



The Mansion House at Berry Hill Plantation: Architecture and the Changing Nature of Slavery in Antebellum Virginia

Author(s): Clifton Ellis

Source: *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, 2006, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2006), pp. 22-48

Published by: Vernacular Architecture Forum

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20355367>

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/20355367?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Vernacular Architecture Forum is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*

JSTOR

The Mansion House at Berry Hill Plantation: Architecture and the Changing Nature of Slavery in Antebellum Virginia

Clifton Ellis

Berry Hill in Halifax County, Virginia, is considered one of the finest examples of Greek Revival architecture in the state. James C. Bruce, a successful entrepreneur and tobacco planter, constructed the “mansion house,” as he called it, and its two Tuscan order outbuildings that flank the forecourt in a two-year building campaign from 1842 (fig. 1). The monumental octastyle Doric portico of the house evokes, as it no doubt was meant to do, the Parthenon of the Athenian Acropolis. This temple-fronted collection of buildings, set on a gentle rise at the center of the plantation, announced the ascendancy of a new style of architecture among the elite of antebellum Virginia. Although several architectural historians have canonized Berry Hill as among the great examples of domestic Greek Revival style, none of them has looked beyond the columns to understand the everyday workings of the domestic life or to question what Berry Hill’s unusual ar-

rangement of spaces might imply.¹ A series of asymmetrical massings and projections, the most notable of which is the 100-foot long service wing (fig. 2), lies behind Berry Hill’s temple front; the difficulty of explaining the peculiar jumble of architectural configurations in plan and elevation that occur at the rear of the building no doubt accounts for the lack of critical analysis.

While Berry Hill’s serene Grecian façade represents a change in fashion, the plan and form of the house announce another equally significant change. With a dramatic departure from plans of gentry houses of the eighteenth century in which rules of symmetry were predictably consistent, Berry Hill’s unusual plan suggests that the Bruce family functioned differently from their eighteenth-century predecessors. Recent work has helped explain how gender and race were inextricably linked



Fig. 1. North elevation of Berry Hill, Halifax County, Virginia. (Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA)



Fig. 2. Service wing extending behind Berry Hill. (Photo: Author, 1999)

and in tension with each other in the elite antebellum Southern slaveholding household, and how architecture formed part of the response to these tensions. Importantly, the changes were not only in plan but also in life within the house.

A close reading of the documentary evidence and of the house itself reveals the hand of Eliza Bruce, James C. Bruce's wife, at work in the planning (figs. 3 and 4).² While the façade of Berry Hill shows a desire to present a fashionable, even monumental face to society, the asymmetry behind the scenes illustrates the results of Eliza's influence which, though substantial, are out of sight, as might befit her status as a wife and mother in the antebellum South. Eliza Bruce took an active role in planning and overseeing the construction of Berry Hill, especially those service areas used by slaves whom she supervised. Looking at Eliza in her role as a wife, a mother, and as a mistress to slaves, allows us to consider Berry Hill as an architectural response to two growing trends in antebellum America: abolitionism and the cult of domesticity. Ultimately, other members of the Bruce family adapted and perfected Eliza's modification of Berry Hill in other houses they built, thus codifying a spatial arrangement that facilitated the new reality of social relationships between master and slave in antebellum Virginia. While this paper focuses narrowly on Eliza Bruce and Berry Hill, its larger significance is to suggest the

ways in which antebellum architecture responded to a world that increasingly relied on material objects to mediate the complex human experience of daily life on a plantation.

James C. Bruce intended Berry Hill to be the focal point of his plantation and the administrative center for his influential business and agricultural empire. Bruce's investments were diversified, and he owned substantial stock in numerous banks, railroads, and canals in addition to bonds he held from municipalities including Richmond, Petersburg, and Philadelphia. He also owned two other plantations in Virginia and one in Louisiana, and he would eventually buy three more plantations on which to settle his sons. To place James Bruce in context with other slaveholders we should consider that by 1860 twenty-four percent of all white households owned slaves. Of this number, twelve percent owned twenty or more slaves, and less than one percent owned 100 or more slaves. When James Bruce inventoried his slaves in 1852, he counted 402 enslaved African-Americans on his three plantations in Virginia and on his plantation in Louisiana. Of this number, 108 slaves lived at Berry Hill. Another way to understand the resources that Bruce commanded is to consider that when the final bill for building Berry Hill was reckoned in 1844, Bruce paid his builder \$31,132.00 cash. That same year, he paid William Pollard \$300.00 for his services as overseer at

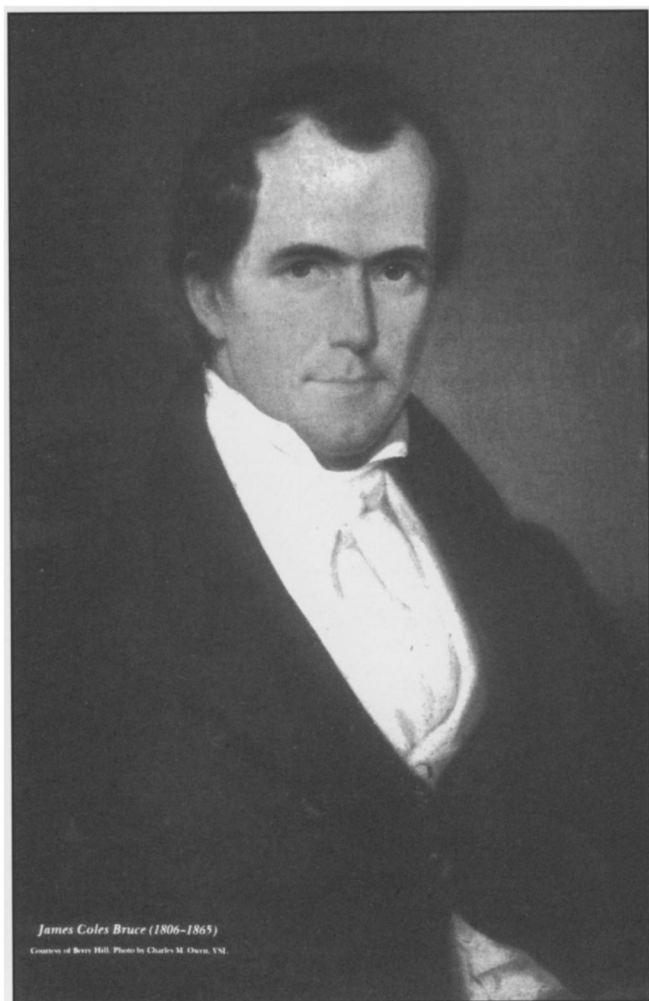


Fig. 3. Portrait of James Bruce by George Cooke, 1837. (Courtesy of Ellen Tully)

Berry Hill. Without question James C. Bruce was among the wealthiest Southern slaveholders.³

In March of 1842 Bruce signed a contract with a local builder, Josiah Dabbs, to construct a house on Bruce's recently acquired plantation called Berry Hill. As Bruce gave verbal dictation, his assistant wrote the contract that described the principal elevation and the disposition of the principal rooms on the first floor of the house, along with two small offices flanking a forecourt. Growing weary, and a little frustrated, with the tedium of describing such an undertaking, Bruce explained: "It's impossible to express every thing in a contract of this kind, but a plan & drawing having been made there can be no difficulty in understanding it." Bruce was referring to a drawing of the Doric portico and a plan of the first floor done by John Johnson, a friend who had taken courses in drawing and civil engineering at West Point. The drawing no longer survives, but the plan of the house can be reconstructed



Fig. 4. Portrait of Eliza Douglas Bruce by George Cooke, 1837. (Courtesy of Frederick Fisher)

from the precise building instructions within the contract (fig. 5; appendix A).⁴

Johnson drew a large central hall flanked by double parlors to the east and a bedchamber and nursery to the west. At the end of the central hall on axis with the front door was the dining room, which projected ten feet south of the main block of the house. To the east of this projection was a greenhouse and to the west was a closet providing storage for the dining room. Two sets of stairs gave access to the second floor. The main stair rose in a double flight from the central hall. The secondary stair was located in what Bruce called the nursery passage between the dining room and nursery. It is clear from the contract that Johnson drew only the first floor and an elevation for the house. Other rooms are listed, but not described, with the stipulation that they will be finished "at the direction of Bruce."⁵

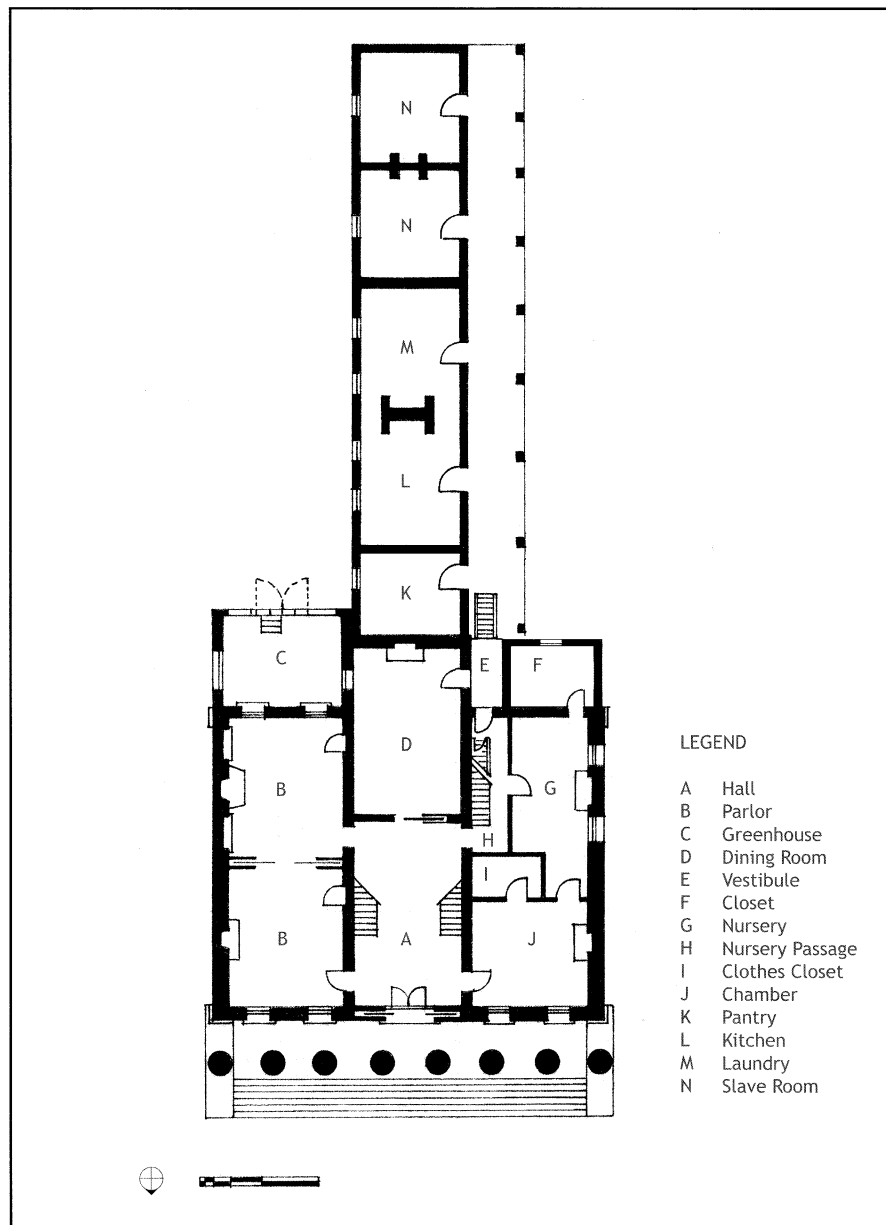


Fig. 5. Conjectural reconstruction of the original plan of Berry Hill based on the 1842 building contract. (Drawing by Urs Peter Flueckiger adapted from those of the author)

Bruce also wrote further directions on a sheet of Eliza Bruce's pink stationery, giving a more complete description of the rest of the house, specifications on decorative materials, and the dimensions of the rooms in the service wing (appendix B). The pink stationery suggests that James and Eliza probably discussed these specifications, perhaps one night in their chamber, and while talking, he put pen to paper. These rooms included five storerooms and workrooms in the basement and five bedrooms upstairs, all corresponding in plan to those on the first floor. Also described in the contract, but not drawn,

was the row of service rooms that projected directly behind the dining room. This row of rooms included the kitchen, laundry, and two rooms for slaves.⁶

These two documents—the contract and the instructions James and Eliza most likely wrote together—reveal much about their intentions. A primary concern was producing a monumental effect making an impressive public presentation with a temple façade set within a forecourt and flanked by diminutive temples. Johnson's plan of the first floor, as well as the building contract with Dabbs, and Bruce's additional

instructions, focus on the disposition and decoration of the grand public rooms. The men involved in the building of Berry Hill house had a clear understanding of the symbolic role of the house as the seat of an elite slaveholder.

Nevertheless, the house was not built in full accordance with the plans of these men. During construction, substantial changes were made to the service wing. Changing brick patterns and notable breaks in the brickwork offer clear evidence of this. The main house at Berry Hill took its form in a building campaign that had four distinct phases between 1842 and 1844. The main block of the house containing the public rooms and private family rooms was built first, followed in succession by the pantry wing, the service wing, and an extension of the service wing (fig. 6). Identifying these four phases of construction is important because it reveals an otherwise undocumented logic at work. That logic belonged to Eliza, the wife and mother of the Bruce household, and the mistress of twenty-seven house slaves.⁷

James Bruce, with the help of his friend and draftsman, John Johnson, had planned a monumental Greek temple with grand public spaces served discreetly and efficiently by a one-story wing that projected from the rear of the house forming a symmetrical ‘T’ in plan. While the Parthenon-inspired Greek temple front of Berry Hill is unique to the upper South and to Virginia in particular, the attached service wing is even more unusual. Although summer kitchens were sometimes found in the basements of gentry houses, kitchens and especially slave quarters were otherwise always separate structures, usually well removed from the main house with little thought having been given to convenience of service.⁸

The idea and the form for this attached service wing most likely came from urban examples. Attached service wings were common features in both free and slaveholding urban households of the North and South. Examples can still be found in New Orleans, Charleston, Richmond, Philadelphia, and New York City, cities that both Bruce and Johnson knew well and which Eliza Bruce had visited. In fact, of the several Richmond properties that Bruce inherited from his father, two were configured with service wings projecting to the rear. The property on Main Street consisted of three contiguous structures built flush to the western property line of the lot, the whole forming an ell shape. The property was described in a Mutual Assurance Society policy as “a dwelling with walls of stone and brick, 3 stories high, covered with slate” and a “brick kitchen covered with slate 2 stories high.” (fig. 7) The

dwelling and the kitchen were connected by “a brick covered way with a slate roof.” The configuration of the house on Main Street, and in another Bruce property on H Street, had been established by 1822.⁹

The attached service wing should also be considered in the context of a national trend during the early nineteenth century toward the separation of service functions from genteel spaces and a growing preoccupation with creating more discreet routes between the two. In part, then, the Bruces may have been responding to a trend in segregating service and public space, but when they decided to attach their service functions to the house, they were departing from the long, ingrained custom of Southern plantation architecture that relegated all service to separate outbuildings removed from the main house. In doing so, they created a unique house form for a rural slaveholding household.¹⁰

Although Bruce and Johnson had provided for a symmetrical and perhaps even logical (on paper, at least) arrangement for service, they gave little thought to a configuration of the service spaces as Eliza Bruce would use them. Moreover, the service wing that Bruce and Johnson planned projected directly back from the dining room, leaving little or no possibility for windows to provide light and air to that important public space. A full set of plans and elevations that included service areas would have made this problem apparent, but such plans were probably irrelevant to the men who were planning Berry Hill. For Eliza, however, this omission was crucial. The service wing as built was dramatically different from that described in the contract and detailed on Eliza’s stationery. In addition to the closet behind the nursery, the as-built configuration includes a pantry, servants’ hall, and call bell vestibule all of which are arranged to facilitate Eliza’s daily routine. When the errors of the as-planned service wing were realized, the logical solution of simply moving it evidently proved unacceptable to Eliza, and as construction began, she took a more active interest, directing changes to those spaces that would be under her direct supervision.

There is documentary evidence for Eliza Bruce’s role in making these important modifications to the house as well as evidence that she was involved in decisions concerning its Grecian porch and interior decoration. The first is a diary that she kept in the fall of 1840 as she and her husband took a trip north, through Philadelphia and New York to Saratoga Springs. She was a shrewd observer and took note especially of the grand public buildings they visited. Chief among the

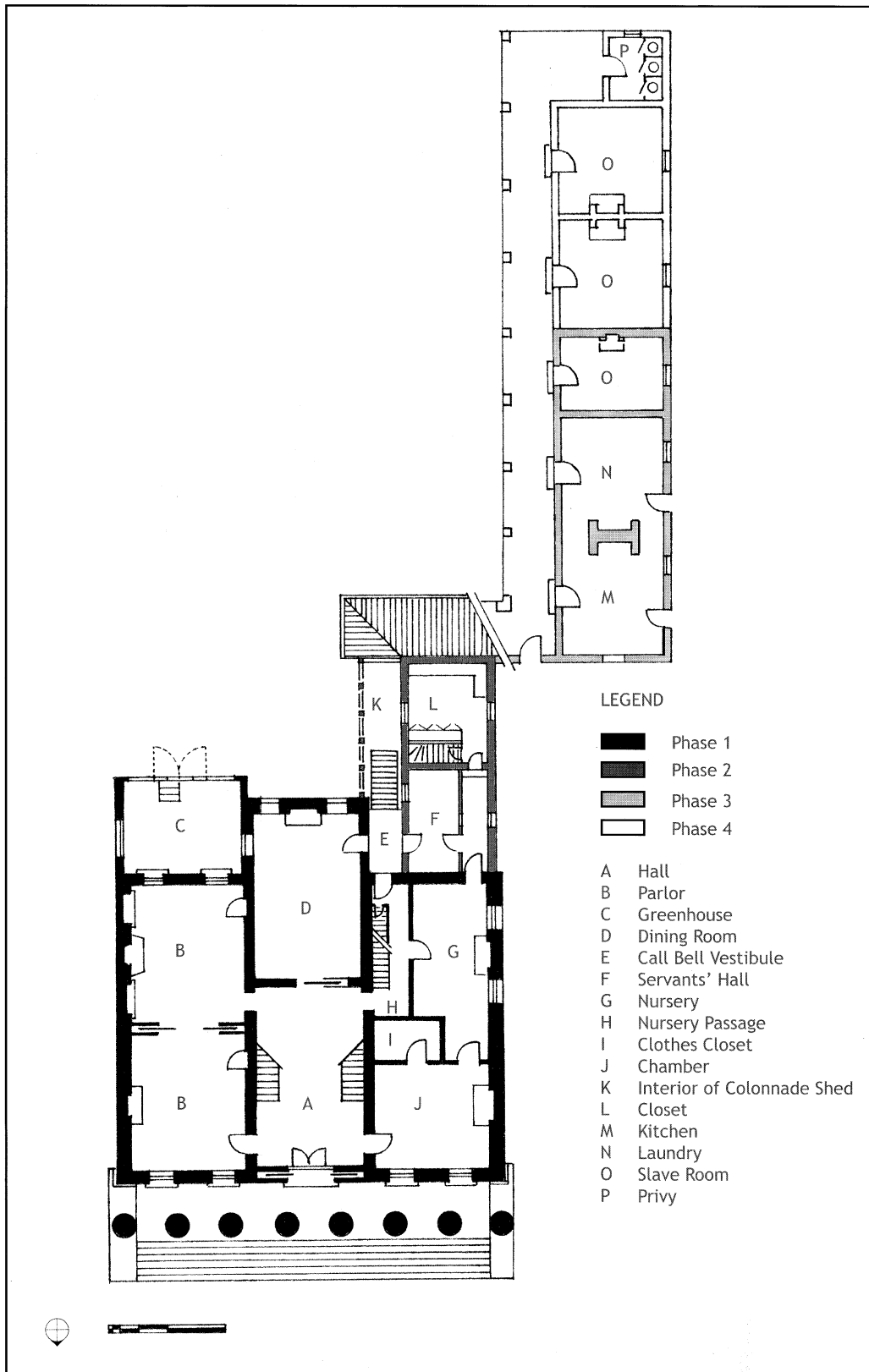


Fig. 6. Plan of Berry Hill as built, showing the four phases of construction. (Drawing by Urs Peter Flueckiger adapted from those of the author)

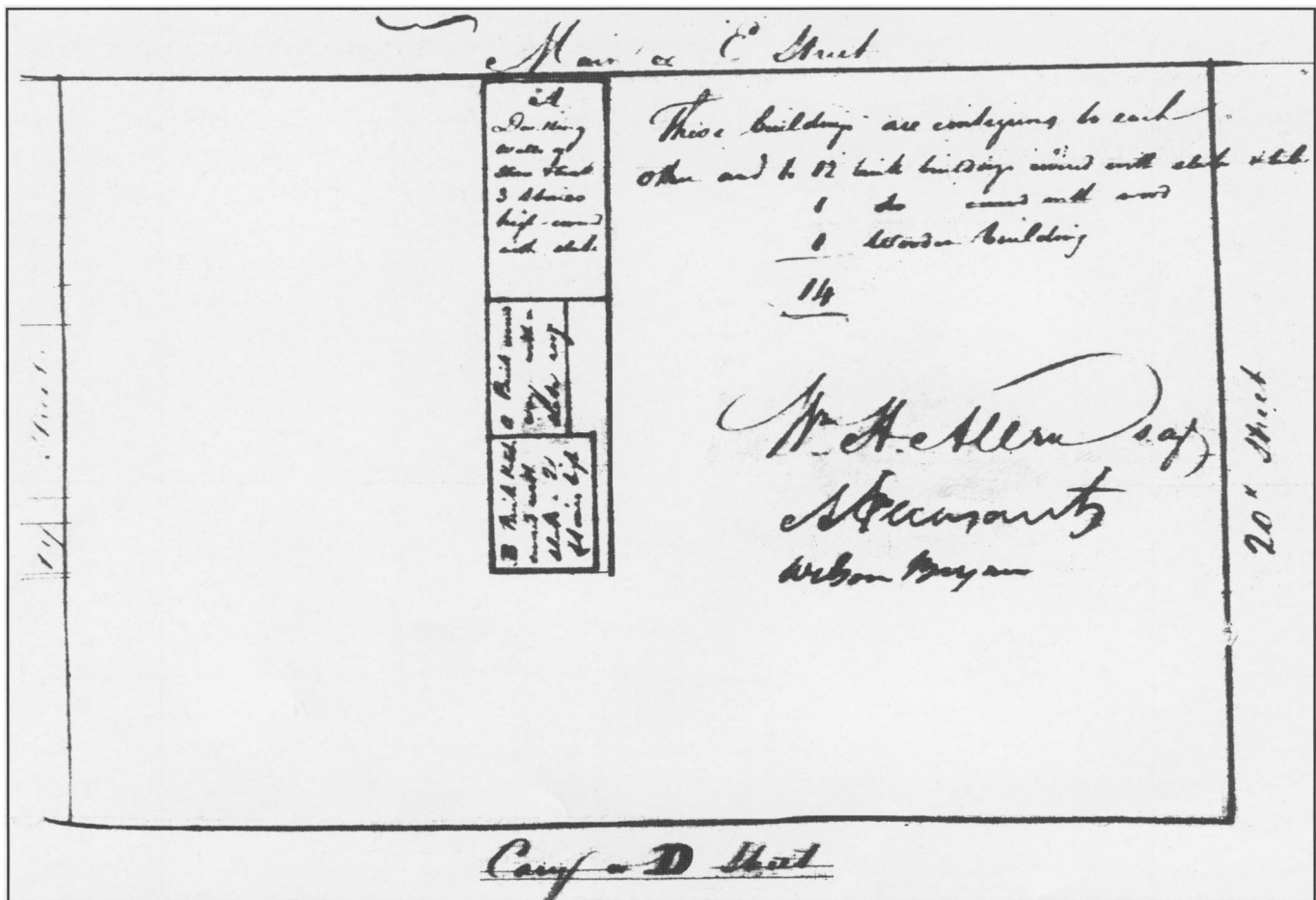


Fig. 7. Mutual Assurance Society plat of 1822 showing the dwelling and attached service ell of a Bruce property on Main Street in Richmond, Virginia. (Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA)

examples of Greek Revival architecture in Philadelphia was Girard College by Thomas U. Walter, which she declared was “the most splendid building I ever saw, the pillars particularly so.” Comparing the work of William Strickland in the city—the Exchange, Post Office, and the Second Bank of the United States—Eliza liked “the U.S. Bank best” for its fine portico. Of all the buildings the Bruces saw during the trip, she was most impressed with the new Vermont State Capitol by Ammi B. Young. She praised the building for “the most beautiful granite I have yet seen,” and for its “handsome portico with six immense granite pillars.” In each instance, Eliza noted with approval the impressive Greek porticoes, and by the time they began construction at Berry Hill two years later, both James and Eliza were in accord about the style they wanted.¹¹

The second piece of documentary evidence that points to Eliza’s role is her husband’s addendum to the contract that he wrote on his wife’s stationery and in which he gave his wife

discretion in some of the aesthetic choices, primarily paint colors and wall-paper. We know, then, that James deferred to his wife’s taste in certain aspects of the design; she, too, had a stake in the appearance of the public rooms, and husband and wife appear to have been partners in some of the decisions.

The third, and most telling, piece of documentary evidence is a series of letters between Eliza and James. These letters indicate that, although James Bruce was the undisputed head of the family, Eliza’s role as the head and director of all domestic matters was unquestioned. In March of 1831, for example, she went to visit her sister in North Carolina, leaving her husband in charge of the household. James wrote to her in a joking manner saying: “Your note of directions has been followed. I ought, however, to except housekeeping as that is not my forte. I kept the keys the first day, but I have not seen one since. So that everything you have in the world is at the mercy of Darby and Julius.”¹²

The keys Bruce refers to are of course the keys that Eliza Bruce carried at all times on her rounds of supervising the household. Darby and Julius were trusted house slaves who knew the routine of household chores and duties. Bruce evidently tired of the constant interruptions of slaves asking for keys, so he relinquished them. This letter acknowledges Eliza's important role in arranging and maintaining the household and her control of its domestic spaces. Moreover, the anecdote speaks less of James Bruce's lack of domestic abilities than it does of his wife's close attention to her duties as mistress of her slaves.

Another letter from James Bruce to his wife is especially suggestive. In August 1842, four months after Josiah Dabbs began work at Berry Hill, James left on an extended trip and was gone five weeks, leaving Eliza in charge of the building campaign. In this letter James urges her to have the overseer check on the ratio of lime to sand being used in the mortar for the house. The timing of this letter is very important because Josiah Dabbs was just laying the foundation of the house, and significant changes were soon to be made in the organization of the service rooms. The fact that James was away, and Eliza was clearly left in charge, indicates that she was an active participant in the changes made to the original plan.¹³

Two-and-a-half years later, in 1844, the house was almost finished and the Bruces moved in. There was still work to be done, but on the advice of his doctor, James left for Cuba in October to avoid the cold damp Virginia winter. He was gone six months, and during that time he and Eliza exchanged a series of interesting and valuable letters. When James left, construction was still under way on parts of the house and its outbuildings, and it was Eliza who made decisions about construction details. The work Eliza initiated was considerable. It included planting clumps of ornamental trees and laying out her own series of terraced flower and vegetable gardens. But in addition to the landscape, Eliza was also responsible for very practical aspects of the finishing of the house. She found that the brick used in the flooring of the kitchen was too soft, so she had it taken up and replaced with flagstone. She initiated the repair of chimney flues in her nursery and the building of new brick chimneys for two slave houses. She also directed the moving of several other slave houses to different locations on the plantation. Of the latter, she reported: "They have just moved Patsy's house. They found it heavy as the walls were filled with brick. That is the last to move, and I'm very glad of it for I am tired of the moving business."¹⁴

Eliza's sister-in-law Sally Bruce visited Berry Hill several times while Bruce was away and witnessed the prodigious amount of work that Eliza performed on the house and grounds. She wrote James, "Sister E. was generally engaged in improving the grounds and attending plantation affairs, and I am sure you will find that things have not suffered from your absence. Such absolute sway as she exercised would have compensated me for the loss of 'Lord, King, and Governor.'" Eliza and her husband had discussed some of these projects before he left, but in many cases she was acting on her own accord, as she indicated when she wrote: "I do hope you will approve of all the work I've been doing." Two months later, after having planned and supervised the moving of slave houses, the building of stables and various other improvements to the plantation, she exclaimed: "How delighted I will be to see you again and resign my authority in your hands."¹⁵

While documentary evidence confirms Eliza Bruce's role in the construction of Berry Hill, a close reading of the house's fabric and plan reveals still more evidence of her hand in the building process. The service spaces—pantry, kitchen, and laundry—to which the contract referred were spaces that Eliza would control with her keys in the new house. The changes she initiated in Johnson's plan during her husband's absence in August and September 1842 centered on disposition of service spaces and circulation patterns, especially as they related to the dining room and nursery, those domestic spaces directly associated with her role as mother and mistress.

As Dabbs was raising the walls of the basement foundation of the main block during the summer of 1842, Eliza must have realized that the original arrangement would leave the dining room with only one window that opened onto the greenhouse. By August Dabbs had already raised the walls of the house beyond the first floor when he received new instructions, presumably from Eliza, but perhaps in consultation with her husband, who was away. Regardless of who gave or approved the change in Johnson's plan, the new arrangement of service areas is so radically different from the original that it must have been made on site. A close look at Berry Hill's final plan and the building fabric itself indicates that the new arrangement was made to suit the needs of Eliza.

In place of the closet behind the nursery Eliza planned a two-story pantry wing projecting thirty-five feet south from the nursery wall (figs. 8 and 9). This wing contains the pantry in the basement and a servants' hall and closet on the first floor.

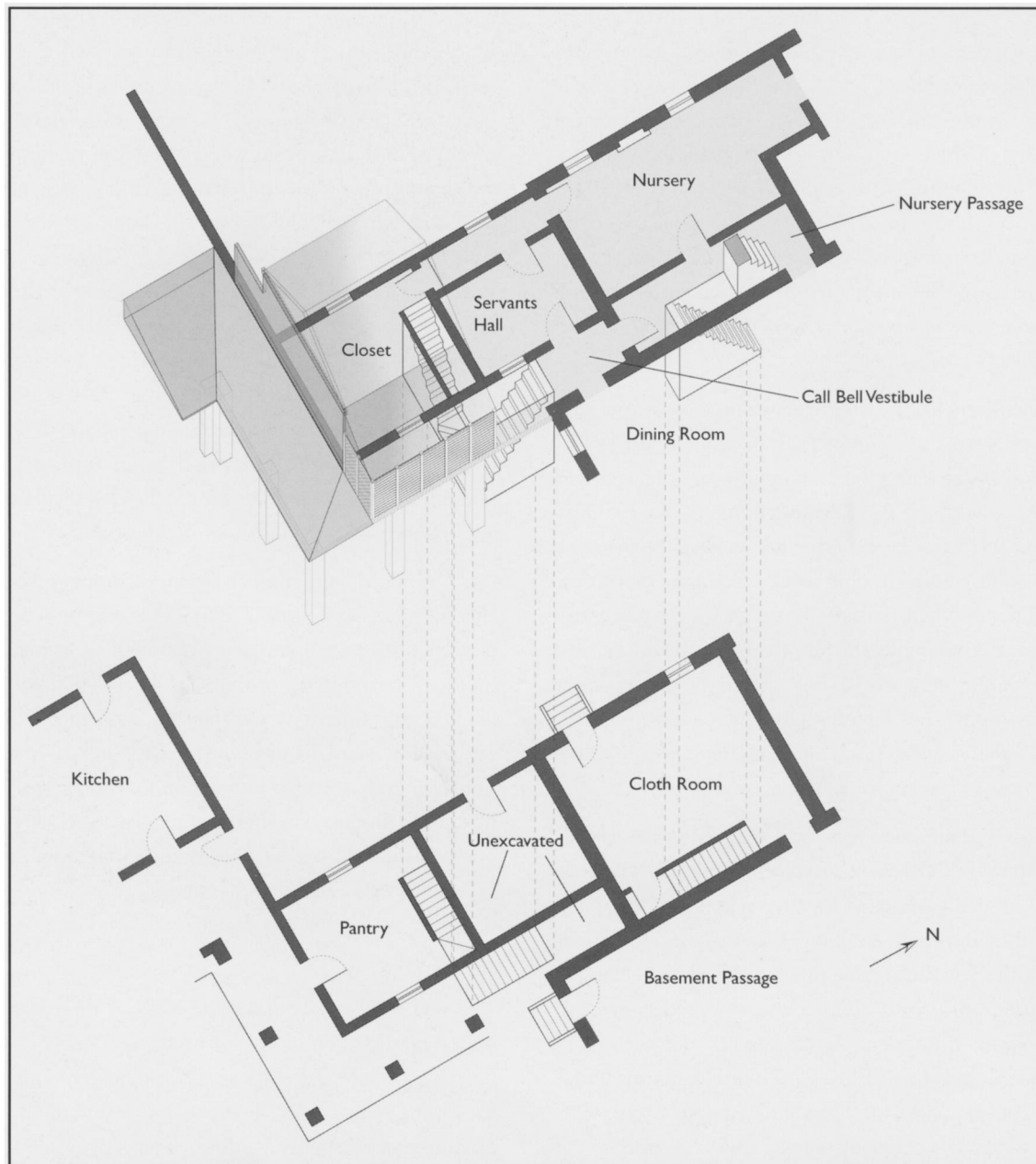


Fig. 8. Lifted isometric of the pantry wing of Berry Hill. (Drawing by John Houser adapted from those of the author)

The first floor of the pantry wing is on level with the first floor of the main block of the house. A door in the north side of the nursery opens into the closet passage running perpendicular to the nursery and leading to a large locked closet, two steps above the passage, where china, silver, and linens were stored. To the east of the closet passage is the servants' hall, a staging area from which slaves served the dining room. Between the servants' hall and dining room is a vestibule, open to the colonnade to the south and accessible by lockable doors from the dining room to the west and the nursery passage to the

north. In this vestibule hung eleven call bells that were connected to the front door and to every major room in the house. The pantry is located directly under the closet of the pantry wing and is sheltered on the east and south by the colonnade. This important storage room has two points of access, one of which is a lockable door in the closet on the first floor that opens into a stair leading down to the pantry. Although the pantry is on the same level as the basement, it has no access to the other storerooms in that part of the house. The other point of access to the pantry is a lockable door in the south



Fig. 9. View of the pantry wing of Berry Hill showing the lowered shed over the colonnade. (Library of Congress, HABS, VA, 42-BOSTS. V, 1-6)

wall that opens onto the colonnade leading to the kitchen. Eliza removed the service wing entirely from the main block of the house, locating it ten feet west of the pantry wing and connecting the two wings by a curtain wall with a door that gave access to the west yard of the main house. Plans for a colonnade connecting the nursery passage to the service wing were retained, but its new circuitous route extended down and around the pantry wing, along the curtain wall, and thence along the entire length of the service wing.

This wing, which was central to Eliza's operation of the household, seems to have been an *ad hoc* plan conceived during construction. The brick walls of the pantry wing are not bonded to the main block of the house, but rather abut the main house, which means that this wing was added after the walls of the main block of the house were raised beyond the first floor. When this change was made, Dabbs evidently miscalculated his vertical measurements since he had to raise

the closet on the first floor by two steps in order to provide headroom for the pantry below. This accommodation made for an awkward means of access to both spaces; as Eliza left the nursery on her way to the pantry, she first climbed two steps in order to enter the closet and then descended to the pantry (fig. 8). The pantry wing shows an ongoing process of attempts to reconcile Eliza's needs and wishes for domestic space with the practicalities of construction practices.

Although original plans for the service wing called for two slave rooms in addition to the kitchen and laundry, Eliza's new plans provided only for a kitchen, laundry, and an unheated storeroom all of which opened onto the colonnade. Shortly after Dabbs had finished the pantry wing and the service wing, however, Eliza once again reconsidered her decisions and instructed him to add two slave rooms and a privy to the south end of the service wing. She also decided to convert the storeroom into a habitable space, and directed

Dabbs to build a fireplace and chimney for the room. Once again, brickwork indicates these changes. The fireplace and chimneystack in the storeroom are abutted, not bonded, to the south wall. The two slave rooms and privy were built in the last campaign and thus were abutted to the south wall of the service wing. In his final billing, Josiah Dabbs charged Bruce for all these changes to the plan.

With these changes, Eliza Bruce had created an efficient and practical, if peculiar, domestic arrangement. Her world centered on her role as mother and mistress, and she created in the southeast corner of Berry Hill a command center from which she discharged her duties. Central to her scheme were the call bell vestibule and the nursery passage. The eleven call bells in the vestibule, each connected to a major room in the house, were arranged in ascending order according to tone. Each room, then, was given a specific bell tone that slaves, who were waiting in the servants' hall, would recognize as belonging to a specific room and would answer accordingly.

The nursery passage with its service stair that runs from basement to attic was one of the most important features of the design. Located at the core of the house, it served both as a barrier to the most private realm of the household and as a discreet means of access to public, private, and work areas. Doors from the passage opened onto the colonnade at the rear of the house, to the central hall, and to the nursery. Although the nursery passage was a discreet, segregated circulation space for slaves, Eliza also used it for access to work spaces in the basement where there were two large storerooms with lockable doors corresponding to the parlors above; a large central space corresponding to the central hall and dining room above; and two workrooms corresponding to the chamber and nursery. Eliza called the two workrooms her "cloth rooms," and it was here that she supervised the work of slave weavers and seamstresses who made clothes for the plantation slaves. With the nursery passage and the reconfiguration of the original service wing, Eliza had created a compact cluster of spaces from which she could easily supervise and survey the household.¹⁶

The nursery passage, the bell vestibule, and the servants' hall, together forming the nexus of service at Berry Hill, were innovations that eighteenth-century Virginians would hardly have recognized. As Dell Upton has shown, there is evidence that during the eighteenth century, slaves had remarkable freedom to move about their master's house. Slaves waited for summons everywhere in the house—in the passage, in the dining room, outside the chamber, or even in the chamber

itself. They were ubiquitous in the great house of the eighteenth century, although often ignored. Upton argues that their freedom of movement came in part because slaves were considered non-persons. Architectural barriers that existed were more to separate class, not race.¹⁷

At Berry Hill, however, slaves were confined to the servants' hall to await a call bell to summon them to other parts of the house. Once summoned, they did not move through public spaces until absolutely necessary. Rather, they moved through a narrow, vertical core within the house—the nursery passage. Thus, the plan diverges significantly from the room arrangement and circulation pattern of the traditional eighteenth-century Virginia great house. The Berry Hill household teemed with the activity of twenty-seven slaves who cooked, cleaned, laundered, tended the gardens, made clothes, provisioned the pantry and smokehouse, and performed any number of tasks for the comfort of the white family. Eliza sought to control the movement of her slaves through her house with architectural and mechanical devices.¹⁸

Berry Hill's plan, then, reflects a growing desire to keep slavery hidden from view and embodies an attempt to reconcile two distinct households, one white, one black; one free, one enslaved. The movement of slaves through Berry Hill house was closely regulated, and the goal was to keep slaves out of sight of the white household and its guests. When it became apparent that slaves walking along the colonnade had a clear view into the dining room, the Bruces built a shed with louvers over that part of the colonnade to block visual contact between the black and white household (fig 10). Confined to a room when not otherwise employed, and screened by architectural devices as they moved through the house, slaves at Berry Hill seemed virtually invisible.¹⁹

These observations of Berry Hill's plan and construction give rise to a fundamental question: Why were the Bruces, an elite household of the antebellum period, more concerned with confining their servants than were their colonial counterparts? The answer to that question lies in understanding the purpose of the great house in colonial and early antebellum Virginia society.

In the eighteenth century, men of the ruling class like John Tayloe of Mount Airy, for example, focused on their public personae. Men of the gentry displayed themselves in public at every opportunity—at weekly services in the Anglican Church and at monthly meetings of the court. The gentry controlled both the political and religious institutions



Fig. 10. The lowered shed addition to the pantry wing blocks visual contact between slaves ascending the stairs and the white household otherwise visible beyond the dining room window, partially seen in the upper right. See Fig. 9, exterior view of shed. (Photo: Author, 1999)

to which Virginians were bound by law. For the gentry, public life was a high calling. The formal, restrained, calculating nature of the gentry's public life was also present in their family life. Although the gentry sometimes expressed deep emotion, even passion in their private lives, familial relations

were characterized by the same choreographed expressions of status and deference they practiced in public life. Maintaining a family's position in political, religious, and social affairs was paramount, and family members all played a role to this end.²⁰

Women, however, wielded little authority in the public rituals that confirmed gentry status. When Robert Carter was absent from his table, the privilege and responsibility of toasting and carving fell not to his wife, but to the tutor of Carter's children, Philip Fithian. Although he was Mrs. Carter's social inferior, presiding at table was his prerogative as a male. Women held forth in their bedchambers, the private spaces removed from but adjacent to the public areas. Here they received and entertained women of their own class, dressed their children, and attended to household matters. Although women often brought substantial dowries to a marriage that allowed their husbands to carry out impressive building campaigns, they never initiated such campaigns themselves. For example, Sarah Taliaferro Brookes, widow of William Brookes of Essex County, Virginia, finished Brookes Bank, the house begun by her husband. Sarah Brookes did not change the plan of the house that her husband had begun; she had no need and presumably no desire to do so. By and large, building was men's business in the eighteenth century, and the structures they built, houses, courthouses, and churches were meant to enhance their own roles in the political and social order.²¹

Tayloe and other members of the ruling elite used architecture to reinforce these notions of an ordered society. A Vir-

ginia great house like Tayloe's Mount Airy was not a family's home as much as it was one man's attempt to link himself to the institutions from which power and authority were derived in Virginia society, the county and colonial government, and the established Church. Thus, the great house was meant for public display and experience. Houses followed strict ordering principles of classicism that accentuated the importance of the planter's house as a locus of power. Mount Airy and houses like it were bids for and confirmation of intergenerational power, and the audience for such an architectural statement was other white males. Tayloe's house suggests the extent to which large segments of the population, specifically women and slaves, could be and were ignored in favor of a calculated expression of patriarchal power and position.²²

Mount Airy is based on the ordering principles of Renaissance Classicism as popularized by pattern book authors such as James Gibbs (fig 11). In fact, Mount Airy is most likely based on Plate 54 of Gibbs' *Book of Architecture* published in 1725. It has a forecourt defined by flankers arranged around a major axis and a minor cross axis, both of which reinforce the principle of bi-lateral symmetry. As Upton's analysis has shown, in the plan of Mount Airy the major axis continues through the house, bisecting the plan and maintaining the



Fig. 11. North elevation of Mount Airy, Richmond County, Virginia. (Library of Congress, HABS, VA, 80-WAR, V, 4-19)

bi-lateral symmetry established by the plan of the forecourt and by the main elevation of the house (fig. 12). A visitor who follows this axis from the forecourt through the house and into the garden beyond finds an almost identical elevation to the one presented in the forecourt.²³

The difference between these elevations is minor. The main elevation has a trabeated loggia, while the garden elevation has an arcaded loggia. The visitor who follows the major axes at Mount Airy experiences this colonial great house, almost in its entirety. The house is readily discernible in all three dimensions and is offered up as a public display of power and position within the social order. The notion that a colonial great house should have identical, or at least symmetrical elevations was common throughout the eighteenth century and carried forward into the early nineteenth century.²⁴

Several examples from the antebellum period indicate the persistence of symmetry in the planning of a great house. In 1808 Joseph Carrington Cabell dithered over whether to buy a particular house in Amherst County and thus establish his seat in Virginia's piedmont. The wealthy and influential Issac Coles of Albemarle County wrote Cabell advising the

young scion to quit his temporary lodgings in Williamsburg, purchase the house, and make "a home ... that you should be master of..." Efforts to maintain power through architecture continued throughout Virginia's antebellum period, as centers of power shifted westward, to the Piedmont and beyond. Coles, himself descended from colonial gentry, knew that establishing an architectural presence in a region was paramount to maintaining privileged status, and he told the young Cabell, "Until you do this [build a house] you can have no real weight or influence in society." Cabell took the advice, purchased the modest house and remodeled it into a five-part Palladian villa, naming it Edgehill. Joseph's cousin Samuel and his brother George settled nearby, Samuel building a five-part dwelling and George building a three-part dwelling. Dozens of such five- and three-part villas were built in Virginia's piedmont well into the 1840s.²⁵

Such symmetrical arrangements were heavily ingrained in the Virginia mindset. When Waller Holladay began planning his house in Spotsylvania County in 1810, he employed a local builder to draw up plans. The builder first proposed a traditional center-passage plan, one room deep, with an

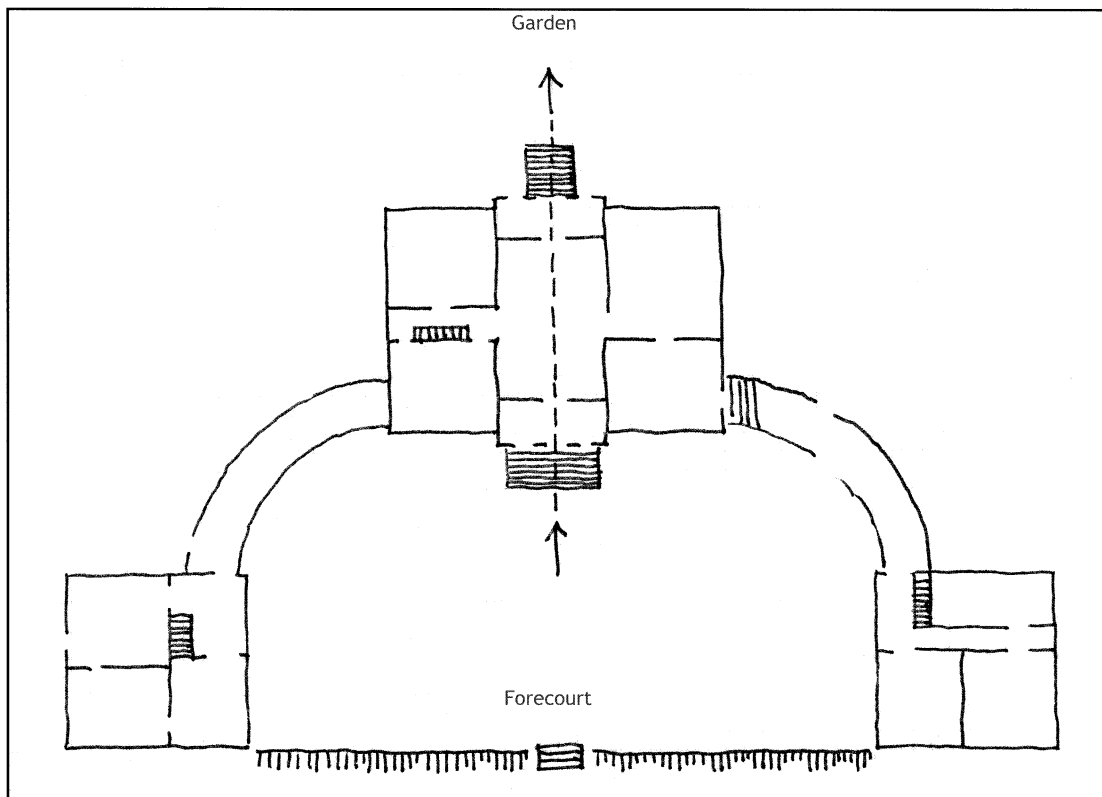


Fig. 12. Dell Upton's analysis of the axial procession at Mount Airy. (Drawing by Urs Peter Flueckiger adapted from those by Thomas Tileston Waterman)

odd wing attached to one end as Holladay's bedchamber. Holladay rejected the plan and several other asymmetrical plans his builder proposed. In the end, he built a symmetrical two-story house with a center passage flanked on either side by two rooms. In front of the house, he created a forecourt, much more modest than that at Mount Airy, but a forecourt nonetheless. Here he placed an office on one side and a school room on the other. To the rear of the house, he created the same arrangement with a smokehouse/dairy and a kitchen. The Caballs and Holladay are but four examples; scores of other elite Virginia families continued to build impressive symmetrical houses throughout the antebellum period with Holladay's two-room-deep center-passage plan being the most common.²⁶

More significantly, the elite of antebellum Virginia continued to follow a long embedded mental template of social organization within an elite household. By 1750, elite Virginians had established four social spaces as essential: the hall, dining room, chamber, and passage. The hall was the most formal and public room of the house and usually was accessed only through the passage. The dining room was semi-public, with access to the passage and the private chamber, and it often had an exterior door that allowed direct service from the detached kitchen. The chamber was the most private room of the house and often had access only from the dining room. The passage was public and controlled circulation to all other rooms of the house. The terms "parlor" and "drawing room" later replaced the term "hall," and the term "passage" was later supplemented with "hall" and "central hall." The Bruces used these terms interchangeably, referring to their double parlors alternately as "parlor" and "drawing room," and to the main stair hall as "passage" and "hall." Regardless of the changing terminology, the function of these spaces remained unchanged; they were the basic and constant components of all elite houses whether they were five-part villas or double-pile center-passage in plan.²⁷

This social organization was further refined in a hierarchy of public and private space during the third quarter of the eighteenth century when democratic rhetoric of the Revolution challenged the rule of the Virginia gentry. Men like Thomas Mann Randolph of Tuckahoe began to "close" their houses. Tuckahoe's distinctive H-plan consisted of two wings, each of them one-room deep with a central passage, connected by a long, formal saloon. With public entrances on each elevation, Tuckahoe once invited visitors to enjoy a full enfilade of the family's space through two stair halls and

the saloon giving access to parlors and a dining room. When, however, his middling neighbors began to assume themselves "in every respect, [his] equal," Randolph and his family retreated to the south wing of the house and confined visitors of all ranks to the saloon or north stair hall. This move toward a more private zoning of the great house gained momentum at the turn of the century when Virginians, like elite Americans in general, experienced a psychological shift toward a regard for the self, a phenomenon that emphasized the individual and the development of closer personal relationships more fulfilling to the self. Consequently, Virginians began to regard the immediate family in a more intimate light, and sought to nurture close familial relationships. The social organization of private and public spaces in Virginia's elite households remained unchanged for more than a hundred years.²⁸

At Berry Hill, the Bruces maintained this social organization. Public and semi-public space lies to the east of the central hall in the form of double parlors, with the north parlor being the more public. The south parlor is semi-public space by virtue of the pocket doors that separate the two rooms. The Bruces made the dining room public space by locating it on direct access with the front door and by closing it from the hall with a glazed pocket door. To the west of the central hall is a suite of private rooms, principally the Bruces' chamber and the nursery. There are, however, more private areas west of the central hall including the nursery passage, servants' hall, closet, and call bell vestibule. It is these additional private spaces that make Berry Hill a unique and informative specimen of antebellum domestic architecture, with a plan and elevations very different from those of the traditional Virginia great house.

Berry Hill is a significant divergence from the eighteenth-century ideal of creating a sequential spatial experience along a direct axis through a house whose identical entry and garden facades created an impression of a unified whole. The visitor to Berry Hill follows the major axis established by the forecourt into the central hall, but the axis ends at the door to the dining room. This door is glazed, and this transparency suggests a continuation of the axis. But once in the dining room, there is no public exit for the visitor. Windows on either side of the fireplace provide light and ventilation, but they are not meant to provide an axial vista or access to gardens beyond. In fact, there are no gardens at the rear of the house. The gardens lie to the east. A stroll through these gardens requires the visitor to retrace the entry sequence—back through the central hall, onto the portico, into the forecourt, and then

eastward through an arched trellis gate in the garden wall, and into the terraced gardens where berms, plantings, and paths determine views of and access to the house (fig. 13).

On entering the garden, the visitor descends a series of terraces, down and away from the house. Originally, the view of the house from the gardens revealed a perfectly blank

wall, covered in stucco and scored to resemble ashlar. This treatment of stucco has a long tradition, and it reinforces the monumental nature of the house itself. From this view, Berry Hill looks like the pristine temple it was meant to recall. The descending terraces of the garden follow the topography of the land, which slopes eastward away from the house. While

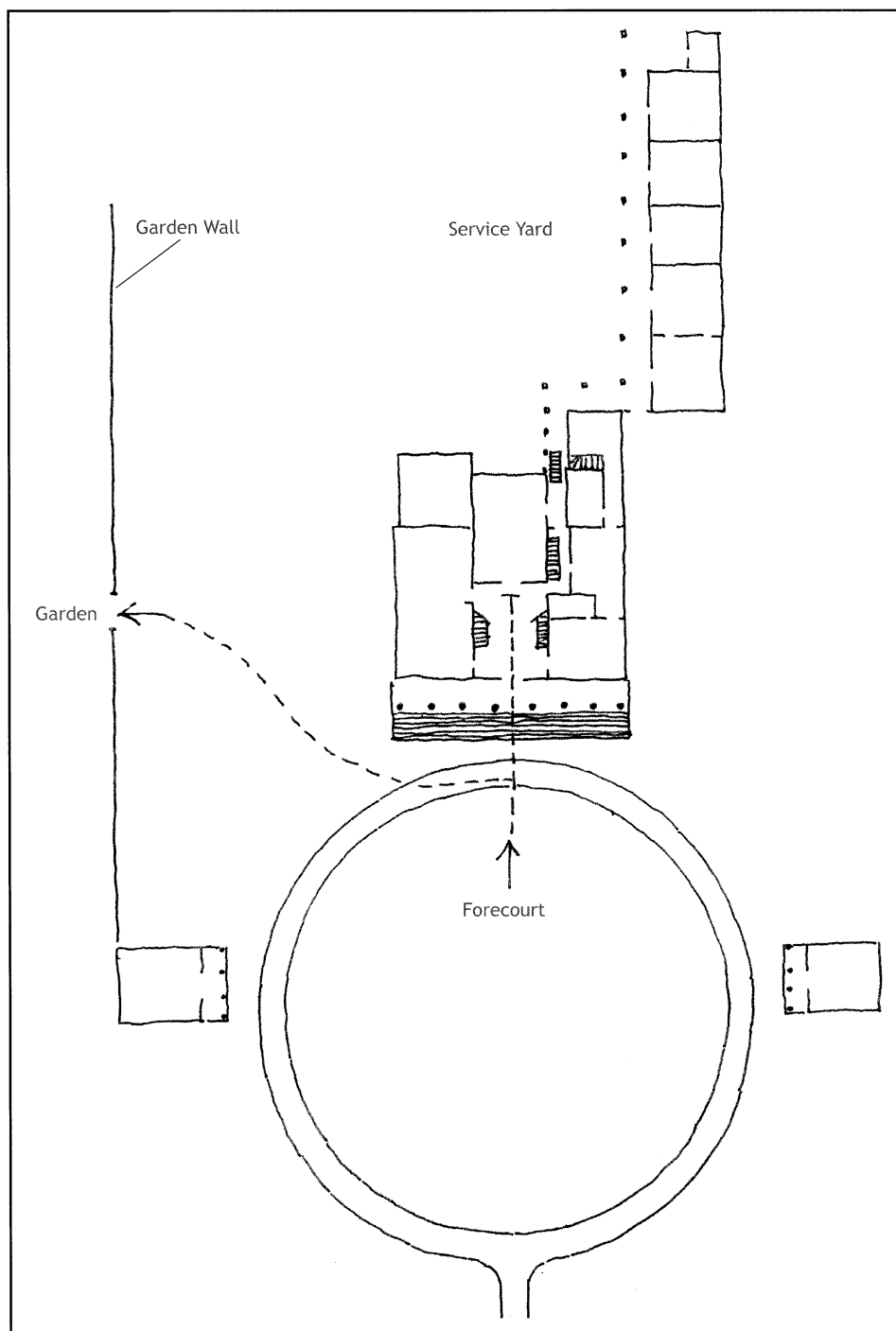


Fig. 13. Analysis of non-axial procession at Berry Hill. Compare to the analysis of Mount Airy in fig. 12. (Drawing by Urs Peter Flueckiger adapted from those of the author)

the terraces heighten the effect of the vista toward the house, they also obscure a significant feature of Berry Hill's plan—the service wing that contains a kitchen, a laundry, three slave dwelling rooms, and a privy. This service wing extends more than 100 feet south of the house, yet the visitor is never aware of it. To ensure the invisibility of the service wing, Eliza built a five-foot high brick wall separating the gardens from the service and side yards of the house (fig. 13). The wing is not visible from any public room in the house, nor is it discernible from any public space on the exterior of the house. Lines of vision are focused firmly on the temple-like profile of the house.

Analysis of Berry Hill's plan and paths reveals the significant difference between it and other Virginia plantation houses. The visitor to a house like Tayloe's Mount Airy or Hollady's Prospect Hill experienced a full processional path from the entrance, through the house, and into the gardens beyond. From this vantage point, the visitor was invited to admire another symmetrical elevation carefully composed to complement the gardens for which it was a backdrop. At Berry Hill, the visitor's progression along the axis abruptly stops; there is no public space beyond the dining room. Berry Hill's rear elevation is a collection of asymmetrical masses and

projecting wings that contain the service functions and that clearly make concessions to Eliza's needs and desires as mistress of the household. As if to distinguish his own place within this architectural conglomeration, James Bruce instructed his builder to extend the Doric entablature around the rear of the main block of the house, a move that lent decorative emphasis to that part of the building that already dominated the smaller projections and massings.

The asymmetrical elevations and corresponding plan at Berry Hill reveal a dramatic shift in the domestic arrangements of the Bruce household. The extensive service wing indicates that the Bruces were more concerned with service and convenience than with long-accepted, even expected, traditions of design principles founded in axis and symmetry. Although the Bruces retained the basic social organization of space—passage, dining room, hall, chamber—these spaces were reconfigured in a manner without precedent in Virginia. This abandonment of time-honored formal aesthetics and traditional spatial arrangements in the planning of a great plantation house probably indicates the influence of Eliza Bruce on the planning of Berry Hill.



Fig. 14. Staunton Hill, Charlotte County, Virginia. View of service wing, c. 1890. Note the larger, castellated massing of the house beyond. Unlike Berry Hill, Staunton Hill's service wing is linked more directly to the house itself. This link is emphasized visually by the matching Gothic Revival motifs. (Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA)

Berry Hill served as a model for other Bruce family houses. When Charles Bruce, the younger half-brother of James C., decided to build his house in 1848, he also employed John Johnson as his designer, and together they conceived a house called Staunton Hill in neighboring Charlotte County that followed the plan of Berry Hill very closely (figs. 14 and

15). An imposing essay on the Gothic Revival, Staunton Hill boasts an octagonal entry vestibule leading to a hall with a double flight of stairs, like those at Berry Hill, beyond which lays the dining room. To the west of this impressive enfilade is a suite of triple parlors that overlooks a detached conservatory. To the east of the center hall is a suite of private rooms

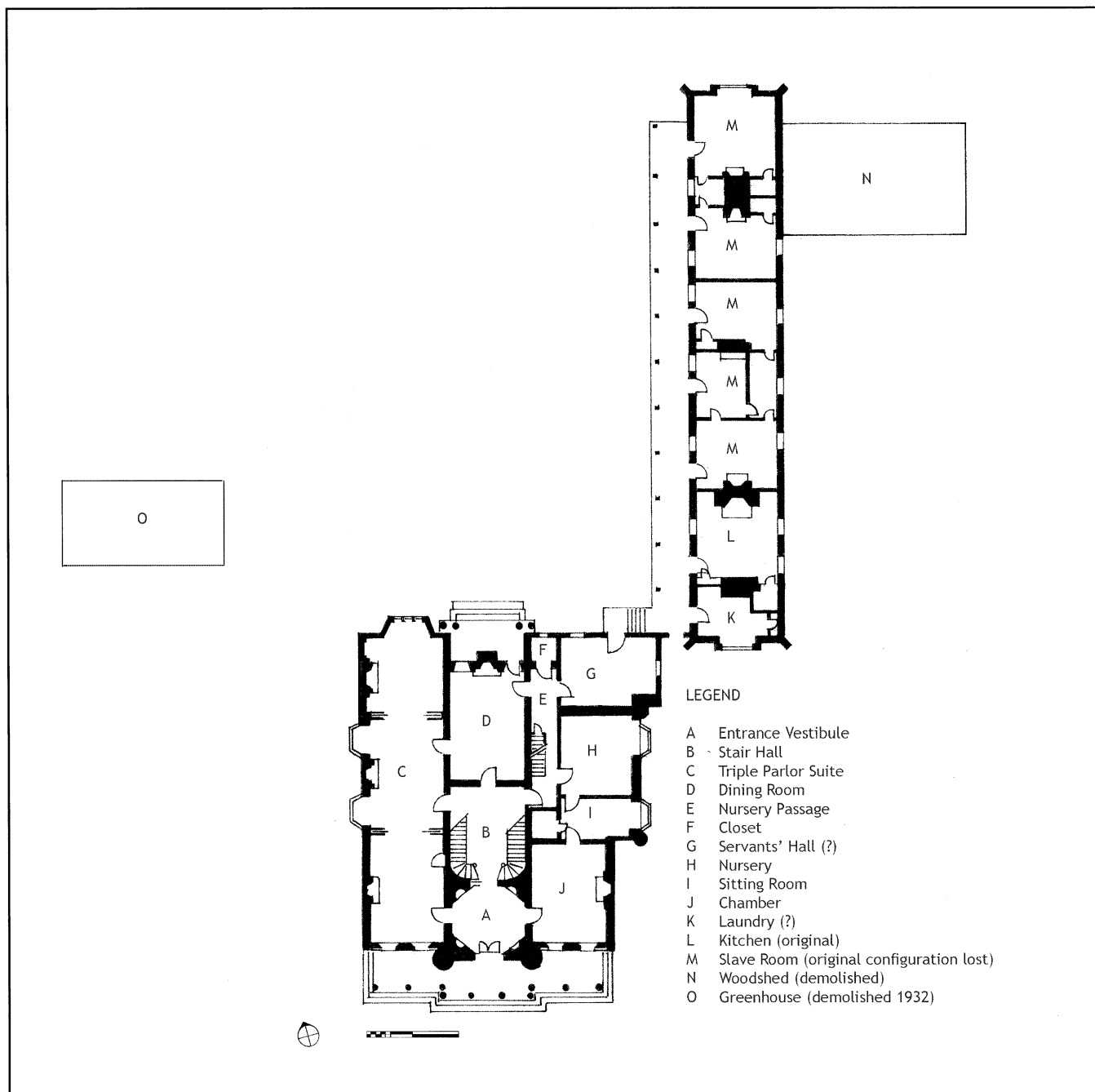


Fig. 15. Plan of Staunton Hill. Areas labeled F through M were modified in 1932. Area G had partitions added. Area L is the original kitchen, but areas K, L, and M lost most of their original configurations in the 1932 remodeling. (Drawing by Urs Peter Flueckiger adapted from those by the Historic American Building Survey, HABS VA, 20-BROOK.V, 1)

beginning with a sleeping chamber for the Bruces behind which there originally was a closet, sitting room, and nursery, and a service stair hall that led to a closet that served the dining room. The plan of Staunton Hill is clearly based on that of Berry Hill, including the service wing, which is set slightly to the side of the house and extends back ninety-five feet. A call bell system, no longer evident, served the house probably in the same manner as the one at Berry Hill. Although similar in plan, some of the awkward connections between the private space of the family and the service space of the slaves have been resolved, particularly the one that leads to the dining room. Whereas Berry Hill has a louvered shed that blocks visual contact along the slaves' service route, there are no devices at Staunton Hill to screen slave movements; the entry from the service wing to the main block of the house has been configured to connect directly, and more discreetly, to the service stair hall within the house.

Staunton Hill was heavily remodeled in the 1930s, and the original closet, nursery, and service wing were reconfigured. Nevertheless, the form of the original house was not changed and enough original fabric remains on the interior so that the house's debt to Berry Hill is clear. Charles Bruce and his wife, Sarah Seddon, obviously drew directly from Berry Hill their ideas for how a slave household should be arranged.

Morotock, the mansion house for the one-thousand acre estate that James C. Bruce gave to his son, William Ballard, upon his marriage to Maria Morson, shows a thoughtful resolution to the awkward attachment of the service wing. Ballard's house, built in 1859, is much more modest than that of either his father or uncle. Simple in fenestration and massing, the only embellishment is a one-story Tuscan porch across the front of the house. In plan, Morotock follows more closely the traditional center passage plan so common to Virginia (fig. 16). The passage runs directly through the house from the front porch to the rear porch. To one side of the passage is a single parlor behind which is a dining room. A single hinged door opens from the parlor into the dining room. To the other side of the passage is a chamber that communicates, like those of Berry Hill and Staunton Hill, through a closet with a nursery beyond. Although most great houses had by this time relegated sleeping chambers to the second floor, the Bruces continued the long tradition of maintaining a chamber on the first floor.

Service to the house followed the idea but not the physical arrangement of Berry Hill and Staunton Hill. A two-story

shed addition, original to the house, spans the rear elevation (figs. 17 and 18). The addition contains a service stair hall that runs from the basement to the second floor. A closet occupies part of the space behind the dining room, and the area between the service stair and closet is an open porch giving access to both the hall and the dining room. Curiously, the service shed is symmetrical in elevation, though clearly it was not meant to be viewed by guests.

To the west of the house is a service wing arranged very much like that at Berry Hill. The wing is removed ten feet to the west and is connected to the house by a curtain wall with a door giving access to the side yard. The wing consists of a kitchen and laundry separated by a large chimneystack and with a privy at the very rear of the wing. Compared to service wings at Berry Hill and Staunton Hill, the one at Morotock is modest indeed, a mere forty-two feet long. Missing from the wing, of course, are rooms for slaves. All of the cellar rooms, however, have fireplaces and might have served as rooms for slaves. At the foot of the stair hall in the basement, a series of call bells survive and hang over the door of the southwest basement room. Slaves awaited summons either in this basement room or in the stair hall.

As they did at Berry Hill, slaves served Morotock by moving vertically through a narrow stair passage. The service stairs open on each floor onto a porch, with the first floor porch giving access to the center hall and the dining room, and the second floor porch giving access to the center hall only. Unlike the service stairs at Berry Hill and Staunton Hill, those at Morotock are not contained within the main block of the house. Rather, that vertical core of service rises at the very back of the house, in the service shed that stretches parallel across the rear elevation. This service shed could have been included under one roof with the main block of the house but instead is pulled in at the sides of the house and covered by a shed roof. This distinctive massing makes the service addition read simultaneously as integral to, yet separate from the main mass of the house (figs. 17 and 18). Slave service at Morotock is pushed entirely out of the main block of the house and is literally peripheral to the household. Morotock resolved the awkward massing found at Berry Hill, and in doing so created another means for segregating servants from the household they served. Fifteen years after the completion of Berry Hill, another generation of Bruces confirmed the efficacy of its service arrangements.

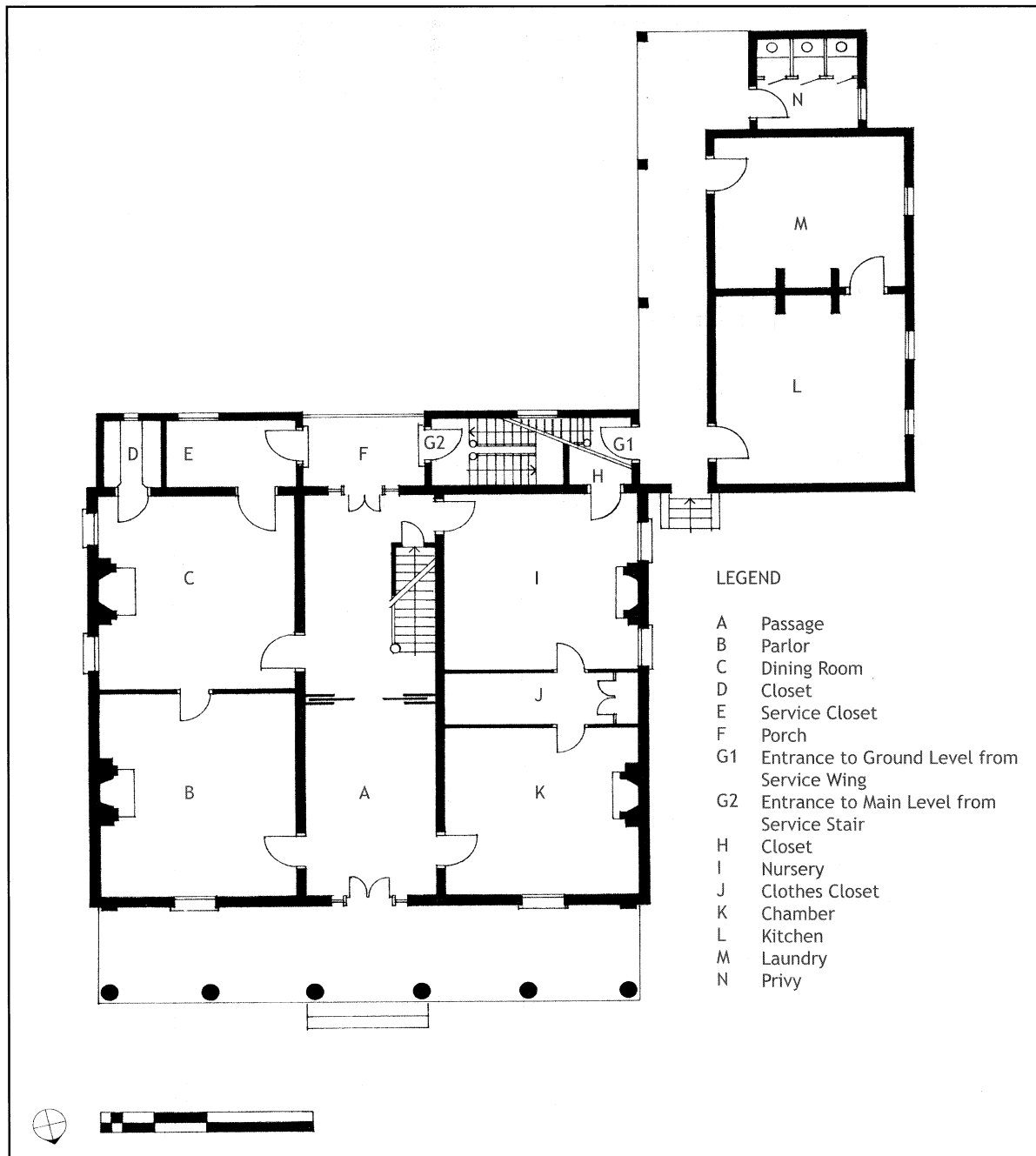


Fig. 16. Plan of Morotock, Charlotte County, Virginia. (Drawing by Urs Peter Flueckiger adapted from those of the author)

At Morotock, however, there is another equally significant change in architectural buffers. The house is more closed to public access of any kind than Berry Hill. The spacious central passage is divided into two sections by a pair of louvered pocket doors. When the doors are pulled together, the louvers allow air to pass through the hall, but the wide and graceful run of stairs at the back of the passage is then closed to the view of visitors. Similarly, the double and triple parlors that were

so important to the designs of Berry Hill and Staunton Hill are missing at Morotock. Instead, both of the public rooms, the parlor and the dining room, are closed to each other and to the passage by single hinged doors. The proportions of the passage, parlor, and dining room are deceptively inviting, and they disguise what is actually a house very much closed to public scrutiny, a household that has turned inward toward itself. The successive plans of Berry Hill, Staunton Hill, and



Figs. 17 and 18. Views of the two-story service shed at Morotock. The service shed was conceived as an integral part of the main house, but the shed's scale and proportions and its separate roof structure make clear the visual distinction between servant and served space. (Photos: Author, 1999)

Morotock suggest that the Bruce family was growing increasingly wary of the world beyond their parlors. In their houses we see a preoccupation with privacy and an emphasis on discreet service to the white family.

This inward turning might be explained in part by the changing role of women during the early nineteenth century. Women—wives and mothers—took on a newly emphasized role as nurturers in the new republic. It was they who imparted meaning and values to the new concept of family. The notion of family life revolved around women who were charged with creating a home: a haven from the larger world for their husbands, and a moral and virtuous atmosphere for their children. Religion and popular literature reinforced these ideal roles for women. Family life became characterized by deeply emotional displays of affection between husband and wife, mother and child. Unlike the colonial gentry that Jan Lewis and others have described, the elite of antebellum Virginia celebrated an intimate family life far removed from the scrutiny of a larger public arena. This new cult of domesticity helped romanticize the house itself and attached to it sentimental emotions making the house much more than a monument to male position and authority. It is precisely this new ideal of domesticity, this expanded role of women as nurturers and protectors of the values of home and hearth, that Harriet Beecher Stowe capitalized on in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at mid-century. Andrew Jackson Downing exploited these sentiments and portrayed the cottages and villas in his books as physical manifestations of a new cultural ideal. Houses themselves became much more than bricks and mortar or board and batten. They came to be seen as possessing special moral powers. The concept of the house changed; it became a “home.”²⁹

There was another factor operating in this period as well, and that was the tendency of elite Virginians to withdraw into the privacy of their families. They sought to protect themselves from the outside world—the world of commercial and industrial capitalism that rapidly developed during the first quarter of the century. Moreover, the attacks of Northern abolitionists called into question not only the Southern economic system, but also the very culture and way of life that this economic system spawned. Slaveholding families across the South not only withdrew from the larger world and its critics, but also became suspicious of their own environments, as slave rebellions and rumors of rebellions periodically swept through their communities. Virginians grew even more wary of their slaves after Nat Turner led a slave revolt in Southampton County in 1831, killing sixty whites, most of them

women and children. Turner's group of rebels numbered only about seventy, and the insurrection was put down in two days. But the fear of slave rebellion always lurked under the smooth façade that Southerners presented to the world. The psychological impact from Turner's rebellion—the fear, panic, and suspicion raised among all whites—was predictably much larger and longer-lasting than the actions of one small band of insurgents might have warranted. The repercussions of the rebellion reverberated throughout Virginia for the rest of the antebellum period.³⁰

Turner's rebellion created in Eliza Bruce's mind a permanent and haunting anxiety, and she expressed what for her would be a life-long fear for the safety of her family. Five years after the massacre she wrote her absent husband saying, “I frequently feel very uneasy at night about the insurrection, but I endeavor to feel resigned and to depend on a higher power.” In another letter, again while Bruce was away, she expressed anxiety over being alone on the plantation. “Except for the overseer, I have not seen a white face in over a month.” And in yet another letter, she reported that a neighbor's slave had tried to poison her mistress's coffee and she asked her husband to bring back “a good strong lock for the door.”³¹ Often alone on a plantation with more than a hundred slaves, Eliza's fears of death at the hands of her servants were not unreasonable.

The plans of Berry Hill, Staunton Hill, and Morotock suggest the increasing tensions aroused by domestic slavery. At Berry Hill, Eliza seems to have resolved to create a secluded haven to which she could retire when her husband was away. Architectural barriers provided what was probably a physical and psychological buffer for her. These devices also added to the perception of cheerful, efficient service even as they disguised much of the real work that slaves performed at Berry Hill. Such provisions for silent and invisible service, however, did not mean that service was always performed attentively or willingly. Oftentimes the ideal of silent, invisible service and the reality of a plantation mistress's work collided. Some house slaves clearly resented the long, grueling hours and tedious tasks they performed for the Bruces. James commented more than once on the difficulty of training a good house servant, and Eliza complained of slaves who carelessly performed the work required of them. Having summoned a slave to bring more wood for the fire in the nursery, Eliza commented with exasperation, “I am so tired of the dirt they bring in on their feet.”³²

This one line, isolated in a letter to her husband, tells much about Eliza's relationship with her slaves. Although one slave performing a single chore prompted her complaint, Eliza saw this one instance as indicative of a general problem with slave service. Clearly, slaves were tracking dirt through the house on a regular basis, and while Eliza did not have to clean the floors herself, she had to direct another slave to clean up. This incident shows that some house slaves did not take initiative, nor did they willingly perform chores that were their responsibility. Moreover, there were disturbing implications to her slaves' lack of attention to duty. The house slaves at Berry Hill practiced an overt and, for Eliza, an exasperating form of resistance. This subtle, but direct challenge to her authority irritated her. However, she chose to avoid confrontation. She learned that while pulling a bell crank might give the illusion of efficient service, the simple act of summoning could give rise to a host of problems.

Eliza Bruce gave careful consideration to the way in which slaves would move through the spaces she planned, and she tried to make their movement both discreet and efficient by using call bells to summon them. She sought to render them invisible. But out of sight was not out of mind. For slaves at Berry Hill mansion house, the call bells were another audible manifestation of power and control over their lives. Yet, while spaces confined them and bells directed them, Eliza Bruce's slaves resisted her authority. Their dirty footprints betrayed a contentious relationship, a contest of wills that could not be resolved by even the most careful architectural arrangements.

The house at Berry Hill plantation was the result of a slow, and ultimately doomed, attempt to devise an architectural resolution for issues raised by the changing nature of slavery within the slaveholding household. Berry Hill's unusual plan was a result of this change and illustrates the ways in which architecture and material objects were used to mitigate the ever increasing tension inherent in the daily life of an antebellum plantation. The Greek temple that James and Eliza Bruce built presented a proud and confident facade to the outside world, but behind that facade they created a haven and retreat from the same world they sought to impress. Inside the mansion house, Eliza built an environment regulated by aural commands and spatial barriers in which she and her family could ignore the scrutiny of a world that increasingly questioned and criticized the nature of their "family, white and black."

APPENDIX A

Articles of agreement made and entered into this 1st day of March one thousand eight hundred and forty two between Jas. C. Bruce of the county of Halifax of the one part and Josiah Dabbs of the other part witnesseth That the said Josiah Dabbs hath this day agreed to Build for the said Jas. C. Bruce a dwelling house and out houses of the following plan and dimensions

The house is to be located on the Berry Hill Estate, where the house that Genl. Edward Carrington formerly resided in,

The main building to be Sixty four feet by fifty two with a projection of ten feet in the center of the building in rear, which projection forms a part of the dining room the balance of the dining room to extend in the main building taking up a part of the passage the whole of this part of the building is to be 2 stories high besides the basement and the rooms and finish of the same to be done and finished after the direction of said Bruce according to a plan & drawing made by Mr. Jno. E. Johnson, to have a portico in front supported by eight collums, the floor & steps of which are to be of nice cut stone granite, and the whole of the external finish of this part of the building to be of the doric Order of Architecture. There is to be a green house in rear of this building, which is to extend as far back as the dining room and on the Opposite Side thereof a large closet to correspond, in the outward appearance, with the green house, there is to be a line of out buildings extending directly back of the dining room, which row of buildings are to be one story high, to be so arranged as to make one room for pantry, one for Kitchen, one for a Laundry and two rooms for Servants, to have a covered way, in front of them six feet wide, the size of these rooms to be as the said Bruce may direct. There is to be two offices in the yard 18 x 24 feet one story high, all of which are to made of brick well burned and laid in good cement, and the whole of the buildings to be covered with tin in the best manner.

All the rooms in this main building to be papered, the two drawing rooms to be elegantly papered. There is to be ten marble mantelpieces two of which pure white to cost at least one hundred & fifty Dollars, there are to be eleven Mahogany Doors the said Dabbs to furnish all the materials for the completion of this house to paint, paper, and make a turn Key Job, and the building to be at the said Dabbs' risk until delivered. the front and two Sides to be Stuccod. in the best manner. the Sills to Doors & window are to be of cut stone

Marble wash boards in all the rooms on the first floor. the glass to the windows in the two drawing rooms to be of plate glass, the locks, & hinges etc. on the first floor to be Silver plated those above to be of the best kind not plated, the said Dabbs to pull down the old house.

It's impossible to express every thing in a contract of this kind, but a plan & drawing having been made there can be no difficulty in understanding it.

The said Bruce pays to the said Dabbs three thousand dollars on the 15th Inst. six thousand dollars when the walls are completed and and fourteen thousand five hundred when the house is finished and delivered according to contract.

The size of the doors, windows & proportions generally to be approved by the said Bruce.

An entablature after the Doric order to extend around the portico and 2 sides of the house 6 1/2 feet broad according to drawing intended to accompany this contract.

Witness our hands this 1st of March 1842.

James C. Bruce

Josiah Dabbs

APPENDIX B

4 rooms in the basement—2 with plank floor and 2 for storerooms with shelves, etc. 5 rooms on second floor—The windows in the two Parlours and the Chamber window, the Hall and dining room doors of plate glass. 11 Mahogany doors—Best plated bolts and Locks. The ceiling to the two parlours curved and divided into compartments. All the rooms papered—The two parlours with the handsomest kind of paper—The Hall and dining room ~~the second best~~ handsome but not the most expensive—The chamber and other rooms over the house such paper as costs about \$1.25 a roll. Mrs. Bruce to have the selection. Flues in every dressing room—the library, and Hall. Portico 8 columns. 8 feet wide and granite floor and steps all across the front—To the back of the dining room—Pantry with fire place, shelves and presses—18 by 16—kitchen 18 by 20—Laundry 18 by 18—2 Servants rooms. Portico extending from nursery to the extreme back building—Closets at the back of the nursery 16 by 14 with shelves and Flue—greenhouse 18 by 12 glassed front and side—with wooden shutters also—Venetian door to the Hall—Flue for Stove—

Two offices by pitch in proportion with porticos. The house and offices gutered. The glass for the windows in House and Offices the best Boston crown glass.

Bruce Family Papers, Business Papers of James C. and Alexander Bruce, Box 20, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Camille Wells who first took me to Berry Hill and suggested its rich possibilities as a topic of study, and who agreed to direct the dissertation that resulted from my initial research. Her help has been invaluable. Ed Chappell, Gina Haney, Willy Graham, Hal Sharp, and Mark Wenger volunteered their valuable time, advice, and insights during site visits to make measured drawings and during consultations thereafter. I thank Judith Kucharski for her friendship and for her patient and insightful readings of my first drafts. I am also very appreciative of the patience and expert help of the librarians and staff at the University of Virginia's Special Collections, the Virginia Historical Society, and the Library of Virginia. Generous grants from the Virginia Historical Society and from the University of Virginia's College of Arts and Sciences supported research for this article.

ENDNOTES

¹For references to Berry Hill, see Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonial and Early Republic* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1922), 180-82; Howard Major, *The Domestic Architecture of the Early Republic: the Greek Revival* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1926), 48; Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), 191; Roger Kennedy, *Greek Revival America* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1989), 31, 139, 207; Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: Virginia* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 188-89. For more recent work on the classical revival see Barksdale Maynard, *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: Greek Revival and Romantic* (Savannah: Beehive Foundation, 1996); Page Talbot, *Classical Savannah: Fine and Decorative Arts, 1800-1840* (Savannah: The Telfair Museum of Art, 1995); Wendy A. Cooper, *Classical Taste in America, 1800-1840* (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1993); Gregory R. Weidman and Jennifer F. Goldsborough, *Classical Maryland, 1815-1845* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1993).

²On the collaborative design process in early America see, for example, Carl Lounsbury, "An Elegant and Commodious Building":

William Buckland and the Design of the Prince William County Courthouse," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 46:3 (Sept. 1987): 228-240; Catherine Bishir, "Good and Sufficient Language for Building," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture IV*, ed. Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 44-53; Jennifer Mauss, "So Many Fingers in a Virginia Pie: Collaborative Design and the Making of Bremono," *Arx*, *Journal of the Southeast Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians* 11 (2000): 1-18. Eliza's role in the design process is not necessarily atypical. Design in early America was a collaborative undertaking and there are many documented cases of builders and clients working together to achieve a desired result. Fewer cases, however, document the role of women in a building campaign. One such case, that of Ann Barraud Cocke, wife of John Hartwell Cocke, has been researched by Jennifer Mauss. While Mauss notes correctly that Ann Cocke was an eager and active participant in the collaboration and that "the entire right half of the principal story is devoted to woman's space," Ann Cocke's role in the design process did not change the form or social space of a traditional Virginia great house. That is, the plan and elevations maintained a strict symmetry, and the plan adhered to the long accepted Virginia norms of private and public space. Eliza Bruce's participation in the building of Berry Hill, on the other hand, produced a house form and organization of space that was unprecedented in Virginia domestic architecture.

³Statistics on slave ownership come from John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 7-8. For the most recent study of elite southern slaveholders see: William Kauffman Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-nineteenth-century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 1-18, 175-217. Scarborough examines 340 planters who owned 250 slaves or more. Many of these slaveholders drew capital from northern investments and had diversified investments beyond cash-crop agriculture. James C. Bruce was typical of this planter class in that he invested in stocks and bonds, canals and railroads, in addition to his cash crops of Virginia tobacco and Louisiana sugar. James C. Bruce's slaveholdings are recorded in: "Register of Negroes, 1852," Bruce Family Papers, Business Papers (BFP, BP), mss. 2692, Box 13; "List and Inventory of the Negroes on the Plantation of Mssrs. Bruce Seddon & Wilkins St. James Nov. 22, 1849," BFP, BP, Box 11.

⁴Berry Hill contract, BFP, BP 1842, UVA.

⁵Ibid.

⁶BFP, BP, n.d., Box 20.

⁷Bruce periodically made lists of the slaves he owned. In all, Bruce owned 402 slaves who worked four plantations in Virginia, two plantations in Louisiana, and at his mill in Halifax County. Slaves at Berry Hill plantation numbered 108, twenty-seven of whom worked in what Bruce called the "mansion house." Of these house slaves, ten were adults: three childless couples; one couple with six children; one couple with one child; a single mother with nine children; and two men and two women who appear to have been single and unrelated,

but who may have been married to slaves at neighboring plantations. "Register of Negroes," BFP, BP, Box 13.

⁸On the uniqueness of Berry Hill's temple front, see Hamlin, *Greek Revival*, 191. On the origins of separating work space from domestic space in early Virginia, see: Fraser D. Neiman, "Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation: The Social Context of Early Virginia Building," in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, ed. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 308; and Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 43.

⁹Mutual Assurance Society. "Declarations of the Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia," 1822, Alderman Library, UVA, Microfilm #5794, Reel 13, nos. 6818-6821; John Michael Vlach, "The Plantation Tradition in an Urban Setting," *Southern Cultures* 5.1: 52-69; Bernard L. Herman, *Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 135. Herman argues: "Servants achieved transparency through the masters' blindness [to their existence] and servants' reading of their masters' and mistresses' assumptions." (134 and 148-50) The careful and deliberate arrangements at Berry Hill and comments by Eliza Bruce, however, indicate that the Bruce slaves never achieved such transparency and that, in fact, their master and mistress were very much aware of their movements through the house.

¹⁰Elizabeth C. Cromley, "Transforming the Food Axis: Houses, Tools, Modes of Analysis," *Material History Review* 44 (Fall 1996): 8-22. Cromley notes that "by the mid-nineteenth century, middle class urban and suburban houses were conceived according to zones of use: the social zone . . . [and] the service zone."

¹¹Journal of Eliza Bruce, BFP, 1838, Box 8.

¹²James C. Bruce (JCB) to Eliza Wilkins Bruce (EWB), BFP, 4 March 1831, Box 4.

¹³JCB to EWB, BFP, 8 August 1842, Box 10.

¹⁴See various letters between James C. and Eliza Bruce dated between October 1844 and March 1845, BFP, Box 10. For examples of references Eliza Bruce made to her vegetable and flower gardens, see EWB to JCB: BFP, 14 November 1844; 12 January 1845; 2 February 1845, Box 10. For references to supervision of various building campaigns still underway at Berry Hill, see EWB to JCB, BFP, 13 December 1844; 13 February 1845; 10 March 1845, Box 10, in which replacing the brick kitchen floor with sandstone is discussed.

¹⁵SB to JCB, BFP, 24 December 1844, Box 10. EWB to JCB, BFP, 13 December 1844; EWB to JCB, 2 February 1845, Box 10.

¹⁶Eliza identifies her workrooms in the basement in letters to her husband. See EWB to JCB, BFP, 18 November 1844 and 20 November 1844, Box 10.

¹⁷Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Places* 2 (1985), 59-72, reprinted in *Material Life in America 1600-1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 357-369; Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 299-323.

¹⁸I am indebted to Mark Wenger for sharing his unpublished manuscript describing the frequency of newspaper advertisements regarding call bells and their possible relation to increased needs for privacy. Mark Wenger, "House Bells and House Planning in Early Virginia," unpublished manuscript. Mark Girouard discusses the early uses by the English gentry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of call bells as a class barrier. This discussion is fundamentally different, however, from the use of call bells in a slaveholding household. See Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 219, 264.

¹⁹It has been suggested that the curious louvered shed provided shelter over the colonnade and stairs and afforded headroom while one ascended or descended the exterior stairs. Shelter and headroom, however, could be provided more simply by building the colonnade roof at an angle equal to that of the stairs. Although this solution would bisect the window opening of the closet, it would still allow direct light and ventilation. The elaborate solution of a louvered shed can only have been intended as a visual barrier between the white household sitting at table and the slaves who served them.

²⁰T. H. Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd series, 34 (April 1977): 239-257; Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 219-232; Carl Lounsbury, "The Structure of Justice: The Court-houses of Colonial Virginia," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture III*, ed. Thomas Carter Hudgins and Bernard L. Herman (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 214-226; Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 169-209; Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 125-201; Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 299-323.

²¹Hunter D. Farish, ed., *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion, 1773-1774* (Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press for Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1943), 54. I am grateful to Camille Wells for sharing her observation of Fithian's account. The role of the bedchamber in the lives of colonial Virginia women has been discussed by Mark Wenger, "Architecture and Privacy in Early Virginia," a paper presented at the Vernacular Architectural Forum Annual Conference, Annapolis, Md., 7 May 1998; On Sarah Taliaferro Brooke's role in building Brookes Bank see: Barbara Mooney, "'True Worth is Highly Shown in Living Well': Architectural Patronage in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1991), 433-453. Mooney traces dowry money as the funding source for many building campaigns in eighteenth-century Virginia. In her thorough and thoughtful work, Mooney found documentation for one example of a woman's building a house. Sarah Taliaferro Brooke, widow of William Brooke, finished the house her husband began, but she did so with the advice of a local Anglican minister. It is not known

at what point in the building campaign that Sarah Brooke entered, but the plan and finish of the house is common to that of all great houses built by men during the period. If Sarah Brooke was indeed in control of planning, she built according to the requirements of her class, without regard to gender or race.

²²Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, 219-232. For another view of how Virginians communicated dominance see: Camille Wells, "Planters Prospect: Houses, Outbuildings, and Rural Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Winterthur Portfolio* 28:1 (Spring, 1993): 1-31. From her analysis of advertisements in the *Virginia Gazette*, Wells concluded that "academic architecture and formal landscape design were seldom--not usually--the means by which landowning planters expressed their command of the countryside." Rather, "signs of work competently directed and resources well improved were the most substantial, compelling demonstration that they could ... dominate.... their world." Wells also demonstrated, however, the importance to the planters of continuing an architectural continuity between generations in order to create a dynastic dominance over the landscape. See Camille Wells, "Dower Play/Power Play," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture X*, ed. Alison K. Hoagland and Kenneth A. Breisch (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 1-21.

²³Upton, "White and Black Landscapes," 357-369.

²⁴Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*; Upton, "White and Black Landscapes," 357-369.

²⁵Marlene Elizabeth Heck, "Building Status: Pavilioned Dwellings in Virginia," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture VI*, ed. Thomas Carter Hudgins and Elizabeth Collins Cromley (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 46-59. The quotes from Isaac Coles appear on page 46. Heck has identified "dozens more of three- and five-part houses" beyond the Piedmont.

²⁶Henry K. Sharp, "An Architectural Portrait: Prospect Hill, Spotsylvania County, Virginia," (M. A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1996), 8-40.

²⁷Dell Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17:2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1982): 95-119.

²⁸Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture," 95-119. Camille Wells, "Virginia by Design: The Making of Tuckahoe and the Remaking of Monticello," *Arts, Journal of the Southeast Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians* 12 (2001): 44-73. Wells finds Randolph's quote in Anburey, *Travels through the Interior parts of America*, II, 215. Through her analysis of Tuckahoe, Wells concluded that the Randolphs maintained a "comparatively 'open'" house in which relatives and guests of appropriate station might view any room--even the two second-story bedrooms." (51) In her comparison of Tuckahoe and Stratford Hall, both of which have a distinctive H-plan, Wells discovered that during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the Randolphs and the Lees of Stratford Hall did not alter the houses, but changed the way in which their families used them. Both families retreated to one of the wings, abandoning the saloon

and the other wing to guests and visitors. Wells sees the ultimate expression of this retreat into private zones in Jefferson's Monticello. Wells's interpretation that these retreats into private spaces were due to a "discovery of the emotional self" (66) is based on her reading of Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), and Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness*. See note 29 for a fuller discussion on the emergence of the modern family in America. Heck, "Pavilioned Dwellings in Virginia," 54. Heck's analysis of the pavilioned dwellings shows an adherence to these traditional social spaces as late as 1843 when Henry George built a tripartite house in Tazewell County, Virginia.

²⁹Barbara Welter first coined the phrase "cult of domesticity" in her ground-breaking article, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-74; Ann Douglas further explored the influence of women on the new nineteenth-century concept of family and home in *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Social historians who study the influence of the family on societies have only recently turned their attention to the planter elite of the antebellum South. Daniel Blake Smith traces the emergence of the modern family (compassionate marriages and child-oriented families) to the mid-eighteenth century. See Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society*, 281-99. Jan Lewis, however, traces this modern family to the early nineteenth century and links this emotive, closely-knit nuclear family to the rise of evangelical religion. See Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 209-30. Lewis draws on the work of Rhys Isaac and supports his claim that this transformation of the family was post-Revolutionary. See Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*. Jane Censer has studied a closed universe of planters that supports the conclusions of Lewis and Isaac and goes further in portraying elite planter families as loving, permissive, and egalitarian. See Jane Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1900-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984). Some scholars admit a change in familial expressions of affection during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries but believe that elite planter families were nevertheless strictly hierarchical

in nature and particularly patriarchal in their function. Their view is that patriarchal planters held both wives and children in subordinate positions. See Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 16-35, 164-79; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 192-241; Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 319-66. For an account of family life of both races and all classes in a small community, see Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), xii-xiii, 9-37. Stevenson argues that slave families were largely matriarchal and that slaves desired a variety of marital and family organizations, not only the nuclear family. She also argues that while whites looked to the family for gender and familial roles, their lives and conduct were still very much influenced by the values and expectations of the larger white community. For a collection of short essays on the antebellum family see: Carol Bleser, ed., *In Joy and Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). On the influence of domestic novelists on the works of Andrew Jackson Downing, see Adam W. Sweeting, *Reading Houses and Building Books: A.J. Downing and the Architecture of Popular Antebellum Literature, 1835-55* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996), 124-125; on Uncle Tom's Cabin, see Charles Johnson's introduction in Harriett Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³⁰For accounts and analysis of Nat Turner's revolt see: Scot French, *The Rebellious Slave: Nat Turner in American Memory* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004); Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed., *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press). For accounts on slave resistance and slave revolts and their effect on white attitudes toward their slaves, see Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), 587-660.

³¹EWB to JCB, BFP, 17 October 1836, and EWB to JCB 25 November 1836, Box 6.

³²EWB to JCB, BFP, 22 November 1844, Box 10.