

Ash Grove
Falls Church Vicinity
Fairfax County, Virginia

HABS No. VA-504

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013

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"Ash Grove"
Falls Church Vicinity
Fairfax County, Virginia

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"Ash Grove"

Present Owner: W. Alwood Sherman, whose family bought the estate in 1850

Present Use: Unoccupied

Present Condition: The measured drawings and photographs prepared by the HABS are making it possible for the owner to rebuild following a disastrous fire in September, 1960.

Location and Setting: Entrance off Leesburg Pike, two miles west of Tyson's Corner.

House situated on knoll amid towering oaks and surrounded by unbroken lawns with boxwood and holly. Northward is a dense enclosure of lilacs with terraces making garden and remnants of old planting: snowballs, peonies, lillies, and roses. Nearby are the burying grounds of the Fairfax and Sherman families. Brick Kitchen and clapboard Smokehouse still stand.

Date of Erection: About 1790 by Thomas Fairfax, ninth Lord Fairfax (1762-1846), successor to the title of Thomas, sixth Lord Fairfax (1693-1781), friend of George Washington and last proprietor of the Northern neck of Virginia.

Number of Stories: Two-and-a-half

Architect: Unknown

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Description: Ash Grove has a T-shape plan with rear ell. There is a central hall with stairs rising to the attic. The building is clapboarded with inside brick end chimneys and projecting end closets. The focal features of the front is a finely detailed covered porch with fixed benches. There are double entrance doors with sidelights. Deep window sills give the dormers the appearance of hugging the roof.

Inside one views two false doors that lead nowhere. One on the stair landing opens into a blank wall with no evidence of door on reverse side. The theory is that the opening into the back stairway proved so dangerous it was abandoned and the rear surface plastered over. Another false door in the drawing room was doubtless placed there for the sake of symmetry, matching its counterpart which leads into the pent closet. The mantel in this room is the most elaborate in ornamentation and a plaster cornice is worthy of attention. Mantels elsewhere are similar in design but become of descending importance. In the dining room closet there is a trap door arrangement, concealing a secret hiding place. An unusual chimney cupboard is found in an upstairs bedroom.

Historical Notes: "Ash Grove" is said to have been named for an older Fairfax house in England. Some historians state that the nucleus of the structure began as a hunting lodge, built either by Lord Fairfax of Greenway Court or Bryan who succeeded to the title as eighth Lord Fairfax. Confirmation is lacking though the stone foundation pre-

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sently supporting a later leanto, possibly pre-dates the house. The ell would appear to have been built contemporaneously as a winter kitchen.

In his late years, Thomas, ninth Lord Fairfax and builder of "Ash Grove" bought "Vaucluse" near Alexandria and bestowed "Ash Grove" upon his second son, Henry. Following Captain Henry Fairfax's death during the Mexican War the property was purchased by James Sherman. Descendants on occasion relate some interesting family lore of Civil War events when the neighborhood was a "no man's land."

References: Caroline Baldwin Sherman, "An Old Virginia Landmark", William and Mary Historical Quarterly (2nd Series), Vol. VII, pp. 87-91. Charles W. Stetson, Washington and His Neighbors, Richmond, 1956, pp. 290-91.

Prepared by: Worth Bailey, HABS, National Park Service, February 1, 1961.

Approved: _____

Robert E. Smith
Chief Architect

Date 2-20-61