

D.E. 6/26/90

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Robinson-Bonnett Inn
other names/site number Bonnett Inn

2. Location

street & number Whites Crossing Road not for publication
city, town Bobtown (near Oakford) vicinity
state Illinois code IL county Menard code 129 zip code 62673

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

[Signature] 6-22-80
Signature of certifying official Date
Illinois Historic Preservation Agency
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC - inn/single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC - single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

EARLY REPUBLIC - Federal

MID 19th CENTURY - Greek Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Description Summary

The Robinson-Bonnett Inn is located on the south side of Whites Crossing Road with its facade facing west, away from the road. It is about eight miles northwest of Petersburg (Menard County), Illinois. The inn was once a part of an early pioneer settlement originally called Robinson's Mills, and later Bobtown. The inn is the only building that remains in this ghost town, with the exception of a large barn across the road from the inn to the north. The inn was built for the community's founders, the Robinsons, by John Bonnett around 1843. (See Exhibit 1 for location map)

The two story, L-shaped brick building contains about 2,000 square feet of space; it was built of soft red brick made on the site. The 13" thick brick walls have headers every 11th course. The building exhibits characteristics of the Federal and Greek Revival styles, including symmetrically arranged fenestration, interior end chimneys, and central main doorway with glass transom and sidelights. The cross gable roof is hipped at the northwest corner where the two wings meet. The roof has been covered with green asphalt shingles recently. All exterior wood lintels, sills and trim are painted white. At one time, the inn had a long, roofless porch across the front (which at the time faced the main road that ran north and south), a back pent roofed porch, and a front gabled porch on the north that was added in the late 19th century when a door was cut in this elevation. None of the porches remain.

Construction Features

The exterior and most of the interior walls are masonry load bearing. The wood floor joists are rough hewn (some still containing original bark), 2" - 3" wide by 9" deep, with cross bridging every 6 feet. The foundation walls are also brick and there is a basement under the northwest room of the inn, which measures approximately 18' x 18'. The rough sawn roof rafters are varying widths and 12" deep.

Front Elevation (See Photos 1 & 2)

The west or front facade of the inn has symmetrically arranged windows around the central main entry. The 2/2 wood double hung windows at the upper level are five ranked, and slightly smaller than the ones at the first story level. At this level, there are two pair of wood 2/1 double hung windows flanking the front entry. The window lintels and sills are plain, flat wood ones, as is the wide front door lintel. The wood front door is paneled. The door has sidelights and a transom window. At the eave level, the wood cornice is unadorned except for some shallow moldings. A set of wood steps with four open risers has been built at the front entry.

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South Elevation (See Photo 3)

The South gable end of the front section contains no openings and is outlined by the simple wood cornice and cornice returns. The interior brick chimney can be seen extending above the gable roof. The top of the chimney has been rebuilt. The south side of the rear extension has a centered doorway at the lower level with a 9 light window to its right. The outline of the pent roof that covered a 12' x 22' rear porch (probably added in the late 19th century) is still visible on the upper wall. A new wood paneled door with upper glass lights has been installed in the rear wing.

East (Rear) Elevation (See Photo 4)

The gable end of the rear wing of the inn is identical to the south gable end of the front section of the building. The rear of the front section contains two, 2/2 double hung windows at the upper level and a 2/1 window and doorway at the lower level. The paneled wood door appears to be original. There is a flat concrete slab (12' x 22') at the rear of the building that formerly served as the floor of the pent roofed porch that used to exist at the rear of the inn.

North Elevation (See Photo 2)

The north elevation contains four, symmetrically arranged, 2/2 wood double hung windows at the second story level; it originally had the same configuration at the lower level. However, a doorway was cut into the front room of the building at one time, replacing the right central window. The wood window lintel can still be seen above the doorway lintel. The three lower story windows are 2/1. There are also two basement windows on this facade at the west end. At one time, a small end gable roofed porch (built in the late 19th century) existed on this side of the building; it was reached by a set of concrete steps. The outline of the porch can still be seen on the brick wall. Also visible on this elevation is an interior brick chimney extending through the roof.

Floor Plans/Interior Details (See Exhibits 2 & 3, and Photos 6-13)

The first and second floor plans of the inn are similar, each originally having three large square rooms approximately 18' x 18' in size. All of the exterior and interior walls are solid brick (13" thick) with the exception of the wall between the two bedrooms on the north side of the inn, and the 20th century partitions added to two of the first floor rooms.

There is a central hallway in the west wing, with a doorway at each end, that separates the two rooms (at each level) in the front section of the inn. It has a straight stairway with a walnut newel post with a cannon ball cap, and a balustrade with flat decorative balusters that appear to have replaced the original pencil post balusters.

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The balustrade on the south side of the stair opening at the second floor level still has its original, hand turned, pencil post balusters. Originally, there were no partitions on the north side of the inn on the second floor and the balustrade continued all the way around the stairwell. The north and west sides of the stairwell were later framed in and a wall added to divide the long north space into two bedrooms. A small storage room was also built at the west end of the stairwell.

There is a brick walled basement under the northwest first floor room of the inn. It is reached by a set of covered wood steps under the main stairway. There is a fireplace in the basement with a segmental arched opening.

The first floor originally contained a kitchen and two other rooms (probably a bar room and parlor), with the upper floor being used for sleeping and storage. The room on the south side of the second floor was never finished and still has its original brick walls. There is also a trap door to the attic in this room. The kitchen had a small area in the northeast corner partitioned off in later years, and the south room in the front wing was also divided into two rooms.

There are four fireplaces in the inn, all with segmental arched openings. The one in the kitchen was used for cooking purposes and still has metal hooks on which to hang pots. There is a fireplace in each of the two lower front rooms on the gable end walls, and as mentioned earlier, a fireplace in the basement. Old wood mantels, appropriate to the mid-19th century character of the inn, have been installed on the fireplaces in the two front rooms.

Most of the original flooring is pine or oak. Old pine flooring (5" width) has been laid in the kitchen over the plywood that was installed in this room sometime in the 20th century. The oak floor in the north room and pine floor in the south front room have been refinished and painted. The east half of the south front room has been remodeled for use as a bathroom with newly installed oak flooring. The original chair rail in the south front room is intact. The pine floors on the second floor will also be refinished.

The walls of the inn (with the exception of the one unfinished room on the second floor) were plastered in the latter part of the 19th century and wallpapered. The plaster was in bad condition and drywall has been installed. The walls will be wallpapered. The deep wood baseboards, interior wood paneled doors and trim are painted.

The old inn has survived the past 150 years remarkably well preserved and the current rehabilitation being undertaken by its new owners will help to preserve it even further.

LEGEND

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| CLASSIFICATION OF ROADS AND STREETS | | CULTURAL FEATURES | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HIGHWAY ROUTE U.S. HILL AND INTERSTATE HIGHWAY WITH CONTROL OF ACCESS CLOSED UNIDIRECTIONAL ONEWAY ROAD PAVED UNIDIRECTIONAL UNIMPAVED ATUNIDIRECTIONAL GRAVEL OR STONE SOIL SURFACE GRAVEL AND GRADED UNIMPAVED FEDERAL AND PRIMARY ROUTE FEDERAL AND SECONDARY COUNTY HIGHWAY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> COUNTY SEAT TOWNSHIP OF COLLECTED AREA STRUCTURES, IRRIGATION AND DRAINAGE HIGHWAY BRIDGES OVER RIVER CLEAR SPAN FOOD STORES OVER 20 FT. IN LENGTH FERRY FERRY BOAT PIER OR LAUNCH DRAINAGE WITH OR WITHOUT STAGAN CANAL BOUNDARY LINES AND SCREENS CIVIL TOWNSHIP OR SOLE DISTRICT FOREST PRESERVE OR PARK AREA MILITARY RESERVATION STRIP WARE OR WARE WASTE AREA AIRPORTS SCHEDULED SERVICE MILITARY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 FARM HOME 2 BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENT 3 SCHOOL 4 CHURCH 5 PUBLIC BUILDING 6 CEMETERY 7 GOLF COURSE 8 GOLF CLUB 9 SMALL PARK 10 REST AREA 11 MEMORIAL 12 PARK GROUND OR RACE COURSE 13 BARRAGE OR DAM 14 LOCKOUT TOWER 15 GRAIN STORAGE BIN 16 STORAGE TANK 17 SEASONAL SWELLING TOWER 18 SOIL OR GAS PILL 19 FISH HATCHERY 20 TOLL PLAZA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 SWELLING 2 INDUSTRIAL PLANT 3 HOTEL OR MOTEL 4 POST OFFICE 5 POWER PLANT 6 GUEST ROOM 7 GOLF COURSE OR COUNTRY CLUB 8 GOLF CLUB 9 CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION 10 COUNTY PARK 11 BARRAGE OR DAM 12 SCENIC SITE 13 TELEPHONE STATION 14 RAMP OR TELEPHONE STATION 15 CLAP NET LAUNCH 16 STATE HIGHWAY POLICE STATION 17 FIRE DEPARTMENT 18 RHYTHM STATION |

GENERAL HIGHWAY MAP
MENARD COUNTY
ILLINOIS

EXHIBIT 1

PREPARED BY THE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
OFFICE OF PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING
IN COOPERATION WITH THE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

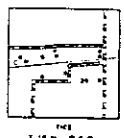
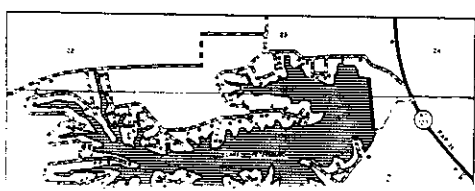
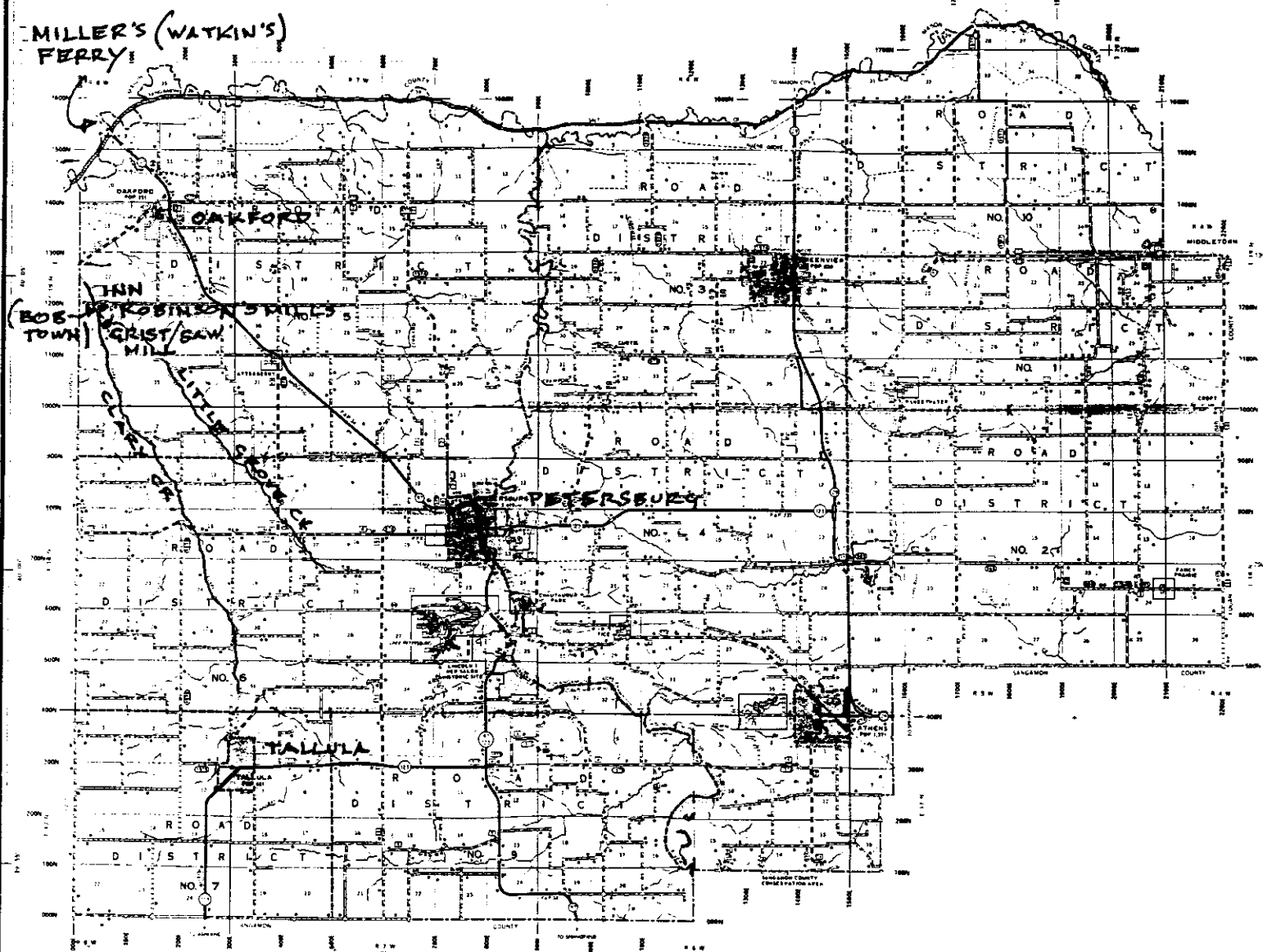
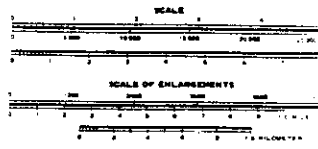
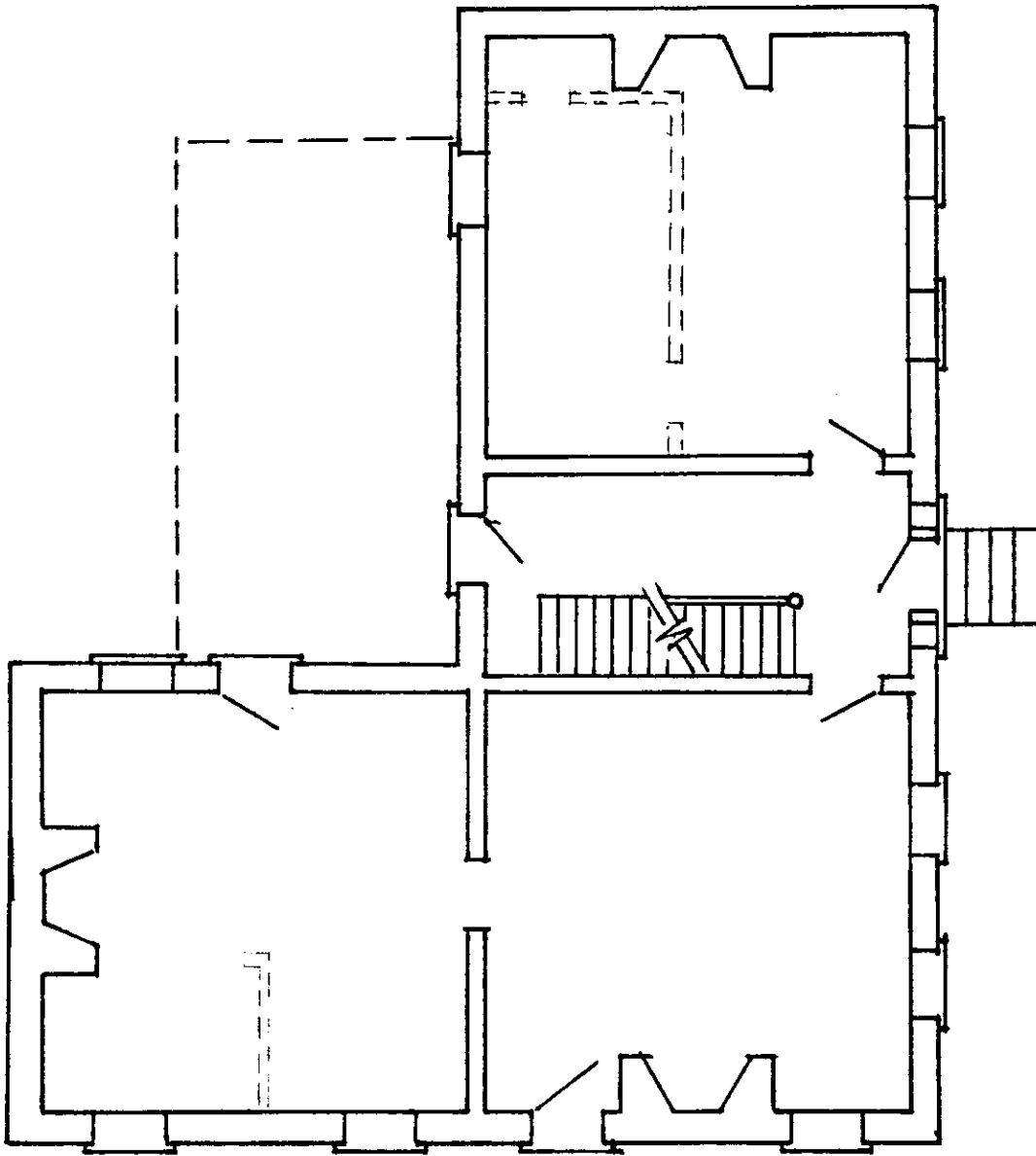
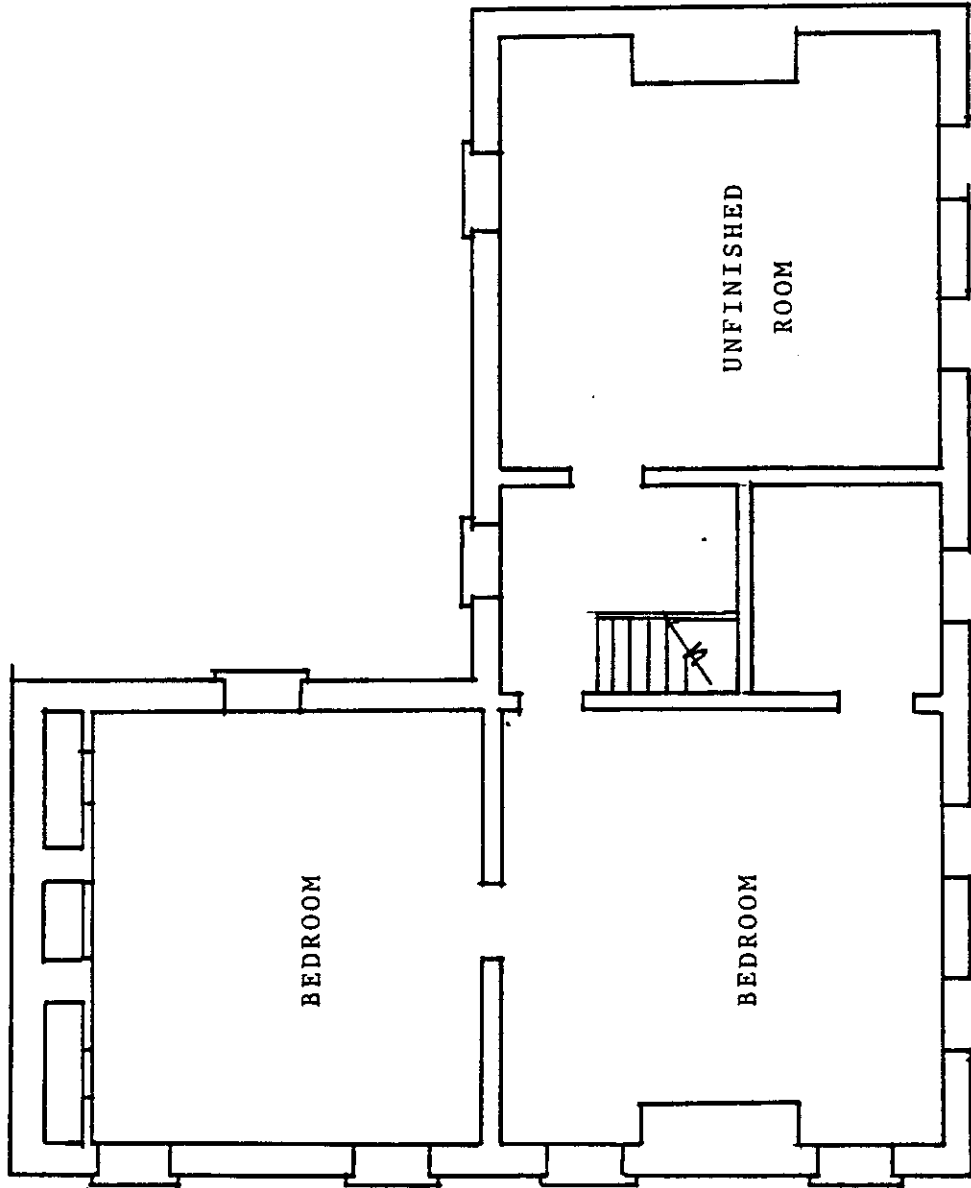


EXHIBIT 2



ROBINSON'S/BONNETT'S INN
FIRST FLOOR PLAN
1/8" = 1'0"

EXHIBIT 3



SECOND FLOOR PLAN
ROBINSON-BONNETT INN

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Transportation
Commerce
Architecture

Period of Significance

1843-1872
1843-1880
1843

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Robinson-Bonnett Inn is a building that reflects significant aspects of the early development of Illinois' transportation, commerce and architecture. It meets National Register criterion A: "associated with events that made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history" - the early settlement of Robinson's Mills and Menard County, Illinois, and early travel in Illinois; and Criterion C: "embodying the distinct characteristics of a type," - one of the few remaining early inns in Illinois, a domestic structure used for the additional purpose of an inn or tavern, and the only known remaining example of this type in Menard County. The Robinson-Bonnett Inn served an important function in connection with customers of an early grist/saw mill and travelers from Springfield to Beardstown, and probably those from Springfield to Lewistown and beyond. The Robinson-Bonnett Inn embodies characteristics of other early Illinois inns that were built in the Federal or Greek Revival styles of architecture, with balanced fenestration, center door on the long side which faced the road, the door having sidelights and transom, internal gable end chimneys, and a central hallway.

HISTORIC THEME/CONTEXT

The theme on which the historic context for this nomination is based is: early inns in central Illinois and their importance relative to travel and commerce in the era 1835-1880.

Early Transportation in Illinois

By the time Illinois became a state in 1818, a rudimentary system of road networks had begun to be developed. In the years following, other routes in the central part of the state would become fairly well-established, one of the most important being the one from St. Louis on the south to Galena on the north (the Fort Clark Trail). Other routes fanned out from Springfield and by 1849, according to Phelps' National Map of the United States, there were routes leading from Springfield to Beardstown/Carthage/Nauvoo; to Jacksonville; to Petersburg and Lewistown; to Urbana, etc.(1)

(1) Phelps' National Map of the United States, a Traveler's Guide (Published by Ensign & Thayer, 1849.

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At the same time, efforts were being made to develop rail transportation in order to further the movement of goods needed for economic growth within the state. The tenth Illinois General Assembly, elected in 1836, voted for a far flung, but ill-designed system of internal improvements that cast a long shadow on the state's financial status for many years. The largest project, at \$3.5 million, was an Illinois Central Railroad from Cairo to the Illinois River at the south terminus of the Illinois and Michigan Canal, and from there northwest to Galena. Two major east-west lines were also provided for by the General Assembly, one at a cost of \$1,85 million running from Quincy through Springfield to Danville and the Indiana border.

While a number of rails were laid, at this point in its history, Illinois lacked the money, engineering skills, and material to properly carry out this task and the state's plans for a railroad system failed.(2) This meant that the state, including the area around Springfield and Sangamon County fell back to a full dependence on horseback, stage coaches and wagons.

Luckily, stage coach travel was improving with better equipment, lower fares and more frequent schedules. Bridges over streams also helped to save time and make travel less hazardous. Frink and Walker, in 1842, listed departures from Springfield for Peoria, and via Peru, Ottawa, Joliet and Lockport to Chicago each day. From Springfield the fare to Peoria was \$4.00 or \$12.00 to Chicago. The trip was made in three days with stopovers each night. Each Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, stages left Springfield for Burlington by way of Peoria, Knoxville and Oquawka; they also left for Galena through Peoria and Dixon's Ferry (at Dixon). Passengers were offered "first rate Troy built coaches" with four horses, and travelers could even be picked up at their houses if they gave notice the night before.(3)

Stage coach travel was usually pleasant in the summer months. But even then, travel could be hazardous and uncomfortable. Travel in the winter time was "likely to be a nightmare."(4) But it was the stage coach that made it possible for central Illinois to become relatively viable, economically, until rail travel could be established.

The Development of the Early Inn/Tavern(5)

As the early highway transportation routes were laid out, a concomitant development occurred - the stage coach inn or tavern. Since horses were often changed every 12 to 14 miles, it is not surprising that a number of inns probably developed along the major

(2) Robert P. Howard, Illinois: A History of the Prairie State, Grand Rapids, MI William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972.

(3) Paul M. Angle, "Here I Have Lived": A History of Lincoln's Springfield 1821-1865, Springfield, IL, The Abraham Lincoln Association, 1935, p. 149.

(4) Ibid, p. 150.

(5) The historic context material on early inns/taverns is based on information contained in a research report by Melinda F. Kwedar and Edward L. Hawes titled: Inns and Taverns in the Midwest: Typical Functions, Forms, and Layouts, Sangamon State University, 1986.

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roadways at the time.

In the late 18th and early part of the 19th centuries, inns and taverns were often found in both urban and rural settings, just as restaurants and motels are in contemporary times. They provided travelers with services similar to those offered by today's eating and lodging places. They also combined such functions with those found in a typical family dwelling or farm.

Inns as Public Accommodations

In many cases, early taverns and inns did not offer very pleasant accommodations. Guests found many such places rather crude and in some inns had to sleep on the floor. Bedding might consist of bearskins, buffalo skins or a traveler's own blanket or pallet. In some inns, mattresses were placed on the floor and up to 20 people would bed down in one room.(6) If beds were available, they were generally crude and uncomfortable. In some cases, men and women slept in the same room, which resulted in many sleeping in their clothes.

Other discomforts were borne by early travelers. Because structures were often poorly furnished, inn patrons were subjected to extremes of heat or cold. Bedbugs and mosquitos were common problems in midwest inns in the 1840s. Water and washing facilities were often lacking and according to Paton Yoder in his book, Taverns and Travelers: Inns of the Early Midwest, the lack of privacy was as troublesome as the lack of soap and water.

While such conditions could be very disheartening to travelers, it is not surprising that they often existed in the early days of inn development. Often, early settlers had little choice but to take in guests due to the location of their dwellings. Crowding also contributed to the bad conditions found in many early inns. Where there were more people than there was space to accommodate them, innkeepers had to make do with what they had.

Conditions improved somewhat by the 1830s, and private rooms were available in larger mid-west cities at least, including Springfield, Illinois. By the 1850s conditions had improved even more according to the inventories of urban inns, but the conditions in more rural areas often remained less satisfying.

The Inn as a Family Home

Early inns were usually the family home of the inn's owner. In his book, A Tour Through America, Patrick Shirreff, a Scottish farmer, said on his trip from Chicago to Springfield in the 1830s, "There are few taverns, but almost every inhabitant entertains travelers for payment."

Yoder developed three criteria to distinguish regular innkeeping from what he called "private hospitality." He said, "Innkeepers commonly 1) charged to make a profit; 2) provided entertainment in order to encourage repeaters; and 3) had tavern licenses." But after offering his opinion on such differences, he admitted that "historically the

(6) Patrick Shirreff, A Tour Through America, New York, 1835/1971, p. 230.

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difference between private hospitality and taverning in the early Midwest is far from distinct.

In Sangamon County, Illinois, Moses Broadwell built a place both for innkeeping and family living at Clayville, about 14 miles west from the center of Springfield. In such cases, all members of the family were involved in the work of running an inn. Harry E. Cole, in his book, Stagecoach and Tavern Tales of the Old Northwest, says that "for most of the landlords and their families, occupancy of a tavern meant a neverending round of duties that left little leisure for contemplation of nature's attractions." On his way to Springfield from Chicago, Shirreff stopped at an inn on Salt Creek (near Middletown). He said, "The landlord, Mr. Musick, was away and two daughters and a son did the honors of the house." Samuel Musick is one of the few central Illinois innkeepers, other than Moses Broadwell, who was known to have been issued a tavern license. He received his license from the Sangamon County Commissioners in 1829 and another one in 1830.(7)

In some of the taverns in which families lived, separate rooms were maintained for the family. After 1850, inns became more a place of business rather than a family residence that was used, in part, as an inn. As the service became more prevalent, some of the inns became more or less official stopping places and were often managed by persons who did not live at the inn. But in more rural locations, the small family residence/inn was found for a number of years. The Broadwell's Inn, mentioned earlier, was an example of this type of facility.

Other Uses of Inns

Another important role of early inns or taverns was to serve as a dining place for travelers. Generally, the kinds of food service depended largely on the types of food grown, raised, or hunted in a particular area. Usually, travelers were served the same kinds of food as the family consumed.

Inns were also places in which to drink alcoholic beverages. While the term "tavern" is perceived today as a place that serves alcoholic beverages, in earlier times, the words "tavern" and "inn" meant the same thing.

Based on the accounts of early travelers in the U. S., it is known that taverns also provided services such as the care and feeding of horses as well as other services to the community. A number of different kinds of events were sometimes held at inns including dances, civic meetings and political events. They also functioned as news centers and occasionally as jails or courthouses. They may have also been used as the basis for other businesses operated by the owner of the inn, as well as post offices.

Few secondary sources refer to the interiors of taverns and inns. So good documentation does not exist with respect to the furnishings and equipment found in early inns. However,

(7) Sangamon County Commissioners' Reports, Illinois State Historical Society.

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those accounts that do exist indicate that there was usually a main room or "bar" which served as a reception, reading, smoking, drinking and general utility room. If the inn had a separate dining room, it would generally have a large table for dining. The kitchen was used both for the inn and the family, and there were usually other rooms used exclusively for the owner's living quarters.

Typical Forms and Layouts of Inns in Illinois

Based on research conducted by Kwedar and Hawes on 59 pre-1860 inns, taverns and hotel buildings in Illinois, the following conclusions were reached about the forms and layouts of early inns.

- "1. It was very common for early inns and taverns in Illinois to function both as places for travelers and community people, and as a home for the family...
2. The vocabulary of architectural styles 'works' reasonably well to define some of the structures examined. Examples are the 'Greek Revival' Paulsen/Kennedy House near Harvard and the Owen/Burton House in Rockford. They are both structures with a gable end main body facing the road, and a side ell on the right side when the observer is facing the front, in the case of the former; on the left, in the latter. Dentilation and other kinds of appropriate detail under the eaves and fine columns on the side ell porch provide further indication that they may be called 'Greek Revival,' as does some of the remaining interior detail, especially on the former place. The features of the Garfield Farmhouse and Inn (near St. Charles), its balanced fenestration, center door on the long side which faces the road, the door itself with its side and overhead 'lights,' and the side ell with its simple 'eyebrow' windows, allow an interpretation of the place as being 'Federal' in style. The Boeke/Dodds House in Lena could be said to be the same style. Although it is built of stone and the Garfield place of brick, the fenestration and door patterns are the same. However, this descriptive vocabulary of the architectural historians does not communicate the more fundamental elements of layout and form. What are more fundamental are the traditional forms, layout and other features which have definite regional antecedents.
3. The descriptive and analytical vocabulary of the folklife scholars works much better for most of the early inns and taverns. They were domestic structures used for additional purposes, even when there was an intent at the outset to provide services to the public. The patterns of northern Illinois buildings may be traced back to New England and Central New York State. The patterns of Southern Illinois go back to Southern antecedents. Thus the Mermaid Tavern in Lebanon is a simple one-room deep, two-room wide structure with two doors and a back addition haveing southern roots. The internal gable end chimneys connect it with Mid-Atlantic patterns, although that feature is found on Virginia homes as well. The Silkwood Tavern near Mulkeytown appears to have southern antecedents also. In the north, Stacey's Tavern in Glen Ellyn is a fine New England Large with a back or side ell, depending on how the structure

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is perceived to be oriented. Rutherford Tavern near Dresden, the Garfield House near St. Charles, and the Howard House in St. Charles are traditional 'Federal' but the central hallways go only halfway back in the structure to the kitchen. The Paulsen/Kennedy House and the Owen/Burton House are fine examples of Glassie's 'Temple' form which was directly transmitted from New York State along present Route 20.

4. The Broadwell's Inn and Farmhouse (near Springfield), as would be expected from the folk cultural theory of regions and antecedents, is a fine example of a Mid-Atlantic house form right between these two extensions of the New England and Southern patterns in the state.
5. One of the structures studied is clearly a vernacular structure designed specifically as a hotel, the Nachusa House in Dixon. It is not certain whether the Wabash 'Hotel' in Edwardsville might fall into the category of traditional with vernacular elements discussed below.
6. The porch forms found on several of the extant structures may be best seen as vernacular elements added to the traditional form. Certainly these porches, one story high or 'double' two-story ones as on the Broadwell's Inn, had practical functions. But it seems likely that they also served as a kind of 'sign.' Since inns were commonly traditional domestic structures, without some way of differentiating them from homes, travelers and local people could be confused. So it is reasonable to assume that the porches served a similar function as do the 'Golden Arches' on MacDonald's or the orange and blue tile roof of Howard Johnsons for modern travelers and local people. Particularly, the double porches were a symbol of inns and taverns."

Kwedar and Hawes also note that "At this point, further speculation becomes unprofitable. More field work is needed in the Midwest and in the antecedent regions to the east." Their report "is the closest anyone has come to an analysis of traditional forms in Illinois. No one has attempted to study the domestic structures used in part for commercial structures outside this state. So there is much room for further study."

Kwedar and Hawes conclude that their "field work did not indicate any easy way to tie form and function together. If anything, it showed that no one knows much about the ways specific rooms were used, and what, if any, impact this had on the layout of the structures. The publicly interpreted sites present information based on heresay, a few travel accounts which may not be related at all to the particular structures or area, or upon guesses based on backward projections of modern taste and space useage. In short, there is no documentation for any of the Illinois sites examined to definitely determine how rooms were actually used."

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ROBINSON-BONNETT INN

The Development of the Robinson-Bonnett Inn (8)

Menard County was formed in 1839. Previously, it had been a part of Sangamon County. John Clary was the first to settle in the area in the winter of 1819. More settlers came in the spring and settled in Clary's Grove on Clary's Creek, a few miles north of the present town of Tallula, Illinois (See Exhibit 1). As others arrived, they settled to the north and northwest of Clary's Grove.

Jesse and George Miller built a ferry on the bank of the Sangamon River in the northwest corner of Menard County (See Exhibit 1). Mail and stage service from Springfield to Lewistown and points to the northwest utilized Miller's Ferry. Kay Watkins later bought the ferry and operated it until around 1900 as Watkins Ferry.

In 1826, Absalom Mounts, a miller, and his two sons erected a crude grist mill not far below the fork of Clary's and Little Grove Creeks. His mill was an important focal point for a large area that included northern Sangamon County and adjoining Morgan County. In 1829, Mounts sold the mill to James Watkins who, in turn, sold it around 1836 to Ebenezer Robinson, who was a miller from the east. He and his son remodeled the grist mill and added a saw mill. Soon the mill was attracting trade halfway to Beardstown. A drawing of the mill is shown in Exhibit 4.

Ebenezer Robinson was born in Foxboro, Massachusetts in 1775. His son, James Madison Robinson was born at Ithaca, New York on June 14, 1809. Both Ebenezer and James are shown to have lived in Tompkins County, New York in the 1830 Census. Ebenezer with his family including a daughter, Caroline, and James M. and his wife (Mary Jay) came to Illinois at about the same time around 1833.⁽⁹⁾ On May 16, 1835, the Robinsons entered 40 acres of land in Menard County. A year later, they entered another 40 acres. In the the northwest corner of this 40 acres were their mills. The Robinsons eventually owned 160 acres of land in the area.

About one quarter mile east from the mill and at the foot of the hills, the Robinsons built a double log cabin with a second story and a wide fireplace. Here, James Robinson and his wife had six children. In an account written by James Robinson's daughter, Emily Burton, in 1906, she says:

"Robinson's Mills became famous. People came from far and near with grists to be ground and logs to be sawed. They came from fifty and seventy five miles away. My father worked day and night. There was always too much waiting for

(8) The background on the development of Robinson's Mills and the Robinson-Bonnett Inn was based on information from the following publications: The History of Menard and Mason Counties, IL, O. C. Baskin & Co., 1879; They Left Their Mark in Oakford 1872, 1972; Historical Sketches, Virginia, Illinois by J. N. Gridley, 1907; Some Interesting Houses in Menard County by Matilda J. Plews, 1967; genealogical records and family interviews.

(9) Family genealogical records show that James M. Robinson had a son born in Cass County, Illinois on November 25, 1833.

EXHIBIT 4



ROBINSON'S MILL.

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ROBINSON-BONNETT INN

the mill to rest. And the poor miller! God bless him, with his powdery curls and his sweet reasonable temper. He certainly had a pleasant way with him, and men called him 'Jimmy' as if from real affection."

She also noted that her father was well read and subscribed to Harpers Monthly, the Saturday Evening Post, and the New York Ledger. He also had a library containing books by Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Bryant and others.

Since transportation was so slow and business was so good, the Robinsons decided that there was a market for overnight accommodations. With the help of John Bonnett (who arrived in Robinson's Mills in 1842), they began building a two story inn from bricks made near the site. The inn had three large 18' x 18' rooms on the first floor with 9' ceilings. There was an equal amount of space on the second floor, which had 8' ceilings due to an underestimation of the number of bricks needed. When completed, business at the inn benefitted from the fact that Abraham Lincoln had helped pass legislation for a road from Beardstown to Petersburg through Robinson's Mills. The inn was occupied by Ebenezer Robinson's daughter Caroline and her husband, Seth Buckley, who, according to family genealogical records were married in 1842. Emily Burton, in her memoirs published in Gridley's Historic Sketches, Virginia, Illinois (1907) states that "Seth Buckley married my father's sister, Caroline, and lived in the house that was afterward owned and occupied by John Bonnett at Robinson's Mills. It was but a few steps from by father's house...." This would seem to substantiate the fact that the inn was built around 1843. The inn was on the corner of Main Street (now Whites Crossing Road) and Cherry Street, with its main front facing Cherry Street which ran north and south past the inn at the time. Cherry Street led southward to the road that paralleled Little Grove Creek (See Exhibit 1) and continued on to New Salem.

By the early 1840s, other tradesmen had established themselves near the settlement that was now known as Robinson's Mills. It had a general store, a post office, a saloon and a doctor's office.

Based on a thorough review of such early travel guides as Phelps & Ensign's Travellers' Guide Through the United States, it appears that the Robinson-Bonnett Inn may not have been on a regularly scheduled stage coach route in its early days, but rather served to accommodate persons traveling from some distance to do business with the mills. It could also have served travelers who took the route Lincoln located between Petersburg and Beardstown that passed through Robinson's Mills. However, by the 1850s, the inn was probably on a regular stage route. Based on the 1850 Census, there appears to have been two stage drivers staying at the inn, which was now owned by John Bonnett. One was a Stephen White (30, N.Y.) and the other an M. Caigal (37, N.Y.). Also, the following excerpt from an ad that appeared in a Petersburg newspaper indicates that the inn was on a regular stage line by the late 1850s:

"SCOTT'S STAGE LINES - Springfield and Havana Route. Leave Springfield Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays at 2 o'clock A.M., arrive at Havana at 5 P.M. Leave Havana Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, at 2 o'clock A.M., arrive at Springfield at 5 P.M., via Bath, Field's Prairie, Robinson's Mills, Petersburg and Salisbury." Dated: June 23, 1859

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Ebenezer Robinson died in 1852 and James M. Robinson left Robinson's Mills in 1849. He had served as a school board member and in 1844 was elected Justice of the Peace for Menard County. In 1846, he was elected to the State Legislature as the first State Representative from Menard County. While at Springfield, he formed a friendship with Abraham Lincoln and other prominent men of the day. In 1853, he moved to Bath, where he bought a flour mill and was elected the town's first police magistrate. In the 1860s he bought a farm and operated a mill in Nebraska. He died in 1871 in Lincoln, Illinois, where he is buried.

John Bonnett, who became the owner of the inn around 1849, had served in a number of capacities in the settlement including postmaster, operator of a general store (for which ledger copies still exist), blacksmith, coffin maker, as well as farmer and miller. He was also mainly responsible for originally building the inn. The Bonnett family continued to run the inn even after the exodus of the settlement's residents to Oakford in 1872 after the location of the railroad through there. Family records indicate that the Bonnetts ran the inn until around 1880 and continued to live there until 1910.

As soon as lots were put up for sale in Oakford, everyone but the Bonnett family left Robinson's Mills. Calvin Atterbery, a merchant, moved his food store to Oakford. The saloon keeper and Dr. Whitley also moved. In a matter of months, all that was left of Robinson's Mills was the old brick inn and the Bonnetts. Sometime following this period, the settlement was renamed Bobtown, as it is still referred to today. The inn and surrounding farmland remained in the Bonnett's family ownership for many years.

The Architecture of the Inn

The Robinson-Bonnett Inn appears to reflect many of the characteristics of early Illinois inns as identified by Kwedar and Hawes. As they note, it was very common for early inns and taverns to serve both as a place for travelers and as a family home. This is true of the Robinson-Bonnett Inn, which is the only remaining example of this type in Menard County. The only other nearby examples are the Broadwell's Inn at Clayville, and the Middletown Stage Coach Inn at Middletown.

In the case of architectural style, the Robinson-Bonnett Inn appears to fit Kwedar and Hawes' description of the 'Federal' style with its balanced fenestration, side and overhead lights around the front door, and side ell with simple 'eyebrow' windows. Kwedar and Hawes note that internal gable end chimneys (as the Robinson-Bonnett Inn has) connect such structures with Mid-Atlantic patterns. Since the Robinsons came from New York, it appears natural that the inn was built with these stylistic characteristics.

At one time, the Robinson-Bonnett Inn appears to have had a long, unroofed porch across its west facade, the one that originally faced the main road. As Kwedar and Hawes noted, porches served as a sort of symbol that the place was an inn. When the road through Robinson's Mills was relocated to the north of the inn, another porch was built on this side of the building.

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ROBINSON-BONNETT INN

Helen Bonnett Wernosky, 89, was born in the building in 1900, a few years after it had ceased being used as an inn. She said that when it had been used as an inn, she believed that the two rooms on the north were used as family quarters, with the first floor room to the right of the front door being the main room of the inn, which was used for receiving guests and other purposes. She said that the upstairs rooms were used as guest bedrooms and storage.

The inn is currently being rehabilitated by Mr. and Mrs. Tim Wallace, who are trying to preserve as much of the original fabric of the property as possible.

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ROBINSON-BONNETT INN

Major Bibliographical References

6. Pews, Matilda Johnson, Some Interesting Houses in Menard County, Petersburg, Illinois, 1967.
7. Weber, Jessie Palmer, Historical Map of Illinois, c. 1900.
8. Interview with Leta Bonnett Crompton (great-great granddaughter of John Bonnett), Summer, 1989.
9. Interview with Helen Wernowsky (granddaughter of John Bonnett), Summer, 1989.
10. Robinson Family Genealogical Records.

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ROBINSON-BONNETT INN

Verbal Boundary Description (cont.)

49 seconds West, 1301.77 feet to a point; thence North 88 degrees 55 minutes 33 seconds West, 2148.13 feet to a point on the centerline of an existing Township road; thence South 19 degrees 52 minutes 28 seconds East, 30 feet to an iron pin on the apparent southerly right of way line of the Township road, being the actual point of beginning; said point being a curve concave Northeasterly with a radius of 584.40 feet; thence Northwesterly along said right of way line, through a central angle of 15 degrees 15 minutes 23 seconds, a distance of 155.62 feet to an iron pin; thence South 22 degrees 22 minutes 40 seconds East, 170.7 feet to an iron pin; thence North 73 degrees 06 minutes 52 seconds East, a distance of 160.14 feet to the actual point of beginning.

9. Major Bibliographical References

1. Adams, James N. (Compiler), Keller, William E. (Editor), Illinois Place Names, Occasional Publications, Number 54, Illinois Historical Society, Springfield, Illinois, 1968.
2. Gridley, J. N., "Mrs. Emily Burton," Historical Sketches, Virginia, Illinois, 1907.
3. Hamblin, Hallie M. (Editor), They Left Their Mark in Oakford 1872 (Centennial publication), 1972.
4. The History of Menard and Mason Counties, Illinois, O. C. Baskin & Co., Historical Publishers, 186 Dearborn Street, Chicago, 1879.
5. Kwedar, Melinda F. and Hawes, Edward L., Inns and Taverns in the Midwest: Typical Functions, Forms and Layouts, Sangamon State University, 1986.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 0.572 Acres

UTM References

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4	4	4	0	1	9	0
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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

A part of the Northeast Quarter of the Northwest Quarter of Section 27, Township 19 North, Range 8 West of the Third Principal Meridian, Menard County, Illinois, more particularly described as follows: Commencing at the Northeast corner of Section 27, Township 19 North, Range 8 West of the Third Principal Meridian; thence North 89 degrees 51 minutes

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated property constitutes the entire area historically associated with the Robinson-Bonnett Inn.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Charles Kirchner
organization Charles Kirchner & Associates date March 24, 1990
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