

Watt House
Richmond National Battlefield Park
Hanover County, Virginia

HABS No. VA-477

HABS
VA
43-COLD,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office Design and Construction
120 South Third St., Philadelphia 6, Pa.

HABS
VH
43-COLD
2-

Watt House
Richmond National Battlefield Park
Hanover County COLD HARBOR
Virginia

HABS No. VA-477
Page 1.

Owner - U.S. Government, Department of the Interior, National Park Service. Richmond National Battlefield Park. Now used as a residence for the Park personnel.

Date of Erection - No documentary evidence. The Watt farm taxes increased ~~from~~ from \$150.00 to \$928.90 from 1833 to 1836 which appears to date the building of the present house.

Date of viewing

Description

Plan dimensions 30'6" x 28'

Basement: kitchen, dining room and storage space
First floor- Entrance vestibule, stairs and two rooms
Second floor- passage and two rooms

Construction

Brick basement story which rises 4' above the ground level. One and a half story frame construction with weather boarding sheathing. The sheathing is of plank boarding cut off at one edge and nailed to the uprights through the narrower part. The thicker edge therefore stands out from the uprights and makes a good overlap. The roof was originally shingled and has dormers. There are two brick chimnies at the east end with pent closets. The roof rafters are pegged together in lieu of a ridge pole. They diminish in width from the eave to the ridge.

Elevations

Front (north)

Basement - Two 9-light windows
First floor- 6-panel door at right and 2 18-light windows plain wood verge board.
Roof- Steep pitch, 9 1/2' to the foot. 2 Ridge dormers with 12-light windows

Rear - Mirror image of north elevation

Side (east)

Two stepped brick chimnies
cellar door with 4-light window between chimnies
First story - At left a 6-panel door under a pent. A pent closet with a 4-light window between chimnies and a pent closet also with a 4-light window at right.
Upper story - an 8-light sash window between chimnies set assymmetrically to left of center. Plain board for verge board which tapers following taper of rafters.

Side (West)

Two cellar windows with 4 lights in lower sash and 2 lights in upper sash.

Ground floor- In center one 18-light sash window

Upper floor - 2 symmetrically placed 12-light windows.

All windows and doors have pegged framing.

Interior

In the basement there is some brick flooring which may date from an earlier building. There is a large fireplace, originally used for cooking. Remains of the crane are visible.

Little of the original trim remains in the house.

Second floor has simple pegged framing about 4-arched fire-opening. A plain board is used for the mantel.

History - As this is an unpretentious farmhouse, it has little recorded architectural history.

Hugh Watt was born in Flenairm, Antrim County, Ireland. After his father's death, with his mother, he emigrated to Richmond, Va. in 1790.

On April 5, 1801, he married Sarah Bohannon Kidd. She inherited from her father, Pittman Kidd, a farm called "Springdale" in Hanover County about 13 miles from Richmond in 1832 (360 acres in one tract and 171 acres in another.)

In 1833, her husband, Hugh Watt was declared legally joint owner. Before 1836, the buildings on the farm were assessed at \$150.00. In 1836, the assessment was \$928.90. It seems evident, therefore, that this building was completed in 1835.

The youngest son, George Watt, came into possession of the property in 1865. The first recorded repairs were made to the house in 1935 after it had been purchased by the Battlefield Park Corporation and deeded to the Virginia State Conservation and Development Commission. The Federal Government accepted title to all the Richmond National Battlefield property, including the Watt house on July 14, 1944. The repairs in 1935 were done by the Richmond firm of Claiborne and Taylor, Inc. Second recorded repairs were done in November 1945. Complete restoration and modernization of the house is being undertaken by the National Park Service during the 1957 fiscal year.

The historic significance of the house is two-fold. The first is architectural for it shows the continuance of an early type of Virginia farmhouse built in the 1830's. It demonstrates how difficult it is to date vernacular buildings constructed with traditional methods unless there is documentary material.

The following traditional items of construction should be noted.

1. The tapering rafters supporting the roof.
2. the pegging of the rafters instead of using a ridge.
3. the tapering verge boards which follow the taper of the rafters and reveal the taper on the exterior of the building.
4. The plank sheathing which is called drop siding.
4. The reuse of old nails, which makes the dating of the fabric even more difficult.
6. Timbers made narrower at ends to permit nailing to other members. The nails would be too short to go through the timbers otherwise.
7. Use of solid corner posts, which usage was limited to a short period 1820-1840 according to Architect Bennett.
8. Slide windows.
9. Use of wood bars on the cellar windows to prevent "break and entry".
10. In cellar a partition made of upright logs and bearded boards.
11. The battened doors put together with nails which are turned twice at right angles to prevent scratching or roughness.

The second claim to fame of the Watt house is that it was used for a few hours by Major General Fitz-John Porter as a field headquarters during the Battle of Gaines' Mill, June 27, 1862 during the War Between the States. It was chosen because of its high location. After the battle, it was used as a hospital, during the war.

References

Christian Observer, May 18, 1910.

"My Visits with Grandmother", by Mrs. M. J. Haw, granddaughter of Mrs. Sarah B. Watt.

U.S. Department of the Interior

National Park Service. MS Reports

Historical, November 1956 by John T. Willett

Architectural, Part I, May 1, 1957 by

Charles E. Peterson and W. Ross Taylor

Part II. September 30, 1957 by

George F. Bennett, Architect

Addendum to:
Hugh Watt House
Richmond National Battlefield Park
Cold Harbor
Hanover County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-477

HABS
VA,
43-COLD,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127