

CONDITION SURVEY OF THE SLAVE QUARTER
BUILDING AT WALNUT VALLEY (090-
0023/44SY0262), SURRY COUNTY, VIRGINIA



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Virginia Department of Historic Resources

AND

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INTRODUCTION

This condition survey focuses on the outbuilding designated as a “slave building” in a previous study of Walnut Valley (Sanford 2012). In 2012–2013, Mesick Cohen Wilson Baker, Architects, of Albany, New York and Williamsburg, Virginia, performed this condition survey through a subcontract to the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research, which had a contract with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) to prepare both the condition survey of this building and a National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) nomination for the entire Walnut Plantation (090-0023/44SY0262) property. The Department of Conservation and Recreation, which owns and administers the property as part of Chippokes Plantation State Park, sponsored the study as part of its effort to list its significant historic properties on the historic registers (both the NRHP and Virginia Landmarks Register) and to manage and interpret Walnut Valley, donated to DCR by the previous owner in 2004.

Field work began with an initial site visit on September 27, 2013 and concluded with a second site visit on March 3, 2013. This report identifies problematic conditions and presents recommendations for remedial action. Recommendations are digested and prioritized in the “Summary Recommendations” below. The chimney is the priority item, owing to its precarious state. The framing is the next concern. And the cladding is next as the means of keeping water out of the entire structure.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Rebuild interior of chimney; repair top course of stack; repoint chimney; replace spalled exterior bricks; flash void between chimney and east gable framing.
- Replace roof covering in kind.
- Replace rear sill; failed sister framing in rear wall and under floor.
- Restore existing window and door frames.
- Replace siding and trim (excluding front cornice and fascia).
- Replace the rear door and the shutter of west gable window.
- Restore interior trim of both ground-floor doorways and both windows.
- Restore hardware of both ground-floor doorways.
- Restore sashes.
- Restore hole in floor.
- Replace the existing ladder to the upper floor with a wider ladder based on physical evidence in the present stair opening. The resulting access would be wider, stronger, more stable and thus safer than the existing ladder.

These measures are intended to stabilize and preserve the building, re-introducing historical elements where remedial work allows. They are *not* intended to make the building suitable for public access. Additional measures for access and provisions for life safety would be required in that case.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

This frame structure dates to 1816, based on dendrochronology testing (Sanford 2012:32). It is situated southwest of the main house at Walnut Valley, in Surry County, Virginia (Figure 1). It is within the plantation yard, which is centered within approximately 262 acres of agricultural fields and woodland. Other buildings within the yard include the ca. 1770 main house, a kitchen roughly contemporary with the slave quarter, and several late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century outbuildings. The slave quarter building stands on brick piers and retains its original brick chimney. Externally, it measures about 16 x 14 ft. in plan, embracing a single heated room on the ground floor, and a divided loft above. Both of the loft spaces were unheated in the beginning, and they remain so today. Two original rooms were of roughly equal size, with a 30-inch doorway between. The first stair ascended in the southeast corner to the east upstairs room. The closed-up opening for this stair is visible in the framing of the first-floor ceiling and in the void left by the newel in the flooring upstairs



Figure 1. Walnut Valley, slave quarter, north elevation.



Figure 2. Closed stair opening.



Figure 3. Closed stair opening and newel mortise.

(Figures 2 and 3). Evidence for the original partition between the rooms appears as a series of mortises in the floor.

Sometime in the middle or late decades of the nineteenth century, the ground-floor room was finished with cyphered pine sheathing applied with late cut nails, and the stair moved to the west wall (Figure 4). (Lap joints for the stringers of this second stair are visible in the header of the present opening). Upstairs, the attic partition moved to its present location to cordon off the new stair space. This alteration expanded the adjacent living space and so improved the domestic accommodations of the upper floor. These new arrangements may have corresponded with the building's occupation by free tenant farmers.

Sometime in the early twentieth century, the present roofing and exterior siding were added. Perhaps these changes reflected in the building's conversion to storage, prior to 1930. In the present century, the period II stair was replaced by the present ladder, composed of salt-treated lumber assembled with square-drive screws.

The initial function of the building is unknown. In view of genteel trimming at the doors and windows, the "mouse-tooth" adornments of the chimney stack, and the absence of a lug pole or other provisions for cooking, it seems unlikely that this structure was built as a slave quarter.

In addition to this uncertainty regarding the building's original function, the vulnerability of early tenant houses and the important social transition they represent, both point to the *post-bellum* era as the period of greatest significance in the life of



Figure 4. Nineteenth-century sheathing with ghost of Period II stair.

this building. Consequently, necessary remedial work should aim to re-establish the building's appearance during that time.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the recommendations are directed primarily at *preserving* the structure, and secondarily at re-introducing appropriate historical elements. This explains the recommendation to replicate a twentieth-century roof—reconstituting a wooden-shingle roof from the *post-bellum* era might be sufficiently expensive to crowd out other necessary repairs, yet this wooden roof would not be as effective in assuring the long-term viability of the structure as a lightweight and economical metal covering that would eventually take on an inoffensive patina.

These are the considerations that have driven our recommendations. They are *not* intended to make the building suitable for public access. If that step is contemplated, additional improvements in access and added provisions for life safety will be necessary.

DETAILED OBSERVATIONS - EXTERIOR

Roof

The roof is clad with galvanized sheet metal, probably dating from the early 20th century. This covering is rusted throughout, and pinholes of rust are showing through on the inside. On the front slope of the roof, sections of this covering have blown off, exposing the sheathing boards and other vulnerable elements to the weather.

Sheathing

The metal covering on the front roof slope lays over “skip” sheathing composed of 15” wide poplar boards spaced on 18” centers. Many cut nails protrude through the inside face of these boards, indicating that there were at least two generations of wooden shingles on this slope prior to the present metal covering. Missing sections of the metal covering have exposed portions of this sheathing to the weather (Figure 5). For the present, this material remains sound, though it should be protected soon to avoid deterioration. On the rear slope, the skip sheathing is 12-inch-wide pine, laid with 3-inch-wide filler boards between. Cut nails protruding through this sheathing indicate that there was just one generation of wooden shingles on this slope prior to the present metal. Clearly, the sheathing was renewed on this roof slope sometime in the cut-nail period, possibly in the *post-bellum* era when the building was reportedly occupied by tenants.

An in-kind replacement of the present metal roof would not portray the *post-bellum* state of this structure. However, it would protect the building and thus ensure its continued survival. Furthermore, most buildings of the sort now have later metal coverings resembling this one.



Figure 5. Failed roof covering.

Weatherboards, Corner Boards and Rakes

Because there was no upstairs fireplace, the upper portion of the chimney was laid directly against the original weatherboards of the gable end. As a result, the mortar on the interior face of the masonry captured the profiles of those early weatherboards (Figure 6). Each was adorned on its lower edge with a ½-inch bead; all were applied with a 6½-inch exposure. The surviving crown molding at the front eave suggests that these first weatherboards were made of poplar. The present siding is untapered, circular-sawn yellow pine, applied with wire nails. It probably dates sometime after ca. 1900. On all four elevations, some or all of this siding has failed (Figure 7).

All siding should be replaced with beaded weatherboards matching the tapered profile of the originals, as captured by the mortar on the chimney. At the ends of these boards the framing behind should be protected by Grace Ice and Water Shield. 3 x 1 1/8-inch corner boards, each with a ½-inch bead on the salient corner, should be applied at all corners, lying on the longitudinal elevations. The framing behind should be protected by Grace Ice and Water Shield. At the eaves, the weatherboards should die against the backs of the fascia boards. New 3½-inch rakes, each tapering ½-inch toward the apex of the roof, should lie over these weatherboards.



Figure 6. Mortar bearing impression of original, beaded weatherboard.



Figure 7. Late weatherboards.



Figure 8. Interior of front door.

Doors and Trim

The “board-and-batten” front door is $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick, having three battens on the interior face, attached with clinched cut nails. A small sliding bolt of wood secures this door in the closed position (Figures 8 and 9). The loops and keeper for this door were attached to the frame with hand-headed cut nails. The exterior bucks and head lining are pine, applied with wire nails. On the interior, the original head casing remains *in situ*, having a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch bead on the inner edge.

The exterior head and bucks should be replaced, the new members to be 1 inch thick with a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch full bead on the inner side of the fore edge. The interior jamb casings should be replaced as well, matching the profile of the original head

casing. The new interior trim should be made of poplar, to match the original.

The rear doorway should be restored to match the restored front doorway.

Door Hardware

The front door currently swings on hinges dating from the twentieth century, though the door leg of the upper H-L hinge remains in place (Figure 10). After the interior door trim is restored, the upper hinge should be removed from the door, repaired, and re-applied to the door with clinched nails. The lower hinge—a mirror image of that above—should be recreated and attached to the door using existing nail holes to determine the original hinge position. The wooden keeper for the sliding bolt should be removed from the present casing and reapplied with hand-headed cut nails after the jamb casing is restored.

Figure 9. Original slide latch.



Figure 10. Remnant of original H-L hinge and head casing.



Figure 11. Original window frame.

Windows and Trim

The ground-floor window frames are cut from the solid, and they appear to be original. Some of the back bands appear to be affixed with wrought clasp nails (Figure 11). However, the sashes appear to be later nineteenth-century replacements, possibly dating to the tenant house period. In some cases, the sashes have been reversed, so that the puttied sides face the interior.

The sills and lower jambs of the rear window are badly deteriorated. The sill should be replaced and the lower jambs scarfed with new material matching the profiles and workmanship of the originals (Figure 12). The jambs of the front window are eroded at the lower ends and the

sill on its upper face. Soft material should be removed and the wood covered with an oil primer and two finish coats of an off-white oil paint, to match the other restored trim and weatherboards.

The sashes should be removed, re-puttied and, where necessary, re-glazed. They should be painted on the exterior to match other exterior trim and placed back in the windows, oriented with the putty on the exterior.

The shutter on the west gable window is badly deteriorated. This should be replaced in kind, the missing sill should be supplied, and the ledgers that secure the shutter should be re-attached to the studs (Figure 13).

Chimney

The original brick chimney, laid in 1:3 bond, remains intact, but is badly deteriorated. This masonry structure has rotated away from the gable-end wall, leaving a large gap between the masonry and the siding. At various times, this gap has been filled with mortar (Figures 14 and 15).

The top of the stack is adorned with a “mousetooth” dentil course and a flat course above it. The flat course has partly disappeared (Figure 16). On the lower section of



Figure 12. Rear window frame.



Figure 13. Gable-end window.



Figure 14. Chimney.



Figure 15. Chimney separated from building.



Figure 16. Chimney cap.



Figure 17. Collapsed fireplace jambs and arch.

the chimney, several bricks have spalled to the point of leaving a void on the exterior face of the masonry, and mortar joints have failed at the front weatherings. On the interior, the jambs of the fireplace and the arch that once bore on those jambs have all collapsed, leaving the breast of the chimney unsupported. (Figure 17).

The fireplace and its arch should be rebuilt. Missing bricks on the top course of the chimney and the spalled bricks on the back of the chimney should all be replaced. The open mortar joints by the front weatherings should be repointed. The gap between the restored masonry and the framing of the gable end should be flashed.

DETAILED OBSERVATIONS - INTERIOR

Framing

Despite failed cladding on every elevation, the framing remains intact in most locations. An important exception is the middle of the rear wall, where termites have damaged the rear sill and the adjacent joists (Figure 18). This has caused the rear wall to sag, dislodging some of the interior sheathing. A later brick pier has been laid under the sill to arrest its movement.

The rear sill should be replaced in kind and new joists “sistered” to the old where the latter are damaged by termites. Moreover, studs at the rear wall (and other locations) should be “sistered” where rot or insects have compromised them structurally.

Flooring

In the ground-floor room, the sixth board from the rear wall is damaged by termites, leaving a hole through the floor (Figure 19). The damaged section of the floorboard should be excised entirely, and a patch of the same species, comparable in character and grain orientation, should be let in to fill the resulting void. The new material should be face-nailed with wire finishing nails.

REFERENCES CITED

Sanford, Douglas W.

- 2012 Investigating the Slave Building at the Walnut Valley Plantation (44SY02620), Surry County, Virginia. *Quarterly Bulletin of the Archeological Society of Virginia* 67(1):31-44.

Figure 18. Failed framing: rear wall.



Figure 19. Failed flooring.