

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Lansdown-Higgins House

other names/site number Riggins House; Kerl House; Sommerer House

## 2. Location

street & number 5240 Tanner Bridge Road [n/a ] not for publication

city or town Jefferson City [x] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Cole code 051 zip code 65010

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] 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 [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ]  
nationally [ ] statewide [X] locally.  
( See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Signature of certifying official/Title Claire F. Blackwell/Deputy SHPO

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.  
( See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date

[ ] 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  
See continuation sheet [ ].

### 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 count previously listed resources.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1 0 buildings

0 0 sites

0 0 structures

0 0 objects

1 0 Total

#### Name of related multiple property listing.

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

#### Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

N/A

### 6. Function or Use

#### Historic Function

(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)

Greek Revival

Other: I-house

#### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation limestone

walls weatherboard

log

roof Metal

other

#### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 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.)

Property is:

☐ **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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

### Periods of Significance

1830-1850

### Significant Dates

n/a

### Significant Person(s)

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).

n/a

### Cultural Affiliation

n/a

### Architect/Builder

Unknown

## Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### 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:

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than 1 acre

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

A. Zone Easting Northing  
15 569290 4262110

C. Zone Easting Northing

B. Zone Easting Northing

D. Zone Easting Northing

[ ] See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title see continuation sheet

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

### Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Kris Ballage--Grande Highland Development Co.

street & number P.O. Box 105227 telephone 573-634-8570

city or town Jefferson City state MO zip code 65110-5227

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Lansdown-Higgins House  
Cole County, MO

**SUMMARY:** The Lansdown-Higgins House, a frame central passage I-house with Greek Revival affinities, is located at 5240 Tanner Bridge Road approximately four miles southwest of Jefferson City in Cole County, Missouri. Built in stages beginning in the 1830s or earlier, the Lansdown-Higgins House evolved from a 1½-story dogtrot house of hewn log construction to its near-present, sided form prior to circa 1854. The symmetrical three-bay building, which faces south, has an imposing two-story pedimented portico supported by square Doric columns. Massive chimneys of gray limestone bracket its traditional gabled roof. As a Greek Revival building, the Lansdown-Higgins House exemplifies the Full-Height Entry Porch subtype as defined by McAlester and McAlester.<sup>1</sup> At some point, a two-story gallery on the rear elevation was enclosed and a one-story addition was constructed on the northwest. Most interior features are intact including the central staircase with its simple but elegant balustrade. Of major interest, some of the house's square log walls--the interior surface of the crossover--remain unplastered and are readily viewed in the upstairs hallway. Fireplaces have been filled in and the mantels removed, but otherwise nearly all doors, windows and trim are original or early. Exact construction dates are unknown but the estimated period of significance runs from circa 1830 to circa 1850. During this period, the original dogtrot building is believed to have been constructed from hewn walnut logs and subsequently converted into a central passage I-house with Greek Revival affinities. The house is currently unoccupied and is in generally good condition considering its age, with a high level of integrity inside and out.

**ELABORATION:** The Lansdown-Higgins House, along with other remnants of a central Missouri farmstead dating from the mid-19th century, is adjacent to an upscale development called Grande Highland Estates. While only the house is being nominated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, it seems appropriate to mention the known missing as well as extant associated properties because they may add perspective and context to our understanding of the house. East of the house across what is believed to be a former stagecoach route between St. Louis and Westport--now a paved road into the development called Highland Waye--is a circa 1840s barn constructed of hewn logs. Enlarged in 1917, this building has a side entry and central aisle and resembles an English barn today. Northeast of the house, a circa 1840s double crib barn of log construction, with a gable roof and a side aisle, is to be dismantled. A circa 1954 concrete block wellhouse is also northeast, between the house and the double crib barn. A circa 1840s smokehouse, a circa 1880 wagon shed/garage, and a circa 1922 chicken house were torn down earlier.<sup>2</sup> Beyond the house on the north, south and west are the newly-constructed streets and residences of the development. The topography is gently rolling, with the Lansdown-Higgins House situated atop a modest rise at the base of a great bend of the Moreau River.

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<sup>1</sup>Virginia and Lee McAlester, A Field Guide to American Houses (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), pp. 178-189.

<sup>2</sup>The dated properties are cited in a hand-written house history prepared by Harold J. Sommerer and Jack Kaufmann, "The Sommerer Home," undated, p.3. The former presence of slave houses is likely because at least two early owners, Joseph Higgins and William Riggins, owned slaves. Higgins owned 33, although the majority were children, according to the 1850 slave census.

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Lansdown-Higgins House  
Cole County, MO

The house rests on a foundation of coursed limestone quarried from local bluffs. The original building, a dogtrot house with walls of square hewn logs with notched corners, was changed to a central passage I-house by framing and enclosing the originally open breezeway and, apparently, elevating the second floor from one-half story to a full story. A two-story gallery was constructed across the entire north elevation. Greek Revival elements were added including a two-story pedimented portico with scrollwork balustrades, multiple light transoms above both entrances (but no sidelights) and small square attic windows in the side elevations. At some point an L-shaped addition of one story was constructed on the northwest corner, the gallery was enclosed and a cellar was added under the east portion of the main block. The roof is corrugated metal over cedar shake, with lightning rods attached to the ridge. The house is painted white and its early wood shutters are painted green. Historic photographs of the Lansdown-Higgins House indicate that the present form has persisted without significant change since early in the century, at least. The historic views are of the south and east facades.

The traditional three-bay primary (south) facade is dominated by a central pedimented two-story portico supported by square Doric columns and pilasters. The two levels have identical but separate support systems. The tongue-and-groove floors have a pronounced slope away from the wall, ostensibly for drainage purposes. Centered in the tympanum, a small window with a round top suggests an Early Classical Revival influence. The pediment's cornice and architrave are supported by curvilinear brackets in various sawn forms. Scrollwork wood balustrades are present on both floors. The upper balustrade has a short anchoring column in the middle. Two poured concrete steps are a replacement of the original wood steps.

The main entrance is double-leaf, with plank doors and side-by-side three-light transoms which are hinged, in the form of horizontal casement windows. The upstairs entrance has a functional three-light transom flanked by single sash windows, in effect a continuation of the transom, consisting of three-over-three lights. The upstairs door consists of four rectangular panels. Flanking the entrance on each floor, aligned one above the other, are window openings with double-hung six-over-six wood sash within molded surrounds. Old, functional wood shutters are attached to each enframingent. Narrow, jointed siding covers the first floor of the main facade. The second floor and the remainder of the house are sided in wider weatherboard. In a departure from the Greek Revival form, the main cornice lacks any sort of trim band. However, an entablature band--aligned with the entablature of the lower level of the portico--defines the separation between floors across the primary facade. Cornerboards are plain flat boards (without capitals) throughout.

The side elevations are dominated by massive exterior chimneys of coursed limestone with accented tops. Tapers are high, above the second floor level. Roof ends are nearly flush with the gable walls. Just below the raking cornices, small fixed attic windows with two-over-two lights flank the chimneys. The only other opening in the east facade is a first floor double-hung window (6/6s) adjacent to the north side of the chimney. The facade continues beyond the main block with the flush and windowless wall of the enclosed two-story gallery. The division is obvious, defined by a cornerboard and differences in the width of weatherboarding. Boards on the gallery wall are slightly narrower than those on the main block. The gallery roof flows smoothly from the main roof but at a slightly lower pitch.

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Lansdown-Higgins House  
Cole County, MO

With the enclosed gallery extending across the width of the house, the rear (north) elevation is devoid of ornamentation. The one-story addition extends from the northwest corner like an oddly situated ell. The ridge of its gable roof is aligned with the corner of the main block. Window spacing on the second floor (three double-hung but small two-over-two sash windows oriented toward the east) strongly suggests that the addition existed before the gallery was enclosed. On the first floor, an entrance is off-center to the west. Two double-hung six-over-six sash windows are directly below the first and third upstairs windows. Two similar six-over-six windows are evenly spaced in the rear of the addition. The cellar entrance is in the east portion of the facade.

The west elevation shows the addition beginning at the north side of the exterior chimney, with a shed roof that is gabled at the projecting north end. An entrance to the west room of the main block, accessed by four poured concrete steps, is adjacent to the south side of the chimney. A nonhistoric metal awning is above the doorway. Another entrance is near the north end of the addition. Window openings with six-over-six sash are in the west (and south) elevations of the addition. Two small attic windows similar to those on the east flank the chimney just below the raking cornices. A small fixed window with six lights is in the wall of the enclosed gallery and a small fixed window with four lights is upstairs just north of the chimney.

The floor plan of the Lansdown-Higgins House is typical for a central passage I-house. The main block is one room deep, with large rooms flanking a central stair hall on each floor--a parlor and living room on the first floor, and bedrooms upstairs. The addition on the northwest corner functions as an ell and is divided, from west to east, into a kitchen with two pantries and a dining room. Ceilings are relatively low, particularly on the first floor where they are level with the window heads. Each main block room measures approximately 15 feet by 16 feet. The hall between the flanking rooms measures approximately 10 feet by 16 feet. The staircase is an "L" type. Beyond the main block, an enclosed seven foot porch provides additional space for living or storage on both floors. The attic, accessed from a wooden ladder in the upstairs hall, has flooring but is otherwise unfinished; scrollwork balustrades removed from the gallery when it was enclosed are stored there. Woodwork is austere on both floors, with modest ornamentation provided by narrow moldings affixed to door and window enframements. Mantels have been removed and fireplace openings covered in all four of the main block rooms.

Interior walls of the four main rooms were plastered and, at various times, papered. Beginning at the first landing of the staircase and continuing into the upstairs hallway, however, the hewn square log walls that formed the underside of the dogtrot crossover are simply whitewashed. The texture of the chinked logs, which appear to be walnut, is readily visible. An unplastered section of load-bearing logs also can be seen under the staircase in the first floor hall, where it forms the rear wall of the house's only true closet. For the most part, the exposed logs are well-squared and tightly spaced. While it is possible that the dogtrot house stood a full two stories, it seems more likely that logs were added in order to elevate the second floor to its present height. At the south end of the upstairs hall, a transom and two flanking windows were somewhat awkwardly inserted into the gap between the top of what was probably the original wall and the log that became the new top plate or girt. On the north, a section of stud wall used to bridge the gap at that end is visible above an unusual conversion of a window to a shallow storage cabinet. Openings in the back wall provide direct access to the gallery from all four rooms.

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Lansdown-Higgins House  
Cole County, MO

The simple but elegant staircase of brown-painted wood is placed against the east wall of the central hallway. The ramp of the slender bannister tops a subtly tapering rectangular newel post with a modestly molded base. Balusters are square sticks. Below the stringer, the staircase is enclosed with vertical boards forming a closet with a plank door. The flight beyond the landing is enclosed with vertical boards but the balustrade resumes on the second floor where it zigzags along the edge of the stairwell.

Locally crafted plank as well as original or early panel doors are present on both floors. Plank doors appear at the double-leaf front entrance and on the doorways of the four rooms flanking the central hall. The plank doors are of traditional construction, with from six to eight jointed vertical boards secured on the inside by upper and lower battens and narrow diagonal bracing. Two-over-two panel doors access the upper deck of the portico, the back door of the main block and other entrances to the enclosed rear porch. A four-light transom is above the back door. Some doors are equipped with rimlocks.

The Lansdown-Higgins House has been only partially modernized. Because the house has no septic system, there is no bathroom and the wall-hung kitchen sink has no drain. Water is supplied by a well northwest of the house. Gutters also carry rainwater to a cistern, with a pump, behind the kitchen addition. The house is wired for electricity but there are relatively few outlets. The four main block rooms and the entry hall have circa 1940s ceiling light fixtures of frosted glass.

Since its two-story gallery was enclosed around a century ago, this very old Cole County house has seen remarkably few changes over the years from the time that it was converted from a log-walled dogtrot house to a sided I-house in the mid-19th century. This impression is confirmed by historic photographs, the oldest of which probably dates from the turn of the century if not earlier. The addition on the northwest corner appears to have been constructed in some form relatively early in the house's history, and certainly before the gallery was enclosed. Currently vacant, the house is owned by the developer of Grande Highland Estates who has stated that the property will be sold. Development plans have not been sympathetic to the historic outbuildings, several of which have been demolished, and others, including the log barn, have been separated from the house by construction of an access road. It is hoped that the official recognition associated with National Register status will attract a preservation-sensitive buyer who will renovate the house while retaining as much of the original fabric as possible.



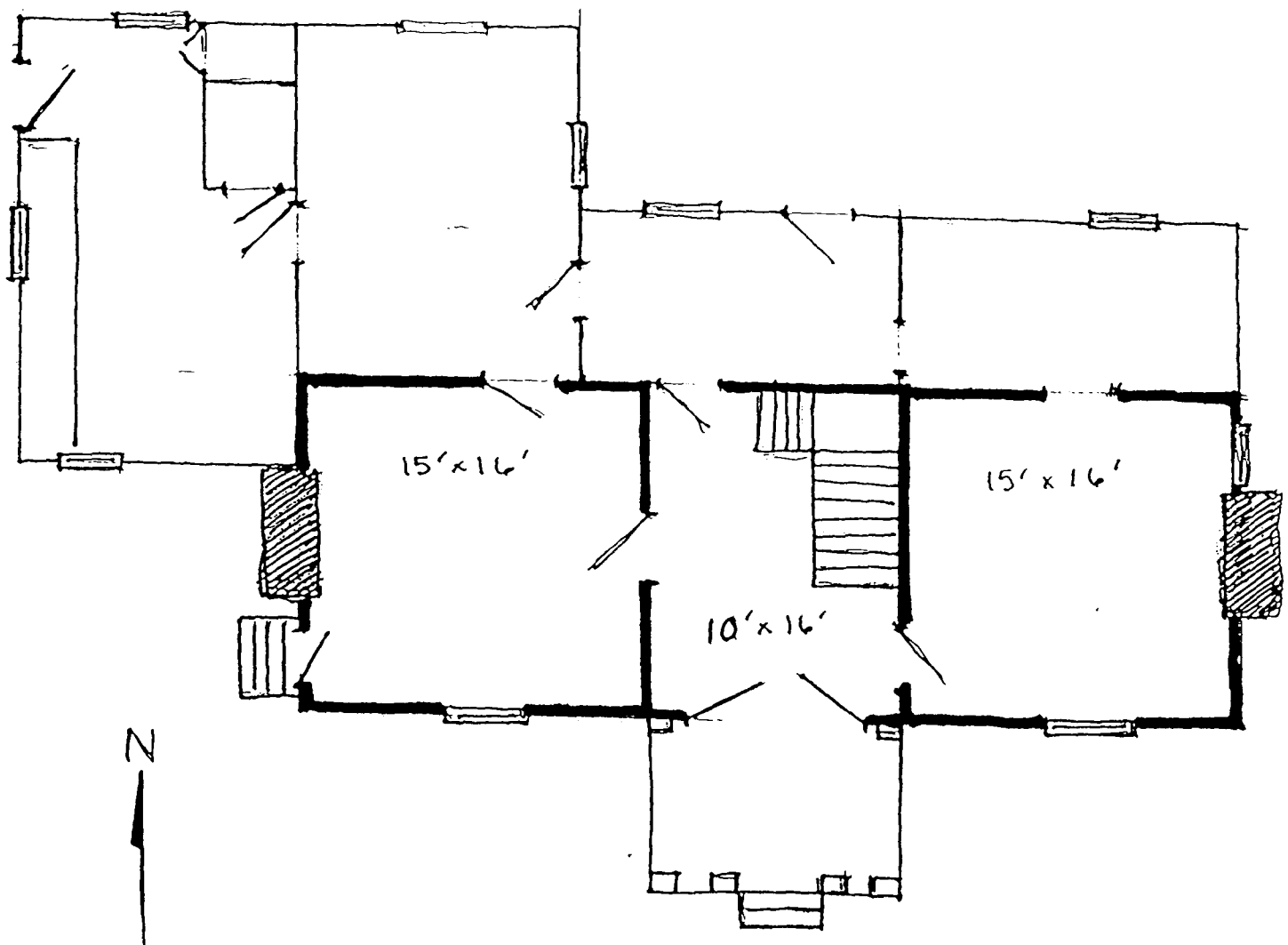
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Lansdown-Higgins House  
Cole County, MO

First floor plan (not to scale)



not to scale

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

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Lansdown-Higgins House  
Cole County, MO

**SUMMARY:** The Lansdown-Higgins House, 5240 Tanner Bridge Road, Jefferson City vicinity, Cole County, is significant under Criterion C in the area of ARCHITECTURE. The central passage I-house was originally constructed as a log dogtrot, probably between 1837 and 1842. By 1854, but perhaps as early as 1842, the house had assumed its present form and style, with its impressive two-story Greek Revival portico and other modest Greek Revival detailing. In Missouri, the I-house form was among the most common of house forms from earliest settlement into the early twentieth century, while the Greek Revival style was the most popular style for domestic architecture from the 1830s through the 1860s. The exterior of Lansdown-Higgins House clearly reflects the Greek Revival style with its two-story pedimented portico supported by square Doric columns and rear pilasters, multipane transoms, correct windows, tiny attic windows suggestive of Tidewater examples of the style, and symmetry. A small rounded window in the tympanum above the portico may suggest a Federal or Early Classical Revival influence but neither style is developed. Overall, the Lansdown-Higgins House stands out as a particularly good early example of the Greek Revival style in Missouri, especially as applied to a folk form. While its Tidewater design was the product of a Southern building tradition, the house was acquired in 1854 by German immigrants whose descendants apparently saw no need to make basic changes. Except for an enclosed gallery and a one-story addition, the house today appears much as it did in the mid-19th century, inside as well as out. Also, the hewn square logs that formed the dogtrot or crossover are boldly displayed in the unplastered upstairs hall. The period of significance is from circa 1837 to circa 1854, representing a likely timeframe for the property's original construction as a log dogtrot house through its metamorphosis into a central passage I-house. While two associated agricultural properties from the same timeframe are nearby, for various reasons only the house is being nominated. The Lansdown-Higgins House exhibits integrity of design, materials, craftsmanship, workmanship, feeling and association.

**ELABORATION:** The Lansdown-Higgins House is on land originally entered by members of the Skidmore family in the early 1820s, when Missouri's statehood was new and the population of Cole County barely topped 1,000.<sup>3</sup> While the date of construction is unknown, Sommerer family tradition considers Dr. George Washington Lansdown, who migrated to Missouri from Virginia, as the most likely builder of the dogtrot house and possibly of the I-house conversion as well. From 1836 through 1840, Lansdown purchased the Skidmore land and some additional acreage at the base of and within a great bend in the Moreau River, a usually shallow tributary of the Missouri River. If the makeover from dogtrot to I-house was not initiated by Lansdown, another likely candidate was Joseph Higgins, a wealthy farmer who owned the property from 1842-50.<sup>4</sup>

In 1833, Lansdown came to Jefferson City, Missouri, where he formed a medical partnership after graduating from the Pennsylvania Medical College at Philadelphia. Lansdown's partner apparently was William Bolton of North Carolina. The two are said to have met at medical school and Lansdown's sisters

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<sup>3</sup>Silas Emmett Lucas, Jr., The History of Cole, Moniteau, Morgan, Benton, Miller, Maries, and Osage Counties, Missouri (Chicago: Goodspeed, 1889), p. 215. According to Harold Sommerer, Samuel Skidmore purchased the land in 1824.

<sup>4</sup>Harold J. Sommerer and Jack Kaufmann, "The Sommerer Home," handwritten, undated, pp. 1-3.

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

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Lansdown-Higgins House  
Cole County, MO

Sara and Mary married William and Walter Bolton, respectively, in 1832 before coming to Missouri. In 1835, Lansdown married Mary Dixson of North Carolina and settled in what became the town of Spring Garden a few miles southwest of the Lansdown-Higgins House. Lansdown is said to have named the town in memory of his Virginia home, Spring Garden, and to have opened the area's first store, farmed and practiced medicine there before purchasing the land on which the Lansdown-Higgins House stands. According to Sommerer family tradition, Lansdown borrowed money from the Boltons and from his wife's brother Warren Dixson and had the house, known simply as the Lansdown House, built in 1840, perhaps with slave labor. Unfortunately, whether "built" means constructed from the ground up or something else is unknown. Pioneers had of course erected log houses in Missouri since the earliest years of settlement, but the tradition of log construction persisted well beyond 1840. The farm, meanwhile, had grown to 360 acres. By the early 1850s, however, Lansdown is said to have relocated to Tuscumbia in Miller County.<sup>5</sup>

In 1842, Lansdown sold the acreage to Joseph Higgins who continued the development of its agricultural potential. In 1850, Higgins--married to Ellen Dellinger in 1848--harvested 500 bushels of Indian corn which was considerably more than needed for his few animals, as well as 200 bushels of wheat; he clearly produced for the cash market. The farm, by this time consisting of 440 acres with 150 acres improved, was valued at \$2,000. Higgins valued his implements at \$50 and his livestock--three horses and two milk cows--at \$70. Animals slaughtered for personal use were valued at \$60. Although Higgins owned 33 slaves in 1850, only three of them were adult males and most were children. Later in 1850 Higgins sold the farm to William Riggins, who operated a mill in Jefferson City. Riggins, also a slaveowner, kept the farm only four years before selling it to Simon Kerl, a native of Germany who came to the United States with his parents in 1838, at the age of nine. The family of Adam J. Kerl settled at Osage City, east of Jefferson City on the Osage River. While it is possible that Riggins sided and otherwise elaborated on the house, rather than Lansdown or Higgins, there is no suggestion of this in a house and family history, "The Sommerer Home," written by Harold J. Sommerer and Jack Kaufmann. Riggins died while serving in the Confederate Army. Slave dwellings undoubtedly existed on the property before the Civil War but no record of their type or location on the farmstead has survived.<sup>6</sup>

The purchase of the property by Simon Kerl in 1854 marked the beginning of a long period of German ownership by the Kerl and Sommerer families, which continued until 1996. Kerl was well-educated. After graduation from the University of Missouri in 1851, Kerl taught school in Jefferson City and New York. Later he received a master's degree from Washington University in St. Louis. Kerl's accomplishments included serving as a presidential secretary in the administration of Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War and, later, writing school texts, poetry and other books with titles like Kerl's Grammar, Kerl's Speller, Kerl's

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<sup>5</sup>Goodspeed Publishing Company, History of Cole, Moniteau, Benton, Miller, Maries, and Osage Counties Missouri (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1889), pp. 536, 558, 569, 785-786; Sommerer and Kaufmann, op.cit.

<sup>6</sup>Sommerer and Kaufmann, pp. 2-4; Manuscript Census Schedules, Agriculture and Slaves, Cole County, Missouri, 1850.

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

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Lansdown-Higgins House  
Cole County, MO

Arithmetic, and The Secession of Virginia.<sup>7</sup> Although details of Kerl's experiences and duties as a presidential secretary are unavailable, Kerl-authored books still exist and copies were intact in the house itself until a few years ago.

While Kerl was in Washington and her own husband was on duty with the Union Army, Mrs. Heinrich Goetz--Kerl's sister--lived in the Lansdown-Higgins House. During the war, Confederate forces are said to have camped on the front yard while scavenging in the neighborhood. After the war Kerl returned to the farm and, in 1868, married Katherina Maria (Mary) Sommerer whose parents Mathias and Rosina Duenkel Sommerer lived just half a mile away. The Sommerers had immigrated from Bavaria in 1842. Despite his other talents, however, Kerl apparently was not a very good farmer and his name is missing from the agricultural census for 1860. Two of his wife's brothers, John Adam Sommerer and Mathias Sommerer Jr., are said to have taken care of the farm after Kerl married into the family. Unfortunately, the relevant agricultural census is either incomplete or out of place for 1870, at least on microfilm, so information about production on the farmstead during Kerl's ownership is not readily available. However, the farm increased in size during this period, to 640 acres.<sup>8</sup>

Simon Kerl died in 1876, leaving his wife with a seven year old son, Thomas Theodore. Maria Sommerer Kerl married Simon's half-brother Markus Kerl soon after her first husband's death. But Kerl's management skills were inadequate to offset the drought, grasshoppers and unstable crop prices that plagued area farmers in the late 1870s, and by 1879 the family's debts had become overwhelming. When the farm was auctioned at the Cole County Courthouse, the successful bidder was Mathias Sommerer, Maria's father, who bought the farm for his two sons. Mathias Jr. received the western half and John Adam received the eastern half containing the Lansdown-Higgins House. In 1881, Maria and Markus had a son of their own, Irving Kerl. When Maria died years later, Markus married her cousin Barbara Sommerer, a daughter of Mathias' brother John Sommerer, thus continuing a pattern of intermarriage which was common among German immigrants who settled in Missouri.<sup>9</sup> A 1914 Cole County atlas depicts the Sommerer farmstead surrounded by farms belonging primarily to German families.

John Adam Sommerer took possession of his portion of the farmstead, 310 acres including the farm nucleus containing the house, sometime in 1879. He and Anna Ziegler, married in 1880, had eight children. The northwest addition and enclosed gallery may already have been in place, but if not they almost certainly were high priority items to accommodate such a large family. Sommerer and Kaufmann also note that "John and Anna and their four sons and three daughters put more work into their half of the farm than had ever been done. They cleared more and more land for pasture."<sup>10</sup> Under Sommerer's

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<sup>7</sup>Sommerer and Kaufmann, pp. 4-5.

<sup>8</sup>Sommerer and Kaufmann, pp. 4-6.

<sup>9</sup>Goodspeed, pp. 895-896; Sommerer and Kaufmann, pp. 6-7.

<sup>10</sup>Goodspeed, pp. 895-896; Sommerer and Kaufmann, pp. 7-8.

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Lansdown-Higgins House  
Cole County, MO

management, production was diversified but the farm was clearly involved in a market economy while providing most of the family's own food. According to the 1880 agricultural census, Sommerer owned 50 sheep and 50 swine, along with horses, mules, cows and poultry. Fifteen acres of Indian corn produced 600 bushels, more than enough for animal food. Thirty-five acres of wheat produced 600 bushels, most of which was probably sold since wheat was not generally fed to livestock and white flour was readily available and preferred for baking purposes. Surplus potatoes, fruit and eggs would also have been sold.<sup>11</sup>

In 1889, a biographical sketch of John Adam Sommerer stated in part: "Mr. Summerer [the family name was temporarily anglicized] has a fine farm of 350 acres, with 125 acres well improved and well cultivated. He has good barns, out-buildings, and has an unusually nice frame building as a residence. He is a Republican in politics, and is a member of the Lutheran Church, as is also his family."<sup>12</sup>

After Sommerer died in 1927, a son, Fred J. Sommerer, purchased the estate from his siblings. He lived there with his wife, Emma Celesta Kaufmann, and sister, Maria Sommerer. Fred J. and Emma Celesta's son, Harold John Sommerer, born in 1932, inherited the property in 1972. He lived in the house, modernizing it only to a limited extent, and operated the farm until his death in a car accident in 1996. According to Sommerer and Kaufmann's monograph (completed by Kaufmann), Sommerer "didn't like modern gadgets and didn't like to part with anything from the past. He had a TV and refrigerator and freezer but those were the main luxuries he allowed himself to enjoy."<sup>13</sup>

From all indications, the Kerls and Sommerers were essentially caretakers for the Greek Revival I-House that was fashioned from a dogtrot at some point prior to 1854, making only minimal changes during their long tenure of ownership. The original building was representative of what McAlester and McAlester call the Midland log tradition, the dominant form of pre-railroad folk housing in much of the eastern United States. Typically, Midland houses were single-pen, double-pen, saddlebag or dogtrot buildings with walls of massive, square-hewn logs. Round-log construction also occurred, but usually houses or cabins fashioned from round logs were expected to provide only temporary shelter. The dogtrot form, with two parallel rooms separated by an open breezeway with flooring, all under the same gabled or hipped roof, typically had one or more exterior end chimneys which reflected its Tidewater South antecedents. The rooms were of equal or nearly equal size, with doors either in the facade or facing onto the breezeway. One, 1½, and two-story versions were constructed. Frame as well as log dogtrot houses were built, although of course only log examples were representative of the Midland tradition. Sometimes, the dogtrot form resulted from an expansion of a single-pen house, and the open passageway became a focal point for family life.

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<sup>11</sup>Manuscript Census Schedules, Agriculture, Cole County, Missouri, 1880.

<sup>12</sup>Goodspeed, p. 896.

<sup>13</sup>Sommerer and Kaufmann, pp. 7-8.

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Dogtrot houses probably were built in smaller numbers than other forms of Midland log houses because of their somewhat greater complexity (there were more corner joints to cut), while the problems of constructing tall walls of hewn logs made examples of more than one story relatively uncommon.<sup>14</sup> Today the sheer novelty of the form makes it widely recognizable. Talbot Hamlin illustrates log construction in Missouri with a photograph of a dogtrot house.<sup>15</sup>

The Lansdown-Higgins House apparently began as a basic log dogtrot house with an open breezeway and an upper half story, bracketed on the ends by massive exterior chimneys. Whether facade entrances in the original pens became the present windows or whether the doors simply faced onto the breezeway, as they now face the central hall, is among the house's secrets. The application of weatherboards improved the sealing of the walls against drafts while, perhaps, making the house appear more civilized, more up-to-date. But since it also obscured the house's log construction system, only conjecture is possible about some things without removing sheathing.

For now, what can be learned about the house's log frame is generally limited to what can be seen on the inside. Fortunately, the texture of the hewn logs and their chinking is visible under the staircase and throughout the upstairs hall, where the logs were simply whitewashed rather than plastered as in other areas of the house. While it is possible that the dogtrot originally stood a full two stories, it seems more likely that horizontal logs were added in order to elevate the roof to its present height when it was transformed into an I-house. On both inside walls, for example, the uppermost two logs stand out because they have little if any chinking compared with the lower walls. This, along with other details, seems to indicate a later stage of construction, with different standards. At the second floor entrance, a transom and its flanking windows are somewhat awkwardly inserted into the gap between the top of the original wall and the log that became the new top plate. A stud wall bridges the gap at the opposite end of the hall. How common it was to elevate the roof of a log house is unknown. In Folk Houses of the Bluegrass, Clay Lancaster describes a two-story dogtrot house in Fayette County, Kentucky, which presumably was created in that form by elevating the roof several feet above its original position, propping it with vertical log sections.<sup>16</sup> The assumption is that the roof of the Lansdown-Higgins House was lifted in a conventional manner with horizontal rather than upright log sections when the building was reworked into the form of an I-house.

How long the Lansdown-Higgins House existed as a regular dogtrot house before being transformed into an I-house is unknown, but such a conversion was not radical. The floor plan of the central passage I-house is very similar to that of the dogtrot house. As McAlester and McAlester point out, problems with

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<sup>14</sup> McAlester and McAlester, p.96.

<sup>15</sup> McAlester and McAlester, pp. 82-86; Allen G. Noble, Wood, Brick, and Stone: The North American Settlement Landscape, Volume 1: Houses (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), pp.117-118; Talbot Hamlin, The American Spirit in Architecture (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press), p.142.

<sup>16</sup> Clay Lancaster, Antebellum Houses of the Bluegrass (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), p.9.

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log-wall houses usually stemmed from expansions and additions. Since the four corner joints work as a unit to provide structural strength, interrupting any log wall would weaken the overall building.<sup>17</sup> But for conversion to an I-house, it was unnecessary to disturb the corners (which, as partially viewed in the upstairs hall, appear to be V-notched). Elevating the roof by adding hewn logs or other structural members to the tops of the original walls must have been difficult but probably involved considerably less work than building an I-house from the ground up. Otherwise, the transformation mainly involved enclosing both ends of the breezeway while constructing entrances at both levels and covering the log walls with weatherboard. Greek Revival was a popular architectural choice for Missouri builders of the period, and characteristic multipane transoms were incorporated above the entrances. The main Greek Revival element, however, is the two-story portico.

The I-house, a British folk form originally introduced in America during colonial times, was built in Missouri from the earliest days of settlement into the first decade of the 20th century. Tall, shallow I-houses--two stories, two rooms wide and one room deep set parallel to the road to create the broadest possible facade--became especially popular in the Tidewater South. Cultural geographer Fred Kniffen is credited with "discovering" I-houses in the 1930s while studying forms and patterns of folk housing between Louisiana and Michigan. Along with their essential attributes, Kniffen noted various chimney placements and floor plans and found I-houses constructed of brick, frame, stone and logs.<sup>18</sup> Most I-houses were made of frame or homemade bricks. Only rarely were they made of stone or, like the Lansdown-Higgins House, logs.

Kniffen also made the connection between I-houses and affluence, noting that the I-house "early in its movement southward...became symbolic of economic attainment by agriculturists and remained so associated throughout the Upland South and its peripheral extensions." In fact, Kniffen could almost have been describing the Lansdown-Higgins House when he claimed that the basal structure of the I-house was "often a simple, one-story dogtrot house (to which) with economic affluence a second story was added and the whole structure weatherboarded."<sup>19</sup> From its location atop a low hill facing Tanner Bridge Road and adjacent to a former stage coach route, the Lansdown-Higgins House, with its pedimented portico and massive exterior end chimneys, certainly offered impressive evidence of its owner's status to neighbors and travelers through the area. Typically, owners of the farm were well-to-do professionals such as Dr. George Washington Lansdown and Simon Kerl or substantial farmers like Joseph Higgins, William Riggins and Matthias Sommerer.

In *Folk Architecture in Little Dixie*, Howard Wight Marshall called central passage I-houses "the most significant single group of houses in Missouri." Among other things, Marshall's locally-specific research

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<sup>17</sup> McAlester and McAlester, p.84.

<sup>18</sup> Fred B. Kniffen, "Folk Housing--Key to Diffusion," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Vol. 55, No. 4 (December 1965), p. 553.

<sup>19</sup> Kniffen, p. 555.

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found that the main dwelling forms in Little Dixie--an eight-county region north of the Missouri River--were also the main dwelling forms of the Upland South. Both dogtrot houses and I-houses were among the forms noted. While Cole County was not one of the counties studied by Marshall in totality, its northern edge bordering the Missouri River (an area including the Lansdown-Higgins House) was within a peripheral zone of transition around the focus area of the study.<sup>20</sup> Appropriately, all early owners of the land on which the Lansdown-Higgins House is located, including members of the Skidmore family who originally entered the acreage, were transplanted Southerners who presumably were familiar with the I-house form from past exposure.

Like other folk houses, I-Houses were often enhanced by elements of whatever architectural style was in vogue. Missouri builders from the 1830s through the 1860s frequently opted for Greek Revival, and antebellum I-houses with Greek Revival features have been documented in many parts of the state. Numerous Missouri examples have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Since 1997, contexts for the Greek Revival I-house property type have been developed for two Multiple Property Submissions from Missouri.<sup>21</sup> Identifying Greek Revival features commonly found on Missouri I-houses include an elaborated door surround with transom and sidelights, cornice and other trim suggesting a classical entablature, gable returns or full pediments, pilasters and pilaster corner boards, an entry porch supported by square or rounded classical columns, six-over-six double-hung windows with prominent straight lintels, and symmetrical facades. These and various other Greek Revival attributes are cited by the McAlesters in their architectural handbook, A Field Guide to American Houses.<sup>22</sup>

In the early 19th century, sympathetic feelings for Greece in its war for independence, combined with American democratic ideals, led to an increasing interest in Grecian architectural models that were being unearthed by archeologists. Greek Revival became a popular style in the United States after public buildings designed by William Strickland, Robert Mills, Gideon Shryock and others pointed the way. In 1798, Benjamin Henry Latrobe's Bank of Pennsylvania was the first American building with a Greek order; in 1818, Strickland's Parthenon-like Second Bank of the United States was an early milestone of the style. Disseminated by pattern books and settlers from the Upland South, the style flourished in Missouri until the Civil War, then fell out of fashion in the postwar years.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Howard Wight Marshall, Folk Architecture in Little Dixie: A Regional Culture in Missouri (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981), pp. 2, 32, 68.

<sup>21</sup> Multiple Property Submissions with contexts for the property type include "The Antebellum Resources of La Grange, Missouri" (1999) and "Antebellum Resources of Johnson, Lafayette, Pettis and Saline Counties."

<sup>22</sup> McAlester and McAlester, pp. 179-182.

<sup>23</sup> Marcus Whiffen, American Architecture Since 1780 (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1969), p.38; Carole Rifkind, A Field Guide to American Architecture (New York: The New American Library, 1980), p.38; McAlester and McAlester, pp.183-184; Talbot Hamlin, The American Spirit in Architecture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), pp.124-125.



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On the Missouri frontier, architectural compromises were common with high-style elements often greatly simplified or omitted. This is certainly the case with the Lansdown-Higgins House, which lacks some Greek Revival features ordinarily encountered in even the more threadbare examples. For instance, the house lacks such staples as cornice trim, sidelights, returns or pediments in the gables and pilaster corner boards, while its relatively plain interior probably is derivative of folk Federal, which preceded Greek Revival. Still, the exterior house clearly reflects the Greek Revival style with its two-story pedimented portico supported by square Doric columns and rear pilasters, multipane transoms, correct windows, tiny attic windows (as seen on Tidewater examples) and symmetry. While the cornice is uncommonly plain, what could be considered an entablature band between the floors across the primary facade serves a similar purpose, if perhaps inadvertently. A small rounded window in the tympanum above the portico may suggest a Federal or Early Classical Revival influence but neither style is developed. Overall, the Lansdown-Higgins House stands out as a particularly good early example of the Greek Revival style in Missouri, especially as applied to a folk form.

While the house is primarily significant for its architecture, its history also reflects a common settlement pattern in central Missouri. Following the migration of Anglo-Saxon family groups into Missouri by way of the Upland South in the early 19th century, immigrants from Germany arrived and established their own communities and close-knit groups. The Southerners brought a culture that included the possession of slaves, a plantation farming system, and perhaps a preference for the Greek Revival style of architecture. According to Russell Gerlach, settlers from Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia dominated Missouri's old-stock American population from 1830-60.<sup>24</sup> The Lansdown-Higgins House was constructed by a Southerner, perhaps Dr. George Washington Lansdown who migrated from Virginia and owned the property for several years in the 1830s and 1840s. German immigrants, possibly attracted to central Missouri by Gottfried Duden or another of the so-called resettlement authors, acquired the house in 1854 and it remained in the same family until the untimely death of Harold Sommerer in 1996.

Today the house remains an intact, strongly vernacular representation of the Greek Revival style as applied to a central passage I-House on the Missouri frontier. Combining an impressive appearance (an imposing facade with a pedimented two-story portico) with primitive simplicity (plank doors and visible logs), the house exhibits a notably high level of integrity of design, materials, craftsmanship, workmanship, feeling and association. Evidence of the building's evolution from a log dogtrot house to a Greek Revival I-house is at least partially revealed in the upstairs hall, adding interest. The one-story addition on the northwest was probably constructed at least a hundred years ago, and the gallery also was enclosed at an early date. Although construction of the addition and siding of the gallery probably occurred after the period of significance, their impact on the overall effect of the house is minimal. Ambience remains high, and the Lansdown-Higgins House is worthy of nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for Architecture.

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<sup>24</sup>Russell Gerlach, Settlement Patterns in Missouri (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), p. 19.

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### 10. Geographical Data

**Verbal Boundary Description:** Sections 7, 8, and 20 of the Grande Highland Estates subdivision, recorded in Cole County Plat Book 11, page 935.

**Boundary Justification:** The boundaries encompass the currently recorded legal description for the parcel of land which contains the house, the only remaining historic building in that parcel associated with the area of significance of architecture. All historic outbuildings adjacent and in close proximity to the house have been demolished. The historic barn is separated from the house by a new, paved access road and is contained within a separately recorded parcel. The remaining acreage originally associated with the house has been subsumed in modern development and no longer retains integrity.

### 11. Form Prepared By

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### Photographs

The following information is the same for all photographs except number 10:

Lansdown-Higgins House

5240 Tanner Bridge Road, Jefferson City vicinity

Cole County, Missouri

Roger Maserang (#10, photographer unknown)

March 1999 (#10, circa 1900)

Missouri Cultural Resource Inventory, Historic Preservation Program, Jefferson City, Missouri (except #10)

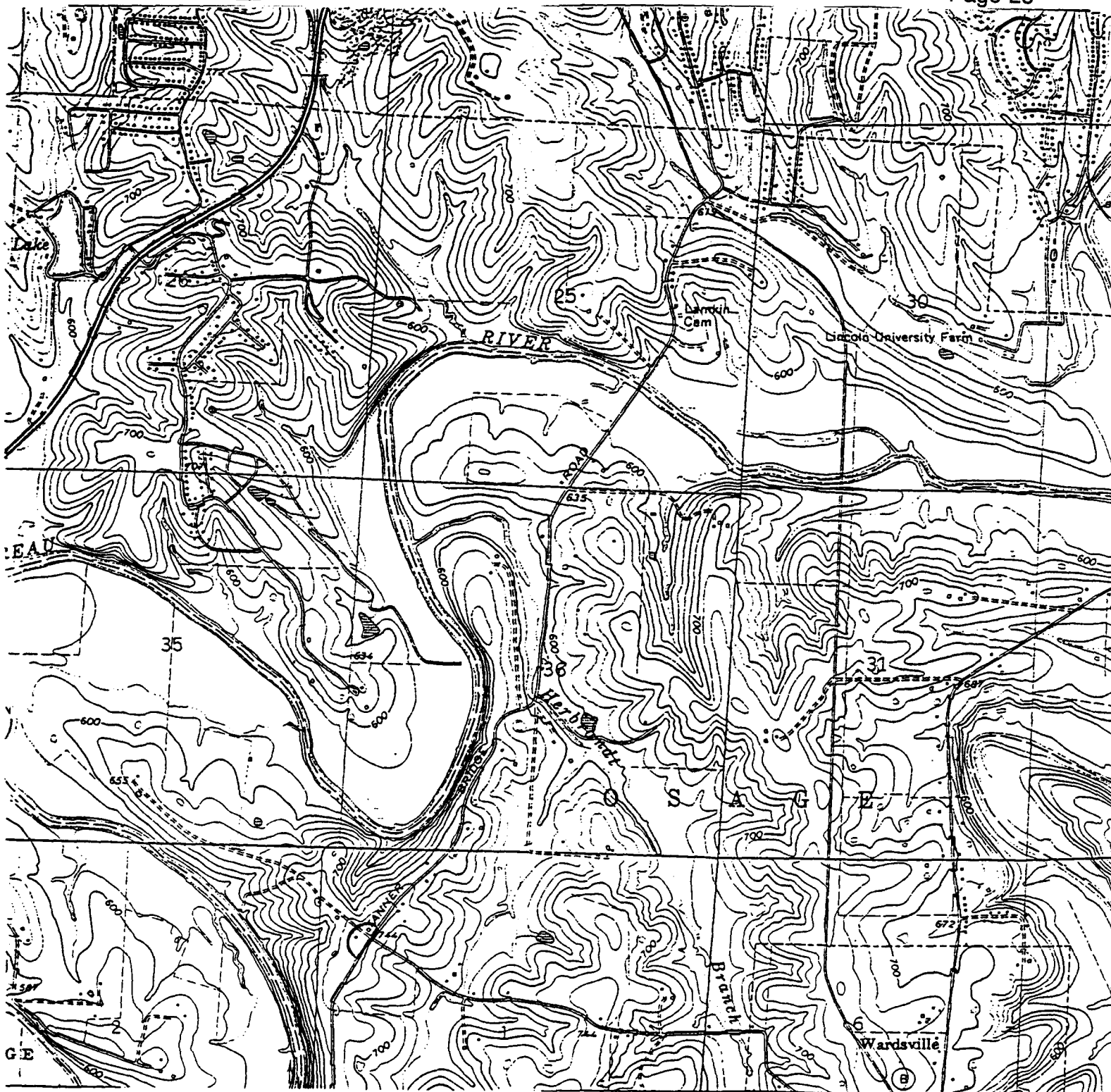
1. South and east facades, facing northwest
2. Primary (south) facade, facing north
3. West and south facades, facing northeast
4. East facade, facing west
5. North facade, facing south
6. Portico detail, facing north
7. Upstairs porch, facing south
8. Typical first floor window, facing north
9. Transom detail, facing north
10. Circa 1900 photo, south elevation, facing north
11. Hall, first floor, facing south
12. Hall, first floor, facing north
13. East parlor, facing south
14. Hall, second floor, facing north
15. Hall, second floor, facing south
16. East bedroom, facing south
17. Second floor porch, facing west
18. Attic view, facing west

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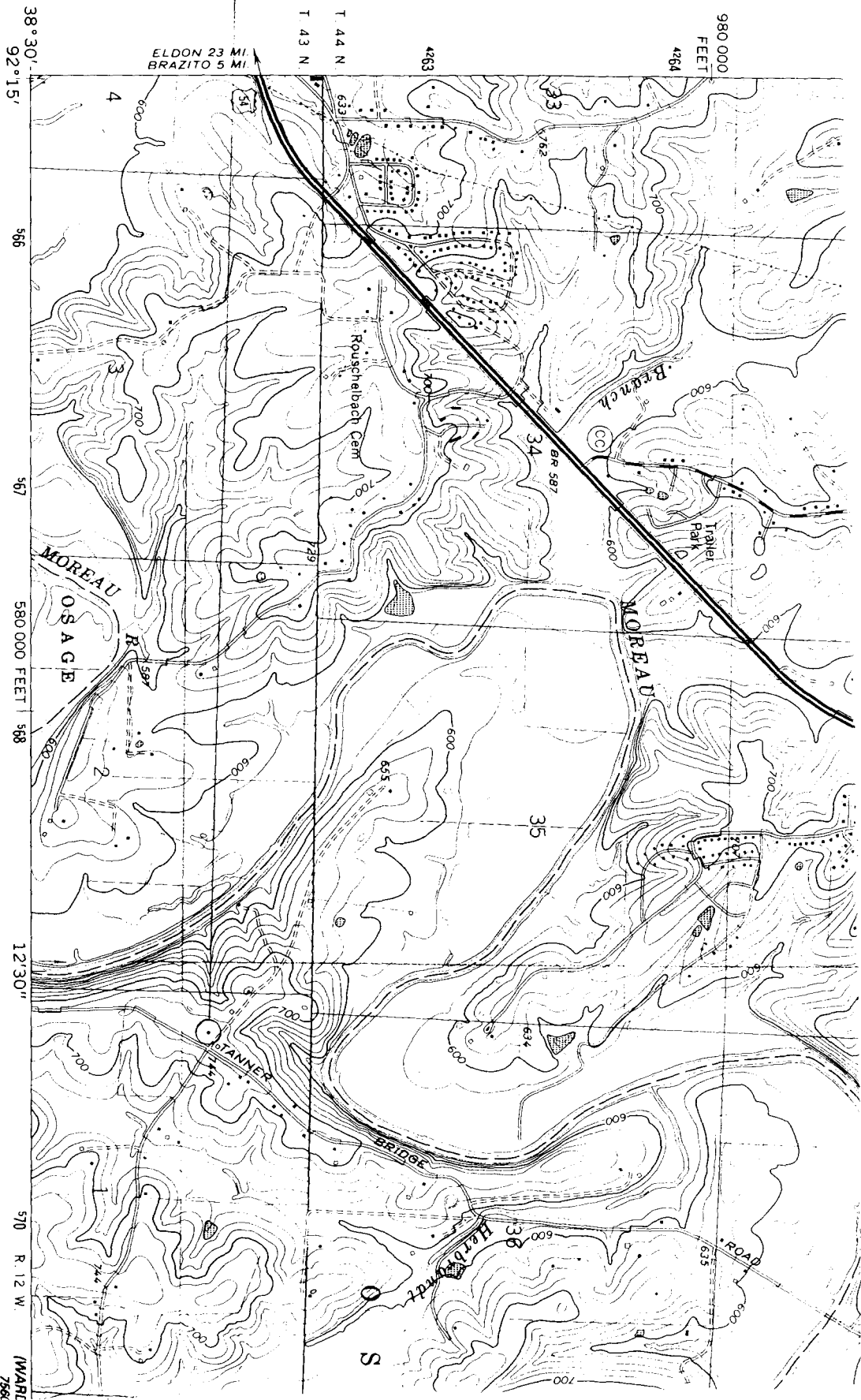
National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 10

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# LANSDOWN-HIGGINS HOUSE COLE COUNTY, MO 15/569290/4262110



(BRAZITO)  
 7560 IV NE

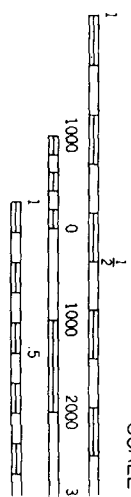
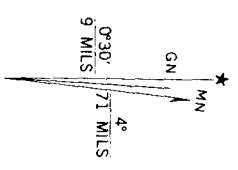
Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
 Control by USGS and USC&GS

Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial  
 photographs taken 1965 and planetable surveys 1967  
 Supersedes map dated 1939

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
 10,000-foot grid based on Missouri coordinate system, central zone  
 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
 zone 15, shown in blue

Red tint indicates area in which only landmark buildings are shown  
 To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983  
 move the projection lines 1 meter south and  
 14 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks  
 There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of  
 the National or State reservations shown on this map

UTM GRID AND 1981 MAGNETIC NORTH  
 DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET



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 NATIONAL GEODETIC VE

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 GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVE  
 AND THE DIVISION OF GE  
 MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL  
 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS









