

Epps-McGill Farmhouse
Name of Property

Williamsburg County, SC
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

Public – Local

Public – State

Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

domestic/single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Vacant/not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN

Other: Folk Victorian

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Wood

Walls: Wood Weatherboard

Foundation: Brick

Roof: Wood Shingle and Galvanized Metal

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Epps-McGill Farmhouse is a large two-story dwelling located on the west side of Eastland Avenue in Kingstree, South Carolina. The structure is situated on two acres on the remnants of the original fifty-one-acre Epps-McGill farmstead. It is an example of Late Victorian Folk architecture with a wing and front gable plan and retains a high degree of historic integrity. Original character-defining features preserved on the exterior of the house include the building's unique porch ceilings, offset bay window, and wood soffit pendants. The interior of the structure features the original staircase, decorative mantels, and interior wood paneling. The structure has served as a farmhouse for the Epps-McGill farm since its construction in 1905. While the original farmstead has been reduced in size, the historic farmhouse retains a high degree of architectural integrity with limited modification of the Folk Victorian form.

Narrative Description

The Epps-McGill Farmhouse is a large 3,658-square-foot structure located on the west side of Eastland Avenue just northeast of downtown Kingstree in Williamsburg County, South Carolina. The structure is set within a rural landscape surrounded by later mid-twentieth century development. The property consists of the Folk Victorian residence and ruins of several utilitarian structures that once supported the farm when it was in operation. The dwelling is set back approximately one-hundred feet from Eastland Avenue, and live oaks surround the main facade.

EXTERIOR

The Epps-McGill Farmhouse was constructed between 1905 and 1907 as a two-story Folk Victorian T-shaped or gable front and wing dwelling with a two-story porch on the front façade. The house is of balloon frame construction on brick piers. At the foundation, the space between the masonry piers has been infilled with a combination of modern concrete masonry unit (CMU) block and decorative brick masonry. The exterior of the house is covered with wood clapboard siding, most of which is believed to be original. The exterior white paint is heavily weathered.

The approach to the main east façade is via a small pathway that leads to a wood staircase. The steps rise to the first floor of the front two-story porch and the main double door entryway with a pair of wood arched half lite doors. The front doors are typical of Folk Victorian design with applied molding and corner blocks. The glass within each door is surrounded by similar surface applied decoration and corner block crowns. The doorknob and plate appear to be original. Above the door is a narrow four-lite transom and flanking three-lite sidelights set within simple flat casing. The framing for the second-story porch is covered with tongue-and-groove wood ceiling. The east (front) two-story porch is simple in detail with square post balusters and square columns with a chamfered edge along the shaft. The balusters have been selectively repaired in addition to the 2x4 fascia and trim boards located between the first and second floors of the porch.

Double wood doors with transom and sidelights are also present on the second-floor porch on this elevation. The second-floor porch replicates many of the details of the first floor, except for a vaulted beadboard ceiling at the southeast corner. The ceiling has been repaired recently in the style of the original. The vaulted ceiling intersects the exterior casing of the window at this corner.

A large two-story bay window is present on the right side of the porch at the east corner. The front gable overhangs the bay window with a pendant placed at each corner. A small wood diamond-shaped attic vent is present within the gable. The original windows on this facade have been replaced with one-over-one lite wood windows. The exact date of the window replacement is unknown. An original six-over-six lite window is present in one opening on the second floor of this elevation beneath the porch. Aluminum storm windows have been installed over all the wood windows. The storm windows on the second-floor bay have been extended to accommodate the difference in height between the original opening, and the metal storm windows and the gap between the metal windows and the original frame has been covered with plywood.

The north elevation is simple in detail and features four windows on each floor. The simple fascia soffit and trim present on the east facade extend across this elevation. Many of the original windows have been replaced with one-over-one double hung sash. The windows on this elevation are covered with metal storm windows. An original six-over-six double hung sash window is present on the first floor at the center of the façade. An original lower sash is located within the adjacent window to the west. An additional original lower sash is also present on the second-floor east window. The remaining sashes have been replaced with newer one-over-one lite wood sashes. The second-story storm windows have also been modified to fit the original opening with plywood installed above the sill.

The back elevation of the house faces the fields to the west of the structure. This elevation originally featured a square projecting pedimented gable at the northwest corner and an open two-story porch infill stretching from the projecting gable to the south façade. A diamond-shaped attic louvered vent is in the gable end. A one-story wood frame kitchen building originally was attached to the west porch but was not connected to the interior of the main structure. The structure is contemporary to the main house. In the mid-20th century, the back porches were infilled, and the exterior covered with vertical plywood paneling. This modification of the porch allowed for the kitchen outbuilding to be connected to the interior of the structure. The attached kitchen features a gable roof with matching trim and cornice. The original structure and porch infill are covered in wood clapboard siding. A one-story 20th century addition between the house and the attached kitchen is covered in vertical plywood paneling. The asymmetrical gable end at the northwest corner of the structure features one central window on each floor. The first-floor window has been replaced with an aluminum double hung sash. The sashes in the second-floor window are missing but the frame remains in place. The clapboard siding on the second floor has been replaced with vertical metal roofing panels. The lower portions of the siding were replaced with gray vinyl siding.

The south elevation of the structure features the two-story facade of the main house structure and the two-story porch infill. The one-story kitchen house extends westward from the porch. The south gable end of the main house projects slightly forward of the south plane of the kitchen and porch infill wall. A small exterior wood staircase provides access to the south porch entrance. The original entryway has been removed and replaced with a modern hollow wood door with a screen door. The original transom and sidelights were replaced with plywood infill during the middle of the 20th century. A hand water pump and sink were originally located on the first floor of the south porch.

The original six-over-six lite windows remain within the attached kitchen structure on this elevation. Metal storm windows are present on many of the windows. A double hung sash is present on the second floor of the porch infill and the upper sash is covered with plywood. The windows within the main house have been replaced with one-over-one lite sash except for the lower sash of the east window on the second story.

The roof contains a cross gable with full cornice returns on each gable. Two masonry chimneys are integrated within the roof and service the six fireplaces within the structure. The roof is covered with a 20th century steel 5v metal paneling and is in poor condition. On the north elevation, the metal roofing panels have failed, exposing the original wood shake roof. Wood battens have been installed over the original shakes to support the new metal roof.

INTERIOR

Upon entering the Epps-McGill farmhouse through the primary front entrance, the structure has an asymmetric floor plan featuring a central hallway running east-west. The interior of the house has been slightly modified over time but still retains a majority of the interior decorative elements. Few changes have been made to the structure since the construction of the house in 1905. A majority of the alterations are reversible and do not appear to have caused any permanent damage.

Within the center room, a small side set staircase is present on the south wall of the room and provides access upstairs. The staircase banister spindles are simple in detail and square. The newel post is square with chamfered edges like the east porch columns. The hallway room features beadboard wainscoting with plaster walls and a beadboard ceiling. The historic Victorian tongue-and-groove flooring is present within this space and is covered with carpet. An exterior door is present on the west side of this space and once provided access to the exterior west porch. The exterior west door is a large four-panel door surrounded by a transom and sidelights that match the east entrance.

Two rooms are present on the north side of the hallway. Both rooms share a chimney with fireboxes on each side. The northeast bedroom is set within the east projecting bay. The walls have been covered with midcentury wood paneling, but the original plaster walls are extant where the paneling is missing or damaged. The front northeast room on the first floor has an elaborate two-tiered oak mantel which appears to be original to the structure. The oak mantel has turned Ionic columns with decorative wreath and fleur-de-lis applied composition. A round beveled mirror is present on the second tier. The firebox has been modified for a furnace. The beadboard ceiling is intact. A simple wood crown is present around the room and is composed of applied trim. The original wood flooring is covered with carpet.

Another bedroom is located at the northwest corner of the stair hall and contains an additional fireplace and a large secondary room or closet that extends north-south the entire width of the room. The original purpose of this secondary room is currently unknown. A simple wood mantel is present above the firebox with diamond trim below the top shelf trim within the header of the mantel. The firebox has been enclosed to support the installation of a later electric furnace. The ceiling has been covered in composite paneling with supporting battens. The walls are covered with plain plaster. The wood flooring is covered in linoleum. The bedroom features two closets. One is adjacent to the right of the firebox and is lined with unpainted pine beadboard. The west side of this room features a large closet that extends north-south the entire width of the room.

A large room is present at the south side of the central hallway. The room has been modified since 1905 as the mantel has been replaced with a modern masonry fireplace and a wood burning stove has been installed in the firebox. Twentieth century wood composite wainscoting is present at the base of the walls. A built-in cupboard with large glass doors is located to the right of the fireplace. The lower cupboard wood cabinets are lined with unpainted beadboard. The casing around the cupboard matches the trim found in the doorways and this unit is believed to be original. The wood flooring and plain plaster walls remain intact. The ceiling plaster was replaced with modern drywall.

The east-west interior hallway also provides access to the infilled porch space on the west façade. A side set exterior staircase running north-south is present on the infilled first-floor porch directly in front of the modified south porch entrance. The ceiling is covered with historic beadboard matching the same profile of beadboard found throughout the house. The stair balustrade spindles match the detail on the main interior staircase. Beadboard is present on the side and underside of this staircase. The stair was constructed at an angle to accommodate the original slope of the porch decking. A small storage space with a four-panel wood door is present directly beneath this stair. The original exterior clapboard siding of the main house and the

kitchen addition remain in place within this space. Modern exterior doors are present on the west and east sides of this enclosed hallway. The mid-twentieth century east addition creates a large mudroom space adjacent to the hallway and kitchen on the first floor. Access to the kitchen is provided via the first-floor enclosed porch.

The one-story kitchen wing contains a large main room and a smaller pantry at the west side of the structure. The interior of the main kitchen space has been greatly altered with composite paneled walls and a plywood ceiling. The west pantry still retains the unpainted beadboard walls and ceiling and houses many pieces of historic farming and cooking equipment.

The second floor mirrors the floorplan of the first floor, featuring a central hallway, two bedrooms on the north side of the house, one large bedroom on the southside, and the infilled second floor of the west porch. Access to the second-floor east porch is provided via the central hallway. The second-story stair hall is similar in decoration and style to the first-floor hallway. Tongue and groove wainscoting lines the walls. Unadorned wood crown molding runs the perimeter of the room beneath a painted beadboard ceiling. The doors to the bedroom are identical five panel wood doors with four vertical panels and a horizontal panel at mid-height. Steel rim locks with metal doorknobs are present on select doors. The balustrade, spindles, and newel posts are identical to the first floor. The original hardware is missing except for the door and key plates. At the east end of the hallway, two five-panel wood doors are framed with flanking triple sidelights and a four-lite transom. Simple flat wood casing and trim surrounds the entryway. On the west side facing the porch infill, the door is a simple four-panel door with matching sidelights and transom. The historic hardware remains in place.

The northeast bedroom on the second floor is simpler in decoration than the room directly below on the first floor. Wood baseboard is present throughout the room. A simple wood mantel and firebox are preserved on the west wall. A small closet is present to the right of the firebox and the closet is lined in unpainted beadboard. An original doorway connecting the northeast and northwest bedrooms has been infilled and covered with drywall. The ceiling is covered in beadboard and the cornice matches the trim seen elsewhere throughout the house. Four double-hung windows are located within this room, including three within the east bay.

The south room is well-preserved with little modification. A small closet is present to the west of the original firebox and wood mantel. The mantel differs in design from the other bedrooms as the legs and mantle header contain intricate molding. A two-tiered baseboard composed of a lower baseboard with base shoe and upper short paneling wraps around the room. The header has been modified in the middle. The pine floors are in good condition. The interior wood side casing is simple in style. The fixtures within this room are modern. The plaster is damaged along the north wall of this structure, exposing the lath and interior framing above the fireplace. The room contains five windows, including a window to the now enclosed west porch.

The northwest bedroom features the original wood mantel and firebox. The historic flooring and ceiling remain in place. The plaster has been covered with drywall at select locations. The room contains three windows including one facing south towards the porch infill. The window sashes in this room have been removed and the windows have been covered with plywood. A large closet is present along the west wall of this room. The interior wall plaster is damaged, exposing

the machine-cut lath throughout this small storage space. One window is located within this storage room, but the sashes have been removed. The flat casing remains intact.

The enclosed second floor west porch is accessed from the interior hallway or from the original exterior stairs on the first floor of the porch infill. One window is located on the south side of this space, and the date of the window is unknown. The exterior clapboard siding of the farmhouse is present on the east and north sides of the room along with an enclosed window on each elevation of the original structure. The original porch decking remains on the floor and gently slopes towards the west. The ceiling and exterior walls are covered with beadboard siding. One small jalousie window is present on the west wall. The ceiling is sloped to match the framing of the original porch roof. The southwest corner of the porch ceiling is coved in a similar style to the front porch and is a character-defining feature of this space.

The structure is currently mothballed after suffering several years of neglect. The failure of the existing roof has accelerated the deterioration of the interior finishes. The house appears to have several active structural issues including failure and crushing of the perimeter sill on the north elevation.

Overall, the later mid-20th century alterations do not significantly compromise the building's integrity. The original Folk Victorian character-defining features remain on the interior and exterior of the structure and the character of the building has changed little since its completion in 1907. The property retains a high degree of integrity regarding location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feelings, and association.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1905 - 1907

1953 - 1976

Significant Dates

1905

1953

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Constructed from 1905 to 1907 in agrarian Williamsburg County, the Epps-McGill Farmhouse is a two-story Folk Victorian structure that has served as the residence for generations of local farmers working the fifty-one-acre farmstead that historically surrounded the property. The Farmhouse is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the development of agriculture and tenant farming from 1953 to 1976 in

Williamsburg County, particularly as an unusual example of a property that ultimately came into the legal possession of an African American family that first lived there as sharecroppers. The Epps-McGill Farmhouse is also eligible under Criterion C at the local level of significance in architecture. The building is a rare surviving example of Folk Victorian architecture in Williamsburg County, featuring Queen Anne influences, cutaway bay windows, and numerous rooms with tongue-and-groove wood paneling.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Criterion A: Social History

The Epps-McGill Farmhouse is a surviving example of a vernacular structure that represents the evolution of agricultural society in Williamsburg County during the 20th century and the end of sharecropping in the second half of the 20th century. The structure's significance is derived from the evolution of the house and farmland over the course of the 20th century which saw the rise of tobacco tenant farming and the eventual reduction of the farmland to its current footprint due to the changes in the agricultural economy. While the sharecropping system generally failed to produce its promised path to land ownership, the Epps-McGill Farmhouse stands out as a rare and important example of success, with the purchase of the property by African American farmer Weaver McGill offering an unusual case within the broader regional history of sharecropping.

As in other portions of rural South Carolina, agriculture was central to the development of Williamsburg County. Created in the early 18th century, the county was originally a frontier township intended to serve as a protective buffer for coastal Charleston and to promote European settlement of the interior of the state. Over the course of the 1800s, slave-based cotton production came to dominate economic life in Williamsburg County, prompting local planters, in the words of one local historian, "to import as many [enslaved laborers] as they could purchase."¹ Census records show some 15,000 people living in the county by 1860, 66 percent of whom were enslaved African Americans.²

With the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, Williamsburg County's agricultural economy was forced to restructure to account for the loss of its traditional labor supply. Consequently, tenant farming proliferated throughout the county and the rest of South Carolina, with newly freed Black farmers—as well as many white farmers—working land they did not own in exchange for either a share of their crop or cash payments. By 1920, sixty-one percent of Palmetto State farmers were working land they did not own. Of those approximately 95,000

¹ William W. Boddie, *History of Williamsburg; Something about the people of Williamsburg County, South Carolina, from the first settlement by Europeans about 1705 until 1923* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1923), 249. Boddie also ties local planters' purchase of slaves to tobacco production, however its dominance was a relatively later development.

² 1860 U.S. Federal Census

tenants, 66,000 were African Americans.³ For former slaves and their descendants, tenant farming was a decided improvement from the county's pre-war labor structure and, if cotton prices rose high enough, could even be quite lucrative. Yet such moments of prosperity were exceptional, and such arrangements, particularly sharecropping, were subject to tremendous instability and uncertainty.⁴ Though touted as a path for laborers without capital to achieve their dream of working their own land, the almost exclusive cultivation of cotton and tobacco within the South and the lack of effective erosion control often destroyed the soil, making it difficult for sharecroppers to obtain a surplus and access alternative forms of capital, keeping a farmer in perpetual debt.⁵

As the labor arrangements of turn of the century Williamsburg County agriculture reconfigured, so too did the hierarchy of crops being produced there. Williamsburg County saw large population growth in the late 19th century, increasing from 15,489 to 31,865 residents between 1870 and 1900.⁶ During this period, the total number of farms recorded within the county correspondingly grew from 2,488 to 4,585.⁷ At the turn of the century, cotton and corn were the dominant agricultural products within Williamsburg County, and the county lacked a significant industry.⁸ However, due to the quality of the sandy loam soil, the region of eastern South Carolina known as the "Pee Dee," including Williamsburg County, was soon producing 95 percent of the state's tobacco crop average by the early 1900's.⁹ As many planters in the county converted their cotton fields into tobacco fields, the crop also fueled a period of economic prosperity in the county seat of Kingstree, which became a major tobacco center with a rapidly expanding commercial district.¹⁰ By 1918, the Kingstree tobacco market became one of the largest in the state with 7.5 million pounds of tobacco produced and sold through local warehouses in that year.¹¹

Among those white Williamsburg County farmers who transitioned from cotton to tobacco agriculture in this period were members of the local Epps family, who ultimately oversaw the construction of the Epps-McGill Farmhouse. Originally from North Carolina, the white family had moved to St. James-Santee Parish near Charleston by 1860 before settling in Kingstree by 1870. By that year, twenty-four-year-old James C. Epps was growing primarily cotton along with other crops like peas and sweet potatoes on eighty-five acres of improved land. By the beginning

³ Orville Vernon Burton, Beatrice Burton, and Matthew Cheney, "Tenantry," South Carolina Encyclopedia, last modified August 1, 2016, <http://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/tenantry/>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Roger L. Ransom, and Richard Sutch, "Debt Peonage in the Cotton South after the Civil War." *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Sept. 1972): 642.

⁶ Sean Norris and Ramona Grunden, *Cultural Resource Identification Survey of the Epps No. Industrial Site in Williamsburg County, South Carolina* (TRC, December 2010), 8.

⁷ Mary Beth Reed and Christina Olson, *Historic Resources Survey: Marion County, South Carolina* (New South Associates, August 19, 2009), 19.

⁸ South Carolina Department of Agriculture, *Handbook of South Carolina*, 1907.

⁹ Michael Trinkley and Debi Hacker, Chicora Foundation, Inc., *The Economic and Social Historic of Tobacco Production in South Carolina* (Pee Dee Heritage Center, December 1992), 24-25.

¹⁰ Philip Thomason, "Historic Resources of Kingstree." National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form. Building Conservation Technology, Nashville, June 28, 1982.

¹¹ Norris and Grunden, *Cultural Resource Identification Survey of the Epps No. Industrial Site*, 8-9.

of the 20th century, the Epps family had acquired hundreds of acres within the surrounding area. In 1905, Epps allowed his son, a young farm demonstration agent named Silas Wightman Epps, to begin construction of the two and a half story Epps-McGill Farmhouse for his future wife, Caroline Monroe, on land owned by his father.¹² Silas Epps and likely other local builders took three years to build the Epps-McGill Farmhouse, crafting a vernacular Victorian style home with large two-story porches on the east and west façade and a kitchen outbuilding attached to the main structure via the west porch. The house sat on a fifty-one-acre tract of land used to grow the newly dominant crop tobacco, and the newlyweds moved into the home by 1907.¹³

Epps family members and their relatives continued to own the farmhouse and surrounding acreage for the next several decades. However, by the 1930s the family had begun leasing the property to tenant farmers, the first known being the white Wingate family who moved there from neighboring Clarendon County by 1940. The Wingate family's arrival to the Epps-McGill Farmhouse came despite broader downward trends in the prevalence of sharecropping throughout the South. The implementation of New Deal crop reduction and soil conservation programs by the Roosevelt administration greatly affected the practice of tenant farming and sharecropping in South Carolina, as a large percentage of farm acreage was removed from production.¹⁴ In the decade after 1930, as farm mechanization increased, the number of tenant farmers in South Carolina dropped by twenty-five percent.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the Wingate family remained at the Epps-McGill farmstead through at least the 1940s, renting the property for \$15 per month. Around 1953, though, a new set of tenants moved onto the farmhouse when the McGill family began leasing the property, the first African Americans known to have done so.¹⁶

Sharecropping was an uncertain enterprise for anyone who took it up, yet the system's uncertainties were even more acute for African Americans like the McGills, many of whom had abandoned it by the time the family took up residence on the Epps property. In the early 20th century, forces such as the boll weevil epidemic, decreasing crop prices, and predatory lending schemes further made acquiring land economically untenable for Black farmers, causing a mass exodus from the South into urban centers of the Midwest and Northeast. In the 1930s, Black southerners found themselves largely excluded from the benefits of New Deal programs meant to

¹² 1850, 1860, and 1870 U.S. Federal Census; Williamsburg Co., SC., Register of Deeds, Plat Book 25 Page 81.

¹³ Kathy Dodge Lloyd, *The Epps Connection* (Westminster, MD: Willow Bend Books, 2004), 131.

¹⁴ Tara Mitchell Mielnik, *New Deal, New Landscape: The Civilian Conservation Corps and South Carolina's State Parks* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 7.

¹⁵ Burton et al., "Tenantry."

¹⁶ Epps and Monroe remained in the farmhouse until 1912, when they moved to Caroline's family home in Latta, South Carolina, following the death of her father. Sometime during the next ten years, Silas returned the farmhouse and surrounding farmland to his father. In 1924 James's wife Martha Ann Henson G. Epps died at home, and, by 1925, a 51-acre tract of land containing the farm and house was conveyed by James to his daughter Eula Epps Wilcox. A plat created during this transaction indicates that this land was the northern part of a larger tract owned by James Epps.; Lloyd, *The Epps Connection*, 131; "Mrs. Annie Graham Epps," *The Charleston Evening Post*, April 12, 1924, 5; Williamsburg Co., SC., Register of Deeds, Book A-51 Page 406; Williamsburg Co., SC., Register of Deeds, Plat Book 4, Page 25; Lillie McGill, in discussion with Kalen McNabb, May 2019. Census records show Wingate living in Williamsburg County by 1940. 1930 and 1940 U.S. Federal Census.

bolster the region's agricultural economy. Local administration meant that programs were often subject to discrimination, while the New Deal agricultural policy of acreage reductions reduced production on many farms, compounding displacement of the sharecroppers and tenant farmers also being prompted by increasing mechanization. Small sharecropper farms were frequently absorbed into larger parcels that were worked by the landowners and diversified into crops and livestock that did not require as many hired hands.¹⁷ Between 1930 and 1940, more than 200,000 Black southern farmers including owners, sharecroppers, and tenants left agriculture, accounting for a 4.8 percent decrease in Black farm ownership in the region, six times as severe as the .8 percent decrease in Black farm ownership across the nation.¹⁸

Over time, several different trends in the broader history of Black southern sharecropping unfolded through the McGill family's tenure on the Epps property. The family members who ultimately took up residence in the farmhouse had deep roots in Williamsburg County, some likely extending back to slavery. Esther (Ervin) McGill (c.1902-1956) first leased the property from the Epps family around 1953, following the death of her husband Burgess McGill in 1952. For two years, she lived in the house and sharecropped the land with her children before they, like countless other Black sharecroppers, chose to leave the South, resettling in Rochester, New York, in 1955. After they left the property, Esther's brother-in-law Weaver McGill (1916-1994) and his wife Margaret (Singletary) McGill moved into the farmhouse with their children and continued to sharecrop the land into the 1950s and 60s.¹⁹ During this time, a large tobacco barn and smaller auxiliary structures were built on the farmland to the west of the dwelling. Unfortunately, the auxiliary structures were demolished during the late 20th century and the barn collapsed in 2015. The McGill family used the land during this period to grow a wide variety of crops including wheat, corn, cotton, collard greens, soybeans, sugar cane, and potatoes. The family also raised chickens, hogs, and other farm animals.²⁰

As Weaver, Margaret, and their children worked the Epps land, sharecropping continued to fade away from the southern landscape. In the late 1960s, changes in the national minimum wage act practically eliminated the sharecropper system, coming after years of increased farming

¹⁷ Camille Goldmon, *Refusing to be Dispossessed: African American Land Retention in the US South from Reconstruction to World War II*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 2017), 63; Mark Reinberger, "The Architecture of Sharecropping: Extended Farms of the Georgia Piedmont," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 9 (2003): 117; Bruce Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, & the Transformation of the South, 1938-1908* (Duke University Press: Durham, N.C., 2007, third printing), 4-38.

¹⁸ Goldmon, *Refusing to be Dispossessed*, 63.

¹⁹ "Esther B. McGill," Find-a-Grave Memorial, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/157709327/esther-b-mcgill>; "Burgess McGill," Find-a-Grave Memorial, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/157709343/burgess-mcgill>. Esther McGill's grandparents, Andrew (b.1842) and Minder (b.1847) Ervin, are documented in Williamsburg County as early as 1880. 1880 U.S. Federal Census, 1910 U.S. Federal Census (father Baisie Ervin), 1930 U.S. Federal Census (B.C. Ervin, Esther); Lillie McGill conversations; "Weaver McGill," Find-a-Grave Memorial, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/142835921/weaver-mcgill>.

²⁰ Lillie McGill, in discussion with Kalen McNabb, April 2019.

mechanization and migration of workers to larger cities.²¹ Locally in Williamsburg County, the population declined ten percent from 1957 to 1967, making it the seventeenth poorest county per capita in the nation, due to the decline of sharecropping and lack of industry.²² Despite the system theoretically serving as a pathway to farm ownership, sharecropping's decline rarely resulted in African American farmers taking hold of their own land. After World War II, African American farm ownership declined 8 percent annually between 1950-1959, before an even greater decline of 11.4 percent in the 1960's. This trend continued as the total number of farms decreased nationwide. In 1987, the last year of the agricultural census, Black farmers held 151,441 acres of farmland in South Carolina, a 94 percent loss from the 2.5 million acres recorded in 1950.²³

The Epps-McGill Farmhouse and a portion of the surrounding historical farmland was among that property that, in spite of those broader trends, ultimately came into legal possession of African Americans who first settled there as sharecroppers. Among the factors that helped make that possible was changing ownership of the land and the interpersonal relationships that developed between the Epps and McGill families. On August 13, 1953, Eula Epps Wilcox, who since 1925 had owned the farmhouse and surrounding fifty-one acres, sold the property to her nephew, Adolphus Epps Frierson, and his wife, Myrtle Frierson, for \$10,000. Over the next twenty years, the now-Frierson farm was subdivided into several lots and sold off, gradually reducing the total size of the farmstead down to two acres.²⁴ As recalled by a McGill descendant, over this same period, Adolphus Frierson and Weaver McGill developed a strong friendship, and Frierson spent many evenings in the McGill home, i.e. the Epps-McGill Farmhouse. During his ownership, Dr. Frierson moved into a small building to the south of the house that served as an office and a personal retreat for the two men. After years of friendship, Frierson deeded 0.86 acres of land including the historic farmhouse to Weaver and Margaret McGill in 1976 prior to his death in 1980. Weaver McGill died in 1996 and his wife Margaret resided in the home until her death in 2006. The house has remained unoccupied and in the McGill family since her passing.²⁵

Few examples have been identified where a Black sharecropping family was able to overcome decades of challenges and adversity to acquire farmland that they originally worked. While additional examples undoubtedly exist, few have received attention, as the individual stories of

²¹ "Automation is Threatening Sharecropping in Dillon," *The News and Courier*, April 5, 1964, 35; "An End to Sharecropping," *Charleston Evening Post*, February 7, 1967, 5B.

²² "Exodus from Williamsburg Probed by Gov Romney," *The News and Courier*, September 28, 1967, 1.

²³ "Black Farmers get equal share of hardships," *Spartanburg Herald Journal*, September 30, 1990.

²⁴ Williamsburg Co., SC., Register of Deeds, Book A-51 Page 406; Williamsburg Co., SC., Register of Deeds, Book A-51 Page 416. Portions of the original farmstead were donated to the local community for important civic uses. Directly behind the Epps-McGill Farmhouse, the land was donated to the Housing Authority of Kingstree for public housing on which the 100-unit Frierson Homes development was built in 1976. Williamsburg Co., SC., Register of Deeds, Book 121 Page 137: Exhibit A; "Kingstree," *Charleston Evening Post*, May 18, 1975, page 7; Williamsburg Co., SC., Register of Deeds, Plat Book 25 Page 81.

²⁵ Williamsburg Co., SC, Register of Deeds, Deed Book 121 Page 137: Exhibit A; Lillie McGill, discussion with Kalen McNabb in August 2018.

Black rural farmers remains underrepresented within the historical record. One known example of a similar situation is the Giles siblings, who recently purchased the Jonesville, South Carolina, farm where their family previously sharecropped. Subject to the same challenges faced by the McGills, Enoumas and Lake Copeland Giles sharecropped the land with their nine children until the 1960s. Fifty years after leaving the farm, the Giles siblings were able to restore the original farmhouse, and their story received national attention.²⁶

While the McGill story is not a singular event, this property is notable as a rare surviving example from this period. Few cases of African American tenant farmers purchasing the land they sharecropped have been recorded within the region and the accomplishments of the McGill family increases the importance of the Epps-McGill Farmhouse in the larger history of Williamsburg County. The ownership of the land and the farmhouse by the McGill family illustrates the struggles and rare opportunities for African American sharecroppers in South Carolina during the 20th century. The evolution of the Epps-McGill Farmhouse property is an integral, living example showcasing the larger social development and economic history of Kingstree and Williamsburg County.

Criterion C: Architecture

The Epps-McGill Farmhouse is an excellent example of a Folk Victorian farmhouse with local vernacular modifications within Williamsburg County. While the original architect is unknown, the structure features Queen Anne influences, cutaway bay windows, and numerous rooms with Victorian applied decoration. Original features such as a kitchen attached via an exterior porch are indicative of a larger vernacular architectural tradition in Williamsburg County. Although some modifications have been made to the rear porch and materials of the house, the structure still retains a high degree of historic integrity and is an excellent example of a two-story gable front-and-wing Folk Victorian farmhouse in Williamsburg County. The architecture of the structure is representative of a period of prosperity and growth for the town and county, during which popular architectural styles became prevalent.

The evolution of the housing stock within Kingstree closely reflects the development of the county. The earliest structures were based on a hall-and-parlor plan commonly used by early English colonists. As additional wealth entered the settlement, the I-house became the prominent form until the Civil War. Within Williamsburg County, additional housing forms began to appear around 1830, and plans were modified to accommodate the local climate. During this time, the southern folk house type was established in the county with the use of large full-width, shed-roof front porches. The arrival of the Victorian style plans and mass-produced housing components in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries corresponded directly with a period of growth in Kingstree driven by the tobacco industry.²⁷

²⁶ Allison Klein, "This family grew up picking cotton. Decades later, they returned to the place the sharecropped – as homeowners," *The Washington Post*, January 24, 2018.

²⁷ Julius Roy Richardson II, "Early Houses of Williamsburg County." Master's Thesis, Clemson University and the College of Charleston, May 2009, 16.

Folk Victorian house forms are defined by the presence of Victorian era detailing but are much less ornate than their traditional Victorian counterparts and have more regular floor plans.²⁸ The details usually seen are inspired by Italianate, Queen Anne, or Carpenter Gothic styles. The spread of Victorian-era styles throughout the United States was made possible by the expansion of railroads into smaller towns and gave rise to the Folk Victorian style. Mass produced features that could be manufactured and transported cheaply and quickly allowed the housing type to quickly spread.

The presence of this housing type in both Williamsburg County and Kingstree is indicative of the rise of wealth in the area during a boom in the tobacco market starting in 1900.²⁹ Downtown Kingstree served as the main tobacco market for the surrounding farmers, and the physical growth of the town from 1900 to 1920 reflects the success of the local merchants. Approximately 86 percent of the buildings within the existing Kingstree Historic District, established in 1982, were built in the commercial Victorian style during the period from 1900 to 1920.³⁰ As the Kingstree commercial corridor expanded, limited growth occurred beyond the downtown area into the surrounding residential areas and countryside.

The Epps-McGill farmhouse is a rural vernacular example of the Victorian style that is distinct in form and design from the contemporary structures downtown. The Epps-McGill Farmhouse adheres to characteristics and features associated with Folk Victorian architecture, including the front-and-wing plan, clapboard exterior, gabled roofline, and two-story Queen Anne-inspired projecting bay with pendants on the north façade. As Folk Victorian houses are vernacular in nature, the Epps-McGill Farmhouse features transitional details borrowed from and combined with different forms and styles of architecture. Large two-story porches on the north and south facades incorporate typical Folk Victorian wide porch and vernacular two-story porch forms common in South Carolina. Chamfered porch columns with a second floor coved beadboard ceiling add decorative detailing indicative of the style. The exterior window and door casing are simple in style while the double wood paneled doors on the front east elevation contain subdued applied mass-produced Victorian molding and corner blocks. The remaining original six over six double hung windows were likely produced outside of the area and easily transported to the site via the nearby railroads. Matching soffit corner pendants below the east gable further illustrate the use of the restrained Victorian elements to decorate the rural structure.

The L-shaped or gable-front interior plan with the large two-story bay is another identifying feature of the Folk Victorian architectural style and defines the modest interior. The simple detailing with vertical beadboard wainscoting in the first and second-floor stair hall, flat plaster walls, and surviving interior trim illustrate the Folk Victorian style. The location of the stair hall within the center of the structure is an earlier colonial era attribute. The center stair is decorated with Victorian elements including a chamfered newel post matching the design on the porch columns with square spindles. The primary rooms except the first-floor south room retain their

²⁸ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 308-17.

²⁹ Thomason, "Historic Resources of Kingstree," 5.

³⁰ Philip Thomason, "Kingstree Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form, Building Conservation Technology, Nashville, June 28, 1982.

Folk Victorian mantels and contribute to the spatial character of the farmhouse. The interior elements exhibit techniques employed nationwide during the early twentieth century and clearly expresses the style of this transitional time period with strong influences of earlier antebellum and colonial era architecture.

A feature of the Epps-McGill structure is the presence of a one-story kitchen building which is connected to the main house by the porch. This regional variant is often found before the Civil War with the addition of shed rooms at the rear of the structure with a porch running between. The Bishop House located eight miles east of Kingstree, SC is an adapted early I-house form with the described local variants. The Epps-McGill Farmhouse is an early 20th example of this vernacular variant that appears to have been used locally for more than a century.³¹ A heavily modified contemporary structure known as the Porter House is located at 128 Mill Street in downtown Kingstree and is similar in form to the Epps-McGill Farmhouse.³² The existing kitchen building has been altered and later attached to the main structure but the plan has been retained.

The Epps-McGill Farmhouse is an excellent example of Folk Victorian architecture within Williamsburg County and the structure retains much of its original architectural integrity 115 years after construction. Similar contemporary examples of this house type listed on the National Register of Historic Places can be found within the W. T. Askins House in Florence County and Carter Hill in Kershaw County, indicating this style was popular throughout the region. However, this type of rural structure remains unrepresented within the county as much of the focus has been directed toward antebellum residences and commercial Victorian structures. The contemporary McCollum-Murray House in Williamsburg County features a similar plan but lacks the rural character and Folk Victorian detailing present at the Epps-McGill structure. Retaining a portion of the original farm, the Epps-McGill Farmhouse serves as an excellent example of a Folk Victorian farmhouse.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

In 1920, the appearance of the boll weevil and two consecutive rainy seasons caused devastation to the cotton industry. In addition to this blight, competition and overproduction in South Carolina textile mills hastened the steep decline in demand for cotton.³³ Between 1920 and 1921, the cotton crop dropped from 37,000 bales to 2,700.³⁴ A nationwide drop in cash crop prices also led to widespread changes in the farming industry.³⁵

In the 1940s the Epps family further split the property among the heirs, and the property was divided to the south of the house by an existing ditch, now Wilcox Street. The southern portion

³¹ Richardson, "Early Houses of Williamsburg County", 44.

³² Linda W. Brown, ed. *Remembering Kingstree: The Collective Writings of Bessie Swann Britton*, (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2007), 26.

³³ Norris and Grunden, *Cultural Resource Identification Survey of the Epps No. Industrial Site*, 9.

³⁴ Boddie, *History of Williamsburg*, 541.

³⁵ Mielnik, *New Deal, New Landscape*, 2.

of the original property was conveyed to Thomas Olin Epps, the nephew of Eula Epps Wilcox.³⁶ Thomas further subdivided his heir tract of land and sold a portion to the Mt. Zion United Methodist Church. An additional plot was sold in 1953 to the school district to build the W.M. Anderson School, a segregated school for African American students built under the state's equalization program, which had the explicit goal of maintaining segregated education facilities (Esther McGill's son was among the laborers who built the school). Today, the streets dividing the original farmstead bear the name of previous owners including "Wilcox Street" and "Epps Road."

During his ownership, Weaver McGill was an active member of the Kingstree community including the local chapters of the NAACP and the Farmers Aid Lodges of the Lowcountry. Weaver was active in working with his local church, the North Kingstree Baptist Church, and with Williamsburg County to preserve wetland near the home and church on Eastland Avenue.³⁷ In 1966, during the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King gave his "March on Ballot Boxes" speech at the local Kingstree high school. In response to Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement, many non-publicized events of KKK rides occurred throughout Kingstree.³⁸

³⁶ Dodge, *The Epps Connection*, 45

³⁷ Lillie McGill, in discussion with Kalen McNabb, May 2019.

³⁸ Cassandra Williams Rush, "Williamsburg County Civil Rights Movement 1954-1968," *Kingstree News*, February 28, 2018.

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“Weaver McGill.” Find-a-Grave Memorial.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/142835921/weaver-mcgill>.

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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.00

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 33.674408 Longitude: -79.815817

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the nominated property is shown on the dark red line marked on a copy of a Williamsburg County GIS online map including tax parcels 18-036-178 and 18-036-217.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary of the nominated property is chosen to include the farmhouse and the remaining portion of the Epps-McGill farmstead.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kalen McNabb, Lead Researcher
organization: Meadors, Inc.
street & number: P.O. Box 21758
city or town: Charleston state: SC zip code: 29405
e-mail kalen@meadorsinc.com
telephone: 843-723-8585
date: April 16, 2020

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Ownership

Parcel 18-036-178 (Farmhouse)

Owner(s) Name: Lynn Vanessa Richardson

Mailing address: 6372 Grandloop Road, Sugar Hill, GA 30518

Telephone: 474-272-6944

Parcel 18-036-217 (Remaining farmstead land)

Owner(s) Name: Lillie C. McGill and Norman McGill

Mailing address: 699 Eastland Avenue, Kingstree, SC 29556

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Epps-McGill Farmhouse

City or Vicinity: Kingstree

County: Williamsburg

State: South Carolina

Photographer: Kalen McNabb

Date Photographed: September 1, 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo 1: East elevation of the Epps-McGill Farmhouse. The camera is facing west looking at the main façade on Eastland Avenue.

Photo 2: Northeast elevation of the Epps-McGill Farmhouse. The camera is facing southwest looking at the two-story bay window and the surrounding grand oaks.

Photo 3: Southeast elevation of the Epps-McGill Farmhouse. The camera is facing northwest at the two-story porch on the southeast corner of the structure.

Photo 4: Southwest elevation of the Epps-McGill Farmhouse. The camera is facing northeast looking at the one-story attached kitchen building.

Photo 5: West elevation of the Epps-McGill Farmhouse. The camera is facing southeast looking at the northwest corner of the attached kitchen building and the west 20th century porch infill.

Photo 6: North elevation of the Epps-McGill Farmhouse. The camera is facing south.

Photo 7: East elevation of the Epps-McGill Farmhouse from Eastland Avenue. The camera is facing west looking at the structure and the surrounding trees from the street.

Photo 8: East gable of the Epps-McGill Farmhouse. The camera is facing south looking at the second-floor and gable of the two-story east bay projection.

Photo 9: First-floor newel post. The camera is facing southwest in the first-floor hallway.

Photo 10: First-floor mantel in the main living room. The camera is facing east towards the early 20th century mantel.

Photo 11: Second-floor porch double doors. The camera is facing east in the second-floor hallway.

Photo 12: Second-floor northwest bedroom mantel. The camera is facing south.

Photo 13: North interior wall of the second-floor south bedroom. The camera is facing northeast looking at the original mantel and door to the hallway.

Photo 14: Coved ceiling framing on the second-floor porch infill. The camera is facing south looking at the interior porch stair baluster and ceiling.

Photo 15: First-floor porch stair. The camera is looking southeast within the south infilled porch.

Index of Figures

Figure 1: 1925 Plat showing 51-acre tract of land conveyed to Eula Epps Wilcox by James Epps.

Figure 2: 1976 Plat showing 0.82 acres containing the Epps-McGill Farmhouse conveyed by A.E. Frierson to Weaver McGill in 1976.

Figure 3: 1958 USGS Aerial showing the Farmhouse with surrounding farm prior to the subdivision of the land.

Figure 4: 2006 Aerial Image showing the location of the now demolished outbuilding to the west of the structure.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

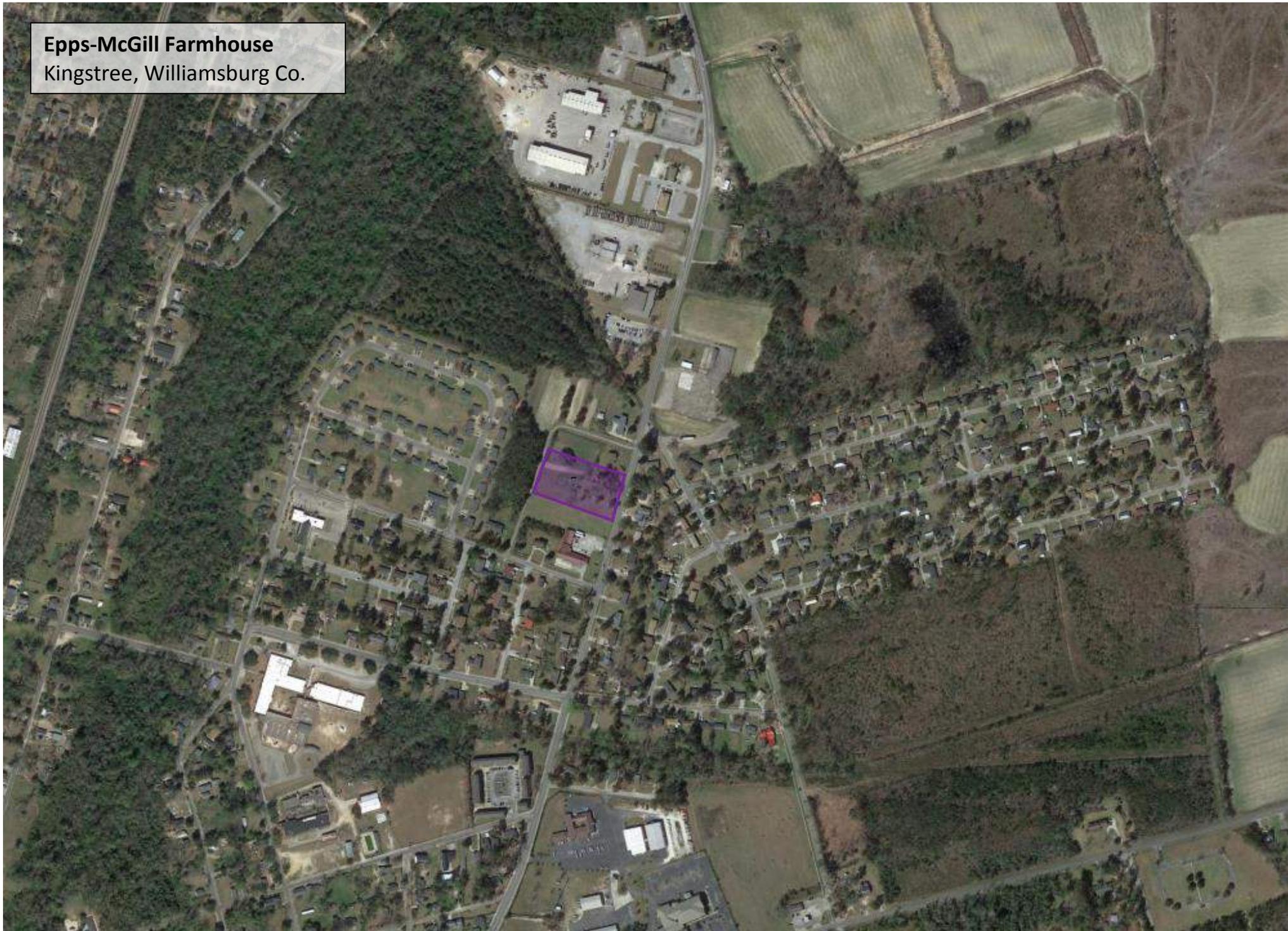
Epps-McGill Farmhouse, Kingstree, Williamsburg Co.



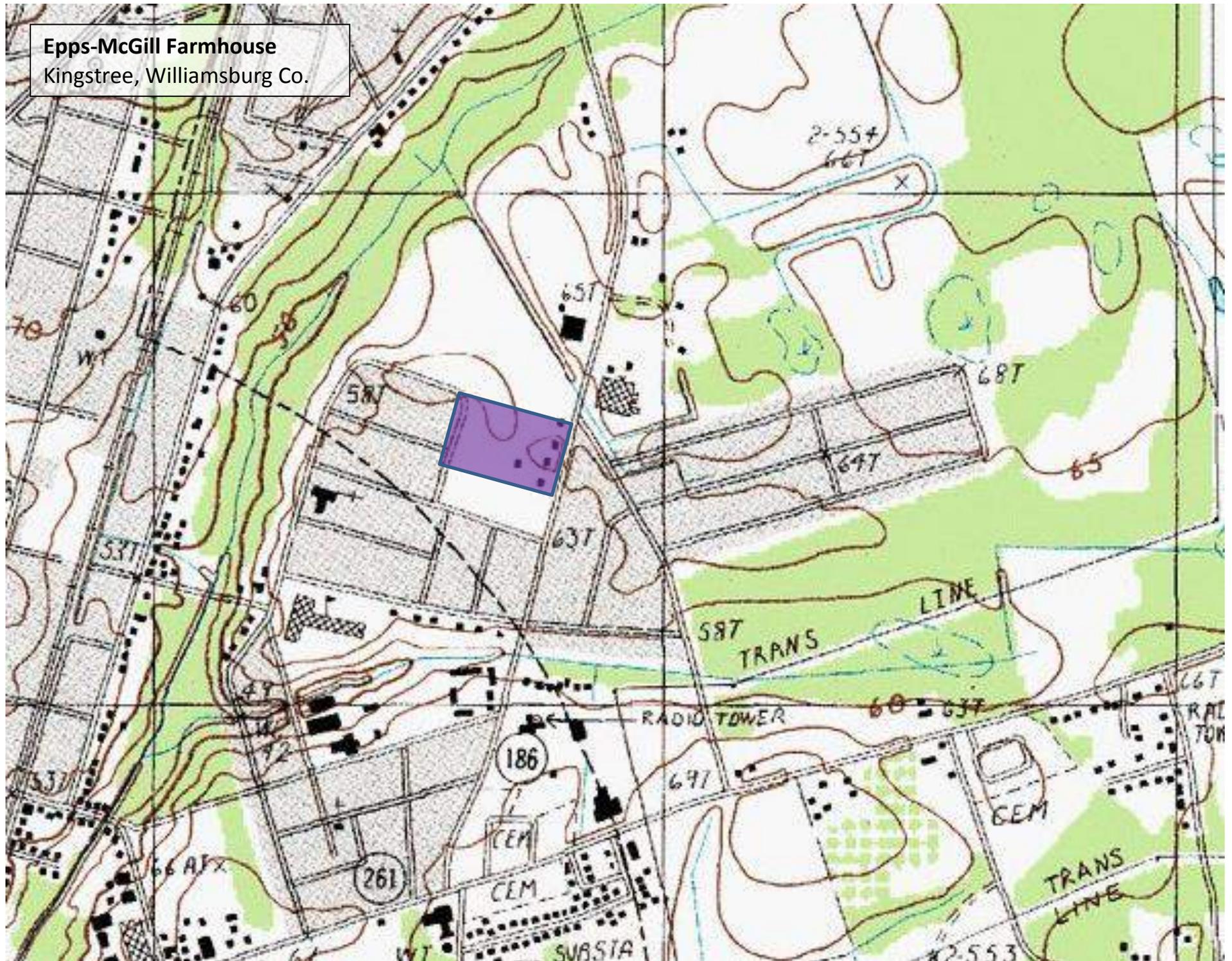
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Epps-McGill Farmhouse
Kingstree, Williamsburg Co.



Epps-McGill Farmhouse
Kingstree, Williamsburg Co.









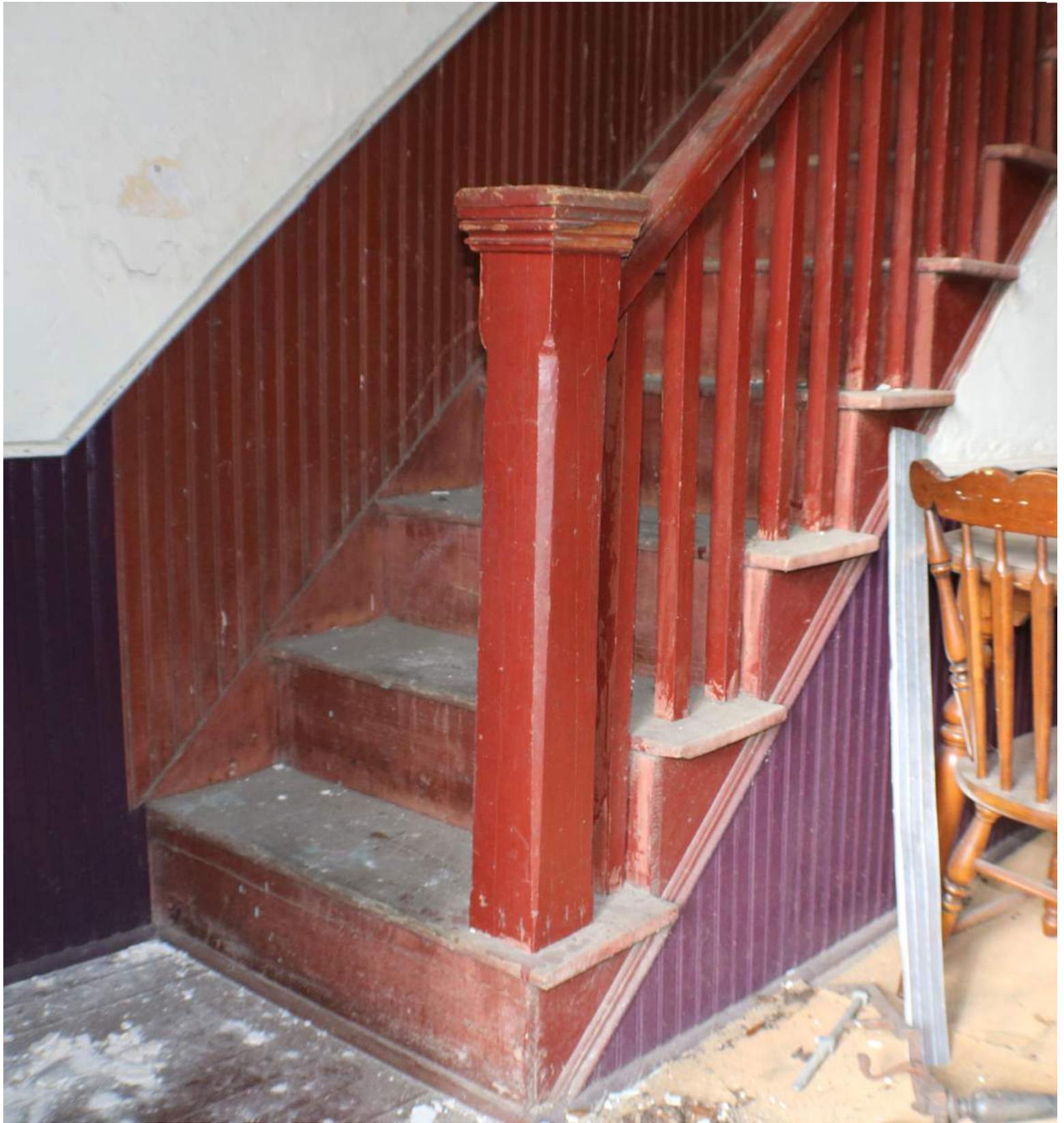
























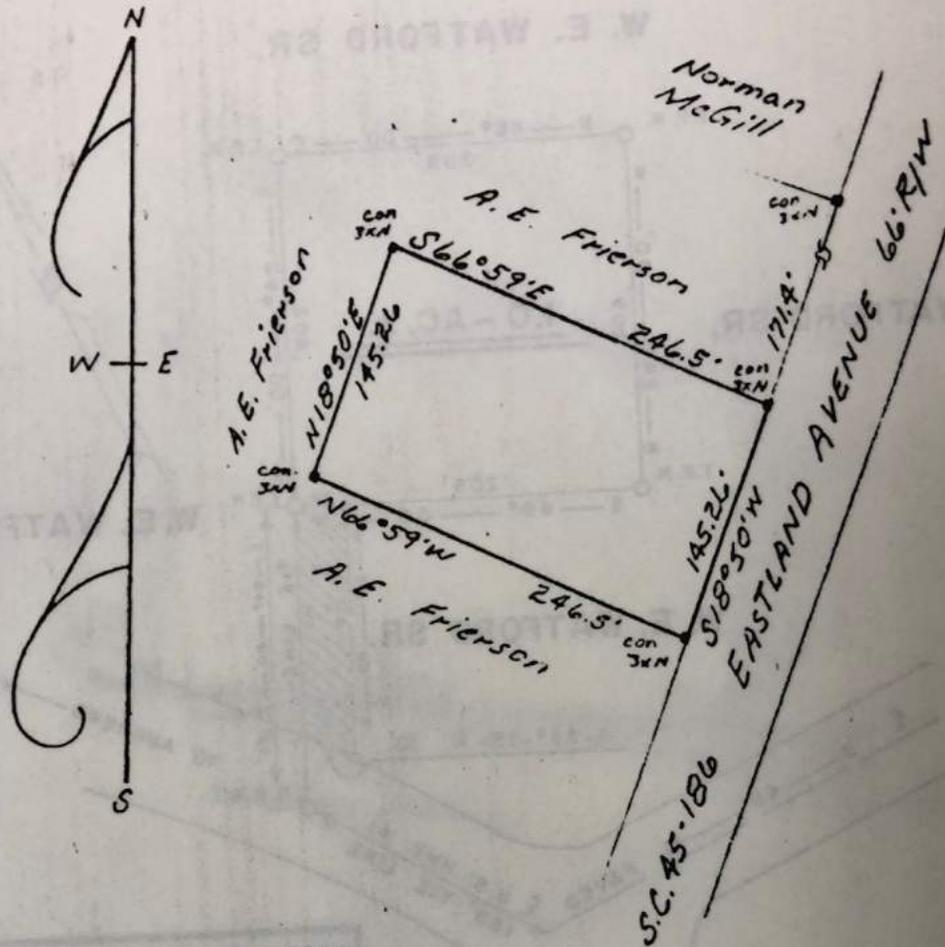


State of South Carolina,
 County of Williamsburg.

MAP of fifty two (52) acres of land surveyed by me for
 land of James Epps, partly within the town limits of Kingstree.
 Surveyed by me in August and September 1924.

F. J. Watson
 Surveyor & Civil Engineer.

MAR 25 1943 9 AM
 RECORDED
 M. S. McFADDEN
 CLERK OF COURT
 WILLIAMSBURG CO., S. C.



STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
 COUNTY OF WILLIAMSBURG

Map of 0.82 acre of land in King Township just North of the Town of Kingstree owned by A. E. Frierson and about to be conveyed to Weaver McGill and Margaret McGill.

Scale: 1"=100'

Surveyed: Oct. 4, 1976

RECORDED
 BOOK... 25 ... PAGE 81
 OCT 20 1976 12 M

J. W. Brackington
 Reg. Land Surveyor 1031
 Kingstree, S.C.

W. P. JONES
 OF COURT
 WILLIAMSBURG CO., S. C.



EPPS-WILCOX FARM



FUTURE WILCOX STREET

EASTLAND AVENUE

ANDERSON STREET

