

312 YELLOW MOUNTAIN ROAD (HOUSE)  
(Rose Hill Farm)

HABS No. VA-1389

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Greenwood  
Albemarle County  
Virginia

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

## 312 YELLOW MOUNTAIN ROAD (HOUSE) (Rose Hill Farm)

HABS No. VA-1389

Location: Positioned roughly four miles from the intersection of Interstate 64 and US highway 250, the house is within the boundaries of Rose Hill Farm in Greenwood, eastern Albemarle County, Virginia.

Present Owners: Mrs. Jackie Martin and the Bessamer Trust.

Present Use: Rental property.

### Architectural Description:

**Exterior:** The house site is located at the top of a small wooded hill. The house is built in a picturesque Dutch Colonial Revival-style, having a gambrel roof covered in asphalt shingles. The gable ends of the house face east and west and show three stories of the house. The east facade is the main entrance to the house. The entry is placed slightly to the left of center, marked by a concrete stoop and a small gable roof. The east facade has two windows on the first floor, two on the second, and a lunette on the third. The south facade has a porch supported by four posts. It provides access to the interior through a pair of French doors with sidelights. French doors also lead to the roof of the porch from the second floor. The south facade is the most elaborate and symmetrical of the four facades. The west facade has no doors but has two types of windows. On the right, four windows are placed directly next to each other, separated only by casing. On the left, a bay window extends from the house by about 1 ½'. The final (north) facade has a small gabled porch at the extreme left. This roof covers a concrete pad that leads to an entrance to the first floor and a concrete stairway that leads to the basement. The right portion of the roof covers a one-story protrusion from the house. The north facade has four windows on the first floor and four on the second. (Figs. 1-4)

**Construction:** The building is constructed of stacked terra cotta blocks set upon a concrete foundation. Each block measures 12" x 12" x 8". The surface of each block is striated and each typically is oriented vertically. All blocks are held together by 1/4" mortar joints. Each course of terra cotta blocks is also shifted over 1" from the course below to insure greater stability. The exterior surfaces of the blocks are faced with wire mesh and covered with a thick layer of stucco embedded with pebble aggregate. All stucco and pebble surfaces are now painted white.

The total exterior wall is approximately 9" thick. On the interior, the terra cotta blocks are covered with lath and finished with plaster and painted a neutral dull-white color. Non-load bearing interior walls are built of standard 2 x 4 wood construction; with the plaster finish, these walls are 5 ½" thick.

The 2 x 10 joists that support the first floor are set 18" on center and topped with ¾" floor decking and a ¾" finished 3" banded hardwood floor surface. The joists remain unfinished in the basement and reveal diagonal cross bracing at regular intervals. The exterior block construction is modified to accept the wood joists of the first floor and the joists rest directly on the terra cotta blocks. The portion of the wall between each floor joist is filled with trimmed terra cotta blocks.

At the second floor, 2 x 6 joists are also topped with ¾" decking and a ¾" finished hardwood floor surface. The spacing of these joists cannot be determined. The underside of the second floor joists is finished with ¾" layer of lath and plaster to form the finished ceilings of the first floor rooms. Although inaccessible, it is probable that the third floor is constructed in the same way.

Interior:

A narrow exterior staircase adjacent to the house wall leads to an unfinished basement (fig. 5). A poured-in-place basement floor slab rests on grade and carries a 5' high concrete foundation wall that is 9" thick. Directly on top of the concrete wall rests the first courses of terra cotta blocks that are used to construct the entire height of the exterior walls. Basement windows have been punched in the walls at intervals above the outside grade line.

The 2 x 10 floor joists that make up the first floor are set 18" on center; a central beam set approximately halfway across the entire basement span carries the floor joists above. This central beam is made up of four 2 x 6 boards laminated together and supported by the central fireplace support mass and two 8" x 8" concrete piers. The joists themselves are notched and rest directly upon the center beam.

The floor plan of the first floor (figs. 7-8) suggests that the main entrance to the house is from the east. One enters into a small foyer with doorways to the left, right, and straight ahead. The kitchen is to the right. An equally small room of unknown purpose is to the left. It has windows on two walls and doorways on the other two. The living room is straight ahead. It is a rectangular-shaped room. It has access to the south porch through French doors. Another pair of

French doors lead to a smaller rectangular room, perhaps a sleeping porch – a use suggested by the number of windows in the room on the south and west walls. Back in the living room, directly across from the first set of French doors, is a brick fireplace. To the right of the fireplace are built-in shelves. To the left of the fireplace is a built-in cabinet about 4 ½' tall that, along with a matching cabinet, serves as a barrier between the living room and dining room. The cabinets are two-sided. The dining room is also rectangular, with a stairway running against its east wall. The dining room has a built-in window seat on the west wall. The north has two windows. To the left of the stairway, a door leads to the kitchen. The kitchen has a linoleum floor, while the previous rooms have had hardwood floors. It is a square room. It has access to a half-bath, has a window above the sink, and has an exterior door on the north wall. The east wall has a window. The south wall is characterized by a door to the original entrance foyer and built-in cabinetry. In the west wall is a small door that provides access under the stairway.

The second floor is spatially configured around the central stair landing and the adjacent masonry chimney flue. From the placement of the fireplace on the first floor, the flue has been shifted at the second floor in order to accommodate the stairway leading from the first floor. Four rooms and one full bathroom lead directly off the stair landing. The placement of the second floor bathroom directly above the kitchen suggests that all plumbing systems are located in this vertical zone of the house.

The central room along the southern wall has a pair of French doors that open onto the roof of the exterior porch below. Although structural problems now make this platform inaccessible, it was probably once used as a small balcony. There is an additional room adjacent to the largest bedroom located at the southwestern corner of the house. This smaller room is only accessible from the bedroom and due to its size and limited access was probably used as a nursery or closet/dressing room. The four rooms placed at the corners of the house have clipped ceilings that are created by the slope of the roof above. All rooms, with the exception of the room with French doors and the smaller nursery, or dressing room, have standard closets.

A short passage between the bathroom and the northeastern bedroom provides access to the staircase leading to the third floor attic. Although wider by 6" the stairs leading to the attic are situated directly above the stairs connecting the first and second story. Opposite the stairway is a built-in closet with shelves

below.

The third floor contains the attic (fig. 6) to the east and a finished room in the western half of the space. Doors separate the two areas. The ceiling of the finished room is much lower than the ceiling heights on the other floors and is clipped by the roof rafters above. There is one window centered within the width of the room. The floor is finished with the same hardwood flooring used throughout the house.

The unfinished attic space reveals some information concerning the construction of the roof and rising masonry chimney. The 2 x 6 rafters are spaced 18" on center. Between the rafters is insulation batting and diagonal cross bracing. The insulation conceals the decking of the roof above. The exterior wall is again revealed to be the same terra cotta block construction. At the attic level, the chimneystack is made of brick and the floor is unfinished.

The most detail within the house has been reserved for the built-in cabinets and the fireplace surround on the first floor, the newel post and stairway between the first and second stories, and the built-in cabinet on the second floor. In addition to these concentrations of detail, all interior walls on the first and second floors, plus the finished part of the third floor, have 9 1/4" high base molding. No room has an applied crown molding.

Double hung sash windows are used throughout the house; the top sash is glazed with five vertical lights, the bottom with one. In some instances, specifically the kitchen, small first floor room, and attic with its lunette window, alternative window types have been used. Each typical window, however, is framed by a 4 1/2" molding and a 6 1/2" high decorative crown. The decorative crown is not specifically classical, but is an early twentieth-century derivative of that more formal style. The molding and decorative crown are also applied at each door opening. The doors themselves consist of two panels, one directly above the other.

Most of the house is original construction with a later enclosure of a portion of the exterior basement stair and an added half-bath on the north side of the house, accessed from the kitchen.

**Condition:** The house is in good condition, but has not been lived in for several months now. Overall, general landscaping and routine maintenance inside are needed.

Moreover, the stucco exterior could use patching in certain areas; overgrown vegetation near the edges of the structure pose a threat unless cut back. Portions of the gutter need repair. Inside, the original moldings, flooring, and cabinetry are intact. The basement has sustained minor water damage and the stone staircase is chipping in places.

Historian(s): Rebecca Howell, Jennifer Lathrop, and Richard Sucre, May 2003.

Project Information: The documentation of the house on Yellow Mountain Road 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: Eastern and Northern Facades.



Figure 2: Western and Southern Facades.

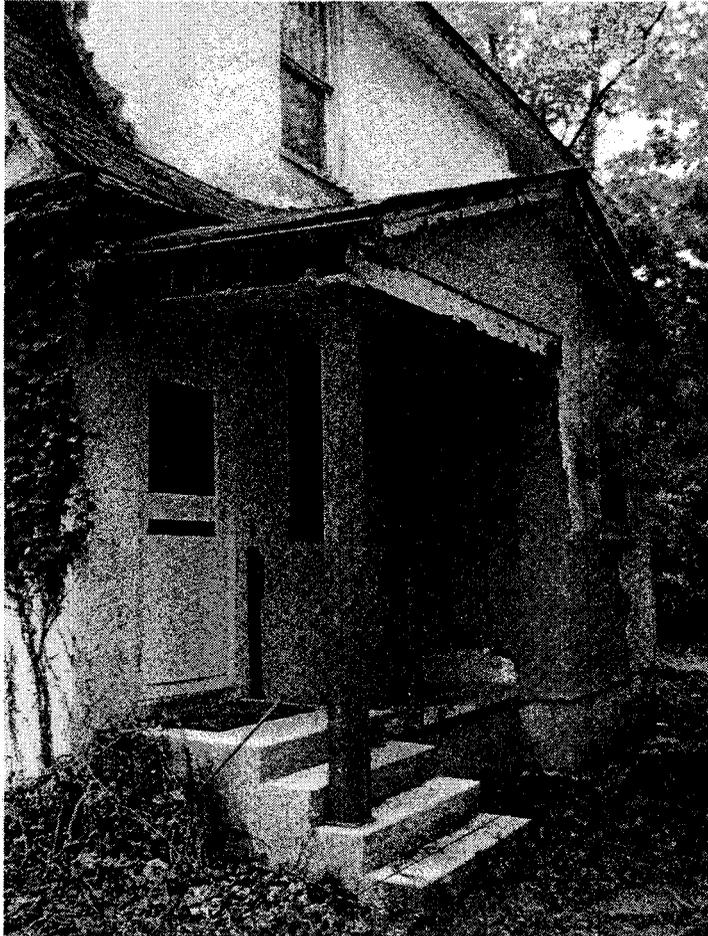


Figure 3: Northern façade detail showing second phase bathroom addition, kitchen entry porch, and exterior basement stairs.

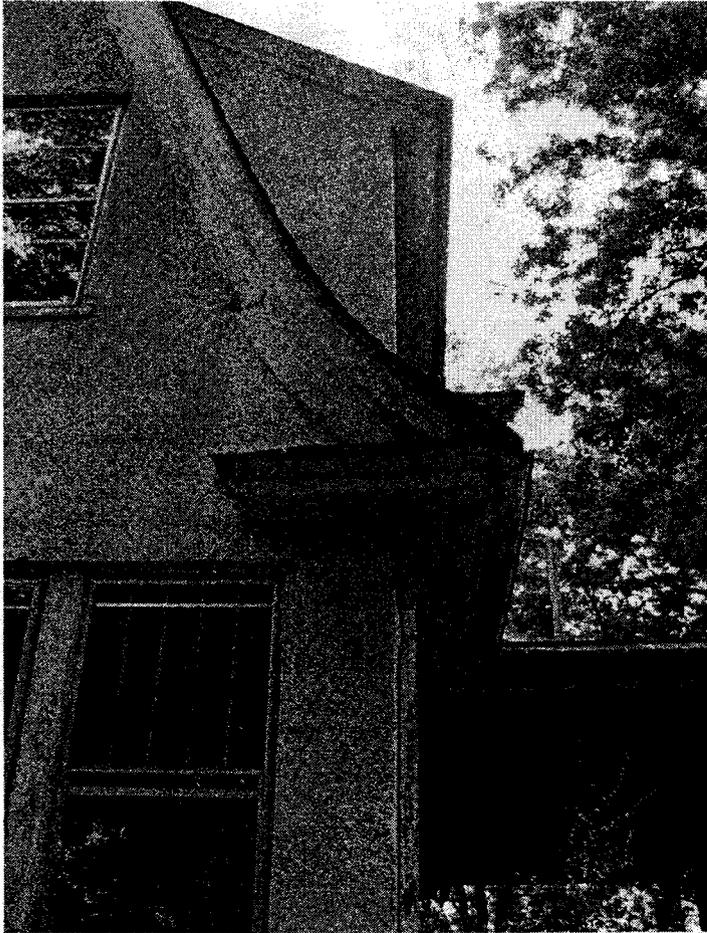


Figure 4: Southwestern corner eave detail.

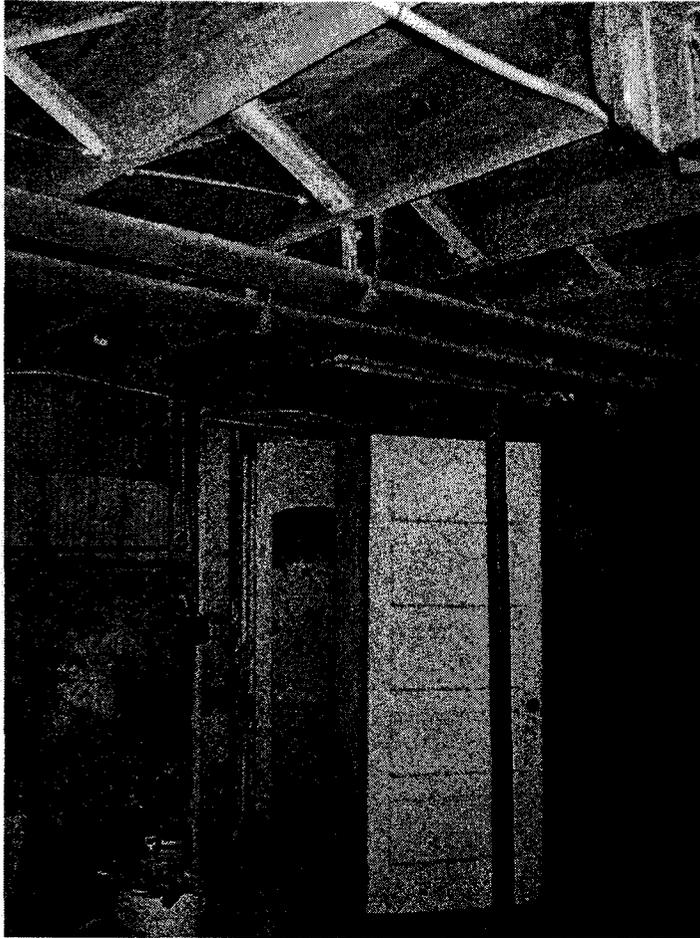


Figure 5: Basement view showing concrete foundation, terra cotta blocks and first floor joists.



Figure 6: Attic view showing roof rafters and back of enclosed stair leading from the second to the third floor.

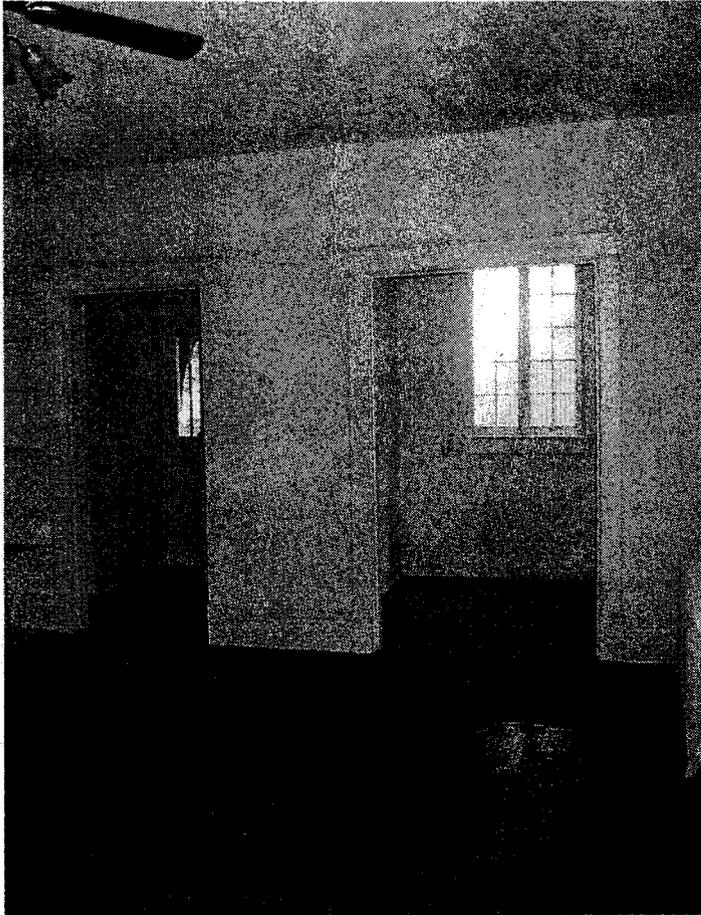


Figure 7: Interior view from living room looking northeast towards entryway and adjacent small room.



Figure 8: Living room fireplace and surround.