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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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FILE CODE:

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

PART I

Administrative, Historical

and

Architectural Data

BOCOCK-ISBELL STABLE

Appomattox Court House National Historical Park

by

James N. Haskett, Park Historian

March, 1961

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FROM:

TO:

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

PART I

RESTORATION

of the

APPOMATTOX COURT HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

RECOMMENDED /s/ Hubert A. Gurney Date 3/17/61
Superintendent

RECOMMENDED Eugene R. DeSilets Date 5-8-61
^{Actg} Chief, EODC

RECOMMENDED ELBERT COX Date 5-12-61
Regional Director

APPROVED: _____ Date _____
Director

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- a. BUILDING NAME Bocock-Isbell Stable
BUILDING NUMBER 13C
- b. PROPOSED USE - It is proposed that the Bocock-Isbell Stable be reconstructed as an exterior reconstruction circa 1865. It will serve to complete the Bocock-Isbell complex of buildings as they appeared in 1865, further completing the historic scene. It is proposed that the interior be used as a two-stall Garage. This will serve to house the Superintendent's official and personal car.
- c. PROVISION FOR OPERATION AND FURNISHING - Funds for the operation of the Bocock-Isbell Stable will come from regular Buildings and Utilities, and Quarters Operation accounts.
- d. PRELIMINARY ESTIMATE - The estimate of cost for rehabilitation of the Bocock-Isbell Stable is \$10,000.00.

THE BOCK-ISELL STABLE

A Documentary Survey
of the Building, its
Background and Con-
struction, with
General Data on the
Bock-ISELL Group

By

James N. Haskett
Park Historian

March 1961

THE BOCOCK-ISBELL STABLE

Part I (General Background)

This study is intended to provide the historical documentation for the reconstruction of the Bocock-Isbell Stable. This structure was part of the Bocock-Isbell Complex of buildings.¹ Originally, this group was comprised of the house, a smokehouse, a kitchen and servants quarters, a well, a stable, and possibly other minor structures. At the time of the creation of the Park in 1940, the House, the Kitchen, the Smokehouse, and the Well were still standing in various degrees of disrepair. By then, the Stable had passed from the scene. It most probably had collapsed, a victim of neglect and decay. Whether its materials had decayed, been used for firewood or on another structure, can only be surmised. At just what time the Stable's removal occurred is questionable. There is some reason to believe that it stood as late as 1937.² The family which occupied the property until 1940, Mr. and Mrs. Curtis Mitchell, could do little to describe, or to recall the removal of, the Stable. Mrs. Mitchell seems to vaguely recall a shed at the location of the Stable, while Mr. Mitchell can only recall a pile of logs at the site.³ This, however, is not conclusive because of several factors. By this time, the Bocock Lane approach had been abandoned in favor of a lane directly from the Main Street or Lynchburg Stage Road to the front of the house. Also the outbuildings were not in use. Therefore, it would not be unusual for the memory to falter when recalling a

a relatively obscure part of the premises, especially when some 20 years later, Mr. Allen O'Brien recalls that the building was taken down but does not recall what happened to the materials nor when this occurred.

Although the data necessary to the restoration of the House, Kitchen, and Smokehouse have been secured previously, a recapitulation of the history of the group will add much to the documentation.

The Bocock-Isbell House and its outbuildings were built during 1849 and 1850.⁴ It was built by two brothers, Thomas Salem and Henry Flood Bocock.⁵ Thomas S. Bocock owned a large plantation north of present day Vera, called "Wildway", so it is assumed that this was built as the residence of Henry Flood Bocock. Henry F. Bocock served as the second County Clerk of the newly formed County of Appomattox succeeding his father, John T. Bocock, who appears to have held the office only a short time before his death in 1845.⁶ Just what the financial arrangements were between the two brothers regarding the house is not known. However, the yearly rent was listed in the County Land Tax Books as \$150.00. In 1855,⁸ the Bocock-Isbell property was purchased by John H. Flood. During the following year (1856), Flood bought additional lots from both the Bococks and from McDearmon's Trustees.⁹ These additions made this one of the most extensive properties in the Village Area. The addition of lots 26, 27, 28, 24, 25, 32, and 33 extended the boundaries north to Main Street and the County Plot, east to

Bocock Lane, south to Back Lane and west to Market Lane. Flood seems to have been a wealthy man for this section. At one time his household and kitchen furniture was valued as high as \$2,000 which contrasts quite a bit with Henry F. Bocock's highest evaluation of \$300. His personal property tax returns showed such items as a piano, silver and gold plate, two watches valued at \$200, etc.¹⁰ By 1860, the Bocock-Isbell property had again changed hands. Flood had sold the property to Lewis D. Isbell¹¹ and had moved into nearby Lynchburg. Isbell served as Commonwealth's Attorney as early as 1847. The following year (1861) he served on the Secession Convention in Richmond, and from 1868¹² to 1872 he served as first Judge of the County Court.

Since the proposed reconstruction is as of April 9, 1865, only that research necessary to determine that no additions were made to the Stable was conducted.

Part II (Stable, Historic Period, 1849-1850)

One of the basic prerequisites for providing authentication for any structure is the substantiation of the existence of the building during the period of historical significance. In this particular instance, this is made difficult by the absence of the historic structure. This eliminates the possibility of architectural evidence substantiating the data which is uncovered.

A consistent source of data for more pretentious and important structures are the many various contemporary lithographs, paintings, sketches, etc. However, in this case, this source proved unprofitable. Part of this is due to the fact that views from the southeast depicting the Stable to best advantage would be singularly ineffective in portraying the Village. This is due to the arrangement of the buildings and the variations in terrain. Another source investigated was contemporary maps. Though several were available they proved unsatisfactory because their large scale precluded accurate placement of the Village buildings.

As a total lack of contemporary evidence exists, the investigator must look for another method upon which to base his documentation. The end result being that any authentication must rest upon a combination of rationalization and evidence of a non-historic nature.

A knowledge of the basic nature of the community itself is a valuable asset in any type of reasoning involving the Stable itself. This was a community of semi-independent households possessing a far

greater degree of self-sufficiency than a citizen of the Twentieth Century can visualize. As a result, no Livery Stable existed nor did a ready source of fresh meat or milk. Because of this, each citizen was compelled to provide his own transportation and a convenient supply of those basic necessities. A close scrutiny of the personal property taxes of the owners of the Bocock-Isbell House during the period 1849-1865 tend to substantiate this. Though there is some variation in amount, each of the owners possessed draught animals combined under the column entitled, "Horses, Mules, Asses & Jennets" and some means of vehicular transportation listed in a column at one time entitled, "Four Wheel Pleasure Car-¹³riages and Harness and Value." They also possessed in most instances livestock raised either for milk or for meat.

Henry Flood Bocock, for instance, had one entry under the column entitled, "Horses, Mules, Asses & Jennets" in 1849.¹⁴ The following year he had no draught animals listed but did have one entry under "Four Wheel Pleasure Carriages ...".¹⁵ Bocock again reversed himself in 1851, at that time having one draught animal.¹⁶ The draught or more probably, the riding animal was again listed in 1852, and this year the combined column listed as "Cattle, Sheep, & Hogs," had one entry valued at \$10. To anyone familiar with the number of animals necessary to support a family these figures seem quite low. The explanation may lie in a column seen only once during this entire period which reads as follows: "Amount of exemptions in Cattle, Sheep, and Hogs, or personal property in lieu

thereof."¹⁷ Since the amount allowed was \$100, this would eliminate a large number of livestock from taxation if this provision were in effect during this period. In 1853 and 1854, Bocock possessed two draught animals and two meat or milk animals.¹⁸ While it must seem strange for Bocock to have a vehicle and no horse or a horse and no vehicle, it must be remembered that he was a member of a large and fairly well-to-do family, in a time of great family loyalty and generosity, so any need of transportation or of foodstuffs could be readily remedied.

John H. Flood was as affluent in his transportation facilities and livestock as in his household furnishings. This was the most evident in 1858 when he listed two items under the draught animal column valued at \$300 (these must have been good quality horses) and three items under the vehicle column valued at \$200. He also had two items under the "Cattle, Sheep, & Hogs" column valued at \$30.¹⁹ It should be noted that Flood not only showed his prosperity in the quantity of his possessions but also in the quality in that they were far above the ordinary valuation for the same articles.

When Lewis D. Isbell took over the property in 1860, he, too,²⁰ possessed a draught animal and a vehicle. This continued to be the case as long as his tax records were checked.²¹

While the preceding information was not overly pertinent in its own right, it is felt that it demonstrates the need for, and conversely, the existence of, the Stable.

To document when the Stable was constructed is not possible on the face of now existing data. Just when it was built must rest on the face of negative rather than positive information. As has been previously noted, the construction of the house was completed from 1849 through 1850, and since there is no evidence of additional construction throughout the period of historic significance it seems safe to assume that it was done at this time. This is somewhat substantiated in that the other outbuildings are standing today and architectural investigations placed them in the same period as that of the construction of the house.

The basis for assuming that there was no construction rests in the Appomattox County Land Tax Records. In other instances, any new construction was noted in the remarks column. In addition, and changed in evaluation after 1850, were investigated and found to be a part of an overall tax revaluation.

The aforementioned information constitutes the basis for the conclusion that a Stable existed during the period of historic significance and that it was constructed at the same time as the house and other outbuildings.

Part III (Stable, Appearance of, As Based Upon Data From Its
Non-Historic Period, 1866-1937)

While sufficient evidence exists as to the existence of a stable in 1865, no documented source was found as to its appearance. A stable of indeterminate origin did exist on the property in the 1930's. Whether this is the same structure as the original Stable must finally rest upon the architectural investigation of all existing data.

Mr. Frank Allen O'Brien, one of the Park's neighbors on the northeast, was able to do much toward bridging the gap between 1865 and the present. During his teens, he attended a small school run by one of the spinster sisters of Judge Henry T. Parrish. The school was conducted in the Bocock-Isbell House. He recalled that this was in the late 80's or early 90's. He said that he remembered the Stable, having been in it on numerous occasions. His description in general coincided with accounts of more recent occupants of the house. He stated that the Stable was in sound condition during this period and it appeared to have been at least 20 to 25 years old at this time.

Another creditable link between the historic structure and the existing structure of the 1930's rests in information obtained from Mrs. Bessie Ferguson. Mrs. Ferguson is the widow of Sam A. Ferguson, who purchased the Bocock-Isbell House around 1901. After her husband's death, Mrs. Ferguson retained ownership of the property until 1937, at which time it was purchased by the United States Government. In this interview, Mrs. Ferguson noted that both the

house and outbuildings were quite run down and had to be renovated before they moved in. This adds statute to the theory that this was the original Stable in that a structure built much after 1865 generally would not have been in such an advanced state of dis-
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repair.

Unfortunately, however, Mrs. Ferguson recalled little of the actual appearance of the building. She stated that, "the stable was a log structure (with shingle roof) exterior walls covered with siding. It stood at the edge of the lane inline with the well."

To supplement this description, interviews were arranged with local inhabitants who had lived in the house or nearby. From these interviews a general conception of the building was formed.

From these descriptions it appeared that the building was composed of a central section with a loft and two sheds. The building faced west with its east face along Bocock Lane. The road from the Bocock Lane to the rear of the house seems to have run a short distance north of the Stable. Estimations of its size and condition varied. Mr. Duval Conner, who occupied the house for several years after 1919, listed the dimensions as approximately 34 feet by 16 feet and the condition of the build-
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ing as poor. Mr. E. T. Mitchell, who had resided in the Village Area since 1910, pictured the building as more pretentious, being 30 feet by 40 feet and in fine condition; in fact, with the central
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building being constructed of brick. While there were glaring

contradictions there were many points where the stories coincided, or where these contradictions could have easily been a result of changes due to decay, etc. The central portion was described as a story and a loft. The downstairs was entered by either one or two doors from the west.²⁵ In this section was stored the harness and other paraphernalia necessary to the use of horses and mules. This also served as a storage place for grain and for limited hay. The hay and grain were fed to the animals in the stalls in one or both of the sheds by means of feed racks and grain boxes. The downstairs may or may not have had partitions to separate the various sections and activities. Mr. Conner believes the floor to have been dirt.

Mr. O'Brien said that the floor was dirt with a small part having a board floor with this most probably being used as storage place for harness, etc.²⁶ Concerning the loft there are several points of contention. The first is the number of doors. Mr. Mitchell places a door on both the east and west faces, while Mr. Conner recalls only an opening on the west and believes if closed in later evidence, it might just have been boarded up. As Mr. Conner used the Stable only in a limited way, it is possible that his memory failed him on this point. There is also two variations in the methods used in reaching the loft. Mr. Mitchell recalls that a stairway starting from the north corner of the east face ran up to a platform just outside of the loft door. He noted that neither the stairs nor the platform had any rail and that one sort of had to lean against the building while climbing up. He estimated that

the stairs were three feet wide and that they were generally under the eaves. Mr. Mitchell also said that a trap door was cut in the loft floor through which hay was thrown down for the animals. Mr. O'Brien supported Mr. Mitchell's contention in that he recalled that the loft was entered from the outside; however, he thought that this was on the west face instead of the east. Again, a matter of time. Mr. O'Brien also recalled that the building had a shingled roof. Mr. Conner said that the loft was entered by means of a ladder nailed to the wall which entered a trap door in the loft floor. He noted that the ladder was merely two poles nailed to the wall with crude rungs. He said that this trap door was in the northwest corner of the loft. These discrepancies could easily have been the result of the different periods which they occupied the structure. The roof was described as being chestnut shingles by Mr. Mitchell, and as just having old boards on it by Mr. Conner; again easily a matter of time. The left hand or northern shed was described by both men as being used for the stabling of animals. It was described as having two stalls, being completely partitioned off within. Both men agreed that each stall had an outside entrance, though there was a difference in the location of these two doors. Mr. Conner described the doors as being in the northern corner of the west face and the eastern corner of the north face. Mr. Conner recalls that this section was constructed of horizontal framing. The right hand or southern shed was much more controversial.

Mr. Conner described as being smaller, not extending the full east-west axis. He believes it to be constructed of vertical lumber with overlapping striping. He said that it was principally a buggy shed, having a double door in the west face. Mr. Mitchell recalled it first as another stall arrangement similar to the northern stall and of the same size. Then he later said that it was used for the storage of hay, so he seems to have had a lapse of memory where this particular shed is concerned. Mr. O'Brien's recollections as to the interior arrangements are scant. He recalls some type of small stall and a place where buggies were stored.

The greatest value of the testimony of the three gentlemen is that of providing a continuity of existence of the structure as described by Mrs. Ferguson.

The only concrete evidence of the Stable's existence is that of a post 1926 photograph in the possession of the Park. It generally coincides with the conception gained from the interviews. The sheds are missing, but certain features which are visible, substantiate the existence of the sheds.

This data collected from such varied sources documents the existence of the building from 1901 to 1937 and seemingly for a substantial period prior to this time.

Little concrete exists to accurately place the site. Those who could recall the foundation at all spoke of it as a simple stone foundation. It is possible that it was not even held together with mortar; that it was merely a group of stones supporting the foundations or bottom logs.

Part IV - Summary

On the face of the limited data available, it seems safe to assume that a stable was a part of the Bocock-Isbell group in 1865. It would also appear valid that the structure which was in existence at the prescribed site from 1890 to the late 1930's is that selfsame building.

It is unfortunate that more construction data in pictures, lithographs, paintings, etc., did not come to light. It is hoped that an evaluation of existing data will produce sufficient architectural evidence for a successful reconstruction.

CITATIONS

- (1) It has been the policy to name a structure after its builder (Bocock) and its 1865 inhabitant (Isbell).
- (2) A Department of Agriculture Aerial Photograph shows a structure occupying the approximate site in 1937. Dr. Charles W. Porter's "Supplementary Report, Appomattox Court House, Virginia", has a small photo (No. 18) which indicates a structure in poor repair at that approximate location. A blowup of this photograph will be secured to allow further investigation. The building definitely existed in 1931, as it is shown on a topographic map drawn by the Construction Division, Office of the Quartermaster General, in 1931. The only existing photograph of the Stable is an unidentified photograph of the post 1926 period. This can be verified in that the photograph shows the United Daughters of the Confederacy Monument in the foreground, and this monument was not erected until 1926.
- (3) Data secured in phone conversation on February 14th and 16th, 1961, by Superintendent Gurney.
- (4) This is assumed from the Appomattox County Land Tax Records (1845-1849). Prior to 1849, these lots were held by Samuel D. McDearmon, developer of the Court House, and listed no structures upon them. In 1849, lots number 35, 34, 36, 43, 39, and 40, passed into the possession of the Bocock Brothers and were listed as containing buildings to the value of \$1500. The following year (1850), the value of the buildings increased to \$2700. Whether this involved new construction is open to question. During this year all properties showed an extensive revaluation. However, a comparison with several other large properties shows the increase to be disproportionate. If it is accepted that there were additions, the amount of work done must be purely conjecture.
- (5) It should be mentioned that Thomas Salem Bocock was most probably the most outstanding citizen ever produced by Appomattox County. Prior to the war, he had a distinguished career in the United States House of Representatives. At one time he was a candidate for Speaker of the House, but withdrew to break a tie. From 1861-65, he was Speaker of the Confederate House.
- (6) Featherston, N. R., History of Appomattox, Walsworth Brothers, Marcelline, Missouri, 1948, p. 68. (Hereafter cited as Featherston).

- (7) Appomattox County Records. Land Tax Book, 1850-1854, un-numbered page (Town Lot Section) at rear of regular land tract records for the year 1851. (Hereafter cited as LTB, Vol. No., Year, etc.)
- (8) Appomattox County Records. Land Book, 1855-1859, p. 49 of 1855 List.
- (9) Ibid., p. 51 of 1856 list.
- (10) This was assembled from the Personal Property Tax Lists of Appomattox County, Vols. 66 (1853-56) and 67 (1857-1860). These lists may be found in the Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia. (Hereafter cited as PPT, Vol. No., Year, etc.)
- (11) LTB, 1860-65, 1861, p. 51. Flood retained another piece of property and his residence was listed as Lynchburg.
- (12) Featherston, p. 80.
- (13) Though there were several modifications in title, the basic intent of the column did not change.
- (14) PPT, 65, 1845-52, 1849, p. 4.
- (15) Ibid., 1850, p. 3.
- (16) Ibid., 1851, p.3.
- (17) Ibid., 1852, p.3.
- (18) Ibid., 66, (1853-1856), 1853, p. 4; 1854, p. 3.
- (19) Ibid., 67 (1857-1860), 1858, p. 25.
- (20) Ibid., 1860, p. 19
- (21) Personal property taxes were checked from 1848 to 1865, Vol. 65-69.
- (22) Interview with Mrs. Bessie Ferguson conducted by Superintendent Gurney, September 2, 1942.
- (23) Interview with Mr. Conner by Park Historian, Feb. 1961, see Tape #1 (Tape Recorder), Appomattox Court House NHP Files.

- (24) Interview with Mr. Mitchell by Park Historian, Feb. 1961; see Tape #1 (Tape Recorder), Appomattox Court House NHP Files.
- (25) Mr. Conner say one; Mr. Mitchell, two. The photograph seems to confirm Mr. Mitchell.
- (26) Interview with Mr. Allen O'Brien by Park Historian, Feb. 1961. See Tape #1 (Tape Recorder), Appomattox Court House NHP Files.



Post 1926 Photograph Showing Bocock-Isbell Complex And Jail.

(Note United Daughters of the Confederacy Monument, which Dates Photograph).

Number 2



Blow-up From Photograph #1. This Shows A Number OF
Pertinent Construction Details.

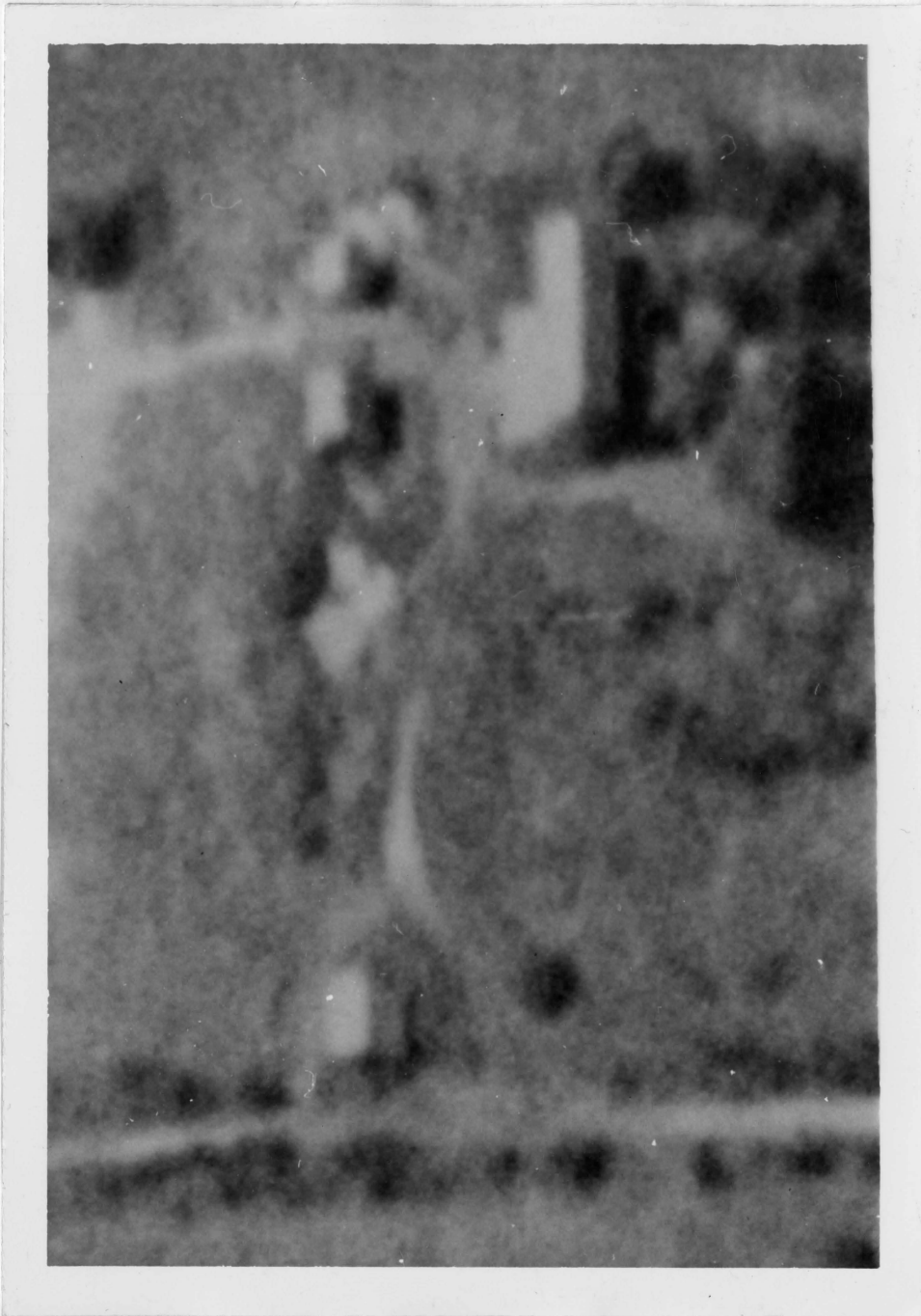
Number 3



This Blow-up From Photograph #19 Of Porter's
Supplementa Report Is Sufficiently Clear To Authen-
ticate That The Same Structure Was Standing In 1937.

Number 4

West



North

This Blow-up From A 1937 Department of Agriculture Aerial Photograph Shows A Structure At The Proposed Site.



A Nearby Barn, Typical Of This Section, And Regarded As Similar In Several Instances To The Bocock-Isbell Stable.

Number 6



Recently Discovered Rocks, Thought To Have Been The Northwest Corner Of The Central Structure. (Note That It Is Directly In Line With The Other Structures As Indicated By Mrs. Ferguson).

Number 7



Same As Photograph Number 6, Except It Is Shot Looking Directly South.

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

PART I

ARCHITECTURAL DATA

Since neither the Stable nor any of its components exist today, no concrete architectural data is available. Therefore, the reconstruction of the Stable rests upon data contained in the Historical Data Section. The evaluation of such information is to be performed by the Eastern Office of Design and Construction. This evaluation will appear in Part II, Historic Structures Report.

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

PART I

ARCHEOLOGICAL DATA

In the absence of the Stable itself, archeological evidence will be invaluable in gaining indications of the Stable's location and construction. A limited archeological investigation was conducted on the site in the Summer of 1960 by a contract archeologist. Two shallow exploratory trenches on the general site location proved unproductive. However, on the basis of new data, an excavation by the Park Maintenance Staff in March, 1961, uncovered the northwestern corner of the crude rock foundation (see photographic section). With this as a basis, limited investigations by Park Service Archeologists should produce the necessary data. This required less than a week and cost approximately \$500.00.

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

PART I

LANDSCAPE DATA

Since several documented studies have been completed describing the Village Scene, little is to be gained by additional studies of features. Since the other structures of the Bocock-Isbell complex are existing and provide points of reference as to any placement of roads, paths, etc., little else is needed in this field. This is especially true when this buildings' features may have to be altered to make its operation feasible.