

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

001463

PART I

ARCHITECTURAL DATA SECTION

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ON

MCLEAN HOUSE SLAVE QUARTERS

Appomattox Court House National Historical Park
Appomattox, Virginia

Prepared by
Orville W. Carroll
Architect
November 1963

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction

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A P P R O V A L S H E E T

Director _____ Date _____

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I. FOREWORD

This report contains only a brief description of the Slave Quarters once standing to the south of the McLean House in old Appomattox Court House village. Reconstruction of the Slave Quarters building is programed for fiscal year 1964.

A Historical Data Section of the Historic Structures Report, Part I, on the Slave Quarters, was completed in 1962 by Park Historian Wescoat Wolfe. His report contains most of the known information collected on the subject. An archeological examination of the McLean House property, to the rear of the house, was conducted in 1962 under the direction of John Walker. His report written on this investigation was released in 1963.

Orville W. Carroll
November 1963

II. ARCHITECTURAL SECTION

A. General Background

Prior to 1865, it was a common practice of the slave owners of the south to quarter their servants in separate structures apart from the main dwelling. Such was the case in 1848, when Charles A. Raine constructed on Lot No. 21 in the village of Appomattox Court House a three story brick tavern, which later became known as the Wilmer McLean House. It is likely that he planned and built the numerous outbuildings to the rear of the house at the same time, particularly the Slave Quarters which is the subject of this report. We have no good photographs of the building and the field sketches that we have, treat the subject lightly. This is understandable, since the building was a simple log structure of no architectural merit. It is usually when these unpretentious outbuildings are grouped in their traditional manner that they become architecturally interesting.

There are no surviving log buildings within the Park although several existed as stables, blacksmith shops, corn cribs, kitchens, barns and the like in the historic period. The surrounding area offers a few log buildings that date back to the mid-nineteenth century and they will be useful in supplying the many construction details.

B. General Description

We have very little information on the exterior appearance of the Slave Quarters for the McLean House. Archeological investigations

to the south of the McLean House by John Walker, did not uncover a trace of its foundation. This seems strange in the light of the fact that three artists of 1865 show the building with a chimney. It is not uncommon, however, to find local log buildings resting upon a stone at each corner which might account for the missing foundations, but the elimination of a chimney base is somewhat more of a feat.

This writer feels certain that the Slave Quarters appears through the foliage of the trees in the Brady Photograph No. 223. What seems to be the wall of a log building with a small window to the left can be seen just above the picket fence abutting the McLean House. This location of the building is further substantiated by Mr. Ragland Featherston, who made some additions in 1940 to an 1893 sketch of the McLean House property. Featherston locates the Slave Quarters about 70 feet south of the McLean House and approximately 20 feet west of the kitchen. He describes the building as a one story wartime log cabin for slaves and in "ruinous condition."¹

Other sources of information verifying the existence of the Slave Quarters are the sketches by contemporary artists of 1865. W. Weber (one drawing showing the southeast view of the McLean House and its outbuildings) Colonel Battersby (two drawings, one showing a general view from the northwest and the other a general view from the southeast)

¹Interview with Mr. Ragland Featherston by Ralph Happel at Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, October 12, 1940.

and George L. Frankenstein (one painting showing the northwest view) show a building akin to the Slave Quarters located in the general vicinity, southwest of the McLean House. The orientation of the roof ridge running east and west seems to be unanimous. There is some discrepancy among the artists as to its exterior appearance. Battersby and Frankenstein agree in their three views that the building was one story high with a central chimney. Weber is an exception. He draws the log cabin with the chimney on the east end. Most of the artists are unanimous in placing a window in the west gable end wall. Possibly the attic was used as a sleeping loft. Two artists show a door located in the south wall.² Beyond these bits of information, the design will have to be conjectural.

If we accept the artists conception of a structure with a central chimney, a very good precedent existed in this area at the Clover Hill Tavern. The Slave Quarters for the Clover Hill Tavern was a frame building measuring 15'-4" x 27'-6", with a central chimney containing one room on each side.³ This should be very close to the size of the McLean House structure. With these different pieces of evidence, we should be able to reconstruct a very convincing replica of the original Slave Quarters building.

²Wolfe, Wescoat; NPS Study on McLean House Slave Quarters, 1962. See Illustrations No. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 & 15.

³Photographs of the Slave Quarters for the Clover Hill Tavern before its reconstruction are on file at Appomattox National Historical Park.

C. Architectural Recommendations

a. Reconstruct the Slave Quarters of logs, one story with frame roof and weatherboarded gable end walls. Logs will be exposed with mortar chinking. The plan will be composed of two rooms, one on each side of a central chimney, with a fireplace in each room.

b. Reconstruct interior; exposed log walls, chinked between logs with mortar and whitewashed walls. Steep stair to second floor.

c. No utilities are contemplated.