NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018 (Expires 5/31/2012)

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Georgia Welcome Center

other names/site number Georgia Visitor Information Center

2. Location

street & number 8463 Burtons Ferry Highway (U.S. Highway 301) [ ] not for publication

city or town Sylvania [x] vicinity

state Georgia code GA county Screven code 251 zip code 30467

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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___ **national** _x_ **statewide** ___ **local**

David C Crass 11-4-11

Signature of certifying official/Title: Dr. David C. Crass/Historic Preservation Division Director/Deputy SHPO Date

Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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 12/28/11

Georgia Welcome Center
Name of Property

Screven County, Georgia
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- [ ] private
- [ ] public - Local
- [x] public - State
- [ ] public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box.)

- [x] building(s)
- [ ] district
- [ ] site
- [ ] structure
- [ ] object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
1	0	objects
2	1	**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

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

TRANSPORTATION: road-related

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

TRANSPORTATION: road-related

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: New Formalism

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE
walls: CONCRETE
GLASS
roof: ASPHALT
other: METAL: Aluminum (plaque)
STONE: Marble (wall panels)

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Georgia Welcome Center (now the Georgia Visitor Information Center) is located approximately 16 miles northeast of the county seat of Sylvania in Screven County. It is ¾ of a mile west of the Savannah River and the South Carolina border on a rural U. S. highway (301) that was once a major route between the two states. Dedicated in January 1962, the building has been in continuous use as a state visitor center. It is a one-story modernist design by Statesboro architect Edwin C. Eckles. The core measures approximately 37 feet wide by 45 feet deep, excluding the exterior canopies. The roof is a series of five pre-cast concrete vaults forming shallow arches that run from front to back. A three-bay symmetrical façade, divided by concrete piers, is flanked by a covered patio on each side. The front faces south with a plate-glass curtain wall framed in aluminum trim. There is a glass double door in the center bay. The other two bays are each inset with a rectangular panel made of pink marble from Jasper, Georgia. One panel features an aluminum dedication plaque. The side and rear walls are concrete block, some with large windows and additional doors. The west side has three restrooms – originally designated as men's, women's, and "colored" (now used as an extra restroom/storage). The interior has an L-shaped information lobby and lounge with a display area that retains several intact historic features, such as aluminum chandeliers and terrazzo floors (now under carpet). Rear staff areas include an office, kitchen, and restroom. The building is set back from the highway with grounds that include a grassy front lawn, a large 1960s sign, parking near the building, granite benches, a small utility building, and a rear picnic area with nine concrete tables set on slabs among landscaped paths.

Narrative Description

The Georgia Welcome Center is a one-story state-owned building on the north side of U.S. Highway 301 near the South Carolina border. It is set back from the two-lane road on an isolated rural section of what is also known as Burtons Ferry Highway, less than one mile west of the Savannah River (also the state line). There are no other buildings in the immediate vicinity of the Georgia Welcome Center, but the surrounding property is known locally as the Wade plantation. The setting is flat and low-lying in sparsely populated Screven County. Because the large front lawn is open and treeless, the small welcome center and its prominent sign are clearly visible for some distance when approaching from the east (photograph 2).

The design of the Georgia Welcome Center reflects many of the prevailing architectural trends of early 1960s modernism. The building is mostly devoid of references to historical precedent, and uses concrete, steel, glass, marble, and aluminum to create a streamlined compact form. Its core shape is rectangular, with an interior that is slightly deeper than it is wide. It is set on a concrete slab foundation. The front has three main bays of uniform size, plus two side bays that are covered patios (photograph 1). If the patios are included, the building is just over 60 feet wide and 45 feet deep. It has excellent integrity, appearing much as it did after its 1962 completion date.

The most distinctive feature is the series of five shallow arches that form the roof (photographs 7 and 8). Each arch is supported by front-to-back beams set on narrow concrete-block piers, creating an uninterrupted open space in the lobby (photograph 18). The arches are pre-cast concrete shells (2 ½ inches thick) forming shallow vaults that run from front to back. On the outside they are covered in asphalt roofing material, and on the inside they have sprayed-on acoustical plaster. The arches extend beyond the front curtain wall with scallop-shaped edges with metal trim. On each patio side, the roof terminates in small, upswept, wing-like extensions (photographs 6 and 13).

The front (south side) of the building consists of three bays with glass window panes set in aluminum frames between concrete posts (photograph 9). The central bay has a glass double-door (photograph 23 shows the inside view). Each side bay has a rectangular panel made from four slabs of native pink marble from Jasper, Georgia. The aluminum dedication plaque is set into the panel to the right of the door (photograph 10). It names the governor (S. Ernest Vandiver), the architect (Edwin C. Eckles, A.I.A.) and directors of the Georgia Department of Commerce and the Georgia Highway Department at the time of the dedication. The last line says, "Dedicated to the Development of Georgia's Great Travel Industry." For reasons that are unclear, the date on the plaque is 1960, even though the architectural plans were only completed in late 1960 and the official dedication was in January 1962.

Both sides of the building are shaded by the concrete canopy (photographs 11 and 12). Near the front, each side has a secondary glass entry door set in a wall of windows with aluminum trim. The walls toward the rear are painted concrete block. On the west side, to the rear, are metal doors to three small restrooms. The original plans label these as Men's, Women's, and Colored, reflecting the segregation of the early 1960s. The tiny third restroom near the rear (used by African Americans until 1967 or 1968) is now mostly used for storage (photograph 26). The men's room interior has white ceramic tile (photograph 25), and the women's room has pink tile (photograph 24). The north (rear) exterior of the building is concrete block.

The visitor's lounge and lobby is an L-shaped space (photograph 19). Floors have carpet covering the original terrazzo. The concrete block walls were covered in a carpet-like material in 1971. Ceilings retain the shape of the arches, and are coated with acoustical plaster. Spandrels under the arches have aluminum screens. There are four original aluminum chandeliers. Most other lighting fixtures and the ceiling fans were added in the early 1990s. The larger section in the front lobby has a U-shaped information desk. The smaller section of the "L", to the rear, has several brochure racks, which date to the late 1990s (photograph 20). On the wall are three back-lit oblong display panels with scenes from various regions of Georgia (photograph 21). These are visible in historic photographs of the lobby, and appear to be original.

The floor plan includes separate staff areas in the rear portion of the building, behind the information desk. A hallway (photograph 22) leads to a mechanical equipment room, an open work space, a small kitchen, and a staff restroom. These utilitarian areas all have concrete block walls.

The building sits on a 3.63-acre lot that forms a parallelogram. The front (south side) includes a semi-elliptical driveway leading to approximately 25 total parking spaces, distributed on both the east and west sides of the building (photograph 5). (The welcome center was advertised as having spaces for 40 to 50 cars when it first opened.) Mature trees and landscaping characterize the large picnic area behind (north of) the welcome center. In this area, geometrically arranged paths lead to nine concrete picnic tables set on concrete slabs and several wooden swings and metal grills (photographs 15 and 16). In the front of the building, near the flagpole, granite from Elberton, Georgia, was used on a small "Georgia Welcomes You" monument in the shape of the state (photograph 17). Two granite benches (photograph 14) also carry this slogan. The monument and benches do not appear in 1960s images of the property, but were reportedly donated at some later date.

In addition to the contributing Georgia Welcome Center building, there is a much smaller storage/utility building directly behind it that is considered noncontributing. This plain concrete block building with a flat roof did not exist in 1962, but does appear on some early 1970s images. It is unlikely it was there during the period of significance. The building has a rear extension with a gabled roof. (Most of this building can be seen on the far right in photograph 11.)

The large sign near the roadway has been on the property since opening day, and is considered a contributing object (photographs 3 and 4). Its design was used in several of the first generation of welcome centers in Georgia from the 1960s. It has a metal frame topped by a shallow arch, the state seal in a circle, and two sign

panels (plastic or vinyl) with the words "Georgia Welcome Center" on the large upper panel and "Georgia Information, Rest Area" and hours of operation on the smaller panel below.

Two non-historic structures that shelter a well and a pump are not included in the resource count due to their small size. These are located in the picnic area, and are not highly visible. A wastewater treatment plant (sewage lift station) to the rear was built in 1972 on additional land that is separated by a fence. It is not included within the National Register boundary, and was not in the original boundaries of the welcome center. (The fence line is visible in the background of photograph 16.)

Georgia Welcome Center
Name of Property

Screven County, Georgia
County and State

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.)

[x] 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.

[x] 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.

[x] G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE
ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance
1962-1969

Significant Dates
January 1962 – dedication of completed building

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Eckles, Edwin C. (architect)

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance for the Georgia Welcome Center begins with the completion of the building in 1962 and culminates with the opening of the last of the "first generation" of Georgia visitor centers in 1969 in Augusta. The first seven centers to serve automobile tourists at entry points to the state (plus an eighth at the Atlanta airport) were all part of the same initiative under the newly created state Tourist (now Tourism)

Division. These prototype visitor centers (many with similar designs) were initially completed at an average rate of approximately one per year, but after 1969 there was a hiatus of several years before any new centers were constructed. For this reason, the period of 1962 to 1969 can be viewed as a distinct era in the history of tourism in Georgia.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

The Georgia Welcome Center achieved its significance within a period less than 50 years before its nomination, and must therefore meet Criteria Consideration G. The property is exceptionally significant because of its important role in Georgia as the first state welcome center and tourist information station. It was the forerunner of all visitor information centers in the state and it represents the beginning of an entire program designed to showcase Georgia as an attractive destination for travelers to linger, rather than as a pass-through to other places. This emphasis on hospitality and marketing to out-of-state visitors was a major initiative of Governor Ernest Vandiver who believed that state government should be a catalyst for economic development. The Georgia Welcome Center in Sylvania was the first tangible result of these efforts, with the governor speaking at the 1962 dedication ceremony. The modern design also reflected the Vandiver administration's desire for Georgia to be seen as a state that was looking to the future, while offering attractions to induce tourists to visit. The Sylvania center is the only welcome center from the 1960s that is still operating with its original use.

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Georgia Welcome Center is significant at the state level under Criterion A in the area of entertainment/recreation because the facility was the first state welcome center in Georgia, as well as the forerunner of a series of six more information stations for automobile tourists constructed between 1962 and 1969. These were initially conceived under the 1959-1963 administration of Governor Ernest Vandiver, who actively promoted a comprehensive tourism initiative by creating a new Tourist Division in what was then the Georgia Department of Commerce. The property is also significant at the state level under Criterion C in the area of architecture as an excellent and intact example of mid-20th-century modernism in a small public building in Georgia. Architect Edwin C. Eckles (1928-1995) of Statesboro designed the building with an unusual series of arched vaults made of thin pre-cast concrete shells forming the roof, ceiling, and canopy. On the exterior, the vaults have a scalloped edge that seems to almost float above the lightweight glass and aluminum façade. The choice of a modern design, utilizing native Georgia marble details, fit with the new emphasis on state-of-art facilities for visitors.

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

The Georgia Welcome Center is significant in the area of entertainment/recreation for its central role in the growth of automobile tourism in the state of Georgia. As governor of Georgia from 1959 to 1963, Samuel Ernest Vandiver, Jr. (1918-2005) implemented a number of changes in state government. Among them was a policy of substantially enhancing tourism efforts. His administration implemented the state's first large-scale survey of motorists on Georgia's highways to determine their destinations, as well as their impressions of the state as a place to vacation. Vandiver believed that the state should actively promote tourist attractions, which he saw as one way of increasing economic development. This led to the construction of the first welcome centers for visitors, the creation of a Tourist Division in the state Department of Commerce, and the state's first conference on tourism in 1961. According to Vandiver's biographer, Harold P. Henderson, no previous governor had shown the level of commitment to the development of the tourist industry that Vandiver had.

The primary function of the Georgia Welcome Center (implemented first in Sylvania and then in other locations) was to show hospitality to tourists and provide a "sales pitch" for visitors who might be persuaded to stop and stay a little longer in the state. Before the Interstate highway system was complete, U.S. Highway 301 drew much of the automobile traffic headed to Florida. Georgia tourism officials believed that travelers were not aware of what the state had to offer. Restrooms and a place to picnic provided reasons to stop at a welcome center, but items like maps, brochures, gifts, travel information, literature on historic and scenic attractions, and Georgia-made products were also available. Weather reports and information on highway construction and alternate routes were vital in an era before such reports could be readily obtained from other sources. Well-trained and informed staff was central to the success of this program.

The welcome center initiative was started at a crucial time. Based on statewide highway surveys in 1960-1961, Georgia needed to improve its image as a travel destination. The success of the program was documented in numbers gleaned from a series of studies in subsequent years. Visitors to welcome centers were given questionnaires that provided a basis for analysis of travel trends and visitor opinions. These were quantified in research reports published every year by the Tourist Division (now the Tourism Division). By the early 1970s, welcome centers were playing a vital role in Georgia's travel industry by hosting over three million travelers per year, a number that placed Georgia in the forefront of this type of program. Along with increasing visitor numbers, satisfaction with Georgia as a vacation destination also increased.

The Georgia Welcome Center is also significant in the area of architecture as an excellent example of the use of modernism in rural Georgia in the middle of the 20th century. The building has several eclectic elements of modern design. It does not display the precise rectangular form of International-style buildings, but is more closely related to the style of New Formalism with its symmetrical arcade-like façade and use of the arch as the primary motif. While this style was usually seen on larger government buildings of the 1960s, the Georgia Welcome Center uses several of the elements to create a small self-contained temple to tourism. The building has not had any major alterations, and it still strongly conveys the qualities that associate it with the Modern Movement in Georgia architecture.

In the years before World War II, many German modernists immigrated to the United States, and brought their design philosophies. Modernism, with its emphasis on steel and glass, was right for the time because modern buildings could be built fast and inexpensively compared to traditional masonry buildings. The basis of the International Style was its universality—its lack of spatial and temporal references. A few years later, New Formalism employed more ornament and returned to some simplified classical forms. In the United States, modernism was largely a post-World War II phenomenon. This is especially true for Southern states, such as Georgia, which remained devoted to classicism well into the 1950s. During the middle of the 20th century, the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) in Atlanta was training a generation of architects who reshaped the Tech campus in the International Style and later designed modern buildings throughout the South. Edwin C. Eckles, the architect for the Georgia Welcome Center, was also trained during this period at Georgia Tech.

Edwin C. Eckles, A.I.A (1928-1995) was considered a local civic leader as well as an accomplished architect. After obtaining his bachelor's degree in architecture from the Georgia Institute of Technology in 1953, Eckles spent most of his productive years in his adopted town of Statesboro, Georgia. His firm of Eckles, Martin, and Rule was formed late in his life, after working with other partnerships and then establishing a private practice that lasted from 1959 to 1990. It was during his solo practice that he accepted several commissions from the state of Georgia, including work on four of Georgia's welcome centers during the 1960s. Eckles designed the welcome centers in Sylvania, Ringgold, and Augusta, plus an expansion of the center in Lavonia. These four plans were all very similar, with the major difference being the number of enclosed bays. Later welcome centers extended the interior lobby into the end arches that were used for patio space in the Sylvania example.

The welcome center in Sylvania is the only one of the four that is still extant. In 1965 Eckles designed Dorman Hall, a men's dormitory at Georgia Southern College (now University), that has subsequently been demolished.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

Screven County, located in the Coastal Plain region of Georgia, was officially formed in 1793 from portions of Burke and Effingham counties. Early settlers populated the bottom lands along rivers, rather than the "pine barrens" that characterized much of the area. Burton's Ferry Landing, just east of the present location of the Georgia Welcome Center, was a long-time crossing point of the Savannah River between South Carolina and Georgia, and this is where the highway bridge for U.S. Highway 301 was eventually built.

U.S. Highway 301 runs through the states of Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. The entire route is now roughly paralleled by Interstate 95, but U.S. 301 was once a major tourist route between the coastal Atlantic states and Florida. Construction of the portion of Highway 301 between Statesboro, Georgia, and the South Carolina border was completed by around 1947. It initially averaged about 5,000 vehicles per day. Roadside commercial development, such as motels, restaurants, and service stations, began to stretch along the highway, especially in and around the towns of Sylvania (county seat of Screven County) and Statesboro (county seat of Bulloch County). By 1960 Highway 301 was one of Georgia's heaviest traveled roads, especially for leisure traffic, and was often referred to as the "short route to Florida."

The state of Florida opened the first highway welcome centers in the United States. Their program began in 1949 on U.S. Highway 17 near the state line with Georgia, and more centers were added between 1952 and 1954. These stops along the highway offered free Florida orange juice as well as brochures promoting state attractions. The Georgia Welcome Center on U.S. Highway 301 near Sylvania was the first non-Florida welcome center in the nation in 1962. The center in Sylvania offered complimentary peanuts and Coca-Cola along with its promotional materials. In its early years, the Sylvania center even had a small cotton patch where guests could view the plants and pick bolls of cotton. Within a few years, most states in the South had visitor centers at some of their principal entry points for travelers.

The 3.6 acres of land for the Georgia Welcome Center was donated in 1960 by A. H. Rowan, who continued to own a large tract adjacent tract. A contract was let for $46,348.25 to Construction Enterprises of Nashville, Georgia, to act as the general contractor. Initially only $32,000 had been allocated for the station's construction, but the remainder of the money was transferred by Governor Ernest Vandiver from the state's surplus fund. While the building was originally scheduled to be completed in March 1961, the official dedication did not occur until January 20, 1962. According to some sources, the final costs may have escalated to almost $75,000. Those attending the dedication included Governor Vandiver (who was keynote speaker), Bill Hardman (the first manager of the Tourist Division in the Georgia Department of Commerce), Jack Minter (Director, Georgia Department of Commerce), Edwin C. Eckles (the architect), State Senator Carl Sanders, and a number of other state and local officials. The original displays were done by Custom Creations of Atlanta and the landscaping was by Georgia Newberry of the Jekyll Island Authority.

When it opened, the Sylvania center was staffed by a manager, two receptionists, and a maintenance person, who were all employees of the Georgia Department of Commerce. Hours of operation were 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., 362 days a year, with extended hours in the summer. College students worked as interns during the

summer. Initially, the young female receptionists were referred to as "hostesses." Managers and receptionists wore mix-and-match red, white, and blue ensembles. All were required to undergo extensive training in numerous specific areas, such as Georgia history; map reading and road bulletin interpretation; applying for camping and cabin rentals; hunting, fishing, and boating regulations; general rules and regulations of departments related to tourism; complete knowledge of brochures and their contents; and general acquaintance with Georgia's historic sites, vacation areas, recreational attractions, and scenic spots. This training was provided by the Georgia Historical Commission, Georgia Highway Department, the Game and Fish Commission, and the State Parks Department. Training tours were also conducted periodically.

The first seven highway welcome centers in Georgia opened as follows:

1. Sylvania, U.S. Highway 301, January 20, 1962.
2. Savannah, U.S. Highway 17A, June 24, 1963.
3. Lavonia, Interstate 85, December 2, 1964.
4. Columbus, U.S. Highways 280 and 27 on Victory Drive, June 8, 1965.
5. Ringgold, Interstate 75, August 11, 1965.
6. Valdosta, Interstate 75, December 14, 1966.
7. Augusta, Interstate 20, November 13, 1969.

In addition, a visitor center was opened at Hartsfield International Airport in Atlanta on July 14, 1966. All eight centers were operated by the Tourist Division (later Tourism Division) of the Georgia Department of Commerce, which became the Department of Industry and Trade in the mid-1960s (later the Department of Industry, Trade, and Tourism, and presently the Department of Economic Development). The Exchange Club of Chatham County donated the building in Savannah, and the Columbus Junior Chamber of Commerce donated an already-constructed building there. Most of the other centers cost from between $50,000 and $75,000 to build. Those that were purpose-built usually had modern designs with some Georgia materials such as marble, pecan wood, and/or granite. Of the first seven, only the welcome center in Sylvania is still operating with its original use. Almost all others have been demolished, except the original Savannah center on U.S. Highway 17, which is a round modernist building that is currently used by a local tour company.

The success of the statewide tourism program could be measured in several ways, including the increasing visitor numbers and changing attitudes toward the state of Georgia as a destination. Each party visiting a welcome center was requested to sign a register and provide certain basic information about their trip. Out-of-state tourists were also given questionnaires to mail back after their visit to the state. The research served the dual purpose of providing analysis of specific highways and checking traveler characteristics. A year after the opening of the Sylvania center, visitors who answered research questions expressed more satisfaction with Georgia than those who had responded to a similar statewide baseline survey in 1960-1961.

Based on surveys taken throughout the 1960s, tourism officials determined that visitors to the Sylvania Welcome Center were less likely to stay the night in Georgia than visitors to the other centers. This was because the travelers were usually on their way to or from Florida, and this route was a shorter one through the state. There were also fewer high-quality accommodations in this part of Georgia. The "pass-through" nature of much of the out-of-state travel was seen as a challenge to the Georgia tourist industry. These travelers were considered an important market for future development, and the welcome centers played a role in influencing vacation decisions.

Between 1962 and 1969, the state estimated the number of visitors to the Georgia Welcome Center in Sylvania as follows (statistics are in thousands): 1962 – 56.7, 1963 – 136.3, 1964 – 108.9, 1965 – 121.0, 1966 – 87.9, 1967 – 99.3, 1968 – 130.7, and 1969 – 217.6. (The dip in 1966 and 1967 may be partially explained by the effects of the 1967 Arab oil embargo.) By 1969, when the first seven highway centers were complete, the Sylvania center ranked number five in visitors, likely because some of the newer welcome centers were on recently completed sections of Interstate highways, which were beginning to draw more traffic. The estimated total visitation between 1962 and 1969 for all eight welcome centers (including one at the Atlanta airport) was 8.3 million. After 1969, visitation at most of the first-generation welcome centers continued to increase for many more years.

Less than 100 miles of the proposed Interstate highway system in Georgia was complete in 1961. The primary road system was composed of numbered state or U.S. highways. The most heavily traveled routes in 1961 were U.S. highways 41, 17, 301, and part of 23. Even by 1971, U.S. Highway 301 had the highest percentage of leisure travelers of all routes, mostly headed to and from Florida from the Mid-Atlantic States or the Southeast. That year the state Department of Transportation estimated that traffic flow would be altered by each of the Interstates, but particularly by the projected completion of Interstate 95 to Florida. A secondary effect on traffic patterns would be a concentration of traffic where there had once been dispersion among many alternate routes. Based on annual highway traffic counts, it appears that delays in the completion of Interstate 95 in Georgia may have resulted in a continued reliance on U.S. highways 301 and 17 for several more years. Drivers who used Interstate 95 in the Carolinas would be forced to divert to one of these routes as they neared Georgia.

As more of the Interstate system in Georgia began to be completed through the 1960s and 1970s, traffic gradually diverted from the smaller through-roads, such as U.S. Highway 301. However, this process was uneven in different parts of the state, as it was also driven by several other factors. Highway 301 in Georgia did not closely parallel an Interstate highway, yet it was eventually affected by the completion of the system. Traffic volume maps showed that between 1961 and 1970, traffic on U.S. Highway 301 increased nine percent, while traffic on coastal U.S. Highway 17 (another major north-south artery) increased 51 percent. This was because tourists could more easily reach Highway 17 from portions of Interstate 95 that had been completed in South Carolina, and also because of the increasing appeal of Savannah, Brunswick, and the Georgia coast as stopover points. Interstate highways 75 and 85 through Atlanta (the first Interstates to be completed) drew some north-south drivers who were willing to take longer routes in exchange for the convenience of a high-speed controlled-access highway.

The automobile remained the most important mode of travel in the country. The Interstate highway system brought increasing numbers of travelers to Georgia, but also tended to isolate them from the state. Tourism officials recognized that they needed to promote recreational attractions in order to convince the pass-through traveler that Georgia was a destination with many interesting things to see and do. It was believed that the tourist industry needed to improve its standards in order to compete with other states. The increasing economic impact of tourism in Georgia was quantified in several of the studies based on the welcome center surveys and questionnaires.

The state of Georgia continues to operate visitor information centers through its Department of Economic Development. Of the 11 that are open in 2011, almost all are part of Interstate highway rest areas at entrance points to the state or at highly traveled interchanges. (One notable exception is the Georgia Visitor Center in Plains, Sumter County, which is the home of President Jimmy Carter.) The stated program goal has not changed much according to the mission statement: "The Georgia Visitor Information Center Program is to provide travel information and assistance in a courteous, hospitable, and friendly manner to all that seek its

services." The historic Georgia Welcome Center in Sylvania was a forerunner in this area and still fulfills that role.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Keeling, William B. and Polly Hein. Georgia Welcome Center Research Report Number One. *Characteristics of Out-of-State Visitors by Major Destination.* Prepared for Tourist Division, Georgia Department of Industry and Trade. Athens, Georgia: Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Georgia, 1968.

_____. Georgia Welcome Center Research Report Number Two. *Georgia Welcome Centers – Program and Visitors.* Prepared for Tourist Division, Georgia Department of Industry and Trade. Athens, Georgia: Division of Research, College of Business Administration, University of Georgia, 1970.

Lee-Ford, Angela. *Images of America: Screven and Jenkins Counties.* Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia, 1999.

Georgia Welcome Center
Name of Property

Screven County, Georgia
County and State

Marlin, Tiffany. "Georgia Welcome Center." Historic Property Information Form and supporting documentation, March 10, 2011. On file at the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division, Atlanta, Georgia.

Newspaper clippings file. Various newspaper and magazine articles on file at the Georgia Visitor Information Center, Sylvania, Georgia. Copies also on file at the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division, Atlanta, Georgia.

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:

_X_ State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State agency
___ Federal agency
___ Local government
___ University
___ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 3.63 acres
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	17	451630	3644320	3	N/A		
2	N/A			4	N/A		

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

The National Register boundary is indicated with a heavy black line, drawn to scale, on the attached National Register map/survey plat based on the 1960 property survey for the state of Georgia.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary is the historic legal boundary during the period of significance. It does not include additional land that was added to the tract in 1972 in order to create a wastewater treatment plant to the immediate north of the nominated property.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Denise P. Messick, historian
organization Historic Preservation Division, GA Dept. of Natural Resources date November 2011
street & number 254 Washington Street, Ground Level telephone (404) 656-2840
city or town Atlanta state GA zip code 30334
e-mail Denise.Messick@dnr.state.ga.us

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Georgia Welcome Center

City or Vicinity: Sylvania

County: Screven State: Georgia

Photographer: Charlie Miller, Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources

Date Photographed: August 2011

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of 26. Front (south side) of Georgia Welcome Center. Photographer facing north.

2 of 26. Georgia Welcome Center from U. S. Highway 301. Photographer facing northwest.

3 of 26. Georgia Welcome Center from edge of front lawn. Photographer facing northwest.

4 of 26. Georgia Welcome Center sign. Photographer facing west.

5 of 26. Georgia Welcome Center from front lawn. Photographer facing northwest.

6 of 26. South (front) and east side of Georgia Welcome Center. Photographer facing northwest.

7 of 26. Close-up of south (front) and east side of building. Photographer facing northwest.

8 of 26. South (front) and west side of building. Photographer facing northeast.

9 of 26. Detail of front door and marble panels. Photographer facing north.

10 of 26. Detail of dedication plaque. Photographer facing north.

11 of 26. Patio on east side of building. Photographer facing west.

12 of 26. Underneath the patio on west side of building. Photographer facing south.

13 of 26. Northwest corner of building from rear picnic area. Photographer facing south/southeast.

14 of 26. Granite bench near the west parking area. Photographer facing north.

15 of 26. Concrete picnic table in rear picnic area. Photographer facing northeast.

16 of 26. Sidewalks and picnic table in rear picnic area. Photographer facing north/northeast.

17 of 26. Granite welcome sign in front near flagpole. Photographer facing southeast.

18 of 26. Interior lobby area. Photographer facing northwest.

19 of 26. Interior lobby area. Photographer facing northeast.

20 of 26. Lobby display area. Photographer facing north.

21 of 26. Wall display in lobby. Photographer facing west.

22 of 26. Corridor behind information desk in lobby. Photographer facing north.

23 of 26. Interior of central bay and front door. Photographer facing south.

24 of 26. Women's restroom. Photographer facing east.

25 of 26. Men's restroom. Photographer facing east/southeast.

26 of 26. Former "colored" restroom (now storage). Photographer facing east.

Georgia Welcome Center
Name of Property

Screven County, Georgia
County and State

Property Owner:

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

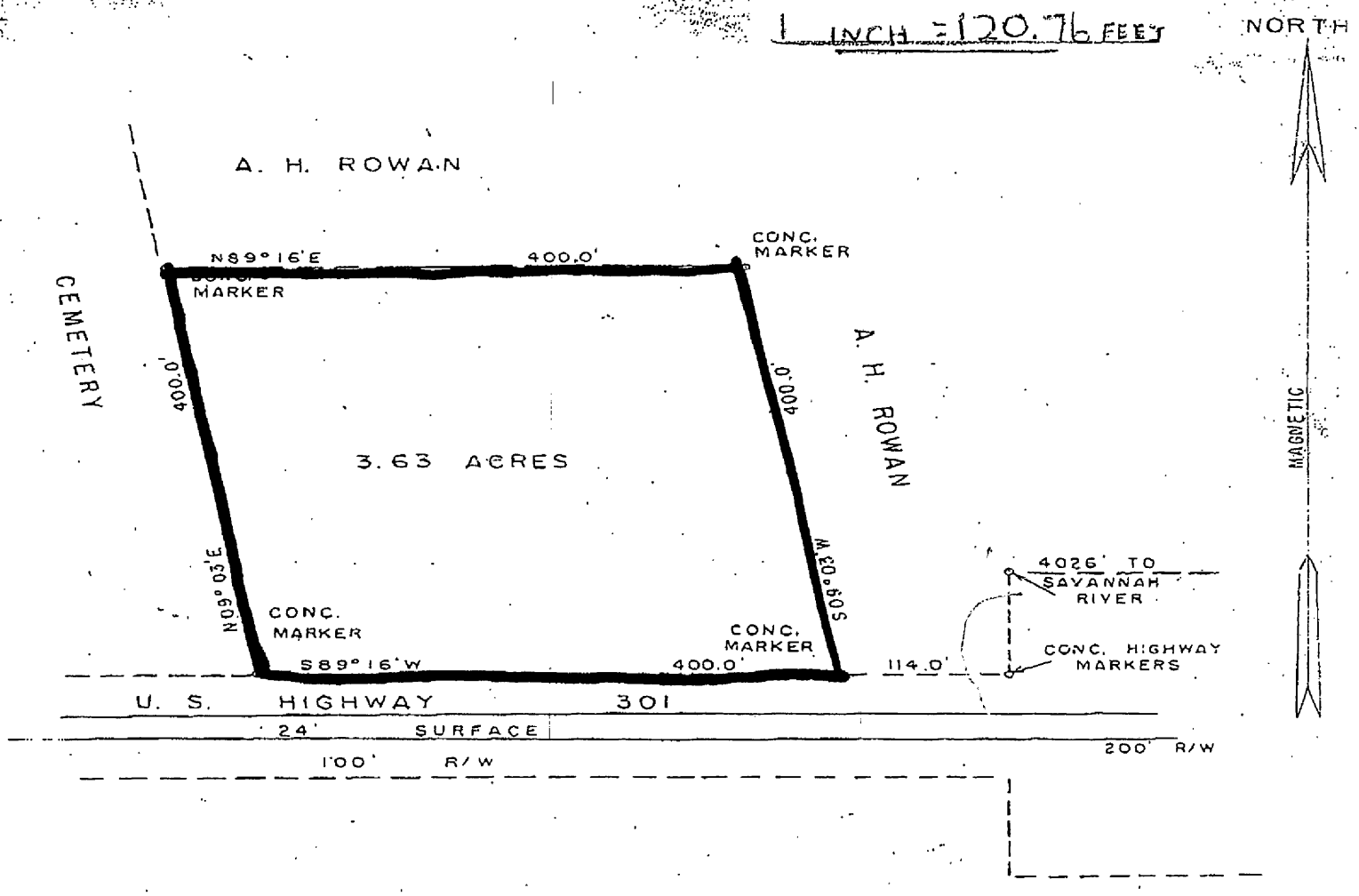
name Georgia Department of Economic Development

street & number 75 Fifth Street NW, Suite 1200 telephone 404-962-4832

city or town Atlanta state Georgia zip code 30308

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 18 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.

SCALE
1 INCH = 120.76 FEET

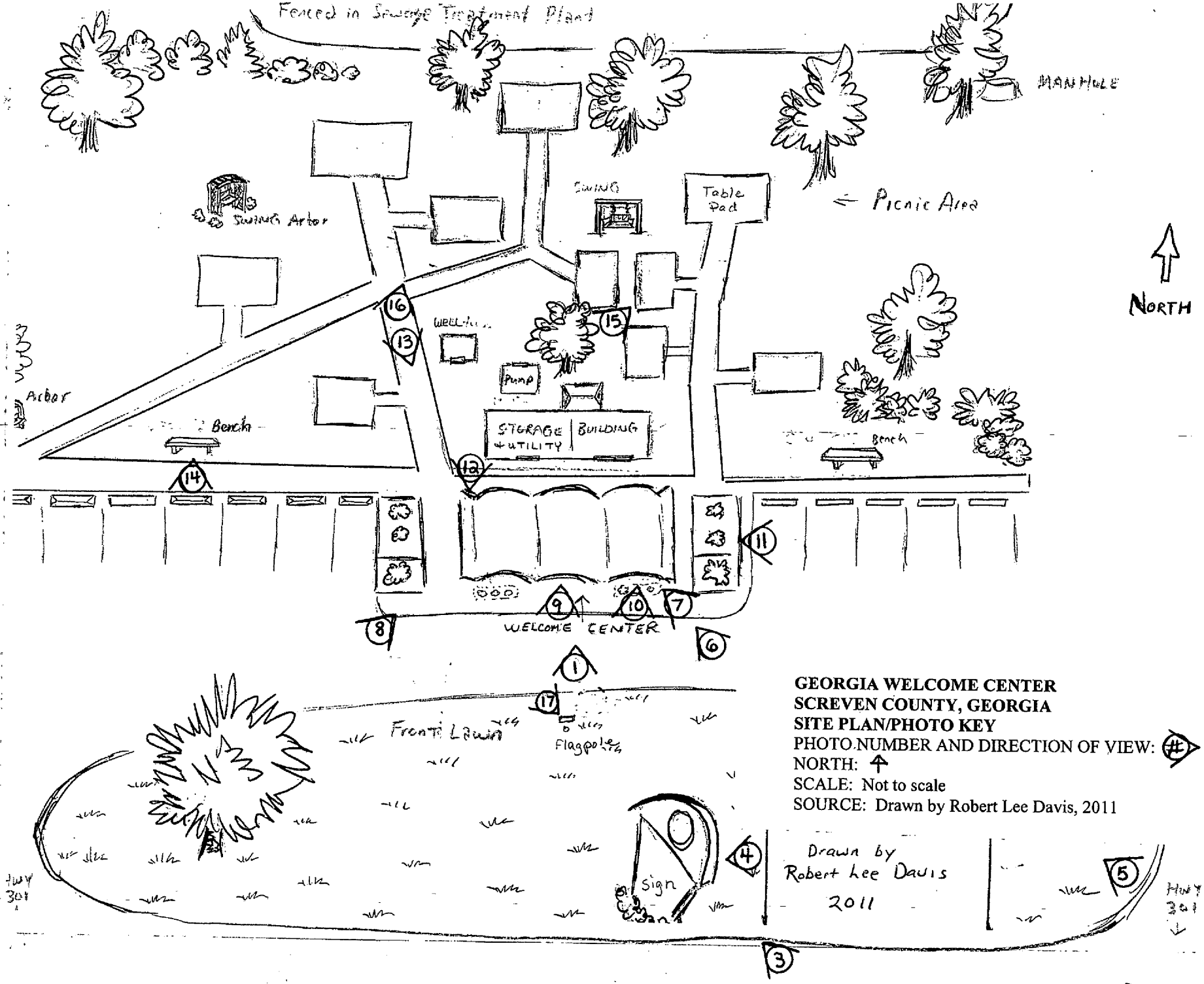


LOCATION:
260 TH. G. M. D.
SCREVEN COUNTY
GEORGIA

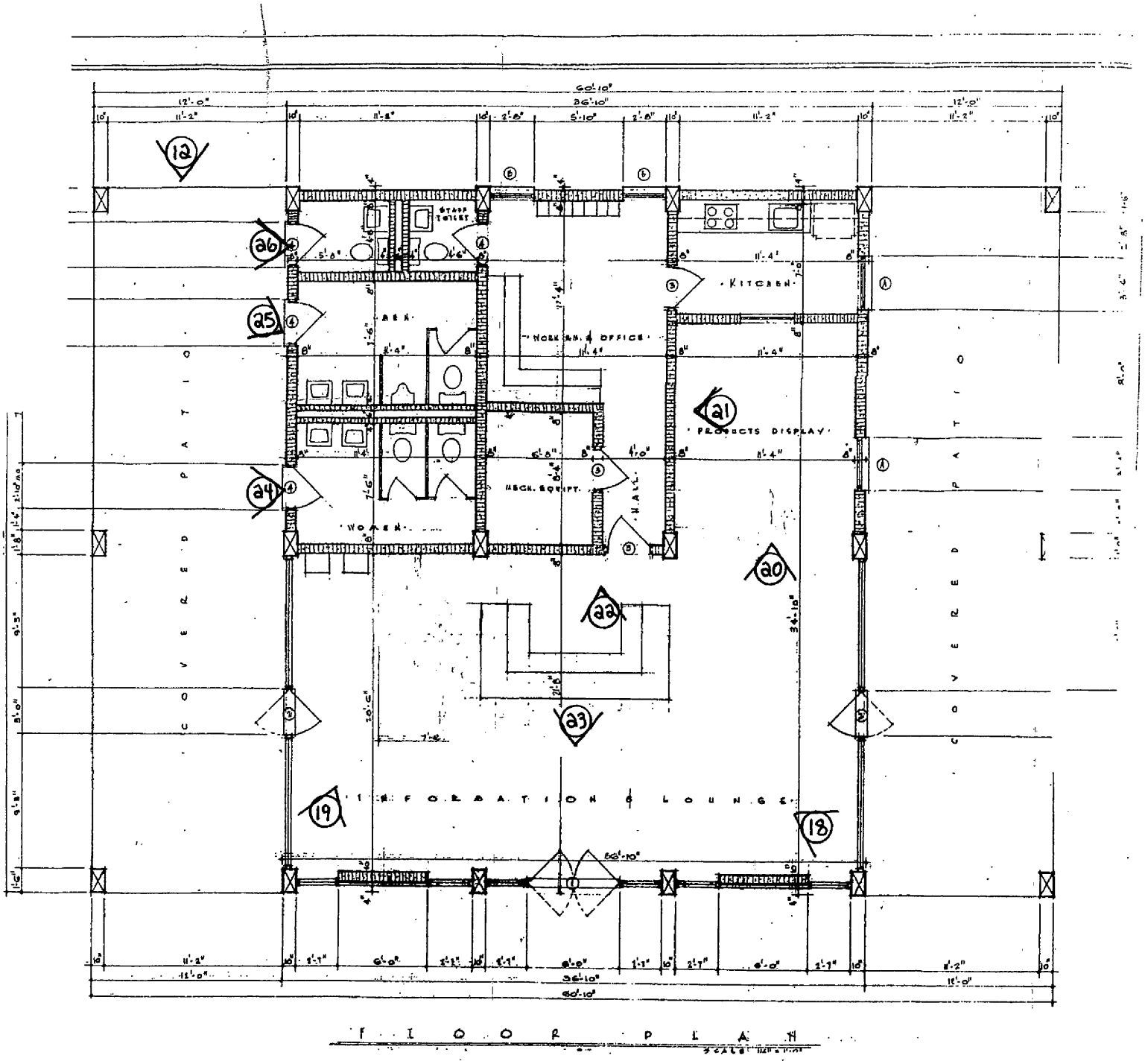
PROPERTY SURVEY
FOR
STATE OF GEORGIA

SURVEYED: JAN. 20, 1960
BY: ROBERT L. BELL
REGISTERED LAND SURVEYOR
NO. GA-274
Robert L. Bell

GEORGIA WELCOME CENTER
SCREVEN COUNTY, GEORGIA
NATIONAL REGISTER MAP/ SURVEY PLAT
NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY:
NORTH:
SCALE: 1 inch = approximately 120 feet
SOURCE: Georgia Department of Economic Development



GEORGIA WELCOME CENTER
SCREVEN COUNTY, GEORGIA
SITE PLAN/PHOTO KEY
PHOTO NUMBER AND DIRECTION OF VIEW: (#)
NORTH: ↑
SCALE: Not to scale
SOURCE: Drawn by Robert Lee Davis, 2011



GEORGIA WELCOME CENTER
SCREVEN COUNTY, GEORGIA
FLOOR PLAN/PHOTO KEY
PHOTO NUMBER AND DIRECTION OF VIEW: (#)
NORTH: ⏃
SCALE: 1 inch = approximately 9 feet
SOURCE: Based on 1960 architectural drawing by Edwin C. Eckles, A.I.A, with modifications to reflect current (2011) conditions

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WELCOME
CENTER
GEORGIA
INFORMATION
REST AREA
8:30 - 5:30

STATE OF GEORGIA
CONSTITUTION
WIS
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DOM
1776
GEORGIA
WELCOME
CENTER
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INFORMATION
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GEORGIA WELCOMES THE WORLD

GEORGIA
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Closed Sunday
& Monday
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No Smoking
ON-THE-GO!
GEORGIA TOURIST
WELCOME CENTER
S. ERNEST VANDIVER
GOVERNOR
FIRE & BURGLAR

GEORGIA TOURIST
WELCOME CENTER
1960
S. ERNEST VANDIVER
GOVERNOR
GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
JACK J. MINTER, DIRECTOR
GEORGIA HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT
JAMES L. GILLIS, CHAIRMAN
EDWIN C. ECKLES, AIA ARCHITECT
DEDICATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF
GEORGIA'S GREAT TRAVEL INDUSTRY

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VISITOR
CENTER

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YOU

Coca-Cola
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PUSH

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AUGUSTA
MARGARET MITCHELL HOUSE IN ATLANTA
Jekyll Island
ST. SIMON'S ISLAND
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Northeast Mountains
Atlanta Metro
Family Fun in the
Great Outdoor
Stone Mountain
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HISTORIC GEORGIA
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MARGARET MITCHELL HOUSE IN ATLANTA
Jekyll Island
ST. SIMON'S ISLAND
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MADISON
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1776

Georgia

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Hours
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Closed Sunday
& Monday

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GEORGIA FRUITS & VEGETABLES
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The Safety Zone
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Disposable Textured Latex Gloves
LARGE