

FORT HILL FARM, MANSION
West of the Staunton (Roanoke) River
between Turkey Run and Caesar's Run
Clover Vicinity
Halifax County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1288-A

HABS
VA
42-CLOV.V
2A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

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VA
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FORT HILL FARM, Mansion

HABS NO. VA-1288-A

LOCATION: West of the Staunton (Roanoke) River between
Turkey Run and Caesar's Run, Clover Vicinity,
Halifax County, Virginia

PRESENT OWNER: Old Dominion Electric Cooperative, Halifax County,
Virginia

PRESENT USE: Vacant

STATEMENT OF
SIGNIFICANCE: The Fort Hill Mansion is an example of a post-
bellum, rural "manor," built circa 1880 for John,
eldest son of William H. Sims of Black Walnut Farm.
The house displays the stylistic influences of both
Italianate and Greek Revival architecture, as well
as a regionally traditional high-ceilinged, center-
hall, single-pile plan.

I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection: The house is believed to have been built for John Sims, who received title to the land from his father in 1880. The bay window of the house at Fort Hill faces toward the bay window at "Edgewood" (HABS No. VA-1290), the house built by John Sims' brother William sometime between 1880 and 1888.

2. Architect: Not Known

3. Builder, Contractor Suppliers: Not Known

4. Original Plans and Construction: No original plans have been located for this property.

5. Alterations and Additions: The original, full-length front porch, which had tapered posts and brackets matching those on the eaves of the main roof, was replaced, probably early in the twentieth century. At an unknown date, a one-room, lean-to addition was made at the south end of the rear wing. Other, also undated, alterations include enclosure of the east porch and construction of a gable-roofed shed over the bulkhead to the basement at the east end of the house. The house was also, at one time, furnished with louvered shutters, no longer extant.

II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: The Fort Hill mansion is a clapboarded, two-story, I-house with a full-height rear wing. The symmetrically massed building features decorative elements of the Greek Revival and Italianate styles including wide, overhanging eaves with a dentilled, bracketed cornice, slightly peaked window and door surrounds, a front entrance with double doors with round-arched top panels surrounded by transom and side lights, and a projecting bay window on the west side. The interior window and door frames also feature slightly peaked, shouldered frames with decorative moldings.

2. Condition of Fabric: The house is in fair structural condition; however, it has been vacant for several years and exhibits deterioration from lack of maintenance.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall Dimensions: The Fort Hill Mansion is a symmetrical two-story building, three bays wide and one deep, with a full-height rear wing and a shed-roofed, one-story addition at the south end of the wing. The overall form is T-shaped, approximately 47 feet east-west by 52 feet north-south.

2. Foundations: The foundation is constructed of oversized, handmade brick. The wythes are approximately twelve inches thick, mortared with lime. The bricks are arranged in a standard running bond with a header course at the sill. Vent holes are regularly spaced in the header course along the facade. The cellar beneath the east wing is accessed from an exterior entrance on the east side of the house. There are crawl spaces under the remainder of the building, but no crawl space openings were located.

3. Walls: The exterior walls are clad with untapered, horizontal, wooden clapboards fastened with wire nails. Paint analysis indicates that the exterior was painted only once, with a white, lead-based primer and paint used for the walls, and green, lead-based paint over white, lead-based primer applied to the trim.

4. Structural System: The house is constructed of wood stud framing using circular-sawn, dimensional lumber. The only structural members visible were floor joists in the basement under the east room.

5. Porches: The main porch covers the central portion of the front (north) elevation. The hipped roof (which was originally supported by four hollow, square posts of which only two remain) covers a tongue-in-groove, wooden floor. On the east side of the rear wing is a hip-roofed, screened porch with a closet or pantry partitioned off at the south end.

6. Chimneys: There are three interior brick chimneys, each with a rectangular stack and corbelled cap. One is located on the ridge, one-third of the distance in from the west. The other two are centered in the east and south walls of the east and south rooms respectively.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and Doors: See sketch plan for location of entrances to the house. The principal entrance is centered on the north elevation. A single-light transom and three-light sidelights, enclosed in a plain, slightly peaked surround, frame the double doors. The two-panel doors have arched top panels on the exterior and square panels on the interior.

The east porch entrance is similar to the front but with simpler moldings and a single door. The surround is slightly peaked with a two-light transom above the opening.

b. Windows: The majority of windows are 2/2 double-hung sash. The exceptions include: the first floor windows of the front elevation which are 2/4 double-hung sash; the 1/1 double-hung sash in the bay of the west room; the 6/6 double-hung sash found in the southern addition. All of the windows are framed in plain, slightly peaked surrounds.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, Covering: The roof of the main block is hipped with wide overhanging eaves. The roofs of the front and east porches are also hipped. The southern addition has a shed roof, and the cellar entrance has a gable roof. Standing seam, galvanized metal roofing covers all of the roofs except that of the basement entrance, which is covered with galvanized, corrugated seam roofing.

b. Cornice, Eaves: Plain, scrolled brackets are regularly spaced around the cornice with dentils between the brackets and recessed panels located below the dentils. The cornice of the west room bay window is treated in a similar manner but with more decorative brackets.

c. Dormers, Cupolas, Towers: None

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor Plans: See sketch floor plans for arrangement of rooms. Each floor contains three main rooms arranged around a large central hall. Very small rooms, amounting to walk-in closets, are located on the first floor in the south room and off the hall at the top of the stairs. An additional room is present at the south end of the rear wing.

2. Stairways: See sketch plans for the position of stairs. There is one straight-run stairway running from the first to the second floor. This stair has a shaped railing, turned balusters, and a turned newel post from which a finial or other ornament has been removed. Vertical, recessed panels and a raised-scroll stringer skirt adorn the wall below the treads. A closet is located underneath the stairs on the first floor.

3. Flooring: The house has tongue-in-groove flooring throughout. The flooring runs east-west with the exception of the first and second floor halls and south rooms and the southern addition on the first floor where it runs north-south.

4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: The primary wall and ceiling finish is painted plaster on lathe. Paint analysis indicates only one or two coats of paint on the interior walls tested. Samples from the first floor rooms show that sizing was used as a primer underneath each of one or two coats of paint. The existence of the sizing could indicate a layer of paper that was later removed, but this cannot be proven.

Three of the walls and the ceiling of the southern addition are finished with wide, beaded boards covered with a single coat of lead-based paint. The weatherboarded northern wall of this room, which was an exterior wall prior to the addition of this room, has the same paint seriation and appears to have been painted at the same time as the rest of the room. There is no evidence of the white exterior paint on this wall, although the surface of the wood has been disturbed possibly as a result of being stripped or being bleached by the sun (since it faces south).

In the first floor west room there is a 1/2" dry-wall ceiling with a cornice molding applied over top. The opening to the bay window has a paneled soffit and paneled jambs as well as a peaked, shouldered surround on the wall face. The ceiling of the bay is a sunburst pattern with alternating light and dark wood.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and Doors: Treatment of these features is consistent throughout the house. Openings are framed with surrounds with slightly peaked, shouldered hoods. Doors have four raised panels edged with decorative moldings. Most are stained, the panels dark reddish-brown and the stiles and rails dark brown. Most doors are fitted with iron box locks, and several retain brown or white porcelain knobs.

b. Windows: Windows are set in slightly peaked, shouldered surrounds, and all of the first floor windows, except the full length front windows, have panels edged with decorative moldings below the sills. Many of the window surrounds are also stained in two tones, the moldings and sills a dark reddish-brown and the surrounds dark brown. The windows of the southern addition are simpler, set in plain surrounds with slightly peaked heads and no panels below the sill. Isolated panes of crown glass are found in windows throughout the house.

6. Decorative Features and Trim: All rooms except the southern addition and hallways have fireplaces with wooden mantels with brick or concrete hearths. The general mantel design is "post and lintel" with two posts with Tuscan capitals flanking the fireplace opening supporting a plain rectangular lintel which carries the mantel shelf. In the east and west rooms of the first floor, the lintel has a scallop in the center. The most ornate mantel is in the first floor south room. Here the posts continue above the capitals to the height of the mantel shelf, and another, capital-like block is located in the center of the lintel.

The hearths in the first floor south room, and second floor south and east rooms have been filled in. All of the chimney breasts except those in the south and west rooms of the second floor have stove thimbles. A thimble, but no chimney, is also found in the north wall of the southern addition. Most of the rooms have a built-in closet adjacent to the chimney breast. The first floor south room has a china cabinet with paneled doors below.

7. Mechanical Equipment:

a. Heating: The presence of stove thimbles suggests that the house was heated by stoves. There is no evidence of central heating.

b. Lighting: All of the lighting fixtures have been removed. However, nearly all of the rooms exhibit evidence of electric ceiling fixtures.

c. Plumbing: There is no physical evidence that the house had plumbing.

D. Site

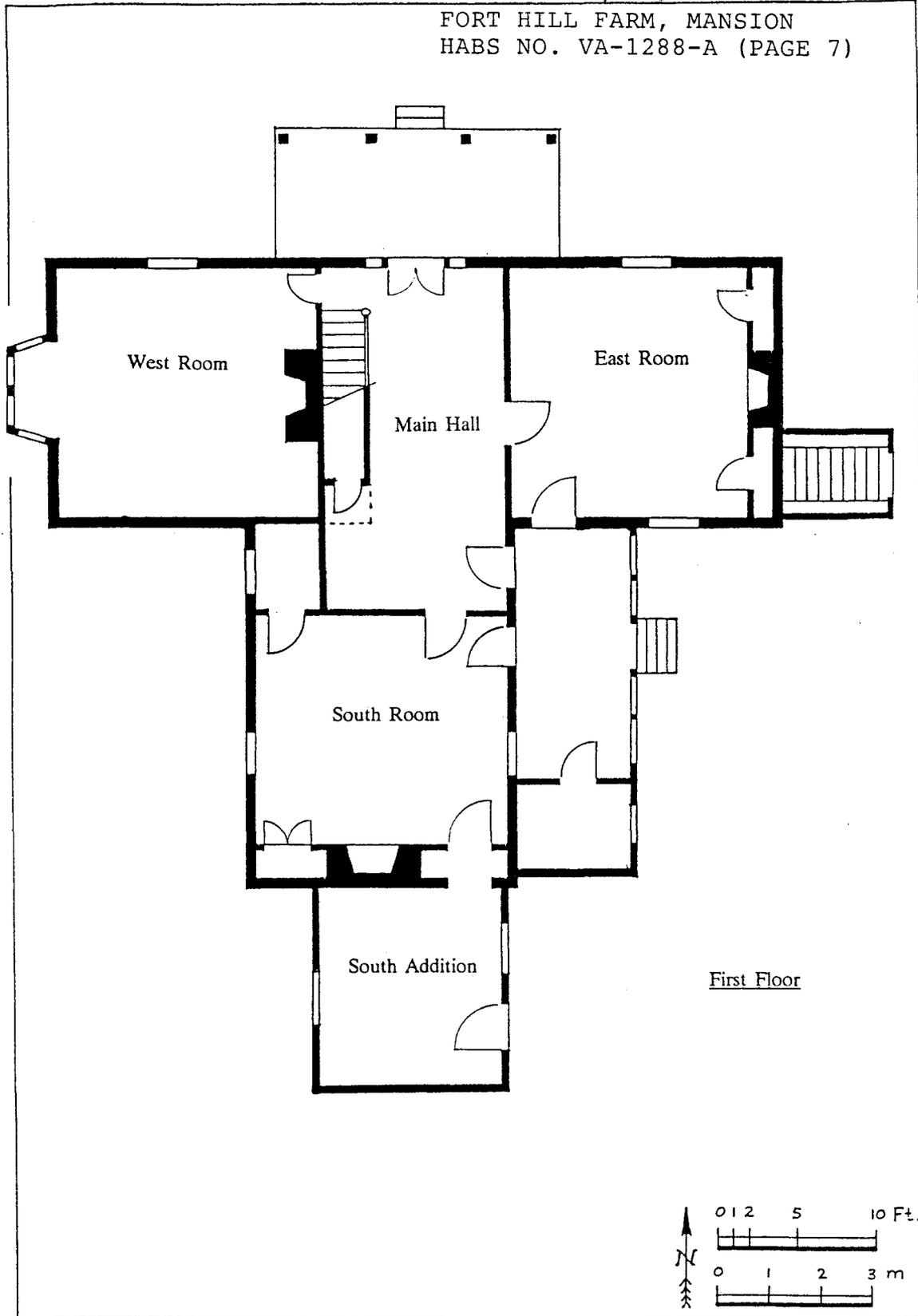
1. General Setting and Orientation: The house is prominently sited on a knoll and centrally located within the Fort Hill Farm tract. The house faces north-northeast, toward the Roanoke (Staunton) River about one mile away. Mature deciduous trees shade the house on the west side.

2. Historic Landscape Design: The setting of the house contains no obvious elements of designed landscape. The land around the house, vacant for some years, is reverting to weeds and high grasses.

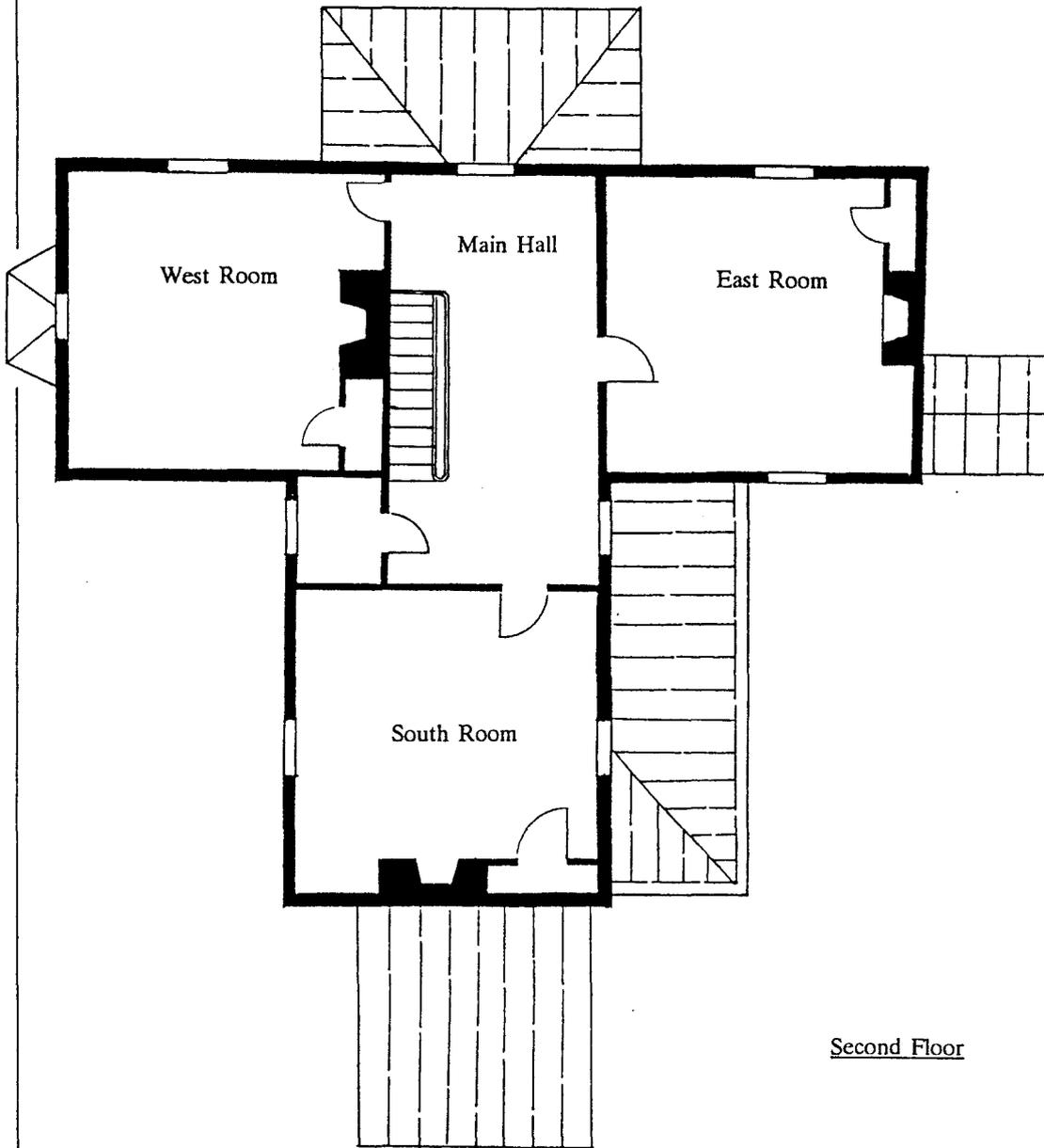
3. Outbuildings: See following discussions for HABS No. VA-1288-B through M for descriptions of outbuildings at Fort Hill Farm.

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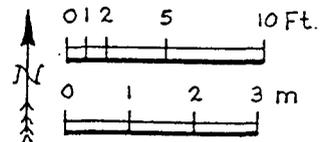
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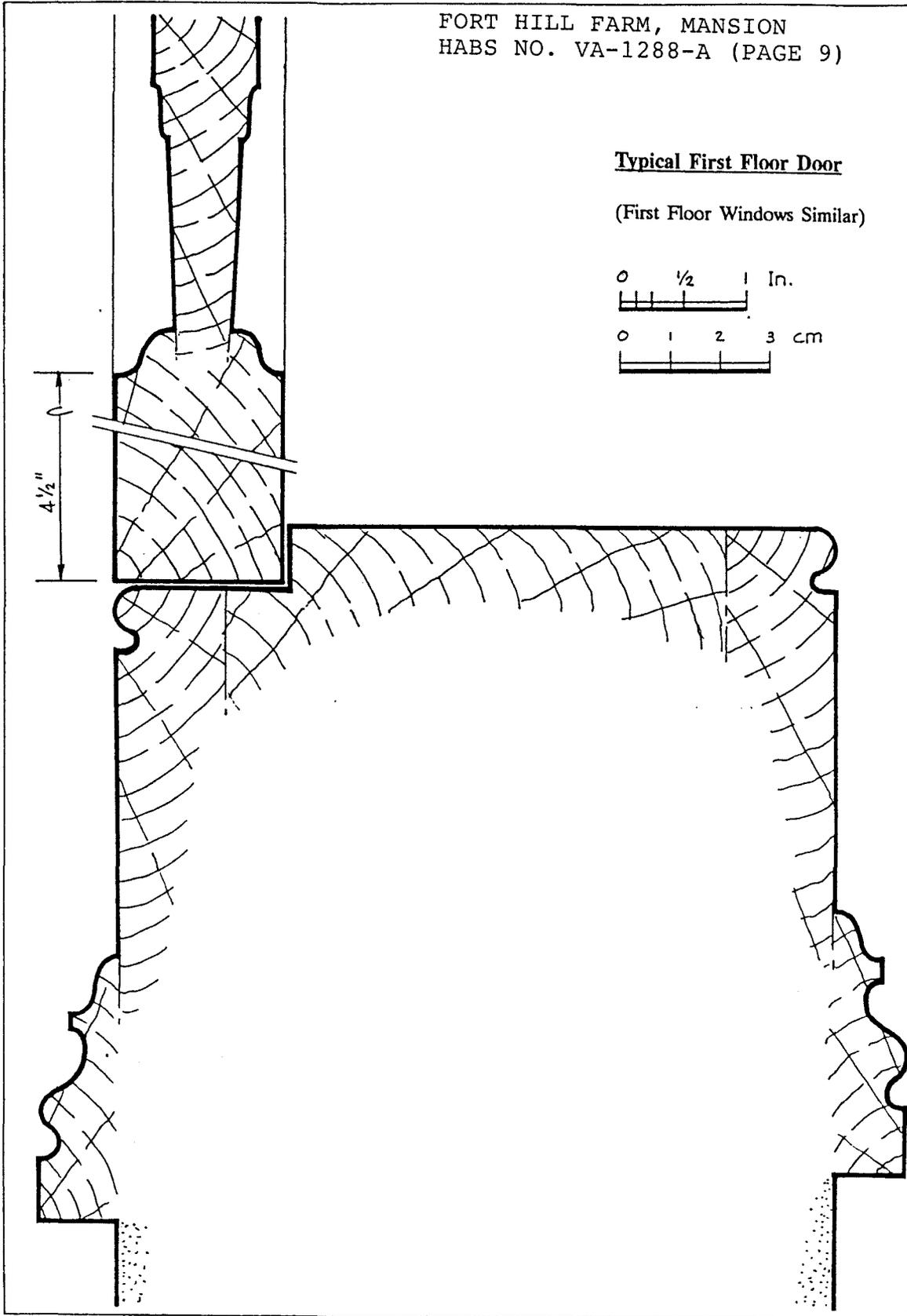
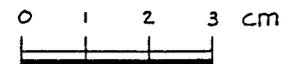
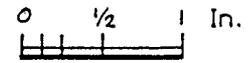
Second Floor



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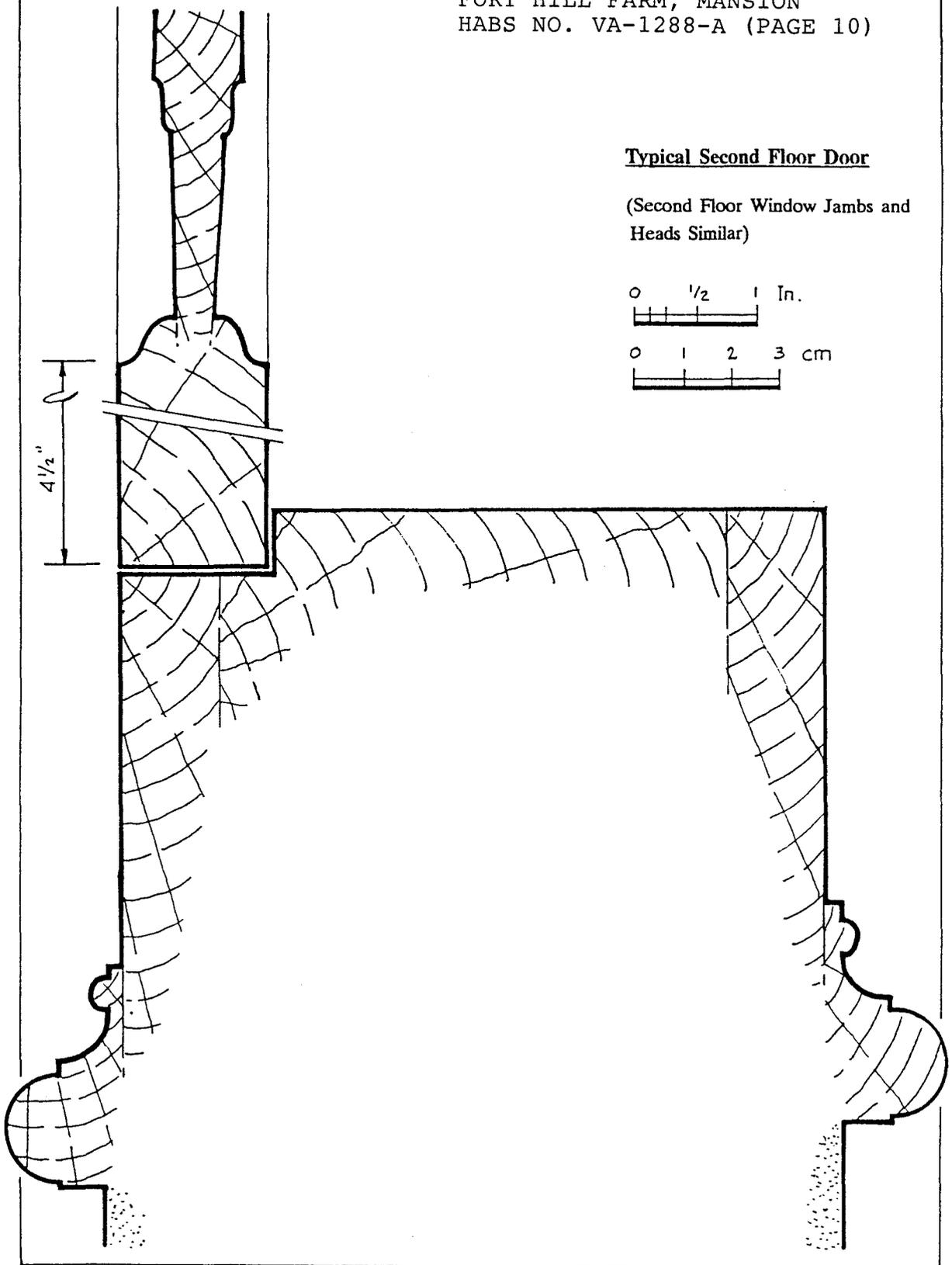
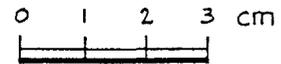
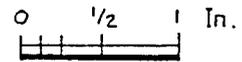
Typical First Floor Door

(First Floor Windows Similar)

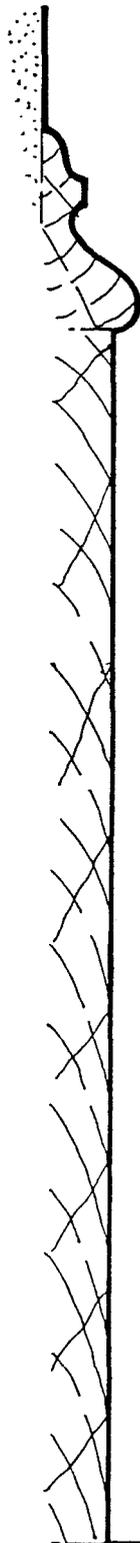
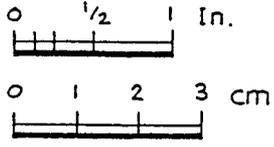


Typical Second Floor Door

(Second Floor Window Jambs and
Heads Similar)



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Typical First Floor Baseboard



Typical Second Floor Baseboard