

COLONIAL

Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



COLE DIGGES HOUSE A Historic Structure Report

Formerly known as the Thomas Pate House

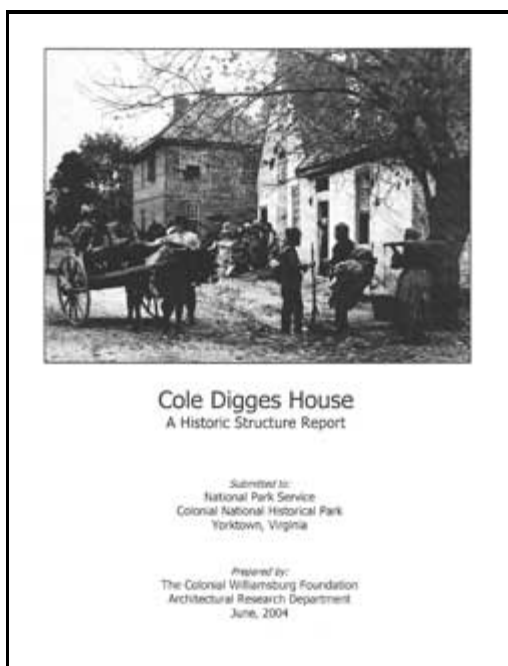
Prepared for
National Park Service
Colonial National Historical Park
Yorktown, Virginia

Analysis and recording by
Mark R. Wenger, Willie Graham, and Edward
A. Chappell; produced by Peter B. Sandbeck

Written by
Edward A. Chappell

Architectural Research Department
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

July, 2003
Revised June, 2004



[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

colo/cole-digges-hsr/index.htm
Last Updated: 19-Jan-2005

COLONIAL

Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Introduction](#)

- Purpose
- Introduction/Summary

[Visible Exterior](#)

- Upper Walls
- Lower (Cellar) Walls

[Exterior Woodwork](#)

[Interior](#)

- Front First Floor Rooms
- Vestibule
- Stair Passage
- Rear First Floor Room
- Second Floor and Roof
- Cellar

[Preservation](#)

- Brickwork
- Exterior Woodwork
- Interior
- Interior Woodwork and Framing
- Plaster
- Hardware

[Conclusions](#)

- Archaeology
- Proposed Use and its Impact on the Property
- Acknowledgement

[Floor Plans](#)

[Drawings](#)

[Photographs](#)

[Appendix I](#): "The Thomas Pate House and Lot 42 in Yorktown" by Charles E. Hatch, 1969

The cover illustration is a still photo from director D. W. Griffith's 1924 film *America*. The unrestored Cole Digges House is on the right. The building in the background, to the left, is the Customs House.

[<<< Previous](#) [<<< Contents >>>](#) [Next >>>](#)

COLONIAL

Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



INTRODUCTION

Purposes

This study, like any historic structure report worth its salt, has two purposes: (1) explaining the building's character and evolution and (2) providing assistance in preserving its distinctive qualities. The two are intertwined because thoughtful preservation is best grounded in comprehension of what is being preserved, and vital, dramatic interpretation is possible only if the fabric of the building is conscientiously protected.

Introduction/Summary

Historians have long believed that ferryman and tavern-keeper Yorktown's lot 42, in 1699, and that it was this house to which he referred in 1703 as "my house & Lott in Yorktown". [1] While surviving Virginia buildings of this character and general plan were often attributed to the 17th century when first extensively studied in the 1920s, most have in the last two decades been reassigned to the second and third quarters of the 18th century. Dendrochronology (tree-ring dating) offers the best prospect for a precise construction date, and samples of the original framing timber taken in April, 1999 are likely to provide a date for the house. [2] In the meantime an approximate date of the 1720s or later seems more plausible, based on the nature of the building's plan, brickwork, and framing, and on the history of the property's ownership. Pending dendrochronology, the successful merchant Cole Digges (1691-1744) is the likely builder of the house. Digges became a member of the Council in 1720, several years after being appointed as a "visitor and Governor" of the College of William and Mary. He owned two plantations, a warehouse, a storehouse, wharf, and this property as well as other Yorktown lots in 1744. This elite association offers the best context for the building's interpretation -- it is a sizable, refined residence, yet without the lavish appearance and extent of accommodation provided by larger and more expensive houses like that built by Thomas Nelson a block southeast on Main Street. His son, Dudley Digges, is the principal alternative, but the son apparently built the house that now bears his name c. 1760.

The building apparently began life with two first-floor rooms and no passage in the main block, together with a narrow passage and a third first-floor room in the rear ell. This is a familiar means of arranging three main rooms and circulation to the upper floor in 18th-century houses from Virginia to as far away as Bermuda. Three or more bedchambers were located upstairs in this case, and there was extensive space intended for storage in the cellar, probably for merchants' goods. The rear cellar room may have been a workspace. An exterior chimney was centered on the left end, serving the hall or largest room, and an interior one at the rear of the ell provided fireplaces for the first-floor room and at least one other space, above or below it.

There were substantial changes in the 18th and 19th centuries, some associated with use as a

store. While it was called "the old brick Store house" or "the Brick Store House" as early as 1784, we see no physical evidence of it being constructed to house commercial or storage space, with the significant exception of its generous cellar. [3] The dormer windows are part of a c.1800-20 upgrading, and more substantial changes about 1840-50 appear domestic in nature, though old photos show glazed exterior doors that could date from early in the 19th century, and the building was back in commercial use by the end of the century. [4] It was returned to residential use by a very interesting restoration in 1925, planned by owner Helen (Mrs. Carroll) Paul and John H. Scarff from the prestigious Baltimore architectural firm of Wyatt and Nolting, prior to the reclamation of Virginia's colonial capital nearby. Scarff was an antiquarian, and his work among early Maryland buildings affected his designs for the Cole Digges House. [5] Paul was an actively engaged client, always urging Scarff to recognize and cultivate the building's picturesque qualities, while insisting that he think practically, as when selecting roof materials and arranging a kitchen. [6]

Scarff attempted to bring visual order to the outside, making it appear to be an intact colonial Chesapeake house, in a general way, in favor of removing later elements and trying to return it precisely to its initial form. In spite of his obvious effort to create an archaic, pre-Georgian interior, both architect and client thought of the house in a romantic way. They did not, for example, study the brickwork and attempt to re-create original doorways and windows.

The combination of 18th-century and 1925 fabric, with small fragments from the first half of the 19th century, now characterize the building. Yorktown's Main Street and the adjoining area of Read Street have been raised since the 18th century, hiding much of the originally exposed cellar walls and reducing the apparent size of the house. As a result, our tour of the building will begin with what is normally visible outside, then look at masonry evidence uncovered in 1998-99, and conclude with assessment of the interior. The scale of the present project has been kept relatively modest, based primarily on observation, without much intrusion into the fabric. We did remove some very small areas of 20th-century plaster to check for evidence of early partitions, stairs, and ceiling finish, most extensively in the present "living room" (original hall). Recording was intentionally confined to photographs, three measured plans suggesting periods of construction, and this text.

<<< [Previous](#)

<<< [Contents](#) >>>

[Next](#) >>>

COLONIAL

Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



VISIBLE EXTERIOR

A close look at the exterior masonry normally visible at the Cole Digges House tells much of the building's evolutionary story. The character of the masonry is consistent with a 1720s date, although some similar brickwork can be found earlier and it continued to be built, selectively, through the end of the 18th century. [7] Here a regular Flemish bond with glazed headers was used everywhere above present grade, and the brickwork along the edges of the gables was manipulated to create a diagonal line of glazed headers paralleling the roof slopes. (Some of the glazing is now obscured by paint, and some bricks close to modern grade have lost their glaze, but virtually all sizeable areas of unglazed brickwork above the water table are replacements.) This sort of treatment rose to prominence in the early 18th-century Chesapeake and declined from favor in the third quarter of the century. The lined joints were carefully executed and small closers were used with enough consistency that they help define the extent of original openings. There is modest brick rubbing at the edges of these openings and at the building's corners. The only distinction in the brickwork of the two street-front walls is the use of rubbed and gauged, beveled bricks with thin putty joints capping the water table, contrasting with ordinary brick on the four left and rear walls.

A tour of the exterior quickly affords an understanding of the building's original form. We will begin with the front wall and move clockwise. The house faces southwest. This report will employ right and left, front and rear directions for simplicity and will use the cardinal directions only when needed for clarity.

Front Wall

Sizable portions of the original front wall survive in spite of its partially painted and shopworn appearance. The major area of missing masonry is all that between the two left windows. This, combined with the absence of evidence for original jambs for these openings, suggests that the house may have initially had a three-bay front, with a central door flanked by single windows roughly centered on the wall to either side of the doorway. [8] The right opening began as a window. Closers along its left edge reveal this as an original jamb, and one closer as well as courses once butted against now-lost closers indicate that the window rose to the top of the wall, much like the two present left windows on the facade. The opposite side of the right window is cut through original brickwork, and so began as a narrower opening. The top of the opening was lowered to create a doorway, perhaps during a late 18th-century remodeling as a shop, and was closed by the time an engraving of Main Street was published in *Frank Leslie's illustrated Newspaper* on November 1, 1879. [9] ([drawing 1](#)) The present window dates from c.1925.

A partial column of closers likewise defines the left jamb of the front doorway as original, although originally it was lower and thus had no transom. Again, the right jamb is cut away, so that the opening was originally narrower. The doorframe, like the front window frames, now has single architraves with narrow quirked backbands. These are 1925 additions, as are

the frame door reveals with flat recessed panels, and all other window and exterior doorframes. We suspect the door enlargement was part of a c. 1840-50 conversion.

Brickwork between the two left windows is also c. 1840-50, and it is entirely possible that the largest room of the house did not receive two front windows until that remodeling.

Parts of two courses immediately above the water table are damaged by concrete apparently laid over much of the yard when a cement firm named the American Cement Company owned the property c.1915.

The present window shutters and their wrought iron shutter keepers date from the 1925 restoration. Scarff took pains to point out that early shutters were stored "in the lean-to" and that they had been attached to the frames with wrought-iron hinges. [10] Those shown in pre-1925 photos appear to be part of the 19th-century improvements.

Happily, substantial portions of early woodwork survive on the front eaves and dormers. Part of the fascia, soffit, modillion band, modillions, and bedmold are early -- dating from either original construction or c. 1800-20. The cornice looks very academic for the 1720s, but apparently the Brush-Everard House had a comparable one in 1718 or '19, and there is no visible evidence for earlier eaves finish at the Cole Digges House. The dormers are early 19th-century in form and detail. Parts of the cheeks, cyma moldings, and tympanums survive from this period.

The National Park Service installed the present shingle roof in 1993, replacing a slate roof installed in 1925. Paul and Scarff discussed the choices of wood and slate. After initially considering shingles, Scarff recommended slate. Paul responded in a characteristic way, with desire for a venerable appearance and interest in the cost. [11] Employing a picturesque method often used on Olde English-style suburban houses of the 1920s, the restorers applied the slate in consciously rough-coursed manner, with chipped corners and varied lengths. They were applied to the sides of the dormers as well as the roof slopes.

Left Wall

The left end wall has also sustained much alteration, and this incorporates elements from several construction periods. Originally, a central exterior chimney seems to have risen in line with the ridge. This was rebuilt, probably c. 1840-50, resulting in the present chimney which corbels toward the rear. [12] Presumably the change was intended to remove an unnecessarily large c. 1720s chimney and perhaps to provide more light by inserting new windows, one centered in the gable and two flanking the chimney. The stack seems to have been rebuilt late in the 19th century. Both first-floor windows were cut in after the initial construction period. Closers and associated brickwork at the right jamb of the right window indicate that originally there was a smaller aperture, narrower and only seven or eight courses tall, like those seen in comparable Chesapeake brick houses and frame houses with brick ends, of c.1720s. We assume all evidence of a matching original window on the left was obliterated by insertion of its larger successor c.1840-50. The present gable window was probably associated with the c.1840-50 arrangement, though we see no evidence for an original attic fireplace. It is possible, then, that a smaller attic window existed behind the earlier chimney stack. The corbeled chimney probably developed structural problems, and by c. 1900 supporting brickwork was later carried up from grade to the rear (northeast side) of the stack.

Rear Wall of Main Block

Substantial and informative early fabric remains visible on the rear wall in spite of alterations and partial removal, as well as obstruction by finish inside the vestibule added in 1925 to link the large left room with the stair passage. The best-preserved original brickwork is now sheltered by a 1925 porch roof, replacing an old one described as collapsed in 1924. [13] Up high, the brickwork just right (northwest) of the vestibule is remarkably intact and unweathered, providing an opportunity to see how the walls of the entire building looked originally: a relatively dark range of brick with nearly black splotches, all glazed headers, random glazing on the stretchers, very white (high lime content) mortar, and relatively thick and uneven mortar joints, deeply struck with a finishing tool.

An area 5' 9" wide and 5' 3" high above present grade was originally enclosed by a long-demolished shed-roofed cellar entrance, and it retains the whitewash finish applied to the interior of this structure. The original cellar entrance may have been demolished when steps were added to the right of the main block, adjoining Read Street, apparently late in the 19th century. To the right is a later doorway into the largest room, the opening apparently cut in the mid-19th century as access to a rear wing of that date, an addition that coexisted with the old cellar entry. As elsewhere, the door and doorframe were remade in 1925. The brickwork above this doorway is largely original, spotted with remnants of yellowish, 19th-century plaster; that to the right is 18th-century, patched c.1840-50; the work to the left dates from c.1840, 1925, and c.1720s. Crude water table courses below the door date from 1998.

Left (Northwest) Wall of Ell

The left wall of the ell also retains much of its original brickwork, although 19th-century whitewash softly obscures some of its coloration, and sizable areas have been removed or hidden by the 1925 vestibule and a 19th-century coal chute. The masonry is of the same quality as that in the rear wall, though much of it below the window includes lighter, rosy brick. The window opening retains its original width (3' 5-1/2") and its approximate original height (5' 1/2"), though the head and upper jamb were rebuilt in 1925. Just above present grade are two original water table courses, constructed of ordinary brick. Double headers just left of the vestibule may indicate that the original masons were approaching a doorway in the stair passage. Also adjoining the vestibule is the ghost of a shed-roofed space higher than the coal chute, with the outline of a roof extending about 4' 5" to 6' 6" above the water table and roughly 3' out from the 1925 water table. The foundations of this structure were observed recently by Colonial Williamsburg archaeologist Dwayne Pickett, who interprets it as an 18th-century addition. Under the level of the long-lost 18th-century rafters are many layers of whitewash.

The coal chute was added in the second half of the 19th century to serve a furnace in the ell. This relatively modern function was accommodated in a brick dog house-like structure with a barrel-vaulted top and a parapet, with an appearance reminiscent of early 19th-century buildings in Charleston, South Carolina.

Rear (Northeast) Wall of Ell

The rear gable wall of the ell is much altered, its doorway and pantry window cut through in the 1920s and the present 4' 9" by 2' 5" chimney apparently built in the mid-19th century. The chimney brickwork, consistent in color and brick size, does not match other mid-19th-century masonry in the house so we assume it was built as a different stage. Much of the original gable survives, however, with parts of original brick jambs on both attic windows. There is no direct external evidence for an earlier chimney serving a second-floor fireplace, and fragments of framing for a second-floor hearth, assembled with mature cut nails, suggest

the fireplace there was rebuilt or inserted in the mid-19th century. However, the two gable windows suggest that there was a rear chimney, reinforcing the clear evidence visible inside above the collars.

Here again we see a plain water table, partially rebuilt in the 20th century.

Right (Southeast) Wall

The right wall is richly illustrative of the many changes the building has sustained. The most extensive original brickwork is in the gable, in the first-floor wall just right of the present doorway into the front room, and across most of the ell. Sufficient brickwork survives at the juncture of the main block and ell to make it evident that the two sections were constructed at the same time. There appears to be an original left (southwest) jamb for a central first-floor window, long blocked, and the left jamb of a gable window, serving the present aperture. Convincingly early closers reveal the presence of a cellar window, also centered, visible within the present exterior stairwell. There is debate among the team members over the vintage of the cellar window, however, and it could have been inserted early in the 19th century when other cellar windows were cut, before construction of a mid-century chimney.

The famous 1863 Mathew Brady photograph of Main Street ([photograph 1](#)) offers a glimpse of the Cole Digges House, and appears to show an exterior chimney centered on this end. Much of the brickwork has been cut out at the center of the first floor and below the gable window, so it seems likely that the right chimney was added, probably during the Greek Revival remodeling, and was removed by the late 19th century. Views of the street in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, November 1, 1879, and October 1, 1881 (drawings [1](#) and [2](#)), and contemporary photographs show a spindly exterior chimney that replaced the old addition, the later one associated with stoves rather than fireplaces and located sufficiently far to right to leave the gable window unobstructed. The exterior stairway to the cellar appears to have been excavated at the same time, and an end doorway into the first floor was cut in at the corner, just beyond the new stair. This would seem to have made a front doorway to the south room redundant, and the illustrations show that the latter was closed by the late 19th century. Charlottesville architects Browne, Eichman, Dalglish, Gilpin and Paxton recommended extending the exterior stair toward the front to meet building code requirements, and this was done in the summer of 1998, necessitating addition of a larger masonry wall, iron railing, and comparable ironwork blocking the doorway at the head of the steps. [\[14\]](#) Correspondence indicates a 19th-century side porch incorporating the cellar steps was removed during the restoration, but the photograph from D. W. Griffith's film *America* shows it already removed ([photograph 14](#)). [\[15\]](#)

Both openings in the right side of the ell are alterations. The doorway was created or enlarged c. 1800 and the window looks to have been cut in the same era. The present doorway serves the rear passage, and one would expect an entry in this location. It is quite possible, however, that exterior access to the street was originally limited, and that the only external doorway to the passage was on the opposite wall facing the yard. There is a short column of closers relatively high on the wall between the two present openings, indicating an original window just to the right of the present doorway. If so, it is sufficiently close to help suggest the present doorway is an addition.

A pair of double-sheathed door leaves with horizontal boards up to 1' 6-1/2" wide inside and studded with wrought nails appear salvaged, apparently from the end doorway at the front right corner, as the January 26, 1925 plan calls for the shift: "Doors from Opening C recommended." [\[16\]](#) This was not their original location, however, as late 19th-century views show a glazed door in that location.

Lower Walls

Excavations around the Cole Digges House in preparation for waterproofing the foundations in July and August, 1998, revealed almost all of the 18th-century lower walls and the alterations they have sustained. (photographs 32-35) The chief revelations are that the grade was originally much lower, and the cellar was quite substantial in height. This cellar seems to have been dark, except in the ell, having a single exterior entrance -- in the rear wall of the main block.

Twentieth-century grade has always been roughly even with the top of the building's water table. This, combined with insertion of higher first-floor joists and some concrete paving, has left the beveled upper course in battered condition. It is nevertheless evident that this course on the front and right sides was rubbed and gauged to a degree that allowed the use of thin putty head joints. In the absence of specialized arches, the upper water table course has the best quality of brickwork in the house. The less public faces (left end, left side of eli, and rear wall of main block and ell) had cheaper caps with conventional mortar joints.

Access to the cellar was made more public late in the 19th-century by removing an original rear bulkhead, blocking its doorway through the foundation, and excavating new steps to a new cellar doorway beside Read Street.

Front Wall

On the front wall, thirteen courses (3' 3") of the English bond below this cap course have scored joints, and carefully sized closers extend down twenty-eight courses, to the top of a 1998 concrete step footing. We interpret this to indicate that the masons executed their masonry with relative care below grade, but that they began to strike lines in the joints only at or just below grade, 3' 3" below the beveled water table cap.

There is no evidence for original cellar windows or doorways in the front wall. The two openings, roughly 6' high, were cut through otherwise unspoiled brickwork, and provided with deep window wells lined with brick. Both windows appear to have been cut in two stages, first as relatively small and conventional cellar windows perhaps early in the 19th century, and then as very deep openings, probably c.1840-50. Related window wells are most evident in early 20th-century photographs of the front. The right 3' 5" opening was blocked at a relatively early date, perhaps late nineteenth century, with handmade brick and lime mortar, while the left opening was filled with brickwork matching that inserted when the main floor level was raised in 1925.

Left Wall

Likewise the two extant windows in the left cellar wall were cut through eighteenth-century brickwork in two stages. They remain open, with c. 1925 frames and sash replaced by the National Park Service in 1993.

Closers at the corners descend the full depth of the foundations. The mortar is more degraded, but the lining appears to have descended thirteen courses, indicating original grade was lower here as well. The existing chimney, 5' 7" by 2' 6" at present grade, sits on six or more courses of a 6' 1-1/2" by 3' 1/2" base extending 3' below the top of the water table. [[17](#)]

Rear Wall of Main Block

At the outer (northwest) end of the rear wall the upper six courses of the water table are battered and pushed out of shape, perhaps for a now-lost 19th-century porch, but the brickwork below it is in very good condition. Again, scored joints extend down thirteen courses, and closers carry on past them.

Archaeologist Dwayne Pickett recently uncovered the original English bond cellar entrance well, with substantial (brick and a half thick) walls, 8' 7" wide and 6' 10" deep (exterior dimensions). While the joints are uneven, the walls enclosing the cellar entry are at least partially keyed into the rear wall, and the original opening, 6' wide, extends through the wall, now blocked by machine-made brick and Portland cement mortar. Pockets for wooden step nosings remain in each cheek, those on the left (southeast) descending from roughly nine courses below present grade to the bottom of the wall. This could suggest that the original grade was slightly higher at the rear. The interior of the bulkhead was whitewashed above the steps, emphasizing the outline of the steps indicated by nosing slots in the brickwork. The whitewash carries up to a point, roughly 4' 10" above the water table, and its upper edge is flat, where a shed roof terminated.

Left Wall of Rear Ell

On the exposed left (northwest) side of the rear ell is a white-painted area higher than that in the bulkhead, with the outline of a shed roof extending about 4' 5" to 6' 6" above the water table and roughly 3' out from the 1925 projection that houses a connection between the 20th-century parlor and rear passage. Dwayne Pickett found the foundations for this space, and he interprets it as an 18th-century addition. The cellar wall here has scored joints on the thirteen upper courses of the water table.

Rear Wall of Rear Ell

Part of the rear wall of the ell below grade is covered by the deep foundations of the 20th-century porch and c. 1870-80 foundations of the rear chimney, and much of that to the northwest was cut away for a boiler installation. Nevertheless, we see scored joints descending at least nine courses below the top of the water table. The lower chimney foundations are built of reused brick, many of which still retain soot and white paint surviving from their earlier life.

Right Wall

Below grade as well as above, the right wall has no seam between the main block and the ell, illustrating that the ell is contemporary with the front of the house. A late 19th-century stairwell along the right wall damaged and caused repointing of much masonry from the front corner to the junction with the ell. When the rear of the wall was briefly glimpsed during the waterproofing, it appeared that original joints were scored at least seventeen courses below the top of the water table, raising the possibility that the right end's location beside Read Street may have exposed the wall to a greater depth than in other areas. As already mentioned, there are two closers and associated brickwork on both sides of an early cellar window opening about 3' 3" wide and 1' 11" high, eight courses (1' 10") below the top of the water table and directly centered below the right gable. The opening seems to have been filled in the middle of the 19th century, presumably when the right chimney was constructed.

The lower right wall of the ell remains relatively intact, and here too the scored joints extend

twelve to thirteen courses below the top of the water table. There may have been a late 18th-century cellar window just behind (northeast of) the door in the ell, where we see a 19th-century patch about seven courses high, above a row of soldier bricks, ten courses below the top of the water table. A later window, patched in August, 1998, below the right window in the ell was chopped through, with no evidence of an earlier opening.

[<<< Previous](#) [<<< Contents >>>](#) [Next >>>](#)

COLONIAL

Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



EXTERIOR WOODWORK

Substantial parts of the front and rear cornice are early, and the dormers retain sections of early 19th-century diagonal sheathing. Most other woodwork dates from c.1925.

<<< [Previous](#)

<<< [Contents](#) >>>

[Next](#) >>>

colo/cole-digges-hsr/hsr2.htm
Last Updated: 19-Jan-2005

COLONIAL

Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



INTERIOR

The present interior is largely a product of the 1925 restoration, and the room shapes and finishes represent both an important pre-Colonial Williamsburg interpretation of how a 17th-century Virginia house would look, and how it should function as a 20th-century habitation. The owner's intense interest in Yorktown led her and the architect to respect what they took to be the structure's early form, and in some ways that form does survive. They were freer with several parts than vigorous preservationists of subsequent decades would be, but far less aggressive than very wealthy remodelers like William duPont had been a quarter-century earlier at Montpelier and that Archibald and Mollie McCrea were several years later with Carter's Grove.

The present first-floor plan approximates the original one, with several exceptions: (1) the addition of a rear vestibule to provide access between the principal front space and the stair passage in the ell (and thus to the new kitchen and upper floor), (2) the enlargement of that passage at the expense of the front right room, and (3) the creation of small ancillary spaces. The upper floor has three bedchambers, as it probably did in the 18th century, but the 1925 plan appropriated some of the space for closets, cupboards, and a bathroom. [18]

Precisely how a 17th-century Virginia interior looked was largely unknown in the 1920s -- as it essentially remains -- but architects and antiquarians believed they knew, based on a sizable number of surviving houses, most of them now thought to date to the first half of the 18th century. The architect John H. Scarff's handling of the Cole Digges House interior was both archaeological and relatively free, resulting in an evocative appearance that deserves care and protection against change. The woodwork combines archaic details with later 18th-century references and some distinctly early 20th-century constructions. It is visually unified by the use of unpainted pine, darkened by subtle stain and patina. [19] Our tour of the house will address both the evidence for its early form and the nature of the 1925 interior. The restoration removed or hid much evidence for earlier alterations inside, but those too will be recorded when found. The tour will move from left to rear right, on all three floors.

Front First-Floor Rooms

Front and rear doors now give access to the large, square, principal room, which in the 1720s was probably called "the hall". It now measures 19' 9" deep, 20' 1" long, and 9' 1" high, although the original height was greater (the floor was about 7" lower), and the precise length is unclear. [20] Just how generous the size of the hall was in the early 18th century is illustrated by the original framing that survives largely intact overhead. Plaster and metal lath has recently been removed, revealing a 8" by 10-1/4" transverse bridging beam, originally one of two resting on the front and rear walls and providing support for a pair of 7-1/2" to 8" by 7-1/2" longitudinal beams, both of which survive, their old joints reinforced by c. 1925 steel saddles. This heavy framework created nine rectangles into which 7-1/2" to 8" by 2-1/2" transverse floor joists were dropped, in favor of attempting to span roughly 20' with only

joists. The choice was entirely structural, not done for visual impact, as the overhead framing has always been hidden by plaster, a choice more representative of 18th- than 17th-century Chesapeake houses.

After discussion about visible beams, the remodelers respected this concealment throughout the house, exposing archaic-looking framing only in the stair passage, and there for structural as well as visual reasons. Apparently Paul had raised the possibility of exposed beams in the principal rooms after seeing R. T. H. Halsey's American period rooms at the Metropolitan Museum, and Scarff "consulted more than one authority" before responding that "the plaster ceiling is more in keeping for a Virginia sitting room of the period than the timber, which is used in kitchens or kitchen sitting rooms." Earlier he had specified "structural beams, all showing." [21]

In 1925, both front rooms were entirely fitted out with vertical molded sheathing, which runs from a plain rail below a small and folksy cornice down to a thin architrave-like chair rail. By omitting horizontal returns for the panels, Scarff made reference to early sheathing widely known in Britain and New England and virtually unrepresented in eastern Virginia. On the partition he carried the vertical panels from top to bottom, broken only by a plain rail above head level. Elsewhere in the front rooms he gave the treatment eclectic interest by stopping the panels at a chair rail and using plain flush boards for a wainscot, an approach most common in the Chesapeake on houses of about 1770-1820. For the base he used a plain beveled board. The chair rail acts as a front for flat windowsills inside, and simple and freely interpreted single architraves with ovolo backbands terminate at the sill level. The architect did not attempt historically inspired sash, relying on a standard 1920s-30s solution with wide, flat surfaces and very thin moldings, here nicely boxed with an authentic-looking frame. The architect emphasized the bold quality of the big room by carrying a literally-rendered bolection molding around the fireplace, as was done at the early Lynnhaven House in Virginia Beach and countless British buildings. This contrasts with a more delicate, later-looking (late 18th-century) mantelshelf in the smaller front room. Otherwise, the only distinctions in finish are a round-headed, double-leaf rear doorway in the hall, and a conventional rear door with a whimsically pierced wooden transom in the smaller room. The transverse partition is made to look very thick by placing closets on both sides of a wide, double-leaf door, a distinctly post-Colonial feature that permitted the two rooms to be thrown together like double parlors.

Eighteenth-century paneled doors in the Chesapeake ranged from two to eight panels per leaf, depending on size, expense, location, and date. By mid-century, doors with two panels, one above the other, came to be considered less elegant than those with pairs of panels stacked two or more high. In eastern Virginia and Maryland, then, two-panel leaves are generally found in buildings of the first half-century, or in modest locations. Scarff consciously modeled his interior Cole Digges House doors on these picturesque sources, with a wide lock rail between the panels. He used pairs of two-panel leaves in the hall partition and doorway to the rear lobby, and single two-panel leaves elsewhere on the first floor, reserving a six-panel leaf for the front door. For other exterior doorways he used 20th-century glazed doors, with six panes above a panel. The additional light helped alleviate some of the darkness created by dark walls in the front rooms. [22]

Scarff and Paul selected their hardware with relative care, principally by choosing among hinges and latches available from a producer of period ironwork in a relatively free, arts and crafts idiom. Most of the first-floor doors have visibly hammered HL hinges with round-headed screws (obsessively installed to align with the hinge arms) and a historicist mark stamped into their face. Oversized (1' 6" to 1' 7" by 1' 9") HLs on the double front doors may have been made especially for the house or salvaged from elsewhere and re-drilled. These as well as a diverse collection of reproduction brass and iron rim locks are unmarked. Five

cupboards built between the two front rooms have small, thin, stylized versions of archaic foliated H hinges, unmarked but undoubtedly from the same manufacturer. These have marked miniature latch bars on little foliated plates, a kind of latch that must have worked as poorly in 1925 as it does today. [23]

Sometime in the 19th century, probably c.1840-50, the large room was reduced in size when a new partition was added to the left or northwest of the front door to create what was essentially a central passage. This was accomplished by punching studs for the new partition through the hall ceiling and securing them to the new bridging notched into the original joists with mature cut nails. This partition seems to have remained in place until the 1925 restoration.

All the overhead framing in the right-hand room was replaced in 1925, presumably because of structural problems and the necessity to rework the bridging beams and joists when the room's rear wall was moved forward to create a wider stair passage at the juncture of the main block and rear ell. Originally the principal rear wall was continuous for the length of the main block, though the right end was handled with a frame partition. We removed a 1' 10" by 7" area of wall plaster in the stairwell and found the left plate, decayed but still displaying a roughly 8" by 4" mortise pegged for a longitudinal plate that originally sat atop the partition about 4' 2" beyond the present partition. We then opened a 1' 4" by 2' 2" area of plaster in the first-floor toilet and found the vague vertical ghost of the partition on the right wall, just below the ceiling and opposite the telltale mortise.

Vestibule

The vestibule was added in 1925 to create a small space between "the Sitting Room" and the rear garden and to connect the principal front room with the stair passage, giving access to all other rooms in the house without passing through the inner front room. Its large arched entrance seems unlikely as an early feature, but Scarff seemed to describe it when writing to Paul in March, 1925: "A very pretty segmental arch has been uncovered at this doorway, between the Sitting room and rear hall, and I think it gives a decided note of interest, and as it is undoubtedly original, I decided to leave it, and put a pair of doors here in the arch." [24]

Stair Passage

Sufficient framing survives above the hall to indicate the absence of a stair there, and the passage or the front right chamber are the only reasonable locations, the latter only if the stair rose from the hall. The two rear (northeast) joists in the passage are truncated to the right, and a header was secured to their ends with wrought or cut nails, presumably for a stairway preceding the present, 1925 stair. The passage is the most plausible location of the original stair, though the two partial joists represent the only potential direct physical evidence. Moreover, the reason for the rear passage is likely to have been circulation to the second floor as well as to the outside.

A second frame partition originally separating the passage from the rear room appears to have been located several inches forward (southwest) of the present kitchen partition. Original studs were face-lapped and secured with pairs of wrought nails to the front side of the joist. Stud spacing suggests a doorway was centered in this wall. The placement of this partition created a passage that was about 6' wide. This may have been the wall Scarff described as being found with parts of its pine sheathing. [25]

Scarff expanded the passage and gave it additional functions. Moving the first partition forward provided space for a substantial period stair, with a cellar stair below it, and a 4' 7"

wide unframed opening to the rear vestibule. He added a toilet opposite the foot of the stair, borrowing a corner from the already reduced front right room to capture modest additional space and a window for the toilet. A second door in the new rear partition entered a space carved from the modern kitchen and since 1925, equipped with a shower. While the placement of this space and the nature of the kitchen might suggest the shower room was intended in 1925 as a cook's toilet, the 1925 first floor plan shows the space as it remains, and the elevated interior window lighting the shower retains its 1925 finish. It is possible that this was designed to accommodate Mr. Chenoweth's wheelchair. [26]

Scarff's stair is a light and freely interpreted colonial revival design, with thin and widely spaced balusters placed on a closed stringer. [27] Hiding the step ends with a stringer was seen as archaic, and the folksy quality was cultivated with acorn-like turnings on the tops and bottoms of the newel posts. Every exposed end -- seven in all -- was turned, giving the stair its maximum number of possible acorns. Enclosed parts of the stair were sheathed with shadow-molded vertical boards. Beaded edges were lapped into adjoining boards with concave moldings and beads, resembling 17th- and early 18th-century English and New England sheathing, and a handful of early Virginia examples. Scarff treated this as secondary to the wall sheathing in the front rooms, and made it the principal finish upstairs. Conscientiousness of room hierarchies was also expressed in using plaster on the principal walls in the passage, kitchen, and second floor. Here the doors and windows were framed with the same single architraves used in the front rooms, but set into white-painted plaster intentionally given a roughly troweled surface. Contributing to this rustic quality are recycled hewn beams used and exposed as bridging and its wall support (somewhat like the carved post supporting floor framing at the partition in Criss Cross in New Kent County), and carrying the wall above the entrance to the rear vestibule. This is the one space in which Scarff played with the image of an exposed timber frame.

As discussed outside, the pair of early sheathed doors were salvaged, apparently from the doorway further forward on the right (southeast) wall, a location to which they may have been moved from elsewhere c. 1900.

Rear First-Floor Room

The 1925 kitchen reflects the general size of the original rear room, with the two right corners given up for a shower and pantry. Literally no pre-20th-century fabric is visible, including overhead joists seen through small openings we cut near the front and rear walls.

The space is finished with an eye to domestic function rather than visual preservation. Like the baths and toilets, it has conventional flat plaster and no historical woodwork beyond the doorways to the passage and exterior. In fact, the pantry door, visible only from the kitchen, has a stock leaf and off-the-rack hardware, unlike the doors in all other spaces. The door and window frames were shellacked or otherwise finished with a hard, clear surface that has dramatically alligatored, apparently from contact with grease and tobacco smoke. Inexpensive pine shelves in the pantry and a window there have the same surfaces. Paint appears to have protected two sets of glass-fronted cupboards above cheaply built counter cupboards and a later sink along the left wall. In sum, the present kitchen is an evocative social document illustrating its backstage role. Its amount of light and well-ordered arrangement of work surfaces and storage spaces show the influence of earlier American women's effort at reforming domestic work rooms. Unlike middle-class kitchens in the late 20th century, this was not intended to be seen by guests. The finish suggests it was space more intended for a hired cook rather than the resident, Mrs. Chenoweth, yet Scarff's drawings show and his correspondence suggests that the Chenoweths expected to eat there. [28]

Second Floor and Roof

Upstairs, only the gable ends and much of the roof frame are original, along with parts of early 19th-century dormers, but these are all of some importance, and the 20th-century fabric is also informative.

The front block retains the original overall shape, bounded by the gable ends and knee walls. There were probably two front chambers, their partition roughly above that separating the two first-floor rooms, but any evidence for its framing in the roof is hidden by strata of late 20th-century pink insulation. Five lap joints in a collar reveal that the ell had a stud wall about 1' in front of the present transverse partition, and the rear attic room was about 16' long. In short, the upper floor was probably partitioned into four bedchambers. The roof framing provides no visible evidence for original dormer windows. The present dormers seem to have been inserted in an early 19th-century remodeling and have been much renewed in the 20th century.

While the inner face of both front gables is uninformative, the rear gable and adjoining rafters reveal the original presence of a T-shaped interior chimneystack. Nineteenth-century builders demolished the original interior chimney and replaced it with an exterior chimney. But they left parts of two flues visible in the gable above the roof collars, and three sets of truncated rafters reveal that the stack had a third flue. The stack was 3' 4" wide, right to left (southeast to northwest) as it extended in from the gable, with the rest of the T being 1' 10-1/2" wide. The precise depth is unknown, but the rafters reveal it was at least 3' and less than 4' 6" deep. Most significantly, this indicates there was more than a first-floor fireplace in the ell. The three flues could have served a number of roles: one from a fireplace on each floor, two from a cellar cooking fireplace and one from the first floor, or -- less likely -- two from a large first-floor fireplace and one from the upper floor.

The front roof frame is impressively heavy, with tapering rafters 3-1/2"—3-7/8" by 4-7/8" at the base and 3-1/2" to 4 square near the pegged tenon upper joints, and 2-1/2" to 3-1/4" by 4" collars, dovetail-lapped and pegged. The rear rafters are somewhat heavier, but their collars are only face-lapped and nailed. However, the roof again provides clear evidence that the ell is original, because truncated rafters at the front of the ell sit on the wrought-nailed, butted sheathing used as a base for shingles on both wings, and there are no shingle nails in this sheltered sheathing.

The roof frame consists of tulip poplar so methodically sized and sawn that it makes the observer question a date as early as the 1720s, but it does include enough solid members with bark attached that dendrochronology should provide an answer.

The 1925 restorers were conscientious in preserving the early roof, and its sheathing, and shape. [29] They extensively reinforced it, using some salvaged material, including pit-sawn flooring undercut but not gauged, and painted (along with its long-lost joists) with whitewash.

The second floor underscores the non-family quality of the c.1925 kitchen. Clearly the new upper circulation space and three bedrooms were primarily private, and they are simpler than the front rooms and passage downstairs, but they are emphatically part of the historical presentation. The acorn-laden stair rises unchanged into an L-shaped passage, which leads directly to all the bedrooms and a bath. Shadow-molded vertical sheathing seen downstairs only on the stair enclosure becomes the standard wooden wall finish on the second floor. Linen closets in the passage, closets in the bedrooms, board partitions, and all the doors are handled as shadow-molded sheathing.

It is evident that Scarff was interested in the details of how the sheathing would read as a composition. Doors in the sheathing around three sides of the upper passage are literally sawed out of the walls, with the leaves swinging out and stopped against peculiar big half-round frames in the rooms and closets. Two of the passage doors, to the rear bedroom and bath, are located in plastered walls, and here Scarff employed single architraves like those used on plastered and paneled walls downstairs.

The same combination of cut nails and square nails with hammered, folded heads are used on the first floor and the upper level.

Scarff's choice of hardware contributed to the more rustic, less refined character of the second floor. While he used HL hinges and brass or iron box locks on every sizable first-floor door except on the leaf of the antique exterior door in the passage, here he chose strap hinges and iron latches. These are Craftsman products, and only the full, graspable latches on the bedroom and bathroom doors even approximate genuine early Chesapeake hardware. The smaller doors have miniature latch bars like those on cupboards downstairs. The moveable arms of the strap hinges resemble early American straps, but this version has a large butt hinge-like stationary plate in favor of a pintle driven into the woodwork. Diminutive H hinges are used on small closet doors, and only these lack the manufacturer's marks.

The bathroom maintains the full dress: shadow-molded doors, sawn hanging pegs, hinges and latches, and a well-hammered sliding bolt, sharing space with a very nice Tomlinson/Pelham commode and a footed or "birthday" bathtub.

Cellar

While the cellar now has a rather undifferentiated, grim, Tony Perkins quality, it began with two spaces of differing quality and had a lively subsequent use, judging from evidence in the walls.

Originally, the front block appears to have been unlighted storage space, the one possible source of light being a relatively early window at the right end. There are brick closers and clear edges that once formed the jambs of a generous, 6'-wide cellar entrance on the back wall, 6' 8" out from the left foundation wall, just as was evident from excavation behind the house, including sockets for wooden nosings that originally finished the edges of brick steps. There is no perceptible evidence for original windows in this space, and its height suggests intended use for substantial storage. The present concrete floor is at or above the original floor level, judging from the rear opening, and an offset for overhead joists is 8' 8" overhead.

As already noted, original access to the front cellar space was through a doorway in the rear wall, an opening blocked with c. 1900 brickwork perhaps contemporary with a doorway cut through the right wall.

The rear room, below the ell, seems to have had two original windows on the right and one on the left, about 3' 2-1/2" wide and 1' 9" high, indicated by closers and one decayed lintel. As observed in the attic, the ell had an interior chimney with three flues, one or two of which may have served a cellar fireplace. The absence of cellar windows in the front space and presence in the ell suggests the latter could be a workspace, quite possibly a kitchen. Cellar kitchens were always an alternative to exterior cook rooms in the slaveholding South, and enough early examples survive in Williamsburg and elsewhere in the Chesapeake to make this plausible for the Cole Digges House. It would have required a partition preceding the present c.1840-50 brick wall, and probably independent access to the outside. The one possible location of an exterior entrance to the rear cellar is in that now occupied by the

vaulted coal chute, though no direct evidence is visible. The cellar partition must have been of wood, given the absence of evidence for a brick wall and the necessity of building the present partition.

The status of at least the front space rose sometime in the 19th century, perhaps c.1840-50. If windows had already been cut in earlier in the century, their sills were dramatically lowered. Sizable wells created outside to bring light into the space, although the higher grade would have made the cellar openings more practical than they now seem. A fireplace was cut through the left end wall, then (and still) provided a flue by the present exterior chimney. A wooden floor was raised on joists or sleepers, chair boards were added, and the walls and ceilings were plastered.

It was at this time the front and rear spaces were separated by a brick wall, and a work-size fireplace (4' 2" wide, with 8-1/2"-wide jambs), cut into the rear wall, served by the new exterior chimney, and replacing the original interior chimney. One would expect direct access to the rear room, at least after construction of the fireplace, but there is no clear evidence for one prior to the coal chute. The left wall seems to have been cut through for this entry, not an earlier one.

There was discussion with Scarff about reworking the *front* space to resemble an early kitchen that could be used for meetings by the Daughters of the American Revolution, but this never came to pass. [30] A solitary acorn on the otherwise rough open stair reveals that ultimately the cellar saw little 20th-century work beyond masonry repairs and an installation of a furnace in 1925. Worth noticing and retaining, however, are two reused 2-1/2" by 3-1/4" handrails, with a convex upper surface, and holes for diamond-set 1" square balusters on 4" centers. These are probably late 18th or early 19th century in date.

All the cellar ceiling framing was said to be deteriorated when the restoration began, and all of it now dates to the upper floor raising. [31]

<<< [Previous](#)

<<< [Contents](#) >>>

[Next](#) >>>

COLONIAL

Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



PRESERVATION

The Cole Digges House has had a varied life, with aggressive changes to both the exterior and interior spaces. Outside this evolution is richly evident, while inside the 1925 restoration provided an entirely new skin, covering early fabric and obscuring generations of change. Almost no original interior finish remains visible, but the 1925 fabric has assumed its own importance. Brickwork and exterior woodwork is worthy of gentle care, as is the interior woodwork.

Brickwork

The current policy of leaving the exterior as it exists is the right one, in favor of any attempt to resuscitate this venerable work of taxidermy as a young building. The other responsibility of conscientious, anti-scrape preservation is thoughtfully conceived repair, as needed. While there has been no single-minded restoration of the brickwork, much of the repair that has been done over the years has been harsher than appropriate for a building of this age, importance, and location.

Numerous masons have used hard mortars and unmatched brick in repointing or rebuilding parts of the brickwork, some prior to 1925. It is preferable now to leave this in place, except where hard mortar is loose and easily removed. Certainly the Portland cement-like mortars should not be cut out with power tools or in any way that chips the brick. All new mortar repointing, on the other hand, should be done carefully with a softness as well as color matching the original. Mortar recipes should be reviewed and approved in advance by knowledgeable conservators. While unweathered areas of original mortar have relatively rough joints, these are generally superior to later work and should not be perceived as license for inferior workmanship in the future.

Sample brick panels using proposed mortar and exhibiting intended level of craftsmanship should be executed with comparable new brick and acceptable samples approved before any work is done on the building itself.

If masonry walls need to be cut for installation of electrical or plumbing lines, the work should be carefully planned and reviewed, the cutting done inside rather than where visible, and confined to new (20th- to 21st-century) brickwork.

The masonry should never be sandblasted or heavily power-washed. Any action that cuts or erodes early masonry should be avoided.

Exterior Woodwork

It is remarkable, given the physical history of the house, that much early exterior trim survives. These are substantial parts of the front cornice and dormers, particularly the

facings, that have been retained and used in combination with 20th-century elements. Parts of a rear dormer and cornice on the rear wing are also early, as are the right exterior door leafs. The normal preservation standard of retaining early finish, carefully patching rather than replacing it, should continue to be followed at the Cole Digges House. Epoxy and other modern patching materials currently used by architectural conservators offer acceptable alternatives to patching in kind, if this permits more early fabric to survive, and if carefully executed. None of the early woodwork should be stripped prior to repainting.

Microscopic paint analysis is a rapidly developing field. Paint analysis is not currently a high priority for this building, given the era in which it is presented. But remnants of early exterior paint are always endangered by weather and cleaning, so sampling and analysis would ultimately be useful in order to understand the house. Early woodwork should not be stripped after analysis because early finish layers can respond to repeated investigation.

Interior

If the exterior is marked by change, the interior is characterized by completeness -- almost total survival of a coherent body of colonial revival finish. In a region where colonial revival taste dominated residential architecture for most of the 20th century, this is an important monument, more literal in rendering than earlier design here and elsewhere, but more personal than the literalism spawned by Colonial Williamsburg beginning in the early 1930s. The intact state of the 1925 interior is worth preserving. If unconsidered changes are gradually permitted, its special visual qualities will erode.

Interior Woodwork and Framing

It is appropriate to leave all existing woodwork in place and ensure that new electrical, plumbing, fire detection or suppression, and life safety elements not be cut through them. This report mentions all original framing. Contractors should be clearly informed of which framing is early and that should, therefore, be left unspoiled by installation of systems.

The need to keep heating, cooling, and ventilation grilles as well as lighting and safety elements inconspicuous can sometimes clash with the need to avoid cutting original masonry and framing. But careful planning and rigorous review of proposals for installation and change of systems can maintain a balance. Ultimately, long-term preservation of early fabric is more important than short-term appearance.

Life safety codes will change in subsequent years, but the appearance and integrity of the building should remain a major concern. Given current codes, fire suppression systems are best continued to the cellar and attic.

The woodwork was originally lighter in color when installed, and has taken on a rich patina, though there may be some soft c.1925 and subsequent stains. Selected elements of the woodwork may be gently cleaned but should not be stripped with solvents or sanded. If light-colored scratches on the wood are thought intrusive, an architectural conservator should recommend means of selective spot staining. It is essential that the walls and floors not be treated with inappropriate, permanent finishes like polyurethane.

Less obvious than the 1925 woodwork is the presence of many pieces of earlier architectural trim used as raw material in the restoration. Carpenters sawed up interior trim like chair boards and bases to use as furring behind their new woodwork and plaster. Most of what we see is very simple and predominantly early 19th-century but it is worth retaining as evidence for how the building evolved, and as a source for information about 19th-century paint

colors. The fragments may actually be more useful for paint investigation than exterior trim still in place.

Plaster

The house was completely re-plastered c. 1925, using an intentionally crude application to create a rustic effect. Scarff described it as "colonial finish, and not the hard smooth finish of modern plastering." [32] This is more similar to the plaster used in new Olde English suburban houses of the '20s than it is to the excessively precise plaster employed by Colonial Williamsburg from the 1920s to the '60s. Only in the kitchen, baths, and closets is conventional 20th-century plaster used.

The plaster is worth retaining. Wherever it is necessary to repair or replace plaster, a roughly troweled surface should be used, matching the existing. These include the ceilings where plaster was removed for our architectural investigation, most notably in the hall (left first-floor room).

Hardware

As noted above, virtually every piece of c.1925 hardware survives in place. Most of the ironwork is specially made, while the window latches are ordinary stock items, and the locks are from an eclectic variety of sources and eras. All this is worthy of remaining where it is. When pieces of the hardware are broken, they should be either repaired by a knowledgeable blacksmith or reproduced and the originals labeled and stored in the NPS collection or in a permanent container above the roof collars. Attempting to make the hardware more literally 18th-century is not appropriate in this case.

<<< [Previous](#)

<<< [Contents](#) >>>

[Next](#) >>>

COLONIAL

Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



CONCLUSION

Archaeology

The recent archaeological report clearly defines which areas have been excavated, immediately around the house, and which have not. This will aid in planning for services that involve ground disturbance. Original floor levels in the cellar were deep, and there may be evidence for an interior kitchen and other uses below the present floor, so salvage excavation will be needed there ahead of intrusive work.

Proposed Use and its Impact on the Property

The current plan is to use the Cole Digges House as a restaurant. A restaurant is likely to be a harsher presence than domestic residents, so it will be very important to plan approaches to cooking, service, and dining that will do as little damage to the fabric and appearance as possible.

From the building's standpoint, it is highly preferable for the National Park Service to manage the restaurant in favor of leasing it. The best means of ensuring conscientious care for the building is to have knowledgeable people (professional Park Service staff) as close as possible to the day-to-day decisions that affect both its appearance and the preservation.

It has been said that dining on the second floor will require an external fire escape and reinforcement of the frame. Adding a fire escape or stair visible outside would have a major visual impact, probably to an unacceptable degree. Adding a new wing also seems inappropriate, given the nature and location of the house. Structural reinforcement of the floor framing might do minimal damage to original summer beams, plates, and joists, if carefully planned, but any reinforcement of the walls would either require removing paneling and cutting original masonry or would be quite visible in the rooms. In short, there are a number of important reasons for confining the restaurant to the first floor and cellar. Office or residential use of the upper floor would be preferable.

The best location for rest rooms is probably the present shower room, located in the kitchen and accessible from the stair passage. Because the 1925 first-floor toilet plays a role in the plan, projecting into the passage and right front room, we recommend leaving it in favor of reworking the plan and finish.

Planners have considered using the bulkhead as a dumb waiter. This is possible if the waiter moves diagonally from cellar to outside. Obviously, it does not give access to the first floor, and undermining the walls must be avoided.

Electric panel boards and meters should either be hidden in the rear porch or be automated to make visible meters unnecessary.

HVAC lines through the house should be carefully planned to do the least cutting of early material as possible, whether or not it will be visible to the public. For example, any lines cut above the ceiling should affect 1925 rather than the surviving 18th-century joists.

Exterior lighting should be small in scale, carefully placed, and not attached to early brickwork, preferably not to the building in general.

Acknowledgement

We wish to thank Jane Sundberg, Cultural Resource Management Specialist, at the Colonial National Historical Park. She invited us to study the building and prepare this report, and she provided all necessary support and gentle prodding until the work was completed. She was especially helpful in reviewing the documentary material and photographs with Chappell.

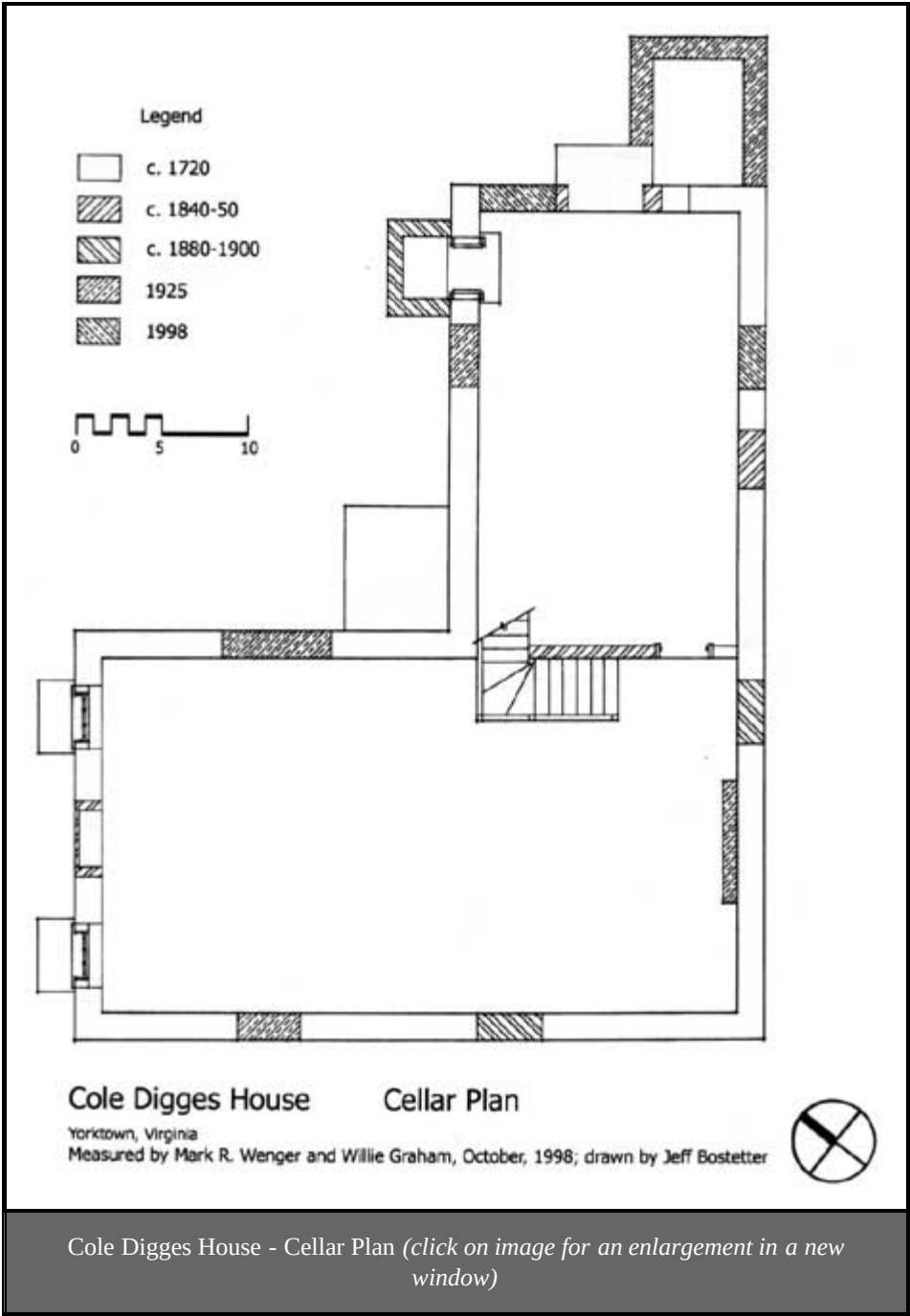
<<< [Previous](#) <<< [Contents](#) >>> [Next](#) >>>

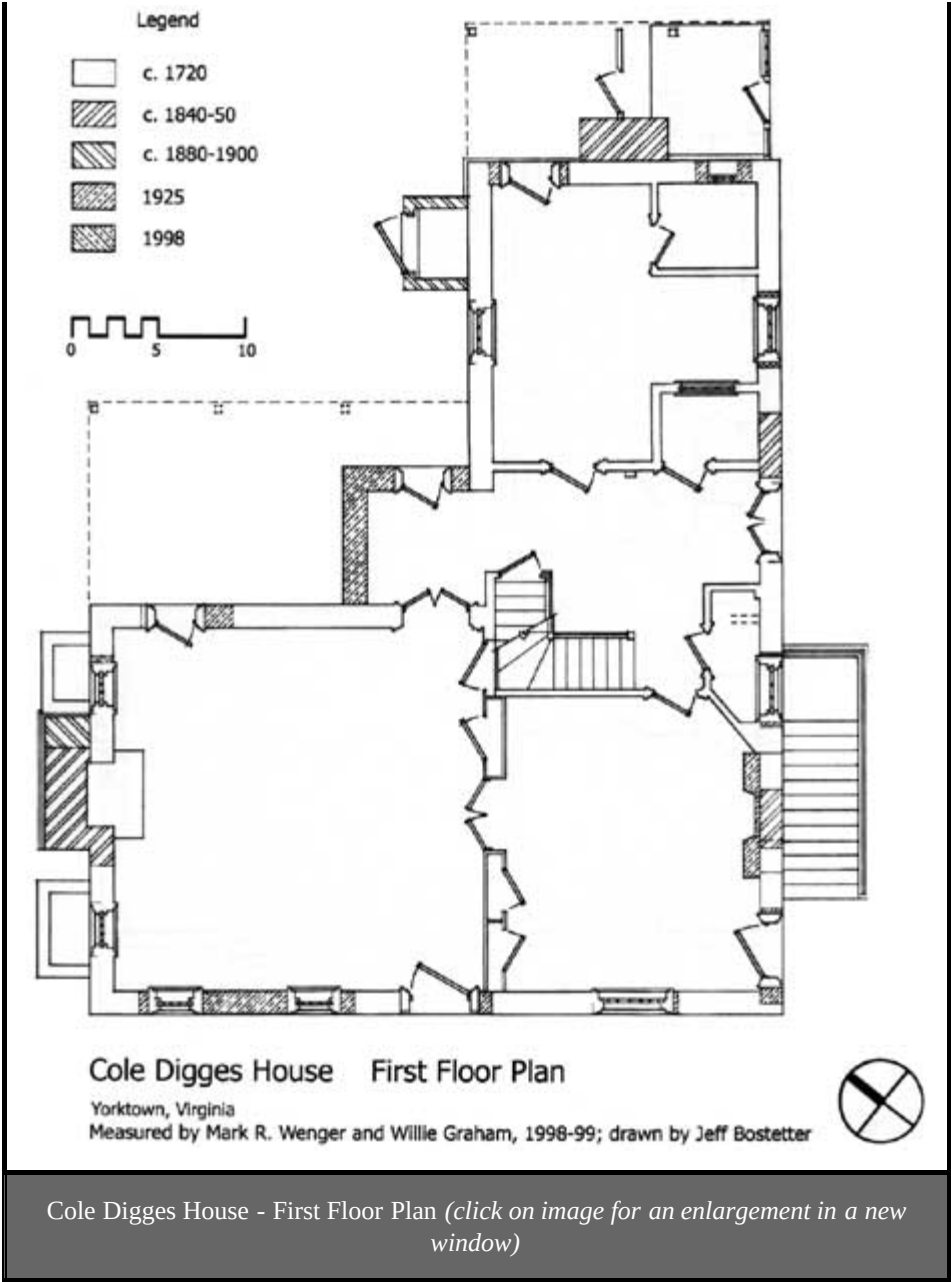
COLONIAL

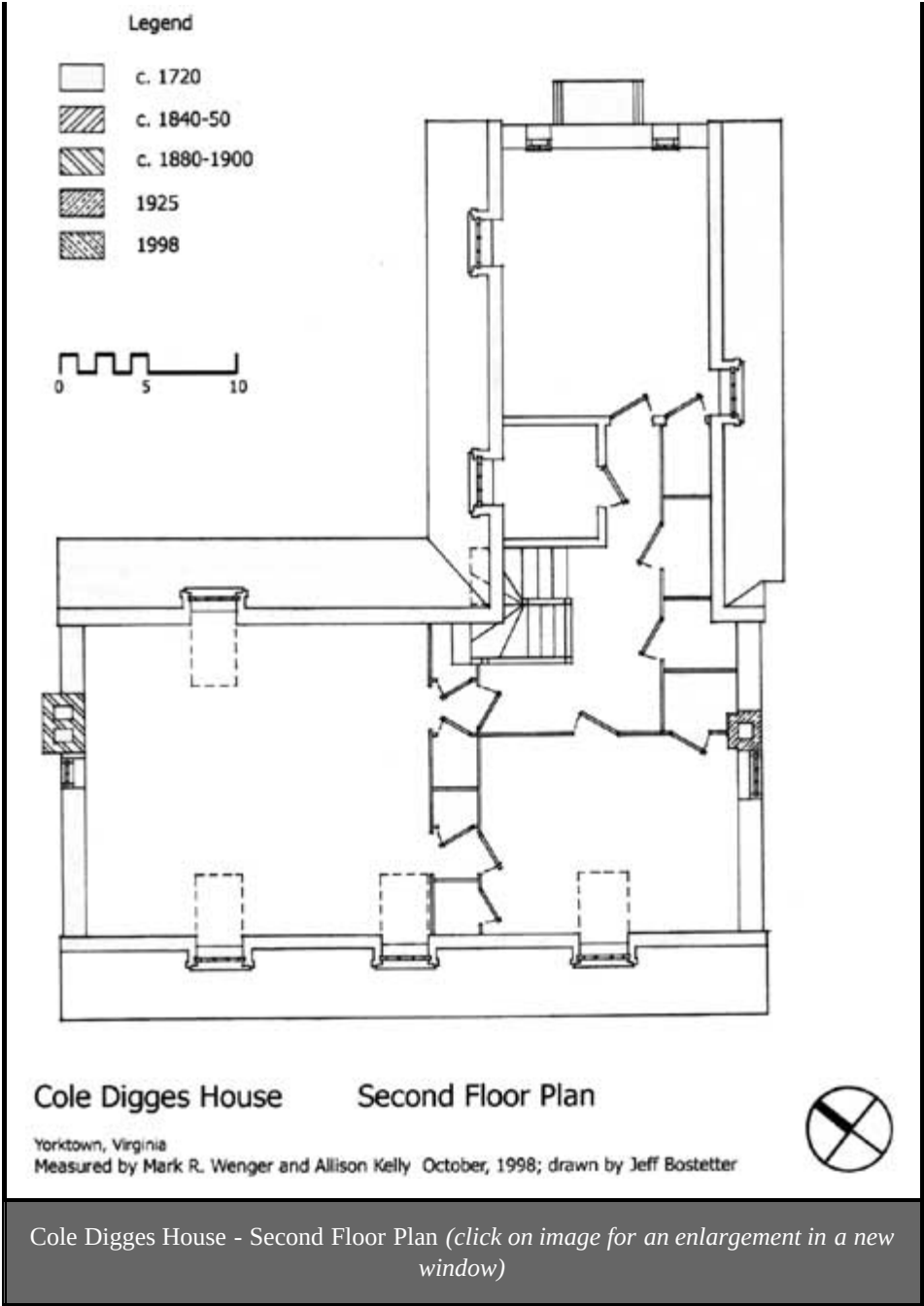
Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



FLOOR PLANS







[<<< Previous](#)

[<<< Contents >>>](#)

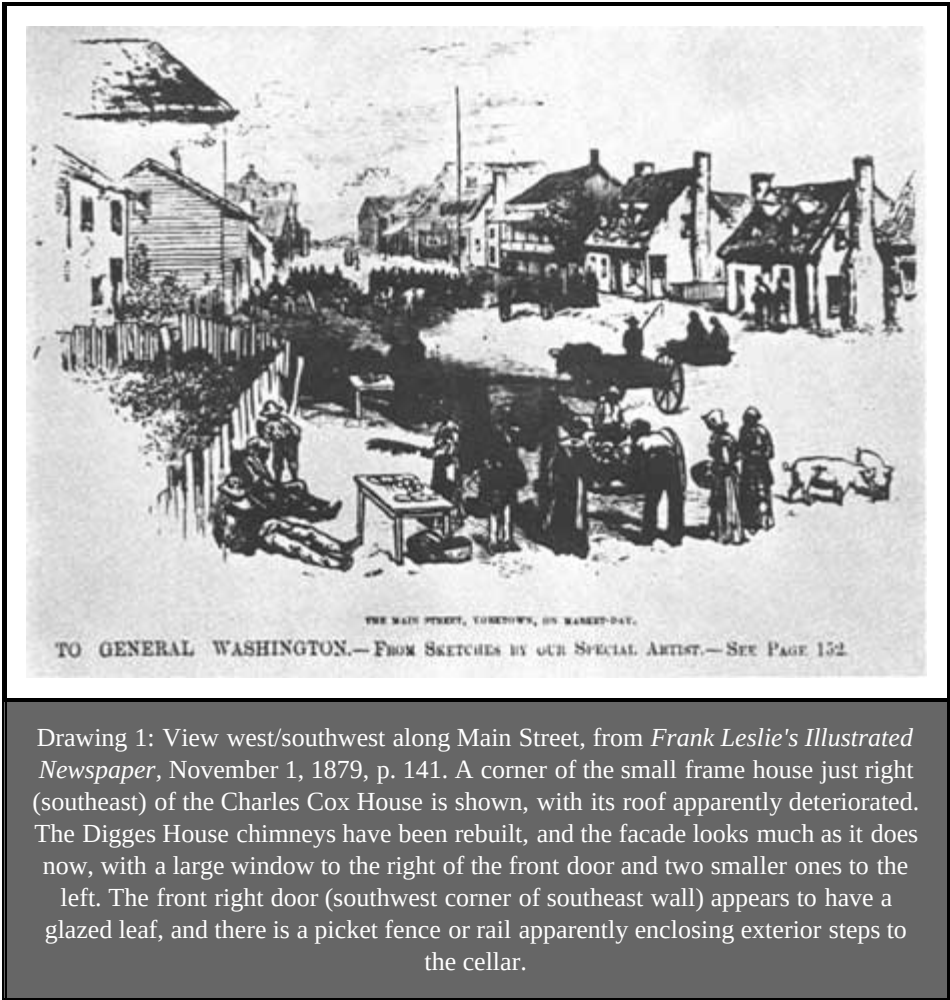
[Next >>>](#)

COLONIAL

Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



DRAWINGS



Drawing 1: View west/southwest along Main Street, from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, November 1, 1879, p. 141. A corner of the small frame house just right (southeast) of the Charles Cox House is shown, with its roof apparently deteriorated. The Digges House chimneys have been rebuilt, and the facade looks much as it does now, with a large window to the right of the front door and two smaller ones to the left. The front right door (southwest corner of southeast wall) appears to have a glazed leaf, and there is a picket fence or rail apparently enclosing exterior steps to the cellar.



Drawing 2: Similar view from south, from *Frank Leslie's illustrated Newspaper*, October 1, 1881. The Digges House is in the approximate center. This appears to show a small shed-roofed porch at the left front. On the right is the dilapidated Cox House.

[<<< Previous](#)

[<<< Contents >>>](#)

[Next >>>](#)

COLONIAL

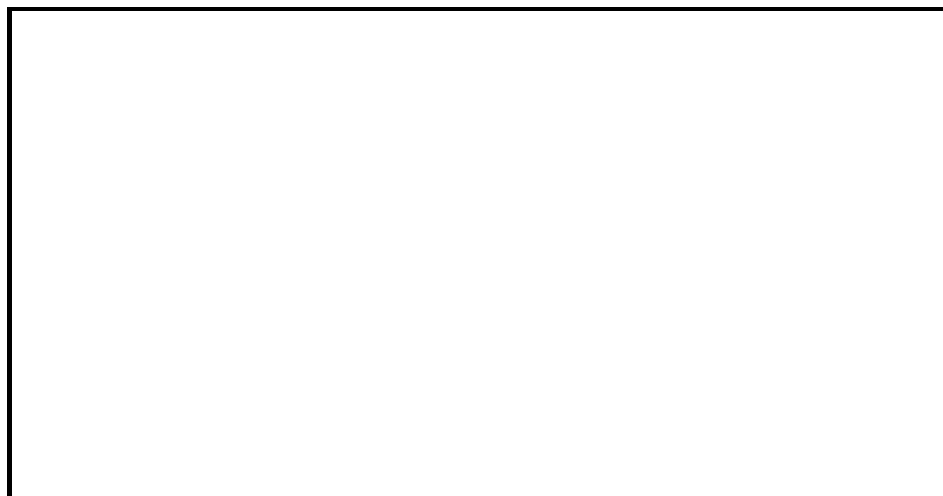
Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



PHOTOGRAPHS



Photograph 1: View northwest along Main Street, with Custom House to left and Charles Cox and Coles Digges houses on the right. Winter of 1863, during Union occupation but apparently before the Swan Tavern blew up. Said to be a Mathew Brady photo. Right (southeast gable) and the exterior chimney centered on it as well as the centered left (northwest) chimney are visible behind the Cox House. This may be the only known photo showing the old right chimney. The house shows a fresh coat of white paint, or more likely, whitewash, at this time.





Photograph 2: Cook Collection photo (from Valentine Museum, Richmond) looking northwest along Main Street, with the river visible in the distance. Possibly c. 1865-75 because the small frame house in right foreground beside the Charles Cox House appears well maintained, and this building was already deteriorating when a piece of it was shown in a sketch of a similar view published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, November 1, 1879. The photo shows the Cox and Digges houses freshly painted. There is a glazed door in the right front corner (southwest end of southeast wall) of the Digges House.



Photograph 3: View northwest along Main Street with Custom House and 19th-century wooden houses on the left, Cox House with scruffy outbuildings, Cole Digges, and Somerwell House (probably owned by Lightfoot) to the right. Probably c. 1870-80. The old right (southeast) chimney is missing, and its replacement is partially visible behind the left Cox House chimney. The left (northwest) chimney has been rebuilt with the stack behind the ridge. Brickwork appears freshly painted white, except the chimneys. The two-story frame house visible just beyond the Cole Digges House in this photo, is absent from Photo 1. Here it has either dark paint or very little white paint.



Photograph 4: Summer view of Cole Digges House from the south, c.1880-1900. Elizabeth A. Cooper's tearoom sign is in place over the front door of the Digges House. It is thought that Cooper opened the tearoom in the cellar by 1881, and she died in 1901. The door has two six-light leaves, opening out. Louvered shutters on the first-floor windows and dormers. Picket fence to the right (southeast), surrounding shed-roofed porch, square-butt shingle roof with traditional combing at the ridges and swept valleys, installed precisely like 18th- and early 19th-century Chesapeake shingles. It is likely that this is mid-19th-century roof covering. Front painted white, relatively fresh, right side dirty, upper woodwork unpainted or dark paint. Shows second left (northwest) chimney with some damage and scrawny stove

chimney on right (southeast).



Photograph 5: Another summer view from the south, also showing the derelict Cox House to the right, within a year or two of the fourth photo, judging from extent of vines on the right gable and shrubs inside the picket fence. Shows the E. A. Cooper sign, shingles, glazed front doors and louvered shutters. The two-story frame Old York Tavern visible to the left of the Cole Digges House looks freshly painted.

<<< [Previous](#)

<<< [Contents](#) >>>

[Next](#) >>>

COLONIAL

Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



APPENDIX I

**THE THOMAS PATE HOUSE
AND LOT 42 IN
YORKTOWN**

**COLONIAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
YORKTOWN, VIRGINIA**

By
Charles E. Hatch, Jr., Historian

Division of History
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

October 1969

U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

[<<< Previous](#)

[<<< Contents >>>](#)

[Next >>>](#)

COLONIAL

Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



ENDNOTES

¹The building was called the Pate House until April, 2003, when it was changed to Cole Digges House based on this report. The report was written in 1998-99 and revised to reflect the change in July, 2003. For a full treatment of the property's documentary record, see Charles E. Hatch, Jr., "The Thomas Pate House and Lot 42 in Yorktown, Colonial National Historical Park," Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, October, 1969. The text of the Hatch report is included as Appendix I of this report.

²Denchrochronologist Herman J. Heikkenen of Dendrochronology, Inc., Blacksburg, Virginia, took samples from tulip poplar second-floor joists, rafters and collars, all with bark or natural edges. Results have not been received in June, 2004.

³Hatch, p. 14.

⁴Both the front and right front (southwest end of southeast wall) doors had leafs with panes of glass above the lock rail. Such doors were common on Virginia stores through much of the 19th century and were rare, at best, on houses. Insurance policies for 1838, 1846, and 1853 all describe the building as "dwelling and store." Hatch, illustrations 2-4.

⁵John Henry Scarff (1887-1964) studied architecture and entered the profession at a still eclectic time when designers worked in many period and regional styles, though early American idioms were favored, particularly for middle-class houses. Scarff studied at MIT and the American Academy in Rome, worked for Wyatt & Nolting in 1912-14, for Alfred Hopkins in 1917-18, and returned to Wyatt & Nolting in 1920. Wyatt died in 1933, and Scarff is said to have managed the firm until its dissolution in 1940. He directed the Historic American Buildings Survey in Maryland during the 1930s and was later secretary of the Society for the Preservation of Maryland Antiquities. Most of his known projects were for new construction rather than restoration, though his last work was restoration of the Mother Seton House on North Paca Street, Baltimore in 1963, a year before his death. In 1930 he published *Some Houses of Colonial Maryland* (New York: R.F. Whitehead, c. 1930). Information, Peter Kurtz (Maryland Historical Trust) to Chappell, February 5, 1999. The firm of Wyatt and Nolting did one house and at least seven banks and public or commercial buildings in Virginia between 1897 and 1930. John E. Wells and Robert E. Dalton, *The Virginia Architects: A Biographical Dictionary* (Richmond: New South Architectural Press, 1997), p. 493.

⁶Professor Gardner from MIT recommended Scarff to Paul. Paul was the client, though the house was to be occupied by fellow D.A.R. member Emma Chenoweth. Helen and Carroll Paul lived in Marquette, Michigan, and virtually all the surviving correspondence (in the Cole Digges House property file, Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown, perhaps acquired when the Park Service bought this property as well as the Nelson House from the Blow estate

in 1968) is between Marquette and Baltimore. Scarff remarked to Paul that he was "in perfect sympathy with your desire to restore [the house], and not to remodel it" in a letter of July 12, 1924. In a remarkable three-page letter of August 19, 1924, Paul explained changes she had made to Scarff's early floor plans, ranging from her intention to use the entire front cellar as a museum and meeting room for the Daughters of the American Revolution, to her concern that Scarff would sacrifice character for a sense of order: "To my way of thinking the stiffness of an axial arrangement is not the proper 'part' for this cottage, whose casual irregularity has such a delightful flavor of the country and of the English who built it. In consequence, I hesitate to destroy any single peculiarity, and would, for instance, rather kink my garden path than erase the funny little cellar entrance which may not be as old as the rest of the house, but which is charming just the same, and has been there long enough to have grown into the picture of the house. Let's see just how much of the odd irregularity we can keep, and fit our modern changes in so that when we get it done, it won't look like an old house done over at all, but as if it had always been that way." Paul to Scarff, Aug.19, 1924, p. 3. Also see her letters of February 28 and March 16, 1925. Gardner's recommendation is noted in letter from Scarff to Paul, April 14, 1924.

⁷The main building at the College of William and Mary offers an instructive example of 1690s Virginia brickwork. While this edifice, now called the Wren Building, was expensively constructed, its brickwork lacks the regularity of bond and general care in execution seen at the Cole Digges House.

⁸There is one small brick resembling a closer just right of the present left window, three courses below the cornice, but all the brickwork around it appears to date from 19th-century alterations and later restorations, diminishing the credibility of this as evidence for left-hand windows in roughly the present location.

⁹Photograph 2 may show a door in this location.

¹⁰Scarff to Paul, March 16, 1925, p. 1.

¹¹Scarff to Paul, July 12, 1924, p. 2; February 17, 1925; March 16, 1925, p. 2.

¹²This analysis is based on observation of the brickwork. Looking at the 1863 photograph of Main Street and post-Civil War photos on July 30, 2003, it appears the left chimney was still centered on the ridge in the 1860s and that it was soon thereafter rebuilt toward the rear.

¹³Scarff to Paul, July 28, 1924, p. 2.

¹⁴Browne Eichman, Dalglish, Gilpin and Paxton, P.C., "The Pate House, Yorktown, Virginia: A Preliminary Plan for Adaptive Use as a Restaurant for the National Park Service, The Colonial National Historical Park," report, December 5, 1995.

¹⁵Scarff recommended its removal in a July 2, 1924 letter to Paul, p. 2.

¹⁶"Restoration of Cottage for Mrs. Carroll Paul," Wyatt & Nolting Architects, no. 12132.

¹⁷19th-century left chimney was built roughly on center, perhaps because of the available old chimney footings, and corbeled out 1' 7-1/2" to the rear (northeast). This apparently did not provide sufficient support and as a result, the void below the corbeling was bricked in sometime later in the 19th century.

The 1925 restoration plan for the upper floor employs the old term "chamber" intended as a heritage reference. "Restoration of Cottage for Mrs. Carroll Paul, Main and Reid Sts., Yorktown, Virginia," second-floor plan, January 26, 1925, initialed G.E.W.

¹⁹Paul to Scarff, February 28, 1925, p. 2: "Mr. Paul questioned the use of white pine, on ground of expense, but I told him it had to be for correctness of period. The question in my mind is, would oak be just as expensive, while just as correct?" Scarff to Paul, March 7, 1925: "I would under no circumstances consider the use of oak, it will be out of the local period, and also more expensive in working up. Mr. Marshall has just told me that in tearing down the partition between the dining Room and rear stair hall an old doorjamb and a portion of a boarded wall was uncovered. The detail of the doorjamb corresponds exactly to what we show on our working drawings, and the boarding is of pine, which confirms me in my original plans. (We are planning to re-use the old pine boards)."

²⁰Scarff and Chenoweth identified the high front sidewalk, slightly above the first floor, as a major problem. and he suggested raising the floor after his first site visit. Scarff to Paul, July 12, 1924, p. 2, and July 17, 1924. Later the same month he reported, "I am raising the first floor approximately seven inches, which will materially help the conditions at the main entrance door. This is about all it can be raised to have the staircase headroom practical and keep the window sill at a normal relation." Scarff to Paul, July 28, 1924, p. 1.

²¹Scarff to Paul, February 17, 1925; Scarff, "Memorandum of Specifications for Cottage for Mrs. Carroll Paul, Main and Reid Streets, Yorktown, Va., for purposes of estimating," August 27, 1924, p. 3.

²²Scarff was clearly interested in giving the new wood walls a dark, aged appearance, as evidenced by his specifications calling for "all interior wood work except floors...to be first coated with a saturated solution of permanganate of potash, and after that is dried a water stain is to be applied of walnut crystals repeated until the proper color is obtained." This would have given the new white pine a dark, walnut hue. The color of the wood today is certainly darker due to aging, smoke and cooking since 1925. Scarff specifications, January 26, 1925.

²³The specifications call for reproduction locks from Hubbard and Eagleston and wrought-iron hardware manufactured by Myron S. Teller, 280 Wall Street, Kingston, N. Y. Scarff specifications, pp. 7-8.

²⁴Scarff to Paul, March 16, 1925, p. 2.

²⁵Scarff to Paul, March 7, 1925.

²⁶The window was suggested by Paul and included by Scarff. Scarff to Paul, March 7, 1925, p. 3.

²⁷Wyatt and Nolting must have produced detailed drawings for the stair and other specialized finish, but the only known stair drawing is a 1/4" = 1' section on the 1925 second-floor plan. While they corresponded about the stair's location, Scarff and Paul seem not to have discussed its design.

²⁸Paul and Scarff referred to the right (southeast) side of the kitchen, between shower room and pantry, as "the dining alcove." Scarff to Paul, March 7, 1925.

Scarff included a statement about the roofs character in specifications written August 27, 1924: "Roof of best grade cypress shingles, 6" x 20", laid 5" to the weather. It will be required to lay these roof shingles over some sheathing boards, carefully placed to give the appearance of an old roof where the ridge sags slightly. This is to be done to prevent the mechanical appearance of a newly constructed roof.

³⁰Paul to Scarff, August 19, 1924.

³¹Scarff to Paul, July 12, 1924, p. 1.

³²"Memoranda of Specifications," August 27, 1924, p. 2.



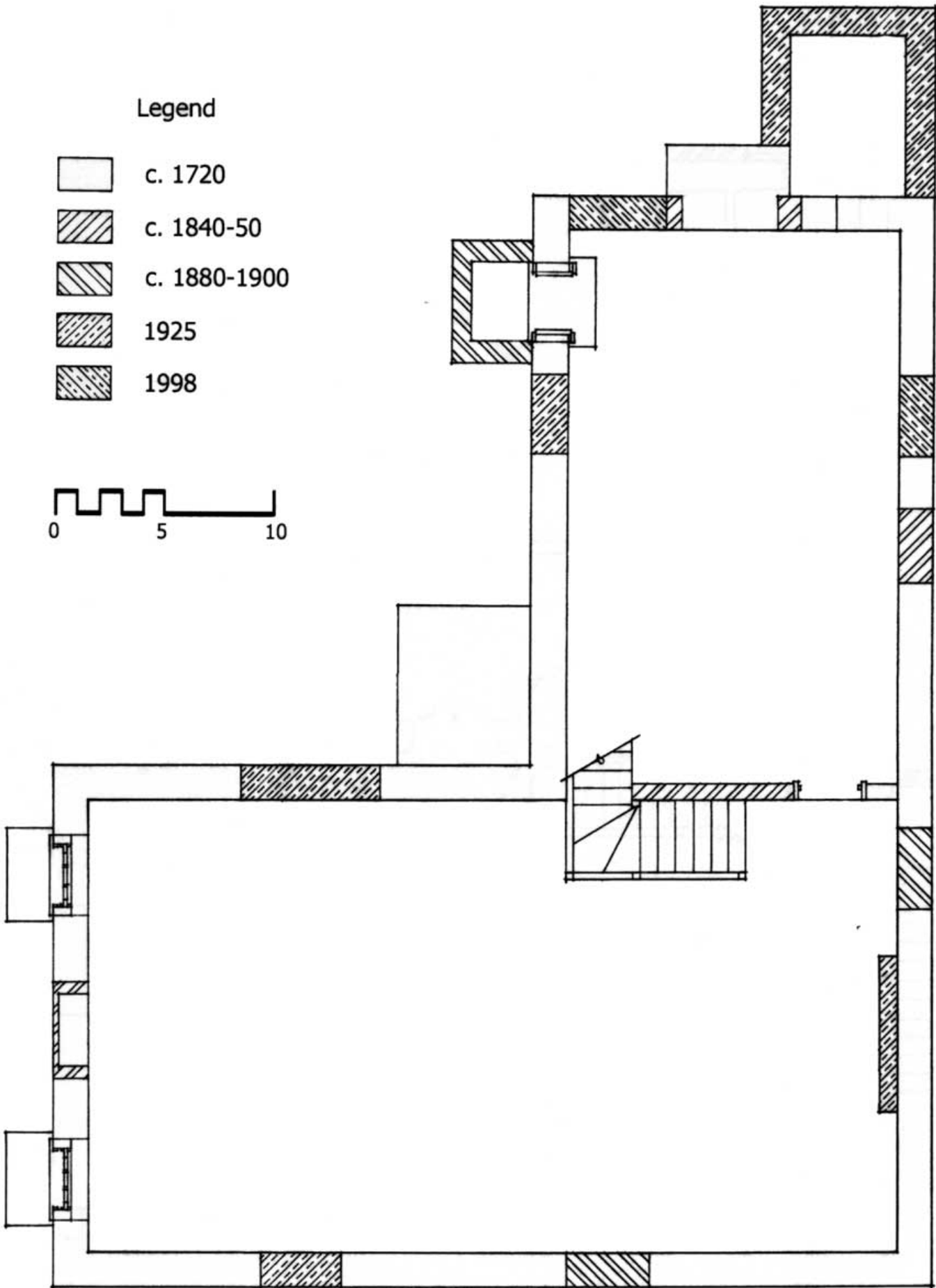






Legend

- c. 1720
- c. 1840-50
- c. 1880-1900
- 1925
- 1998



Cole Digges House

Cellar Plan

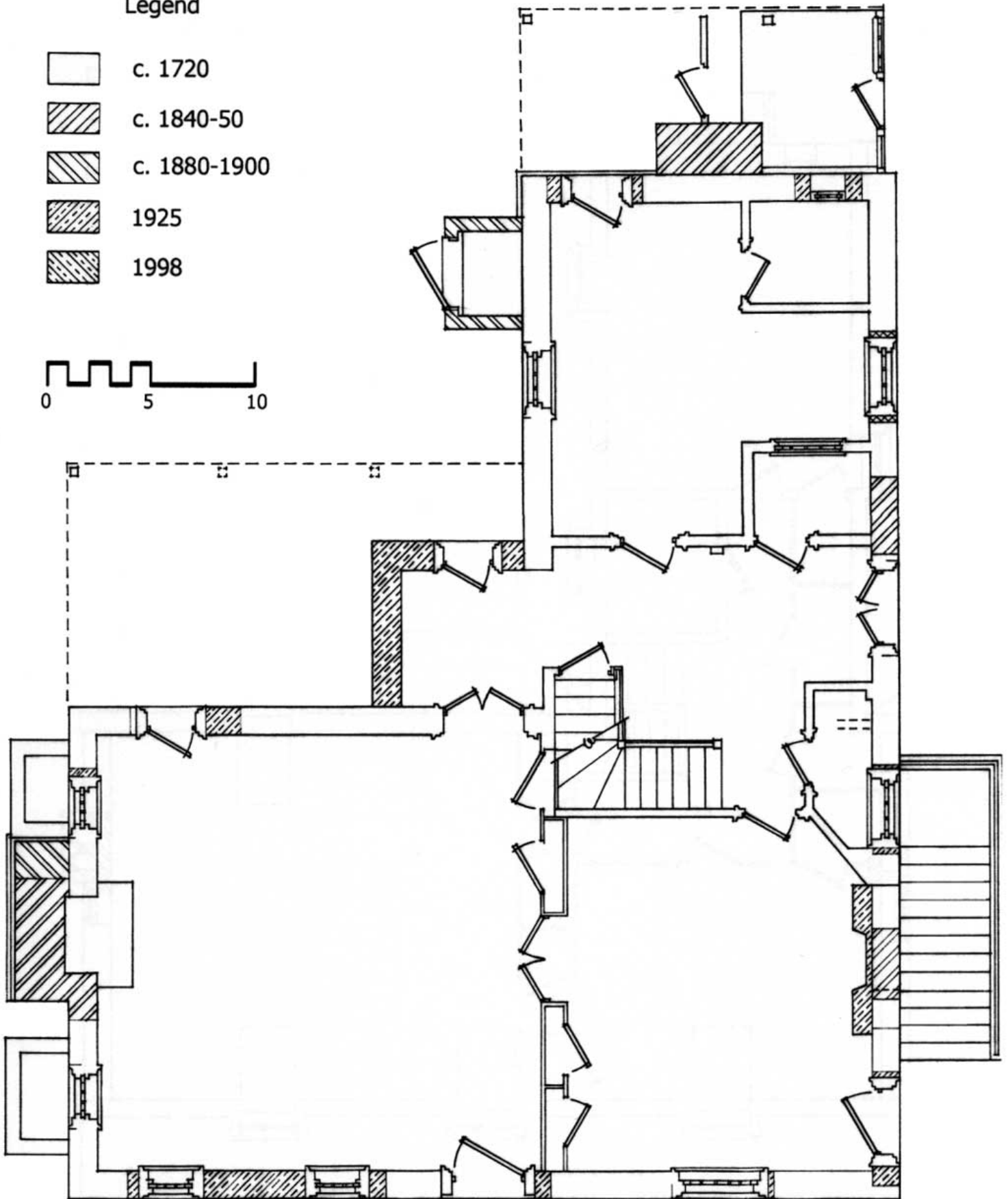
Yorktown, Virginia

Measured by Mark R. Wenger and Willie Graham, October, 1998; drawn by Jeff Bostetter



Legend

-  c. 1720
-  c. 1840-50
-  c. 1880-1900
-  1925
-  1998



Cole Digges House First Floor Plan

Yorktown, Virginia



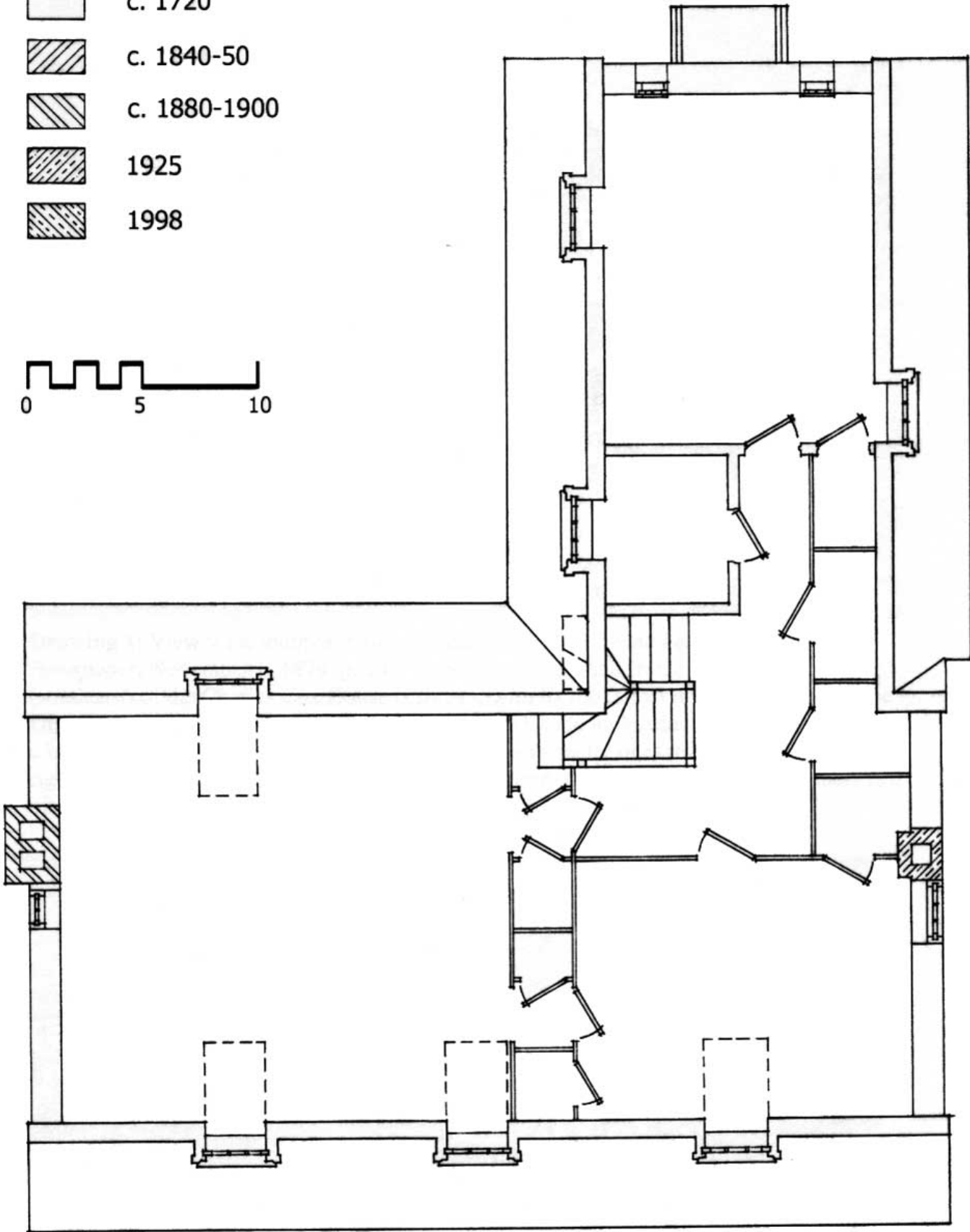
Measured by Mark R. Wenger and Willie Graham, 1998-99; drawn by Jeff Bostetter



Legend

- c. 1720
- c. 1840-50
- c. 1880-1900
- 1925
- 1998

0 5 10



Cole Digges House

Second Floor Plan

Yorktown, Virginia

Measured by Mark R. Wenger and Allison Kelly October, 1998; drawn by Jeff Bostetter



COLONIAL

Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report

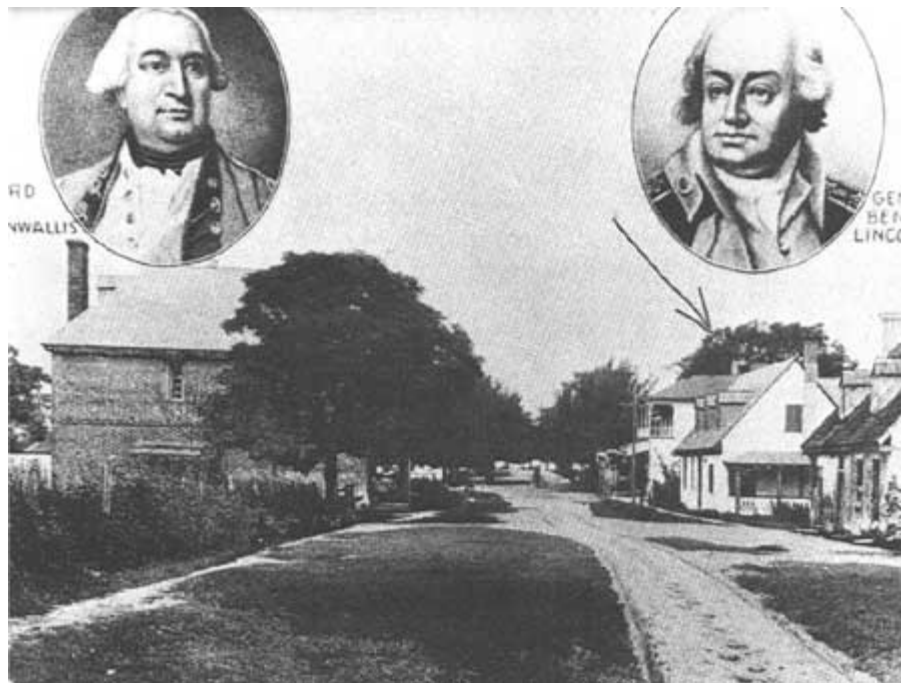


PHOTOGRAPHS



Photograph 6: A printed winter view looking north/northwest along Main Street, roughly contemporary with photos 3 and 4. The ramshackle single-bay wooden house east of the Cox House has substantially deteriorated since photo 2 was taken. The J. S. deNeuville store has not yet been built northwest of the Digges House.





Photograph 7: View looking northwest along Main Street published in Charles H. Callahan, *Washington: The Man and the Mason*, (c. 1913), with the Custom House on the left. The Digges House appears in better condition, freshly painted white (except woodwork and upper chimneystacks), and with a new sawn-work porch railing enclosing the exterior cellar steps at right end. The front right door is visible inside this enclosure, and louvered shutters remains in place. The Cox House, which apparently burned in 1912, remains standing, and the turn-of-the-century J. S. deNeuville store is now standing.¹



Photograph 8: Photograph taken from near the Nelson House, looking northwest, offering a clear view of the Cox and Cole Digges houses, with chickens and sleeping dog in the foreground. Taken somewhat later than photo 6 because the one-story wooden extension has disappeared from the east end of the Cox House by this time.



Photograph 9: View of the Digges House from the south, across a rutted dirt Main Street, with a telegraph pole to the left. The house seems to have declined somewhat. All shutters have been removed from front and visible right windows. A solid front door has replaced the glazed leaves, and an old nail-studded leaf is in the right front door. There are nine-over-nine sash with wide muntins in the right window lighting the right front room, perhaps the earliest surviving sash visible in any of the photographs. A small rectangular sign has been attached to the right of the front door transom.



Photograph 10: A view from the west contemporary with photo 8. In this rare view, one glimpses the mid-19th-century brick-walled rear shed across a white-painted

brick fence. Two front window wells intended to light the cellar are clearly visible. Shutters are absent on the left wall as well.

¹Photos of the street taken by Rufus N. Barrows in 1914 show the Digges House in the same condition and only the brick walls of the Cox House standing. John A. Barrows Photograph Collection, Special Collections, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

COLONIAL

Cole Digges House Historic Structures Report



APPENDIX I

Contents

- [Preface](#)
- [Thomas Pate and Lot No. 42](#)
- [John Martin](#)
- [Cole Digges and Son Dudley](#)
- [Jameson and Others](#)
- [Analysis of Insurance Policies](#)
- [Late Years and Restoration](#)
- Illustrations (not included in this report)

Illustrations

- (Note: not included in this report)
- No. 1 The Alexander Berthier Billeting Plan of Yorktown
 - No. 2 Plot from Insurance Policy of 1838
 - No. 3 Plot from Insurance Policy of 1846
 - No. 4 Plot from Insurance Policy of 1853
 - No. 5 Mathew Brady Photograph of Yorktown
 - No. 6 Yorktown's Main Street in 1879
 - No. 7 Yorktown's Main Street in 1881
 - No. 8 Sketch of Pate House, c1900
 - No. 9 Yorktown Main Street about turn of century
 - No. 10 Yorktown's Main Street c1920
 - No. 11 Thomas Pate House as a Bank, c1915
 - No. 12 Thomas Pate House, c1915
 - No. 13 Pate House, c1923
 - No. 14 Thomas Pate House as Movie Set
 - No. 15 Pate House, 1965
 - No. 16 Pate House, 1965

<<< [Previous](#)

<<< [Contents](#) >>>

[Next](#) >>>