

NR LISTED 9/30/93

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Tolbert E. Gill House

other name/site number: N/A

2. Location

street & number: State Highway 22

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Paris

vicinity: N/A

state: AR county: Logan code: AR 083 zip code: 72855

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>3</u>	<u>      </u>	buildings
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>      </u>	structures
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	objects
<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

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

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.      See continuation sheet.

Cathryn H Slater Signature of certifying official August 12, 1993 Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program State or Federal agency and bureau

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

     Signature of commenting or other official      Date

     State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register            
     See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register            
     See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain):

     Signature of Keeper      Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: DOMESTIC Sub: Single dwelling  
Current: COMMERCE/TRADE Sub: Office building

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Other

Other Description: Rustic

Materials: foundation Stone roof Asbestos/asphalt
walls Stone other Concrete architectural and landscape ornament

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

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

Applicable National Register Criteria: C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE

Period(s) of Significance: 1920-1935

Significant Dates: N/A

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Gill, Tolbert E.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above. X See continuation sheet.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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X See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of Property: Less than one

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing      Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>15</u>	<u>433310</u>	<u>3905460</u>	B	<u>15</u>	_____	_____
C	<u>15</u>	_____	_____	D	<u>15</u>	_____	_____

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Part of the SE quarter of the NW quarter of Section 11, Township 7 North, Range 26 West in Logan County, Arkansas, described as beginning at the NW corner of the SE quarter of the said section, thence South 205 feet, thence East 65 feet, thence N 01 degrees 24 minutes West 205.1 feet, thence West 60 feet to the point of beginning, containing .29 acres more or less.

Boundary Justification: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

This boundary includes all the property historically associated with this resource.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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Name/Title: Kenneth Story, Architectural Historian

Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

Date: 08/11/93

Street & Number: 323 Center Street, Suite 1500

Telephone: (501) 324-9880

City or Town: Little Rock

State: AR

Zip: 72201

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## Summary

## Criterion C, local significance

The Tolbert E. Gill House is locally significant under Criterion C by virtue of its overwhelming architectural uniqueness. Though similar to one other known complex of structures within the state -- the Crystal River Tourist Court in Cave City (Sharp County) -- this building, constructed during the period 1920-1935, has no known stylistic antecedents and thus appears to be attributable solely to the peculiar genius and craftsmanship of its designer, builder and first occupant, Tolbert E. Gill. Furthermore, certain of the surrounding landscape features and sculpture -- designed and installed continuously during the period of house construction and until the end of the Second World War -- bear a strong resemblance to the work of the Mexican sculptor Dionicio Rodriguez, who was known for his sculptural renditions of such natural forms as trees, mushrooms, and logs.

## Elaboration

Paris, Arkansas was the first Logan County seat, achieving that status in 1874 via the authority of a county-wide election held to determine the location of the center of county government (though there were probably settlers of European descent living in the area prior to that time, it is not clear how many there were and to what extent they formed a cohesive community of any kind). Paris grew gradually and prospered, largely due to its location on one of the major overland roads between the rich, cotton-growing land of surrounding rural Logan County and both the Arkansas River and the Little Rock-Ft. Smith Railroad that ran along its north bank. It became an important regional hub, therefore, not only for the conducting of official county business but also for trading, social activities, and obtaining other services.

Paris also grew as a result of the German-Swiss immigration that occurred during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The explosive growth of the railroad industry in Arkansas after the Civil War tied many of the heretofore rural and relatively isolated parts of the state into a national and international network that would generate far-reaching social and economic implications. One of the earliest was the realization on the part of the railroads that their fortunes would only be enhanced through the encouragement of new settlement from outside the state, thereby increasing the demand for both passenger and freight traffic. European immigration in particular increased dramatically after the cessation of hostilities that had closed many Southern ports and rendered even some Northern ports unsafe. Many of those that arrived from such countries as Germany, Italy and parts of Eastern Europe were usually poorer people from rural areas that possessed few work skills, typically knowing only one of the building trades or farming.

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One need shared by all immigrants to the United States, however, was land, and this was one commodity the railroads in particular possessed in abundance. The railroad industry had been rather successful in convincing the federal government that large land grants along their railroad lines were necessary to create the nationwide rail infrastructure that the government (and the railroad owners) desired. This was certainly true of the fledgling Little Rock-Fort Smith Railroad that completed its line between the two cities in 1876 and in the process gained an abundance of unclaimed land on both sides of the Arkansas River with which to lure immigrants to the valley. Even the new immigrants that did not purchase their property directly from the railroads frequently followed other countrymen who did in order to remain part of a familiar and culturally-cohesive community. Paris certainly received its share of German-Swiss immigration, due in part to its status as a governmental and commercial hub for the region, but due also to its relatively close proximity to the fledgling Benedictine abbey at Subiaco, located approximately five miles to the east, which would become a religious and cultural focus for these largely Roman Catholic immigrants.

By one account, Tolbert E. Gill -- himself either a German immigrant or a first-generation American descended from German immigrants -- first came to Paris, Arkansas as early as 1918; however, virtually all sources agree that he relocated to the northern county seat of Logan County (northern and southern districts had been created by 1900, with Booneville becoming the seat of the southern district) by 1920, at which time he began work on this residence. Gill's principle vocation was a clothing and dry cleaning service that he owned and operated in downtown Paris, though he purportedly worked as a barber prior to his arrival there.

Clearly, Mr. Gill acquired some construction expertise along the way (one informant recalled having heard that a local architect, Mansill "Max" Sutton, designed both this and the other Gill residence, the Evelyn Gill Walker House, designed for his daughter; however, though it is known that Mr. Mansill did design several buildings in Paris, interviews conducted with several members of the extended Mansill family did not produce any documentation of this, either written or recalled). Located across State Highway 22 (known locally as West Walnut Street) from the home of his in-laws, Gill began with a small, wood frame building already on the site. Doing the vast majority of the construction work himself, Gill expanded and elaborated the existing building to create this residence for himself and his family over the next fifteen years. Though the overall design of the house itself is not unusual -- a one-and-one-half story gable roof core with a single-story, wrap-around section that includes both an open porch and an enclosed room -- the style and construction technique reflect a clear confidence and proficiency with masonry construction. Gill's previous construction experience is not known, but given the fact that he built this himself and over a period of fifteen years, it is quite conceivable that he was self-taught. Nevertheless, this three-dimensional, bouldered aesthetic is unique and without

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known precedent (there is no reason to believe that the similarity to the Crystal River Tourist Court buildings is anything other than circumstantial), as are the bouldered stone walls, bird baths, planters, and other landscape features designed in the same style.

The concrete sculpture surrounding the residence, however, is another matter entirely. In its essentials it bears a remarkable resemblance to the concrete sculpture of Dionicio Rodriguez, the sculptor of Mexican ancestry who worked out of his studio in San Antonio, Texas. Rodriguez designed and installed his unique sculptural work at sites in Texas, Arkansas and Tennessee during the 1930s, with one of his largest and best known installations occurring at the T. R. Pugh Park in North Little Rock, Arkansas. His rendering in concrete of such natural forms as mushrooms, logs, and stumps was decidedly distinctive during his lifetime and has since become the focus of substantial scholarly and curatorial study to understand and appreciate his work more completely. While there have been artists who have attempted to imitate Rodriguez and his sculptural style, such study has uncovered no known stylistic antecedents.

There is substantial evidence to support the contention that Mr. Gill was, in fact, directly exposed to both the work of Rodriguez and the concrete techniques Rodriguez employed to craft his sculpture. One informant who was raised in Paris during Mr. Gill's lifetime recalls that Mr. Gill spent time in North Little Rock helping Rodriguez with the work in T. R. Pugh Park in the mid- to late-1930s, during which time he was also finishing the house and, presumably, beginning the landscaping work on the surrounding yard. This account of Mr. Gill's experience is corroborated by another local resident who knew Mr. Gill personally during Gill's later years. Mr. Ray Blaty recalled that Mr. Gill had told him of spending some "slack time" over the course of several summers in North Little Rock, working with Rodriguez on the creation and installation of the various sculptures there. It is known that Rodriguez frequently employed such assistants; and though Rodriguez could speak little English, he apparently experienced little problem in communicating his techniques to his helpers. Even a cursory comparison of Gill's concrete sculpture with that of Rodriguez reveals the remarkable stylistic similarities, and so virtually confirms the influence of Rodriguez. However, it is important to note that Mr. Blaty and others specifically remember Mr. Gill working on and producing these works himself, and later he even opened a small studio and store on the south side of town for the purpose of making and selling his creations; and thus there is no reason to suspect that he simply brought some of Rodriguez's own work for installation in his yard.

The Tolbert E. Gill House and its richly-landscaped yard comprise a truly unique testament to the creative inspiration of Tolbert Gill, the man who designed and built it all. His obvious interest in understanding traditional masonry construction techniques was merely one step along the path toward his greater goal of gaining a mastery that would allow him, whether intentionally



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or not, to develop a unique architectural aesthetic that was the result of his own inspiration and vision. And although his sculptural style clearly owes its inspiration to the work of his teacher Dionicio Rodriguez, he created a body of work that demonstrates a comparable control of the medium of sculptural concrete. For these reasons the Tolbert E. Gill House is eligible under Criterion C with local significance.

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### Bibliography

Blaty, Ray, *Interview*, April 2, 1993 and May 25, 1993.

Czaplicki, Karen, *Interview*, December 3, 1992.

Workers of the Writers' Program. *The WPA Guide to 1930's Arkansas*, with a new introduction by Elliot West. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1987 (original copyright 1941).

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Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1**Summary**

Located on the south side of State Highway 22 west of downtown Paris, the Tolbert E. Gill House is a one-and-one-half story, reinforced concrete and stone veneer residence designed in a stone rubble aesthetic style resembling the later style that would become known as Rustic but which actually is unique to its builder and original occupant, Tolbert E. Gill. The fundamentally simple plan of the house -- formed by a rectangular one-and-one-half story section with a full-width, single story combination porch/room section across the front and a separate garage building to the east connected by a single stone arch -- is obscured by the picturesque texture created by the irregular stone veneer. The house and garage are also surrounded by an assortment of stone walls and concrete sculpture -- also created by Mr. Gill -- that are included in the nomination.

**Elaboration**

The Tolbert E. Gill House is a one-and-one-half story, reinforced concrete and stone veneer residence designed in a stone rubble aesthetic style resembling the later style that would become known as Rustic but which actually is unique to its builder and original occupant, Tolbert E. Gill. The fundamentally simple plan of the house -- formed by a rectangular one-and-one-half story section with a full-width, single story combination porch/room section across the front and a separate garage building to the east connected by a single stone arch -- is obscured by the picturesque texture created by the irregular stone veneer. A stone chimney vents an original fireplace near the intersection of the single-story front section and the western wall, and another, smaller brick chimney rises through the main gable peak near its midpoint. The gable roof surfaces are all covered with asbestos shingles designed to resemble slate; the flat roof surfaces are sheathed with a built-up/tar system, and the hipped roof on the rear has been recently re-clad with modern composition shingles. The walls are finished with fieldstone, and a continuous stone foundation supports the entire structure.

The northern or front elevation of the main house is formed by the single-story, combination porch/room section set in front of the main one-and-one half story, gable roof rectangle of the house. The porch/room section dominates the elevation by virtue of its massive arched openings and castellated roof parapet. The two arched openings to the east lead into the open entrance porch behind, the rear wall of which is fenestrated with a pair of one-over-one windows to the east and a single-leaf entrance to the west, next to the perpendicular wall of the enclosed section. The large openings continue to the west in the enclosed section, though these arches have been squared-off to accept the large, combination windows. This "wrap-around" section terminates

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with a perpendicular wall that runs into the side of the western elevation, next to the stone chimney. The portion of the gable end wall above the single-story section is relieved by a single, symmetrically-placed arched opening that is filled with a pair of one-over-one sash windows. The single-story garage building to the east (described below) is connected to the main house with a stone arch that is surmounted by a concrete eagle.

The eastern elevation is formed by the recessed porch at the southern end, the entrance porch openings at the northern end, and the side gable wall, which is fenestrated with two pair of one-over-one wood sash windows. The southern recessed porch contains a single-leaf entrance in its northern wall and a single, small window in its western wall, which is otherwise blank, though its concrete finish has been molded to make it resemble vertical logs. The eastern wall inside the northern porch is relieved only by a single-leaf entrance into the room beyond. The western elevation opposite is composed of the single-story, wrap-around section to the north, the side gable wall in the center, and the single-story, hipped roof rear section to the south. The wrap-around section contains the large, rectangular windows described above in the beveled corner bay and the western bay before it terminates with a perpendicular wall returning to the western, side gable wall. The tall, irregular chimney is further ornamented with a decorative open stone arch that resembles a bellcote set atop a false buttress. A small arched window opening is placed in the wall just to the south. A pair of one-over-one sash windows lights the wall to the south, and another pair fenestrates this wall of the hipped roof section on the back.

The southern or rear elevation is by far the simplest of the four, as it features the recessed porch at its eastern end, a single one-over-one sash window near the center, and a pair of identical windows near its western end. A grouped pair of small windows are symmetrically-placed in the gable peak above.

Apart from the aforementioned arched openings that abound in this design and the concrete eagle sculpture above the garage/house connecting arch, the principal detail of note is created by the rich interplay of light and shadow created by the bulky, irregular river stones used to finish the exterior walls. These heavy, rounded stones, installed without apparent finishing of any kind, lend the exterior its rough, bouldered appearance that constitutes the building's defining aesthetic character.

The interior has been altered somewhat with the replacement of the original plaster with gypsum wallboard, but such details as the stone fireplace and overmantel, the heavy wooden entrance door, the matching stained wood door and window trim, and the narrow plank flooring all remain from the original design. Unfortunately, the map of the United States inset above the mantel that Mr. Gill created from stones representative of each state became so deteriorated in

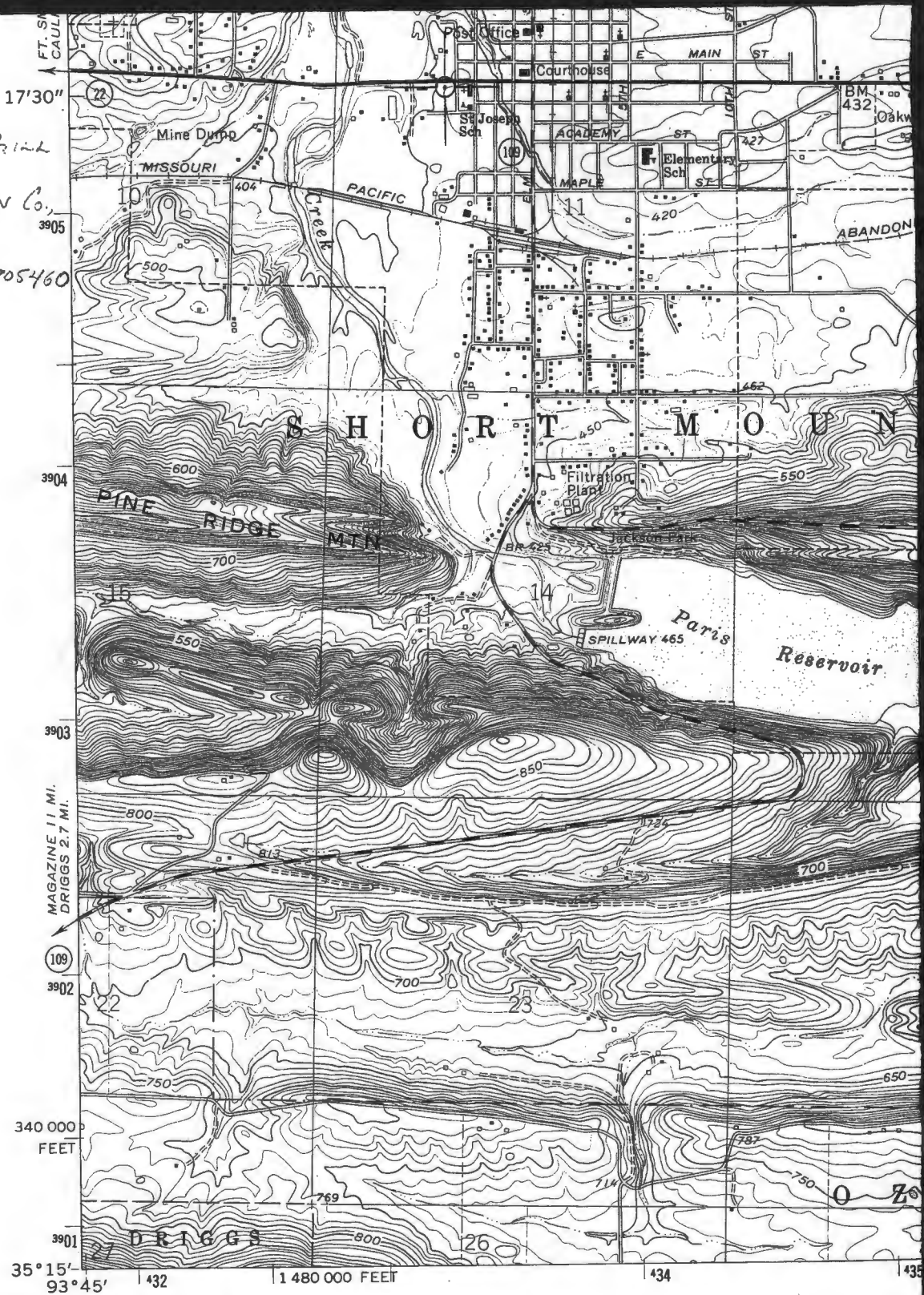
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recent years -- due to both neglect and vandalism -- that it had to be removed.

Included in the nomination is the gable roof, single-story garage building -- located to the east of the main house -- that is of identical construction and style. It is a relatively simple building, though a low, upper half-story is accessed via a semi-circular, concentric flight of steps on the rear elevation that terminates in a row of stairs with flanking stoops that strongly resembles a throne. As noted above, it is connected to the main house only by a simple stone arch that runs between its northern elevation and that of the house. The arch is adorned by the sculpted concrete eagle.

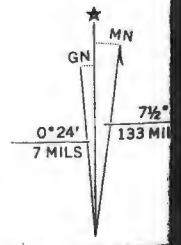
Also of note are the abundance of both designed landscape features -- such as stone walls, concrete "stumps", arched entrances, stone grottos, and the sunken concrete pond -- and sculpted concrete furniture and decorative elements, all of which were created by Mr. Gill. These features adorn the yard surrounding the two principle buildings and define the actual lot boundaries. Of especial note are the stone grotto at the southern end of the property, complete with vaulted ceiling, cooking fireplace and concrete "wood" furniture; the other stone grotto abutting the western wall, which seems specifically designed to shelter a religious icon of some kind; the concrete "log" furniture that surrounds the concrete pond at the southwest corner of the property; and the handsome, three-dimensional stone walls that run throughout. Due to the overgrowth that has occurred over the years and the difficulty therefore in determining an exact count of these features, they were not counted in the original survey; however, they are explicitly included in the nomination.

T. ALBERT E. GILL  
 HOUSE  
 PARIS, LOGAN Co.,  
 ARKANSAS  
 15/433310/3905460



BOONEVILLE 1:62 5001  
 7284 III

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
 Control by USGS, USC&GS, and USCE  
 Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial  
 photographs taken 1958. Field checked 1961  
 Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
 10,000-foot grid based on Arkansas coordinate system, north zone  
 1000-metre Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
 zone 15, shown in blue  
 Red tint indicates area in which only landmark buildings are shown  
 Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where  
 generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked  
 To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983  
 move the projection lines 6 meters south and  
 17 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks



UTM GRID AND 1961 MAGNETIC DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET  
 There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National State Reservations shown on this map









