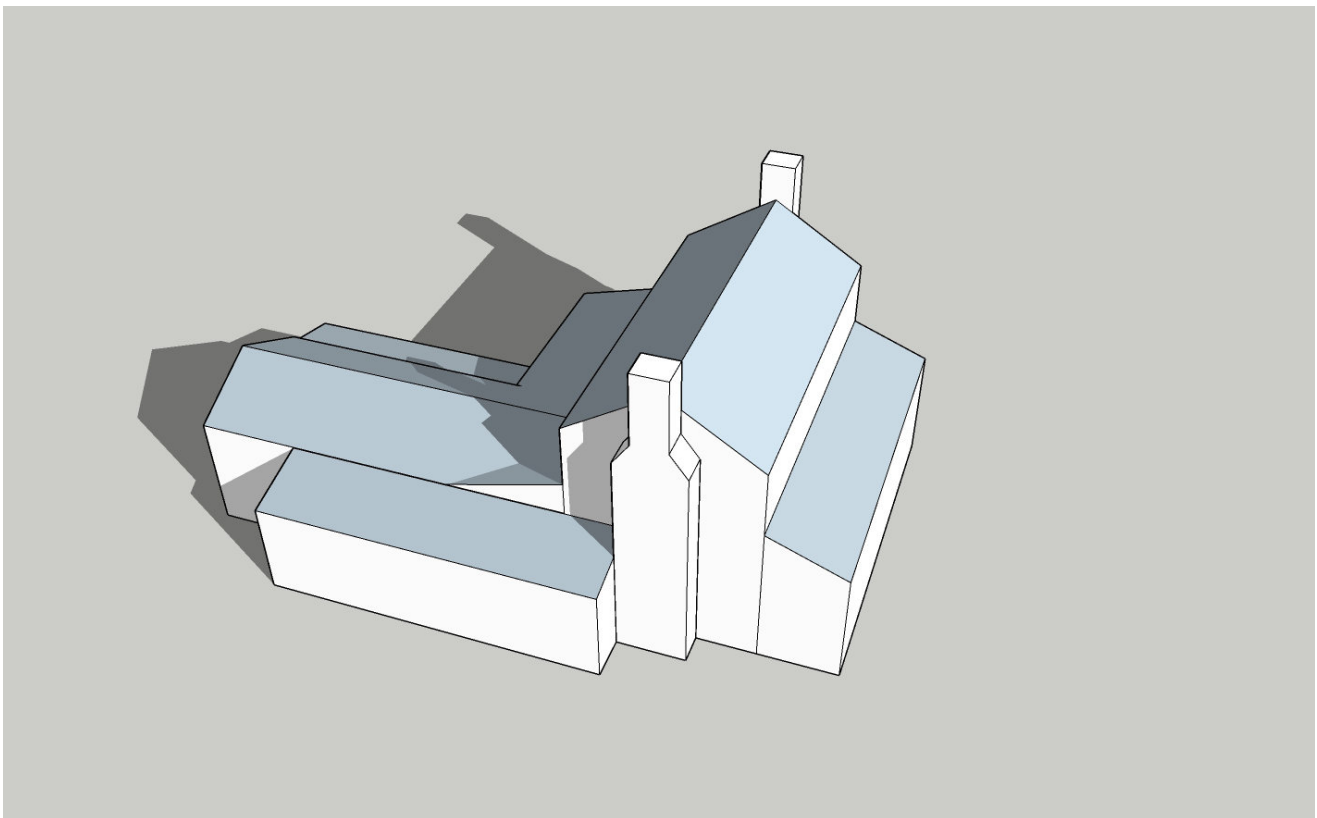
The house form is known as Plantation Plain or I-House and features a Center-Hall plan with two differently-sized rooms separated by a central hall. The big room features an enclosed single-run stair along its east wall.

The house appears to have remained largely unchanged well into the twentieth-century. It was not until the 1940s that the house was wired for electricity and it was another decade before it received plumbing and its first inside bathroom. The front porch was rebuilt several times, most recently it was given a concrete deck and concrete breeze-block posts sometime in the 1970s. Around that same time, the exterior of the house was covered in vinyl siding with a PermaStone water table. From the 1970s on, a succession of one-story additions enclosed and expanded the former rear porches. Other changes include the removal of the kitchen fireplace and chimney, removal of the main house fireplaces and mantels and replacement with modern veneer brick fireplaces, replacement of the windows with smaller aluminum framed windows, replacement of all of the doors, and a generally accretive process of adding interior cladding.

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Conjectural massing of the Maguire-Livsey House prior to connection of kitchen building.



Conjectural massing of the Maguire-Livsey House after connection of kitchen, prior to Livsey period alterations and additions.

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Figure 3: Image of Maguire-Livsey House in 1951



Figure 4: C. 1970 image of the Maguire-Livsey House.

PLANTATION PLAIN / I-HOUSE



Chesser-Williams House, Gwinnett Environmental & Heritage Center. Photo by author.

The term I-House was first used by Fred Kniffen in 1936 when he found an “absence of any common term, either folk or architectural,” to describe the house type he had identified in mostly the “I” states of Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa. Practically synonymous with the term I-House is the Plantation Plain House, terminology developed by Frederick Doveton Nichols to describe early Georgia houses that share characteristics of the I-House.

I-Houses/Plantation Plain Houses typically include a two-story, one-room deep massing with two rooms on each floor.

A hall may be present between the first floor rooms and the stairs are often either in the hall or accessed from the hall and occupying space in the larger of the rooms.

The I-House form evolved during the period of early to mid-nineteenth century expansion in the United States, with the type prevalent along the valleys and foothills of the Appalachian Mountains down into Georgia and the Piedmont, along the Ohio River valley and into the Midwest.

Typically, the larger of two first floor rooms functioned as an all-purpose room for working, dining, and entertaining; the smaller room was used for more formal activities, entertaining, and/or as the head-of-household bedroom. Later examples of I-Houses often feature a center hall with either a straight run stair along one wall or a winder/half-landing stair at the rear of the hall. Typical I-Houses have multi-lite, double-hung windows; a chimney on either gable end; a front porch; a back porch, which is often enclosed; and a kitchen ell or separate kitchen behind the house.

For further reading see The Georgia Catalog, Historic American Buildings Survey: A Guide to the Architecture of the State and Fred Kniffen’s Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion.



The rear of the c. 1812 Elijah Winn House. Image courtesy of the Gwinnett Historical Society

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION & CONDITION ASSESSMENT

The following description of physical conditions is broken down by building system. The primary focus is on the building elements associated with the original construction and subsequent changes up to the period of interpretation of roughly 1921. Additions and alterations made after this point in time are noted, but not described in detail, nor are their conditions noted, as it is assumed that these non-historic, non-contributing materials will be removed in future interpretations of the house.

Observations and condition assessments were made with visual and invasive analysis. In several locations, modern material was removed, either temporarily or permanently, to reveal the historic structure and substrate and observe their condition.

FOUNDATION

Portions of the historic foundation can be seen from several access hatches around the building. A dug-out basement below a portion of the former kitchen also affords views of the historic foundation. Physical access to most foundation elements is restricted by obstructions or lack of physical space.

The foundation is composed of intermittently spaced mortared field stone piers of varying sizes depending on the loads they carry. Large stone piers carry the large longitudinal sill beams while smaller stone piers carry the lateral sill beams and provide mid-span support. Additional supplemental piers of treated wood, stone, brick, and CMU have been added or altered over time.

Foundation piers appear to be in stable condition but with typical signs of settlement and erosion/compaction of the surrounding earth. Mortar is present but has eroded significantly in most places. Repairs appear ad-hoc. Significant termite damage and dry rot is visible in most of the primary load-bearing, un-treated wood structure.

FRAMING

The framing can be viewed in several areas within and below the house. Several walls have significant openings revealing framing members. As well, framing can be viewed from the basement, crawl spaces, and from the attics.

Primary structural framing is composed of 12-inch by 12-inch longitudinal sill beams supporting diagonally-braced, vertical timber posts. Historic framing is mortised with wood pegs securing the join. Lateral sill beams are 5-inches by 12-inches. Floor joists are 9-1/2-inches by 1-1/2-inches spaced roughly 22-inches on center. As a potential indicator of age, the timber framing members have regularly spaced parallel saw marks, indicating mechanically milled timber. As noted below, some of the roof and ceiling framing exhibits circular saw marks which may indicate a later period of construction.

Much of the wood framing shows signs of significant termite damage and past infestation. No live infestations were observed. There also appear to be areas where the historic framing was cut and removed to make new openings or passages. It is not clear yet how these interventions have impacted the structural integrity of the framing system, though no critical failures were observed.

ROOF AND ROOFING

The roofs are composed of several wood-framed systems: a side gable structure over the main house; single-slope framing over the porches; and, a wood-framed gable-ended structure over the historic kitchen wing. There are two openings into attic spaces affording access and views of the roof system: a hatch at the top of the main house stairs and a hatch in the ceiling of the second floor kitchen. Roof framing is composed of unbraced rafters

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Figure 5: Stone foundation pile supporting large sill beam.



Figure 6: Mortise and tenoned timber framing.



Figure 7: Typical roof framing and live-edge board decking.



Figure 8: Gabled framing above sloped framing in the attic.

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(spaced roughly 22-inches on center above the main house and roughly 32-inches on center above the kitchen wing). Decking is composed of live-edge boards, some well over 20-inches wide. Above these boards is a layer of modern plywood. Roofing is primarily composed of asphalt composite shingles, though a portion of the non-historic additions feature sheet material roofing. Blown fiber insulation is present throughout the attic spaces. Ridge vents and other ventilation appurtenances, as well as gutters and downspouts, are present and functioning.

In the attic above the rear porch, sloped framing below gabled framing supporting existing roofing indicates a change in the roof between the Big House and Kitchen. Likely, the rear porch of the Big House originally had a shed roof that terminated several feet from the wall of the kitchen and later a new gabled roof was built to join the Big House and Kitchen. It appears that the live-edge roof deck boards were reused for the new roof. Saw marks and lumber sizing may support this observation.

The roof framing and decking appear to be in stable condition, though evidence of termite infestations in many areas of the house suggest that a thorough inspection of framing members be undertaken. The roofing, from visual aerial inspection, appears to be at or beyond its functional life, though no active leaks were observed.

EXTERIOR WALL CLADDING

The building exterior is clad in a variety of non-historic materials, including stucco, plywood, Perma-Stone, and vinyl clapboard. In a few areas, wood clapboards are visible underneath the modern cladding. As well, historic wood clapboards can be seen from the attics and behind modern materials where formerly exterior walls have been incorporated into an interior space. The presumed former exterior wall of the kitchen, facing the main house, is board and batten. Part of the kitchen's eaves is also visible from the attic space accessed from the stairs.

Where visible, the historic weatherboard cladding appeared stable. However, considering the extent of termite damage visible in other wood building systems, it would be reasonable to assume that some of the historic cladding is similarly damaged. It is also likely that many areas of historic cladding have been removed to make way for modern interventions.

CHIMNEYS

The building features two chimneys, one exterior to each gable wall of the two-story portion. The chimneys are made of mortared field stone and are unified with their mortared field stone foundations.

A large vertically-oriented crack is present on the north chimney. The crack shows evidence of multiple infilled mortar repairs. The chimney is believed to be largely stable though as the crack is visible in several historic photographs, including one dated 1951, and appears to have not significantly changed in dimension since that time.

A remnant of a large, mortared fieldstone foundation below a portion of the Old Kitchen/Sewing Room indicates that there may have been another chimney with cooking fireplace in this location. Oral interviews support these findings.

WINDOWS

Existing windows throughout the building are non-historic and range in style, type, and material. Portions of the historic window jambs and/or casings were observed in situ during this assessment, however; further investigation is necessary to understand the historic window condition precisely. One window location was excavated to reveal a segment of historic wood casing with a corner bead, which is presumed to be the historic window casing.

It is expected that any remaining wood window elements are subject to the same termite and rot damage observed and noted in this report.

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Figure 9: One of several locations where wood clapboards are visible.



Figure 10: Board and batten siding on Kitchen. Note the boxed eaves.



Figure 11: South chimney showing repaired crack.



Figure 12: Aluminum window in a larger opening. Note the corner bead wood trim, removed sill/stool, and wainscot below.

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DOORS

Existing doors throughout the building are non-historic and range in style, type, and material.

There are two locations where portions of what appear to be historic door casing is exposed (noted in drawings). This trim is composed of vertical and horizontal fluted trim boards with no plinth or corner blocks, which is unusual for the presumed period and style. In one location, a roughly 24-inch segment of fluted casing has a different profile from that present in the remainder of extant trim.

There are other locations where corner beaded trim is present at existing door surrounds and presumed to be the historic door trim (noted in drawings).

The center partition of the former kitchen features a floor to ceiling opening framed by chamfered posts. The function of this feature is not yet known.

As with other wood material throughout the house, the likelihood of termite damage is very high. The trim located near the stairs shows significant signs of internal damage from termites.

INTERIOR WALLS

Typical historic walls are clad on each side with 10-1/2 to 11-inch horizontally-laid, tongue and groove boards. Judge's paneling wainscot exists in the two primary, first floor rooms of the main structure. Projecting roughly an inch from the wall plane, the wainscot is composed of a 3/4-inch chair rail, a 3-inch ledger, dado, and five-inch base with 1/4-inch square mold on top. Vertical 3-inch rails repeat every 18" on center.

Evidence suggests that in the primary rooms, the wall above the wainscot was papered. Several campaigns of early wall paper exist in situ behind modern sheathing in the north wall of the southern room on the first floor of the main house. One of the earliest layers has printed in the margin, "UWPC of NA; Union-Made". This wallpaper was made by workers belonging to United Wall Paper Crafts of North America sometime between 1923 and 1938. There are at least two layers of paper below this one.

Nearly all walls have several generations of sheathing on top of the historic material, including; several layers of wall paper, gypsum board, and wood veneer. The leading edge of chair rail found in the two primary first floor rooms has been substantially removed for the installation of the modern sheathing.

As noted previously, some interior walls feature weatherboard hidden under modern sheathing, an indication of formerly exterior walls. Portions of the historic kitchen wing appear to retain vertical board sheathing (Southernmost corner) as well as 6-inch horizontal boards (center partition wall). As well, board and batten wall, in situ at the transition from the shed porch to the gabled kitchen wing, is visible from the attic hatch at the top of the main stairs.

Termite damage is evidenced at several interior wall locations throughout the house, especially in the lower portions of the first floor rooms. In some cases, the damage is so extensive that the wood base is indistinguishable from wood pulp.

CEILINGS

Historic ceilings appear to be tongue and groove boards affixed to saw-cut lumber joists. These board ceilings are visible in all of the ground floor and second floor rooms of the main house and its porches.

All ceilings have a slight sag towards their center points. Individual boards also exhibit slight to moderate cupping. It is likely that the material sitting on top of the boards in interstitial spaces and attics has attracted moisture and pests, exacerbating the warping.

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Figure 13: Fluted trim exposed in the former kitchen.



Figure 14: Corner bead door trim and tongue and groove wall boards exposed behind modern materials.



Figure 15: Tongue and groove wall boards above judge's paneling wainscot with original door trim to the left.



Figure 16: Detail of wallpaper discovered beneath layers of modern sheathing.

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FLOORS

Hardwood floors are present under modern flooring. In the small closet under the stairs in main house, 6 to 6-1/2-inch boards are visible. As well, similarly sized floor boards, with no sub floor, are visible from crawl spaces.

As with other wood material throughout the house, the likelihood of termite damage is very high. Floors in several areas of the main structure are soft and flex when loaded.

SYSTEMS

The house has residential grade heating, electric, and plumbing systems; all of which are past their functional life. No air conditioning systems were observed. Gas fueled heating is provided by floor registers fed by a forced air furnace located in the basement. Electric service is distributed throughout the house from a panel located in first floor north room of the main structure. There are three modern bathrooms and no evidence of historic fixtures. It is likely that at the house's proposed period of interpretation, there were no indoor bathrooms/toilets.

EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

Using the National Register Criteria for Evaluation of Historic Properties, the Maguire-Livsey house is clearly significant under Criterion C for its architecture. It is a representative example of an I-House/Plantation Plain House, despite the alterations made to it over time. It retains its recognizable two-story form with front and rear porches and semi-detached kitchen. As well, much of the original material is still present and though in questionable condition, retains enough information to inform an appropriate treatment approach.

The property may also be locally significant under Criterion B for its association with Thomas Maguire, who was one of the largest agriculturists in the region.

Significant, character-defining features include the overall I-House form and the original interior center hall configuration, wood clapboard siding, stone chimneys and foundation piers, mortise and tenon and nailed wood framing, interior tongue and groove wood board walls, judges paneling wainscot, historic door and window frames, wood flooring, tongue and groove wood board ceilings, and any remaining historic finishes.

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Figure 17: Exposed tongue and groove board ceiling.



Figure 18: Exposed original flooring in original under-stair closet.