

FARR COTTAGE
(Blenheim)
Main Street
Fairfax
Independent City County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1388

HABS
VA - 1388

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FARR COTTAGE

(Blenheim)

HABS No. VA-1388

Location: 3610 Old Lee Highway, Fairfax City, Virginia.

Farr Cottage is situated on twelve acres owned by the City of Fairfax, Virginia. The property includes another house, now known as Blenheim but originally part of the Willcoxon estate, constructed between 1857 and 1860. The Blenheim property is currently under development to become a museum. Farr Cottage has been moved twice, the first time out of the way of a shopping center (1962) and the second because of a housing development (2001). In spite of this, Farr Cottage is still just about a mile away from its original site at the corner of Main Street and Old Lee Highway. The cottage will be interpreted as one of two tenant houses that were on the historic Blenheim estate in the mid-nineteenth century.

Most likely dating to the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Farr Cottage is significant for its log-wall construction, a technology its builders used in tandem with hewn timber framing with brick infill – or nogging - between the studs.

Architectural Description:

Exterior: In its present orientation, the house faces east and west, with later additions to the south and east (fig. 1). The original portion of the house is 1 ½ stories and measures 17'4" x 20'1" with a pair of porches on the long sides measuring 8' x 20'10". The core of the original house is covered by a side gable roof. The roof ridge is centered over the core and was extended to create covered porches on the front and back. The exterior is covered with beveled wood siding.

The front facade has one door and one window that appear to be in their original positions. The front porch, facing west, is supported by three square posts with a molded cornice and base. The third post, to the south, has been partially subsumed by the shed addition and may be the only original post still in place. The porch rests on modern brick pillars, while both the house and shed sit on a fieldstone foundation which was replaced after the 2001 move. There is also an exterior door opening off of the porch and leading to the shed addition. The porch roof has hand-hewn logs as the major supports (fig. 2). Several of the rafters are shaped logs, one with the bark still in place. Even so, these rafters are not from the initial construction period.

The north elevation has two off-center windows on the first floor that are glazed

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with six-over-six lights (fig. 3). There is an additional window, also glazed with six-over-six lights, in the gable end of the half-story. A small door provides access to the cellar (below grade) with a modern trellis around the crawl space.

The east (rear) facade has three windows, all glazed with six-over-six lights, but the central window is shorter than the others. It lights the bathroom. The rear facade of the shed has a modern double window, also glazed with six-over-six lights.

The south facade reveals the original house's gable end, seen above the shed roof, and reveals a central chimney stack made of brick masonry in a stepped diagonal profile (fig. 4). Two small casement windows flank the chimneystack at the half-story gable level. The south side of the shed addition has one window, glazed with six-over-six lights, and has one door. An addition that held the modern kitchen and entrance porch has been removed, but ghosts of their presence remain.

Interior: From the west porch, the front door leads into a small lobby. The floor is covered with 5" pine boards running north to south with a baseboard consisting of a 5 ½" flat board with a beveled top edge. The entrance door is made of two vertical panels. The hall allows access to the enclosed stairs which rise to a single, second-story bedroom, and the northwest bedroom directly in front of the entryway, and a parlor.

The northwest bedroom has the same flooring and baseboard as the entrance lobby. Brick nogging under plaster is visible on the east wall. An up brace can also be seen through the deteriorating plaster, probably a later insertion for additional support as the member clearly does not join the plate in any conventional way. A small access door leads to storage space under the stairs.

The parlor also has the same 5" wide pine floor boards and baseboard as did the lobby and bedroom. The door from the entrance hall is a four panel example with molding and slightly raised panels on both sides. The door into the south addition is made of board and batten construction and has a wrought iron latch. The mantel is in the style of the mid-nineteenth century and may be original. The window is glazed with six-over-six lights, but is single hung and lacks a parting stop. There is old glass in the upper sash.

The enclosed stairs (possibly a boxed winder stair) are accessed by two

steps located in the lobby that lead to a narrow batten door; behind the door, the steps make a sharp right angle turn as they rise to the second floor.

The upper bedroom has 2" flooring running east to west. The north and east walls have brick nogging placed within the studs (fig. 5). On the north wall there is a sash window glazed with six-over-six lights. On the south wall there are two casement windows glazed with two by three lights. The stair guardrail has one end post and one corner post with three horizontal guardrails.

From the original core of the building, the shed addition can be entered from the parlor. The room known as the dining room has 3" pine flooring running north to south. The walls are of plaster on lath over log construction or plaster on boards nailed over the logs. The double windows are double-hung and glazed with six-over-six lights. There is a door to the outside and to the southwest bedroom.

The southwest bedroom has narrower flooring – only 2 ½" wide – and a 4 ¼" baseboard. The exterior door which connects to the porch has two vertical panels, whereas the door between the bedroom and dining room is comprised of five horizontal panels. There are ghosts marks on the door and jamb of earlier hinges and locks.

At some point in the 1940s the east porch was enclosed. A small bedroom, bathroom, and walk-through closet were built in the space. In a small attic that was created by this enclosure over the porch roof, it is possible to see the original circular-sawn weatherboards. Also visible are marks where the rafters for the rear porch were cut off during the renovation (fig. 6).

Historian(s): Gwendolyn Wright, May 2003.

Project Information: The documentation of Farr Cottage took place as part of Louis Nelson's (2003) field methods class at the University of Virginia, School of Architecture, Department of Architectural History. Students recorded various structures through measured drawings and written description; the record the students created was dependent on their ability to read what the structure was telling them about its construction history rather than on traditional documentary research.



Figure 1. Front view of Farr Cottage

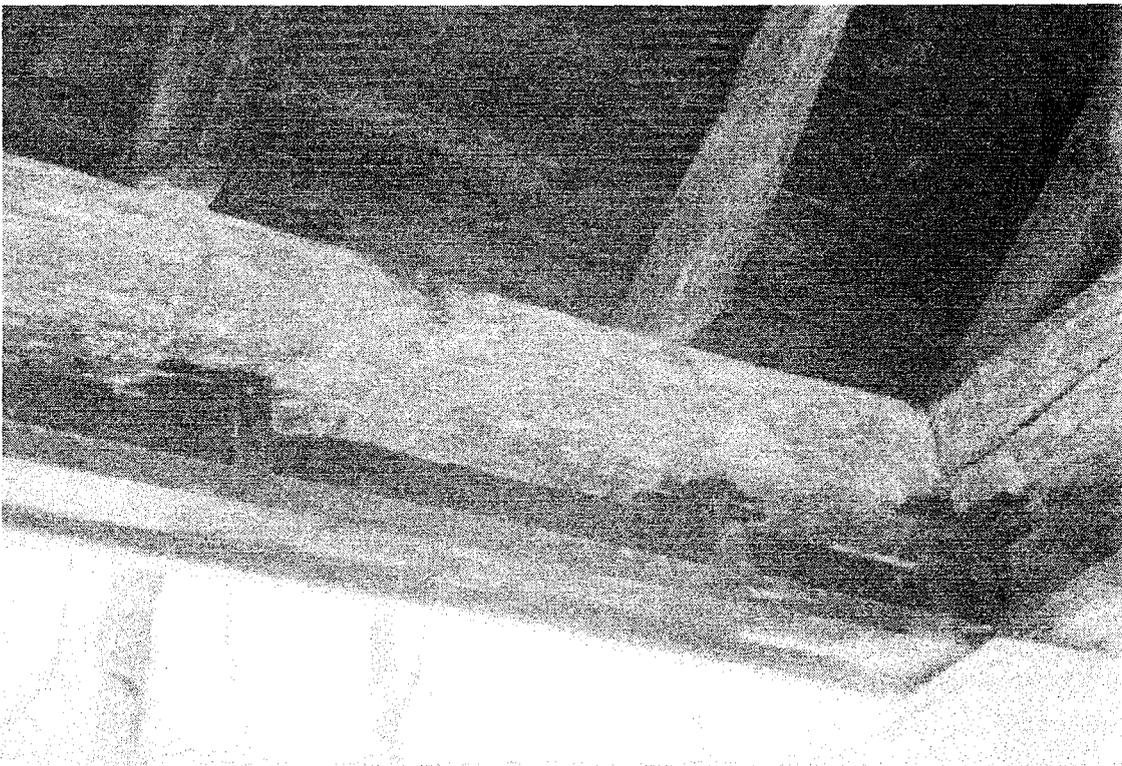


Figure 2. Hand-hewn timber posts on porch roof

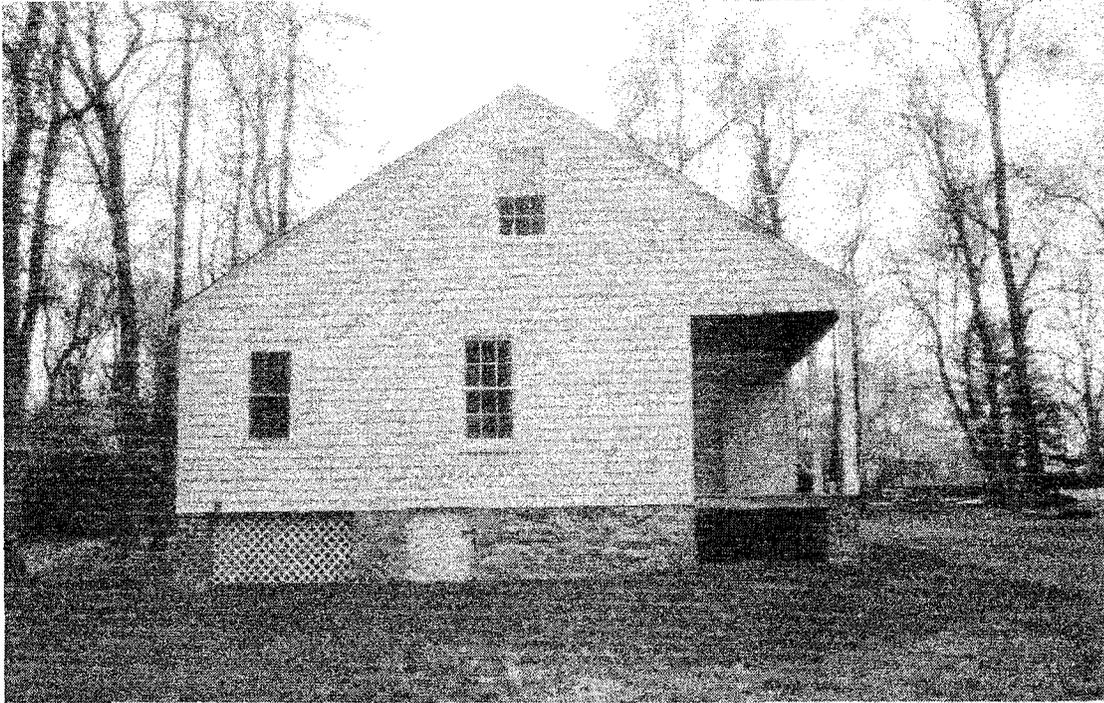


Figure 3. North side showing the original house's roof-line

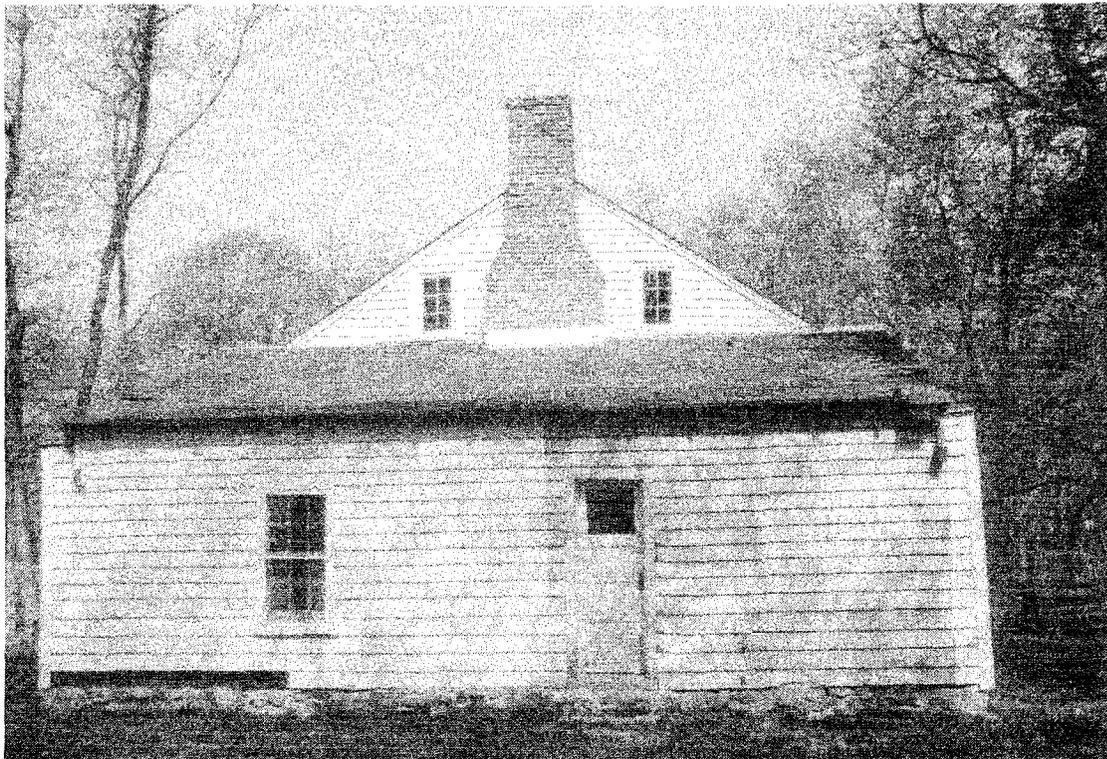


Figure 4. South end of shed addition with chimney stack of the original house

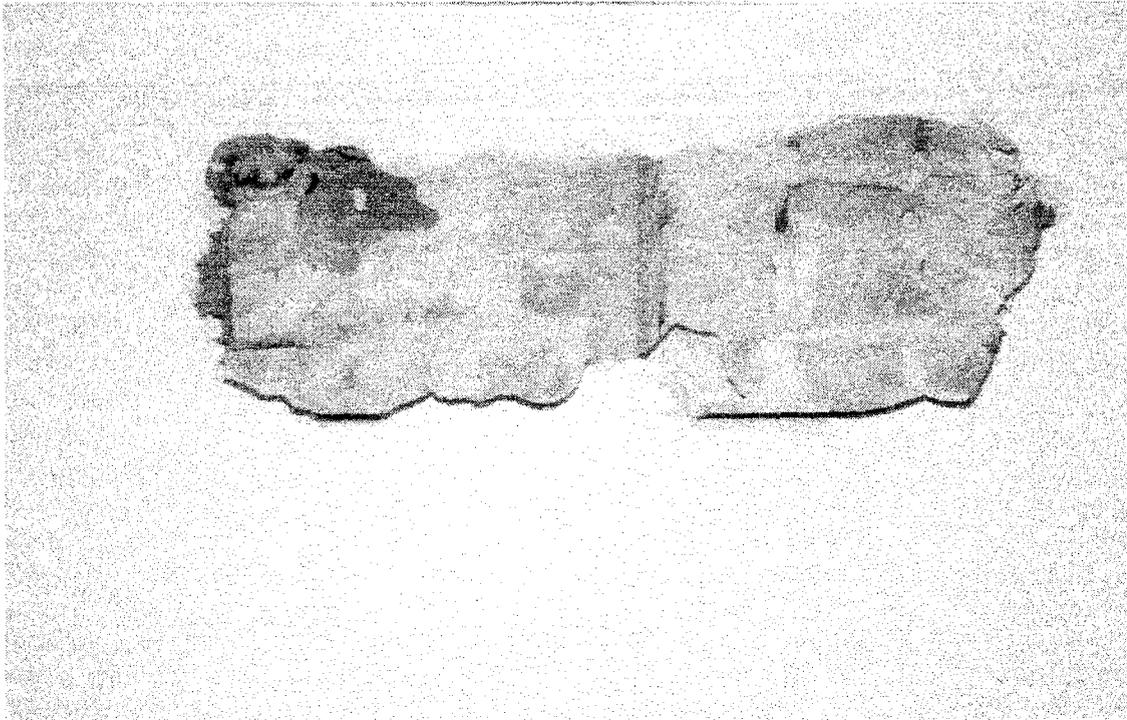
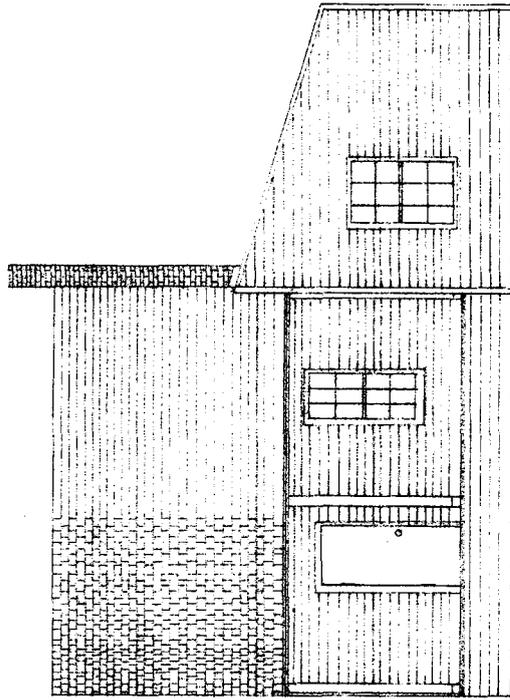


Figure 5. Brick nogging between studs in second floor bedroom, east wall

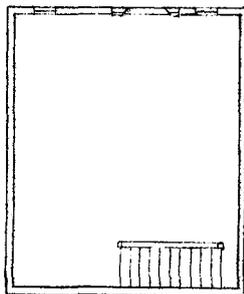


Figure 6. Weatherboard on east wall that was covered when rear porch was enclosed

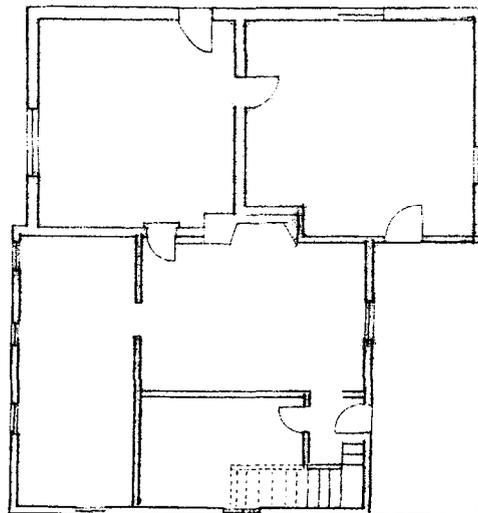


WEST ELEVATION

SCALE 1/4" = 1'



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN