



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 123-0024

Purpose of Evaluation

Please use the following space to explain briefly why you are seeking an evaluation of this property.

The Strachan-Harrison house is a 18th century Tidewater Colonial home in the Old Towne Petersburg Historic District. Its sister house is the Moore House in Yorktown, where Cornwallis arranged his surrender in 1781.

Are you interested in applying for State and/or Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits? Yes ___ No X

Are you interested in receiving more information about DHR's easement program? Yes ___ No X

1. General Property Information

Property name: Strachan-Harrison House
Property address: 501 High Street
City or Town: Petersburg
Zip code: 23803

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Petersburg

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):

Building X Site ___ Structure ___ Object ___

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 2+ acres

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban X Suburban ___ Town ___ Village ___ Hamlet ___ Rural ___

Briefly describe the property's overall setting, including any notable landscape features:

The Strachan-Harrison is situated on 2+ acres of manicured gardens and has hundreds of English boxwood. It has an expansive front yard, it is the only house that sites back from the street. There is a stone wall that divides the front yard and forms an entrance to the yard around the house. The home has brick pathways, a cobblestone driveway to a carriage house, terraced backyard with perennials, 100+ year old American Elm, two other Elm trees, numerous Virginia native plants, a potting shed with brick chimney, gazebo, barn, and a 4-board fence around 1-acre pasture that houses sheep.

The house is oriented almost due south on the land sloping north toward the river. Land drops off sharply about 30 feet beyond the house. Those grounds are terraced with boxwood and perennials. The house is located in the city but, has the feel of being in the country.

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Tidewater Colonial

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: unknown

If the builder is known, please list here: _____

Date of construction (can be approximate): 1760

Narrative Description:

In the space below, briefly describe the general characteristics of the entire property, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the architectural style, materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions, remodeling, or other alterations.

The 18th century Strachan-Harrison House exhibits most of the architectural features of a Tidewater Colonial. It is a framed clapboard 5 bay front house that is 1 room deep and has a center hall plan with 2 flanking wings, a stone/brick foundation, and front and back matching porches. The home has 2 exterior chimneys and 2 interior chimneys. It is very unique in its outside appearance, chiefly due to the combination of a gambrel and clipped gable roof. Examination of the roof shows a decided "kick" at the eaves. Also, the shingles rise to the dormers, thus guiding the water away from the siding. This rise is accomplished using the wedge shaped wooden flashing.

The Strachan-Harrison is significant for its long, linear plan arrangement and its construction methods, which includes mortice and tenon joints with pegs. The braced frame construction features unusually heavy corner posts in each room, as wide as 4" x 19". All major joints are pegged. The studs are mortised into the plate or girt. The upper and lower rafters are numbered with matching Roman numerals. To level the floors, during the construction, the one-and-a-half inch floor boards were foot adzed or cut back in thickness at the point of contact with the floor joist. An interesting member of the upper frame is the "false plate". This is the board which lies flat upon the ends of the attic joists, or collar beams. It supports the lower ends of the roof rafters. The structural system of the house is heavy axe-hewn timbers.

In keeping with the practice of those times, the interior trim, such as the chair rail, baseboard, and door and window frames, were nailed in place before plastering. The plaster was brought to the molding, instead of using the molding to hide the joint, as with modern construction.

The west wing and west passageway predates the main house. Wooden flashing, identical to that used at the dormers, fastened with eighteenth century nails, was used to protect the joint between the passageway roof and the weatherboarding of the main house. The passageway butts up against a separate framing which would indicate that the west wing existed before the main house was built. The east wing of the house was added early in the nineteenth century.

This house has been spared the fate of many older dwellings in that the basic structure has not been altered by modernization. The frame is original throughout. There was considerable termite damage in the dining room. Sills, flooring, and floor joists in that area have been replaced. The dormers have been completely rebuilt, retaining as much as possible of the original fabric. The bulk of the roof sheathing, boards reaching widths of 16", is still serviceable. First floor windows have been preserved, with some repair to the sash. The windows on the first floor are 9 panes over 9 panes and the second-floor windows are 6 panes over 6 panes.

The chimneys and fireplaces in both wings have been rebuilt. The downstairs mantels date to the 19th century. The upstairs mantels are original. The double doors in the west passageway, with their unique "rising hinges" and the north door in the center passageway, are original, as are the interior doors and most of the interior trim. All the doors retain their HL hinges; period hardware or authentic reproductions are throughout the house.

The Strachan-Harrison House is 1 room deep, has original doors separating each room, and a fireplace in each room. Original and reclaimed wood flooring throughout, wainscoting in each room, 10-foot ceilings, and numerous original hardware. The interior of the house is completely restored and in excellent condition. The exterior of the home has also been restored and painted its original red color. It is a red house with a red standing seam metal roof. Shutters with period shutter dogs are present on the home.

The home boasts 3 bedrooms, living room/parlor, main hallway, dining room, kitchen, west wing hallway, west wing sitting room, 7 fireplaces, heart pine floors throughout, and a basement. Fortunately, the basic architecture of the Strachan-Harrison was never altered, and the house exhibits today much of its original dignity and charm.

Briefly describe any outbuildings or secondary resources (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

Early drawings of the Strachan-Harrison House show numerous outbuildings. To keep the home as period as possible, several outbuildings have been recreated.

- Carriage House (2004) used as a garage
- Gazebo (2005)
- Potting shed (2009) matches the house, has standing seam metal roof, brick chimney
- Barn (2010) wooden barn with slate roof which houses my sheep
- In-ground swimming pool (1997) with stone surrounding and automatic pool cover
- Cobblestone and Belgian block driveway (2006). All of the stones were collected from the property.

Carriage House, potting shed, and barn have been recreated to match the main house.

4. Property's History and Significance

In the space below, briefly describe the history of the property, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

The 18th century Strachan-Harrison House stands as a reminder of Petersburg's past. It was once the home of the Scottish immigrant, Alexander Strachan, a "Yankee" doctor in the American Revolution, and later an alderman in early Petersburg. During the Revolution, he was assigned to the company of Captain Meade, to attend to the sick and the wounded. In addition to this service, Dr. Strachan furnished supplies to the American army. He was a vestry man of the old Blandford Church. When Petersburg was incorporated in 1784, Dr. Strachan was one of the first alderman. His wife, Lucy Pride Strachan, had inherited the house from her father in 1774. It remained in the Strachan family until 1860 and then John Blackwood Strachan sold it to the Harrisons. From 1876 to 1914, the misses "Muffie" and "Mollie" Harrison conducted a private academy in the west wing of the home. In 1936, it was sold to Grace Episcopal Church which had been built on the land between the house and High Street. The Strachan-Harrison was used as a parish house until the 100-year-old church was torn down in 1956. The original stone wall is still present in the front yard.

Dr. Strachan died in 1812. A detailed inventory of his estate can be found in the records in the clerk's office of the Circuit Court of Petersburg. Included among his descendants were three noted physicians, Dr. Theophilis Strachan, Dr. John Blackwood Strachan, who married Rebecca Pocahontas Bolling, and Dr. Robert Strachan, a surgeon in the Army of the Confederacy.

Ellen Glasgow visited the house and knew it well. It is pictured as the home of Virginia Pendleton, the central character in her early novel, *Virginia*. The book discusses numerous details of the house.

This intact preserved Tidewater Colonial is very rare. The sister house is the Moore House in Yorktown, VA. This is where Cornwallis arranged his surrender in 1781 and the house is currently a museum.

The above information was obtained by the HABS report (VA-642) that was done in 1968.

5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: X Public\Local _____ Public\State _____ Public\Federal _____

Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: Dana N. Ballenger

organization: _____

street & number: 501 High Street

city or town: Petersburg state: VA zip code: 23803

e-mail: dballengerrn@yahoo.com telephone: 804-490-5912

Legal Owner's Signature:  Date: 2-1-2018

•• Signature required for processing all applications. ••

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: _____

Daytime Telephone: _____

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: _____

organization: _____

street & number: _____

city or town: _____ state: _____ zip code: _____

e-mail: _____ telephone: _____

6. Notification

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator or City Manager.

name/title: Aretha R Ferrell-Benavides (City Manager)

locality: City of Petersburg

street & number: 135 N Union St.

city or town: Petersburg state: VA zip code: 23803

telephone: 804-733-2301