Building Berry Hill:
Plantation Houses and Landscapes
In Antebellum Virginia

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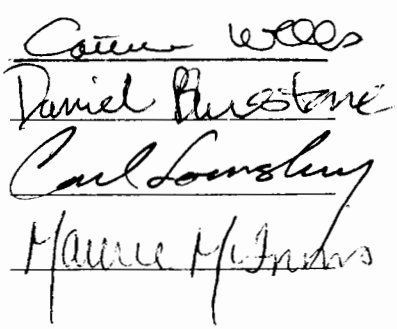

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Abstract

The subject of this dissertation is Berry Hill plantation in Halifax County, Virginia. James and Eliza Bruce built the plantation house in 1842, and it is still considered the finest example of Greek Revival architecture in antebellum Virginia. The house is, however, a radical departure from the plantation house of the eighteenth century. The change in house form is the result of the transformation of women's role in the household during the nineteenth century -- in plan, Berry Hill responds to Eliza Bruce's role as mistress and mother, and she took an active role in planning the house. Over the next decade James and Eliza Bruce shaped, with the help of slaves and local builders, an extensive and intricate plantation landscape. Berry Hill was not the vision of one man, but rather the result of negotiations between husband and wife, master and mistress, slaves and slaveholders. This plantation landscape served a large community of whites and blacks. Berry Hill plantation was a response not only to larger national issues of politics and aesthetics, but of complex social relationships that revolved around issues of class, race, and gender.

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"My son, beware . . . Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

Ecclesiastes 12:12

Abbreviations

BFP	Bruce Family Papers
EWB	Eliza Wilkins Bruce
JB	James Bruce
JCB	James Coles Bruce
LOC	Library of Congress
LOV	Library of Virginia
UVA	University of Virginia
UNC	University of North Carolina
VHS	Virginia Historical Society
VMHB	Virginia Magazine of History and Biography
WMQ	William and Mary Quarterly

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Introduction

This dissertation is about Berry Hill plantation in Halifax County, Virginia. James Coles Bruce and his wife Eliza Douglas Bruce built the Greek Revival house between 1842 and 1844, and during the next decade they built and shaped the larger landscape of their plantation. Because the house is the largest and most conspicuous example of Greek Revival in the state, it has been the subject of several articles and local histories, and it has been included in all major surveys of American architectural history. These writings have focused on the biography of James C. Bruce and on the style of the house he built. None have examined the larger plantation landscape, and none have considered the role of Eliza Bruce in planning the house and grounds. Nor have these writings considered how the slaves of Berry Hill helped create not only the plantation landscape that James C. and Eliza Bruce conceived, but a protective landscape, mental as well as physical, of their own. James C. Bruce did not build Berry Hill plantation by himself. Both the house and the larger plantation landscape were the result of a process of negotiation between Bruce, his wife, and his slaves. This dissertation will reveal a more complex story of why and how the Bruces built Berry Hill.

Architectural historians have a long tradition of ascribing meaning and value to a building through its style. That tradition judges a building by how successfully it achieves the ideal form of a given style. By this method, the house at Berry Hill plantation is accorded a place in the American canon of architectural history because it is a fine example of domestic Greek Revival architecture; the house has national significance. Berry Hill house was, however, well-known to

Virginians decades before it was accorded a place in the nation's architectural narrative. At the turn of the twentieth century, writers who were interested in Virginia's colonial and antebellum architecture developed an appreciative literature on the state's early domestic architecture. Old houses were a tangible, and often fragile, link to an illustrative past. These writers encouraged their audience to identify with old houses on an personal, although vicarious, level, and readers experienced Virginia's history through a series of romantic anecdotes about influential, history-making families -- primarily men. This genre of writing set the tone and method of analysis for generations of architectural historians, and in the case of Berry Hill plantation, the house gained meaning and significance through its association with James C. Bruce, the quintessential rich and benevolent slaveholder. Genealogists used the Bruce's house to help tell the story of a prominent Virginia family. In this biographical context, Berry Hill was offered up, even enshrined, as a wistful reminder of Virginia's mythical past; a past untarnished by contentious debates over slavery, the very reason for Berry Hill's existence.[1]

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[1] Fiske Kimball, Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922) 180-82; Hamlin Talbot, Greek Revival Architecture in America (1944. New York: Dover Publications, 1964) 191; Roger G. Kennedy, Greek Revival America, The National Trust for Historic Preservation, (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1989) 31, 139, 207. Robert A. Lancaster, Jr., Historic Homes and Churches (Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lipponcott Co, 1915); James River Garden Club, Historic Gardens of Virginia (Richmond: William Byrd Press, 1926); Frederick Nichols, "The House That Mercantilism Built," Arts in Virginia (Spring 1966), Vol. 6 No. 3, 12-21. For an analysis of the motivations of early historians and preservationists of Virginia's architecture see: James M. Lindgren, Preserving the Old Dominion: Historic Preservation and Virginia Traditionalism (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993). For the historiography of domestic architecture in Virginia see: Camille Wells, "The Multi-Storied House: Twentieth-Century Encounters with Domestic Architecture of Colonial Virginia," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, (Autumn 1998) vol. 106, no. 4, 353-418.

In one sense, Bruce's hagiographers were correct: history *can* be apprehended through a study of architecture. Old houses do indeed offer a way to understand the lives of the people who built and lived in them. Architectural space, like language, is a construct of the human mind. And like the study of language, the study of architecture can reveal the thought process -- the intention -- of those who create space. This way of looking at architecture has revolutionized the way a new generation of historians has interpreted the architecture of early Virginia, particularly the colonial period. This "new architectural history" has focused not only on the houses of the gentry class, but on a larger landscape that includes churches, courthouses, and outbuildings, as well as a variety of house forms built by Virginians of all classes. The result of this inclusive approach has been a new understanding of architecture as a determining force in colonial Virginia's social relationships. These studies have increased not only our knowledge and understanding of Virginia's early society; they have provided a model for investigation applicable to any place or period. This dissertation applies the new architectural history model to Virginia's antebellum period in order to explain the change in form of the Virginia plantation house.[2]

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[2] The pioneering work in new methodologies applied to architectural history was Henry Glassie, Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975). Glassie's work inspired a flood of new methodologies for architectural historians, and during the next ten years scholars produced a formidable body of literature. The new works and the state of the discipline are summarized in Camille Wells, "Old Claims and New Demands: Vernacular Architecture Studies Today," in Camille Wells, ed., Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, II, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986) 1-10. The term "New Architectural History" was proposed by Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Hermann in "Toward a New Architectural History" in Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Hermann, eds., Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, IV (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991) 1-6. During the last twenty-five years, many scholars have used a multi-disciplinary approach in this new architectural history. See for example: Dell

With one notable exception, Virginia's antebellum architecture has not figured prominently, if at all, in either a national or regional narrative, or in the new architectural history. Architecturally, the antebellum period is dominated by the work of Thomas Jefferson who championed the classical style as the most expressive of, and appropriate for, a republic. Predictably, early studies of "Jeffersonian Classicism" focused on issues of style. These studies traced a lineage from Monticello to Virginia's state capitol, through courthouses and churches and plantation houses, culminating at the University of Virginia's Rotunda where Virginia's contribution to the history of architecture seemed to end in 1826. A few scholars have offered an analysis of Jefferson's Monticello as an expression of his own idiosyncratic personality, but few have yet to place Jefferson's work in the larger context of Virginia's antebellum society. Regardless of methodology, however, the focus of Virginia's antebellum architecture remains sharply focused on one man.[3]

Upton, Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia, Architectural History Foundation Books, 10 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986).

[3] Fiske Kimball is responsible for single-handedly resurrecting Thomas Jefferson as an architect. See Fiske Kimball, Thomas Jefferson, Architect, (Boston: Privately Printed, 1916; reprint edition, with new introduction by Frederick Doveton Nichols, New York: Da Capo Press, 1968). Kimball's work established Jefferson as an architect in the twentieth century meaning of the term. Jefferson made preliminary drawings, working drawings, and full-size detail drawings. He also specified materials and supervised construction. Jefferson was not, however, an architect in the modern sense of the word -- a word that had no meaning in eighteenth-century America. Jefferson made a unique contribution to design history, but a larger contextual analysis of his work would include, for example, how social issues such as slavery affected Jefferson's sense of space, his perception of the roles of private and public architecture, and the ordering of the larger landscape. Several scholars have studied Jefferson in such a larger context. See for example: Rhys Isaac, "The First Monticello" in Peter Onuf, ed., Jeffersonian Legacies, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 77-108; Mark R. Wenger, "Thomas Jefferson and the Virginia State Capitol," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, vol. 101, no. 3 (Jan. 1993), 77-102; Mark R. Wenger, "Thomas Jefferson, the College of William and Mary, and the University of Virginia," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, vol. 103, no. 1 (July 1995), 77-102; Mark R. Wenger, Winterthur article on Palace

Yet Virginians continued to build during the antebellum period. Their houses, courthouses, and churches served the same functions, and they were often similar in form, to those of their colonial counterparts. Antebellum Virginians built in very different times, however, and for very different purposes. A new historical context gave new, sometimes only subtle, meaning to these buildings. The first half of the nineteenth century was a period of dynamic change in Virginia's political, economic, and social life. Intra-state political rivalries mixed with national politics to create a shifting terrain of alliances and coalitions that challenged established political practices. New economic institutions along with new markets and technologies created opportunities for acquiring wealth and influence. Canals, steamboats, and railroads opened new routes of commerce and communication, and they changed people's notions of time and space. For all the worry about the state's agricultural decline, and for all the nostalgia some Virginians felt for the lost glory of their colonial past, it was an expansive and invigorating period for Virginians. As Virginia's political and socio-economic life changed, so too did the practical structure of everyday life. Social relationships were still centered on slavery and revolved around a patriarchal family and kinship network, but antebellum Virginians experienced slavery and family in ways that were fundamentally different from the colonial era.[4]

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[4] Although historians have characterized the antebellum period as one of decline in Virginia., this was not the case. See: William G. Shade, Democratizing the Old Virginia: Virginia and the Second Party System 1824-1861, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); For a social history of antebellum Virginia see: Jan Lewis, The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); see also, Brenda Stevens, Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); For a social history of family life in colonial Virginia see: Daniel Blake Smith, Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century

Slavery remained the foundation of Virginia's economy, and it was always a defining feature both of society and the landscape. This monolithic institution, the constant in Virginia's history before the Civil War, was not as stable as some Virginians might have wanted. After the Revolution, Virginians debated both the moral and economic justifications for their system, and a rash of emancipations during a period of Revolutionary euphoria at the turn of the eighteenth century indicates that slaveholding Virginians questioned basic assumptions of their social order. Later, Nat Turner's rebellion and the ensuing debates on slavery in the Virginia Assembly caused genuine doubt and soul-searching among some slaveholders, James C. Bruce included. Turner's rebellion and the debates were the result of direct, personal interaction between masters and slaves. Slaves never had been passive and since their time of enslavement in the seventeenth century they had developed their own culture and their own forms of resistance which they carried out on a daily basis. The nature of the master/slave relationship began to change during the antebellum period as Virginians embued paternalism with notions of humane, reciprocal obligations. The rhetoric surrounding the management and care of slaves was not developed unilaterally by slaveholders -- it was the result of a process of negotiation; a result of the day-to-day reality that slaveholders faced in dealing with their slaves.[5]

Chesapeake Society, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1980). An excellent early work on colonial women is Julia Cherry Spruill's Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies, (1998, New York: W.W. Norton with introduction by Anne Firor Scott; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938).

[5] The institution of slavery in America remains one of the most important topics of research among historians. The literature on slavery is extensive. The major contributions have been Eugene Genovese, Roll, Jordon, Roll: The World the Slaves Made, (New York: Pantheon, 1974); Herbert G. Gutman, The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925 (New York:

The family in antebellum Virginia remained patriarchal in nature, but women took on new responsibilities as Virginians increasingly focused their attention on the family as a place of refuge from the larger, more complicated and threatening world of post-Revolutionary Virginia. Women -- wives and mothers -- took on a newly emphasized role as nurturers, and it was they, not men, who imparted meaning and values to the new concept of family. The notion of family life revolved around women who were charged with creating a 'home' -- a haven from the larger world for their husbands and a moral and virtuous atmosphere for their children. Religion and popular literature reinforced these ideal roles for women and family life became characterized by deep emotional displays of affection between husband and wife, mother and children. Unlike the colonial gentry, the elite of antebellum Virginia celebrated an intimate family life far removed from the scrutiny of a larger public arena. Women had always been responsible for maintaining the care and nurturing of their husbands and children. Women had always been in charge of maintaining

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Pantheon, 1976): Lawrence W. Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). Genovese characterized the master/slave relationship as a complicated and often subtle web of paternalism in which accommodation and resistance were driving forces. Religion was the center of slave life and ultimately proved to be the uniting force in slave life. Gutman disagreed, saying that slaves had established a stable family life long before masters introduced an ideology of paternalism. Gutman focused on the process by which Africans became African-Americans, and he credited a strong sense of family obligation among slaves for the survival of hardships. Levine, like Gutman, believed that slaves had a more autonomous life than Genovese portrayed. Levine studied folkways, religion, and art among late antebellum slaves and found that the distinctive African-American culture that slaves developed prevented "legal slavery from becoming spiritual slavery" (80). For an historiography of the topic of slavery see: Charles Dew, "The Slavery Experience," in John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, eds., Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987),120-62. The most recent studies have focused narrowly on subregions of the South and specific communities. See for example: Lorena S. Walsh, From Calabar to Carter's Grove: The History of Slave Community, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997, for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

the household as well. These duties and responsibilities, however, seldom conferred on colonial women the same stature or recognition they gained during the antebellum period.[6]

These changing attitudes towards slavery and the role of women in antebellum Virginia fundamentally altered the way that elite Virginians built their houses and ordered their landscapes. Race, class, and gender -- the staples of southern historical study for more than a quarter of a century -- direct the work of this dissertation because these issues are still key to a full understanding of society, and domestic architecture, in the antebellum South. But can another work dealing with these issues really add to the understanding historians already have of the period? The answer is yes. Historians of material culture have the advantage of a rich cache of objects, including architecture, with which to analyze and interpret the human experience. These objects are not mere indicators of social status or group identity; they are actual means to achieve and maintain such real distinctions. The house at Berry Hill and the larger landscape do not simply describe life on an antebellum plantation or add to a general knowledge of material life in the nineteenth century. The buildings at Berry Hill plantation were agents of change and determinants of behavior in a world that increasingly relied on material objects and architecture to mediate the complex human experience of daily life on a plantation. A material approach to history reveals more clearly the power structure within a society; the sources of that power, how it was wielded and how it was resisted.[7]

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[6] Rhys Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Lewis, Pursuit of Happiness.

[7] On material culture as a method for historical inquiry see: Ann Smart Martin "Shaping the Field: The Multidisciplinary Perspectives of Material Culture," and Cary Carson, "Material

This dissertation focuses on one elite slaveholding family and their plantation in Virginia's southside piedmont. Until recently the Greek Revival house at Berry Hill plantation stood virtually unchanged since it was finished in 1844. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Bruce descendants installed electricity and a central heating system, but the pipes and conduits that were snaked between floor joists and stud walls had no effect on defining features. The large closets between the bedchambers of the first and second floors were converted to bathrooms at the same time, and these were the only changes in the physical configuration of space in the house. The family retained original features which survive today such as the call bell system, pantry and storage rooms, shelves and cupboards, and the privy. Original decorative schemes like floor cloths and marbleized woodwork also survive. In the larger landscape a smokehouse, icehouse, granary, and corn house stand fully intact. Ruins of a slave cemetery, a stone stable and seven stone slave houses survive in conditions sufficient for recording and analysis. Original farm roads, drainage systems, ponds, and stone quarries offer other evidence of the working plantation. These unusually well-preserved original elements make Berry Hill house and

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Culture History: The Scholarship Nobody Knows," in Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison, eds, American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press for Winterthur Museum, 1997) 1-21, 401-428. On the methodology of material culture see: Jules Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," in Robert Blair St. George, ed., Material Life in America, 1600-1860 (Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1988) 17-37; Dell Upton, "Form and User: Style, Mode, Fashion, and the Artifact," in Gerald L. Pocius, ed., Living in a Material World . On power and how it is wielded by social and economic groups see Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization (New York: The Free Press, 1947), and Joseph Gusfield, Symbolic Crusade (Urbanna: University of Illinois Press, 1963).

plantation an excellent specimen for a case study. The house and surrounding landscape are one set of primary documents in this investigation.[8]

The Bruce family were meticulous record keepers throughout the early national and antebellum periods. During the twentieth century Bruce descendants began depositing the bulk of these family records at the library of the University of Virginia. In addition to copious financial and business papers, the Bruces maintained a personal correspondence that opens a broad vista, not only of the Bruces's family life, but of the larger social and political life of the period. This correspondence also offers valuable insight into the attitudes and beliefs of elite antebellum Virginians. These remarkable family papers, combined with the papers of related families, as well as court, tax, and census records of the period are the primary written documents at the center of this study.

Chapters One and Two are narratives of family history. James C. Bruce inherited a fortune from his father James Bruce. Undoubtedly it was this legacy that made possible the extensive building campaign at Berry Hill. When the elder Bruce's will was recorded at Halifax Courthouse in 1837, the clerk estimated the estate to be worth more than $1.5 million, a huge sum for the period. Historians and genealogists have characterized Bruce's estate as a

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[8] Initial investigation of Berry Hill house and its surrounding landscape was conducted during the spring of 1996. Additional investigations during the winter of 1998 and 2000 included mapping the original plantation landscape, and measuring and drawing Berry Hill house as well as extant and ruinous buildings and sites. AXA Insurance company bought Berry Hill in 1997, and in preparation for renovating the property as a conference center commissioned a Historic Structures Report. See John G. Waite Associates, "Historic Structure Assessment for Berry Hill, South Boston, Virginia," on file at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia. AXA has since completed renovations to the house and surrounding landscape which have destroyed evidence especially of those areas where slaves lived and worked.

"mercantile fortune" and as "the first agricultural fortune." These labels are too simplistic to explain the complex machinations of the new economic paradigm that developed in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Bruce's chain of country stores and his plantations were only two components of a diversified investment strategy that the he developed during his life. Bruce was a shrewd business man, and he took advantage of every new business opportunity within Virginia's expanding economy. He invested in banks, real estate, and transportation schemes, and with his excess capital he made personal loans, often at rates higher than allowed by law. Bruce was a bourgeois capitalist and occupied that contradictory position that all successful planters held; one foot planted firmly in an agricultural economy based in slavery, and the other in a commercial economy based on manufactory and trade. His son James C. Bruce followed his father's investment strategies less aggressively, maintaining and modestly adding to the fortune he inherited. Both father and son represent the new breed of planter/businessman in antebellum Virginia which replaced the colonial gentry. This new monied class gained social stature by marrying into old gentry families. Thus antebellum Virginia's elite was composed a new money and old names.

New ways of accumulating wealth in antebellum Virginia did not fundamentally alter the structure of society; class distinctions remained as real as they had in colonial Virginia. The new elite sought to protect and maintain the economic and political basis for those distinctions in the face of increasingly democratic challenges. Chapters One and Two reveal the nature of power in

antebellum Virginia -- power based, as always, in money and politics. The political and economic landscape of antebellum Virginia was contested ground, and the losers in this contest -- slaves, debtors, and democrats -- contributed significantly, albeit indirectly, to the building campaign at Berry Hill plantation.

Chapters Three and Four focus on building the house at Berry Hill plantation. The contract that James C. Bruce signed with a local builder found among the family papers gives some details about the construction of the house. A friend of the Bruces's, John E. Johnson, drew plans and elevations of the house, but these drawings are lost. Johnson has been identified as the 'architect' of Berry Hill, but there is no evidence that he received formal training in the profession. The roles of client, builder, and architect were seldom, if ever, clearly defined in antebellum Virginia and it is doubtful that Johnson led Bruce and his builder to some ultimate vision of the house. Moreover, the construction of Berry Hill house offers evidence of a building process in which these roles overlapped; a process that was much more fluid and flexible than a set of drawings or a contract might imply. A fourth person, not mentioned in the building contract but referred to in additional written instructions, was involved in building Berry Hill -- Eliza Bruce. Although the contract identifies James C. Bruce as the client, he was acting in tandem with his wife Eliza Bruce. James C. Bruce signed the contract and paid the bills, but he did not act alone. Understanding how Berry Hill achieved its final form requires inquiry beyond the contract and drawings. Chapters Three and Four explain the building campaign at Berry Hill as a collaborative, negotiative, and even ad hoc process

rather -- a sharp contrast to the architect/patron paradigm of many architectural histories.

Chapter Five analyzes the plan of Berry Hill in relation to Eliza Bruce's role as wife, mother, and mistress of slaves. The house served multiple purposes as the center of social, familial, and economic life of Berry Hill plantation. Rooms were dedicated to public social rituals, intimate family routines, and domestic production of food and clothing. All of these activities took place under one roof and all were supervised by the mistress of the household. Eliza Bruce's duties and responsibilities ultimately determined the plan of the house and it was she who determined how slaves would serve her family and guests. Eliza Bruce planned the passages and service rooms that regulated circulation patterns and slave access to the household. Chapter Five explains how the great house in Virginia came to be recognized as a feminine domain.

Chapter Six continues the theme of Chapter Five and interprets and analyzes the form of Berry Hill house in relation to the plantation houses of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Virginia. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, elite Virginian's struggled with the problem of maintaining a household served by slaves. The solution was to remove service functions from the house altogether. Domestic production, formerly incorporated into the planter's house, now took place in numerous outbuildings. Slaves who once slept by their master's hearth now slept in these outbuildings or in 'quarters' dedicated for their use. Architecture achieved a real segregation of labor and race in early Virginia. During the eighteenth century elite Virginians adopted the principles of Renaissance classicism in planning their houses and plantation landscapes. Bi-

lateral symmetry, major and minor axes, coupled with Palladian motifs created an architectural language that elite Virginians used to distinguish themselves among other white Virginians. Churches, courthouses, and plantation houses formed a unified landscape that implied an underlying and natural order that justified the economic and social hegemony of the gentry class. Slaves, still removed from the house in their working and sleeping arrangements, nevertheless moved at will through the planter's house during the eighteenth century. Any architectural barriers like the central passage were intended to segregate by class, not by race. The great house in colonial Virginia was not meant to serve the domestic needs of the planter and his family as much as it was meant to assert and affirm his claim to power within the existing order.

After the Revolution the great house of the colonial gentry lost its meaning as a part of the larger political order. New democratic principles rendered such an architectural bid for power useless and elite Virginians came to view their plantation houses as retreats from, not the centers of, the political world. The house became the nucleus of family life and increasingly women gained authority over the domestic realm. Duties and responsibilities unique to the role of a plantation mistress required a re-ordering of the elite household and a distinctive house form developed to achieve her purposes. A paramount concern to the mistress was the way in which slaves would serve her family. The form of Berry Hill house was one solution to the problem of slaves within a household, and it is part of an evolutionary process that took place over a period of 150 years.

Chapter Seven deals with the issue of style, the focus of most previous studies of Berry Hill house. To explain Berry Hill only as part of a national fashion fails to recognize its meaning in the particular context of Virginia's southside piedmont. James C. Bruce was a merchant-planter whose business interests were national in scope, and he moved in a much larger political and economic world beyond his home in Southside Virginia. For Bruce, that larger world was centered in Philadelphia, a city whose wealthiest citizens, mostly Whigs like Bruce himself, developed a distinct aesthetic expression of their elite status as patrons of the Greek Revival. Bruce, however, was also very much influenced by the conservative, anti-materialistic evangelical religious culture that dominated Virginia's Southside during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For James C. Bruce, the Greek Revival was a profound and contradictory statement of self, one that simultaneously proclaimed his political allegiance even as it rejected the traditional values of his father's generation.

Chapter Eight examines the larger landscape of Berry Hill plantation that James C. and Eliza Bruce created. The stone slave houses, the stables, barns, granaries, smokehouse, corn house, and icehouse were all components of an ordered landscape the Bruces envisioned. Berry Hill slaves, however, were an active, influential force that the Bruces had to consider when planning their plantation. Both households, black and white, carried on a domestic life in discreet, well-defined spaces enclosed by wood, brick and stone. Yet the yards, the fields, and the woods constituted another space which blacks and whites claimed, abandoned, surveyed, and contested daily. Berry Hill plantation, like

any plantation in the antebellum south, comprised a landscape that was simultaneously simple and comprehensible, complex and inscrutable.

Chapter One: James Bruce

James Bruce, father of James Coles Bruce, died a rich old man. During his lifetime he built a mercantile and real estate empire that laid a financial foundation that his children and grandchildren built upon, making the Bruce family one of the wealthiest and most influential families in antebellum Virginia. Thus established among the economic elite, James Bruce and his descendants made advantageous marriages that linked them socially and politically with Virginia's leading families, creating a web of relationships that secured the Bruce family's position in Virginia society. Like the gentry of colonial Virginia, the Bruces stood at the apex of a social and economic order they believed to be natural to the human condition. For them, the economically disadvantaged whites and enslaved African-Americans were part of a social order that God ordained. Unlike the colonial gentry, however, the antebellum elite of Virginia had to compete with democratizing forces that constantly challenged their assumed positions in the economic and social order. Landless whites challenged their exclusion from the franchise and abolitionists called upon slaveholders to honor the ideals of the Revolution. Economically, the opening of new western lands, the establishment of new financial institutions and trade policies, and industrialization of the north created new opportunities for accumulating wealth. Although these same economic changes challenged the control of Virginia's antebellum elite, opportunities existed for entrepreneurs to gain great influence on the local, state and even national level. Real estate, transportation and

finance, as much as agriculture, were the keys to new wealth in Virginia, and James Bruce successfully navigated a difficult course to prosperity in the midst of Virginia's changing economic and social scene.

James Bruce was born in Virginia in 1763. He was the eldest son of Charles and Diana Banks Bruce. His father Charles served as a captain in the French and Indian War under George Washington and eventually settled in Orange County on a plantation he called "Soldier's Rest" near Kelly's Ford on the Rapidan River. Charles and Diana Bruce had two more children: Henry born in 1764 and Charles, born in 1768.[1]

In the early 1770s James Bruce left his father's home in Orange County to work for Colquhoun & Co., a Scottish mercantile house based in Petersburg with a chain of stores in Virginia's Southside Piedmont. After his apprenticeship as a clerk, the young Bruce became manager of John Colquhoun's stores in Amelia County. In this position, Bruce was expected to devote all his energies to its operation and to ensure his store's profitability in the face of competing merchants. Bruce learned how to do business, but he was never allowed to trade in his own interest. Scottish mercantile houses forbade managers "from all manner of Trade whatever directly or indirectly on his own account." Store

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[1] Bruce Family Genealogy, Virginia Historical Magazine, Vol. 11, No. 4, (1904) 328-332. After Diana Bruce died, Charles married Frances Stubblefield, a daughter of a well-to-do planter, and they had three more children. The Bruce family Bible at Berry Hill lists the following children born to Charles and Frances Stubblefield Bruce: Thomas, 1773; William, 1774; Elizabeth, 1777. See BFP UNC. The early history of the Bruce family was reconstructed from deeds and wills and published in the Virginia Historical Magazine, Vol. 12, No. 1, (1904) 446-453. According to this source, the first Bruce of this line was George Bruce who is listed in the land records of Rappahannock (now Richmond) County in 1668. His will was probated in that county in 1715 and gives his age as seventy-five years. It is not certain whether George Bruce was born in Virginia or in England in 1640. His son Charles (1), who is mentioned in the will, died in King George County in 1754 leaving his son, also named Charles (2), land in Orange County. Charles (2) who built "Soldier's Rest" died in 1792.

managers were well compensated for their hard work. In addition to an allowance of £20 annually for living expenses, a typical five-year contract provided for £80 sterling in the first year, £90 in the second, and £100 thereafter. Generous as this compensation was, store managers found that mercantile houses expected an unusual degree of dedication. One firm, Cunningham & Co., dismissed a manager after he married saying that the store could not "be served by a married man [who] must often be called from Business by his family affairs." Scottish merchants generally considered colonial Virginians unsuited to the strict requirements of their business and preferred to employ their own countrymen. Colquhoun, however, found an eager and willing manager in the young Bruce, himself descended from Scottish immigrants.[2]

Establishing and operating such a mercantile system required a large amount of capital, and in the cash-poor colonies, most stores were owned by Scottish merchants based in Glasgow with ready access to banks and investors. Well paid as they were, few store managers ever accumulated enough capital to start their own businesses. James Bruce, however, impressed his father with his business dealings and by 1787, with encouragement and capital from his father, he left Colquhoun's employ and, together with his brother Charles, started a mercantile business with John Pannill in Halifax County. Within the decade, James and Charles Bruce had opened stores in Pittsylvania and Charlotte counties as well. Business was good in Southside Virginia, and the brothers

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[2] James Bruce's early years with Colquhoun are not well-known. An undocumented source states the Bruce left home at the age of sixteen to work for Colquhoun, first in Petersburg and then in Amelia County. See Virginia Historical Magazine, Vol. 11, No. 4, (1904) 328-332. For a description of Scottish mercantile practices in Virginia, see J.H. Soltow, "Scottish Traders in Virginia, 1750-1775," The Economic History Review, 2nd Series, Vol. XII, Nos. 1, 2 & 3, 1959-60, pp. 83-98.

began buying land and slaves and soon established plantations for themselves at advantageous locations in Halifax County. James Bruce settled at a place he called "Woodburn", a thousand acre plantation on Terrible Creek four miles northeast of his store at Halifax Court House. Charles Bruce situated himself eight miles southwest of his brother acquiring 1,300 acres he called "Tarover" on the banks of the Dan River. In addition to these home places, each brother bought tracts of land along the county's major tributaries of the Dan, Bannister, and Staunton rivers (fig. 1.1). The location of these plantations and other tracts of land near market towns and major rivers assured the brothers that the produce of their plantations would have a ready access to markets.[3]

By the close of the eighteenth century, thirty-six-year-old James Bruce was a very eligible bachelor with a plantation, slaves, and a thriving chain of mercantile stores. When he decided to marry he chose a partner who would

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[3] On prospects for store managers, see Soltow, "Scottish Traders," p. 87. Only one letter survives between James Bruce and his father Charles. It is addressed to 'James Bruce, Merchant, Amelia Courthouse.' The letter is not dated, but on the back in James Bruce's hand is written "Fall 1784." In the letter, Charles Bruce expresses confidence in his son's ability and promises to have a neighbor's tobacco assigned to James Bruce for him to sell. He also encourages James to provide his brother Charles "a place either to do business for you or some other person." James Bruce evidently was planning to open his own store because his father wrote: "I long to see you to know from your own mouth the situation of your affairs and whether you intend to have a store in this neighborhood next fall." James Bruce would have been twenty-one at the time his father wrote him. It is unlikely James would have enough capital to open his own store and the letter implies that his father is in a position to help James by providing him both capital and business. See Charles Bruce to James Bruce, BFP, UVA, Box 19. James Bruce and John Pannill are listed as "Bruce and Pannill" in the 1787 Personal Property Tax of Halifax County. During his lifetime, James Bruce was a partner in eight firms operating at least twelve stores in Southside Virginia: Bruce & Sydnor, Bruce & Williams, Bruce & Hagood, James Early & Co., James Adkisson & Co., James Easley & Co., Pannill, Wilson, & Co., John Chappell & Co. See BFP, BP 1800-1838, UVA. Business receipts in the Bruce Family Papers between the years 1800 and 1838 show that Bruce was a partner in all of these ventures. Firms doing business in Virginia were required to have a license from the state. The firms in which Bruce was a partner are listed in the License Returns on Businesses in the Auditor of Public Accounts Inventory held at the Virginia State Library. These licenses however do not name partners, so it is impossible to determine how long Bruce was a partner in the firms that did not carry his name. The land

complement his already considerable fortune and reputation. In 1799 he married twenty-nine-year-old Sally Coles, daughter of Walter Coles and heiress to large estates on both banks of the Staunton River in Halifax and Charlotte Counties. Walter Coles's father, John Coles, had settled his son on a 5,700 acre plantation on the banks of the Staunton River in Halifax County in the early 1760s. With this substantial advantage, Walter Coles quickly established himself among the county's elite. He served as a magistrate in the county, a vestryman of Antrim Parish, and as Halifax County's representative in the House of Burgesses. He worked his plantation called "Mildendo" with 102 slaves and he operated a ferry at the major crossing of the Staunton River. In terms of wealth, Walter Coles ranked in the top one percent of all heads of household in Halifax County. With his marriage to Sally Coles, James Bruce allied himself with one of the wealthiest and most influential families in Southside Virginia. During their brief marriage, James Bruce and Sally Coles had three children. Their first two children, Mildred and Charles, died in infancy. Their third child, James Coles Bruce, was born January 26, 1806. Sally Coles Bruce died a short four months later on May 21.[4]

During the next thirteen years, James Bruce concentrated on expanding his mercantile business, real estate holdings, and other investments. In 1819 he made another advantageous marriage into the prominent Cabell family when he wed thirty-six-year-old Elvira Cabell Henry, the widow of Patrick Henry, Jr. The young Henry had died in 1804 shortly before their daughter Elvira Ann was

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transactions of James and Charles Bruce during the 1790s are recorded in Halifax County Deed Books 15, 16, and 17.

[4] Bruce Family Genealogy, Virginia Historical Magazine, Vol. 11, No. 4, (1904) 328-332. Coles Family Genealogy, Virginia Historical Magazine, Vol. 7, No. 1, (1899) 101-102. Walter Coles's wealth was determined by analyzing the Halifax County Personal Property Tax and Halifax County Land Tax lists for the years 1780-1785.

born. Elvira Cabell was the daughter of Col. William Cabell, Jr. whose father had amassed 25,000 contiguous acres stretching six miles along the James River in Amherst County before the Revolution. As county surveyor, William Cabell, Sr. was well situated to judge the lands he traversed and he made land acquisitions with an eye to maximizing his already strategic location along major trade corridors. Cabell was a county justice and vestryman as well. He served in the colonial House of Burgesses and later as a state senator in the new Republic. William Cabell, Jr. followed his father into public and military offices and eventually inherited his father's large estate called "Union Hill" in Nelson County. When he married Ann Carrington of Charlotte County, the bride's father, Judge Paul Carrington, gave the couple two thousand acres as a wedding gift, thus increasing Cabell's already enormous holdings. The Carringtons allied themselves with the Coles in 1785 when Ann Carrington's brother, Paul, Jr. married Mildred Coles, the sister of Sally Coles Bruce. By the time James Bruce and Elivra Cabell Henry married, they had known each other for more than two decades through ties of kinship, and in fact Elvira Henry had attended James Bruce's wedding to Sally Coles, her aunt's sister. James and Elvira Bruce had four children. Their son William died in 1834 when he was eight years old, but the other children, Ellen born in 1820, Sarah born in 1822, and Charles born in 1826 survived the hazards of childhood. [5]

The Bruces were connected to Virginia's elite families in an intricate web of kinship. The Cabells, Carringtons and Coles were powerful and influential families in the political and economic life of colonial Southside Virginia and like

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[5] Bruce Family Genealogy, Virginia Historical Magazine, Vol. 11, No. 4, (1904) 328-332; Alexander Brown, The Cabells and Their Kin (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1895), 190-

their Tidewater counterparts, they had maintained their position through strategic land acquisition, advantageous marriages, and remunerative and influential public office-holding. They were a homogeneous group of planters, slaveholders, and Anglicans who had established themselves early in the Southside Piedmont. Descended from English families, they were related by bonds of marriage and ruled in political and economic life through a form of republican consensus. For the most part, this small elite continued to dominate political and economic life in post-Revolution Virginia. Like most of their colonial counterparts, however, these families saw their influence begin to wane as a new set of economic and political principles revolutionized the manner in which power was acquired and managed in Virginia after the Revolution. Virginia's homogeneous elite group of planters increasingly faced challenges from social and economic interests that flourished in a new political climate. New political ideals gave rise to a pluralism that found expression in a lively sectarian religious life, intrastate regional competition, and an increasingly diversified agricultural and commercial economy. Expanding opportunities in Virginia, and in the new republic generally, encouraged the development of a socio-economic creed that rejected the old order of elite republican consensus in favor of a contentious liberalism dedicated to democratic individualism. James Bruce understood the nature of this new regime, and his strategy of economic diversification was the key to wealth and power in the rapidly changing social and economic life of antebellum Virginia.[6]

200, 324-327.

[6]Turk McCleskey asserts in his study of Augusta County that newly settled parts of Virginia were deliberately structured to replicate the social and economic order of the Tidewater. Speculators and surveyors carefully controlled access to land and thus ensured that westward

Bruce's system of country stores provided the base from which he built his fortune. The importance of the country store in the development of Southside Virginia's piedmont economy can hardly be overestimated. Located south of the James River and east of the Fall Line, the Piedmont Southside stretched 150 miles inland. Landlocked and poorly served by a network of bad county roads, the region never developed significant, centralized trading centers. In the absence of towns, country stores functioned as major retail centers and tobacco depots. Merchants sold a planter's tobacco in return for commission or a line of credit in his store. At the store, planters found a variety of retail goods such as cloth, food, drink, hardware, housewares, ready-made clothes, and personal items of all kinds. Store owners typically charged a mark-up of 100 to

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expansion could be had without the social upheavals that accompany spontaneous migration. See Turk McCleskey, "Rich Land, Poor Prospects: Real Estate and the Formation of a Social Elite in Augusta County, Virginia, 1738-1770," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography Vol. 98, No. 3, (July 1990) 449-86. This scenario was played out in Virginia's Southside Piedmont in general and in Halifax County in particular where an Anglican gentry, led by the Coles, Carringtons, and Cabells among others, emerged early and continued to dominate political affairs into the 1790s. For an analysis of the changing social, political, and economic life in post-Revolution Virginia, see William G. Shade, "Society and Politics in Antebellum Virginia's Southside," Journal of Southern History, Vol. 53, (1987) 163-93; John T. Schlotterbeck, "The 'Social Economy' of an Upper South Community: Orange and Greene Counties, Virginia, 1815-1860," in Orville Vernon Burton and Robert McMath, eds., Class, Consensus, and Community (Westport, Conn., 1982), 3. For analysis of these changes in Virginia in general see: William G. Shade, Democratizing the Old Virginia: Virginia and the Second Party System 1824-1861 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 17-49. For a cultural study of changing attitudes toward authority and power in colonial and post-Revolution Virginia, see Rhys Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), esp. chapters 10-13. On the decline of the colonial aristocracy and the rise of a new antebellum elite see Lorraine Eva Holland, "Rise and Fall of the Antebellum Virginia Aristocracy: A Generational Analysis," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1980. Holland traces the fortunes of the descendants of Virginia's one hundred richest families according to the state census of 1788, the first year for which reliable statistics are available for determining wealth. [see Jackson Turner Main, "The One Hundred," William and Mary Quarterly, series 3, vol. 11 (July 1954) 354-84. Unable or unwilling to adapt to the economic changes brought about by increased competition in business and agriculture, and by new political and economic institutions, the descendants of these families lost wealth and political influence to a new elite who was aggressively entrepreneurial.

150 percent on all the goods they carried. In the cash poor economy of Southside's Piedmont, planters either purchased items on credit or bartered for the goods they required. Those planters who bought with cash or tobacco paid less for goods than those who bought on credit; merchants passed the cost of carrying credit on to the consumer. This easy system of bartering was complicated by another role the merchant played in the economy -- that of banker. The owner of a country store in effect became the clearinghouse for the local debt structure. Thus the simple trade network became a complex business relationship as customers used store credit, goods, and services to pay and to collect debts from third-party interests. Merchants would advance goods and cash to customers and charge interest on the balance until it was paid in full. This informal banking service accounted for anywhere between fourteen to twenty-one percent of a store's entire business.[7]

Between 1787 and 1832 James Bruce entered into partnership with eight separate merchants who did business in Halifax, Pittsylvannia, Charlotte, and Mecklenburg counties (see fig. 1.1). These stores allowed Bruce to expand his business opportunities not only as a merchant, but as a creditor, a role which was

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[7] Charles J. Farmer, In the Absence of Towns: Settlement and Country Trade in Southside Virginia, 1730-1800 (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993) 159-184, esp. 178 and table 6.1 on page 160. Farmer analyzed 936 accounts of 226 stores in Halifax, Mecklenburg, Charlotte, and Pittsylvania counties between the years 1750 and 1800. Farmer found that the stores did three types of business transactions: retailing, cash, and cash/goods/services to third parties. He then determined the percentage of business each store did in these three categories, concluding that payments to third parties accounted for fourteen to twenty-one percent of the value of store business. For an earlier but thorough study of the country store in the antebellum south see L.E. Atherton, The Southern Country Store, 1800-1860 (1949, New York: Greenwood Press, 1968). Atherton estimated that wholesalers charged a 100 to 150 percent mark-up on goods to which southern retailers added a similar advance. See p. 170. On Scottish factors in Virginia see Jacob M. Price, "The Rise of Glasgow in the Chesapeake Tobacco Trade, 1707-1775," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, Vol. XI, No. 2, (April 1954) 179-199; and J.H. Soltow, "Scottish Traders in Virginia, 1750-1775," The Economic History Review, 2nd Series, Vol. XII, Nos. 1, 2 & 3, (1959-60) 83-98.

much more profitable than that of storekeeper. He thus quickly placed himself in a powerful economic position in Southside Virginia. The firm of Bruce & Hagood in Pittsylvania County was typical of all Bruce stores in its extension of credit and its collecting of debts. Generally, a planter could carry credit with the store for one year before the owner made any serious effort to collect or secure the debt. Many customers of Bruce & Hagood who bought on credit fell into chronic debt with the firm and eventually had to offer their real and personal property as collateral. Between 1819 and 1834 seventy-one indebted planters forfeited much of their property to Bruce & Hagood. Together these planters owed $222,650, with an average individual debt of $3,135.91. To settle these debts the planters turned over land, slaves, household goods, and in some cases their crops of tobacco, corn, and wheat. During their fifteen-year partnership, Bruce & Hagood came into possession of 4002 acres, 90 slaves, cattle, and miscellaneous household items.[8]

Planters who bought goods on credit were charged more than those who paid cash for goods. This fact, coupled with the standard 100 to 150 percent mark-up on these goods meant that planters risked forfeiting property to Bruce & Hagood that was worth far more than the firm's original investment in the merchandise. The case of Thomas Martin was typical. Martin owed Bruce and his partner John Hagood $475.82. Martin's property was to be auctioned off in January of 1831 to pay his debt and Martin was afraid that the highest bid still would not fetch enough to cover his debt. He wrote a letter to Bruce pleading

[8] Pittsylvania County Deed Books Index lists seventy-one planters who forfeited property to Bruce and Hagood between September 20, 1819 and February 20, 1832. Each deed was examined to determine amount of debt and type of property forfeited.

patience as he tried to liquidate assets to pay the debt. He implored Bruce not to auction his property:

> there is a parcel of hogs and I have agreed to take $7.00 for them if you are willing as they will not fetch as much at public sale. I have four or five at home and I am in great hopes that you will let me keep them as it is my only chance for a mouthful of meat. If you will let me keep them I shall be very thankful indeed. . . . I am afraid that you won't get as much for the land at public sale as you have been offered and I wish you to sell private if you can.[9]

Martin had bought goods on credit at inflated prices and at the time of the sale of his property, demand for land, slaves, and livestock was very low. He faced the real possibility that, after he sold even the implements which allowed him to make a livelihood, he would still be in debt to Bruce & Hagood. Such circumstances were ideal, however, for those like James Bruce who had capital to invest. When Hardaway Chandler lost everything he owned to the firm of Bruce & Adkisson, James Bruce attended the auction and bought axes, knives, shovels, scythes, pots, bowls, earthenware plates, a set of knives and forks, a pepper mill, a walnut folding table, chests, water stands, feather beds and bedsteads. In total, he paid $816.00 for Chandler's entire personal estate including 120 acres and "one negro boy Lewis" for whom he paid seventy-six dollars.[10]

By the 1811 James Bruce had accumulated sufficient capital to make personal loans himself which he diligently recorded and followed. Like many of the customers at his stores, planters who borrowed from Bruce personally often lost their collateral. When W. H. Shelton defaulted on his loan of $3,800, he

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[9] Thomas Martin to James Bruce, Dec.16, 1830. BFP, FP 1830, UVA.

forfeited his 969-acre plantation and his three slaves. Leonard Claiborne suffered a similar fate. He lost his 710-acre plantation and five slaves when he was unable to repay Bruce's loan of $9,661.00.[11]

Shelton and Claiborne are dramatic examples of the high stakes involved between James Bruce and his creditors. No loan, however, was too small for Bruce, and neither did its timely payment escape his notice. Thomas Spraggins's debt of $103.65 was as diligently pursued as the considerably larger debts of Shelton or Claiborne. As Spraggins fell further behind in his payment, Bruce became increasingly irked by the situation and he wrote a highhanded letter to Spraggins:

> Do you not recollect that I talked of bringing suit? I think you will do right, as I have never found difficulty in settling with you before, though rather slow to pay. . . . you know the moral obligation as well as legal is as strongly binding as in any other contract.[12]

There is some irony in Bruce's lecture to Spraggins on "doing right" and the moral and legal obligations of contracts, for he himself was brought before Richmond's Chancery Court on a charge of usury, a case that was eventually taken to the Virginia Court of Appeals in 1820. The substance of the case was a loan that Bruce made to the Petersburg mercantile firm of Holloway & Hansen in 1811. When Holloway & Hansen found themselves in "pecuniary circumstances" they appealed to James Bruce for a loan which he made them at

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[10]"Acct. of Sales of Hardaway Chandler's Property made by James Adkisson, Trustee" BFP, BP, Dec. 2, 1829, UVA. The sale of Chandler's entire estate brought $977.90. Halifax County Deed Book no. 37 p. 482, Jan. 25, 1830.

[11]Pittsylvania County Deed Book 29/456 and James Bruce to W.H. Shelton, Dec. 3, 1830, BFP, UVA. Pittsylvania County Deed Book 33/357 and James Bruce to Leonard Claiborne's Jan. 13, 1832, BFP, UVA.

[12] James Bruce to Thomas Spraggins, Sept, 24, 1828. Charles Bruce Family Papers, LOC.

eighteen percent interest -- three times the limit allowed by Virginia law. When Holloway died, Bruce tried to collect on the loan, but the executor of Holloway's estate refused to pay, arguing that the loan was usurious and therefore invalid. Although Bruce won his appeal in a three-to-two ruling, the close vote was not deemed precedent setting, and it invited similar cases to be brought before the court in an effort to more fully define the civil law in relation to usury. The two dissenting judges were very dissatisfied with the ruling and believed that the evidence offered by the defense was far from exculpatory . Judge John Roane opined that:

> It is proved . . . , as clearly as human testimony can do, that the transaction was both in its origin and consummation founded in usury. It is equally clearly proved that this was known to the appellee, the chief actor and mover in the business. The appellee should, in my judgment, be made to disgorge his illegal and iniquitous gains and receive only his principal money."[13]

But, he admitted ruefully, "...this is not the opinion of the other judges."

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[13] Taylor, adm'r of Holloway vs. Bruce, Virginia Reports, Vol. 12, (June, 1811) 43-98. Bruce's reputation in business was the subject of speculative conversation for years after his death in 1837. In his diary Hugh Grigsby (1806-1881) of neighboring Charlotte County recounted a conversation with his father-in-law, Col. Clement Carrington (1762-1847), about James Bruce's appeal. Carrington was a contemporary of James Bruce and the uncle of Bruce's second wife, Elivra Cabell Henry. Grigsby wrote: "The Col. said that formerly, around thirty years ago [c. 1810] nobody thought of charging interest on anything but specialties/ that his father [Judge Paul Carrington] never did -- that his father's plan was to renew the bond with interest included every year, but the Mr. [James] Bruce never changed the original bond, but exacted the interest every ninety days. I observed that four-fifths of the present money transactions of the country were illegal -- usurious, that his father's plan above said was usurious. As for Mr. Bruce I said that he must have been bit at some time or other, else he would hardly have been so careful. The Col. said he was bit in purchasing the bonds of Holloway who died. His executor refused to pay the bonds in Mr. Bruce's possession. The case was carried to the Court of Appeals where Mr. Bruce gained his case; three to two judges stood. The explanation of Mr. Bruce was that he found the bonds in market and asked no questions. Judge Roane asked him to say upon oath whether he believed the bonds to have been given in real transactions, or were made on purpose to raise money. Mr. Bruce replied that he found them on market and asked no questions. Roane spoke severely at such mental reservations and Mr. Bruce afterward said that Roane was a very saucy fellow. The Col. said "No sir, Mr. Bruce did not cut a very handsome figure in that affair." See "Diary of Hugh Grigsby", June 11, 1842 to Nov. 12, 1843, p. 271, VHS.

The case is important not only for what it tells about the nature of finance in early Virginia, but for what it reveals about the manner in which James Bruce accumulated so much wealth. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, before Virginia had established a state banking system, Virginians often found themselves, as in the case of Holloway and Hansen, in "pecuniary circumstances." Although credit was often easily obtainable, cash was not readily available. Whether borrowing cash or buying on credit, many Virginians ultimately found themselves vulnerable to less-than-scrupulous lenders and creditors. As a merchant-creditor James Bruce discovered that he could quickly come into possession of real and personal estates at heavily discounted prices. With a little capital, he found that by lending money he could turn a substantial profit and increase his capital exponentially.

With his increased capital Bruce diversified his investments, pursuing ventures that would complement both his agricultural and business interests. This strategy of diversification eventually allowed Bruce fully to integrate his business interests with all aspects of antebellum Virginia's developing economy. Bruce sought out investments at the local, regional, and national levels so that he was involved in every aspect of the economy. In agriculture, Bruce not only produced cash crops himself, he processed and transported them to market. In addition to his thousand-acre home place in Halifax County, Bruce bought three plantations in Mecklenburg County, three in Charlotte County, one Pittsylvania County, one in Campbell County, Upon death of his brother Charles in 1825, he inherited a plantation in Caswell County, North Carolina as well as "Tarover," Charles's home plantation in Halifax County. These were well sited along the

major tributaries of the Roanoke River, the major transportation route from the interior of Southside Virginia to the coast of North Carolina. Together, these nine plantations comprised 12,953 acres (see fig. 1.1). Bruce held an average of thirty-five slaves on each of these plantations. These outlying plantations were called 'quarters' and were run by overseers who reported regularly to Bruce. The primary function of these quarters was, of course, the production of tobacco and wheat for sale to national and international markets. In addition to growing and harvesting these cash crops, Bruce's slaves cultivated corn and raised livestock to feed themselves and their overseers. They also grew flax and cotton, raised sheep, and processed the linen, cotton, and wool for their own clothing.[14]

James Bruce not only produced crops for market, he processed crops and timber for local consumption. He owned a grist mill at Meadsville on the Bannister River and on Terrible Creek in Halifax County as well as one on Turnip Creek in Charlotte County. His mill complexes at Meadsville and Terrible Creek also included a sawmill, cotton gin and carding machine for flax and wool. Bruce hired white mill managers who dealt with customers and kept the books. He also kept a number of slaves at each site and in the case of his Meadsville mill, one slave called "Meadsville Joe" assumed some responsibility for dealing with customers. Like his chain of mercantile stores, Bruce's mills answered a need for services in the local economy.[15]

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[14] Bruce's land and slave holdings were determined through the 1837 Land Tax and Personal Property Tax records for Halifax, Charlotte, Mecklenburg, Pittsylvania and Campbell counties in Virginia, and Caswell County, North Carolina.

[15] For the Meadsville Mills see Halifax County Deed Book 41/315 and 49/109. William Thomas sold 105 acres on Terrible Creek which included the mill to Bruce in 1831. See Halifax County Deed Book 39/229 and 40/62. In 1832 Thomas's widow, Frances, claimed her right of dower from Bruce: See BFP, BP, 1832. Bruce bought the Turnip Creek mill from John Smith in 1824: See Charlotte County Deed Book D17/113. For store managers and slaves see BFP, BP, 1837, UVA.

All planters, including James Bruce, had a vested interest in getting his crops to a larger market. Transporting crops was a major concern. Planters in Tidewater Virginia had always had relatively efficient routes on the many navigable rivers and waterways that traversed the region and fed the Chesapeake Bay. Southside planters, however, had a longer and more difficult terrain to cross to market. The problem for these planters throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was getting their cash crops to market. Transporting anything along the muddy roads of Southside Virginia was arduous at best and treacherous at worst. Planters relied on the Roanoke River and its tributary to carry their produce to coastal ports for processing and shipment to national and international markets. With some help from the State Assembly, private citizens began to organize ventures aimed at improving Virginia's inland roads and waterways.[16]

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[16] Throughout the colonial and early national periods, Virginia's road system was established and maintained at the county level. Counties levied taxes to survey and build roads only within their jurisdiction. As a result, there was no comprehensive road system intended to link regions or trade routes. Counties were rarely able to raise enough revenue to maintain their roads and contemporaries constantly complained of the poor condition of roads. After the Revolution, George Washington and James Madison proposed schemes for state-funded roads, but the State Assembly preferred to concentrate on improvement of the states rivers as major transportation arteries. In 1785 the Assembly established the precedent of private enterprises to undertake works of internal improvement when it chartered the James River and Potomac companies. In 1795 the same principle was applied to road building when the state chartered the Fairfax and Loudon Road Company. By 1808, Virginia had three turnpike companies which together had fewer than twenty-five miles of graveled road. In contrast, New York had twenty-eight turnpike companies and nine hundred miles of toll road. Private companies were unable to raise sufficient capital and the state was unwilling to offer financial aid or investment itself. Finally in 1816 the State Assembly established the Internal Improvement Fund and its administrative body, The Board of Public Works. This act encouraged state oversight and a regularization of plans to connect the state's internal transportation system. The act also helped navigation companies, and later railroads, to raise capital with state financing based on projected revenues of the chartered companies. See Philip Morrison Rice, "Internal Improvements in Virginia, 1775-1860," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1948: 39-54, 148-165.

Several companies formed to exploit the river system that reached deep into Virginia's western counties. By improving the rivers and building canals, these companies hoped to turn a profit by transporting goods. In 1815 the State Assembly granted a charter to the Roanoke Navigation Company which stated its purpose to be improving the navigability of the Roanoke River from Roanoke, Virginia to southeast Atlantic port towns in North Carolina's Albemarle Sound. The company planned to dredge the river's shallow places and to build canals and locks at the fall line, Weldon, North Carolina. James Bruce was a founding board member of the Roanoke Navigation Company and, as required of board members, he immediately subscribed to stock in the Roanoke Navigation Company.[17]

Virginia's State Assembly also chartered new towns on the interior rivers in an attempt to encourage economic development. James Bruce was one of the petitioners for a new town called "Meadesville" located at the falls of the Bannister River, a major tributary of the Roanoke. The Bannister River drained the interiors of Pittsylvania and Halifax counties and the town was well sited to receive and process goods on their way to market. Bruce realized an opportunity to increase his business and in addition to his mill complex, he bought nine of the town's forty-three lots on which he built a store and several houses.[18]

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[17] Rice, "Internal Improvements," 223-234. A rail line from Petersburg to Weldon later rendered the Albemarle Sound route useless, but the Roanoke Navigation Company considered the rail link to the larger port of Petersburg more desirable since it relieved the company of maintaining its system beyond Weldon.

[18] For the holdings of James Bruce in Meadsville, see Halifax County Deed Books: 21/438; 25/337; 33/342; 36/374; 36/651; 38/101. Meadsville Mills were transferred in Halifax County Deed Book 41/315 and 49/109. In 1797 more than 1,100 citizens of Halifax, Pittsylvania, Henry, and Patrick Counties petitioned the state assembly to establish a town and tobacco inspection

Meadesville was located about half way along the Roanoke River's route from Roanoke, Virginia to North Carolina's Albemarle Sound. Weldon, North Carolina was located at the falls of the Roanoke where the bateaux from the interior unloaded their goods for portage to boats below the falls. Weldon promised to be an important nexus in the transportation of goods through the Roanoke River Valley and James Bruce invested heavily in real estate in the town, buying seventeen of its ninety-four lots and one hundred shares in the Weldon Toll Bridge Company which linked Southside Virginia and eastern North Carolina. Bruce built a store, warehouse, and dwelling in Weldon.[19]

Crucial to these investments in Meadesville and Weldon was the success of the Roanoke Navigation Company. Bruce not only sat on the company's Board of Directors and lobbied Virginia's State Assembly for funds, he invested heavily in the venture. The Company was a private venture, but public funds were invested to help provide stability and to inspire public confidence in the scheme. The Bank of Virginia and the states of Virginia and North Carolina owned 38 percent of the company's stock. James Bruce held perhaps the largest personal investment. He owned 306 shares in the company, or 9.2 percent of all

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point called Meadsville at the Great Falls of the Bannister River. The site was near the main road from Charleston, South Carolina and Philadelphia and it already supported a ferry and a flour mill and sawmill. The petitioners proposed navigational improvements around the falls at this site which would allow a shallow boat to carry as many as fifteen hogsheads of tobacco all the way to the port town of Edenton, North Carolina. The petitioners stated that such improvements in transportation would "open markets for many articles that will not bear a land carriage." See Legislative Petitions, Halifax County, December 6, 1797. Between 1791 and 1798 the State Assembly established twelve towns, eight with tobacco inspection, in Southside Virginia. See Samuel Shepherd, ed., The Statutes at Large of Virginia, (Richmond, 1835), Vol. 2, p. 120.

[19] BFP, BP, 1819, 1829, 1830, UVA. A map of Weldon showing Bruce's lots in the town is in BFP, UVA, Box 20, "Sketches". Bruce carries on an extensive correspondence with Thomas Bragg, Sr., a builder in Weldon, NC concerning the specifications for his Weldon store. See James Bruce Letter Books, 2692 A, BFP, UVA.

the stock owned by individuals. Bruce's investment proved wise. His stock eventually yielded dividends of $1.31 per share. At the time of his death in 1838, he received $400.28 a year in dividend income, twice the amount he paid to each of the overseers at four of his plantations.[20]

In order to maximize his potential profit on this improved river system, James Bruce operated his own bateau company using three slaves as boatmen. Thus Bruce was involved in every aspect of the local, regional, and national economy. His mercantile stores made him an integral part of the local and regional merchandising business. Along with those of his neighbors, his plantations produced crops which his mills processed, and his boats carried this produce to markets and depots where it was stored in his warehouses or sold in his stores.[21] Bruce did not confine his real estate investments to the Roanoke River Valley, or even to Virginia. In Lynchburg, he bought a substantial lumber house built of stone and in the county seats of Halifax and Mecklenburg counties, he bought stores to house his mercantile businesses. In Richmond, he bought six lots, three of which had been improved with brick houses. On a fourth lot Bruce built two lumber houses where he sold building supplies. Bruce owned unimproved land in North Carolina and Kentucky and he joined in speculation

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[20] Rice, "Internal Improvements," 237-239. The state of Virginia owned twenty percent of the RNC stock, the state of North Carolina owned thirteen percent, The city of Norfolk owned five percent. The rest was held by private individuals in Virginia and North Carolina. Receipts for four of Bruce's overseers are found in BFP, BP, 1839, UVA. He paid James Bradshaw $200 for his services as overseer at his Staunton River plantation in Charlotte County. Bruce owned two other plantations in Charlotte County, but overseer receipts do no survive. He paid Eli Stone $250 as overseer at his Pittsylvania County plantation of Ware's and his adjoining plantation in Caswell County, North Carolina Wolf Island. William Younger got $125 and Bezaled Ray $200 for services on the Halifax County plantations of Branch Quarter and River Quarter respectively. Unaccounted for his Bruce's homeplace, Woodbourne for which no receipt has been found in any year.

of newly opened lands to the south and west. He bought land in Alabama, and he briefly considered buying land in Iowa with his business partner James Easley.[22]

As a merchant and investor James Bruce was keenly aware of the need for a national banking system that would facilitate access to capital. Bruce was an early supporter of the Bank of the United States, and unlike many of his fellow Virginians, he advocated the opening of its branches in Richmond and Norfolk. Not only did he work for the establishment of these branches, he sought the investment advice of Thomas Biddle and brother of the Bank's president Nicholas Biddle. Bruce bought $30,000 worth of stock in the Bank of the United States and on Biddle's advice he bought $22,000 worth of bonds in the State of Pennsylvania and $30,000 worth of Baltimore City bonds. In Virginia, Bruce held 594 shares in the Bank of Virginia valued at $100 each and 763 shares in Farmers Bank valued at $100 each. He bought $30,000 worth of bonds issued by the City of Richmond, $75,500 worth of bonds issued by the State of Virginia. Bruce's

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[21]James Bruce makes his first reference to his bateaux company in 1815. His son James C. Bruce continues this business until his death in 1864. See BFP, BP, 1815-1850, UVA.

[22] Bruce & Sydnor operated stores in Halifax and Mecklenburg counties. In 1817 Bruce bought a half-acre lot next to the courthouse in Halifax for $1,000. Halifax County Deed Book 26/645. In 1822 Bruce paid $2,000 for a lot in Mecklenburg's county seat Boydton. The deeds state that stores already stood on the sites. Mecklenburg County Deed Book 19/339. In 1838 James C. Bruce acquired six more lots in Boydton as his father's executor from Thomas Well who owed James Bruce $3,600. Mecklenburg County Deed Book 28/104, Dec. 20, 1838. James Bruce's Richmond property is recorded in Richmond City Deed Books: 7/38, 15/348, 16/364, 16/366, 16/368, 17/563. The houses on E, H, and I Streets were insured by the Mutual Assurance Society and recorded in plats, see: "Declarations of the Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia," Microfilm #5794, Reel 13, nos. 6818-6821. On Bruce's Alabama lands see Thomas Childress to James Bruce, May 6, 1833, BFP, UVA. On Bruce's business partner James Easley and his speculative ventures in Iowa see Robert P. Swierenga, Pioneers and Profits: Land Speculation on the Iowa Frontier, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1968), 158-60.

total investment in Virginia institutions alone was $241,200 which yielded him an annual dividend income of $14,472.[23]

Another major investment by James Bruce, and perhaps his most costly in both fiscal and moral terms, was slaves. At the time of his death, 284 slaves worked on his eleven plantations, at his stores and mills, and on his bateaux. Bruce rarely saw the slaves on his out lying quarters and he left his overseers in charge of all aspects of daily operations. In his stores and mills, Bruce's slaves hauled goods by wagon, loaded and unloaded produce and products, and generally assisted in operations. At least two slaves were skilled as millers and one slave, "Meadesville Joe," was trusted with keeping a store in Meadesville. Bruce's most trusted slaves served as boatmen in his bateau company. These slaves not only loaded and unload goods at the docks, they navigated the cargo down the river through its locks and canals to Weldon. Without white supervision, these slaves conducted business along the entire route of the Roanoke, arranging for and accepting payments and giving receipts. Bruce's boatmen enjoyed an autonomy that his other slaves rarely, if ever, knew.[24]

Another group of slaves who had a similar autonomy were those skilled at a trade. In 1836 he hired out two coopers, nine carpenters, two stone masons, two blacksmiths, two waiters, one store servant, and one miller. The fact that Bruce hired out these skilled slaves indicates that other slaves with similar skills

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[23] James Bruce to Thomas Biddle, Sept. 29, 1829, Feb. 8, 1830, Dec. 22, 1831, BFP, UVA. James Bruce's stock holdings are listed in his will. Halifax County Will Book 18/183. For a history of banking in antebellum Virginia, see George Talmage Starnes, "A History of Banking in Virginia prior to 1860," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1925. Starnes lists the dividends paid by four banks chartered before 1856. The average dividend paid by the Bank of Virginia and the Farmer's Bank of Virginia between 1804 and 1837 was 6.2 percent. See page 174.

already were employed on his plantations and businesses. Enslaved African-Americans represented a considerable investment for Bruce and he profited directly from both skilled and unskilled slave labor. Bruce also profited indirectly from the slave economy in general. As a board member of the Roanoke Navigation Company Bruce approved the purchase of forty slaves who were set to work digging canals and locks at various locations along the Roanoke. When additional unskilled labor was needed the company hired slaves by the month.[25]

James Bruce had so many slaves working at various tasks and locations that it was impossible for him to have any meaningful interaction with or understanding for their welfare. In at least one instance he literally lost track. One slave, Connie, whom he and his business partner Thomas Hagood had acquired sometime before 1820 in a foreclosure. Evidently Bruce and Hagood had hired the woman out. By 1857, nineteen years after James Bruce's death, she had been lost in the shuffle and her "guardian" John Forbes wrote to James C. Bruce that

> the old woman Connie owned by Bruce and Hagood is still at my house and wishes to remain with me. I have kept her up to the first of January for $20.00 per annum at which time I informed Dr. Atkisson that I would have to charge more. Dr. Atkisson said he wished her to continue where she is and that you would do right. The old woman is almost helpless and needs waiting on. I thought $30.00 per year would not be too much and I can keep her for that as she wants to stay. I haven't received anything for the last two years and being pressed for money, if it suits your convenience, I would be glad.[26]

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[24] In his correspondence James Bruce refers in passing to slaves who work on his plantations and in his businesses. See James Bruce Letter Book, 2692 A, BFP, UVA.

[25] For a list of the skilled slaves that Bruce hired out see the codicil to his will dated Oct. 3, 1836 in BFP, BP, 1836, UVA. On the purchase and hire of unskilled slaves by the Roanoke Navigation Company see Rice, "Internal Improvements in Virginia", 446-452.

[26] John Forbes to James C. Bruce, Feb. 25, 1857, BFP, UVA.

In executing his father's will James Coles Bruce had left Connie in the employ of the man who originally hired her. Rather than assume direct responsibility for Connie when she became infirm James C. Bruce arranged for her to stay under the care of Forbes. Like his father, however, James C. Bruce found himself with a surfeit of enslaved labor and he forgot about Connie's existence altogether. In March Bruce paid Forbes the money due him, but Forbes wrote again in August, this time informing him of Connie's death and charging him $3.50 for providing her a shroud and coffin and $1.56 for digging her grave.[27]

James Bruce was keenly aware of the economic forces that were shaping antebellum Virginia, and he spent his life shrewdly building an agricultural and business empire that reached far beyond his home in Halifax County. He was a man who was in control of his destiny. Old Connie, on the other hand, knew little of the machinations of the market economy, except that much of that economy depended on the forced labor of people like herself. Old Connie spent her life in the constant knowledge that powerful people like Bruce could go bankrupt or die, leaving her fate in the hands of yet another master or mistress.

Although court records provide some clues to the circumstances of slaves and poor whites in antebellum Virginia, the historical record for this segment of society is not extensive. If not for the personal papers that James Bruce and his son kept, the lives of people like Old Connie and Thomas Martin would remain obscure in the history of antebellum Virginia. Martin's plea to Bruce for "a mouthful of meat" and John Forbes's enigmatic sketch of Old Connie's life are

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[27] Receipt, John Forbes to James C. Bruce, March 7, 1857. John Forbes to James C. Bruce, Aug. 30, 1857, BFP, BP, 1857, UVA.

evidence a much larger drama that James Bruce effected in his personal and business affairs. James Bruce's influence over people like Martin and Old Connie continued long after his death as his son James Coles Bruce settled the estate.

James Bruce fell ill in 1835 and he made several trips to Philadelphia to seek remedies. The only clue to his illness is from his son James C. Bruce who wrote that doctors at the University of Pennsylvania were treating his father for a "facial ulcer," which might have been melanoma. Whatever his condition, James Bruce had sought out the most advanced treatment for the time at the best-known medical institution in the country. In spite of the best medical care, his condition worsened. James C. Bruce accompanied his father on his last trip to Philadelphia in the winter of 1837. James Bruce died there May 12 in his seventy-fifth year and was buried in St. Andrew's Cemetery.[28]

When Bruce's will was probated in Halifax County, it was bonded for $3 million -- a testament to the old man's business acumen and acquisitiveness. The provisions he made in his will assured his wife and children a secure future in the economic and social life of Virginia. To his wife Elvira, Bruce gave a dower interest in his home plantation Woodburn and his Campbell County plantation called "Long Island." Elvira Bruce also received the dividends of 750 shares of bank, canal, and other stocks which gave her an annual income of $5,040.00. At her death, Elvira Bruce's share of the estate was to be divided among their children. Bruce made his son, James C. Bruce guardian of his sisters and brother and provided the three youngest children with land, slaves, and investments that not only guaranteed their economic security and independence but assured them

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[28] James C. Bruce to Eliza Bruce, Feb. 12, 1837, BFP, UVA. Virginia Historical Magazine, Vol. XI, No. 4, (April 1904) 331.

a place among antebellum Virginia's elite families where they could make suitable marriages. Ellen and Sarah Bruce inherited the Mecklenburg County plantations. Ellen received the Roanoke and Baker's Island plantations which consisted of 1,659 acres, fifty slaves, and livestock, and Sarah the Monteparo estate with 1,100 acres, fifty slaves and livestock. Charles Bruce inherited the Charlotte County plantation on the Staunton River which consisted of 3,603 acres, one hundred slaves, and livestock, and a mill complex consisting of a grist and sawmill, cotton gin, and carding machine. The stocks and bonds that Ellen, Sarah, and Charles received also brought them $1,103.06 in annual income.[29]

James C. Bruce received the bulk of his father's estate, which was in addition to the land and slaves that James Bruce had settled on his son at the time of his marriage. In 1831 James Bruce had given them the two plantations he had inherited from his brother Charles in 1825: Tarover, the 1,500-acre home plantation in Halifax County, and Ware's Place, the 1,100-acre quarter in Pittsylvania County. At his father's death, James C. Bruce inherited a thousand-acre plantation called "Wolf Island" on the Dan River in Caswell County, North Carolina. In Halifax County, James C. Bruce received five hundred acres called "Halifax Quarter" on the Staunton River, a 250-acre tract called "Poplar Forest," and Boyd's Tract, five hundred acres near his father's home plantation of Woodburn. James C. inherited 125 slaves in addition to the fifty slaves his father gave him when he married. The stocks and bonds that James C. Bruce inherited

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[29] Halifax County Will Book 18/183. Annual income from stocks and bonds was calculated at 61/2 percent interest, the average dividend of Virginia bank stocks and bonds for the period. See Starnes, "Banking in Virginia," 174

provided him $3,510.00 in annual income. To his five grandsons, the children of James C., James Bruce left $6,000 each.[30]

James Bruce made no provision in his will for the continuation of his mercantile business. He instructed his executor to sell his stores to his partners and to liquidate stock in ventures he deemed no longer profitable. He also divested himself of real estate holdings in Halifax County, Lynchburg, Weldon, Meadsville, and Richmond. Bruce had no illusions that his sons had either the inclination or interest in continuing their father's business interests. Charles was too young to consider such a career, and while James C. had proved his talent for investment, he never took an active role in his father's mercantile concerns.

James C. Bruce wrote the epitaph for his father's tombstone. The text is typically laudatory, but seems even romantic in its sentimentalization of the relationship between father and son. The old man might have been flattered, even touched, by the deep feelings his son expressed. But it is unlikely that James Bruce himself ever would have indulged in such sentiment. Certainly his own correspondence never articulated such feelings. He was a stern and sensible man, not given to indulging his emotions whether they were of anger, affection, or delight. James Bruce was the product of a different generation and time -- a period in Virginia's history when familial relations seldom involved elaborate expressions of love and affection.[31] The epitaph that James C. Bruce wrote speaks as much to his own sentimental understanding of the relationship with his father as it does to his father's character and accomplishments:

> His well balanced mind, correct judgment, temperate, systematic and diligent habits, sterling integrity, equable temper and dignified

[30] Ibid.

[31] Lewis, Pursuit of Happiness, 72-85.

simplicity of manner challenged respect, inspired confidence and conciliated affection. Faithful and disinterested in friendship, he delicately shrank from notoriety in fulfilling his offices, and in the ministration of charity he sought no reward but the luxury of doing good. A tender and affectionate husband, kind and diligent parent, a useful citizen and upright magistrate, he died a firm believer in the truth of the Christian religion and in the humble hope of participating in the joy promised to such hereafter.[32]

[32] Inscription on James Bruce's tombstone, Bruce Family Cemetery, Berry Hill Plantation. Also printed in Kenneth Harvey Cook, "Bruce Family Cemetery," Virginia Genealogical Society Quarterly, Vol. 12, No. 4, (Oct. 1974) 121-126.

Chapter Two: James C. Bruce

James C. Bruce came of age during a period of great social, economic, and political changes in Virginia. The fortune he inherited from his father was built through shrewd anticipation of trends in shifting economic forces. Despite a brief decline in agricultural output and a general malaise among Virginia's old elite, the state's economy expanded dramatically during the 1820 and 1830s as new institutions began to unify an increasingly national economy. James C. Bruce followed his father's economic strategy, increasing his fortune and laying a secure foundation for his family's future.

James Coles Bruce was born January 26, 1806 at his father's plantation Woodburn in Halifax County, Virginia. He was the first child of James and Sally Coles Bruce to survive infancy. Sally Coles died four months after the boy was born and little is known of how the young boy faired without maternal presence. When his father married Elvira Cabell Henry in 1819, the young boy already knew her as his mother's aunt by marriage. The young Bruce and his step mother quickly formed bonds of respect and genuine affection which lasted until Elvira Bruce's death in 1858.[1]

In 1821 James Bruce sent his son to Hampden-Sydney College, a Prince Edward County institution which James Bruce served as trustee and patron. After two years the young man transferred to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where he followed the uniform classical course of studies and

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[1] Bruce Family Genealogy, Virginia Historical Magazine, Vol. 11, No. 4 (1904) 328-332; Brown, Cabells and Their Kin, 190-200, 324-327. Correspondence between James C. Bruce and his step-mother indicate that each admired and respected the other. For some examples, see JB to ECHB, March 6, 1826; Jan. 24, 1843; BFP, UVA.

graduated in 1825. The young man was inspired by the histories he read of Greek city states and the Roman republic and decided he would study law and enter politics. He hoped to continue the tradition established by Virginia's great statesmen, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe, and to lead a life of public service.[2]

Bruce was a good and diligent student, but he found Chapel Hill more pedestrian than he had expected. He longed for the excitement of a large and sophisticated city where his intellectual curiosity would be fully stimulated. Upon graduation, Bruce convinced his father to send him to Harvard to study law. The great distance and the lack of closer supervision disturbed the elder Bruce and created some strain in the relationship with his son. Perhaps the old man was anxious over the separation. Whatever his true concerns, the elder Bruce expressed his concerns in a manner typical to him: he criticized his son's financial affairs. The old man admonished his son for spending too much money in his pursuit of Boston society and implied that while his son was doing well in his studies, his distractions there were too numerous and too expensive. The young Bruce, responded defensively to his father: "I informed you I was living here as a gentleman, somewhat expensively, I now make renewal of the same confession. But I do most solemnly declare to you that I have in no case transcended that limit -- dissipation and extravagance I have never entered into." In another reaction to paternal oversight, Bruce assured his father "[y]our money has never been the minister of vice or immorality, and on my return I

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[2] Hampden-Sydney Record, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Summer-Fall 1967) 1-4. Hampden-Sydney was established in 1775. James Bruce served as trustee from 1805 to 1830. He donated to the college stock in the Bank of Virginia and with the other trustees commissioned in 1824 the building of Cushing Hall, a four-story building with forty-eight student rooms and five classrooms. James C. Bruce describes his studies and aspirations in letters to his father and step-mother. See JB to

will give you a minute account of all my expenditures." Although James Bruce had agreed to his son's plans to go north for further education, he did so reluctantly and with some resentment. The correspondence between father and son during this period reveals a tension between two strong-willed individuals. If James Bruce had learned anything in his business career, it was the danger of falling into debt, and he feared that, absent his close supervision, his son would develop extravagant, unaffordable habits. The old man kept close watch on his son's finances and few items escaped his disapproving judgment. James C. Bruce found his father's parsimonious letters annoying and provincial, and when James Bruce criticized a purchase of expensive books his son wrote defensively that "I cannot be convinced that the books you consider an extravagance come under that heading. So desirous am I to possess them that I would deprive myself of necessities." James C. Bruce would eventually build his library to twelve hundred volumes ranging in subject matter from art to zoology, a testament to his love of learning. Although he clearly resented his father's scrutiny of his expenditures, James C. Bruce followed his father as a careful, prudent investor and, later, as a strict overseer of his own son's finances.[3]

Elvira Bruce, however, encouraged her step son's exploration of northern society and asked him for details of the concerts and plays he attended. The

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JCB, July 12, 1823; Jan 30, 1826; April 20, 1826; May 14, 1826; July 8, 1828; JCB to ECB, March 6, 1826. BFP, UVA.

[3] John Goodall Bruce, The Bruce Family Descending from George Bruce (1650-1715), (Parsons, West Virginia: McClain Printing Company, 1977), 99. James C. Bruce graduated from the University of North Carolina fourteenth in a class of thirty-nine. He did not receive a degree from Harvard. James C. Bruce attended the University of Virginia the academic year of 1828-29. Before 1831 the University of Virginia did not grant degrees, but did issue 'certificates of proficiency.' There is no record, however, that a certificate was issued for James C. Bruce. For a history of the University of Virginia, see Philip A. Bruce, University of Virginia, (New York:

young man responded enthusiastically to her inquiries and invited her to visit him in Boston, an invitation she declined, citing her dislike of travel. Bruce valued his social experiences in the urban north which he considered part of his education, and these included not only attending concerts and plays, but also participating in the fashionable trend of exploring and experiencing nature. Roaming the countryside in and around Boston was the beginning of a life-long interest for James C. Bruce. During his outings he began to develop a keen eye for observing the natural world and for evaluating human attempts to order that world. He would later apply these skills in his efforts to improve both the fertility and beauty of his own lands. After an excursion to Niagara Falls he wrote his step mother that "I should be very much ashamed never to have seen so stupendous a work of nature. How anyone who has ever read anything can be so void of curiosity as to remain at home and to limit his ideas to his own country, I cannot conceive."[4]

During his college career from 1821 to 1826, James C. Bruce sought to prove himself a capable manager both of his money and his time. The young man did well at Harvard and he was able to write his father that "with all your prejudices against a northern education, you shall be fully satisfied." After a year in the north, however, he tired of the contentious relations with his father and decided to return to Virginia where he enrolled at the University of Virginia and continued his study of law. Yet the young man's plans continued to suffer the disfavor of his father. He wanted to travel through Europe in order "to acquire

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Macmillan, 1920). JB to JCB, July 12, 1823; Jan 30, 1826; April 20, 1826; May 14, 1826; July 8, 1828;

a better knowledge of the practical operations of different governments" and to quench his "thirst for miscellaneous information." His father strongly opposed this plan and refused to fund any such trip. When the young Bruce then proposed a summer trip north to visit friends, his father suggested he go instead to one of the Springs of Virginia. The son responded:

> I am unfortunate in my plans. Anything like pleasure, papa, in your eyes is always clothed with the horrid form of the Gorgan and I verily believe that the most useful scheme or undertaking if tainted by a drop of pleasure would be abandoned as useless and unprofitable. You seem to think that pleasure is morally like usury -- it will taint a whole transaction. But to this I submit as the slightest intimation of your wishes on such subjects shall be law to me.[5]

James C. Bruce finished the term at the University of Virginia and came back to Halifax County with the thought of practicing law. At home again, the relationship between father and son greatly improved and James Bruce began to teach his son business and to help him prepare for a career in politics, a plan that the elder Bruce fully approved. He also arranged for his son to meet Eliza Douglas Wilkins the daughter of one of his business clients, William Wyche Wilkins, a wealthy planter from Northampton County, North Carolina. The young couple married on July 21, 1829 at the home of Eliza's father. James and Eliza Bruce returned to Halifax County and started housekeeping at Tarover, the fifteen-hundred-acre plantation on the Dan River that James Bruce had inherited from his brother Charles. They began life together in very comfortable circumstances. Eliza Bruce's father had given the newly weds $10,000 which her

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[4] JCB to ECHB, March 6, 1826. BFP, UVA. For the rise of nineteenth-century 'tourism' see: Charlene Marie Lewis, "Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society at the Virginia Springs, 1790-1860," Ph.D. Dissertation, 1998, University of Virginia.

[5] JCB to JB, May 14, 1826; Feb. 8, 1828; Feb. 14, 1828; BFP, UVA.

husband immediately invested in bank stock, and 40 slaves and after the young husband had proved himself a capable and reliable manager, his father deeded him and Eliza both Tarover and Ware's Place, the eleven-hundred-acre plantation on the Dan River in Pittsylvania County, another legacy from Charles Bruce. With these deeds of gift came forty-four slaves at Tarover and twenty-five slaves at Wares, as well as horses and other livestock. With two well established and productive plantations, good educations, gifts and legacies, the young Bruces stepped into the roles for which their parents had prepared them in Virginia society.[6]

As a member of Halifax County's elite with ties of business and kinship to influential families, James C. Bruce was positioned to carry out his plan for a career in public service and in 1831 he made a bid for a seat in Virginia's State Assembly. Politics in Virginia during the first quarter of the nineteenth century had changed little since colonial days. Election to the State Assembly was strictly a local matter and candidates were judged more for their personal characteristics and reputation than for their stand on state or national issues. A relatively small group of wealthy men ran the nomination process and it was more important to gain the confidence of this influential few than it was to appeal to a large

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[6] The marriage record and details of the marriage of James C. Bruce and Eliza Douglas Bruce is recorded in William Wyche Wilkins Bible Transcript, Wilkins Papers, UNC, SHC, and JCB to JB, July 19, 1829, BFP, UVA. William Wilkins and James Bruce had business dealings as early as 1825 when Bruce sent Wilkins sixty bushels of cottonseed. Wilkins's son, William, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1825 and probably referred James Bruce to Philadelphia doctors during his later illness. See JB to William Wilkins, Wilkins Papers, UNC SHC, May 3, 1825. For gifts to James C. and Eliza Bruce see the will of William Wyche Wilkins, Will Book 4, 222-224, Northampton County, North Carolina; and Halifax County Deed Book 38/441. Pittsylvania County Deed Book 32/434. James Bruce gave his son power of attorney to represent him in the Bank of Virginia and Farmer's Bank saying that "my chief motive is that I have confidence in your discretion and it will give you

segment of voters. Campaigning was informal and unorganized, and candidates relied on endorsements from respected county leaders as much as they did on their own personal appeals to voters. With endorsements from the county's leaders James C. Bruce's election to the State Assembly was virtually assured and in the spring elections of 1831, Halifax County voters sent the twenty-five-year-old Bruce and his contemporary William Sims to Richmond as their representatives.[7]

James C. Bruce began his political career during a time of transition in Virginia politics; terms of political selections were changing. Beginning in the early 1830s and continuing through the antebellum period, political parties formed in Virginia over issues of national importance that directly affected local voting patterns. In addition to slavery, tariffs, and secession, which were national issues with local ramifications, Virginians grappled with issues of public finance, internal improvements, and the franchise. Virginia's voters began to judge candidates for their stands on these issues and the relatively closed political process that James C. Bruce knew and relied on for maintaining his office began to change dramatically during his tenure in the state house.[8]

The year before the young Bruce took his seat in the House of Delegates, the Assembly had ratified a new state constitution after a contentious debate that

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information and experience in the ramifications of our banking institutions which may be worth something to you as a politician." See JB to JCB, Dec. 18, 1832, BFP, UVA.

[7] For an account of the political process in nineteenth-century Virginia see William Shade, Democratizing the Old Virginia, 165-70. William G. shade, "Society and Politics in Antebellum Virginia's Southside," Journal of Southern History, Vol. 53, (1987): 163-93; John T. Schlotterbeck, "The 'Social Economy' of an Upper South Community: Orange and Greene Counties, Virginia, 1815-1860," in Orville Vernon Burton and Robert McMath, eds., Class Consensus, and Community, (Westport, Conn., 1982), 3. James C. Bruce's election and re-election were reported in the Richmond Enquirer April 27, 1831; May 3, 1832; April 30, 1833.

[8] Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 17-50.

revealed a growing intrastate conflict between the eastern and western parts of the state over apportionment and the franchise. The Constitutional Convention of 1829 centered on such divisive issues as the franchise, representation based on population, and free election of governor and judges. Although the resulting Constitution of 1830 provided for a modest extension of the franchise to include all householders, it did not address apportionment or free elections of local and state offices. The Constitution of 1830 was a triumph of gentry rule and conservatism and it left unresolved the sectional conflict within Virginia. Deeply dissatisfied with the new constitution, voters in the western half of the state elected a group of young, energetic reformers to the Assembly in 1831. James C. Bruce entered the state house in the midst of divisive issues and ideas that would dominate political discourse in Virginia for the next thirty years. [9]

Although elected in the spring of 1831, Bruce and other Assembly members did not convene to conduct the state's business until December of that year. In the interim, events thrust upon the Assembly an issue that would dominate most of its winter session. On August 22 Nat Turner led a slave revolt in Southampton County, killing sixty whites, most of them women and children. Turner's group of rebels numbered only about seventy and the insurrection was put down in two days. The fear of slave rebellion, however, always lurked under the smooth facade that Southerners presented to the world and the psychological impact -- the fear, panic, and suspicion raised among all whites -- was, predictably, much larger and long-lasting than one small band of insurgents might have warranted. The repercussions of the rebellion reverberated

[9] Ibid., 65-76.

throughout Virginia for the next four months, and when the Assembly convened in December for its regular session, there ensued a heated debate over slavery that forced Virginians to consider the nature of their society and the fate of those they held in bondage. It was a remarkable period in the history of the state and of the South, as men like James C. Bruce grappled with the moral and legal question of slavery.[10]

The young legislator prudently sought the advice of the leading men in Halifax County, asking for both their personal opinions on slavery and their sense of where his constituency stood on the issue. With one exception, all of his friends replied that the voters of Halifax County would consider no plan for emancipation. On January 19, Bruce rose to deliver a speech outlining both his own views and the views of his constituents, saying "I do not stand here as an advocate for slavery. I see, and feel too, the evils of the system. I justify it on the grounds of necessity." In the context of the debate, "evil" meant a social and economic condition that hurt all whites -- slaveholders and non-slaveholders alike. Like most slaveowners, Bruce was reluctant to consider the moral ramifications of slavery, but he did have close friends who urged him to vote for emancipation for moral reasons. William Ballard Preston, son of former governor James Preston and nephew of the incumbent governor John Floyd, proposed a plan for emancipation and urged Bruce to vote with him. Bruce's

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[10] On slave debates in VA. see Joseph P. Robert, "The Road From Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832," in Historical Papers of the Trinity College Historical Society, Series XXIV, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1941) esp. 1-32. Robert defined 'evil' by analyzing the contexts in which the word was used during the debates. In the larger context of southern slavery, Virginia was the only state to publicly debate this issue of slavery. In the Deep South, no public debate was even considered. On the similarities and differences on attitudes toward slavery in the South see Clement Eaton, The Mind of the Old South, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, revised edition, 1981) 13-24.

Halifax County friend William Clark wrote encouraging him to stand with Preston. He noted that Halifax County people were against emancipation but that "public sentiment might be changed by a man of energy and talents who would openly advocate it." Clark implied that the young legislator lacked the moral conviction to vote for freeing the slaves. Bruce's father, in his typical frank fashion, echoed other influential Halifax slaveholders who corresponded with his son when he wrote that he hoped "the people will turn out on their next election these young men who have proved rash and wreckless with the property of others."[11]

In the end, James C. Bruce considered himself representative of the majority of slaveowners who lamented the problem of slavery but offered no solutions. In the end, as William Clark suggested, Bruce lacked the "energy and talents" to advocate emancipation, and he urged Ballard and others to drop their resolution for emancipation:

> You are exciting in the minds of our black population hopes that can never be realized. You are holding up to their deluded eyes, the torch of liberty, which glimmers for a moment, and is then obscured forever. Their happiness is converted to misery and their content is changed to discontent, and soon this ripens into rebellion. For their sakes, then, if not for ours, I beg, gentlemen, to push this matter no farther.[12]

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[11] For Bruce's speech, see The Richmond Enquirer, January 19, 1831. William Ballard Preston proposed a plan for gradual emancipation that would free all slaves born after 1840 when they reached the age of eighteen. Bruce found the plan wanting and cited the U.S. Constitution, saying that "private property shall not be taken for public uses without just compensation." Bruce felt that slaveowners, after having raised and cared for slaves under this plan, would not have realized their investment at date of emancipation. Bruce wrote the leading slaveholders of Halifax County asking for their opinions and for their sense of Halifax voters on the issue of slavery. Their replies were overwhelmingly against emancipation, with the exception of William Clark. See William Clark to JCB, Dec. 21, 1831; Thomas H. Arnett to JCB, Dec. 28, 1831 and Jan. 23, 1832; James Chalmers to JCB, Feb. 22, 1832; James Easley to JCB, March 8, 1832; JB to JCB, Feb. 3, 1832, BFP, UVA.

The historic debates in Virginia over slavery forced slaveholders like Bruce to justify slavery and to prove that their ownership was just and humane; public debate spawned public rhetoric which affected personal behavior in slaveholders. Bruce's participation in the debates and his conversations with men like Preston and Clark. The debate and James C. Bruce's participation in it did have an ameliorating effect on Bruce's attitude toward his slaves. Bruce was typically paternalistic in his contention that the lot of the slaves was a happy one as long as they were not tempted by impossible dreams of freedom. He was typical also in his belief that God had ordained the social and economic order of the slave states, and that slaveowners had solemn duties to the slaves whom God had entrusted to their care.

James C. Bruce did not have to make difficult choices when considering the issues before the Assembly that winter. His defense of slavery was, of course, predictable and it was an easy path to follow given the position his constituents took on the issue. Even his opponents acknowledged Bruce's skills at oratory, and his speech impressed and reassured the county's voters that they had chosen well. Bruce had proved himself to both the political leadership and his constituents in Halifax County and they showed their approval of his first term and his public stand on slavery by re-electing him to the Assembly in 1832 and 1833.[13]

Bruce's success, however, dismayed his wife. Eliza Bruce hated the separation from her husband, not only for the lost companionship but also because it left her alone to care for their children. Their first child, Thomas, was

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[12] The Richmond Enquirer, January 19, 1831.
[13] William Clark to JCB, Dec. 21, 1831; Thomas Arnett to JCB, Dec. 28, 1831, BFP, UVA.

born in 1830, a year before Bruce was elected to the Assembly. Two more sons soon followed; Richard was born in 1831 and Alexander in 1833. His young wife and growing family complained of his absence when the Assembly was in session, and Bruce himself found that long winters in Richmond made him yearn for the warm companionship of his wife and small sons. Eliza Bruce was torn between her duties as a mother and her desire for the company of her husband. The separation of the family was a source of great anxiety in 1831. Bruce asked his wife to leave the children in the care of her North Carolina kin and join him in Richmond for the duration of the session, but Eliza responded "why do you not determine to offer no more and to resign all public business for there are so many things to prevent my being with you and when I think that we know not how soon we may be separated forever we ought to be together as much as possible. I feel I will dislike being parted from my children, but I feel still more keenly being parted from you."[14]

Eliza expressed what for her would be a life-long fear of sudden death of family members during periods of separation from her husband. After Nat Turner's rebellion, when Bruce attended his first Assembly, Eliza wrote "I frequently feel very uneasy at night about the insurrection, but I endeavor to feel resigned and to depend on a higher power." Alone on a plantation with more than a hundred slaves, Eliza Bruce's fears of death at the hands of her slaves were not unfounded. Closer to home, Eliza reported that a neighbor's slave had tried to poison her mistress's coffee. Compounding her fear of slave

[14] JCB to EWB March 4, 1831; March 11, 1832; Dec. 6, 1832; EWB to JCB Dec. 30, 1833. BFP, UVA

insurrection was the constant fear that her sons might fall ill to one of the many mysterious childhood diseases that plagued her own family and friends.[15]

James C. Bruce also felt keenly the separation from his wife and family, but he tried to weigh his absence against his determination to serve the public. Bruce always assured his wife that he would be home as soon as business in the Assembly was finished, but not before, citing his duty to his constituents. Bruce did not share his wife's fears of death during periods of separation, but he was solicitous and reassuring of her anxieties. Bruce's concerns centered on the loss of familial affection of his wife and sons and on the homely routines of fox hunts, bird shoots, and supervision of his plantations. Bruce also complained of city life while in Richmond. On his visits to cities like Philadelphia, Charleston, and New Orleans, Bruce obviously enjoyed the diversity and stimulation of urban settings. He enjoyed visiting cities for pleasure and to conduct brief business dealings, but Bruce never longed for urban life; he was committed to the countryside which he valued for its beauty and tranquillity. For Bruce, Richmond meant confinement and the worrying problems of politics and business. Despite his family's protests and his own reservations, Bruce felt compelled to follow his course. He was stoic in his resignation that political duties came at the price of separation from his family, and he aimed to continue his career.[16]

The political issues that Bruce grappled with during his next two years in office proved more difficult to resolve with his constituents than the issue of slavery. Virginia voters became much more mindful of national affairs as

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[15] EB to JCB, Dec. 15, 1831; Feb. 10, 1838. Thomas Ogden to EB, Jan. 28, 1834; March 7, 1835; Diary Letters EB, Nov. 14, 1844-April 10, 1845. BFP, UVA

[16] JCB to EB March 4, 1831; March 11, 1832; Dec. 6, 1832; April 20, 1835; March 18, 1837; Diary Letters of JCB, Oct. 25, 1844-March 29, 1845.

Democrats and Whigs battled over tariffs, nullification, finance, and the role of the executive branch of the federal government. The late 1820s and 1830s was a period of rapid social and economic change in the United States which transformed American politics. Industrialization, technological innovations, improvements in transportation, and the opening of western land created a feeling of boundless opportunity among Americans. Stronger political parties developed new campaign techniques which brought national issues to the local level. Third parties like the Anti-Masons and the Workingmen's Party developed along class lines and the extension of the franchise challenged the old republican rule. A spirit of democracy pervaded political discourse.[17]

Andrew Jackson embodied the period's sense of opportunity and progress, and his democratic political and economic policies challenged those of the Whigs who adopted Henry Clay's American System as their guiding principle. Whigs favored a strong central bank that would provide credit and currency to facilitate and support industrialization. They also favored federally sponsored public works such as roads, canals, and railroads. Northern, and some southern, Whigs supported tariff protection. Most Whigs were industrialists, bankers, entrepreneurs, and conservative farmers who tended to disregard new notions of popular will and majority rule. Whigs were typically eighteenth century in their understanding that republican government meant the virtual, not actual, expression of the people's will. Consequently, Whigs tended to worry about the distribution of power among the branches of government. As Jackson pushed to increase the power of the executive branch,

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[17] Robert V. Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1833-45, (New York: Harper & Row, 1984) 50-58.

Whigs increasingly became hostile toward him and the democratic agenda he proposed.[18]

Jackson and his Democrats realized that social and economic changes inevitably led to increased participation in the democracy. They also recognized that voters were not concerned with the distribution of power among the branches of government, but with the rights of individuals classes fully to participate in both the government and the economy. The Whigs were easy targets on this count. Too often Whigs expressed contempt for Jackson's "egalitarianism," and the Democrats responded by casting the battle in terms of the working class versus the capitalists, or as Jackson called them, "the speculative class."[19]

On the state level, Virginians also debated extending the franchise and the role of government in the economy. By the time James C. Bruce took his seat in the Assembly, the franchise had been extended only modestly. The issue of state support of banks and internal improvements dominated the Assembly debates in the early 1830s, and Bruce joined a group of legislators that would eventually form the Whig party. Concerned over the decline of agricultural productivity, some planters believed that the future of Virginia's economy depended not only on agricultural reform but on new ventures in finance and transportation. In 1833 John Coles wrote to James C. Bruce:

> I am busy setting my land right after years of neglect by others. Virginia must reform her agricultural practices if we are ever to prosper once more. I heartily approve your banks, railroads, and canals which will lead us into a new era of prosperity.[20]

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[18] Ibid. 140.
[19] Ibid., 142-60

Like his father, James C. Bruce was heavily invested in the Bank of the United States, the Bank of Virginia and the Farmer's Bank of Virginia. Both also had vested interests in the Roanoke Navigation Company, the Kanawah Canal, and other private transportation ventures. Their economic interests compelled them to support the new Whig faction developing in Virginia, but friends in Halifax County warned Bruce of his tenuous position as a Whig. When a charter for the Petersburg Railroad was presented to the Assembly in 1831, Thomas Arnett wrote Bruce that "the people oppose a system of loans upon any plan and to place the Petersburg Railroad upon such a footing would 'damn it' with them, as well as with you." Another political leader in Halifax sternly warned Bruce that "as a public man, you are standing on the edge of a most tremendous precipice. There is no subject about which the public sentiment in the part of the country is more decidedly and unchangeably fixed."[21]

Although the Bruces owned only ten percent of the stock of the Roanoke Navigation Company, it was rumored that the father and son owned controlling interest in the profitable company. Obviously James C. Bruce stood to gain from public support of such private ventures and he was warned to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest. On the advice of his father and friends, Bruce initially opposed the Petersburg Railroad charter because the company was under capitalized. Two years later, when another rail line from Portsmouth to the Weldon was proposed, Bruce's father considered the state's risk to be minimal and he urged his son to vote for the proposal despite "those who

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[20] John Coles to JCB, March 4, 1833, Berry Hill Plantation Records, microfilm reel #4, UNC SHC
[21] On the Petersburg and Portsmouth Railroads see Rice, "Internal Improvements in Virginia," 303-314. Thomas Arnett to JCB, Dec. 28, 1831; Unsigned letter to JCB, Jan. 11, 1832, BFP, UVA.

clamor against you on the question." The young legislator voted in favor of the Portsmouth charter.[22]

James C. Bruce did indeed quell the "clamor" against him on this issue and only "a few obscure post office politicians around the Courthouse" opposed his vote. Bruce had taken a great risk, however, in holding the Whig line among his constituency. On the national scene, Whigs were becoming increasingly unpopular as Andrew Jackson led a campaign against their banking policies and schemes for internal improvements. The tariff issue and nullification crisis of the year before had proved disastrous for one of Bruce's allies, William Daniel of Lynchburg. Upon his defeat, Daniel wrote Bruce that "[t]he election turned altogether on Federal politics [tariffs and nullification]. I have never known party feelings to interfer so much with an election before." Daniel's defeat was indicative of a shift in Virginia politics. Beginning in the early 1830s, voters recognized an opportunity to affect federal politics by supporting a candidate whose political party might have influence at the national level. Politics were no longer only local matters, but James C. Bruce came to realize this too late.[23]

The issue that led to James C. Bruce's defeat in the spring elections of 1834 was not a local but a federal one. In the fall of 1833 Andrew Jackson again

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[22] William Ballard Preston offered to sell James C. Bruce his ten shares of stock in the Roanoke Navigation Company, joking that "then you and your father will own all of Roanoke, as it is said." William Ballard Preston to JCB, Dec. 5, 1835, BFP, UVA. James Bruce advised his son on matters relating to state finance of internal improvements. "Were I a legislator, I should give extensive encouragement to joint stock companies even if it should make moderate loans necessary. When three fifths of the private capital embarks on improvements, it is the best symptom we could have that the project will succeed." James Bruce considered the Petersburg Railroad to be under capitalized. See JB to JCB, Feb. 3, 1832, BFP, UVA; He later advised his son to support the Portsmouth Railroad which he felt to be financially solid. See Feb. 8, 1834, BFP, UVA.

attacked his old nemesis, the Bank of the United States and in an attempt to weaken that institution he withdrew federal deposits. Whigs in the United States Congress, long suffering over Jackson's extension of executive power, regarded this latest action as a line in the sand. Henry Clay led a three-month debate over Jackson's move against the Bank and on March 28, 1834, the Senate formally censured the President for exceeding his authority. This move enraged Jackson and he issued a protest on April 15 accusing the Senate of attempting "to degrade the Executive in the minds of the people and destroy the confidence of the people in him, and thereby procure the re-charter of the Bank of U.S." Jackson threw down the gauntlet in his conclusion: "Against all such unauthorized, unprecedented, unconstitutional conduct of the Senate, I protest." Jackson claimed that he represented the people's will and that "this great struggle was between the monied aristocracy of this country . . . and the people."[24]

Jackson's linking of the Presidency with the popular will of the people immediately gained him support. An anonymous author wrote the Richmond Enquirer rallying the Democrats and exclaiming "Yeomanry of the country!--- think of these things! . . . There are two great parties in this country. On the one side are the People -- the democracy of the country. On the other, is the money power attempting to crush them. . . . Henry Clay, the Advocate of English Lords

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[23] Opposition to Bruce's record during the 1833-34 session was reported in the Richmond Enquirer May 6, 1834. William Daniel to JCB, April 11, 1833, BFP, UVA. For the change in Virginian's voting patterns see Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 167-173.
[24] Remini, Andrew Jackson, 143, 150.

and the U.S. Bank . . . has again aroused his class against the Constitution of the United States."[25]

In the spring elections of 1834 Halifax County voters reconsidered James C. Bruce's support of the Portsmouth Railroad and his membership among the Whigs. They also remembered that his father had been brought before the Virginia Supreme Court on charges of usury. In the minds of his constituency, their wealthy young representative stood exposed as a member of "the speculative class." James C. Bruce had cast his lot with the Whigs, and his constituents turned against him in favor of Jackson. A Halifax County Democrat wrote in the Richmond Enquirer that "Halifax has this time spoken in language which the Editor of the [Richmond] Whig . . . cannot misrepresent. And [those] few who alone were opposed to the course of the late Delegates last winter have swelled out to a large majority of the Independent voters of the county. It was a fair and decided a test of the state of parties as I have ever witnessed." William H. Pegram, the staunch Whig from Prince George County, wrote Bruce expressing his frustration with the Halifax County electorate. "After the appearance of our President's novel and extraordinary 'protest', I doubted not that the virtue and intelligence of Halifax would have been disgusted at the audacity and presumption of Gen. Jackson and supported you . . . at the polls with a decided unanimity."[26]

Bruce garnered only 34 percent of the votes cast. The Whigs never again had a representative from Halifax County. Indeed, with the exception of

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[25] Richmond Enquirer, April 25, 1834.

[26] Taylor, adm'r of Holloway vs. Bruce, Virginia Reports, Vol. 12, (June, 1811) 43-98. Bruce's reputation in business was the subject of speculative conversation for years after his death in

Pittsylvania County, the Piedmont of Virginia's Southside remained solidly Democratic throughout the antebellum period. Even among the planter elite, James C. Bruce was unusual even among Whig planters because of his diversified investments in banks, canals, railroads, and city and state bonds. Although many planters held small amounts of bank stock, Bruce's investments were more comparable to those of northern capitalists. Halifax County planters concentrated on tobacco cultivation alone, producing six and one-half million pounds of the weed annually, more than one-tenth of the state's entire crop. One in eight Halifax planters owned more than twenty slaves and enslaved labor accounted for three-fifths of the county's population. Halifax was a typical slaveholding county dominated by a cash crop and planter elite -- no place for Whiggery to flourish.[27]

In the rest of Virginia, however, the Whigs gained majorities in 1834 and held power for seven of the next ten years. Prospects for Bruce's return to the Assembly still looked good and his friend William Preston wrote to encourage him:

> the battle has been won although at a great price and the desired and controlling majority which will be in our next legislature renders our ultimate success sure. I know the temper of your

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1837. See also Diary of Hugh Grigsby, June 11, 1842 to Nov. 12, 1843, p. 271, VHS. Richmond Enquirer, May 6, 1834.

[27] Election returns were reported in the Richmond Enquirer, May 6, 1834. In state elections, Halifax County remained Democratic. In Congressional elections, however, the district which included Halifax County maintained a Whig majority. According to William Shade, differing religious, ethnic, and economic characteristics in Mecklenburg and Pittsylvania Counties allowed the Whigs to maintain a small majority. See Shade, "Society and Politics in Antebellum Virginia's Southside"; On the investments of planters, see Schweikart, Banking in the American South; James Oakes, The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982) 245-250. Oakes included Halifax County in his statistical analysis of ten southern counties.

> people well enough to predict that this very defeat is to secure you ultimate success -- success you aspire to.[28]

In fact, some political leaders thought Bruce should stand for Congress. Although Halifax voters were decidedly Democratic, the county was part of the Congressional district which strongly supported Whigs. John Pleasants wrote encouragingly that Bruce's defeat in Halifax County "will benefit you. I hear you will be brought out and elected for Congress [in 1836]. I believe it next to certain."[29]

In addition to those who would have him run for Congress, Bruce still had allies who wanted him back in the state Assembly. His friend Preston urged Bruce to consider standing again for election to the Assembly in 1835. "Your pecuniary situation is one that enables you to stand anything as a politician. . . It is only those who are independent of the people for substance whom they will long support for honors. But Mrs. Bruce says no. Tom, Dick and Harry [the Bruce children] say no -- are they constitutional voters? I long to see you in the Legislature that nominates a successor to Jackson."[30]

Bruce had lost his appetite for politics, however, during the short time that he had been in office. Virginians were no longer content with the oligarchical rule of consensus that had characterized the electoral process during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. A restless and resentful western delegation had risen up over divisive issues of representation and the franchise while a growing and increasingly diverse economy pitted commercial and agricultural

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[28] William Ballard Preston to JCB, May 20, 1834

[29] Between 1834 and 1851, Whigs held the majority in Virginia's Assembly in 1834, 1838-41, and 1844. John Pleasants to JCB, May 28, 1834, BFP, UVA

[30] William Ballard Preston to JCB, March 6, 1835.

interests against one another. National debates over states rights, tariffs, and finance were resonating at the local level. James C. Bruce was not prepared to navigate this new landscape of Virginia politics. Gaining public office required a taste for electioneering and an enthusiasm for conflict and debate -- qualities the young man did not possess and disliked in others. After his defeat James C. Bruce reconsidered what for him had suddenly become a thankless sacrifice to public service. He concluded that politics were too divisive and damaging, not only to the character of those involved, but to his own family. With some resentment, he resolved not to stand for election in 1835 or ever again.

Although he resolved to devote himself to his family and the management of his plantations, Bruce did remain active in politics. He subscribed annually to that party's newspaper the Richmond Whig, and he supported Whig candidates, delivered speeches, and lobbied the State Assembly on issues of internal improvements and state finance -- issues that were crucial to maintaining and increasing his and his father's economic interests. This role suited him and he felt that his lobbying efforts were not in his own interest only, but for the good of the Commonwealth. The wrangling behind the scenes, however, confirmed his dislike of politics. On a trip to Richmond to persuade legislators to extend the Petersburg Railroad and to improve the Roanoke River, he wrote his wife: "You know what a bore Richmond is to me always. I thank my stars that my lot is not cast among them [legislators]. I am more and more resolved never to be a candidate for political office again."[31]

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[31] Business Papers 1842-56; JCB to EB Feb. 8, 1838; William Ballard Preston to JCB, Dec. 3, 1835, BFP, UVA; Walter Grayson asked Bruce for help in lobbying the legislature to charter a railroad from Farmville to Cartersville. See Walter Grayson to JCB, July 11, 1835, BFP, UVA;

After 1834 Bruce spent most of his time managing his plantations. Like many Virginians, Bruce was deeply concerned over the perceived deterioration of Virginia's farmlands. He joined the county's agricultural society and bought a life membership in the Virginia State Agricultural Society. This agricultural society, along with others like it throughout the antebellum South, encouraged better husbandry by forming county organizations, holding local and state fairs, publishing journals, conducting surveys to determine what innovations worked, and by lobbying the state and federal legislatures for planter-friendly legislation. Bruce actively supported such efforts to reform the agricultural practices of his fellow Virginians and he contributed articles on farm management to agricultural journals. As president of the Virginia and North Carolina Union Agricultural Society Bruce gave $10,000 to support the society's Model and Experimental Farm.[32]

Bruce also began to indulge his love of traveling, and he made trips through the South searching for lands and investments. The Bruces had six sons by 1838 and he thought of establishing them on plantations further south where he believed economic opportunities would prove more fertile than in Virginia. Bruce eventually decided, however, to keep his sons closer to home and began

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Two speeches that Bruce made to the Whig Committee of Mechlenburg and Brunswick Counties are in "Political Speeches, 1840," BFP, UVA.

[32] Charles Turner, Green Revolution: Essays on the Nineteenth-Century Virginia Agricultural Reforms and Fairs, (Waynesboro, Virginia: Humphries Press, 1986), 7-9; On the Model Farm see BFP, BP, 1856, Box 14. Despite Bruce's huge contribution, the farm was under capitalized and the venture failed after only three years. But Bruce and others remained committed to the principles on which they founded the Model Farm. In 1833 James Bruce published in the Farmer's Register an article explaining his method of ditching to prevent soil erosion. This article was re-published by the editors of the Southern Agriculturist with a commentary explaining how the editors tried Bruce's method with great success. See James Bruce, "Horizontal Trenching to prevent the washing of Hilly Lands," Southern Agriculturist, Vol. 6, (Feb. 1834) 94-98.

buying land in Roanoke, Halifax, and Charlotte counties, Virginia. Most of these lands were established plantations on major rivers, but he also began buying small tracts with the intention of accumulating contiguous acreage for large plantations. As his father did for him, James C. Bruce hoped to provide his children with a solid footing in the social and economic life of Virginia when the reached their majority.[33]

Bruce sought to insure the continuation of the social order that he ruled and that his children would inherit by supporting institutions and causes that provided stability. A good education was important in both social and business circles, and Bruce valued learning highly. In 1836 he and ten other planters from the county petitioned the state Assembly for money from its Literary Fund to establish Halifax Academy. The Literary Fund was meant to assist public schools established and funded by Virginia communities. The eleven charter members of the Academy contributed $990.00 of which total James C. Bruce gave $500.00. Students paid between $7.50 and $15.00 annually to attend the Academy where they studied art, modern languages, mathematics, physics and chemistry. Six of Bruce's sons attended Halifax Academy until he hired a private tutor in 1842.

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[33]Bruce traveled through southwest Virginia, and across Tennessee looking at lands he might buy, but found none that he considered good. See JCB to EB, March, 14, 20 and April 1, 1835, BFP, UVA. Bruce later thought of buying plantations in Louisiana for his sons, but after spending a winter there for his health, he wrote Eliza that "I don't like the idea of sending any of our children to this part of the country, and it is high time we were making provisions for them. It might be better to buy land than to leave money to them which might be squandered." See JCB to EB, March 15, 1845, BFP, UVA. Bruce began to buy plantations and tracts of lands in and around Halifax County. Halifax County Deed Book 47/408; 49/150/; 58/137; Charlotte County Deed Book 30/31.

Three of his sons continued their education at Virginia Military Institute and two attended their father's alma mater, the University of North Carolina.[34]

Both James C. and Eliza Bruce were liberal supporters of the Episcopal Church, and both believed that the devotion to religion was essential to creating good moral character and obedience. The Bruces were regular subscribers of the Episcopal Church's journals The Southern Churchman and the Spirit of Missions, and they contributed funds to the Church's African Missions, Education Society and Bible Society. Like most of their contemporaries, James C. and Eliza Bruce believed that God had ordained the social order. Illness and health, wealth and poverty, free persons and slaves, democrats and despots were all part of a divine plan of time that was unfolding in a linear fashion toward the Second Coming of Christ. That this plan was at times decidedly obscure to human understanding made it all the more imperative that the faithful seek to know and do God's. James C. and Eliza Bruce had different understandings of the role of religion in society. James C. Bruce regarded religion as another stabilizing force in society, one that not only imbued the community with good moral character, but also encouraged habits of obedience and industry. More importantly, religion justified Bruce as a slaveholder. During the antebellum period, slaveholders increasingly turned to the Bible as a guide for building a paternalistic defense of slavery. At the heart of paternalism was the belief in racial superiority--that God

[34] The charter for Halifax Academy, a list of charter members, and other papers relating to the Academy are in the William Bailey Papers, Box 3, UVA. James M. Green tutored the Bruce children from 1842 to 1846, possibly longer. See BFP, BP 1842-1846, UVA.

himself sanctioned slavery and that as the superior race, it was the bounden duty of whites to continue the institution for the welfare of their slaves."[35]

For Eliza Bruce, religion was a deeply personal experience. She was typical of elite Episcopalian women who, influenced by the evangelical nature of the Baptists and Methodists, sought to instill in their families the desire for a personal relationship with Christ. For Eliza, life on this earth was uncertain at best and cruel at worst. Slave revolts, sudden injuries and deaths, loomed in her mind like the plagues of Egypt, and she came to rely on the promise of God's unknowable plans for both the world she inhabited and the world that awaited her beyond. Her faith was strong, experiential, and evangelical in nature, and she sought advice from ministers on how to carry out her duties as wife and mother, as well as how to prepare herself and her family for the life everlasting. Founded on fear and anxiety, Eliza's faith nevertheless gave her great moral authority, and she earnestly pursued her role in the advancement of religion both within her family and the community.[36]

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[35] Receipts for subscriptions and contributions are in BFP, BP 1842-44, UVA. For James C. Bruce's attitude toward religion see for example JCB to EB Nov. 3, 1844; Mar. 15, 1845; JCB to William Ballard Bruce, April 12, 1855, BFP, UVA. Another of James C. Bruce's contemporaries decried the lack of social order in the absence of strong religious institutions. On a trip through the West Samuel Mitchell wrote "a person unskilled in the science of human depravity would suppose that a people so highly favored should certainly manifest gratitude to the kind author of their blessings, but alas the reverse is the melancholy fact and the few faithful ministers of the gospel here have been toiling to keep their flocks from being swept away by the desire to be rich." See Samuel Mitchell to Francis T. Anderson, Dec. 15, 1836, Anderson Family Papers, UVA. For contemporary accounts of the decline and revival of the Episcopal Church in Virginia see "Diary of Hugh Blair Grigsby 1842-1844" pp. 47 and 262, VHS. For contemporary accounts of evangelical Baptist activity see "Diary of Daniel Tatum Merritt 1820-1866, VHS. See also James Breeden, ed., Advice Among Masters: The Ideal of Slave Management in the Old South, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 16. See also, H.N. McTyeire, C.G. Sturgis, A.T. Holmes, Duties of Masters to Servants: Three Premium Essays, (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1851),

[36] On the role of women in the antebellum Episcopal Church see Richard Rankin, Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen: The Religion of the Episcopal Elite in North Carolina, 1800-1860, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993). The nature of Eliza

Although James C. Bruce was an Episcopalian, he supported all denominations in his community since, in his mind, all denominations worked for the same end. When the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian congregations in Halifax County sought funds for building churches, Bruce contributed $25 to the Baptists and $100 each to the Methodists and Presbyterians. Like other Episcopalians of antebellum Virginia, however, Bruce and his family worked diligently to restore their own church to its former primacy in colonial society. The Anglican Church survived the Revolution to become the Protestant Episcopal Church but after Disestablisment in 1786, it lost both its economic and cultural hegemony in Virginia. During the next forty years the Church fell into decline as Methodist and Baptist congregations answered the need for more experiential forms of worship and democratic church governance. With the help of two energetic, evangelical bishops and committed parishioners like the Bruces, Virginia's Episcopal Church began slowly to rebuild. By the 1830s, parish life in Virginia generally and Halifax County in particular was remarkably vibrant and most of the county's elite families belonged to the Episcopal Church. The Bruces gave generously to the support of their own parish. James C. Bruce donated $100 to the Episcopalians in Danville for their new church, but his largest contributions by far were to his home parish. He gave $100.00 annually to the minister's salary at St. John's Church at Halifax Courthouse, and when the parish sought money to build a new church, James C. Bruce gave $500.00 and Eliza Bruce gave $75.00 to the building fund (fig. 2.1). His step mother and sisters each gave $1,333.00 toward building the church and $100.00 each to building the

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Bruce's faith is revealed in letters to her husband and children. See for example EB to JCB, Dec. 15, 1831; Feb. 10, 1838; and Diary Letters EB, Nov. 14, 1844-April 10, 1845, BFP, UVA

parsonage. Building campaigns such as these gave the reviving Episcopal Church a visible presence within the community and was a testament to the considerable financial resources of the parishioners.[37]

The generous contributions that James C. Bruce made to his community were not possible from the profits from his two plantations alone. Bruce followed his father's example of investing in stocks, bonds, and manufacturing and transportation ventures. Bruce bought shares in the Bank of Virginia, the Farmer's Bank, and the New York Bank of America. He also bought bonds for the cities of Richmond, Petersburg, and Clarksville as well as the states of Alabama and Tennessee. Like his father, Bruce realized that transportation was crucial to his own investments in plantations and he sought out people who owned stock in the Roanoke Navigation Company. His purchase of that stock from individuals was so consistent and aggressive that his contemporaries joked said that James C. Bruce and his father owned the entire company. As railroads began to replace canals and toll roads, James C. Bruce invested in the new mode of transportation. He bought stock in four railroad companies that linked Virginia east and west and southward into North Carolina and Tennessee. James C. Bruce's investment strategies were remarkably consistent with those of

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[37] Contributions to other denominations are listed in BFP, BP 1842-44, UVA. The contributors to St. John's building fund are listed in William Bailey Papers, Box 3, UVA. Bruce's step-mother, Elvira Cabell Henry Bruce established in her will the Bruce Fund for the Episcopal Church. Elvira Bruce contributed funds to several parish building campaigns and upon her death instructed that a portion of her estate be set aside as the Bruce Fund of the Episcopal Church for aiding in the construction of church buildings. See Richmond Hustings Court Will Book 19/36, 1858. For a contemporary's history of the Episcopal Antrim Parish, which includes St. John's and other Episcopal churches see William Meade, Old Churches, Ministers, and Families of Virginia, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1857), vol. II, 354-56. For a history of the decline and revival of the Episcopal Church in Virginia see David L. Holmes, "The Decline and Revival of the Church of Virginia," in Up From Independence: The Episcopal Church in Virginia, (Richmond: The Interdiocesan Bicentennial Committee of the Virginias, 1976), 1-65.

his father, and they included loaning money to individuals. He did not, however, take an interest in his father's chain of mercantile stores.[38]

Before his father's death in 1837, James C. Bruce's investments were relatively small compared to those of his father. The young man owned stock only in the Bank of Virginia and the Roanoke Navigation Company which together amounted to less than $15,000. These two investments were nevertheless substantial and they provided Bruce with an annual income of about $700, three times the salary of Eli Stone, the overseer at Ware's Place, his Pittsylvania County plantation. This income along with that of his two well-managed plantations supported Bruce's young family comfortably and provided ample resources for the future.[39]

Upon the death of his father, James C. Bruce became the executor of the estate and guardian for his siblings: Ellen aged seventeen, Sarah aged fifteen, and Charles aged eleven. Bruce spent the next ten years settling the huge estate which the County Court bonded at $3 million. As James C. Bruce learned, this was an under estimation of the old man's vast holdings, and the business of settling the estate required in addition to his own attentions, that of two clerks

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[38]Business Papers 1856-1860, BFP, UVA. Will of James Bruce, Halifax County Will Book 18/183.

[39] James C. Bruce's investments in the Bank of Virginia and in the Roanoke Navigation Company are mentioned in the "Opinions on the Will of James Bruce, Deceased rendered by Judges B.W. Leigh and Thomas H. Green," BFP, BP 1837, UVA. James C. Bruce was executor of the estate and he and the three commissioners assigned to oversee its distribution asked Leigh and Green for legal advice on certain provisions of the will. Among the questions they asked was whether investments made by the father with the son's money were to be considered part of the son's legacy or as a debt of the estate to the son. James C. Bruce had given his father Eliza's dower of $10,000 and $4,000 of his own money to invest for him. The judges ruled that the investments should be considered a debt paid to the son. The total came to $14,227.08. James C. Bruce paid Eli Stone $250 for his services as overseer at Ware's Place. See Business Papers 1837, BFP, UVA. For annual dividends of the Bank of Virginia and of the Roanoke Navigation Company, see Starnes, "History of Banking in Virginia," 174. Rice, "Internal Improvements," 237-239.

and three debt collectors. The county court appointed three friends of the Bruce family as commissioners to oversee Bruce's administration of the assets, and they received 2.5 percent of the estate's cash distributions for their services.[40]

Real estate, land, slaves, stocks and bonds made up a substantial portion of James Bruce's estate. The bulk of the estate, however, consisted of debts due the two mercantile partnerships and loans that Bruce had made to individuals. Many of the store debts were simple "open accounts" bearing no interest like that of John Clark who owed ninety cents. Some of the store accounts were overdue and on these Bruce and his partners charged interest. William Anderson owed eighty cents and he was charged nine cents interest on his account. Pennies make dollars, however, and a page of such small debts listed in one of Bruce's account books amounted to $2,2991.51 bearing $196.97 in interest. Most debt, however, was due from personal loans that Bruce made to individuals. These loans were due over periods ranging from one to ten years and bore interest between six and twenty-four percent. In one partial accounting of the estate, James C. Bruce reckoned that debts totaled $959,704.45. The actual figure probably exceeded the original bond of $1.5 million placed on the estate.[41]

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[40] Halifax County Will Book 18/183. Bruce hired William Pennick, Joshua Banks, and Elijah Barksdale as debt collectors. William Pennick also served as Bruce's clerk from 1838 to 1842. Charles Cabiness was clerk from 1840 to 1846. The Halifax County Court appointed William H. Clark, Thomas J. Coleman, and Beverly Sydnor, as commissioners to oversee the settlement of the estate. See "Estate of James Bruce, Deceased in Account With James C. Bruce, Executor" and "Estate of James Bruce, Deceased in Account With James C. Bruce, Guardian" in Accounts of James C. Bruce, 1837-1847, BFP, BP 1837-48, UVA.

[41] Records relating to the estate of James Bruce are in the BFP, UVA and in the Berry Hill Plantation Records at UNC, SHC. Complete records of the estate do not survive in either collection, but together the two collections provide enough evidence to calculate assets. In a partial listing of more than 400 debtors James C. Bruce calculated in 1838 that the estate was owed $329,502.03. Another list in 1840 of more than 700 debtors totaled $880,304.78 bearing interest of $79,704.45. See Berry Hill Plantation Records, microfilm reel #2, UNC, SHC; and "Estate of James Bruce, Deceased in Account With James C. Bruce, Executor" and "Estate of James Bruce, Deceased in Account With James C. Bruce, Guardian" in Accounts of James C. Bruce,

As money from store accounts and from interest-bearing debts came to the estate, Bruce devised a financial strategy for the four legatees, including himself, which provided immediate cash as well as an annual income from investments. Between 1839 and 1844, he made cash distributions to each legatee totaling $143,098.05. He also bought bonds, mostly from the State of Virginia, which paid semi-annual interest and were fully redeemable in the year 1858. These investments totaled $170,000.00 for each legatee and guaranteed each $6,060.00 in annual income for the next twenty years. James C. Bruce also loaned money from the estate to individuals. At the final settlement in 1847, each legatee held personal notes due in the amount of $259,964.00 with a first-year interest income of $15,597.84 -- a mere six percent. After ten years, the estate of James Bruce still had outstanding debts owed it in the amount of $372,367.84. Bruce divided these remaining debts, giving each legatee responsibility for collecting $93,091.96. For his own part, James C. Bruce hired another debt collector and agreed to give him half of any money he collected.[42]

James Bruce proved himself to be a capable administrator, and in fact, by investing assets from his father's estate, he greatly increased the value of the old man's legacies to his children. In the final reckoning legatees each received more than $660,000 in cash, stocks, and bonded debt, exclusive of the land, slaves, and stocks and bonds they immediately inherited upon their father's death. The Bruce family was by far the richest in Halifax County.

BFP, BP 1837-48, UVA. Only one complete record survives of the final settlement of James Bruce's estate. In 1847, James C. Bruce presented his brother Charles with a final statement that represented one-fourth of James Bruce's estate. See "Estate of James Bruce, Deceased in Account With James C. Bruce, Guardian of Charles Bruce" in Accounts of James C. Bruce, BFP, BP 1837-48, UVA.

[42]Ibid.

For James C. Bruce, society depended upon an elite group of slaveholders and capitalists for maintaining order, and like most men of wealth he sought political alliances that would codify and sustain the existing economic order. As a Whig he worked directly and indirectly in politics to affect public policies that insured an elite rule. He also gave financial support to those institutions, namely schools and churches, that provided the means of socialization --- of instructing succeeding generations in the nature of authority and of their place within the larger scheme of things. The political rallies he at which he spoke, the schools and churches he helped build, were all manifestations of James C. Bruce's understanding of the world he hoped to build. The spaces, both temporary and permanent, that Bruce was instrumental in creating influenced the way people acted out the routines of their daily lives and the way they perceived the workings of the world. The financial and social order that James C. Bruce sought to establish for his family finally found expression in the landscape he created at his dwelling plantation, Berry Hill.

Chapter Three: Buildings and Contracts

James Bruce was among the few who made a successful transition in the changing economic and political landscape of post-revolutionary Virginia. His son James C. Bruce continued his father's financial strategy and tried to build a political career consonant with the wealth and social position that he inherited from his father. His failure at politics forced James C. Bruce to reconsider his priorities and he turned his attention from the rough-and-tumble world of politics to focus on his family. Bruce did not become a recluse, he took an active interest in all facets of life -- including politics, finance, education -- but he observed from the sidelines.

His family's future was his paramount concern and Bruce focused his energies on building a house which would serve as the seat of the family dynasty he planned. In this way, Bruce was very much like the gentry of colonial Virginia who asserted their authority through architectural statements. The house that James C. Bruce built, however, was fundamentally different from the houses of the colonial gentry, not only in style but in room use and spatial disposition. By the time Bruce built his house, Virginia society had undergone a fundamental transformation that changed the way elite Virginians ordered their households. Elite families no longer sought to offer their own houses up as public venues, but rather built them as private havens.

The house James C. and Eliza Bruce built at Berry Hill plantation is important for understanding elite households in antebellum Virginia -- how they

built, what they built and why they built the way the did. The story of Berry Hill offers insight not only into their households, but into building practices in antebellum Virginia.

The Decision to Build

On March 1, 1842 James C. Bruce signed a contract with Josiah Dabbs, a local builder, for the construction of a new house and outbuildings at Berry Hill according to a plan and drawing made by John E. Johnson. The plans and drawings are now lost, but the contract and other documents associated with the building of Berry Hill still exist and provide valuable insight into the process of building a great house in antebellum Virginia. Such contracts are rare for this period and the one for Berry Hill is particularly valuable, not only for its description of the original plans for Berry Hill, but for its identification of the principals involved in the planning and building of the house. Although the contract seems to provide evidence for an architect who guided the client and builder toward an ultimate vision for the house, the roles of client, builder, and architect were seldom, if ever, clearly defined in antebellum Virginia. The construction of Berry Hill house offers evidence of a building process in which these roles overlapped; a process that was much more fluid and flexible than a set of drawings or a contract might imply. Moreover, there is evidence for a fourth person, not mentioned in the building contract but referred to in additional written instructions, who was involved in building Berry Hill: Eliza Bruce. Although the contract identifies James C. Bruce as the client, he was acting in tandem with his wife; James C. Bruce signed the contract and paid the

bills, but he did not act alone. Understanding how Berry Hill achieved its final form requires inquiry beyond the contract and drawings.

One of the largest debts that James C. Bruce had to collect for his father's estate was that of Edward Coles Carrington who had borrowed more than $26,000 from James Bruce in 1834. The bond was due on December 1, 1836, but by the time that James Bruce died in 1837, Carrington had paid nothing toward the principle of the debt and in fact had borrowed more money. By July 1840, Carrington owed Bruce's estate $47,000 and his cousin James C. Bruce wrote him a letter, urging him to sell land to satisfy the debt. In October of 1841, Carrington sold his 1,988-acre plantation, Berry Hill which was one mile east of Bruce's home place Tarover, to James C. Bruce for $64,500. Later that month, Bruce paid Carrington $17,705.00 for forty-seven slaves that Carrington held at Berry Hill plantation. Although he paid cash for the slaves, Bruce arranged to pay for the land in three equal installments over a thirty-month period, due March 1843.[1]

Like his father before him, James C. Bruce was a careful investor and he never incurred a debt that he could not repay in a timely fashion. As executor of his father's estate, James C. Bruce knew that he and the other legatees were due large sums of cash over the ensuing ten years, and he could enter into such agreements with relative assurance that he would be able to meet his obligations. By September of 1840, James C. Bruce had already distributed $14,798.00 to each of the four legatees, himself included. In September of 1841,

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[1] Carrington's initial debt is recorded in papers relating to the estate of James Bruce. See "List of Debts, 1838" in BFP, UVA, 2692-d, Vol. 5.; JCB to ECC, July 10, 1840, BFP, UVA, 2692c, Box 5; Halifax County Deed Book 47/138; Receipts BCC to JCB Oct. 4, 1841 and Oct. 28, 1841, BFP, BP 1841, UVA.

each legatee received $39,060.06 and in April of 1842 each legatee received $64,738.05. By the time his note to Carrington came due in March of 1843, James C. Bruce had ample resources to retire his debt.[2]

Bruce originally intended to move his wife and seven sons to Berry Hill and live in the large house that Carrington had occupied. These plans changed, however, as James C. and Eliza Bruce considered building their own house. A new house would allow both to indulge their growing interest in fashionable architecture -- an interest that had long been repressed both by the disapproving James Bruce and by a lack of financial resources. Building anew would also allow the couple to plan a house that answered more directly the needs of their growing family. James C. and Eliza Bruce looked at the old Carrington house and determined that it no longer met their requirements for fashion and function.[3]

Bruce's plans for his house were ambitious, and considering that they included pulling down the substantial house that Carrington had built at Berry Hill, they seem extravagant. No contemporary descriptions of the Carrington house at Berry Hill survive, but archaeological and documentary evidence reveal that it was an impressive brick dwelling (fig. 3.1). The 1815 Federal Direct Tax provides a good means of comparison. In addition to taxing slaves, livestock, carriages, and furnishings, a tax was levied on all dwelling houses with a value of more than five hundred dollars. Of the 2,582 households in Halifax County, forty-one lived in houses worth more than $500. Of this number, forty-six percent owned houses valued between $500 and $999. Thirty-six percent owned

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[2] For the distribution of James Bruce's estate, see BFP, 2692-d, Vol. 5.

houses valued between $1,000 and $1,999 and twelve percent owned houses valued between $2,000 and $2,500. Edward Carrington's house, valued at $10,000, was by far the most expensive dwelling in Halifax County. Its taxable furnishings included two dining tables, a sideboard, four silver candlesticks, and five mirrors, which indicate a gentry life style that rivaled that of the colonial Tidewater. Archaeological excavations at Berry Hill revealed the brick foundation of Carrington's house and together with the information of the 1815 Tax List, it appears that the dwelling was at least one-and-a-half stories tall, possibly two full stories in height. In plan, the house probably measured about 32 feet by 50 feet.[4]

The house at James C. Bruce's home plantation Tarover was substantial. The house burned in 1853, and while it is impossible to reconstruct accurately the plan of the original house, it is possible to make some generalizations regarding its spatial arrangement from a sketch and from documentary evidence (fig. 3.2). Tarover was a one-and-a-half story double-pile frame house set on a brick foundation with exterior end chimneys. The central passage was eleven feet wide. The first floor had a dining room, parlor, and chamber and probably a fourth room which functioned alternately as a nursery or library. Thus it was

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[3] JCB to Samuel Marx, Oct. 6, 1841, BFP, UVA.; JCB to Charles Bruce, Oct. 8, 1841, BFP, VHS; Bruce Family Bible, BFP, UVA, Box 20.

[4] 1815 Federal Direct Tax. It is impossible to determine when the house was built since the land tax records do not list separate values for buildings before 1820. The foundation of Carrington's house was discovered during archaeological excavations in the summer and fall of 1998. See Thomas F. Higgins, et al, "Archaeological Investigations in Proposed New Development Areas at Berry Hill Plantation" prepared by the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research, VDHR File No. 97-1819, on file at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond Virginia. pp. 43-66. Carrington did not insure his house with the Mutual Assurance Society, an insurance company of early Virginia which kept records, including plats, of all the policies it sold. Mutual Assurance Society records have been helpful in identifying Bruce properties.

arranged in the traditional manner of an eighteenth-century gentry house. The house at Tarover, was, however, valued at less than $500 in the 1815 tax. In 1840, the total assemblage of buildings at Tarover were valued at $5,500 while Carrington's at Berry Hill were valued at $2,000.[5]

It seems that the larger brick house at Berry Hill plantation would have answered all the needs of Bruce's growing family. If more room was required, the Bruces could have built additions to the existing house. Instead, they decided to pull down the Carrington house and build anew on the same spot, at the crest of a gently rising hill in the center of the plantation, half way between the main county road to the north and the Dan River to the south. Carrington's house, the old gentry form associated with a previous generation, no longer worked for the antebellum elite.

Clients, Builder, and Architect

James and Eliza Bruce were already experienced in the building process when they began planning their new house. Throughout the 1830s James Bruce directed improvements to Tarover and to his other plantations and mill properties. Bruce hired carpenters to repair and build houses for his overseers,

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[5] The exterior of Tarover survives as a sketch in the papers of Ellen Carter Bruce. See Bruce Family Papers VHS, MSS1, B8306, a1. The floor plan can be ascertained by a letter from Eliza Bruce to James Bruce in which Eliza gives the measurements of the stairs in the central passage for the purpose of fitting it with oil cloths. The central passage measured 11 feet three inches wide. The first run of the stairs and the stair landing measured twenty-two feet long. These measurements suggest a double pile house. See EB to JCB, March 4, 1837, BFP, UVA. For an explanation of the various floor plans that Virginian's built during the eighteenth century, see Dell Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, eds., Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture (Athens: University of Georgia Press), 315-336. Land Tax records record the value of all buildings on a particular property, including dwellings. For the values of Tarover and Berry Hill in 1840, see Halifax County Land Tax Records, 1840.

build granaries and tobacco barns, and to maintain his stores, grist mills and saw mills at Meadesville and Turnip Creek. James Bruce took an active interest in these projects and was knowledgeable concerning the building process and construction methods. George Baker, a tenant in one of Bruce's Meadsville Mills houses, was impressed by the care that Bruce had taken in building the tenement:

> Had I known how careful you were to secure the walls of this house against damp I would not have written a word. I thank you for the trouble of coming here, however, for it is a relief to know the precautions you have taken.[6]

Always, Bruce sought to ensure the quality of work he paid for. Baker was impressed with the property, but especially with Bruce's attention to quality of construction.

When James Bruce was away on business Eliza Bruce oversaw all aspects of plantation life, including repairs and building projects. She was adept with a tape measure, and she understood proportion and ratios. She also was familiar with construction techniques. Eliza Bruce most often acted on behalf of her husband, passing on his instructions to the overseer to carry out projects, but she also initiated her own repairs and changes at Tarover. When Eliza Bruce herself was away visiting her family in North Carolina, she often left instructions for her husband. Eliza Bruce was usually deferential in her instructions and was careful to acknowledge her husband's ultimate authority, as when she thanked her husband for indulging her the expense of creating a pleasure garden. In matters

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[6] The quote is from George Baker to JCB, April 9 [no year], BFP, UVA, Box 19, misc. papers. The papers of James C. Bruce contain many receipts for services by carpenters, blacksmiths, and masons. See for example: Hughes and Kersey to JCB, Sept. 29, 1835, BFP, BP 1835: "for raising house"; Dabney Cosby to JCB, May 3, 1837, BFP, BP 1837: "for laying 4800 brick"; William T. Ballow to JCB, Sept. 1 1840, BFP, BP 1840: "rebuilding grist mill, water wheel, and saw mill."

that directly affected her duties as mistress and mother, however, Eliza Bruce often acted on her own. When she noticed that the brick floor of her kitchen was crumbling, she had it replaced with durable stone without seeking her husband's permission for the additional expenditure. In this case, her only concession to his authority was scribed as an after thought: "I hope you approve." There is no indication that her husband ever disapproved or countermanded such decisions. In fact, James Bruce was solicitous of his wife's opinions, and he actively sought to please her when he was charged with making decisions for them both. In most cases, however, the Bruces collaborated in their efforts to create a home at Tarover. While they made no structural changes to the house, the couple did buy furnishings after discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each purchase.[7]

By the time that the Bruces were ready to build a new house, they were familiar not only with the nature and process of construction but with the many carpenters and masons in and around Halifax County. James and Eliza Bruce settled on Josiah Dabbs whose recent work on Mecklenburg County's courthouse indicated him to be a capable and reliable undertaker of building projects. The Bruces had ambitious plans for a Greek temple facade, and for help in planning this, they turned to their friend John E. Johnson whose training in civil engineering at West Point had also included learning and drawing the five

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[7] For examples of Eliza's charge of plantation matters in Bruce's absence see EWB to JCB, March 4, 1837 and EWB to JCB, December 13, 1844, BFP, Letters 1844. For Eliza's understanding of the proportion, ratio, and measure, see "Journal of Mrs. J.C. Bruce," BFP, UVA, Box 8. Eliza had carpenters do repairs at Tarover. See: Receipt, Pleasant Headspeth to JCB, March 4, 1837, BFP, BP 1837, and EWB to JCB, March 4, 1837, BFP, Letters 1837. On the replacing of the brick floor by Eliza see EWB to JCB, March 10, 1845, BFP, Letters 1845. For cooperative efforts of James and Eliza Bruce in planning changes and decorating at Tarover see JCB to EWB, March 13, 1837, BFP, Letters 1837.

orders. Johnson and his wife had also acted as tour guides when they accompanied the Bruces on a tour through the northeast during the summer of 1839. This tour included inspections of the latest architectural projects in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.

The Bruces probably came to know Johnson when in 1833 he and his first wife Adelia Armistead settled in Halifax County on the 500 acres Mrs. Johnson had inherited from her father. Johnson was born in 1815, the son of Col. William R. Johnson a well-to-do planter who served in the Virginia Assembly and raised thoroughbred horses on his Chesterfield County plantation, Oakland, an occupation through which he developed connections to Philadelphia and New York. The colonel's partner in the thoroughbred business was John Charles Craig, the brother-in-law of Nicholas Biddle, president of the Bank of the United States. When the young Johnson arrived in Halifax County, he already possessed the credentials to allow him entry into the social life of the county's elite. Johnson and Bruce might have met at the horse races at Halifax County Courthouse. Johnson's first wife died in 1834 and in 1836 he married Mary Swift, the daughter of Philadelphia's mayor John Swift and a business acquaintance of William Johnson. The Johnsons were in Philadelphia during the winter of 1836 and probably visited James C. Bruce during his father's illness. By 1838 the Johnsons had moved to Halifax County and taken up residence on the farm that Johnson's first wife had left to their only son. By this time, the Johnsons were fast friends of the Bruces and the two couples took a pleasure trip together to Niagara Falls.[8]

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[8] Henry W. Lewis, More Taste Than Prudence: A Study of John Evans Johnson, (Chapel Hill: Borderer Press, 1983) 1-12,19-30. Halifax County's race track is mentioned in Joseph Martin,

The mention of Johnson's plan and drawing in the Berry Hill contract implies the services of an architect, a trained professional responsible for both the aesthetic and functional requirements of the client. Johnson never assumed the title of architect, however, and there is no evidence that he was trained as one. The contract specifies Bruce as the final authority on both disposition of space and aesthetic choices, and it is clear from subsequent changes to the original plan that the new house at Berry Hill was primarily a collaborative effort between client and builder.[9]

Johnson nevertheless provided for Bruce some skilled drawing services which he probably learned during his short tenure at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Johnson entered the Academy in 1830 at the age of fifteen, joining there other Virginians including Philip St. George Cocke, Francis Henry Smith, and Edgar Allen Poe. After two and a half years, Johnson quit the Academy rather than face court martial for being absent without leave -- Johnson had left his post to pick apples in the garden of his French teacher. Johnson's short career at West Point, however, gave him skills enough to become a competent draftsman. West Point had been established in 1802 to train military officers in the conduct of war, but the curriculum also provided for training of engineers responsible for building roads, bridges, and forts for military purposes. During his first year, Johnson studied French, algebra, geometry, trigonometry and mensuration. The second-year curriculum added drawing to these courses, and in the third year Johnson had begun to study topographical drawing. Johnson's drawing teacher, Denis Hart Mahan, taught

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Gazetteer of Virginia and the District of Columbia, (Charlottesville: Moseley & Tompkins, 1835) 184-85.

"the elementary parts of buildings, the design of arches, canals, bridges, and other public works, and the machines used to construct them." Mahan published his own text books, including Notes on Architecture and An Elementary Course in Civil Engineering. Although no examples of Johnson's drawings exist, those of his classmate Philip St. George Cocke survive, and it is possible to infer from these Johnson's exposure to architectural drawing at West Point (fig. 3.3). Cocke produced structural drawings of roof trusses similar to the truss system at Berry Hill and he made skilled drawings of the Greek Doric order, the Roman Doric order, and one drawing after Vignola's Denticular Doric order.[10]

Johnson's travels and activities after West Point took him to New York and Philadelphia, but there is no evidence that he ever studied architecture in the offices of prominent architects of those cities. In 1837, he purchased Mahan's An Elementary Course in Engineering, and in that same year, the city directory for New York listed for the first and last time a John Johnson practicing as an architect at 47 Warren Street. There is no reason to believe, however, that the New York architect was the same one who made the drawings for Berry Hill. Johnson's training in architecture probably came solely from his days at West Point, in which case he was probably competent enough to produce detailed

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[9] Berry Hill building contract, BFP, 2692a, BP 1842, UVA.

[10] Johnson's career at West Point is described in Lewis, More Taste Than Prudence, 6-23. The curriculum at West Point is described in Stephen E. Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966) 90-122. Before 1848 West Point and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute were the only schools in the United States to offer courses in civil engineering which included some training in architecture. Those who wanted to study architecture without military training, usually apprenticed with a practicing architect. The drawings of Philip St. George Cocke (1809-1861) are held in private hands, but were photo-copied in Muriel Rogers, "Belmead: Philip St. George Cocke's Gothic Revival Manor House", April 1995, unpublished manuscript in the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia.

drawings like those of Philip St. George Cocke to assist Josiah Dabbs in constructing the grand Doric facade of Berry Hill.[11]

Josiah Dabbs was a well known builder in central and Southside Virginia by the time James C. Bruce contracted with him to build Berry Hill. Dabbs was born in Charlotte County in 1802. His father died in 1814 and the young Dabbs was probably apprenticed at that time to learn carpentry. By 1825 he was doing carpenter's work and in 1828 he entered into partnership with John Smith, the first of at least four such partnerships over the next thirty years. Dabbs and his partners undertook building projects ranging from the simple fence he constructed for George Roberts to the steeple of Village Presbyterian Church at Charlotte Courthouse. His largest and most lucrative commission before Berry Hill was the Halifax County Courthouse which he built between 1838 and 1840 in partnership with John L. McDearman (fig. 3.4). The courthouse project was an important commission for Dabbs. He was responsible for procuring materials, hiring and supervising carpenters, brick masons, stone masons, and plasterers, keeping account records, and for reporting to the county's committee overseeing the project. The courthouse commission proved Dabbs to be capable of large undertakings and guaranteed his reputation in Halifax County.[12]

The Contract

James Bruce planned an extensive building campaign for Berry Hill plantation and Josiah Dabbs was in charge of most of the projects. In addition to the main

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[11] Lewis, More Taste Than Prudence, 21-23.

[12] Gerald T. Gilliam, "Josiah Dabbs: Carpenter and Contractor," The Southsider Vol. 5, No. 1 (Winter 1986) 13-20.; Josiah Dabbs & Co., Accounts (1837-1845), and Dabbs, McDearmon & Co.,

house, Dabbs built a smokehouse, carriage house, and stable. Bruce also employed another carpenter, Pleasant Headspeth who had worked for him at Tarover, to build a granary and tobacco house. Bruce also planned to move barns and slave houses to new locations, and to build dikes for two ponds to hold the waters of an extensive drainage system. Bruce, Dabbs, and Headspeth evidently carried out all of this work under verbal agreement. The outbuildings that Bruce planned for Berry Hill were of simple but substantial construction and for builders like Dabbs and Headspeth, both steeped in a traditional understanding of the building types, little more than informal instructions were required. For a building project as large and complicated as the main house, however, Bruce sought a formal contract to ensure both the cost and quality of the building. Accordingly, Bruce and Dabbs drew up a contract that was intended to state clearly the duties and obligations of both parties:

> Articles of agreement made and entered into this 1st day of March one thousand eight hundred and forty two between Jas. C. Bruce of the county of Halifax of the one part and Josiah Dabbs of the other part witnesseth That the said Josiah Dabbs hath this day agreed to Build for the said Jas. C. Bruce a dwelling house and out houses of the following plan and dimensions
>
> The house is to be located on the Berry Hill Estate, where the house that Genl. Edward Carrington formerly resided in,
>
> The main building to be Sixty four feet by fifty two with a projection of ten feet in the center of the building in rear, which projection forms a part of the dining room the ballance of the dining room to extend in the main building taking up a part of the passage the whole of this part of the building is to be 2 stories high besides the basement and the rooms and finish of the same to be done and finished after the direction of said Bruce according to a plan & drawing made by Mr. Jno. E. Johnson, to have a portico in front supported by eight collums, the floor & steps of which are to be of nice cut ~~stone~~ granite, and the whole of the external finish of this part of the building to be of the doric Order of Architecture. There is to be a green house in rear of this building, which is to

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Accounts (1839-40), in possession of Mrs. David McGehee, Halifax County. I am indebted to Gerald T. Gilliam for providing me copies of Dabbs's account books.

extend as far back as the dining room and on the Opposite Side thereof a large closet to correspond, in the outward appearance, with the green house, there is to be a line of out buildings extending directly back of the dining room, which row of buildings are to be one story high, to be so arranged as to make one room for pantry, one for Kitchen, one for a Laundry and two rooms for Servants, to have a covered way, in front of them six feet wide, the size of these rooms to be as the said Bruce may direct. There is to be two offices in the yard 18 x 24 feet one story high, all of which are to made of brick well burned and laid in good cement, and the whole of the buildings to be covered with tin in the best manner.

All the rooms in this main building to be papered, the two drawing rooms to be elegantly papered. There is to be ten marble mantelpieces two of which pure white to cost at least one hundred & fifty Dollars, there are to be eleven Mahoggany Doors the said Dabbs to furnish all the materials for the completion of this house to paint, paper, and make a turn Key Job, and the building to be at the said Dabbs' risk until delivered. the front and two Sides to be Stuccod. in the best manner. the Sills to Doors & window are to be of cut stone Marble wash boards in all the rooms on the first floor. the glass to the windows in the two drawing rooms to be of plate glass, the locks, & hinges etc. on the first floor to be Silver plated those above to be of the best kind not plated, the said Dabbs to pull down the old house.

It's impossible to express every thing in a contract of this kind, but a plan & drawing having been made there can be no difficulty in understanding it.

The said Bruce pays to the said Dabbs three thousand dollars on the 15th Inst. six thousand dollars when the walls are completed and fourteen thousand five hundred when the house is finished and delivered according to contract.

The size of the doors, windows & proportions generally to be approved by the said Bruce.

An entablature after the Doric order to extend around the portico and 2 sides of the house 6 1/2 feet broad according to drawing intended to accompany this contract.

Witness our hands this 1st of March 1842.
James C. Bruce
Josiah Dabbs

The wording, sentence structure, and organization of this contract are indicative of the informal, collaborative nature of the building process in antebellum Virginia. The first paragraph is couched in the standard contractual language of the period. The following paragraphs, however, are even by

antebellum standards remarkably inconsistent in sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation. The penmanship of the contract is that of Charles H. Cabiness, Bruce's clerk, and Cabiness wrote in the manner of one taking dictation from two people simultaneously. A scene presents itself of Dabbs, Bruce, and possibly Johnson, looking over the drawings that Johnson had made and trying to describe verbally what they saw. Here, two traditional forms of communication clash. The legal tradition with which Bruce was most familiar and most concerned demands precise word descriptions of services rendered and properties acquired in order to make a binding contract. The metes and bounds of Berry Hill plantation, for example, are relatively easy to discern by verbal description: the survey begins with a fixed point and measures to other fixed points so that the mind's eye travels a landscape marked by natural and man-made features, like roads, rivers, streams, and trees. The building tradition with which Dabbs is most familiar relies on a body of knowledge and references that are codified not by law, but by experience. Building contracts that Dabbs entered into seldom gave more than the dimensions of the proposed building. The locations of windows and doors, and the details of plan and finish were often assumed by both client and builder within a traditional vernacular understanding of the construction process. On those occasions when this traditional building process was preceded by a formal agreement, the parties usually summed up their unwritten expectations with the phrase "all to be finished and compleated in a workmanlike manner."

As Dabbs and Bruce dictated to Cabiness, the description became so complicated that the frustrated Bruce himself finally took the pen from his clerk

and wrote "It's impossible to express every thing in a contract of this kind, but a plan & drawing having been made there can be no difficulty in understanding it." Johnson's plan and drawing introduced another form of communication between builder and client. Johnson's work was visual in nature, not verbal, and the scaled drawings allowed an immediate understanding of the building's appearance and its disposition of space. Johnson provided a valuable service for both Bruce and Dabbs, not only in his ability to render a fashionable and correct classical order, but in his ability to make a complex building easily understandable through the medium of drawing. When verbal description confounded Dabbs and Bruce, they gratefully referred to Johnson's drawings for contractual clarification. Johnson's drawings satisfied Bruce's concerns over legal obligations and they provided a valuable reference for both builder and client.

Johnson's plans, however, were not a complete representation of the proposed house and outbuildings. Johnson had drawn a plan and elevation for the main block of the house, but he did not include the line of outbuildings that the contract described as projecting from the back of the dining room. These outbuildings included the pantry, kitchen, laundry, and two servants' rooms. Since the contract stipulated that Bruce was to determine the size of these rooms, Johnson could not have included them in his scaled drawing. It appears that Bruce had employed Johnson's skills only in the creation of the grand facade and in those spaces within the main block of the house. Although Bruce clearly intended to build service spaces at the time of the contract, he never directed Johnson to provide such space in his drawings. Bruce relied on Johnson's West Point training to give the house the correctly proportioned massing and scale

required for a monumental appearance, but he counted on Dabbs's proven experience to finish the service areas in a "workmanlike manner" with little more direction than room dimensions.

It was agreed in the contract that Bruce would be responsible for determining the size and finish of the row of outbuildings and for other details not specified in the contract. Accordingly Bruce wrote additional instructions for Dabbs:

> 4 rooms in the basement -- 2 with plank floor and 2 for storerooms with shelves, etc. 5 rooms on second floor -- The windows in the two Parlours and the Chamber window, the Hall and dining room doors of plate glass. 11 Mahogany doors -- Best plated bolts and Locks. The ceiling to the two parlours curved and divided into compartments. All the rooms papered -- The two parlours with the handsomest kind of paper -- The Hall and dining room ~~the second best~~ handsome but not the most expensive --The chamber and other rooms over the house such paper as costs about $1.25 a roll. Mrs. Bruce to have the selection. Flues in every dressing room -- the library, and Hall. Portico 8 columns. 8 feet wide and granite floor and steps all across the front -- To the back of the dining room -- Pantry with fire place, shelves and presses -- 18 by 16 -- kitchen 18 by 20 -- Laundry 18 by 18 -- 2 Servants rooms. Portico extending from nursery to the extreme back building -- Closets at the back of the nursery 16 by 14 with shelves and Flue -- greenhouse 18 by 12 glassed front and side -- with wooden shuters also -- Venetian door to the Hall -- Flue for Stove --
> Two offices by pitch in proportion with porticos. The house and offices gutered. The glass for the windows in House and Offices the best Boston crown glass. [13]

These additional instructions give a more complete understanding of the house as it was originally planned. Johnson had drawn an elevation for the main block of the house featuring a Doric porch that ran the width of the principal facade which faced north. The contract describes the rooms of the first floor and refers to Johnson's drawings for clarification. In plan, Johnson drew a large central hall flanked by double parlors to the east and a chamber and nursery to

the west (fig. 3.5). At the end of the central hall on axis with the front door was the dining room which projected ten feet south of the main block of the house. To the west of this projection was the green house and to the east was the closet which opened off the nursery. Two sets of stairs provided access to the second floor. The main stair rose in a double flight from the central hall. The secondary stair was located in what Bruce called the "nursery passage" between the dining room and nursery.

It is clear that Johnson drew a plan for the first floor of the house, but it is not clear that he drew plans for the basement and second floor. Bruce's additional instructions stipulate "4 rooms in the basement . . . 5 rooms on second floor." It seems that Bruce's addendum was meant to clarify plans not only for the row of back buildings but for the disposition of rooms in the basement and on the second floor. Both levels would follow roughly the plan of the first floor. The five rooms upstairs corresponded directly to the rooms of the first floor with the addition of an unheated room at the north end of the upstairs hall. The basement also followed the plan of the first floor. A bulkhead under a dining room window in the south wall provided access to a central hall that ran the depth of the house and served as the main circulation space. Two unheated store rooms on the east and two heated work rooms on the west opened into this hall. A windowless room at the north end of the central hall served as the wine cellar. Johnson did not draw plans for the row of outbuildings mentioned in the contract, but the verbal description in both the contract and Bruce's later

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[13] BFP, UVA, Box 20, Business Papers of James C. and Alexander Bruce, undated.

instructions provided for a service wing projecting southward from the dining room.

The contract between Bruce and Dabbs, along with Bruce's additional instructions reveal much about the intentions of James C. Bruce. His primary concern was with producing a monumental effect with the new house at Berry Hill. Johnson's elevation drawings focus on public presentation -- a temple facade set within a forecourt and flanked by diminutive temples. Johnson's plan of the first floor, the contract, and Bruce's additional instructions are most concerned with the disposition and decoration of the grand public rooms. Everyone involved in the building of Berry Hill house had a clear understanding of the its grand presentation and how to achieve the fashionable, monumental effect that Bruce wanted.

Service spaces, however, were accorded little real thought. Johnson did not draw plans and Bruce provided only dimensions for the rooms of the service wing. A full set of plans and elevations that included service areas were irrelevant to the men who were planning Berry Hill. For Eliza Bruce, however, this omission was crucial. As construction began, she took a more active interest in planning Berry Hill and directed changes in the plan of the house. The only documentary evidence for her role in planning the house comes from Bruce's addendum in which Eliza Bruce is given discretion in some of the aesthetic choices, primarily paint colors and wall paper patterns. Her larger role in planning the disposition of space in the new house is revealed in an analysis of the changes that occurred during construction. The service spaces -- pantry, kitchen, and laundry -- to which the contract referred were spaces Eliza Bruce

would control in the new house. As the mistress of thirty-two household slaves and the mother of seven children, she was very concerned about the way these service spaces related to the dining room and nursery -- two other domestic spaces central to her role in the plantation household. James Bruce probably gave little thought to the way in which these spaces were related until his wife began to scrutinize the building itself. The house that some historians describe as the finest example of Greek Revival domestic architecture in Virginia was not the product of a skilled architect and a discriminating patron, but the result of a continually changing collaboration among all the individuals involved in the planning and construction process.

Chapter Four: Building Berry Hill

Laborers

On March 15, 1842 Bruce paid $3,000 to Dabbs who immediately set to work preparing the site for building. Dabbs had the house at Berry Hill ready for occupancy by November of 1843 and the Bruces were settled by Christmas of that year. Although Dabbs had finished most of the work on the house within eighteen months, he continued to work on outbuildings and the house itself for another year. During the entire building campaign Dabbs was responsible for procuring materials and for employing and supervising brick masons, stone masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, tin smiths, and general laborers. The most important members of his work force were skilled white laborers like the brick masons, James and Joseph Whitice, who had experience with large building projects. James Whitice, in partnership with carpenter William Howard, had built the large courthouse in Mecklenburg County between 1838 and 1842 (fig. 4.1). The resemblance between Mecklenburg's courthouse and the house at Berry Hill plantation is striking. Comparable in scale and dimension, the most striking similarity of the two buildings is the temple front motif. The difference lies in the Ionic order of the courthouse and the Doric order of Bruce's house. Whitice no doubt understood the monumental nature of the building project at Berry Hill. Dabbs also employed two stone masons, George and Enoch Taylor, along with their assistant William Coarse to locate, quarry, and dress the granite. Except for their work at Berry Hill, the careers of these stone masons remains unknown.

Many craftsmen who worked at Berry Hill remain unknown. Dabbs, the Whitices, and the Taylors supervised both skilled and unskilled, free and enslaved workers. Unskilled laborers were employed for such tasks as felling and hauling timber, preparing clay pits for bricks, and hauling brick and stone. Skilled free laborers included apprentices and journeymen like William Course, Taylors's assistant and Joseph Whitice, the son of James Whitice. Apprenticeships were unregulated in antebellum Virginia, and advancement to journeyman was an informal rite, based on the artisan's reaching the age of majority and his experience. Journeymen generally possessed the same skills as their employer but lacked the capital to operate independently as a general undertaker. Some apprentices and most journeymen worked for daily wages. William Coarse worked for $.50 a day, while his employers made $1.50 per day. The rate of pay for the Taylors exceeded that which Bruce paid the overseers at his four plantations, but was less than he paid his clerk and the tutor of his children. Although good overseers were highly valued and well-paid, it would seem that skilled artisans could command a higher wage due, in part, to their skill. The higher wage, however, might simply compensate for the relatively short term nature of their employment -- overseers were always in demand, but those involved in the building trades suffered or prospered from fluctuations in the economy. Moreover, an overseer usually had a year-long contract that often included a dwelling house, some provisions such as pork, and sometimes the services of a slave to cook and keep house.[1]

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[1] On builders, apprentices, and journeymen see: Catherine W. Bisher, Charlotte V. Brown, Carl R. Lounsbury and Ernest H. Wood, Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building, (Chapel Hill: University Press of North Carolina, 1990), 33-38, 93-97; and Richard Charles Cotes, "The Architectural Workmen of Thomas Jefferson in Virginia,"

Owners of skilled slaves could often command wages equal to those of free skilled laborers. The slave usually kept a very small portion of his pay, while his owner appropriated the rest. It is unlikely that Dabbs or Whitice hired skilled slaves for the job, for at the time they contracted to build Berry Hill, Dabbs owned eleven slaves and Whitice owned ten. James C. Bruce owned two slaves trained as carpenters and one trained as a mason, and it is possible that when their skills were not required on one of his other plantations, these slaves worked at Berry Hill. Bruce did hire John Royall, a slave carpenter, from his step mother. Bruce hired Royall's skills for one year beginning in December of 1842, nine months after construction on the house began.[2]

The Taylors owned no slaves and it is possible they hired unskilled slave labor to help dislodge and haul the stone from the quarry, and to help install the granite they shaped themselves. It is unlikely, however, that Bruce used any of his own slaves as unskilled labor for the building of his house. During the

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Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 1986, 80-109. The account book of Dabney Cosby, a prominent builder in Southside Virginia and in North Carolina during the antebellum period is located at the Virginia Historical Society and is the source for many of the conclusions of Cotes, Bisher et al. Wages for George and Enoch Taylor and for Bruce's overseers, clerk, and tutor are listed in BFP, BP 1842-43, UVA. The average pay of Bruce's four overseers was $245.00. His clerk and tutor were paid $400.00 each. In addition to an annual salary of $250.00 James C. Bruce provided Eli Stone the overseer at Ware's Place, his Pittsylvania County plantation, with a house, 500 pounds of pork and the services of a slave as cook for his family. See BFP, BP 1839, UVA.

[2] On slave labor in the building trades in antebellum Virginia, see: Bisher, et al, Architects and Builders, 99-102; and Cotes "Architectural Workmen", 97-99. Also see Catherine W. Bishir, "Black Builders in Antebellum North Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review, Vol. 61, No. 1 4 (Oct. 1984) 423-61. Dabbs's experience with slave labor is described briefly in Gilliam, "Josiah Dabbs", 16. For Dabbs's slaves see Halifax County Personal Property Tax, 1842. For Whitice's slaves, see Mecklenburg County Personal Property Tax 1842. George and Enoch Taylor did not own slaves at any time during the building of Berry Hill. The slave John Royall was hired from Elvira Bruce, but the receipt does not identify Royall as a carpenter. See JCB to Elvira Bruce, Dec. 27, 1842, BFP, BP 1842, UVA. Bruce inherited Royall after the death of his step mother and in his list of skilled slaves, he identifies John Royall, Jacob, and "Cheeseman" as carpenters, and Ellick as a mason. Jacob was born 'about 1806', Cheeseman was

construction of Berry Hill, Bruce sold his 1500-acre Wolf Island Plantation in Caswell County, North Carolina because he did not have enough hands to work it. In fact, Bruce struggled during the early 1840s with a labor shortage on his four plantations, as he required the labor of more slaves than he owned. When he began making improvements to the drainage system at Berry Hill, he had to hire ten slaves from his neighbors to dig ditches. Although Bruce's slaves had a minimal role in building the house, the slaves who worked on his plantations, in his mills, on his boats, and those who toiled for the Roanoke Navigation Company in which Bruce owned stock, all contributed directly to the resources that Bruce commanded, making such a building campaign possible.[3]

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born 1822, and Ellick in 1815. No birthdate was given for John Royall.; See "Register of Negros" BFP, Box 13, UVA.

[3] In a letter to William Price, Bruce offered to sell his Wolf Island plantation stating he did not have enough hands to work it. JCB to William Price, April 18, 1842, JCB Letterbook, BFP, UVA. Bruce sold the 1500-acre plantation to Price on April 30, 1842. See Caswell County, North Carolina Deed Book FF, p. 810. In 1847, Bruce hired slaves to dig drainage ditches at Berry Hill indicating that he still had a shortage of labor. See various receipts for hire of slaves BFP, BP 1847, UVA.

Work Begins

Regardless of the status of his workforce, Dabbs was responsible for the quality of all his workmen and he was held accountable according to the contract. After assembling his work force, Dabbs directed the brick masons to begin work.[4] Having finished the courthouse a few months before, Whitice already had a group of skilled brickmakers and masons ready to start immediately and he would have been well prepared to undertake work at Berry Hill. Whitice may have had brick fired and ready to lay when he undertook the commission at Berry Hill. If so, masons could have begun laying the foundation while brickmakers prepared clay pits for making more brick. The Whitices evidently began work immediately, for by August of 1842 they had laid the foundation and begun building the walls of the house. By March of 1843, when they had finished the walls and installed the windows, construction of the roof was ready to begin.[5]

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[4] Letters indicate that the Bruces moved into the house during the first week of November 1843. See Sarah Bruce to Charles Bruce, October 6, 1843, and Elvira Clark to Charles Bruce, BFP, VHS. Receipts for finished work also indicate the progress of the building campaign at Berry Hill. See: Receipt, Josiah Dabbs to JCB, March 15, 1842, BFP, BP 1842, UVA. Receipts, Josiah Dabbs to JCB, November 8, 1843 and December 25, 1843, BFP, BP 1843, UVA. Receipts for services rendered by Dabbs and other skilled laborers and for the hire of skilled slave masons are in BFP, BP 1842-46, UVA. Bruce also owned slaves who were skilled as stone masons, brick masons, carpenters, and blacksmiths who presumably worked on the building projects at Berry Hill. See Slave Book, Berry Hill, 1841, BFP, 2692-c, vol. 6, UVA.

[5] On the Whitices's work at the Mecklenburg County courthouse see John O. and Margaret T. Peters, Virginia's Historic Courthouses, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 78-79; and "Mecklenburg County Courthouse," VDHR file no. 173-6. On the Whitices's work at Berry Hill see JCB to EWB, August 8, 1842, BFP, UVA: Bruce instructs his clerk to check on the progress of the walls and quality of the brick and the lime in the mortar; See also a performance bond in the amount of $25,000 dated May 29, 1843 that Joseph and James Whitice co-signed with Josiah Dabbs to James C. Bruce guaranteeing that work would be 'well and faithfully' executed: BFP, UVA, FP 1843. The bond implies scheduling problems in the construction, and the fact that Bruce required Dabbs to pay interest on subsequent advances indicates that Bruce felt he was now advancing too much money for too little work. The bond

For the roof over the main block of the house, Dabbs supervised the carpenters in building a principal rafter roof system which spans the sixty-four foot breadth of the house. Both Dabbs and the Whitice brothers were familiar with this roof system since they had employed it in their courthouse constructions. The largest structural members, the king posts and the principal rafters, were hewn on the site. Although Bruce operated a sawmill at his Meadesville site, the common rafters, as well as the studs framing the partition walls of the first and second floors, were prepared by the water-powered reciprocal saw at nearby Dixon's Mill and hauled by wagon to the building site. By June of 1843 tinsmiths were installing the roof and gutters.[6]

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was voided upon completion of the house and Dabbs recorded that he had paid Bruce $634.10 in interest between January 1, 1843 and January 1, 1844. Evidence that the Whitice brothers completed the walls and installed the windows by March 1843 are in Bruce's business papers of 1842 and 1843. On December 12, 1842 Charles Cabinnes bought for Bruce window glass and ten pounds of putty which indicates that the window frames were made and ready for glazing. In March and May of 1843, Dabbs billed Bruce for two kegs of white lead which were probably used in paint and in the lead paste that filled the joints of sheet-metal roofing. On May 6 Dabbs billed Bruce for thirteen kegs of nails, each weighing 100 pounds, which indicates that carpenters were beginning work on interior partitions and the roof framing. (See also Wait Report, VDHR, p. 10.) Little is known about the actual work of James and Joseph Whitice at Berry Hill. There is no evidence in the Bruce Family Papers to indicate where they made the brick used in construction, who they employed, or when they began and finished work. Their work schedule can be inferred from other evidence relating to building sequence, such as bills for timber, nails, and plaster. The brick for Berry Hill was hand made. For more on nineteenth-century brickmaking see: Bill Weldon, "The Brickmaker's Year", in Earl L. Soles, Jr., ed., The Colonial Williamsburg Historic Trades Annual, Vol. 2, (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1990) 1-41; Bricks were handmade in Virginia throughout the antebellum period. Thomas Jefferson estimated that two men could mold 2000 bricks per day. In 1819 the first patented brick-molding machine operating near Washington D.C. molded 30,000 bricks in a twelve-hour day. There is no evidence to suggest that such machines were in use in Southside Virginia during the antebellum period. For the mechanization of the brickmaking industry in the United States see: Harley J. McKee, "Brick and Stone: Handicraft to Machine", in Charles E. Peterson, ed., Building Early America: Contributions toward the History of a Great Industry, (Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton Book Co., 1976), 74-96.

[6] Dabbs charged Bruce for hauling materials from Dixon's Mill. See: Receipt, JD to JCB, June 15, 1843, BFP, BP, UVA. Large structural members for framing continued to be hand-hewn in Virginia well into the second half of the nineteenth century. Smaller structural members like studs and rafters were often prepared at saw mills using reciprocal saws powered by water. By 1820 three sawmills were in operation in Halifax County. See: Census of Manufactures, Halifax County, Virginia, 1820. While smaller framing members were mechanically sawn, lath for

The house was fully enclosed before summer and work on the interior began early in June. At this stage, the house was a shell with fully exposed brick walls, floor and ceiling joists, and stud partitions. In this state, the house was ready to receive the only infrastructure that the Bruces had planned, a complex call bell system that Dabbs installed in early June. Dabbs hung thirteen bells in the service vestibule and connected each bell to a crank by the fireplace in each major room of the house. Dabbs connected the bells and cranks with brass pulleys and copper wires which ran along the brick walls at baseboard height, through wood partitions and floor and ceiling joists. Marble baseboards in the parlors and dining room and the wood baseboards elsewhere later hid the mechanisms. With the call bell system in place, Dabbs installed the two finely carved marble mantels in the parlors and carpenters began to lay floorboards, apply lath to the interior wood partition walls and ceiling joists, and prepare the interior to receive plaster.[7]

While brick masons and carpenters worked on the house, George and Enoch Taylor, along with their assistant, began to quarry and finish the granite that Bruce had specified for trimming the openings as well as building the steps

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plastering continued to be hand-riven. Lath at Berry Hill is hand-riven. Dabbs billed Bruce for four bushels of "coal for tinners" indicating that the tin roof was in place and that the tinsmiths were using the coal to heat the solder for the roof work. See: Receipt, JD to JCB, June 5, 1843, BFP, FP 1843 UVA. See also Wait Report, VDHR, p. 11.

[7] Receipt, JD to JCB, June 15, 1843, BFP, FP 1843, UVA. Dabbs's receipts for the call bells and mantels indicates that the house was enclosed. In his Historic Structure Assessment, Wait suggests that the house might have received most of its plaster during the summer of 1844, eight months after the Bruces moved into the house. Between March and August of 1844 Bruce paid for more than nine thousand pounds of plaster that he processed at his Meadsville Mills. These billings are not from Dabbs, however, but listed in Bruce's Meadsville Account Book. Bruce often used his own mill to process building supplies for jobs that he contracted separately. Since Dabbs was responsible for a 'turn key' job, it seems unlikely that the plaster processed at Meadsville was intended for the house at Berry Hill. Moreover, the final settlement between Dabbs and Bruce of March 21, 1844 indicates that Dabbs had finished his 'turn key' job, including plastering the entire house. See Waite Report, VDHR.

and base of the Doric portico. The stone the Taylors sought was easily available in the natural outcropping of gray granite in a ravine a quarter-mile northwest of the building site (see fig. 4.2). The Taylors began work during the summer of 1842 and immediately found their task frustrated by dulled and broken rock drills, hammers, wedges and chisels. By May of the following year, however, as the brick masons were finishing the walls, the Taylors were delivering the granite sills and lintels for the windows. While Dabbs installed the call bell system and the tinsmiths worked on the roof, the Taylors were putting up the massive granite architraves around the front door. In June of 1843 the stone masons and their assistant completed the stone work on the porches of the small flankers. They also laid the stone floor of the front porch of the main house and finished the broad flight of granite steps that spanned the entire breadth of the Doric portico.[8]

By the fall of 1843 the great house with its forecourt and flankers had assumed the monumental form that Bruce had envisioned from the beginning --

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[8] The work of the Taylors and their assistant can be traced in the receipts for work done at Berry Hill. Repairs to masonry tools are in receipts from May 24, 1842 through September 1, 1843. See Enoch Taylor to JCB, BFP, BP 1843, UVA. Taylor charged for "sharpening rock drills, making rock wedges, putting steel to hammers, making 5 rock punches, 2 chisels, 1 crowbar, 6 clamps, 1 dozen rock wedges, 34 pounds iron, 2 pounds steel." For bills for lintels, the front door, the two offices and other stone work, see: George W. Taylor to JCB, May 12, 1843; and JD to JCB, June 15, 1843 BFP, BP 1843, UVA. The evidence that the granite was quarried on the site is conclusive. A series of holes in the bed of this outcropping indicates markings of early nineteenth-century quarrying techniques. One set of tools repaired at Berry Hill were rock drills used to make these holes. Other tools repaired were wedges used to split the granite into large blocks, and chisels used to prepare the blocks for finishing. For more on nineteenth-century quarrying techniques, see: Harley J. McKee, "Brick and Stone: Handicraft to Machine", in Charles E. Peterson, ed., Building Early America, 74-96. The rock outcropping at Berry Hill is a type of granite known as "Petersburg granite" which is found in veins running northwest from the Piedmont of North Carolina into Virginia as far as north as the Potomac River. Ranging in color from light pink to light gray, the granite surfaces in natural outcrops throughout the Piedmont of Virginia. Commercial quarries operated in Amelia County during the antebellum period and this type of granite was prized as a durable building stone. See

a Greek temple complex set on a hill. The plan of the house, however, had been radically altered during construction. Dabbs raised the building in one campaign over a two-year period, but the process took place in four distinct phases as plans for the service areas began to change.

A Change in Plans

The main house at Berry Hill was built in four phases (fig. 4.3). The first phase consisted of the main block that Bruce and Johnson carefully described in the contract and addendum. The second phase of construction began when plans for the closet behind the nursery were abandoned and replaced with a pantry wing. The third and fourth building phase began when plans for the service wing were modified. Identifying these four phases of construction at Berry Hill's main house is important, because it reveals an otherwise undocumented logic at work. The changes centered on disposition of service spaces and circulation patterns, matters that directly concerned Eliza Bruce in her role as mother, hostess, and household manager. As Eliza Bruce considered how she would use the service area in her daily routine, she prevailed on her husband and his builder to change the plans according to her needs. Analysis of the building sequence points to gender and race as determining factors in the final form of Berry Hill house.

In March of 1844, two years after construction began, Dabbs and Bruce began settling accounts and Dabbs presented a bill for "extra work done on house" listing the changes and additions made to the original construction plans. Among miscellaneous charges for small items such as screws and doorknobs,

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Keith Frye, Roadside Geology of Virginia, (1986; Missoula, Montana: Mountain Press, 1995), 83-90.

Dabbs listed changes to the dimensions and original plan of the house. He charged for adding three feet to the breadth of the house, one foot to the depth of the dining room, and six feet to the depth of the green house. He also charged for additions to the row of outbuildings, changes to the main stair case, extending the Doric entablature to the back of the house, and for "fixing the gentlemen's privy."[9]

These changes illustrate the collaborative nature of the construction process in antebellum Virginia. The plans that Johnson drew and the written instructions that Bruce later gave Dabbs were subject to change as the building rose from its foundations and as the Bruces considered the practical implications of their original plans. Before Dabbs began to lay the foundation of the house in the summer of 1842, Bruce made minor changes in the dimensions of the house. Originally meant to be sixty-four feet wide, the plan was extended to east and west to make the Doric porch sixty-eight feet broad. The dining room projects eleven feet rather than ten beyond the plane of the south elevation, and the green house projects an additional four feet beyond the dining room. There is no explanation in the documents for these changes, but they might have been made to enlarge spaces that the Bruces thought too small. The green house, for example, would have been a very narrow 9 feet by 19 feet according to the original plan. The additional breadth also broadened the main rooms of the house -- the double parlors, the central passage, and the dining room -- rooms which, as originally conceived, would have been too narrow for the monumental effect that the Bruces sought to achieve. These minor changes affected the

[9] Account of James C. Bruce with Josiah Dabbs, BFP, BP 1844, UVA.

dimensions of the house, but they did not fundamentally change the main block of the house as Johnson and Bruce envisioned it. Dabbs also charged Bruce for extra work on the double flight of stairs in the central hall. There appears to have been a miscalculation in the placement of this staircase, requiring Dabbs to build the unique raised bridges that connect the front and back portions of the upstairs hall.

The Bruces also made substantial changes in plans for the service wing during construction. As Dabbs began laying the foundation of the main block during the spring of 1842, James and Eliza Bruce considered the original locations of both the service rooms projecting from the rear wall of the dining room and the closet behind the nursery. Perhaps realizing that such an arrangement would leave the dining room with only one window, they instructed Dabbs to continue construction on the main block while they planned a solution for the service wing. It was midsummer before the Bruces settled on a new arrangement, and Dabbs had already raised the walls of the house beyond the first floor before he received new instructions.[10]

In place of the closet behind the nursery the Bruces planned a two-story pantry wing projecting thirty-five feet south from the nursery wall. The Bruces removed the service wing entirely from the main block of the house, locating it

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[10] Physical evidence for this change of plans is found in the east and west walls of the pantry wing foundation, visible from an unfinished crawl space. These walls abut, but are not bonded into, the south wall of the main block of the house, further indication that this wing was added after the foundation and first floor walls of the main block were finished. Inside the crawl space, the south wall of the main block of the house is finished with fine, pointed masonry joints, as if this wall was intended to be seen. Indeed, if the service wing had been built behind the dining room according to the contract specifications, this wall would have been exposed to view. The fine pointing of this masonry wall is in keeping with the contract which called for stucco only on the north, east, and west facades of the house. Thus Dabbs had

ten feet west of the pantry wing and connecting the two wings by a curtain wall with a door which gave access to the west yard of the main house. Plans for a colonnade connecting the nursery passage to the service wing were retained, but its new circuitous route extended down and around the pantry wing, along the curtain wall, and thence along the entire length of the service wing.

Although original plans for the service wing called for two slave rooms in addition to the kitchen and laundry, the Bruces's new plans provided only for a kitchen, laundry, and an unheated store room. Shortly after Dabbs had finished the pantry wing and the service wing, however, the Bruces once again reconsidered their decisions, and they instructed him to add two slave rooms and a privy to the south end of the service wing. They also decided at this time to convert the store room into a habitable space, and directed Dabbs to build a fireplace and chimney for the room.[11]

The House as Built

The final form of Berry Hill was both monumental in its presentation and domestic in its organization (fig. 4.4). It not only answered the Bruce's needs for a fashionable architectural statement of status, it also met the needs for privacy and efficiency of a large slaveholding family. The first floor is dominated by public rooms. The central hall bisects the house and serves as the main circulation space in the Bruce family's public life. From this hall guests were

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finished the first floor of the main block of the house before the Bruces had decided on a revised plan for the service wing.

[11] Physical evidence that the two slave rooms and privy were added after the completion of the service wing is found in the break in masonry; the addition is not bonded into the first phase of construction. Likewise, the chimney breast in the store room abuts, but is not bonded into, the south wall.

directed either into the double parlors that opened to the east or into the dining room located directly south and on axis with the front door. The private life of the Bruce family also centered on rooms on the first floor. The bedchamber of James and Eliza Bruce is located at the front of the house, in the northwest corner, and opens directly onto the central hall. Behind this chamber is the nursery, the most private family space at Berry Hill. The nursery communicated with the Bruce's bedchamber to the north and was buffered from the dining room to the west by the nursery passage.

The bedchambers of the second floor correspond in plan to the rooms of the first floor and in finish to the dining room. Two bedchambers flank each side of the stair hall and are separated one from another by large closets. Another bedchamber is located over the dining room, and a small room with a glazed sliding door occupies the space over the front door. The stairs in the nursery passage allow access for slaves and family from the first floor, and an enclosed set of winder stairs leads to the attic. The central hall on the second floor is most notable for the curious bridges that connect the front of the hall to the back (fig. 4.5). Without the bridges, those ascending the double flight of stairs would lack sufficient headroom to clear the ceiling of the hall as the stairs turn to meet at the landing over the dining room door.

While the second floor of the main block was reserved for bedchambers for the family and guests, the basement was devoted to work spaces. In plan, the basement also corresponds to the rooms of the first floor above. A central hall runs the depth of the house and serves as the main circulation space. Goods and provisions were brought in through a bulkhead entrance in the south wall

and distributed to the five rooms which opened onto this central passage. Two of the rooms, the northeast and the northwest store rooms are situated below the double parlors. Neither of these rooms were heated, but each had two windows flanking the chimney foundations of the rooms above. Two heated work rooms correspond to the Bruces' chamber and the nursery above. The northwest work room beneath the chamber has two windows flanking the fireplace while the southwest work room beneath the nursery has a fireplace flanked by a window and a door that opened onto the west yard. A stair led from this workroom to the nursery passage above. At the north end of the basement's central hall was the wine cellar. All of these rooms had doors with locks and none communicated with another except by way of the basement hall.

The second stage of construction centered on the two-story pantry wing which extends southward directly behind the nursery and replaced the closet in the original plan. This wing contains the pantry in the basement and a servants' hall and closet on the first floor. The first floor of the pantry wing is on level with the first floor of the main block of the house. A door in the north side of the nursery opens into the closet passage running perpendicular to the nursery and leading to a large locked closet where china, silver, and linens were stored when not needed in the dining room or parlors. To the west of the closet passage is the servants' hall, a staging area from which slaves served the dining room. Between the servants' hall and dining room was a vestibule, open to the colonnade to the south and accessible by locking doors from the dining room to the west and the nursery passage to the north. In this vestibule hang eleven call

bells which were connected to the front door and every major room in the house.

The pantry is located directly under the closet of the pantry wing and is sheltered on the east and south by the colonnade. This important storage room has two points of access. A locking door in the closet on the first floor opens into a stair leading down to the pantry. Although the pantry is on the same level of the basement, it has no access to the other store rooms in that part of the house. The other point of access to the pantry is a locking door in the south wall which opens onto the colonnade leading west to the kitchen.

The service wing was the third sequence of construction. The two most important rooms of the service wing, the kitchen and laundry, are located at the north end, closest to the pantry and dining room. The kitchen and laundry share one large rectangular space. A massive chimney stack divides the room into separate work areas and provides each space with a large fireplace fitted with cranes. The space between the chimney stack and walls was closed by wood partitions, but doors in each partition provided easy access between these two important work areas. A stone hearth extends five feet from each fireplace and runs the width of the rooms. The rest of the kitchen and laundry is floored with wooden planks resting on joists. A door in the east wall of each room opens onto the colonnade and a door and window in the west wall opens onto the west yard where outdoor work activities took place.

The next room of the service wing lies immediately south of the kitchen/laundry and was originally a narrow store room probably intended for extra provisions. A door opens onto the colonnade and a window in the west

wall lights the room. This room was unheated when built, but a fireplace was added later to the south wall, making it habitable as a domestics slave's room.

The Bruces immediately decided to extend the service wing and in the fourth and final sequence of construction, Dabbs built two more heated rooms for slave dwelling. Like the other rooms of the service wing, these rooms have doors opening onto the colonnade and windows in their west wall. Dabbs also built a three-seat privy attached to the last slave room and recessed an additional ten feet behind the plane of the service wing's east wall. Each seat of the privy is separated by a paneled wooden partition and further sequestered accessed by a door that latches from the inside. In his final billing, Josiah Dabbs charged Bruce for "fixing gentmns privy" and this designation indicates that the privy was for the use of male members of the white household. The presumption, then, is that women used close stools or chamber pots in their bedrooms.

Johnson's drawings, the written description contained in the contract, and Bruce's additional instructions for the house at Berry Hill all proved inadequate to the task of creating a fully satisfactory house. None of the participants had anticipated the complicated nature of household management. Despite the drawings that Johnson provided, it was James and Eliza Bruce who ultimately determined the form of Berry Hill house. The final result had nothing of the rational scheme that Johnson and Bruce had conceived -- a central square block with a symmetrical projecting wing. The original plan privileged bilateral symmetry and simple, direct paths of circulation. Attempts to realize such an idealized plan was complicated, however, by the reality of a household run by a woman and served by slaves. The final form of the house was decidedly

asymmetrical with complex, circuitous paths of circulation which answered the needs of Eliza Bruce.

Chapter Five: House and Household

The Multi-Purpose House

The house at Berry Hill served multiple purposes -- it was the center of social, familial, and economic life of the plantation. Its Greek temple facade, along with its large stair hall, double parlors, and dining room were settings for genteel hospitality and confirmed for visitors the elite status of the Bruce family. The private chambers on the first and second floors served the intimate needs of the family. The basement, pantry wing, and service wing were the center of the plantation's production of meals and clothing that the Bruces and their slaves consumed. Berry Hill house accommodated guests, family members, and slaves simultaneously and the spaces they occupied were settings for complex human relationships -- guest and host, master and slave, parent and child. The nature of these relationships is revealed in the plan of the house itself.

Berry Hill house was spatially segregated by function -- public areas for reception, private areas for the family, and service areas for slaves. These spaces, and the people who occupied them, intersected at the crucial circulation points within the house -- the main hall and the nursery passage. Of paramount concern for the Bruces was the manner in which these circulation spaces would regulate movement within the house according to status -- class, gender, and race.

The house at Berry Hill was first and foremost a setting in which the Bruces confirmed their elite status, and the first floor is dominated by public rooms designed to receive and impress visitors from all ranks of society. The

central hall bisects the house and serves as the main circulation space in the Bruce family's public life. From this hall guests were directed either into the double parlors that opened to the east or into the dining room that lay directly south on axis with the front door. The molding profile of the doors and windows of the public rooms is the finest in the house, establishing a visual hierarchy that complements the scale and position of these rooms in the house. Bold shouldered double-fascia architraves with crossets mark the hall and the double parlors as the most important spaces. The parlors are further distinguished by marble baseboards and marble mantels with friezes and shelves supported by caryatids. The dining room is second in the hierarchy of finish with double-fascia crosseted architraves finished by a delicate beaded backband. The central hall and resulting circulation pattern were not innovative; the gentry of colonial Virginia had fully incorporated it into their houses by the middle of the eighteenth century as a means to sort and segregate visitors of various social rank. Like their eighteenth-century counterparts, visitors to Berry Hill might wait in the central hall until confirmation of their status gained them access to the grander reception areas of the double parlors or the dining room. The Bruce houses at Woodburn and Tarover both had a central hall, parlor, and dining room. These same rooms at Berry Hill are grander in scale and finish, but James and Eliza Bruce arranged the public spaces at Berry Hill in keeping with traditional, accepted notions of spatial arrangements in rural Virginia.[1]

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[1] On the development of the central passage as a social barrier see Mark R. Wenger "The Central Passage in Virginia: Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Living Space," in Camille Wells, ed., Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture II, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 137-149. Eighteenth-century Virginians invariably used the term "passage" to describe the central circulation space. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, this space was more often called the "hall," although "passage" was often used as well. On the

The central hall served not only as a social barrier, but as a buffer between public and private spaces. The position of the Bruces's own chamber in the scheme of the first floor is in keeping with the traditional arrangement of elite households in Virginia. It is prominently located and readily accessible to the main, public circulation space, but it is used exclusively by James and Eliza Bruce as a private place to retire during the day and to sleep during the night. Behind this chamber is the nursery, the most private family space at Berry Hill. The nursery communicated with the Bruce's chamber to the north and was buffered from the dining room to the west by the nursery passage. In the hierarchy of finish, the Bruce's chamber and nursery are second, equal to the dining room with double-fascia crosseted architraves and beaded backbands. The nursery, the most private area of the house, was imbedded in the plan, easily accessible to the family but effectively secluded from public rooms and public circulation patterns.

The Bruces were especially concerned about service within the house, and they devised a way to regulate the movement of their domestic slaves spatially and aurally. The first floor of Berry Hill also includes service spaces necessary to the public rituals of reception and dining and essential to the comfort of the family. Just as the central hall provided a public circulation space for visitors and family, the bell vestibule and the nursery passage provided a private circulation

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development and importance of the dining room as a space for social ritual see Mark R. Wenger, "The Dining Room in Early Virginia," in Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman, eds., Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture III, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 149-159. The central passage also gave rise to a variety of room arrangements. While elite Virginians of the eighteenth century often employed many different room arrangements, the central passage remained a central feature of the floor plan. See Dell Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in Dell Upton and John Michael

space for the family and their slaves. It was the nursery passage rather than the grand stair hall that served the central core of the house horizontally and vertically. This passage, running from the central hall to the bell vestibule, connected the public spaces at the front of the house to the private spaces at the back of the house. A stair in the nursery passage led to the private family rooms on the second floor as well as to the work rooms in the basement. Family members and slaves alike used this circulation space to access public, private, and work areas within the house.

The nursery passage was particularly important to Eliza Bruce as she carried out her duties as mother and mistress, and she shared this space with slaves who attended the adjacent public and private rooms. The nursery passage was only one element in a much larger scheme to regulate slave movement through the house. The nursery passage, the bell vestibule, and the servants' hall together were the nexus of slave circulation within the main house (fig. 5.1). These spaces assured the Bruce family and their guests that slave presence among them would be kept to a minimum. Slave service was intended to be discrete, silent, and almost invisible.

Crucial to achieving this effect was the call bell system. The eleven bells in the bell vestibule over the door to the servants' hall and were connected to the bedchambers, the public rooms, and the front door. The bells were graduated in size so that each room had its distinctive tone, and slaves had to learn which tone signaled them to which room. The call bells gathered slaves in one place until they were summoned, at which time they could move inconspicuously through

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Vlach, eds., Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 315-336.

the house by way of the nursery passage and bell vestibule. Without the bells to summon them, slaves would have to wait in the public and family areas of the house itself, including the main hall outside the doors of the parlors or dining room or in the upstairs hall outside bedroom doors. Such an arrangement would leave slaves both conspicuous and unsupervised within the heart of the household. The servants' hall and the call bell system gathered the slaves in one place -- adjacent to, but not within the main block of the house. While this arrangement did not guarantee maximum surveillance of slave activity, it assured the Bruces that their slaves had no access to rooms with valuable contents and that their movement within the main house would be unobtrusive.

Because the dining room and greenhouse overlooked the south yard where the Bruces had planned the service wing, they also wanted slave activity in and around this area to be as unobtrusive as possible. The Bruces's desire for more discreet means of service account for the change in plans which comprised the third and fourth phases of construction on the service wing. By moving the service wing ten feet west of the main house, several views opened. The westward slope of the south yard almost made the service wing submerge from view, effectively blocking any prospect of this long row of service rooms from the dining room and greenhouse. Slaves traveling along the colonnade of the service wing were virtually invisible to anyone looking from the dining room or greenhouse windows; the view to the south yard was clear of any service structure. Views toward the house from the east garden were also protected. The garden that Eliza Bruce planned lay on a series of terraces sloping away

from the house to the east. The garden wall together with the sloping terrain blocked all view of the service wing from the garden.

The colonnade shed, the most curious feature of Berry Hill house, is the result of the Bruces's efforts to maintain visual barriers between the white and black households (fig. 5.2). The colonnade shed, which is covered with louvered blinds, extends south from the bell vestibule along the entire length of the east wall of the pantry wing. From the vestibule, a set of stairs leads down to grade level onto the colonnade of the pantry wing. This section of the colonnade is sheltered by a five-bay shed with fixed louvers set atop the pillars of the colonnade. The shed has the curious effect of a narrow out-door room raised on piers and open to the elements on the first floor. Anyone approaching the main house along the colonnade passes under this structure, and although the eye is naturally drawn up, toward the ceiling of the shed, the view into the dining room window is blocked by the fixed louvers. Likewise, the view from the dining room window toward the colonnade is blocked by the louvered blinds. As slaves traversed the colonnade of the pantry wing, they could not observe the Bruce family and their guests at table in the dining room. Perhaps more important, the Bruces and their guests could not see the activity of the slaves who served them.[2]

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[2] The shed was probably added during construction of the pantry wing when it was realized that the roof of the colonnade would have to be raised to accommodate headroom while ascending the stairs to the first floor of the main house. The simple solution to this problem would have been to raise the roof level of the colonnade at an angle equal to the pitch of the stairs to the first floor. This solution, however, would have blocked the windows of the pantry on the first floor and the closet and servants' hall on the second floor. The shed as built allows for the windows, but the louvers of the shed block the light. For this reason, the fixed louvers are neither necessary or desirable and they must have been added to the shed to prevent visual contact between the dining room window and the open colonnade.

In plan, the basement, pantry wing, and service wing appear to be discreet, separate spaces that have little relation to one another. The finish of these rooms, however, indicate that they share a similar status within the hierarchy of the main house. All of these spaces are plastered and all are trimmed with baseboards. Each room has double paneled doors, and the window and door architraves are composed of single fascia surrounds with simple backbands, the least elaborate of the three molding profiles used at Berry Hill. The architectural finish of these rooms implies a shared logic of utilitarian function. In fact, that function is defined by the people who occupied these spaces -- an elite slaveholding woman and her slaves. Thus gender and race are the keys to understanding why the Bruces made such substantial changes to the original plans of their house.

Eliza Bruce's Household

Family, guests, and slaves were all brought together under one roof at Berry Hill house and at any given moment, a cross section of plantation society was represented in the house. Organizing the household required sorting, segregating, supervising, and surveying those who peopled the house at any given time. These complex social relations were regulated and mediated spatially and aurally at Berry Hill under the supervision of Eliza Bruce.

James Bruce, Josiah Dabbs, and John Johnson planned the house front to back focusing on a grand facade and entrance forecourt which promised impressive public rooms within. These were the only elements of the house described with any detail in the contract. When Eliza Bruce entered the planning

process, however, she thought of the house from her perspective; thus the plan of the house came to revolve around her duties. The changes that the Bruces made during the construction of Berry Hill's main house are the result of a dialogue -- a dialogue between Eliza and James C. Bruce, and their builder Josiah Dabbs which can be reconstructed using documentary evidence and analysis of the construction changes. The dialogue centered on Eliza's role as plantation mistress and her supervision of the slaves who worked in the household and centered on a central question: how does a household served by slaves and supervised by a woman function? The answer to that question found physical manifestation during the construction of Berry Hill house.

Eliza Bruce was typical in her attitudes and conduct of elite women in the antebellum South. Her life revolved around her family and church and she constantly worked to reinforce the values of these two institutions. Like all southern women, Eliza Bruce's position in society was strictly proscribed by a process of socialization from childhood into early youth. Ministers and educators taught their young female charges that God had ordained women's role in society, and that her proper place was in the home. Evangelical ministers were often teachers as well, and they celebrated a woman's domestic skills and benevolent works as her greatest contributions to a harmonious family, and by extension to a harmonious society. These teachers prized sobriety, frugality and hard work. They taught their wards to be submissive and dutiful to their husbands and devoted to the rearing and moral instruction of their children. Ministers constantly reinforced this message and promised that the woman who took up this role in society would be happy, appreciated, loved, and admired.

Antebellum advice literature praised a woman who quietly and obediently pursued her responsibilities in the home and church as fulfilling the ideal of true womanhood. This literature claimed that a woman's mission was to redeem society through her role as guardian of domestic, maternal values.[3]

Eliza Bruce strove to fulfill her duties as wife and mother. Her primary concern was with the health and safety of her husband and children and she took great care to guard against the possibility of illness in her family. Experience quickly taught Eliza Bruce her own limitations as a nurse -- four of her eleven children died before the age of three -- and she often called a doctor at the first sign of illness, especially in one of her children. During periods of illness and convalescence, Eliza Bruce required extra help from her slaves in stoking and maintaining fires, running errands, and sitting through the night at the sick bed. Life was fragile and Eliza Bruce was keenly aware that those she loved could die suddenly. She took comfort, however, in the Christian promise of reunion with her dead children in Heaven, and she sought to instill in her surviving children her own devotion to religion. Raised in the new evangelical atmosphere of the Episcopal Church, Eliza Bruce regularly consulted ministers on spiritual matters and she sought a personal, experiential relationship with Christ. She read to her children daily from the Bible and she encouraged their own spiritual

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[3] Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture, (New York: Knopf, 1977), 8-10. Although Douglas focuses on middle-class women of the northeast, she argues for a national trend toward the sentimentalization of the home. On the socialization of southern women see: Christie Anne Farnham, The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Ante-bellum South, (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 1-6; and Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 3-21; On antebellum advice literature see: Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," American Quarterly 18 (April, 1966), 151-165. On southern women and their roles as mothers see Sally McMillen, Motherhood in the Old South:

development toward an evangelical, born-again experience. Although James C. Bruce proved himself a dutiful Christian, Eliza Bruce also presumed to direct his spiritual life, urging Bruce to read his Bible and to provide an example to his sons. Eliza Bruce nurtured her family, both physically and spiritually, with keen and earnest fervor.[4]

Eliza's religion also taught her to be submissive and obedient to her husband and she was always careful to acknowledge her husband's authority. When her husband was away on business, leaving her with the responsibilities of managing the plantation, Eliza Bruce felt reluctance, fearing that her decisions would not meet the approval of her husband. Although she expressed deference to her husband's wishes, she also made her own views and desires clear. When James C. Bruce took an extended tour of the South in the winter of 1844 Eliza wrote:

> I wonder how I could have remained here alone, nothing but the belief that it was more agreeable to you and therefore my duty could have supported me through the trial of this winter . . . six months is a terrible length of time for a man and wife to part.[5]

Eliza Bruce submitted to her husband's wishes that she not accompany him and she acknowledged her duty to abide by his decisions, but she also expressed the anxiety and displeasure that his actions caused her. James C. Bruce did not relish the separation either, and while he did not relent in his plans to travel, he did tell

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Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990).

[4] Eliza Bruce's concerns for and ministrations to her family's health are revealed in her letters. See Diary Letters EWB, Nov. 14, 1844-April 10, 1845, BFP, UVA. On evangelical nature of the antebellum Episcopal Church see Richard Rankin, Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen. The nature of Eliza Bruce's faith is revealed in letters to her husband and children. See for example EWB to JCB, Dec. 15, 1831; Feb. 10, 1838; and Diary Letters EWB, Nov. 14, 1844-April 10, 1845. BFP, UVA. See also The Rev. James Ogden to EWB, Feb. 10, 1834, BFP, Box 5.

his wife how central she was to his life and happiness. After he attended the theater in New Orleans he wrote his wife describing the performance. Bruce allowed that his negative critique might be due to the ill humor that their separation always seemed to produce in him: "It seems to me that I am not entitled to any pleasure or gratification which is not shared by you."[6] James and Eliza Bruce were devoted to each other and Eliza Bruce sought to provide her husband and children a suitable environment in which daily family life might unfold.

Eliza Bruce's deepest concern was with the health and spiritual well-being of her family, but she was also responsible for other practical matters of the family's daily routines, namely the preparation of daily meals, laundry, and house cleaning. The feeding of her large family required Eliza Bruce to supervise the planting and maintenance of vegetable gardens, the making and preservation of dairy products, and the raising and slaughtering of pork, beef, and poultry. Slaves of course worked at these tasks, but Eliza Bruce organized and supervised all of the labor required to provide for her family's comfort.[7]

Eliza Bruce's duties as wife and mother extended far beyond the physical, spiritual, and emotional health of her immediate family. She was also charged with the well-being of the slave populations at Berry Hill and at the three other Bruce plantations: Tarover and Edwards in Halifax County and Wares Place in Pittsylvania County. As with her own family, Eliza Bruce's primary concern among the slaves was for their health. At the other plantations, the overseer and his wife took care of sick slaves, but they always reported illnesses to Eliza Bruce,

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[5] EWB to JCB, Feb. 16, 1845, BFP.
[6] JCB to EWB, March 15, 1845, BFP.

and if the symptoms seemed to indicate a condition beyond the expertise of the overseer's wife or that of her own, she authorized the overseer to call a doctor. At Berry Hill Eliza Bruce herself cared for sick slaves, both those who worked in the house and those who worked the fields. She visited the slaves in their own quarters, prescribed treatment, and followed their condition closely. The health of the family's labor force was cause for constant concern, and in her correspondence Eliza Bruce seldom failed to remark upon the health of the slaves under her care. In one letter to her husband she reported that "our negroes are very healthy. Two little boys, the sons of Billy at Tarover have had a little attack of fever, but they are both better. We have had no other cases worth speaking of. I have not known so little sickness for several years."[8]

Eliza Bruce might well take note of such unusually good health among the Bruce's slaves. As with her own family, a slave's illness sometimes required more treatment than she was capable of giving, and in these instances, she called a doctor. In the winter of 1844, Eliza Bruce called on the services of Dr. George Carrington who made thirty visits to Berry Hill during a six-week period and stayed overnight for one full week. In the late summer of that year, she called Dr. Thomas Stokes who visited Berry Hill slaves every day for seven weeks. That year the Bruces paid doctors more than $650.00 for their services at Berry Hill plantation alone -- the equivalent of two overseers' annual salary.[9]

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[7] EWB Diary Letters, Oct. 25, 1844--March 15, 1845, BFP, UVA.

[8] EWB to JCB, August 2, 1849, BFP, UVA. For examples of Eliza's duties to the slaves on other plantations see JCB to EWB, July 21, 1849, BFP, UVA; and James Younger [overseer] to JCB, Dec. 3, 1846, BFP, BP 1846, UVA. Eliza Bruce visited slaves in their own quarters, see EWB to JCB, Feb. 8, 1845, BFP, UVA.

[9] Receipt, George Carrington to JCB, Jan. 26, 1844; and receipt, Thomas Stokes to JCB, Sept. 30, 1844. BFP, BP 1844, UVA.

Eliza Bruce was also responsible for provisioning the Bruce slaves with food and clothing. On all of the Bruce plantations, slaves were allowed to keep their own vegetable gardens but Eliza Bruce rationed all meat supplies on a weekly basis. Eliza Bruce authorized and supervised the slaughtering and preserving of the meat for both her own family and the slaves. She kept her own records and reported to her husband with satisfaction when the smokehouses at Berry Hill and the other plantations were filled with winter supplies of meat. As with matters of health, overseers at the other plantations reported to Eliza Bruce on the rations that the slaves received.

A great deal of her time, Eliza Bruce was supervising the production of clothing, blankets, and shoes for 264 slave men, women, and children at all the Bruce plantations. All of the slave clothing was produced at the home plantation, Tarover and, later, Berry Hill, under her direct supervision. Eliza Bruce assembled a work force of slaves from the four plantations, summoning skilled slaves to the home place and sending them back when their tasks were finished. When labor was short due to illness or unexpected production requirements, she hired white women from the county as weavers. More often, however, Eliza Bruce hired extra slave help from relatives or neighbors. Slave women worked as weavers, cloth cutters, and seamstresses throughout the year. Slave women and men also cut leather for shoes which were made by a slave skilled in cobbling. Each Christmas, Eliza Bruce presented the fruits of their labor -- two sets of shoes, clothing, and blankets for each slave -- as presents from the Bruces

to the slave communities of Berry Hill, Tarover, Edwards and Wares plantations.[10]

Eliza Bruce's responsibilities to both her own family and the Bruce slaves made her an indispensable member of the plantation work force. In the antebellum south, the household, slaveholding and non-slaveholding alike, was the main unit of economic production and women were charged with organizing and supervising the work. Men took charge of growing and marketing the cash crops, women supervised the production of food, clothing, and other necessities that the household, black and white, consumed. In slaveholding households, a woman's responsibilities increased exponentially when she became responsible for the welfare of the family's slaves, and plantation mistresses regarded their duties toward their enslaved charges as similar to their duties to their own family -- Eliza Bruce often spoke of tending to "the comfort of the black family." A mistress's relationship with her slaves was complicated and complex, and while slaveholding women referred to their "black family" they always viewed that "family" as inferior to their own. Eliza Bruce did empathize with her slaves, mourning the death of Martha, her personal maid, and worrying about the separation among the Bruce family slaves. Ultimately, however, Eliza Bruce's relationship with her slaves centered on supervising their work to serve her own family. Any emotions that Eliza Bruce might experience in regard to the Bruce family slaves was superseded by her duty to her own kin. In this aspect, she was

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[10] For weekly rations see "Weekly Allowance of Meat, Edwards [plantation]" in Box 19, Miscellaneous Papers, undated, BFP, UVA. On slaughtering hogs and filling smokehouses and provisioning the other Bruce plantations see EWB to JCB, Nov. 22, 1844, BFP, UVA. On the production of slave clothing see EWB to JCB Oct. 17, 1836; Nov. 20, 1844; Dec. 13, 1844, BFP, UVA. On the hire of extra help see Receipt, JCB to ECB, dated 1840, BFP, BP 1842, UVA.

typical of plantation mistresses across the South in that her work was essential to the economic well-being of her family.[11]

Eliza Bruce's roles as wife, mother, and mistress found architectural expression in the house at Berry Hill plantation. She carried out her duties in specific architectural settings -- nursery, kitchen, laundry, pantry, and the basement workrooms among others -- that she herself planned during the construction of the house. The changes she made were the result of the Bruces's attempt to rationalize and better control the way their slaves served their household. Berry Hill house teemed with the activity of twenty-seven domestic slaves who cooked, cleaned, laundered, tended the gardens, made clothes, carried water, provisioned the pantry and smokehouse and any number of tasks around household. Slaves always outnumbered the white inhabitants and their presence was ubiquitous. Putting into order such a household was an arduous,

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[11] For an example of Eliza Bruce's references to 'the black family' see EWB to JCB, Dec. 13, 1844, BFP, UVA; For her mourning of Martha, see EWB to Sarah Bruce, Sept. 5, 1845, BFP, UVA; On separation of slave husband and wife see EWB to JCB, March 26, 1835, BFP, UVA. On the essential differences between households in the industrial North and the rural South as economic units see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Antebellum Southern Households: A New Perspective on a Familiar Question," Review 7, No. 2 (Fall 1983) 215-53. On slaveholding women and their roles as mistress and integral to the plantation economy, see Catherine Clinton, The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South (New York, 1982), 7-8, 16-35; In her chapter titled "Slaves of Slaves" Clinton dismantles the myth of the pampered, proper southern belle as mistress and portrays slaveholding women as 'trapped within a system over which she had no control, one from which she had no means of escape." Where Clinton interprets the southern mistress as burdened by slavery, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese rejects the notion that southern mistresses were 'slaves of slaves' and insists that they were willing participants and beneficiaries of the slave system. In her final judgment, Fox-Genovese says that "Slaveholding women were elitist and racist." See Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). Suzanne Lebsock criticizes Fox-Genovese's work both for its methodology and for its analysis. Lebsock faults Fox-Genovese for her reliance on documents describing the lives of elite southern women saying that a more thorough investigation of court records and newspapers, for example, calls into question Fox-Genovese's contention that southern mistresses were united in their support of slavery. See Suzanne Lebsock, "Complicity and Contention: Women in the Plantation South," Georgia Historical Quarterly Vol. 74, No. 1,

time-consuming task. The Bruces sought to organize the service to their household both spatially and aurally by creating a separate circulation pattern for slaves within the house and by controlling that circulation further through a mechanized system of call bells. Berry Hill's plan then embodies an attempt to reconcile two households, one white, one black -- one master, one slave. This process of rationalizing space is evident in the way in which Eliza Bruce and her slaves occupied these spaces and moved through these new configurations.

Eliza Bruce's first responsibility lay with her husband and children and her duties to them corresponded architecturally to the chamber and nursery. While the nursery is not a new development within the elite household, its sequestered location suggests a change in attitude toward its role. Moreover, the traditional service rooms -- closet, pantry, kitchen, laundry -- are integrated into or linked to the block of the main house in a manner that points to another, concurrent, change in attitudes toward service. Most important is the introduction of a new circulation space, the nursery passage with its service stair that runs from basement to attic. Significantly, this passage was included in Johnson's original drawing for the house, indicating that James and Eliza Bruce already had definite ideas about how service to the household would be regulated. Located at the core of the house, the nursery passage serves both as a barrier to the most private realm of the household and as a direct but discreet means of access to public, private, and work areas. The Bruces intended this passage to be the center of service to the house. Doors from the passage opened onto the colonnade to the rear of the house, to the central passage, and to the nursery.

(Spring 1990) 58-84; and Suzanne Lebsock, The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1985).

The nursery passage, then, was intended to be a circulation space for slaves. Its location in the center of the house gave easy access to all the public and private areas as well as to the service yard behind the house. Thus, from the beginning, Johnson had drawn a plan to the Bruces' specifications to include a unobtrusive, segregated circulation space within the house itself for slaves who served the household.

In their new house Eliza and James Bruce planned more carefully the private spaces their family would occupy. Above stairs were five spacious bedrooms served by two staircases and individual call bells. Yet the Bruces did not choose the more secluded and private second floor as the center of their domestic life. They placed themselves instead adjacent to their public space. The central passage, then, is flanked by both public and private space. The private space, the chamber is where both James and Eliza Bruce resided in authority, he over the plantation and the world beyond, and she over the household entrusted to her care. The chamber thus was not removed to the second floor for privacy; it was prominently placed within the house as a zone of transition between the public and private domains.

James and Eliza Bruce occupied this room, but slaves were of course often present as well. At least two slaves had regular access to the chamber and performed specific duties related to the room's function. The Bruces started their day by summoning their personal slaves Ellick and Martha to this chamber. The bell crank next to the fireplace connected to a bell in the vestibule where Ellick and Martha, who had risen earlier than their master and mistress, were expecting the call. Another slave would also enter to light a fire, clean the room,

fluff and make the bed, and empty to the chamber pot. Each slave would receive instructions for the day and Ellick and Martha then prepared their clothes for the day and perhaps helped them dress. The large closet adjacent to the chamber was outfitted with pegs that held James's and Eliza's every-day clothes. Ellick and Martha would brush and smooth the wrinkles from the clothes that their master and mistress chose to wear. Finer clothes for receiving guests were also stored here in trunks and in wardrobes in the chamber itself. The care of the Bruces wardrobe consumed a great deal of their slaves's time. Ellick would prepare James's shaving stand and Martha would prepare for Eliza's toilet. Ellick and Martha were thus intimately acquainted with the Bruce's chamber. Their ready access to this most private space in the plantation household was an acknowledgment of their elite status within the slave community of Berry Hill plantation. Such a status might gain them privileges, but it meant too that they were at the beck and call of their master and mistress at any time. The closet, a mundane space in any household, held a very different meaning for Ellick and Martha than it did for the Bruces themselves. The master and mistress regarded this space as essential for the maintenance of their public selves. Large closets were rare in antebellum households and the devotion of this much space to the storage of clothes represented a considerable expenditure on finery. To Ellick and Martha, this same space was a place where they could observe the objects that their labor not only bought, but maintained and cleaned. The closet also represented the tedious chores that these slaves performed in the process of grooming their master and mistress.[12]

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[12] For a contemporary's description of the duties of house servants, see Robert Roberts, The House Servant's Directory, (Boston: Munroe and Francis, 1827; republished in Afro-American

When James Bruce was home, he and Eliza retired to this chamber after the children were asleep or after guests departed for the evening. When Eliza Bruce wanted privacy during the day, she retired to this room to read, sew, write letters, and to rest. She never slept in this room when James Bruce was away from home. Eliza Bruce wrote her husband "I sleep in the nursery. The chamber makes me think too much of you." But she would come to their chamber in the evening -- after the children were asleep -- to write him letters by the light of a lamp. Eliza Bruce never expressed a sense of quiet, contented solitude. Her husband's absence always left her in profound loneliness and anxiety. "Your portrait hangs over my chamber fireplace," she wrote, and she would stop her writing to gaze at this portrait, hoping to conjure a semblance of his presence. After finishing her letters, Eliza went to the nursery where she climbed into bed with the youngest child and fell asleep to the sounds of her children's breathing. In the absence of her husband, their chamber held little appeal for Eliza.[13]

When James Bruce was away on business, the chamber also served as a guest room for close family members. Eliza's brother, William Webb Wilkins, slept there when he visited. Eliza's niece, Sally, who occupied a chamber on the second floor, would occasionally sleep in this chamber when James was away and Eliza wanted another relative close to her and the children in the nursery. Overnight guests who were not family members were assigned one of the rooms upstairs not occupied by Sally or by one of the older boys.

History Series, Vol. 9, Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1970); see also Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 327-65; Fox-Genovese, Plantation Household, 137-86; John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 132-54.

Eliza did not consider the chamber her own space, but a space which had meaning only in the context of her husband's physical presence. With her husband gone, Eliza's role as mother loomed to prominence, increased in meaning, and she confined herself to those parts of the house where this aspect of her identity was more defined and palpable. When her husband was away on business, Eliza's world centered on the nursery.

Here Eliza Bruce tended her youngest children who rarely left this room before the age of two. The woodwork of the nursery matches that of the chamber it adjoins, indicating that this room is of equal importance to the chamber. The walls were papered and the woodwork painted a light yellow. Two large windows with interior shutters flank a fireplace on the west wall. During cold winter nights Eliza closed the shutters against the windows and pulled heavy curtains across them to protect her children from the draughts. When the children became restless, Eliza would take them to explore other rooms of the house. Three-year-old Charlie delighted in visits to the greenhouse behind the rear parlor. Here he observed and sometimes picked and ate the exotic fruit from the orange trees that Eliza carefully tended. When Eliza had to supervise the setting of the table, she often took Little Eliza with her to the closet at the back of the pantry passage. The little girl was fascinated by Eliza's heavy set of keys and by the locked door which opened onto a room laden with gilded china and sparkling silver. These she liked to touch. Eliza kept a desk in the nursery and while she tended to household ledgers or wrote letters, her children played with toys their father brought them from his many trips.[14]

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[13] Diary Letters of EB and JCB, 1842-45, BFP, UVA.
[14] Ibid.

Eliza of course had slaves at her disposal to help with her duties as mother and mistress. A bell crank beside the fireplace allowed Eliza to call a slave to her side without leaving the nursery. The slave could enter the room from the stair passage or from the pantry passage, both of which connected to the bell vestibule. The nursery, then, was a central location for both Eliza and the slaves who helped her run the household.

Eliza Bruce's duties as the mistress of a retinue of domestic slaves took her from the nursery into other spaces dedicated to her role as supervisor. Most of these spaces held valuable items and as she made her daily rounds, Eliza constantly carried with her a large set of keys to unlock not only rooms, but cupboards and furniture as well. The locked spaces through which Eliza moved and the keys to those spaces symbolized both her responsibility and her complicity in a system that depended on enslaved labor (fig. 5.3). The spaces in which Eliza worked were well-finished and genteel compared to those on some plantations, but it was in these relatively refined work spaces that slaves transformed the raw materials of their plantation labor into finished items for the consumption of their white masters. Not surprisingly, these spaces were the scenes of complex and sometimes tense relationships.

Eliza Bruce rose early to prepare the household for the day. She first had to provision the kitchen for the day's meals which meant a visit to the pantry. One daily trip to the pantry would not suffice, especially if guests were expected for dinner, and the location of the pantry and the points of access reflect the central position of this space within Eliza Bruce's daily routine. She, and possibly a slave, could proceed from the nursery, down the closet passage. At the door of

the closet, Eliza would pause to unlock the door, and once in the closet, pause again to unlock the door at the head of a set of stairs leading to the pantry. This route allowed Eliza access to the pantry without leaving the main block of the house, and without exposing herself to the cold of the open colonnade. If she chose, she could pass through the servant's hall, into the bell vestibule, and down the exterior stairs of the pantry wing colonnade where slaves would be working at a variety of tasks. If Eliza were in the kitchen and discovered the need for more provisions from the pantry, she could enter the pantry from the door that opened onto the colonnade, a short distance from the kitchen.[15]

The smokehouse, like the pantry, was an important site of food storage. The location of the original smokehouse at Berry Hill is unknown, but it probably stood in the west yard, close to the kitchen.[16] Eliza did not kill and butcher the hogs, but she did supervise the beginning of hog-killing season and

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[15] On daily routines of slaveholding women see: Clinton, Plantation Mistress, 16-36; and Fox-Genovese, Plantation Household, 100-46.

[16] James C. Bruce paid Josiah Dabbs to build the present smokehouse in 1855. See BFP, BP 1855, UVA. The present smoke house is located twenty feet south of the extreme end of the service wing. The smokehouse on a plantation was extremely important and great care was normally taken in its construction to secure it against intruders. Berry Hill's smokehouse is a large and capacious frame building with a gable roof measuring twenty feet by eighteen feet and set on a brick foundation. The framing of a smokehouse related directly to its significance as the repository of so much of the plantation's meat supply; the studs are set ten inches apart. From sill to plate, the smokehouse measures eleven feet, sufficient height to hang the meat stored here in three tiers. In constructing the smokehouse, studs were generally set closer together to prevent theft of the hams and such that hung inside, and at Berry Hill a mere ten inches separates each stud. Even if a thief pried off the weatherboards, it would be impossible to squeeze either himself or a ham between the studs. The smokehouse, then, stood as both a symbol of bounty and a symbol of forbidden something. Slaves looked upon the smokehouse, knowing that the fruits of their own labor were denied them. The location of Berry Hill's present smokehouse was both for convenience and surveillance. It stands directly on axis with the back door in full view from the dining room and greenhouse. Because the southern end of the colonnade rises four feet above grade, Bruce had to approach the smokehouse directly through the yard without the protective covering of a colonnade. If the weather was bad Bruce could send the slave to the smokehouse with her keys. He could do this without fear of pilfering for the smokehouse door is in the direct line of vision of the back door of the main house, the dining

the subsequent processing of the hog into edible portions. In one season, Eliza filled her smokehouse with 27,000 pounds of pork which came from about a hundred hogs on the plantation.[17] Eliza Bruce never set foot in the smokehouse by herself, instead taking a slave with her to retrieve the meats. She was also responsible for filling the smokehouse with meat, and her control over both the smokehouse and its contents was absolute.

The kitchen is the first room at the north end of the colonnade and stands only a short distance from the pantry. This room had no shelves built into its walls, but was probably furnished with long work tables, movable shelves, cabinets and chairs. The most conspicuous feature was of course the large fireplace, eight feet wide and two-and-a-half feet deep, and furnished with a crane for holding pots over the fire. The hearth is six feet deep and extends from the east wall to west wall. Eliza paid special attention to the hearth in the kitchen and the laundry directly next door. Not satisfied with the quality of the brick that was originally laid here, she ordered it taken up and replaced with stone which indeed proved more durable. This large work area in front of the fireplace was cluttered with utensils. Large iron pots of various sizes outfitted with short legs would sit nearby and could be placed directly over the coals of the fire or hung from the crane over the fire. Other hearth utensils of iron or copper such as gridirons, skillets, and waffle irons with long handles could be laid directly on the fire or coals. All manner of ladles, skimmers, and baisters hung nearby. Cooking over an open fire required endless poking, prodding, and

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room windows, and the greenhouse. Bruce could observe the slaves proceed to the smokehouse and watch as the meat was removed.

turning of the logs to maintain a constant temperature, and it was a dangerous business. Eliza's cook spent a great deal of time stooping, squatting, and kneeling by the open fire, all the while wary of live embers which would pop from the fire and perhaps scorch her skin or clothes. Maintaining the fire required a reliable source of wood, and slave men were assigned to felling and chopping timber and hauling the logs to the kitchen yard west of the service wing. Here, the job of making kindling and splitting the wood fell to the cook's female helpers.[18]

The laundry was a mirror image of the kitchen. Cabinets built into the wall opposite the fireplace provided storage for any number of utensils used in the constant process of laundering for a large plantation household as Berry Hill. The large fireplace and expansive hearth speak to the importance of laundry to Eliza's household. Both the kitchen and the laundry had doors that opened onto the west yard, which was a place where slaves worked outdoors.

The basement at Berry Hill house was the work center for the production of clothing for the plantation slaves. Slaves brought sacks of yarn and other bulk supplies through the bulkhead entrance on the south wall of the basement passage which served as the central circulation space. Supplies went to the unheated northeast and southeast storage rooms which were outfitted with open shelving like that found in the pantry and closet. The northwest and southeast basement rooms were workrooms for slaves engaged in the production of clothing. Here slave women worked at spinning wheels drawing

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[17] Catherine Clinton, The Plantation Mistress, 23-24. Eliza Bruce to James Bruce, Nov. 17, 1844 BFP UVA. JCB to CB, Nov. 23, 1861, BFP, UVA. James Bruce reports that hogs averaged about 250 lbs. each on his plantation.

out the fibers and twisting them into yarn stored on bobbins. Here slave women sat at a loom and wove the yarns into cloth of linen, wool, or a combination of both called 'linsey-woolsy.'[19] Other women worked at large tables cutting the finished cloth according to patterns for slave men, women, and children.[20]

As the Bruces began to build the house at Berry Hill, Eliza Bruce came to think more specifically of how she would arrange the spaces that directly affected her duties. She knew that she wanted easy access to the basement, access that could gained from within the house itself. When Eliza discovered that no stair had been provided between the first floor and the basement, she ordered one built under the nursery passage stair. This stair led to the southwest work room which was heated and had access to the west yard. Clothes production was an extremely important task, and Eliza often had to steal time from child care, other domestic activities, and the entertaining of guests in order to supervise the weavers and seamstresses. When Eliza needed to tend to the clothing process, she could leave the nursery upstairs and descend directly to the work area below. From the kitchen, she could exit the colonnade by the door in the screen wall and enter the southeast workroom by its door in the west wall.

As mistress of the household Eliza was in constant contact with the slaves who worked in the areas which she herself had planned; mistress and slaves shared these spaces as a matter of necessity as they carried out their duties. The Bruces took great pride in the efficient and cheerful service that their house

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[18] Susan Strasser, Never Done: A History of American Housework, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 32-36.
[19] Strasser, Never Done, 126-27.
[20] EB to JCB, Oct. 17, 1836; EB to JCB Nov. 20, 1844, BFP, UVA.

slaves performed. James and Eliza Bruce and other family members often commented on the accomplished manner in which their slaves served them. When James and Eliza Bruce's son, Alexander, took a trip to Charleston, South Carolina, he wrote a glowing report of his personal servant, Ellick:

> I have been traveling with a Yankee from Boston. He was particularly pleased by Elick's attention to my baggage and was much surprised when I informed him that I had not seen my baggage since I left home, it being entirely under Elick's supervision.[21]

The Bruce slaves, both house slaves and personal attendants, were responsible and efficient, and the Bruces received compliments on the service of their slaves from strangers and friends alike. Call bells and architectural barriers added to this perception of cheerful, efficient service even as they disguised much of the real work that slaves performed at Berry Hill. These provisions for silent and invisible service, however, did not mean that service was always performed attentively or willingly. Some house slaves clearly resented the long, grueling hours and tedious tasks they performed and James Bruce commented more than once on the difficulty of training up a good house servant, an endeavor that began when a slave was a child. Eliza sometimes complained of slaves who carelessly performed the work required of them. Having summoned a slave to bring more wood for the fire in the nursery, Eliza noted with exasperation "I am so tired of the dirt they bring in on their feet."[22]

This one line, isolated in a letter to her husband, tells much about Eliza's relationship with her slaves. Although her complaint was prompted by one slave performing a single chore, she took this one instance as indicative of a

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[21] Alexander Bruce to Mary Evelyn Bruce, no date, Box 19, BFP, UVA. Written from the Charleston Hotel, Charleston, SC.

general problem with slave service. Clearly, slaves were tracking dirt through the house on a regular basis, and while Eliza did not have to clean herself, she either had to direct the slaves to clean up. This instance suggests that some house slaves, unlike Ellick, did not take initiative -- did not willingly perform chores that were their responsibility. The house slaves at Berry Hill practiced an overt and exasperating form of resistance. Eliza could not depend on her house servants to do anything without explicit instruction, and this constant need for her supervision irritated her.

Eliza, did not however, acknowledge these forms of resistance. In this case, Eliza directed her ire not at the slave, but at the dirt. Clearly the slave was responsible for tracking dirt into the house, but Eliza chose not acknowledge the slaves's responsibility. To do so would require a direct action of discipline, which Eliza shunned. Eliza did not make idle threats of punishment -- threats without real punishment were an acknowledgment of powerlessness. She did not like the idea of physical force, and her slaves knew this. Unwilling to exercise her authority, Eliza chose to ignore the agents of her distress; instead, she blamed the dirt for falling from the slaves shoes.

Despite, or perhaps in spite of, her chastising, some of her slaves continued to track dirt throughout the house as they went about their work. Eliza learned that while pulling a bell crank might impart the illusion of efficient service, the simple act of summoning could give rise to a host of problems.

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[22] EWB to JCB, Nov. 22, 1844, BFP, UVA

As mistress of the household Eliza determined the architectural arrangement of the spaces that she and her slaves used. When plans for the original wing proved to be impractical, Eliza entered the dialogue with her husband and the builder, Josiah Dabbs. Using the nursery as her point of departure, Eliza then arranged the rooms she used for her own convenience. She placed the closet and pantry adjacent to the nursery and gave the pantry two doors for easy access. When she discovered that she would have to leave the main block of the house to access the basement workrooms, she ordered a stair constructed from the nursery passage to the basement. After carefully planning the arrangement for the kitchen and laundry, Eliza inspected the areas herself and when she determined that a brick hearth would not be sufficient, she ordered it replaced with a larger stone hearth.

Eliza Bruce gave careful consideration to the way slaves moved through the spaces she planned and she sought to make their movement both discreet and efficient by using call bells to summon them. She intended to render them invisible. But out of sight was not out of mind. For slaves at Berry Hill house, the call bells were another audible manifestation of power and control over their lives. Yet, while spaces confined them and bells directed them, Eliza Bruce's slaves sometimes resisted her authority. Their footprints betrayed a contentious relationship, a contest of wills that could not be resolved by architectural arrangements.

Chapter Six: Evolution of the Virginia Great House

Scholars have described the house at Berry Hill plantation as the finest example of domestic Greek Revival architecture in Virginia. Few historians would dispute this declaration, but some would argue that the significance of Berry Hill's house lay not in its style but its form. Berry Hill's house offers historians much more than a fine Doric porch to admire -- it holds the key to understanding how the elite of antebellum Virginia used architecture to proscribe and mediate social relations. The grand public spaces at Berry Hill, the more intimate family chambers, and the slave workrooms and living quarters were spaces that actively produced and regulated social relationships. The spatial disposition of Berry Hill house mediated the Bruces's public and private life, the world beyond the household as well as the world within the household. The form of Berry Hill house, then, is a manifestation of a social logic that James C. and Eliza Bruce deliberately employed as they planned their house.[1]

In planning Berry Hill house, James C. and Eliza Bruce were following a long tradition in Virginia of responding to changing realities of the social order.

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[1] Dell Upton describes how colonial Virginians employed a social logic to their room arrangements producing a variety of house forms that answered their needs. See Dell Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," Winterthur Portfolio (Summer-Autumn 1982) 95-119. Upton shares the notion that the ordering of space by humans is a manifestation of social relationships, that "spatial structure is not merely an arena in which social life unfolds, but rather as a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced." See D. Gregory and J. Urry, eds., Social Relations and Spatial Structures, (London: Macmillan, 1985) 3. For an overview of how structuralist theory has been applied to understanding spatial relationships, see Michael Pearson and Colin Richards, Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space, (London: Rutledge Press, 1994), 1-10. For the specific application of structuralist theory to early Virginia, see Henry Glassie, Folk Housing in Middle Virginia, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975).

From the time of European contact, the history of Virginia was fraught with conflict between competing interests. Yet during most of the seventeenth century, Virginians were remarkably democratic in their sharing of domestic space. Houses usually consisted of two principal rooms, a hall and chamber (fig. 6.1). In the hall, the planter and his family worked and dined alongside their laborers. The chamber opened directly onto the hall and served as the private quarter of the planter and his family. When the planter retired to the chamber, he left his servants in the hall to bed down for the night. Indentured white servants and black slaves were integrated into the daily life of the plantation household, a household based on the medieval social relations among the English yeomanry. These social relations were characterized by an understanding that social roles that were organic, interdependent relationships with mutual rights and responsibilities.[2]

Beginning in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, Virginia's tobacco economy began a period of wide fluctuation that led to social unrest, especially among the white indentured servants who saw their opportunities of advancement dramatically contract. Mutual suspicion eventually replaced mutual respect among masters, servants, and slaves. Planters began to arrange their domestic space in a way that excluded servants, both white indentured and slaves. Planters removed service functions entirely from their houses; they built separate kitchens where servants cooked and performed indoor chores, and they built separate living and sleeping quarters for slaves and indentured

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[2] Fraser D. Neiman, "Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation: The Social Context of Early Virginia Building," in Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, eds., Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986) 292-314.

servants. By the beginning of the eighteenth century specialized functions of labor and production required an architectural assemblage of buildings, and plantations began to achieve the look of small villages. At the center of this village was the planter's house which now was reserved for exclusive use of his family (fig. 6.2). Planters added an enclosed porch or lobby entrance that served as a waiting area for visitors and servants alike, protecting the increasingly private spaces of hall and chamber. The re-configuration of architectural spaces during the late seventeenth century effectively severed the social ties that had bound the planter and his servants together in mutual dependence.[3]

Social relations fragmented further during the eighteenth century with the rise of a gentry class that sought to establish and maintain a social order centered on their role as masters of a patriarchal hierarchy. Having banished servants and slaves from the main house, the gentry vied among themselves for power and status. Domestic space within the gentry house became more specialized, beginning with the introduction of the central passage. In plan, the house usually had a central passage flanked by two rooms to either side. The passage regulated access to more important reception rooms as well as to private family chambers. The dining room usually opened onto the passage and this room became an important venue for social rituals among the gentry. Here correct deportment and knowledge of dining etiquette became a means by which the gentry judged one another, thus establishing another hierarchy within the gentry world itself. The rooms of these houses were distinguished not only by their use but by their finish. The revival of the architectural principles of

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[3] Ibid.

Renaissance classicism -- axis, symmetry and hierarchy -- allowed the gentry to distinguish their rooms, reserving the most elaborate finishes for the most important rooms.[4]

The Virginia great house of the eighteenth century was characterized by symmetry in both plan and elevation. The gentry took great care in making each facade of their house symmetrical and in arranging their outbuildings along a central axis, sometimes forming a forecourt for the house. Design principles of axis and symmetry as well as the architectural language of Renaissance classicism rendered the Virginia great house suitable for public presentation. Planters conceived their houses not as mere back drops but as three-dimensional stage sets in which they displayed and confirmed their status. The quintessential example of this type of house is John Tayloe's Mt. Airy in Richmond County.[5]

John Tayloe built Mt. Airy and its dependencies in 1753, probably using as his model plate 58 from the 1728 edition of James Gibbs's *Book of Architecture* (figs. 6.3 and 6.4). Like most elite Virginians of his time, Tayloe conceived Mt. Airy as a three-dimensional experience. The house is arranged along a central axis which passes between dependencies flanking the forecourt, through the loggia and central passage of the house itself, and finally to the rear loggia and into the gardens beyond (fig. 7.5). From the garden, Tayloe's visitors admired a facade that was as symmetrical and classical as the one they had encountered on their initial approach. This central axis, emphasized by the symmetry of the plan

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[4] Wenger, "Dining Room"; and Barbara G. Carson, Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behavior, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington, (Washington, DC: American Institute of Architects Press, 1990).

[5] Upton, Holy Things and Profane, 100-219; and Upton, "White and Black Landscapes"

and facades, enforced the effect of a processional landscape that was meant to impress Tayloe's peers and to re-enforce his status among his social inferiors. A series of barriers along this axis regulated the progression and access of any visitor to Tayloe's house (see fig. 6.5). Landscaped terraces, the front steps, the loggia, and the central passage of the house itself acted as architectural filters which determined a visitor's access and thus status.[6]

These barriers, however, regulated only the access of white visitors to Mt. Airy. Tayloe's slaves confounded this discriminating processional ideal as they moved about the house serving their master and his guests. Slaves lingered in Tayloe's central passage, often with white visitors, waiting for orders. When they had duties upstairs, slaves passed up and down the same stair case that Tayloe and his family used. The architectural barriers that Tayloe created for his white visitors did not affect the movement of slaves in his household. Indeed, Tayloe was unconcerned with the movement of his slaves through the house, and the barriers he imposed were not intended to impede slave access to the house.[7]

Tayloe's concern focused on his own status within the patriarchal and hierarchical structure of Virginia's eighteenth-century society. Like all the gentry, Tayloe's extended, patriarchal family centered on his role public life. Men of the gentry class displayed themselves in public at every opportunity. The monthly meeting of the county court offered the gentry a venue in which to wield literal and figurative power. As magistrates, they sat on the court bench meeting out punishment and, sometimes, justice. Men of the gentry class vied

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[6] Upton, "White and Black Landscapes"
[7] Ibid.

among themselves in horse racing and cock fighting, symbolically reminding spectators that political power rested with the gentry, among whom struggles were resolved. All Virginians were required by law to attend the established Anglican Church, and when gathered for divine services, they were reminded of the gentry's dominance. Men like Tayloe donated church furnishings and accouterments like chalices and patens. Some gentry families donated the entire building and sometimes reserved burial places for themselves within the church itself. The gentry custom of entering the church last, as if in a liturgical procession, left little doubt of their place within the social hierarchy of the parish or the colony. Among themselves, the gentry entertained lavishly creating in their houses spaces like the dining room where social rituals, like dancing and tea service, tested and confirmed their status among peers.[8]

For the gentry, public life was a high calling. The formal, restrained, calculating nature of the gentry's public life was also present in their family life. Although the gentry sometimes expressed deep emotion, even passion in their private lives, familial relations were characterized by the same choreographed expressions of status and deference they practiced in public life. Maintaining a family's position in political, religious, and social affairs was paramount, and family members all played a role to this end.[9]

Tayloe and other members of the ruling elite used architecture to reinforce these notions of an ordered society. A Virginia great house like

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[8] T.H. Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," William and Mary Quarterly 3rd series, 34 (April 1977) 239-257; Upton, Holy Things and Profane, 219-232; Carl Lounsbury "The Structure of Justice: The Courthouses of Colonial Virginia," in Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman, eds, Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture III. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1898) 214-226.

Tayloe's was not a family's home as much as it was one man's attempt to link himself to the institutions from which power and authority were derived in Virginia society, the county and colonial government, and the established Church. The aesthetic principles of Renaissance Classicism that Tayloe employed at Mt. Airy were also incorporated into the courthouse where he did business and the church where he worshipped. The language of classicism linked Tayloe and his house to a much larger political world which he and his class dominated. The landscape of eighteenth century Virginia was linked by an architectural language reserved for and controlled by the gentry. Thus, the great house of eighteenth-century Virginia was conceived not as a home, but as a seat of extended dynastic power. Essentially, Mt. Airy and houses like it were bids for and confirmation of intergenerational power. The audience for such an architectural statement was other white males. The role of women and slaves, therefore, did not figure in the equation when Tayloe was calculating how he would give architectural expression to his position in Virginia society.[1]

Women wielded little authority in the public rituals that confirmed gentry status. When Robert Carter was absent from his table, the privilege and responsibility of toasting and carving fell not to his wife, but to the tutor of Carter's children, Philip Fithian. Although he was Mrs. Carter's social inferior, presiding at table was his prerogative as a male. Women held forth in their bed chamber, the private space removed from but adjacent to the public realm. Here they received and entertained women of their own class, dressed their children, and attended to household matters. Women often brought substantial dowries

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[1] Lewis, Pursuit of Happiness, 169-209; Kathleen M. Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 125-201.

to a marriage that allowed their husbands to carry out impressive building campaigns and in one instance Sarah Taliaferro Brookes, widow of William Brookes of Essex County, Virginia, finished Brookes Bank, the house begun by her husband. Women in colonial Virginia, however, never initiated building campaigns themselves. Building was men's business and the structures they built, houses, courthouses, and churches were meant to reinforce their own role in the political and social order.[11]

Religious dissent and Revolutionary rhetoric destroyed the old order of deference that men like Tayloe had created, and it rendered useless the gentry's social and architectural displays of power: Virginia's colonial gentry were left with a stage but no audience. Moreover, the locus of power in the early Republic shifted from the country to the city. Even as slaveholders sought to expand their agrarian slave economy, many invested in new commercial institutions centered in cities. Planters were forced to acknowledge, albeit grudgingly, that their economic interests, and therefore their political interests, lay nearer the city. Democratic politics challenged elite assumptions about the social and economic order.

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[10] Upton, Holy Things and Profane, 100-219.

[11] Philip Vickers Fithian, Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion, 1773-1774, Hunter D. Farish, ed. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1953); Mark Wenger, "Architecture and Privacy in Early Virginia," a paper presented at the Vernacular Architecture Forum Annual Conference, Annapolis, Md., May 7, 1998; Barbara B. Mooney, "'True Worth is Highly Shown in Living Well': Architectural Patronage in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1991, 433-453. Mooney traces dowry money as the funding source for many building campaigns in eighteenth-century Virginia. Mooney presents no evidence, however, that suggests a woman of this period was ever in charge of design. The one example she gives of a woman building a house is that of Sarah Taliaferro Brooke, widow of William Brooke. Taliaferro finished the house her husband began, but she did so with the advice of a local Anglican minister. It is not known at what point in the building campaign that Sarah Brooke entered, but the plan and finish of the house is that common to all great houses built by men during the period. If Sarah Taliaferro was indeed in control of planning, she built according to requirements of her class, without regard to gender or race.

Increasingly, Virginia's elite male establishment experienced a deep ambivalence about their role in the larger world, and they turned to the family to fill the void that the loss of public life created. The extended family of the eighteenth century contracted to the nuclear family, and the next generation increasingly focused its attention on the family as a place of refuge from the larger, more complicated and threatening world of post-Revolutionary Virginia. Women -- wives and mothers -- took on a newly emphasized role as nurturers, and it was they, not men, who imparted meaning and values to the new concept of family. The notion of family life revolved around women who were charged with creating a 'home' -- a haven from the larger world for their husbands and a moral and virtuous atmosphere for their children. Religion and popular literature reinforced these ideal roles for women and family life became characterized by deep emotional displays of affection between husband and wife, mother and children. Unlike the colonial gentry, the elite of antebellum Virginia celebrated an intimate family life far removed from the scrutiny of a larger public arena.[12]

This new concept of the family and of women's role within that family found architectural expression in a new house form. The elite of antebellum Virginia abandoned the three-dimensional symmetry of their colonial counterparts and built instead one facade for the public. To the back of the house they added wings and other such appendages as required for the convenience of the family. The great house of Virginia was no longer intended as a public venue; it was no longer part of the larger political and social landscape

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[12] Rhys Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, 299-323; Jan Lewis, Pursuit of Happiness, 209-231.

that men planned and maintained. The locus of power had moved to urban centers, taking with it any statement of power the plantation house held.

The great house of antebellum Virginia was first and foremost a home, a place of retreat and refuge. A private, convenient, familial informality characterized the architectural setting behind a public facade. Removed from the larger political arena, the house now focused on domestic relationships, especially those between mistress and slave. Convenient and efficient service was one concern of plantation mistresses, but slave rebellions and threats of insurrection, unheard of in colonial Virginia, created a climate of suspicion on Virginia plantations. For several reasons elite Virginians sought to regulate slave movement within their households. Although James and Eliza Bruce did regard their personal slaves, Ellick and Martha, as special to their family, they nevertheless regulated the movement of other slaves through their house. The 'family, black and white' to which Bruce often referred became a family divided by architectural barriers and regulated not by human voices but by a mechanized system of metallic sounds. Gender and race, not politics, determined the house form for this new concept of the family.

In plan and in room use, Berry Hill both conforms to and diverges from the traditional center passage house that developed in Virginia during the eighteenth century. Any Virginian would recognize the traditional hierarchy of rooms at Berry Hill. Semi-public rooms like the parlors and the dining room open onto a fully-public central passage which serves as both a circulation space and a social barrier. The private chamber of the head of household also opens onto the central passage, an arrangement in keeping with traditional Virginia

houses. This disposition of public, semi-public, and private rooms is typical of the room arrangement that elite Virginians included in their houses since the middle of the eighteenth century and James and Eliza Bruce were in keeping with a tradition they knew from their childhood homes.[13]

The plan of Berry Hill also diverges significantly from the room arrangement and circulation pattern of the traditional Virginia great house. The sequestered location of Eliza Bruce's nursery, and her pantry wing -- now incorporated into the main block of the house -- were very different arrangements from traditional Virginia plantation households. The nursery passage, the bell vestibule, and the servants hall -- the nexus of service at Berry Hill -- were innovations that eighteenth-century Virginians would hardly recognize as necessary or desirable. These changes to the traditional Virginia house are the result of Eliza Bruce's attempt to rationalize and to control better the way in which she supervised the slaves who served her family and maintained her household.

Berry Hill's call bells and servants hall were not a new concept in ante-bellum Virginia. The introduction of call bells in the Virginia great house during the late eighteenth century, however, signaled a change in the social order that the colonial gentry had sought to reinforce. As early as 1750 Americans had begun to adopt the new English method of regularizing service to their households. In Virginia, call bells were relatively rare before the Revolution, but during the early Republic, Virginians increasingly began to install call bells and to build servants halls. Seldom, however, did the introduction of these amenities

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[13] Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," 95-119.

affect the plan or form of the house. Indeed, elite Virginians continued to build houses that differed little from those of their eighteenth-century counterparts well past the second quarter of the nineteenth century. As the plantation house receded from public life, and as women increasingly came to dominate the domestic environment, these aural and spatial regulators took on new significance.[14]

Although Berry Hill's plantation house shares many of the formal characteristics of plantation houses built during the eighteenth century, it is in fact a radical break from the colonial gentry's understanding of and intentions for the great houses they built throughout Tidewater Virginia. In both plan and elevation, Berry Hill house demonstrates that elite Virginians of the nineteenth century had distinctly different notions about the meaning and function of a plantation house. The growing emphasis on family life during the antebellum period fundamentally altered the way that elite Virginians conceived and ordered social spaces in their houses. As women's role within the household grew and gained moral authority, the plantation house changed not only in concept, but in form, to accommodate the duties and responsibilities of the wife, mother, and mistress of slaves. This change in women's role necessarily affected the way in which slaves were incorporated and accommodated within the new order of the plantation household. The ubiquitous presence of slaves within the house posed a problem for elite Virginians who simultaneously sought privacy and insularity, convenience and efficiency. The distinct form of Berry Hill house was an architectural solution to new social requirements in antebellum Virginia.

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[14] Mark Wenger "House Bells and House Planning in Early Virginia," unpublished manuscript, 1996; and Mark Girouard, Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural

Like many plantation houses in the antebellum south Berry Hill has a public facade that incorporates the classical principles of architectural design. Major and minor axes define a symmetry that emphasizes the classical elements and motifs of the house and its flanking diminutive temple fronted pavilions. Together the buildings form a forecourt which establishes a hierarchy, not only of a formal architectural language, but of function as well. Such architectural principles have always been associated with important buildings and urban spaces in the western tradition. Although Berry Hill house falls within a larger tradition of western architecture, it refers to antecedents much closer in time and proximity. John Tayloe's house also has a forecourt flanked by service buildings, the whole composition forming a symmetrical, ordered entrance. Berry Hill, then, would seem to continue the tradition of great houses built in Virginia for almost one hundred years.

The similarities between these two houses, however, is superficial (fig. 6.6). John Tayloe conceived Mt. Airy as a three-dimensional experience. A privileged visitor to Mt. Airy moves through the full axial progression from its forecourt, through the loggia and central passage of the house itself, and into the pleasure gardens beyond. The garden front, like the forecourt, is symmetrical and the architectural elements and arrangements of the progression implies that the house in its entirety is meant for public display. The same visitor to Berry Hill immediately recognizes the formal elements of axis and symmetry that determine a public path to the Doric portico. This path, however, terminates not in a garden to the rear of the house, but in the central passage of the house itself.

History, (1978, New York: Penguin Books, 1980) 219, 264.

A series of architectural barriers confronts the visitor in the central passage and prevents further access either to the interior of the house or to the yard beyond. Unlike Mt. Air's garden facade, Berry Hill's rear facade is a collection of asymmetrical masses and projecting wings that contain the service functions (fig. 6.7). As if to distinguish his own place within this architectural conglomeration, James Bruce instructed his builder to extend the Doric entablature around the rear of the main block of the house, lending decorative emphasis to that part of the building that already dominated the smaller projections and massings.

The pleasure gardens of Berry Hill lay not behind the house, but to the east where they descended in a series of terraces. A stroll through the gardens required retracing the entry sequence -- back through the central passage, onto the portico, into the forecourt and thence eastward toward the terraced gardens where berms, plantings, and paths determined views of and access to the house. Because of the topography, the service wing of Berry Hill is not visible from the garden and only the house looms on the rise of the hill. The garden facade of Berry Hill was perfectly blank, covered in stucco and scored to resemble large blocks of stone. Such treatment of stucco has a long tradition and it reinforces the idea of Berry Hill as a temple. The garden elevation also highlights the severe profile of the Doric portico, which in turn emphasizes the public nature only of the forecourt. No windows or doors in the east facade invited those visiting the gardens directly into the house. The entry sequence and public nature of John Tayloe's Mt. Airy stands in sharp contrast to the controlled and very private arrangements that the Bruces established at Berry Hill.

In planning Mt. Airy, John Tayloe consulted Gibbs's pattern book to guide him in his design decisions, and while he made changes in the plan to conform to his needs, Tayloe preserved the basic formal qualities that Gibbs illustrated. The garden elevation at the rear of Mt. Airy answered the classical principles of axis and bilateral symmetry established by the entrance and forecourt at the front of the house. The differences in form between the house illustrated in Gibbs's book and Mt. Airy are insignificant. James and Eliza Bruce, however, did not consult a pattern book when building Berry Hill. They did employ a friend with some architectural training to draw a plan and elevation that adhered to some formal qualities of symmetry, but in the end, the Bruces found this plan insufficient. The axes, symmetry, and decorative elements of Berry Hill's forecourt were abandoned at the rear of the house in favor of convenient and efficient arrangements that answered the needs of the Bruce family's private life.[15]

The transition of house form to fit this new ideal of the family was slow. Just how they would arrange a slaveholding household so that slaves could serve the family, not the family's public life was worked out over the first few decades of the 19th century. As early as the first decade of the nineteenth century, elite Virginians were considering how they would simultaneously regulate slave access to the private areas of the house and provide for convenient accommodations for the woman who ran the household. In 1810 when Waller Holladay was planning his house in Spottsylvania County, he commissioned a now unknown draftsman to produce series of plans and

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[15] William Rasmussen, "Palladio in Tidewater Virginia: Mount Airy and Blandfield," in Building by the Book, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1984),

elevations. All of the plans provided for a central passage flanked by a parlor, dining room, and principle chamber in various configurations.[16]

In the first drawing of the sequence, it is clear that the Holladays were thinking of how they would arrange the space within their house for the convenience of their family (fig. 6.8). The first drawing shows that the central issue was the placement of the nursery and the accommodation of the slaves who would serve that space. In the first plan, the traditional symmetry of the Virginia great is broken by the wing which contained the principle chamber and the nursery behind it. From the nursery, a stair led to an unheated garret meant for slaves who served the nursery. This slave space did not communicate with any of the upstairs rooms of the house, nor did it read as living space from the exterior of the principle facade; it was lit only by a small window in the gable of the rear elevation. Holladay clearly intended for slaves to live among his household, but he did not intend for their presence to be discernible by any architectural clue from the exterior.[17]

In the second set of drawings, the nursery is brought into the main block of the house and given access to the central passage (fig. 6.9). A stair in the nursery leads to an unheated room which has no access to the passage or to any room on the second floor. In this configuration, accommodating the nursery and its accompanying slave space, required the delineator to render an asymmetrical plan and facade. Neither he nor Holladay could conceive a solution to the issue of slaves within the house itself. Again, the nursery is the reason for the asymmetrical plan and elevation. In these schemes, the nursery

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[16] Henry K. Sharp, "An Architectural Portrait: Prospect Hill, Spotsylvania County, Virginia," Master's Thesis, University of Virginia, 1996, 8-40.

and its accompanying slave space has been brought into the main block of the house, and while the principle facade has re-gained its eighteenth-century symmetry, the house remains asymmetrical in its plan and its rear elevation.

Additional proposals and drawings brought Holladay, his delineator, and his builder to the conclusion that there was no acceptable means by which to accommodate convenient slave service within the house itself. The idea of a slave space within the house itself was abandoned and Holladay returned to the familiar eighteenth-century house form: a central passage flanked by a parlor and nursery on one side and chamber and dining room on the other (fig. 6.10). In elevation, Holladay planned for symmetrical presentations: a five-bay principle facade to the south and a three-bay facade to the north.[18]

As built, Prospect Hill follows the traditional understanding of family and society of the eighteenth century. As the Holladays considered ways to accommodate and regulate slave presence within their own house, they had to reconceive the traditional space of the eighteenth-century great house. The notion of bringing slaves directly into the house for the convenience of the mistress and her children literally transformed the way that the Holladays thought of space. This notion was a radical break with the ordered, predictable social arrangements that the Holladays knew, and the asymmetry of the plans they considered were more than a metaphorical representation of their thinking. Holladay and his wife were the transitional generation, experimenting with new ideas both of the family, of slavery, and consequently of house form. Their rejection of asymmetry was a rejection not only of slaves within their house, but

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

a rejection of the forces that would eventually change the way the Holladays and other elite Virginians thought of the family itself.

Waller Holladay still conceived of his house as an extension of his public self. The symmetrical plan and elevations of the family's house extended into the landscape to include to flanking outbuildings, a kitchen and weaving room in one building and a smokehouse and dairy in the other. The lofts of the kitchen and weaving room were as close as slaves would get to Waller Holladay's domestic arrangements, but Holladay's placement of these flankers is significant. Rather than positioning these important service structures in front of his house to form a forecourt, he pulled them back -- behind his house in an arrangement opposite that of John Tayloe's at Mt. Airy. In place of Tayloe's domestic support buildings, Holladay put an office and a stable. This rearrangement was not a demotion in status for the service buildings. Rather, it signaled the beginnings of knew idea of domesticity in the Early Republic. Service buildings, once considered an architectural statement of hospitality and public reception, were brought to the rear of the house as an acknowledgment of their centrality to the family.

The Virginia great house of the nineteenth century still presented to the public a symmetrical facade that announced the patriarch's role within the family, and in plan such houses still conformed to an eighteenth-century understanding of public space, although greatly expanded by the double parlor as a space for both men and women to perform social rituals. Indeed, the Bruces followed a traditional eighteenth-century understanding of the public nature of a great house when they built their Greek temple on the hill. Like John Tayloe at

Mt. Airy they created a forecourt flanked by outbuildings arranged along a major and minor axis. But here the public nature of Bruce's house ends. The small columned pavilions that flank Berry Hill's forecourt are vestigial remains of eighteenth-century domestic service structures. Unlike John Tayloe, the Bruces did not place domestic functions in these flankers. Rather, like Waller Holladay, the Bruces removed domestic functions to the rear of the house (fig. 6.11). The buildings that formed the forecourt of Berry Hill were public in nature: one of the diminutive temples served as a classroom for their children and the other as an office for James Bruce. Education and business, the keys to what James Bruce thought would be the future success as his family's dynasty, defined the forecourt at Berry Hill; but public space did not extend far into the house itself. The public axis established by the driveway and embraced by the flankers ends in the central passage of Berry Hill house itself. Visitors do not proceed through the passage into a garden featuring a symmetrical rear facade as a backdrop. The rear of the house is reserved for the domestic functions of a private family, closed to public view.

As the nineteenth century unfolded, elite Virginians began to conceive of the house as a home. Buried within these houses were indications that elite Virginians of the nineteenth century no longer offered up their entire house as manifestations of their role in society. In fact, their houses rejected public scrutiny behind the facade, and visitors were no longer invited to experience an elite house as a three-dimensional experience. Service stairs, call bells, nurseries, and service wings pointed to a new emphasis on the family; a traditional patriarchal household headed by the father, but transformed in meaning by the

role his wife played as mother to his children and mistress to his slaves. Gender and race within the plantation household of antebellum Virginia required new and radically different conceptions of domestic space. Berry Hill mansion house is the result of a slow but steady architectural resolution of issues raised by this new concept of the family. The Greek temple that James and Eliza Bruce built presented a proud and confident facade to the outside world. Behind that facade they created a haven and retreat from the same world they sought to impress. Inside the mansion house, Eliza built an environment in which she and her family could ignore the scrutiny of a world that increasingly questioned and criticized the nature of their 'family, white and black.'

Chapter Seven: Style and Meaning

The house at Berry Hill plantation is perhaps the finest example of Greek Revival architecture in the state of Virginia. James Coles Bruce, a wealthy financier and tobacco planter in Halifax County, built the house between 1842 and 1844 at the height of the style's popularity. In the best ancient manner, the house sets on a platform atop a series granite steps like the stylobate and stereobate of classical Greek temples (fig. 7.1). Its broad, well-proportioned octastyle Doric portico supports a full Doric entablature with metopes and triglyphs in the frieze, and a low-pitched pediment invites a comparison with the Parthenon. James Bruce's house is a testament to the strong influence of the classical tradition that dominated American architecture, especially in the South, during the antebellum period. One way to understand Berry Hill, then, is to place it within the traditional narrative of American architecture as a regional example of a national trend.[1]

To explain Berry Hill only as part of a national fashion, however, fails to recognize its meaning in the particular context of Virginia's Southside Piedmont, that part of the state that lies south of the James River between the Blue Ridge to

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[1] See Howard Major, The Domestic Architecture of the Early Republic: the Greek Revival, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1926); Talbot Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture in America: Being an Account of Important Trends in American Architecture Prior to the War Between the States, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944); For more recent work on the classical revival see, Wendy A. Cooper, Classical Taste in America, 1800-1840, (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1993); Gregory R. Weidman and Jennifer F. Goldsborough, Classical Maryland, 1815-1845, (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1993); Page Talbott, Classical Savannah: Fine and Decorative Arts, 1800-1840, (Savannah: Talfair Museum of Art, 1995); Roger Kennedy, Greek Revival America, published for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, (New York: Stewart, Tabori, & Chang, 1989).

the west and the Fall Line to the east. James C. Bruce was a merchant-planter whose business interests were national in scope, and he moved in a much larger political and economic arena than that encompassed by Southside Virginia. For Bruce, that larger world was centered in Philadelphia, a city whose wealthiest citizens developed a distinct aesthetic expression of their elite status as patrons of the Greek Revival. Bruce was also very much influenced by the conservative, anti-materialistic evangelical religious culture that dominated Virginia's Southside during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For James C. Bruce, the Greek Revival was a profound and contradictory statement of self, one that simultaneously proclaimed his political allegiance even as it rejected the traditional values of his father's generation.[2]

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[2] The classical world had enormous influence on the aesthetic sensibilities of Americans during the early nineteenth century. The decorative arts, painting, and architecture of the period show an undeniable national trend toward things classical. Two interpretations dominate the discussion of the classical revival in America. The first interpretation contends that the classical revival, especially the Greek Revival, was an expression of nationalism inspired by, or at least coinciding with, the wars for Greek independence. The second interpretation holds that the classical revival was primarily an aesthetic movement in which patrons sought expressions of absolute beauty, cultural symbols that could express the nation's new democratic ideals. Most historians have described the Greek Revival as a 'democratic' style, emphasizing its popularity among the middle class and the plethora of vernacular examples. These interpretations focus on urban examples of the Greek Revival especially in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions. More important, these interpretations promote a model of imitative behavior among the elite which obscures the deeper motivations behind displays of power and privilege. A truer understanding of the political and social implications of the classical revival is gained by closer examination of particular regional examples. See for example Maurie McInnis, "The Politics of Taste: Classicism in Charleston, South Carolina, 1815-1840," Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1996. The dissemination of style and fashion is not the result of mere imitation as some historians of the classical revival imply. Rather, style and fashion are appropriated as symbols with deep social, political, and cultural significance. This essay deals with the issue of how style and fashion are adopted and adapted by different status groups. The method of inquiry here is based on Marxist thought as adapted by later scholars, particularly Max Weber and Joseph Gusfield. See Max Weber, "Status, Class, and Religion," in Talcott Parsons, et al. (eds), Theories of Society, (New York: The Free Press, 1961), 1141-1154; and Joseph Gusfield, Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the Temperance Movement, (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1986).

James C. Bruce was a conscientious steward of his father's legacy, and he sought to continue a strategy of diversified investments to augment his already substantial inheritance. The elder Bruce had built his fortune not only in trade and tobacco, but in bank and canal stock, real estate speculation, private loans, and city bonds. He had been among the first generation of merchant-planters in Southside Virginia, men who laid the foundations on which the next generation built even larger, more conspicuous fortunes. James Bruce followed his father's example and expanded his holdings, especially in bank and canal stock, until his investments in these ventures far exceeded his capital in land and slaves. Such a diversified economic strategy extended Bruce's interests far beyond the confines of Southside Virginia, and he took an active interest in state and national policies that would affect his investments. He was a staunch Whig who supported a strong national bank, favored an active state and federal role in advancing internal improvements, and always sided with other moderate southerners on sectional issues. The one notable exception to Bruce's otherwise moderate stance on sectionalism was his vigorous defense of slavery during the debates in Virginia's House of Delegates in 1832. In the 1840s Bruce supported the African Colonization Society, not because he advocated the abolition of slavery, but because he believed slavery in Virginia was ultimately unprofitable. The future of slavery lay in the new lands to the south and west, and Bruce bought two plantations in Mississippi and Louisiana where he settled many of his own Virginia slaves. Initially a southern unionists, Bruce ultimately sided with the Confederacy when President Lincoln called for troops. Nevertheless, during the Jacksonian ascendancy, Bruce was a southerner who realized that his

fortunes depended on a united country. He allied himself with other unionists who formed the Whig party in opposition to the Jacksonian Democrats, and although he never again ran for elected office, Bruce maintained his political ties and lobbied in the legislature.[3]

Most architectural historians regard the Greek Revival in the United States as a material expression of Whig ideology, and they distinguish it from the larger classical revival taking hold in America in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, Whig ideologues like Nicholas Biddle, president of the Philadelphia-based Bank of the United States, championed the Greek Revival as an example of the chaste, austere republicanism they sought to invoke in their politics and economic policies. Biddle's influence as a champion of the Greek Revival is undeniable and widespread. His role in the building of Philadelphia's Greek Revival Corinthian temple at Girard College (fig. 7.2) is well documented, and as president of the Bank, Biddle influenced the Grecian design of all its eighteen branches from New Hampshire to Mississippi and west to Kentucky. In Virginia, the Greek Revival flourished as public architecture in Whig strongholds such as Richmond and Petersburg (figs. 7.3 and 7.4). Elsewhere in the state, the Classical Revival followed more the influence of Jefferson's Roman models for the state capital and the University of Virginia (figs. 7.5 and 7.6). The paucity of domestic

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[3] For James C. Bruce's political affiliations, see letters between James C. Bruce and his father and friends, BFP-UVA, acc. # 2692, Box 5, Vol. 3; For secondary accounts of James C. Bruces political activities, see William Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 222, 297. Also see Roger Kennedy, Architecture, Men, Women and Money in America, 1600-1860, (New York: Random House, 1985), 259-272; For a review of the slavery debates in Virginia, see Shade, 191-224; for the traditional view of the question of slavery in Virginia see Rober, The Road from Monticello. For revisionist views see Alison Goodyear Freehling, Drift toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832 , (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1982), and William Freehling, The Road to Disunion: The Secessionists at Bay, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

examples of Greek Revival architecture in Virginia has been explained as a result of the strong influence of Jacksonian Democrats in the state. Indeed, the only two examples of domestic architecture in the Grecian style are, Arlington House (fig. 7.7) which George Washington Parke Custis built in 1817, and James C. Bruce's Berry Hill; both men were unwavering in their Whig loyalties. Arlington House loomed on a hill above Jacksonian Washington and Berry Hill stood amidst a sea of Democrats who dominated Southside Virginia. The association between Greek Revival architecture and the agenda of the Whigs is obvious, but there was more than national politics involved in the building of Berry Hill.[4]

James C. Bruce was a Whig and he did look to Philadelphia to inform his architectural choices, but like most educated men of his time he was no admirer of ancient Greek political institutions. Nevertheless, in an address to the graduating class of 1841 at the University of North Carolina, Bruce explained how the ancient world might be used as a guide for his young audience. Bruce considered ancient Greece to have been a profoundly corrupt society and he took care to distinguish the differences between democracy in ancient Greece and democracy in nineteenth-century America:

> The petty States of Greece, with Governments compounded of the wildest license and the most cruel oppression . . . bear no resemblance to our glorious system but in name -- as much alike, as a 'horse chestnut and a chestnut horse.' . . . the democracy of the United States is a very different thing from that of Greece or Rome.[5]

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[4] Kennedy, Architecture, Men, Women and Money, 238-247. For evidence of Whig strongholds see Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 114-157, esp. 118.

[5] James C. Bruce, "An Address Delivered Before the Alumni and Graduating Class of the University of North Carolina, at Chapel Hill," (Raleigh: Printed at the office of the North Carolina Standard, 1841), reprinted, 1989, by John Cox's Sons, Baltimore, Md. BFP-UVA, acc # 2692, Box 5.

Moreover, Bruce believed that free-market capitalism was essential to American experiment. As might be expected from a Whig, Bruce urged his audience to take part in the larger national economy, insisting that sectional politics and a provincial economy would ultimately destroy the way of life that Southerners sought to protect.

Although Bruce found the political institutions of the ancient world a poor example for nineteenth-century Americans, he did believe that the ancients set an example for excellence in the fine arts, especially literature. Bruce told his audience that literature and poetry were expressions of a society's true values, its intellectual and spiritual essence. The human ability to reason and to create distinguished man among all God's creation. Bruce believed that classical allusions in art and literature were valuable for their metaphorical power to inform and instruct present generations about universal truths -- these could inspire the flowering of a unique American culture.

The political and economic institutions of American democracy, however, had failed to produce a corresponding achievement in arts and letters. "We have erected no monument of poetry, and have perhaps not a single isolated statue or painting, which will withstand the corrosion of a century," according to Bruce. The astonishing success of American free market capitalism was the culprit.

> Individuals and communities have been busy in improving their physical condition. . . . In the midst of such a hurly-burly of interest and passion, the dreams of the poet have been disturbed, the contemplations of the philosopher broken in upon, and the imagination drawn down from its airy heights. . . not a perch is offered for imagination to rest her weary wings, as she flies around our land.

Ironically, American prosperity had diverted the energies of its people away from the cultural pursuits that were the true legacies of a civilization. Bruce suggested that the beneficiaries of this prosperity should seek a balance between economic and cultural pursuits and turn their attention to cultivating the fine arts.

Bruce urged his audience to consider the ancients, although he cautioned against mere imitation as a sign of intellectual and spiritual poverty. Classical models should inspire the imagination, not serve as a substitute for modern creativity. The Grecian temple front that Bruce began to construct at Berry Hill the year after this address was meant to serve as the ideal setting in which to contemplate those things that gave life its meaning -- a place to nurture the imagination and inspire the mind to still greater accomplishments. For Bruce, objects served the same role as the muses, and the fine arts, including architecture, were a way to transcend the mundane world. Berry Hill, then, was a catalyst for inspiration, not a model of imitation. The distinction was important to Bruce and critical to the meaning of Berry Hill.

Bruce's emphasis on the fine arts contrasted sharply with the evangelical religious culture that still held sway over much of Southside Virginia. The Baptists traditionally were anti-intellectual and anti-materialistic. Intellectualism and materialism relied on a hierarchical understanding of the world which the Baptists rejected. Classical literature and art were pagan, and far from embodying universal principles, they obscured an individual's relationship to God. The material world was an aberration and the love of objects, especially objects that represented fashionable taste, was akin to the heresy of idol worship

and pointed to a degenerate spiritual state. Bruce believed that the material world could inform the spiritual -- could provide inspiration and expression of the unseen. Art and architecture were physical manifestations of intellectual and spiritual achievement. Beneath Bruce's rhetoric, however, lay another understanding of the symbolic power of objects. Bruce's championing of things classical was not merely an attempt to raise the aesthetic and spiritual sensibilities of his audience. It was an implicit rejection of the way his father's generation sought to obscure their political and economic power by conforming to republican and evangelical notions of simplicity and austerity in post-Revolutionary Virginia.

The culture of Southside Virginia's evangelical Baptists is the key to understanding James C. Bruce's use of the Greek Revival at Berry Hill. Although his economic and political activities were national in scope, Bruce was decidedly a product of a conservative religious culture that had established itself in Virginia during the last quarter of the eighteenth century in protest of the Anglican religion and its elitist ideology. The liturgy of the colonial Anglican Church, which stressed order and conformity in its spiritual expression, was a metaphor for the political and social world that it served. Anglican religion and culture legitimized a hierarchical social order dominated by the gentry class, and because the Anglican Church was the established church of the colony, the implication was that God himself had ordained this social order. Wealth and birth into the gentry class determined an individual's opportunities in colonial Virginia society.[6]

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[6] See Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia; and Upton, Holy Things and Profane.

The gentry adopted the architectural forms and motifs of Renaissance Classicism as ideological statements of their status and power. Specifically, they transformed the traditional hall and chamber plan of the Virginia house by introducing the central passage as a social channel and barrier. In addition to the central passage, the gentry established the dining room as a setting for increasingly popular rituals of display and hospitality that distinguished them from middling and lower planters. They also built courthouses and churches which shared an unmistakable architectural vocabulary with their own houses, thus creating a unified architectural landscape in which everyone was compelled to participate. The architectural hierarchy imposed by the Tidewater gentry expressed and enforced the ruling social order.[7]

As early as the 1760s, however, evangelical Baptists began to challenge the elite's carefully constructed system. Wealth and birth into the gentry class, claimed the Baptists, did not determine an individual's worth in the eyes of God. Similarly, an individual's worth in society should not be determined by social standing. The Baptists established a new criterion for judging an individual's worth -- that of the conversion experience. Conversion required a physical, outward sign of God's grace as evidenced by possession of the individual by the Holy Spirit. This intense and complete possession sometimes caused the believer to speak in tongues. In dramatic cases, the believer was thrown into convulsions and sometimes lost consciousness. Such conversion experiences became marks of distinction among evangelicals, providing a new form of social bonding. The "born again" experience replaced wealth and birthright as social markers in

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[7] Upton, Holy Things and Profane; and Wenger, "The Dining Room in Early Virginia."

Virginia and offered a way to participate in important social rituals regardless of political or economic standing. Baptists were thus deeply suspicious of material expressions of status and power; those middling planters who lacked the political confirmation of their rising economic status were especially captivated by the Baptists' anti-materialistic message.[8]

When James Bruce the elder came to Halifax County in the early 1790s, he found a culture that had been revolutionized by eighteenth-century evangelical Baptist ideology. Although Anglican planters of Halifax County still held the political and economic power, they were forced to acknowledge the new order of the American Revolution which Baptists had helped bring about. Halifax County Anglicans deferred to their Baptist constituents' rejection of material expressions of that power, and they dispensed with the architectural examples of the old colonial Tidewater gentry. The Baptists were a scrutinizing force in a new, ostensibly more democratic society and they undermined the contrived and controlling architectural expressions of a hierarchical society. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Anglican gentry of Halifax County built traditional hall and chamber houses, a type which corresponded to their Baptist neighbors' notions of appropriate material expressions.[9]

James Bruce the elder was himself very much affected by the Baptist culture that held such sway over Halifax County in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. When one of his business partners, Charles Williams, bought a four-wheeled carriage, Bruce chided him, calling the purchase "further evidence of your indiscretion." Bruce amortized over one year the cost of

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[8] Stephen J. Kroll-Smith, "Tobacco and Belief: Baptist Ideology and the Yeoman Planter in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," Southern Studies, vol. 21, no. 4, 353-68.

keeping a carriage and the horses that pulled it and sent the estimate to Williams as proof of his folly. He considered the carriage an extravagance and he took a dim view of such public displays of wealth.[10]

The elder Bruce held his son to a similar accounting. Against his better judgment, Bruce relented to the pleas of his son that he be permitted to attend Harvard, but soon began to complain that young James was spending too much money in his pursuit of Boston society. The son, exasperated, wrote to his father "you speak in your last letter to me of my willful and unjustifiable extravagance. I am certainly peculiarly unfortunate -- no sooner is one cause of complaint removed than I immediately incur the penalties of another." In another reaction to paternal oversight, James assured his father "Your money has never been the minister of vice or immorality, and on my return I will give you a minute account of all my expenditures." The old man did not begrudge his son the money spent, nor did he envy his business partner's carriage; Bruce's own house was substantial but modest, and he objected to ostentatious and impolitic displays of wealth. James Bruce had internalized the message of evangelical Baptists with whom he did so much business. His son, however, later challenged the conservative culture that sought to consolidate its power during the antebellum period by allying itself with Jacksonian principles of democracy.[11]

In the mind of James C. Bruce, the bold planes, simple massing, and austere profile of its colonnade might have distinguished Berry Hill house as an appropriately chaste Haligonian expression of fashion and taste; Berry Hill's Grecian allusions could be interpreted as a high-style nod to a cultural taboo

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[9] Clifton Ellis, "Dissenting Faith and Domestic Landscape in Eighteenth-Century Virginia."
[10] James Bruce to Charles Williams, August 7, 1820, BFP-UVA, Box 5.

against ostentatious display. Greek Revival architecture would seem to fulfill both of Bruce's desires -- to give his political agenda an architectural expression and to acknowledge the traditional conservatism of his region. The monumental nature of Berry Hill's Greek Revival temple front, however, was an unmistakable rejection of an evangelical culture that was historically anti-materialistic and deeply suspicious of architectural expressions of wealth and power. James Bruce's temple showed little concern for the restrained aesthetic sensibilities of his neighbors.[12]

Some architectural historians believe that James C. Bruce so admired the Greek Revival buildings he saw in Philadelphia that he imported the style to Southside Virginia. There is little doubt that Bruce was very much influenced by his Philadelphia connections, but the relationship between style and intent is complex and Bruce's taste is not so easily dispatched as a model of imitative behavior. Bruce and his wife did not merely mimic the manners and taste of a more sophisticated urban elite. On the contrary, they made self-conscious and deliberate choices as they considered the manner in which they would present themselves both to their neighbors in Halifax County and to the world beyond. As Virginians moved toward a more democratic society, the Bruces sought to distinguish themselves further from the evangelical and political culture that threatened their quiet and traditionally inconspicuous, but undeniably elite position in society.

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[11] James Bruce to James C. Bruce, May 14, 1826 and July 8, 1828, BFP-UVA, acc.# 2692, Box 3.
[12] For analysis of voting patterns according to religious and political affiliation, see Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 128-132.

James C. Bruce's first documented trip to Philadelphia was in October of 1836 when he accompanied his father to the city. The elder Bruce suffered from a facial ulcer which he hoped to have cured by doctors at the University of Pennsylvania's school of medicine. Eliza Bruce's brother, William Webb Wilkins, had graduated from the university and practiced medicine with several of Philadelphia's finest doctors. These contacts, the family hoped, could effect a cure. Even as he attended his father, however, James found time to observe closely the sophisticated world of Philadelphia's elite. After two months in the city, he received an invitation to spend an evening with the members of the Wistar Club, a clique of wealthy and influential Philadelphians. When he returned to his lodgings, Bruce described the gathering for his wife:

> I am just in from spending the evening with the famous Wistar Club where all the great men of the city were assembled. Doctors, lawyers, judges, [and] politicians constituted the company to which I had the honor of being introduced . . . . The most interesting man I saw was the famous Nicholas Biddle to whom I was introduced and with whom I had much talk. He has the finest face I ever saw -- intelligent and striking and handsome.[13]

Bruce's foray into Philadelphia's high society was not unprecedented. Many Philadelphians had social, political, and economic ties to the South, and Bruce's entree into the Wistar Club was easy. Nicholas Biddle himself had strong family ties in North Carolina, where his mother's family operated a chain of country stores. Elite social activities also pulled urban northerners and rural southerners together, particularly in the company of thoroughbred race horses brought to the track at popular spring resorts in Virginia and New York. James C. Bruce,

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[13] James C. Bruce to Eliza Bruce, December 31, 1836, BFP-UVA, Box 5.

however, had more direct ties to Nicholas Biddle through his cousin Edward Coles, a close family friend of the Biddles.[14]

Nicholas Biddle, champion of the Greek Revival, had commissioned Thomas U. Walter to design the impressive Doric portico of his house Andalusia in 1835 (fig. 7.8), and most scholars assume that James C. Bruce modeled his own house on Biddle's. Perhaps the two men spoke of it, although Bruce never mentioned Andalusia in his correspondence. Eliza Bruce wrote that they passed "Mr. Biddle's house" on an excursion through the north in 1838. Certainly the Bruces knew of Andalusia, but the Philadelphia house that does appear in his papers is the Matthew Newkirk residence which Thomas U. Walter also designed in 1835 (fig. 7.9). After a morning visit to the Newkirk's impressive Greek Revival house, Bruce described it to Eliza. He was particularly taken with the newly fashionable double parlors:

> I had the pleasure of paying a morning visit some days ago to Mrs. Newkirk who lives in the celebrated new marble palace on Arch. St. Verily it is a palace. The walls are ornamented with splendid paintings by an Italian artist of eminence. The ceiling of one room was painted with Venus in her car -- attended by Cupid, etc. The ceiling of another represented Cornelia with her children, who presents them as her jewels to a lady magnificently attired and counting her jewels before her . . . The passage is ornamented with marble pillars and pilasters and paintings on the walls. The furniture is very rich. A glass reaches from the ceiling to the mantel of the breadth of the mantel -- white marble frame. Another glass occupies the whole side of the wall between the windows. The same in each of the rooms. The sofas [are] covered with white casimer, and the chairs with fringing, etc. The only fault is that the rooms are most too small for a magnificent effect. The windows are narrow, the glass narrow and long -- this for your comfort is the [latest] style.[15]

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[14] For an explanation of the intricate social and kin ties between Biddle and the Virginia elite and between Bruce and the Philadelphia elite, see Lewis, More Taste than Prudence, 27-59, and Kennedy, Architecture, Men, Women and Money, 243, 258-265.

James C. Bruce was very much aware of the monumental Greek Revival style and of the relatively new spatial experience that the double parlor and its accouterments afforded. Not yet ready, however, to make such a bold architectural statement themselves, the Bruces turned to redecorating Tarover, the one-and-a-half-story wood framed house they occupied before building Berry Hill. Eliza wanted a set of "first quality white dinner china with a gilt rim." She also sent her husband the measurements of the passage at Tarover for a floor cloth. James duly responded with his own descriptions of things he bought for the house, confessing "I have been very extravagant since I have been here, spending six or seven hundred dollars." He was tempted to spend even more -- $1,000 -- on "a bronze statue that was excavated from the ruins of Rome," but he demurred. Bruce of course recognized the symbolic significance of the statue's provenance, like all members of his class. In this case he restrained himself, however, but his eagerness to give material expression to his social and economic status was strong, even as the admonishing voice of his father stayed by him. Moreover, fashion itself had conservative elements in its display. Quality and appropriateness, not quantity, determined the value of a fashionable object among the elite, and Bruce acknowledged this rule when he wrote to Eliza on the subject of dining room accouterments: "I hope it won't disappoint you that I have countermanded your order about napkin rings. I don't see them on the tables here and I doubt the fashion in that it is rather ultra for Halifax."[16]

The Bruces, however, were not the only Haligonians with Philadelphia connections who would know that napkin rings were not so much in vogue.

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[15] James C. Bruce to Eliza Bruce, February 28, 1837, BFP-UVA, Box 5.

Halifax County's merchant-planter elite did business in the city and Bruce reported that "a great many Halifax people are here. Barksdale, Young, Wooding and Edmondson and Easley, Cabiness and Edmunds." Bruce's neighbors were themselves conversant with the fashions of Philadelphia's elite -- they could recognize and correctly interpret Bruce's aesthetic choices in furnishings. James C. Bruce, like the colonial gentry of Tidewater, was carefully constructing an image of himself -- an image that ostensibly linked him to the larger national economic and political elite to which he belonged.[17]

Fashionable furnishings, however, could not by themselves gain or maintain and individual's elite status. Attire and comportment were crucial to an elite presentation, especially to elite women in the domestic sphere. Confined to this social role, wealthy women took great care to develop a genteel environment for their families. Men, whose business more often took them into the centers of fashion, were keen observers of the manner in which other women presented themselves. James Early, one of Bruce's business partners, wrote to his wife: "Mrs. Bruce was mistaken in writing that large sleeves were again fashionable. They still wear tight sleeves to the elbow and about the elbow is very much banded or puckered."[18]

Women of the upper class were especially encouraged to learn and display delicate manners and fine skills as marks of gentility. Learning to speak and write French, to draw and to play a musical instrument were important

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[16] Eliza Bruce to James C. Bruce March 4, 1837; James C. Bruce to Eliza Bruce March 13, 1837, BFP-UVA, Box 5.
[17] James C. Bruce to Eliza Bruce March, 13, 1837, BFP-UVA, Box 5.
[18] Papers of James Easly, Mss 38-22 James Easly to Sarah Easly, March 12, 1837, Papers of James Easly, Mss 38-22, Univ. of Virginia. For more on the role of women in antebellum Virginia, see

accomplishments. Bruce's sister Sally, whose education he was directing, wrote to Eliza from Philadelphia

> Brother James mentioned that a great deal was expected and that we *must not come home* unless we were *very accomplished.* I am afraid we will never see Halifax if we wait till we are accomplished to get there. For I think we are in a poor way to be so. Please to tell our *highly* expecting friends that they must not be disappointed if they find very little improvement in us." [original emphasis][19]

Although Sally's tongue in cheek manner was typical of the self-deprecation expected of genteel women, her protestations were also a tacit acknowledgment of the long tradition of Halifax County gentry who respected the cultural distaste for elitist expressions. The time was ripe, however, for Halifax County's elite families to defy that tradition and to take their place in the larger world beyond Southside Virginia, where their political and economic interests lay. James Bruce and James Early paid close attention to Philadelphia fashion not because they sought to imitate the city's elite, but because they intended to distinguish themselves from their neighbors in Halifax County -- neighbors whose conservative culture and political allegiances threatened to eclipse, perhaps even extinguish, their own interests.

The power of architecture, furnishings, and comportment to convey political and cultural messages was not lost on James Bruce. In June of 1839 the Bruces took a trip north to Philadelphia, New York City on to Quebec City, passing through Montpelier, the capital of Vermont, and Boston on their return. Eliza Bruce kept a diary of their trip, taking special note of the architecture she saw along the way. In Philadelphia she saw Thomas U. Walter's Girard College,

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Stevenson, Life in Black and White, 37-95; Lewis, The Pursuit of Happiness; Scott, From Pedestal to Politics.

saying that "It is the most splendid building I ever saw, the pillars particularly so." She also saw William Strickland's Exchange, Post Office, and his U.S. Bank, noting that she liked "the U.S. Bank best" for its fine portico (fig. 7.10). Leaving Philadelphia by carriage, the Bruces passed Nicholas Biddle's Andalusia, but Eliza Bruce made no comment on its Doric portico. Both Bruces were particularly impressed with the effect of granite as a building material, noting with approval Quincy Market at Boston. Of the Massachusetts state capitol, Eliza Bruce noted that "wooden pillars and stairs would be much handsomer of granite." Of all the buildings the Bruces saw during their trip, she was most impressed with the new state capitol of Vermont (fig. 7.11):

> The [state] house is built of the most beautiful granite I have yet seen -- Centre building with a dome and two wings -- Handsome portico with 6 immense granite pillars -- the Wings not quite high enough which makes the dome appear rather heavy, but it is a handsome & substantial building -- The building is surrounded by an iron railing on a bottom of granite -- a very wide walk in front -- the yard laid off in 3 terraces with granite steps the full width of the walk with pillars of the same on each side.[20]

Eliza had developed a discriminating eye for architecture and landscape. Her good sense of proportion is manifested in her judgment of the capitol's dome. Her description of the axial approach to the capitol, the granite columns, and the terracing indicates that she recognized and approved the monumental effect that Greek Revival architecture created.

The Bruces may have been instructed in architecture by John E. Johnson, whom Bruce chose to draw up plans for Berry Hill, and who accompanied the

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[19] Sally Bruce to Eliza Bruce, April 15, 1837, BFP-UVA, Box 5.
[20] Journal of Eliza Bruce, 1838, BFP-UVA, acc. #2692, Box 8.

Bruces on their northern excursion.[21] Johnson's own experience and social connections were well suited to Bruce's purpose for he wanted "a portico in front supported by eight columns, the floor and steps of which are to be of nice cut granite, and the whole of the external finish of this part of the building to be of the Doric Order of Architecture. . . An entablature after the Doric order to extend around the portico & 2 sides of the house 6 1/2 feet broad according to drawing intended to accompany this contract." James and Eliza Bruce had specific tastes which perhaps Johnson helped to cultivate on the trip north. The conspicuous use of granite for the steps, portico, door surrounds and window sills seem to be a direct influence of the buildings the Bruces encountered on the trip. The Bruces intended their new house to be as monumental as the public buildings they had admired in Philadelphia, Montpellier, and Boston.[22]

Specifications for the interior of the house also show the influence of early America's urban centers. The contract between Bruce and his builder Josiah Dabbs specified the double parlors be "elegantly papered," that mantelpieces and baseboards be of marble, and the doors of mahogany with sliver-plated hardware. These specifications insured that the interior would be as impressive and finely finished as the exterior.

In the final reckoning, James C. Bruce paid Josiah Dabbs $27,441.00 for his house -- a princely sum in 1844, the same year that Bruce paid his overseer at Berry Hill an annual salary of $325.00. This enormous expenditure represents the transformation of James C. Bruce. After the death of his father, Bruce was no longer constrained by admonitions against displays of wealth. The son was not,

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[21] Lewis, More Taste than Prudence, 1-12,19-23.
[22] Contract between James C. Bruce and Josiah Dabbs, March 1, 1842, BFP-UVA, Box 9.

however, simply rebelling against a strict and parsimonious father. On the contrary, the elder Bruce had set a valuable example for his son in the politics of power. James Bruce's generation had maintained economic and political control over the Southside by accommodating the anti-materialism of their constituency. As that constituency became more restive under the old order, however, the next generation -- that of James C. Bruce -- needed materially to assert itself. Berry Hill was an unmistakable message in the midst of a larger cultural and political conflict.[23]

Bruce's newly finished Greek Revival house offered visitors quite a vision. When Dr. and Mrs. Broadnax arrived from North Carolina to inspect the new house, Eliza Bruce eagerly reported to her husband that they both "admired it very much." Her report on the Broadnax's experience is instructive for it confirms the effect that the Bruces planned for their visitors to their plantation. The focal point was, of course, the main house which Bruce built facing due north on a gentle rise near the center of his plantation. From the public road Dr. Broadnax and his wife observed the house at an oblique angle, a three-dimensional view that emphasized the mass of the building and made it appear even more substantial and commanding.

Turning due south from the main road, the plantation lane placed the Broadnaxes directly on axis with the front door of the mansion, still a thousand feet distant. The road descends a gentle grade to a pair of unadorned square granite pillars that mark the entrance to the grounds of the house. To either side of the pillars a dry-laid stone wall separates the pleasure grounds of the house

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[23] Receipt for payment of William J. Terry, overseer at Berry Hill plantation, March 21, 1844, BFP-UVA, Box 9.

from the agricultural fields surrounding it. The Broadnaxes followed the road through the gates, up the hill, and into an open forecourt created by the house and its two flanking dependencies. During their progress through the pleasure grounds the Broadnaxes experienced the full axial symmetry of the complex as defined by the drive and the complex of buildings. The contrast between the picturesque landscape and the formal mansion house was established -- the hierarchy and intent was clear. When the Broadnaxes climbed the granite stairs and stood on the finely detailed Doric porch of the Bruce's mansion, they could view from this high, classical prospect the rustic but comfortable idyll James and Eliza Bruce had created beyond the confines of the stone wall.

As visitors passed between the colossal Doric columns, they approached a pair of massive paneled doors with silver-plated door knobs and a key escutcheon. A heavy granite architrave with crossettes surrounds these double doors which slide into pockets to reveal a pair of glazed doors flanked by sidelights. Thus is revealed the entry into the generously scaled stair hall (fig. 7.12). The monumentality of the exterior is continued inside the house through the same principles of bilateral symmetry, axial progressions, grand scale, and bold architectural details. The ceilings of the first floor are an impressive fifteen feet high, establishing the sense of expansive space. On axis with the front doors is another glazed pocket door to the dining room which completes the impressive enfilade. The double cantilevered stair sweeps up both sides of the hall before converging on a landing directly over the dining room door to finish the last single flight to the second floor.

The entrance hall continues the tradition of the eighteenth-century Virginia house, establishing social boundaries and announcing a decorative program that could be read by the Bruces's social equals. Any visitor to Berry Hill who had had been entertained in a fashionable venue would recognize the architectural sophistication of the entry. Members of elite society could expect an invitation into the parlors, while visitors who ranked lower on the social scale would remain in the hall for the entirety of their visit.

The monumental effect of the entrance hall is continued in the double parlors (fig. 7.13). Symmetry in these two rooms is carefully maintained. A pair of heavy paneled doors slide in and out of pockets set into the wall between the north and south parlors, thus continuing the sense of enfilade created in the stair passage and creating the mirror image so important to the concept of double parlors. The west wall of each parlor has a false door to balance the door that communicates with the stair passage. The north parlor, used also as a library, originally had a pair of bookcases flanking the fireplace to balance the doors on the opposite wall. Triple-sash windows face each other in the north and south walls, giving direct access to the Doric portico and the green house. Between these two windows Bruce placed large pier mirrors which further emphasized the symmetrical architectural detailing of the two rooms. Moreover, the reflection of these large mirrors increased the lighting effect and made the scale of the already large parlors seem even grander. These mirrors also played an important role in the social ritual of receiving and entertaining; they provided a reflection by which society observed itself on display.[24]

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[24] The bookcase north of the fireplace was removed sometime during the early twentieth century and replaced with a window.

Bilateral symmetry and axial progression in the double parlors created a sense of monumentality which was complemented by architectural details. The doors and windows of the parlors are distinguished the same bold shouldered, double-fascia architraves as those in the stair passage. These tell the visitor that the two spaces approach equal social importance. Several other features indicate the superior status of the parlors. The baseboards of the parlors are marble with double fascias, in contrast to the wooden baseboards of the passage. The ceilings also distinguish the parlors as more important spaces. A triple-fascia, dentiled cornice marks the transition from wall to ceiling surface. The plaster forms of the ceiling are shallow but boldly conceived in geometric precision with square soffit panels, egg and dart molding, and continuous guttae. A large, flat, circular medallion surrounded by egg and dart molding defines the center of the room. The walls of both parlors were papered with a fresco paper that was block printed in shades of gray, beige, and white. A narrow matching border surmounted the marble baseboards.

These simple, but well conceived architectural motifs compliment the Carrara marble mantelpieces in each parlor (fig. 7.14). The mantel shelf sets atop a frieze lavishly decorated with relief carvings of harvest workers in the central panel flanked on either side by cornucopias spilling over with fruit. Solemn-faced caryatids support the entire horizontal composition. The parlor mantels are stock pieces, but the Bruces probably chose them themselves from a pattern book.

Double parlors became fashionable in American cities during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Formal entertaining in Virginia gentry houses

during the eighteenth century focused on the dining room and its accouterments, and on the behavior of those participating in the social ritual of dining. During the nineteenth century men and women increasingly met in yet another arena for social ritual -- the parlor. It is impossible to know when James C. Bruce first encountered double parlors, but he described such an arrangement of space when he wrote Eliza in 1837 about the Newkirk House in Philadelphia. He particularly noted the long mirrors that hung between the windows in each parlor and commented on how the architectural arrangements were "the same in each of the rooms."[25]

In some elite Virginia households of the nineteenth century, the double parlors dominated the social space, replacing the dining room as a place for social ritual. At Berry Hill, the dining room retains some of its significance on account of its spatial relationship to the stair passage. The position of the dining room directly on axis with the front door emphasizes its importance, while the glazed pocket door allows the visitor in the hall to see the room at any time. The enfilade position of the dining room and its always visible quality implies a social importance to the room equal to the stair passage and the double parlors. Yet the finish of the dining room suggests that it is in many respects secondary to the parlors. The most noticeable architectural feature of the parlors, the ceiling decoration, is missing in the dining room. The long, narrow expanse of ceiling is unadorned. The door and window surrounds also indicate the room's secondary status. Instead of the robust profiles of the parlor architraves, the dining room

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[25] For more on how elite men and women interacted socially in architectural settings, see Wenger, "The Dining Room in Early Virginia," and Carson, Ambitious Appetites. Many elite householders reconfigured their eighteenth-century floor plans to incorporate double parlors. For examples, see the Little Brice House and the Dr. James Murray House in Annapolis.

has double architraves with delicate beaded backbands. Although these architraves are crossetted, they lack the assertive scale of those in the parlors. The baseboards are not marble as was specified in the building contract, but rather plain double fascia boards. The mantel is plain, composed of slabs of gray-black marble with delicate white veining in a post-and-lintel construction. Columns of exaggerated entasis support a flat frieze and projecting mantel shelf. The walls were covered with paper in a floral pattern of delicate green sprigs on a white background.

The finish of the dining room seems delicate compared to that of the parlors, yet its position within the house and its accouterments mitigate against truly secondary status. The furnishings for this room prove it to be one of equal importance with the other public spaces of the house. Indeed it was through the furniture, the fine china, silver plate, and flatware that the Bruces indicated to visitors the significance of this room. The Bruces knew that their visitors had a discriminating eye and talked among themselves about their host's table service. Eliza Bruce reported to her husband that "Mr. Clark has been enjoying himself very much partaking of the good dinners of the Richmond people. He had just returned from Mr. Warwick's dinner where all the table ware except the meal dishes were of silver and cut glass, and the courses innumerable." Virginia's elite appreciated the lengthy ritual of dining and they savored not only the delicacies that their hosts provided but the settings in which those delicacies were served. Mr. Clark's report gave Eliza Bruce the opportunity discreetly to compare her own table service and she passed this information on to her husband.[26]

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[26] Eliza Bruce to James C. Bruce, January 28, 1845, BFP-UVA, Box 10.

In 1838, Bruce had rejected the notion of napkin rings as "too ultra for Halifax." By 1844 however, the Bruces were unequivocal in their choices. Just after they moved into their new house, the Bruces took stock of their dining service to determine what else they might need for their already capacious dining table. In addition to the gilt-edged service for twenty-four that Eliza had ordered from Philadelphia in 1838, the inventory lists a full service for thirty-six of "white china," and a service for twenty-two of "common china." The flatware consisted of a full service for eighteen engraved with the Bruce coat of arms. Three dozen plated forks, eighteen plated knives, and twelve gilded knives meant that they could serve even more people. Among the larger serving pieces were six silver serving platters, eight japanned serving platters, four silver water pitchers, four vegetable dishes, and four fruit baskets. Numerous small items such as nut crackers, cheese knives, and salt dishes rounded out the silver service. Three branched and two plain candlesticks illuminated the table and perhaps also the sideboard as guests sipped water from silver plated tumblers and wine from cut crystal glasses. The large table and side board groaned under than 186 pounds of silver listed in the inventory. In four short years, James Bruce had thrown caution to the wind as he acquired a silver service that would rival any in the South. There were, however, no napkin rings listed in the inventory.[27]

Fashionable expressions of status extended far beyond the Bruces's parlors and dining rooms, and into the natural world. Visitors who were admitted into the south parlor or the dining room had a view into Eliza Bruce's

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[27] An inventory of silver at Berry Hill is listed in BFP-UVA, acc. # 2692, Vol. 6. An unitemized receipt for furniture is in BFP-UVA, Box 11, 1848.

greenhouse. Attached green houses like the one at Berry Hill were becoming more common among the South's elite during the mid-nineteenth century. James Bruce paid close attention to such greenhouses on his travels. From Camden, South Carolina Bruce wrote that he had visited some of "the abodes of wealthy planters who have lands and negroes on the Santee. Most of the houses had green houses attached. I observed that the glass had two interruptions only crop slats in the sash. They appeared to be one long pane from top to bottom. This gave the front a fine finish." Bruce had a keen eye for detail, and perhaps he thought that the greenhouses of the South Carolina planters were better finished than his own for in the next line he remarked that "the people here think more of cotton than of literature."[28]

Eliza Bruce was in charge of the greenhouse. Gardening for pleasure was one of her perquisites as mistress of the house, and she indulged herself in the beauty and bounty of her exotic greenhouse plants. In November of 1845, she reported to her husband "[m]y greenhouse is entirely done. It is the envy of all my guests and indeed it is quite beautiful." Eliza and her children both enjoyed visiting the greenhouse and sampling the fruit it nurtured. "Tom is charmed at pulling oranges from the tree to eat them like apples." By January 1846 Eliza was already planning botanical additions to her greenhouse and asked Bruce to bring her palm and coconut trees, as well as ginger and pineapple plants to complement the lime, lemon, and orange trees she already had flourishing. Eliza

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[28] Eliza Bruce to James C. Bruce, October 29, 1844, BFP-UVA, Box 10.

valued ornamental plants as well and told her husband to pack a cactus in paper and bring it with him when he returned from Cuba.[29]

Greenhouses provided her family with fresh fruit for which Eliza Bruce was proud and grateful. She shared some of this fruit with her neighbors and they in turn sent her samples from their own greenhouses. Eliza Bruce told her husband that their neighbor Mrs. Henry had sent her an orange from her greenhouse and she noted too that another planter, Mr. Clark, was so struck with envy that he vowed to build his own greenhouse. Elite Haligonians impressed one another with the exotic fruits of their greenhouses and they vied to maintain this elite form of conspicuous consumption.[30]

The elite of Halifax County were not the only visitors to Berry Hill. The Greek temple front that James C. Bruce built was a notable landmark for his neighbors who regularly passed Berry Hill on their way to Halifax Courthouse. Such an obvious display of wealth proclaimed that the Bruces had more than enough to meet their own needs. Occasionally their poorer neighbors left the public road and made their way through the tree-lined lane to the main house in search of assistance. While writing to her husband on a cold and raw afternoon in March, eight months after moving to the new house and shortly after the Broadnax's visit, Eliza stopped to receive one such visitor:

> I am interrupted by Mrs. Grogan or Mrs. Newman -- I do not know which is her name now and I must stop but will finish my letter this evening. --- I resume my seat to finish my letter. Poor Mrs. Grogan had a long account of her trials and afflictions to give of the suffering of her Father who is living with her. I felt for her most sincerely for although she may be cross yet I have no doubt she is poor. I gave her some necessaries and I hope they may be of

[29] Eliza Bruce to James Bruce February 2 1844; November 18, 1845; December 10, 1845, BFP-UVA, Box 10.
[30] BFP-UVA, Box 10, Mar. 12 1845.

> use to her. She walked here today six miles -- when the poor creature comes here begging, I always feel so humbled for I cannot help thinking why has God made my lot so different from theirs certainly not because I deserve it. How thankful we ought to feel when we have food and raiment and a comfortable home. Instead of being thankful we are frequently fretting and pining for some trifling thing which is useless after we get it.[31]

As Eliza received the unfortunate Mrs. Grogan in the grand stair passage, she felt humbled by her visitor's presence. The sweeping double stair way and the vista into the silver-laden dining room that so delighted the Broadnaxes suddenly had a different and unexpected effect upon Eliza Bruce as she considered her house from a different perspective. The intended effect was inverted, and rather than basking in the approval of her visitor, Eliza was embarrassed by her luxuriant surroundings. The mistress of the great house felt more humble than her visitor, and if Mrs. Grogan felt cross, perhaps she too was wondering "why has God made my lot so different."

Eliza Bruce questioned a divine order that left so many of her neighbors to beg at her doorstep. But she never questioned the temporal order, the social, political, and economic workings of which required her to ponder such injustices. Eliza's faith was deep and genuine, but it was personal, not civic, and she failed to make the connection between Mrs. Grogan's plight and the larger economic system that compelled the poor woman to appeal to Eliza's sense of noblesse oblige.[32]

Mrs. Grogan was not the only Virginian who may have questioned the order of things. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century Virginia

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[31] Eliza Bruce to James C. Bruce March 10, 1845, BFP-UVA, Box 10.

politics was undergoing a gradual but profound democratization. The Constitutional Convention of 1829-1830 had thwarted reformers who sought to extend the franchise and deliver to office representatives directly elected by the people. The failure to rewrite Virginia's constitution led to two more decades of conflict. The diverse ethnic, religious, and economic interests that comprised the electorate fought for political reform, striving for a system that reflected the diversity of the state's population. In spite of Bruce's architectural bid for power, his neighbors consistently returned Democrats to office in both state and national elections. Fully one-third of Halifax County's voters were illiterate and, if they had any notion of things classical, they didn't care for the muses that lurked about Berry Hill's Grecian portico. James C. Bruce knew that his poorer neighbors would not grasp the full significance of his Doric temple, but they would recognize, and perhaps defer to, the wealth and power that built it. At the same time, the members of Virginia's elite ruling class might delight in the effect that Bruce created at Berry Hill, but they would also know that he was no dilettante -- his aspirations were political, not simply aesthetic.[33]

Architecture is a profound statement of intent. The style of Berry Hill's main house, its room arrangement and furnishings, and its placement in the landscape were deliberate and conscious choices of James C. and Eliza Bruce. Their parents' generation had learned early how to wield influence quietly but effectively by shunning displays of wealth and authority. James Bruce the elder knew that his conservative neighbors took a dim view of four-wheeled carriages

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[32] For more on how evangelical religion helped to mask the workings of antebellum Virginia's economic system, see Lewis, The Pursuit of Happiness, 54-57. See also Rankin, Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen.

and pretentious houses, and he successfully navigated a course that left him rich but relatively inconspicuous. His generation faced few challenges during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. James C. Bruce, however, inhabited a very different world from his father -- one that sought to build a democratic society on the foundations of the Revolution. As his class began a fight for its accustomed privileged position of leadership in Southside Virginia, it attempted to give that threatened position architectural expression. The colonial gentry of the Tidewater were very much in the minds of some Virginians who pined for the old order, and the architectural examples of their hegemony still stood as models for emulation. The fact that many of these eighteenth-century great houses were in a state of decline only emphasized the importance of maintaining the status quo. Far from allying himself with a national political and social elite, James C. Bruce built his Greek temple as a rebuff to forces much closer to home that challenged his power.[34]

Political foes, however, were not the only threat to the James Bruce and his family. Malevolent forces seemed to work against James and Eliza Bruce and the home they sought to create at Berry Hill. In quick succession, three of their children died in early childhood despite the best medical attention of the time,

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[33] For an account of the complex social, political, and religious issues that characterized Virginia politics during this period, see Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion.

[34] For a description of how elite Virginians of the early nineteenth century perceived the decline of their class see Robert P. Sutton "Nostalgia, Pessimism, and Malaise: The Doomed Aristocrat in Late-Jeffersonian Virginia," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, 76 (January 1968), 41-52; Michael Flusche, "Thomas Nelson Page: The Quandry of a Literary Gentleman," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, 84 (October, 1976), 40-52; Lorraine Holland, Rise and Fall of the Ante-Bellum Virginia Aristocracy: A Generational Analysis, Ph.D. Dissertation, Univ. of California, Irvine, 1980, 1-13. William Shade's work debunks the myth of Virginia's decline, a myth that many historians perpetuated by basing their work on anecdotal evidence. While the perceptions of elite Virginians of the nineteenth

and four other children died of the then-mysterious tuberculosis, two before the age of fourteen. The blow from each death reverberated through the family, the echoes of grief barely subsiding before another child was carried away. Eliza in particular lived in dread of the approach of winter and the inexplicable suffering that season always seemed to bring. She came to view life as a series of trials and tribulations, and placed her faith in the next world where she believed her dead children awaited her. James Bruce faced this awful attrition with stoic resignation and tender concern for his wife -- for her grief as well as for her own health. Eliza Bruce herself succumbed to tuberculosis in 1850, six years after the completion of Berry Hill.

Berry Hill is a paradox -- one that illustrates the untenable position that James C. Bruce took when he began his ambitious building campaign. For all his rhetoric about the beneficial leveling effects of democracy and free-market capitalism on American society, Bruce was profoundly undemocratic in his actions. He could not reconcile this contradiction, a contradiction that he might contemplate every evening as he settled by the fire in his own parlor. To the right of the fireplace was a silver-plated lever which, when Bruce turned it, would ring a bell in the back entry summoning his butler Ellick to his side. Every room in the house had such a lever and the effect was magical -- a silent turn of the lever and a slave appeared to do the bidding of the one who called. James Bruce, however, revealed a contradiction in his character and in his understanding of the real power of such a silent summons. There before him, carved in the carrara

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century were valid and contributed to their defensive nature, Shade reveals the more complex social and political forces that lay at the base of their perceptions.

mantelpiece, were figures of putti gathering the year's plenty, and cornucopias brimming with the earth's rich offerings (fig. 7.15). The harvest motif is ironic and points to the fundamental paradox of Bruce's mansion house. Every year at harvest time, Bruce's slaves toiled the fields of his plantation, reaping the fruit of their labor for their master's benefit. The figures that adorn the parlor mantels, however, are fanciful allusions to a classical idyll in which the earth freely renders up its bounty for easy gathering. Bruce could not have chosen a sharper contrast to the reality of his enslaved laborers. But neither could he imagine nor accept a system of free white laborers, whom he referred to derisively as "white negroes." If Bruce believed in the power of classical architecture to inspire distinctively American aesthetic accomplishments, he also believed in its power to convey, and possibly to invoke, a particular social and political agenda.[35]

As a slaveholder and a Whig, Bruce ultimately allied himself with the forces that worked to temper the promise of the Revolution. With the fulfillment of those promises imminent, he contemplated the world he had created at Berry Hill. Shuttered against the heat of a hot July afternoon in 1863, James wrote a musing letter to his sister Sally. Eliza Bruce had been dead thirteen years. Eight of his eleven children were buried near her, and the fate of his remaining three sons was uncertain. Indeed the fate of his life's work would soon be determined, and Bruce suspected the outcome would not be to his

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[35] James C. Bruce to Eliza Bruce, Feb. 22, 1837, BFP-UVA, Box 6. Eugene Genovese explains the ideological basis for this paradox in The Slaveholders' Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992). For more on the origin and use of call bell systems see Girouard, Life in the English Country House, 219, 264. See also Mark Wenger, "House Bells and House Planning in Early Virginia," unpublished mss.

advantage. Bruce described to Sally his own search for meaning behind the Grecian facade of his house at Berry Hill plantation:

> I am leading the life of a hermit. Spend my time in the house day after day, and have none but the worst company in the world, that of myself. I read incessantly, and do it for the reason that the plowman whistles "for the want of thought." This is Sunday and I have been studying all day the Apocalypse, but can make nothing of it. It is not Revelation to me, but a puzzle.[36]

James Coles Bruce died on March 23, 1864 at Berry Hill plantation.

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[36] James C. Bruce to Sarah Bruce Seddon, July 9, 1863, VHS, Mss1, G1875, a 157.

Chapter Eight: The Slave Landscape

In the winter of 1837 James C. Bruce left his home in Halifax County, Virginia on a business trip to Philadelphia. His route took him through Pennsylvania's Lancaster County where he observed the especially neat, well tended fields of its Amish farmers. Even in winter, when the fields lay fallow and the trees stood barren, the Pennsylvania landscape looked orderly and prosperous. It was a stark contrast to the unkempt and exhausted fields that Bruce deplored in his own home state.

The fact that northern farmers could create such a promising landscape without the help of slaves was not lost on James Bruce, and he resolved to make his own plantation into an exemplary operation. When he arrived in Philadelphia, Bruce wrote his wife Eliza with instructions to his overseer:

> Tell Adams not to be stingy with his seed. Give him my respects and tell him that I want him to prove that a southern man can be as nice a manager as a Yankee with his white negroes.[1]

Bruce's reference to 'white negroes' reveals much about his attitude toward the free laborers of the north -- he considered their status inferior to that of the enslaved laborers on his own plantations. In this short excerpt, Bruce was expressing more than an envious desire to best his northern counterparts in husbandry. He was setting out to create a plantation landscape that would confirm and justify his identity as a slaveholder. Like all antebellum plantation complexes, Berry Hill's spatial arrangement was a planter's fundamental

expression of power and ideology in a society founded on paternalism. Yet, planters like James Bruce did not create these landscapes alone. Plantations were the scene of conflict and compromise between master and slave. The complex human relationship, the psychological and social landscape, that James Bruce and his slaves constructed together is perceptible in the shaped topography and architecture of Berry Hill Plantation.[2]

To place James Bruce in context with other slaveholders we should consider that by 1860, 24 percent of all white households owned slaves. Of this number, 12 percent owned twenty or more slaves, and fewer than 1 percent a hundred or more (fig. 8.1). When James Bruce made an inventory of his slaves in 1852, he counted 402 enslaved African-Americans on his three plantations in Virginia and his two plantations in Louisiana. Of this number, 108 slaves lived at Berry Hill. Without question James Bruce stood among elite southern slaveholders.[3]

Of the 1 percent of plantations that operated on the labor of a hundred or more slaves, perhaps only half achieved the full architectural expression of

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[1] JCB to EWB, Feb. 22, 1837, BFP, UVA

[2] Paternalism as an ideology developed in North America from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century as a means of controlling an enslaved workforce. See Eugene Genovese, Roll Jordon Roll: The World the Slaves Made, (New York: Vintage Books, 1976) 3-7; Eugene Genovese, The World The Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation, (New York, 1969), part 1. Most scholars agree that ideology works to hide and misrepresent power relationships between groups of people. Social relationships are manifested not only in political and economic ways; they are manifested spatially as well. Michel Foucault has said that "space is fundamental in any exercise of power." See Paul Rabinow, ed., The Foucault Reader, (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 252; Michel Foucault, Foucault and other scholars describe the way in which space describes ideologies and determines social relationships. See Charles E. Orser "From Georgian Order to Social Relations at Annapolis and Beyond," in Charles E. Orser, ed. Annapolis Pasts, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 308-324; Edward W. Soja, Postmodern Georgraphies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory, (London: Verso, 1989) 79; Bill Hilier and Julienne Hanson, The Social Logic of Space, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 2.

southern myth -- that image of the great house surrounded by a full complement of supporting structures such as barns, granaries, kitchens, dairies, smokehouses, and slave quarters. Berry Hill is one of these plantations of mythical proportions and its many surviving components offers an opportunity to investigate the plantation landscape of an elite slaveholder.

Bruce gave careful consideration to the placement of each building on Berry Hill plantation, planning for the effect that the landscape would have on his visitors as well as his slaves (see fig. 4.2). The focal point for the plantation was, of course, the Greek Revival mansion house which Bruce built near the center of his plantation. Although the house seems to stand aloof and isolated on its hill, it was in fact only one component of an extensive and bustling agricultural enterprise. This large operation required numerous structures of its own and Bruce oversaw the construction and placement of all the requisite outbuildings that supported life in the main house. Tobacco barns were essential to the operations of Berry Hill, and Bruce built at least two. Wheat was the second largest cash crop grown at Berry Hill and in 1844 Bruce built a granary behind his own house. Corn was a staple for Bruce's family, his slaves and his livestock. He built a substantial corn house the same year he built the granary. The smoke house, completed in 1845, was one of the most important buildings because it held the cured meat that the entire plantation consumed over a year's time. Bruce placed it in the rear yard of the main house where he could keep a watchful eye on it. The two large barns that Bruce built for livestock no longer stand, but the foundations of his substantial stable, which measured 30 feet by 60

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[3] John Michael Vlach, Back of the Bighouse: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 7-8.

feet, survive near the corn house. All of these utilitarian structures were dispersed through Berry Hill's landscape, located for convenience on the road that bisected the plantation.

The roads of Bruce's plantation through which the Broadnaxes made their leisurely progression served a dual purpose. They certainly were intended as pleasure paths along which Bruce and his visitors could pass. Slave houses, barns, stables, and other structures were well built, and Bruce placed them in the landscape not only for convenience but for the edification and approval of his visitors. Passing through the landscape the visitor often had a view of the mansion house. This well ordered, well tended landscape proved Bruce to be a good steward of his land and a thoughtful, humane master to his slaves. These roads, however, were also service roads along which slaves, animals, and plantation carts traveled. To his slaves, this landscape was a lesson on how the world worked and their place in that world. Bruce's natural-looking landscape mystified the power relations between himself and his slaves -- it made his position in the world seem natural and preordained.

Berry Hill slaves, however, were an active, influential force that James Bruce had to consider when ordering his plantation. Bruce and his slaves together built stone slave houses and the stone stable. Bruce also built a chapel for his slaves and encouraged them to worship under the ministry of his own butler, Ellick Pamplin. Berry Hill slaves appropriated the southeast corner of the plantation as a burial ground, a location that was well beyond white surveillance. Space at Berry Hill was as fluid as it was static. Both households, black and white, carried on a domestic life in discreet, well-defined spaces enclosed by wood, brick

and stone. Yet the yards, the fields, and the woods constituted another space which blacks and whites claimed, occupied, abandoned, surveyed, traversed, and contested daily. Berry Hill plantation, like any plantation in the antebellum South, comprised a landscape that was simultaneously simple and comprehensible, complex and inscrutable.

The stone slave houses that James Bruce and his slaves built between 1853 and 1855 were a crucial aspect of this landscape. Compared with most antebellum slave houses, these stone structures are substantial and capacious. Their quality and their placement in the landscape are significant for what they indicate about James Bruce and his notions of slave management. Bruce spent ten years arranging his plantation landscape before he considered more thoughtfully the living conditions of his slaves. In February of 1853 Bruce wrote to his son Alexander:

> I have put up an overseers house and kitchen of stone with Alec as my principal and Sam, old Darby and Harris for aids. We think it shows talent and energy for a first effort. I shall next build a cooks house of stone with two rooms one for cooking for the people, the other for cook and family to live in. It will be placed where the road crosses the pond branch below Viny's house.[4]

This letter is significant for several reasons. First it firmly dates two of the extant slave houses at Berry Hill. The overseer's house was built in 1852 and the cook's house was built in 1853. The other seven stone slave houses probably were built within the following two or three years. The letter is significant for another reason. It indicates that the location of the overseer's house is well beyond the view of any slave house. Third, and perhaps most important, the letter mentions

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[4] JCB to Alexander Bruce, Feb. 17, 1853, BFP, UVA.

the names of the slaves who built the houses. Sam was one of two stone masons at Berry Hill. Old Darby and Harris both were carpenters. Alec, although not trained in building trades, was a trusted slave who traveled with Bruce and who presumably possessed some organizational skills that Bruce valued in his building campaigns.

The cook's house that Alec, Sam, Old Darby and Harris built is one of two types which survive at Berry Hill (fig. 8.2). It measures 20 feet by 38 feet and its stone walls are, on average, 18 inches thick. A stone partition wall with a paneled door divides the structure into two heated rooms, each of which is about 17 feet square. Each room has an exterior door on the east wall and a glazed window on the west. Above stairs are two more rooms divided by a wood partition, one with a small firebox. Each of these rooms is lighted by two small windows in the gable ends. Bruce built a 15-foot-square kitchen adjoining the north wall of the slave house. There is no door between the kitchen and house proper; access is only through an exterior door on the east wall. This door and a window on the west wall lights the interior. The firebox is comparatively small, but large enough for the cook to prepare the simple meals that slave children would take to the field hands at mid-day.

The second type of slave house at Berry Hill is a variation on the cook's house -- slightly smaller, with different fenestration (fig. 8.3). The slave house near the small pond and just beyond the stone wall surrounding Bruce's mansion house belonged to his butler, Ellick Pamplin. It measures 18 feet by 28 feet and its stone walls are 18 inches thick. A wooden partition divided this structure into two rooms on the first floor. The larger room has a fireplace, three feet in width,

that is large enough for cooking. The other fireplace measures 18 inches wide and was probably used only for heating the small room it served. Each of these rooms has an exterior door. The smaller room has a door on the gable end, while the larger room has a door centered on the long east elevation. Each room also has a window on the west elevation. Although no evidence for a stair survives, the two small windows flanking the west chimney stack indicate that an unheated garret above stairs was occupied as well.

Bruce built at least twelve of these single-family houses at Berry Hill. When he made his inventory of slaves in 1852, Bruce counted seventeen families, so these twelve single-family houses probably supplemented the existing slave houses that are known to have existed on the plantation. Levi Pollard, a slave on Charles Bruce's Staunton Hill plantation described a house similar to the ones that James Bruce built, explaining the room arrangement and how his family occupied those spaces.

> We had us a two story house. Of course upstairs you couldn't stand up straight because the roof cut the sides off. Part of the children stayed up there. There was two rooms downstairs. One was the kitchen, and mammy and pappy and the other children slept in that other room. Some slept in the kitchen, too. There were fourteen children in all.[5]

A family with fourteen children would find Bruce's stone slave houses crowded, to be sure. Yet these slave houses averaged 760 square feet of living space on the first floor -- considerably more than the 256 square feet of the average slave house in the antebellum South. In both materials and space, Berry Hill slave

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[5] Charles L. Perdue, ed., Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia ex-slaves, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 227.

houses were unusually substantial and they provided a level of comfort that characterized the most benevolent of plantation regimes.[6]

Bruce was not alone, however, in taking a more active interest in the material comfort of his slaves. The condition of slave housing improved on many plantations throughout the South during the first half of the nineteenth century. Surveys of antebellum slave houses still standing in Virginia indicate that the average slave quarter was a one-room log or frame structure measuring sixteen feet square and built to accommodate a single family. Similar evidence from Tennessee and coastal Georgia confirms a general trend toward improved slave housing during the period.[7]

James Bruce's stone slave houses were perhaps the culmination of Virginians' efforts to come to terms with the institution of slavery. Beginning in the seventeenth century, Virginians developed an architectural expression for the social relations they were beginning to forge between themselves and their human chattel. During most of the seventeenth century slaves and indentured servants shared with their master a large hall in the house where they all ate and, in inclement weather, worked. While the master usually withdrew to an adjoining chamber to sleep, servants, both black and white, often slept in the hall. This arrangement was consistent with colonists' experience in England, where laborers shared living and work space with their employers. In the late 1600s, however, social and political unrest led masters to relegate tasks and those who performed them to separate buildings. These ancillary structures clustered

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[6] Larry McKee, "The Ideals and Realities Behind the Design and Use of 19th Century Virginia Slave Cabins," in Anne Elizabeth Yentsch and Mary C. Beaudry, eds., The Art and Mystery of Historical Archaeology: Essays in Honor of James Deetz, (London: CRC Press, 1993), p. 198.
[7] Ibid.

around the master's house and inspired the frequent observation that a Virginia plantation looked like a small village. This village, however, was no Virgilian idyll.[8]

These modest, even mean, antebellum slave houses were a vast improvement over slave housing of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when planters were remarkably unconcerned with the houses of their slaves. Many masters provided little more than barracks that housed all of their slaves regardless of kinship. Those who did provide separate houses for families often did so with little regard to quality or comfort. Throughout the eighteenth century, slave dwellings were mostly crude constructions, often built of unhewn logs. These structures usually were windowless, with dirt floors and chimneys built of very combustible logs covered with clay. Some slaveowners, like George Washington, used an even cruder form of prefabricated construction which could be dismantled and moved from field to field following the seasonal crops. The labor intensive tobacco economy of Virginia left little time at the end of the day or the season for slaves to improve their dwellings. Indeed, when James Bruces' father settled in Halifax County during the late eighteenth century, slaves were sleeping in kitchens, barns, dairies, and possibly in smoke houses and corncribs.[9]

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[8]Frasier D. Neiman, "Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation: The Social Context of Early Virginia Building," in Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, eds. Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 292-314; Cary Carson, Norman F. Barka, William M. Kelso, Gary Wheeler Stone, and Dell Upton, "Impermanent Architecture in the Southern Colonies," Winterthur Portfolio 17 (Summer/Autumn 1981), 135-196.

[9] McKee, Ideals and Realities, 197. For more on slave housing in colonial Virginia, see Dell Upton, "Slave Housing in Eighteenth-Century Virginia, A Report to the Department of Social and Cultural History, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution," Contract No. SF2040940000, July 31, 1982. For more on social relations between slaves and their

A rare surviving tax list for Halifax County from the late eighteenth century supports this conclusion. In 1785 James Bates and twelve other Halifax County justices began enumerating the county's inhabitants and buildings pursuant to an order of the Virginia General Assembly. The purpose of the enumeration was to determine how much money Virginia could raise toward its share of the federal budget. Unlike his fellow justices, who simply tallied heads and counted buildings in their districts, Bates systematically described over a thousand buildings on the farms and plantations in his district, noting the dimensions and construction materials for each structure. Bates's list is a remarkable record of the architectural landscape of Virginia's Piedmont Southside at the close of the eighteenth century, and it provides a context in which to place the stone slave houses that James Bruce built seventy years later.[10]

Bates recorded no brick houses, and he counted only five framed houses in his district. The rest of the houses were built of hewn logs, what Bates called "logwalled" houses. The frame and logwalled dwellings may have been raised on piers of brick or stone, but more probably they were set on wooden posts. The most common dwelling Bates noted was the "cabin," a building type which

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owners in colonial Virginia, see Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in Rober Blair St. George, ed., Material Life in America 1600-1860, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 357-369.

[10] James Bates Tax List "A List of White Persons and Houses taken in the County of Halifax 1785," MSS in "Lists and Buildings, 1782-1785," Box 2, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond; Michael Nichols, "Building the Virginia Southside: A Note on Architecture and Society in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," unpublished manuscript; Halifax County Pleas 11, 152. William Waller Hening, ed. The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia . . . XI (Richmond, 1823), 415-17. The law ordered each justice to "take a list from each person with the [district] of the number of white persons in each family therein, and the number of buildings, distinguishing dwelling-houses from other buildings." No record exists telling the

Bates found to be so insignificant that he did not bother to record its dimensions, materials or type of construction. Cabins probably were log structures with dirt floors set directly on the ground. Cabins housed 52 percent of the white families in Halifax County, the rest lived in frame or logwalled house. Cabins also served some, but by no means all, of the slave population.

Bates counted 235 households in his district. Although 104 heads of household owned slaves, only five housed their slaves in quarters. Thus, in a district which had a slave population of 624, only sixty-nine slaves lived in quarters specifically built for them. Four of these slave quarters were frame structures averaging 16 by 24 feet, a remarkable fact considering there were only five frame dwellings in the district that housed white families. Elijah Hunt, Nathaniel Barksdale, and Thomas Spraggins each owned at least fifteen slaves for whom they provided quarters. Each of these men held more slaves than did 90 percent of Halifax County's population. Yet the six other men who owned more than fifteen slaves built no quarters, including Thomas Yuille who held thirty-five slaves. These men assigned their slaves to the outbuildings surrounding their houses, or possibly their slaves were left at the end of the day to find shelter wherever they could.

Hunt, Barksdale, and Spraggins were exceptional in providing specific dwelling spaces for their slaves. These quarters, however, should not suggest that slaves in their households were privileged with space of their own, either as families or individuals. Thomas Spraggins owned a house measuring 32 by 20 feet and a slave quarter measuring 20 by 16 feet. No cabins stood on the

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boundaries of each district. Further research, however, will determine the boundaries of Bates's district and lead to a complete survey of buildings surviving from his list.

property, so this single quarter apparently housed all of his sixteen slaves. It is possible, however, that some of Spraggins's slaves slept in the four barns, two lumber houses, or the detached kitchen.

The personal space of Amy Buckner's slaves is even less certain. Bates assessed Buckner for a house measuring 16 by 20 feet, a kitchen measuring 12 by 12 feet, a log and wood-shingled barn measuring 20 by 20 feet, and a corn crib and smoke house, each measuring 12 by 10 feet. Presumably the ten whites in Buckner's household lived in the house and her three slaves lived in the kitchen, barn or one of the other outbuildings. The five slave quarters in Bates's district appear built for barracks-style sleeping, not for single-family domestic use. After performing the work required by their masters, the slaves in these households navigated among various architectural forms to perform personal tasks and to find a place to sleep.

The vast majority of slaveholders in late eighteenth-century Halifax County gave little thought to the ordering of their landscapes with an eye to controlling their slave population. Although some wealthy planters arranged their slave houses in ordered rows, shielded from the main house but under an overseer's gaze, most slaveholders were unconcerned with enforcing notions of order and hierarchy among their slaves. When Amy Buckner's slaves bedded down for the night in her barn, they knew where they stood in the scheme of things. Although demeaning and uncomfortable, this disregard for a slave's personal space did not have the effect of desocializing the slave community. On the contrary, such arrangements left slaves with some freedom of movement.[11]

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[11] Orlando Patterson, Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development, and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica, (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickenson

This dearth of personal space was hardly conducive to family life among slaves. Provided with little more than a place to sleep, slaves were housed no better than cattle. Nevertheless, at least one slaveholder in Halifax County did provide separate, full domestic space for her slaves. The two slaves of Betty Bostick were the most fortunate in their housing arrangement. Bates listed on her property two slave quarters, both built of logs, one measuring 16 by 14 feet with a wood-shingled roof and another measuring 16 by 12 feet with a board roof. The five whites in her household lived in a frame house with a wood-shingled roof measuring 28 by 18 feet. Bostick also had four cabins on her property and a mill which measured 28 by 16 feet. The cabins may have been used to house some of the whites in her household, or they may have been used by workers at her mill. In any case, the Bostick property included one domestic structure for each person in her household. Betty Bostick's housing for her slaves was an outstanding exception in eighteenth-century Halifax County. By the time James Bruce began his rebuilding of Berry Hill's slave houses, however, Bostick's notions of proper domestic arrangements for slaves had become standard among most wealthy planters.

Several factors were responsible for this change in attitude. Slaveholders began to regard their slaves as more than chattel. Slaveholders found themselves under increasing criticism from abolitionists during the nineteenth century. In response, southerners began to refine their ideology of paternalism. Southern legislators began writing laws that, although did not legally recognize the personhood of slaves, did provide for more humane consideration of their

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Press, 1969), p. 52; Claude Meillassoux, trans. by Alide Dansois, The Anthropology of Slavery, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 99

well-being. Southern orators also developed an apologia for slavery as a superior economic system to that of free-market capitalism. Evangelical religion also developed a rhetoric of paternalism that required masters actively to acknowledge their moral responsibility for the well being of their slaves. Thus legal, political, and religious institutions sought to defend and perpetuate slavery while simultaneously ameliorating its worst effects. The development of this paternalistic ideal unfolds in the prescriptive literature of the southern agricultural press which instructed its readers on slave management. Among the many issues that the agricultural press addressed was slave housing. This change in southern attitudes toward their slaves and the general improvement of the material conditions of slaves is embodied in the stone slave houses that James Bruce built at Berry Hill plantation.

One aspect of this paternalistic ideal was the laws that regulated the master-slave relationship. Beginning in the early nineteenth century southern legislators began a subtle but significant process of recognizing and codifying the rights of their human chattel that eventually made the institution of slavery "into a relation between legal persons."[12] The most dubious recognition of a slave's personhood came under criminal law. Criminal justice relied on the concept of *mens rea*, or the guilty mind, and southern jurists extended this concept to slaves in criminal cases which was the only instance in which a slave was recognized as having agency. In 1853 abolitionist William Goodell raged against this only recognition of personhood:

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[12] Camille Wells, "From Power to Prosperity: The Domestic Landscape of Slaveholding in Antebellum Virginia," a paper presented at Symposium: New Perspectives on Virginia Architecture at Charlottesville, Virginia, Nov. 14, 1992.

> where the interests of the "owner," the wants of society, or the exigencies of the Government require an anomalous departure from the principle of slave chattelhood, by the temporary and partial recognition of their humanity. Such exceptions and modifications are never made for the benefit of the slave. They enable the Government to punish, as a human being, the poor creature whom, in no other respect, it recognizes as such![13]

Slaves never achieved rights to their person under common law, but they did achieve recognition, albeit temporary, as persons under equity law when a South Carolina justice ruled in 1824 that a child born to slave woman after the death of her master could not be separated from the mother. "Sound policy," wrote the justice "as well as humanity requires that everything should be done to reconcile these unhappy beings to their lot, by keeping mothers and children together. In this case, however, the justice argued his position not from principle, but rather from practicality. "By cherishing their domestic ties, you have an additional and powerful hold on their feelings and security for their good conduct." The slaveholder, by practicing a form of enlightened self-interest, gained the cooperation of his slaves, who thus participated in the perpetuation of their own bondage.[14]

The legal recognition of slave personhood came in statutes. It was through statues that slaveholders promoted nuclear families among their slaves. The debate over whether to recognize slave marriage continued throughout the antebellum period and was never resolved. Recognition of families through

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[13] William Goodell, The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice, (New York: American and Foreign Antislavery Society, 1853), 309, quoted in Thomas D. Morris, Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 434-436. See also June Guild, ed., Black Laws of Virginia: A Summary of the Legislative Acts of Virginia Concerning Negroes from Earliest Times to the Present, (Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1936; New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969).

marriage contradicted the market realities of southern-style capitalism. To protect slave families from separation meant to restrict the manner in which a planter's capital, in this case his slaves, could be allocated among his landholdings or heirs. Nevertheless, by the 1850s some states prohibited the sale of children from their mothers; none, however, forbade spousal separation.[15]

Gradually over the course of the early nineteenth century, southern jurists developed what might be called the "protection/allegiance" formula. Some laws recognized slaves's rights to adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. Statutes also protected slaves against cruel punishment by masters. In return, slaves were expected to pledge their allegiance to their master. The master/slave relationship thus was considered reciprocal. In this way, slaveholders legally acknowledged their obligations as owners of other human beings, but they never relinquished their property rights over their human chattel. The leaps of logic southerners had to make in order to arrive at such a legal place betrays their ambivalence concerning their position as slaveholders -- their simultaneous desire to ameliorate the condition of slavery and their compelling need for control. Forced to accede to the demands of abolitionists, and in the case of slave marriage and family separation, their own self-interest and perhaps consciences, southern slaveholders forged this uneasy, contradictory legal landscape for themselves.[16]

At no time did southern jurists explicitly recognize a slave's personhood. Jurists navigated a legal mine field that allowed them to protect the property

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[14] Gayle v. Cunningham, "William Harper Equity Reports," (South Carolina, 1824), quoted in Morris, Slavery and the Law, 436-437.
[15] Ibid., 437-438.
[16] Ibid., 438-439.

rights of slaveholders while regulating the master/slave relationship. Although a slave's treatment more often fell under the scrutiny of the law, the slave was in no way considered a legal person in his own right. Nevertheless, the legal wrangling over these issues had a positive effect in some instances. When James Bruce hired two slaves for the year 1854, he bound himself "to clothe the said Shepperd and Jerry as hirelings are usually clothed say a good summer and winter suit, hat, blanket, socks, and shoes." The fact that James Bruce was required to clothe the slaves is significant. Although such precautions in contracts protected the owner, it also implicitly acknowledged the slave as a human being of the same fragile nature as his master.[17]

The growing sectional tension during the second quarter of the nineteenth century increasingly forced southerners into a defensive position and compelled them to justify the institution of slavery. Apologists for slavery like Charlestonians William H. Trescot and James Henry Hammond, among others, were instrumental in creating for southern slaveholders an identity as "paternalistic, Christian stewards who cared deeply about their slaves' welfare."[18] These apologists claimed that slaves were better clothed, fed, and housed than the wage workers of the North. Unlike the factory workers whose livelihoods depended upon the mercurial and impersonal workings of the market economy, slaves were assured of cradle-to-grave security. Indeed, Trescott claimed that although chattel slavery might one day become obsolete, the inherent insecurities of industrial capitalism would eventually force all wage workers to

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[17] BFP, BP Jan. 1, 1854, UVA.

[18] Jeffrey Young, "The Fictive World of Lowcountry Slaveholders, 1800-1828," in Proceedings from the conference "From Revolution to Revolution: New Directions in Antebellum Lowcountry Studies," (Charleston, South Carolina: College of Charleston, 1996), 9.

pledge fealty to some capitalist in order to assure their family's survival. Under the slaveholder's benevolent hand, they argued, southern culture flourished as an integrated, organic society protected from the vicissitudes of free-market capitalism. In comparing southern slave society to the highly developed capitalist societies of Europe, William Trescot wrote in The Position and Course of the South:

> Look for a moment at the condition of England and France. In both the population is free; labor and capital are politically equal; while, in fact, capital tyrannizes over labor with selfish power, holding to its terrible bond a life of barely sustained toil. The penalty [of this system] is death by starvation.[19]

James Hammond, in speaking directly of the Middle Ages and its organic, reciprocal concept of society warned of the dangers of capitalism and the free market. Hammond wrote:

> The Feudal spirit of our ancestors [had as its mission] the consecrating of the hereditary principle, on the basis of indefeasible fealty, and compensating protection, from generation to generation. This same Feudal system, stretching from prince to peasant, and penetrating all the intermediary ranks, bound the whole structure of society in links of solid iron [but] it fell beneath the blows of a despised Bourgeoisie.[20]

Such rhetoric helped southerners justify their economic system. In some instances, this rhetoric achieved its end: to convince a hostile abolitionist world that Southern society was more humane and benevolent than its critics claimed. One Scots visitor, initially horrified by the sight of a slave auction in Charleston, revised his opinion of slavery after spending several months among Charleston's intellectual elite. T. S. Mills said, although he had "always believed

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[19] Genovese, Dilemma, 81.
[20] Ibid., 98.

that the slaves were most cruelly used, the slaves in this place are much happier than a large number of poor people that I could mention in Colebrook." He added that the workers in northern factories had "hard, cruel masters on their own. And although the people are free in New England yet they are frequently more pressed by the rich, than the slaves are by their masters."[21]

Slaveholders turned to religion, of course, for the moral justification of slavery. Religion was, perhaps, the most important component in their paternalistic construct. Slaveholders brought powerful cultural institutions like the church and the family to bear as they built their metaphorical and literal landscapes of justification for slavery. At the heart of paternalism was the belief of racial inferiority--that God himself sanctioned slavery and that as the superior race, it was the bounden duty of whites to continue the institution for the welfare of their slaves. In a prize-winning essay one Southern planter wrote:

> Let us remember that it is an institution ordained of Heaven, and that we are the chosen instruments for the melioration and civilization of the downtrodden and oppressed African race. Placed in this position by Providence, we should feel and appreciate the responsibilities and importance of our station.[22]

Southern intellectuals looked to the medieval Catholic Church and praised it as an institution that nurtured the organic social relations of a hierarchical society. To be sure, these same intellectuals were all staunch Protestants, and they condemned the Catholic Church as an enemy of free government. Even so, they recognized the Church's medieval heritage and claimed its spirit if not its form. Thomas Cooper, the president of the University of South Carolina, hated

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[21] The quote is from T.S. Mills to William Holabird, January 29, 1821 T.S. Mills papers at the South Carolina Library, Columbia, S.C. in Young, "Lowcountry Slaveholders" Proceedings, 11.
[22] Breedon, Advice, 16;

all clergy, Protestant and Catholic alike. He nevertheless gave the medieval church its due when he said:

> it must be acknowledged, that this powerful body of men, with all their faults, made a far more liberal and disinterested use of their accumulated riches, during the dark and middle ages, than we have since witnessed in times when knowledge has been more extended.[23]

If slaveholders had a divine obligation to their chattel, slaves had a reciprocal duty to their masters. In return for their master's care and protection, slaves owed their masters diligence and obedience. Reciprocity was perhaps the most important component of paternalism. Slaveholders likened the relationship with their slaves to that between parent and child, between the Heavenly Father and his children on earth. Slaveholders thus infantilized slaves and made them extensions of their own families, thus giving rise to that condescending phrase found so often in the correspondence of antebellum slaveholders, "my family, white and black."[24]

Ultimately, however, slaveholders found themselves caught traversing a difficult terrain of their own making. With the one notable exception of capital murder trials, slaves were nowhere recognized as having moral agency. Southern lawmakers and judges consistently ruled that slaves were property and that they could be disposed of at the will of their owners. Yet, paternalism implicitly recognized slaves as having wants, needs, and desires that must be taken into account if a master hoped to maintain order required in a system of forced labor. Paternalism unwittingly served as the melioration of the slave system by acknowledging the humanity of slaves. This acknowledgment was

not lost on the slaves as they made their way through the master's territory. The reciprocal relationship idealized by the master sometimes allowed slaves to negotiate in important aspects of their lives.

Legal, political, and religious rhetoric of the early nineteenth century laid the foundations of a paternalistic ideology for slaveholders like James Bruce. Keenly aware of northern and international scrutiny, slaveholders sought to change the face of slavery if not its soul. Turning their gaze to the larger landscape, then, slaveholders regarded their slave houses and began to consider how they might translate their own rhetoric into tangible, visible testimony of their new regime. Improved slave housing became an important propaganda tool for slaveholders. At the same time, this tacit recognition of a slave's personhood was an opportunity for slaves themselves to influence the way their masters affected their own material well being. James Bruce's slaves became active participants in shaping the space of Berry Hill plantation.

Bruce placed the slave houses in what appears to be random locations (see fig. 4.2). Significantly, they are not under the surveillance of the overseer whose own house stood to the west and just outside the stone wall that surrounded Bruce's own house. The letter that James Bruce wrote to his son describing the stone house he planned to build for the plantation's cook provides some clues to the unusual quality of these slave houses and their placement in the landscape. This letter is dated ten years after the construction of the mansion house and its major domestic and agricultural outbuildings. There was no substantial increase

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[23] Genovese, Dilemma, p.
[24] Genovese, Jordon , 3-7, 87-97. Stevenson, Black and White, 200-205.

in Berry Hill's slave population during this period, so the lapse in time suggests that Bruce at some point became more concerned about the conditions in which his slaves lived. The letter also details the work of Bruce's slaves who were skilled in building trades. Skilled slave labor was of course not unusual, but this piece of evidence, when coupled with other facts in Bruce's correspondence indicates that Bruce's slaves influenced not only the quality of these slave houses, but also their placement around the plantation. These two separate but related issues, time lapse and slave influence, are important clues to James Bruce's intent as he began his last building campaign at Berry Hill in the early 1850s.

In building stone houses for his slaves at Berry Hill, James Bruce was following a trend among some slaveholders of the nineteenth century who advocated not only a specific reform of slave housing, but also a general reform in southern agricultural practices. When Bruce began construction of the main house at Berry Hill in 1842, he was already an experienced and successful planter and effective master of his slaves, thanks largely to his constant search for ways to improve the yield of his lands and the efficiency of his slaves. Bruce, like many elite Virginians of his time, was worried about the future of the state's agriculture. After more than a century of careless husbandry, Virginia's Tidewater lands were almost sterile and tobacco planters all over the state were alarmed by a drop in crop yields. Moreover, during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Virginia's elite planters experienced a general economic decline that affected all of its political and social institutions. Recent scholarship has revised this notion of Virginia's general decline in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Virginia's population and economic base was much more

diversified and resilient, and in the aggregate, the state remained steadily prosperous. Nevertheless, elite planters who still relied heavily on tobacco were alarmed with good reason. From 1823 to 1834, during James Bruce's early adulthood, tobacco planters experienced very bad years. A short period of prosperity reversed in the early 1840s before stabilizing in the last years of the decade. This fluctuating market created a general climate of anxiety for elite planters with much to lose. Thus the agricultural societies spoke to an elite minority's anxiety even as the state as a whole prospered. James Bruce and other planters hoped to reverse their own decline and in the process produced an anecdotal literature that described their own perceptions, not reality. Nevertheless, the perception of these planters was crucial to the development of paternalistic ideals among elite slaveholders.[25]

A series of trends and events converged during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, causing elite Virginians seriously to reconsider the world their colonial forebears had created. During this time, Virginians became acutely aware of their economic decline. Between 1817 and 1829 total land values in Virginia plummeted from $206 million to $90 million. During the same period the value of exports fell from $9 million to $3 million. Virginia's national

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[25] For the typical account of Virginia's economic decline during the early nineteenth century see Turner, Virginia's Green Revolution. For accounts on tobacco's affect on Virginia's economy and culture see T.H. Breen, Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of the Revolution, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Allan Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Lewis Cecil Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern States to 1860, (Washington, D.C.: 1933). For an account of the general anxiety of ante-bellum planters and its affect on the tobacco elite see Robert P. Sutton, "Nostalgia, Pessimism, and Malaise: The Doomed Aristocracy in Late Jeffersonian Virginia," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, 76 (January 1968), 41-51; and Lorraine Eve Holland, "Rise and Fall of the Ante-bellum Virginia Aristocracy: A Generational Analysis" (Ph.D. diss.,

influence was also waning as more western states attained positions in national politics. Many felt that slavery, the basis of Virginia's economic and social life, was the root of the problem. Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831 sparked a national debate over slavery that left Virginians vulnerable to abolitionist criticism and forced them to confront the implications of enslaved labor.[26]

Despite the passionate debate over slavery in the state legislature, Virginia's planter class quashed any moves for gradual emancipation. Mindful, however, of national scrutiny and of their own economic and social predicament, planters worked to reform both their agricultural practices and the management of their slaves. James Bruce came of age just as these issues reached their peak during the 1830s. As a young farmer in 1833, Bruce bought a life membership in the Virginia State Agricultural Society, the successor to a similar organization founded in 1811 by General John Pegram and Edmund Ruffin, editor of the Farmers' Register. Agricultural societies encouraged better husbandry by forming county organizations, holding local and state fairs, publishing journals, conducting surveys to determine what innovations worked, and by lobbying the state and federal legislatures for planter-friendly legislation. Bruce actively supported such and as president of the Virginia and North Carolina Union Agricultural Society, he gave $10,000 to support the society's Model and Experimental Farm. Despite Bruce's huge contribution, the farm was under

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Univ. of California, Irvine, 1980); For the debunking of the myth of Virginia's economic decline, see William G. Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 17-50.

[26] Virginia's economic decline and its effect on the elite is described in Sutton, "Doomed Aristocracy," 41.

capitalized and the venture failed after only three years. But Bruce and others remained committed to the principles on which they founded the Model Farm.[27]

More than half of Virginia's counties had local societies that sponsored agricultural tours of successful farms. The secretary of the Prince George Agricultural Club described that county's meetings.

> We meet once a month regularly. As we have twelve members, each farm is visited annually, and upon such occasion the farm is minutely inspected. Fences, stables, farm implements, stock, plowing, sowing, reaping, all pass under review. Afterwards, the club returns to the dwelling and the president appoints two members to read a report on all we saw.

Editors of agricultural journals regularly published such tours, commenting in judgmental tones on the husbandry of the anonymous planters they visited. It is little wonder that early in his career Bruce became keenly aware of how his own plantation appeared to others -- not only his peers among the planter class, but to visitors as well. Thus Bruce instructed his overseer "to prove that a southern man can be as nice a manager as a Yankee with his white negroes."[28]

During his own travels, Bruce turned a critical and evaluation gaze upon landscapes through which he passed, reporting in letters to Eliza their condition and appearance. In March of 1835 Bruce made a trip to western Tennessee to determine whether he should make land investments there. The trip was long and arduous and took Bruce through southwest Virginia and east Tennessee. From Abingdon he wrote to Eliza describing parts of Virginia and North Carolina:

> I have traveled 130 miles and have not seen one solitary acre of good highland since I left Edmonds store. I have never seen so

[27] Turner, "Green Revolution," 7-9; JCB to EWB, Feb. 8, 1836, BFP, UVA.
[28] Turner, "Green Revolution," vii, 59.

> barren a prospect. We left Mt. Airy in Surry [North Carolina] and after two days' travel through a poor country with miserable inhabitants, passed through that county to Grayson.

From Knoxville, Tennessee Bruce wrote again:

> The soil of East Tennessee would in Virginia be called very good, but it is too far from market to be very valuable . . . Knoxville is a miserable village on the Holston. Houses mean and streets muddy and filthy . . . there is no air of comfort or comeliness to say nothing of elegance.

Near the end of his trip, Bruce wrote from Maury County in middle Tennessee:

> The land receives no rest here. The land in main is badly cultivated. It is much exhausted and will remain so if there is no change in the system of cultivation. The idea which I entertained of buying land is pretty well abandoned. I detest everything I've seen.[29]

James Bruce came of age during a time when agricultural landscapes were being judged as reflections of a farmer's industry and character. By instructing his overseer Adams on how to cultivate the plantation with an eye to order and presentation, James Bruce was conducting not only a propaganda campaign in defense of slavery, he was shaping his own image for presentation to his peers. An important aspect of this image included the material conditions of his slaves.[30]

Under national scrutiny, slaveholders like Bruce became self-conscious about "slave management," a contemporary phrase that planters used to describe the ways they observed, disciplined, rewarded, and housed their slaves. Just as the agricultural societies encouraged the reform of farming practices,

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[29] JCB to EWB, March, 14, 20 and April 1, 1835, BFP, UVA.

[30] Since the eighteenth century, Virginia's planters had judged one another's capability and status by the condition of their plantation landscapes. See Wells, "Planters Prospects." The concerns of planters during

agricultural journals became vehicles for the reform of slave management and especially for the reform of slave housing. James Bruce not only read these journals, he contributed his own essays to them about innovative agriculture. Of course these journals are biased toward the literate and high-minded planter. The articles by no means represent the majority of planters, but they did have a wide circulation and they describe a world not as it was, but as certain planters thought it ought to be.[31]

Several themes emerge from the pages of the agricultural journals in relation to the reform of slave housing and these themes helped determine plantation landscapes. Planters were concerned with the economy and cleanliness of their slaves' houses. At the same time, planters hoped better to control their slaves' behavior, to provide an environment for the development of stable slave families while simultaneously asserting their superiority. One Virginia slaveholder summed up this approach in an essay published in the Southern Planter. "The ends aimed at in building negro cabins should be: First, the health and comfort of the occupants; secondly, the convenience of nursing, surveillance, and discipline; and thirdly, economy of construction." Bruce probably considered all of these goals in planning his new slave houses, but just as surely he had his own ideas drawn from his own experience about slave management and slave housing.[32]

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the early nineteenth century were similar, but more intense because of the perceived general decline of gentry status, and because of the real decline of productivity in Tidewater and some Piedmont lands.

[31] In 1833 James Bruce published in the Farmer's Register an article explaining his method of ditching to prevent soil erosion. This article was re-published by the editors of the Southern Agriculturist with a commentary explaining how the editors tried Bruce's method with great success. See James Bruce, "Horizontal Trenching to prevent the washing of Hilly Lands," Southern Agriculturist, Vol. 6, Feb. 1834, 94-98.

[32] McKee, Ideals and Realities, 204; Breedon, Advice, 129.

Single-family units for slaves was one characteristic of the nineteenth-century effort to reform slave housing. The agricultural press frequently encouraged the notion of accommodating black family life by providing single family houses. A South Carolina planter wrote that "In no case should two families be allowed to occupy the same house. The crowding of a number into one house is unhealthful. It breeds contention; is destructive of delicacy of feeling, and promotes immorality between he sexes." Another planter explained that single family houses for slaves made for better relations among slaves themselves since "there is no contention about the right of passage . . . each one having his own way and exercising his own control over everything in and around his house."[33]

The agricultural press frequently encouraged the notion of accommodating black family life by providing single family houses. Family-based dwellings for slaves promoted stable family life within the slave community, and stable families in turn provided the best means for the socializing the next generation of slaves. Children learned from parents -- and from an extended family if it existed -- their place within the plantation system. Raising a family instilled in slaves a sense of duty, and just as important, strong family ties could be used as a means of control.[34]

Like most slaveholders, James Bruce thought of himself as the head of two families, his white family and his black family. His paternalistic duties weighed heavily on his mind the morning of January 16, 1852 when he sat at his desk with a bound commonplace book and in an unusually legible and large

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[33] McKee, Ideals and Realities, 201.
[34] McKee, Ideals and Realities, 201; Breedon, Advice, 15.

script wrote across the top its cover "Register of Negroes." Looking to the future, Bruce was figuring to provide his six sons, four of whom were still minors, with that crucial economic foothold -- land, slaves, and cash -- which would insure their advantaged position in southern society.[35]

Bruce's eldest sons Thomas and Richard were both ready, with generous help from their father, to take responsibility for their own futures. Tom was twenty-two, already married, and with his wife had set up housekeeping at Tarover, the plantation that his paternal grandfather had established at the turn of the century. Bruce's next son, Dick had proved an indifferent student and Bruce brought him home to Berry Hill to learn farming. The act of dividing his chattel among his sons caused Bruce to consider more fully the slaves under his immediate attention. In the process he was deciding the fate of his 402 slaves.

Bruce first reckoned the number of slaves at each of his four Virginia plantations, his two Louisiana plantations, and his mill in Halifax County. He subtracted the forty-four slaves in Louisiana from the total; although Bruce owned them, they represented his share of chattel contributed to the speculative partnership formed with his two brothers-in-law. When he finished, Bruce himself was left with control of 108 slaves -- thirty-two at Berry Hill house and seventy-six at Berry Hill plantation.

The manner in which he made his register reveals that Bruce thought of his slaves as family groups. Although he numbered his entries consecutively, a pattern emerges from the nine lists that he compiled. Bruce listed old single slaves and old couples first. He next listed young couples with their children. He

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[35] "Register of Negros, 1852" Box 13, BFP, UVA.

recorded single mothers and fathers with their children. Finally, he named single man and women at the end of the list, usually noting them as a son or daughter of another slave woman or man. He had to guess the age of older slaves, but he knew the year of birth for most slaves born after 1830, and he knew the birth month and year of some slaves born after 1840. By 1850, it is clear that Bruce was keeping records of the day, month, and year each slave was born. Increasingly, then, Bruce came to recognize his slaves as individuals, or at the very least, he recognized some value in knowing their exact ages. When thinking of his slaves collectively, he thought of them as family groups or how they related to one of the slave families. The twenty-seven slaves at Berry Hill house were comprised of three families, three childless couples, two single men, and two single women. The seventy-six slaves on the plantation were comprised of thirteen families, a childless widow, and five unmarried men.[36]

Shortly after Bruce finished his register of slaves and determined how many slaves would work at Berry Hill house and its plantation, he began to consider what type of house each family should occupy and where the twelve new houses would be located on the property. There was evidently little question in Bruce's mind that each family would have its own house.

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[36] From the "Register of Negroes" it is possible to determine family groups. There were twenty-seven slaves at Berry Hill house, ten adults and seventeen children. In family groups, there were three childless couples; one couple with six children; one couple with one child; one single mother with nine children; two men and two women who appear single and unrelated, but who may have been married to slaves from neighboring plantations. On Berry Hill plantation, there were seventy-six slaves, twenty-three adults and fifty-three children. In family groups, there was one childless widow; two couples, each with six children; one couple with seven children; one couple with one child; two single mothers, each with one child; two single mothers, each with three children; and three more single mothers, one with five children, one with six children, and one with eight children. Five single men were also listed among the plantation slaves, but it is possible they were married to slaves from neighboring plantations.

James Bruce knew from experience that slaves separated from spouses made bad workers and might spread discontent among other slaves. In general, then, he made an effort to keep his slave families in tact. When a neighbor offered to buy one of his slaves, Bruce replied "I have no wish to sell my man Rob. Should he, however, desire it that he may be near his wife, I should not refuse. Of course, Rob will not be separated from his family by any act of mine." Slaves who married outside their plantation community had to rely on the good will of both their masters if they were to build a stable family life. One of Bruce's slaves evidently made a bad match when she married Abram, a slave who belonged to neighboring planter Samuel Hairston. Hairston was hoping to buy two of Bruce's male slaves and Abram wanted his master to buy his wife as well. Bruce did sell Hairston the two men, but of Abram's wife he wrote "I am sorry that Abram could not get his wife, but her unwillingness to come and his general repugnance to her will I hope excuse us for being instrumental in the separation." Although Bruce had no intention of selling his slave woman to Hairston, he seems to have felt obliged to shield his reasons for not selling by feigning a regret at separation of spouses. By the 1850s paternalistic social conventions required a planter to regret separation, even at a slave's request.[37]

Paternalism, however, offered opportunities for the slave community to work its own will upon a master, and James Bruce sometimes found himself out maneuvered in negotiations with his slaves. The case of Bruce's slave Harry is illustrative. Harry wanted Bruce to buy his wife and his son Rufus from Walter Carrington. Harry's reaction to the separation from his family became a subject

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[37] JCB to Ira Peter, Mar. 19, 1851; JCB to Samuel Hairston, Dec. 22, 1853, BFP, UVA.

of comment among the planters in Halifax County and Bruce wrote to a neighbor about the matter. "Harry's anxiety over Rufus caused him to misrepresent me. I never said that I wished to buy Rufus. To gratify Harry, I offered to sell him to Mr. Carrington, or buy from him his wife, and perhaps I may have said his family. But Rufus is little suited to be a servant about the house or a carriage driver. His qualities as a house servant would make him worth $600, though to me $500 is as much as I would pay." The fact that Bruce was writing a third party about his case indicates that planters were very much aware of relationships among their slaves and they took an active interest in accommodating their slaves when it didn't mean a financial burden. Nevertheless, Bruce wrote a grudging note to Walter Carrington four months later "Enclosed you have my receipt for Harry. I am perfectly satisfied with the award of the gentleman, although I had thought he was worth more." Clearly Bruce was smarting from the deal he was required to strike with Carrington at the instigation of his slave Harry. Bruce felt he had little choice in the matter. Harry and Rufus -- and possibly the entire family -- forced their masters to unite them, to accede to their wishes.[38]

Bruce therefore had to choose a subtle form of control: accommodation. By allowing his slaves certain privileges and by providing them with more than the basics needs in food, clothing, and shelter, Bruce hoped to win the cooperation of his slaves in order to spare himself the repugnant alternative of cruelty. Slaves could find ways to manipulate such a system to their cause when they wanted to, as Bruce must have admitted to himself in the case of Rufus and

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[38] JCB to Alexander Yuille, Nov. 19, 1845; JCB to Walter Carrington, Mar. 7, 1846, JCB Letterbook, Vol. 6, BFP, #2692c, UVA.

Harry. Resistance left Bruce with two choices: accede to slaves's demands and lose control; or use violence to maintain authority. Bruce chose another path. If a master renounced separation of families and violence against his slave's person, he had to be prepared to accommodate the wishes of his slaves and to seek compromise where possible.

The compromise that Bruce ultimately settled upon is manifest in the arrangement of slave houses in Berry Hill's landscape. The apparent random scattering of this slave architecture is at odds with the arrangement of most other plantation quarters (fig. 8.4). A Mississippi slaveholder writing in the Southern Planter about his own slave quarter described a more typical arrangement:

> My twenty-four houses are situated in a double row from north to south about 200 feet apart, the doors facing inwards, and the houses being in a line about 50 feet apart. At one end of the street stands the overseer's house, workshops, tool house, and wagon sheds; at the other, the grist mill and saw-mill with good cisterns at each end.[39]

Such a rectilinear arrangement of slave houses gave, to the planter's way of thinking, the appearance of order and harmony. It also kept the slaves together in one place under his or his overseers' watchful eyes. This type of arrangement became common throughout the South and it is this image of orderly rows of slave houses that is most often associated with slave quarters. With the doors of the raised houses facing the street the overseer could stroll the thoroughfare on his rounds and easily survey the activity and living habits of the

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[39] Breedon, Advice, 121

slaves. One overseer flinched at such close supervision and wrote to the Soil of the South anonymously as Peter Pie:

> Negroes have very keen perceptions of right and wrong: they have some pride of character, and your constant watching and peeping around their cabins is tantamount to an accusation of meanness. [Must] the overseer put his eye under the negroe's beds, once every week, and hunt for filthy rags, and then trot them off to the compost heap[?]. Oh, Lord, deliver me -- must I do this? Do pray have me excused. Just make it my duty to attend to the general cleanliness, both within doors and as to wearing apparel.[40]

There is in the overseer's reluctance to police his slave quarters an acknowledgment that slaves controlled certain spaces and that slaves would resist unwarranted invasion of those spaces. The overseer did not think it beneath his station to inspect the slave quarters and he was willing to use his authority for surveillance, but only up to a point. What the overseer feared was the reaction of his slaves if he were to cross an invisible but established boundary of privacy. He had no desire to provoke a reaction that would force him to extreme measures of discipline.

Some masters also hesitated to make such obvious and intrusive inspections of their slave's domestic spaces. On reviewing the rules made by his overseer, Spottsylvania County planter Waller Holladay acknowledged his slaves' domestic space when he told the overseer that "Sweeping the floor of the Cabins, and before the doors is proper, as cleanliness promotes health. But the examination of blankets is not necessary, and had better be let alone." Moreover, not keeping a yard to the master's standards was a passive form of resistance.[41]

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[40] Ibid., 121, 315.
[41] Henry K. Sharp, "Prospect Hill," 84.

If rules were too prescriptive and surveillance too intrusive, an overseer or master was faced with the task of disciplining the offending slave. James Bruce avoided such confrontations. The Berry Hill slave houses had wooden floors raised well above the ground, but the stone walls rose directly from the ground and offered no view underneath those floors. Bruce reckoned, correctly, that he would gain very little from monitoring the spaces beneath his slaves's domiciles.

Planters were of course always concerned for the health of their work force and the agricultural press offered various architectural remedies for the living conditions of slaves. Just as the promotion of stable slave families had the effect of passive control, so too did the promotion of healthful environments. One planter suggested building slave houses "two feet high, so that the air can circulate freely under them, and that no filth may collect under them. When thus elevated, the master or overseer can see it [filth] and have it removed." Inspecting for health conditions also allowed the master or the overseer to reconnoiter the slave areas for contraband, stolen goods, or any other irregularities that would raise suspicions.[42]

Judging from the placement of the stone slave houses around Berry Hill, James Bruce made little or no attempt to insure that his slaves were under his or his overseer's surveillance. Bruce thus ignored the advice of the Mississippi slaveholder. Of all the slave houses that he built, only three were visible from the mansion house, and none from the overseer's house. In fact, Bruce preferred to shield himself from the gaze of his butler, Ellick, for he wrote to Eliza with

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[42] Breedon, Advice, 134.

instructions to his overseer. "When Adams goes to clearing the field in front of the mansion house, he had better leave some oak shrubs in the side of the field next to Ellick's house."[43]

Indeed, the feeling was mutual between Bruce and his slaves. As mistress of the plantation, Eliza Bruce was in charge of caring for slaves who fell ill. When she tired of making the long trek to the scattered slave houses to dispense medicines and care, she wrote to her husband: "I do think we ought to have a house built as a hospital. It is impossible to have the servants well attended to when they are seriously ill or for us to visit them as often as we ought. I am sure it would work well if we were firm about it." Eliza Bruce's suggestion was, given her experience, a practical one. The year before, Dr. George Carrington made thirty visits to Berry Hill plantation during the month of January alone, staying an entire week to tend not only the Bruce children but many slaves as well. The doctor's bill came to $216.00. Clearly, the Bruces's attempts to organize their slaves' domestic and work space for convenient surveillance had met resistance before. In sickness Bruce's slaves preferred the comfort of their own surroundings and the ministrations of their own families to the regimentation of a bed in a plantation hospital. Bruce had to concede that his slaves's resistance to the idea made the scheme impossible. Eliza continued to visit each slave house separately.[44]

James Bruce's concern for the welfare of his slaves was motivated by more than debates over slavery and advice he read in agricultural journals. The development during the early nineteenth century of sentimental religion focused

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[43] JCB to EWB, Oct. 30, 1844, BFP, UVA.
[44] EWB to JCB, Feb. 16, 1845, BFP, UVA. BFP, BP Aug. 22, 1844, UVA.

on an individual's conscience and encouraged an empathetic understanding of social relationships, including those between master and slave. Southern ministers preached that because God had ordained the institution of slavery, white masters were obligated by God to care for an inherently inferior race.[45]

Indeed, masters began to empathize with their slaves on a fundamentally personal level. When Eliza Bruce's personal slave Martha fell ill, she called in two white doctors to attend her and a white nurse to sit with her at night. Martha died suddenly one night and while Eliza Bruce was philosophical, she was not detached. "Poor Martha. I felt very much for her and I shall feel her loss very much. It shows us the uncertainty of life and the necessity of preparation before a bed of death. Afflictions never come, however, but for our benefit and instruction, and we should endeavor to profit by them and take warning, for we do not know when we may be called." An unseen and indiscriminate hand moved through Eliza Bruce's world and she was made mindful of death -- the common fate she shared with her slaves. Evangelical religion required her to take very seriously her role and duties as mistress.[46]

James Bruce also felt a religious duty to his slaves which made him consider the conditions under which they labored. Bruce wrote his son:

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[45] For accounts of the Anglican Church in colonial Virginia and its effect on the culture, see Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, 58-80, 143-293; Philip Grevin, Jr., The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America, (New York: Knopf, 1977) especially pages 243-50. For an account of how architecture described and determined the way Virginians experienced Anglicanism, see Upton, Holy Things and Profane. For the transformation of Virginian's religious experience from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century, see Donald G. Mathews, Religion in the Old South, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). Mathews asserts that evangelical religion brought together worshipers of different classes and races, thus confusing the old rigid social order that colonial Anglicansin had established. See also Richard Rankin, Ambivalent Churchmen.

[46] EWB to Sally Broadnax, Sept. 5, 1845, BFP, UVA.

> A thanksgiving day is at last appointed by our governor, the beginning I hope of a good custom in the state. I hope that you will give your labourers an opportunity of attending church on that day. Those who grow our crops are entitled to this indulgence and they should be encouraged in it.[47]

Both Eliza and James Bruce began to look upon some of their slaves as equal to themselves in their emotional needs and the Bruces often empathized with the emotional experiences their slaves experienced. Eliza was sensitive to the effect of separation on the slave families. When her husband left on a trip in 1835 he took with him a personal servant, Julius. Eliza Bruce wrote a letter urging her husband to tell Julius that "his wife and children are well. I have compassion on him being parted from his wife." Similarly, on another trip to New Orleans in 1844, James Bruce revealed his own empathy for the plight of slaves when he that "we saw a trader with all his negroes sitting in a row on the benches of a portico in front of a store, well dressed, well combed, and looking their best to please those who wished to purchase. A sorry sight and one which I shall never be reconciled to." The slaves Bruce saw struck a deep cord within him, and he understood something of the vulnerability these slaves felt. Ultimately, however, religion became another tool which paternalistic slaveholders used to appease their own consciences even as it oppressed another race.[48]

Evangelical religion also permeated the lives of slaves but with very different results. For slaves, the biblical message of deliverance from trials and tribulations was resonant, and this message served to bring the slave community together in a way that often disturbed their white masters. Bruce's brother

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[47] JCB to Alexander Bruce, Oct. 30, 1855, BFP, UVA.

Charles did not allow his slaves to worship alone, fearing that the liberating messages of the Bible might be understood by his slaves as more than spiritual or metaphorical. He built a gallery in the church where he and his family worshipped to insure that his slaves received proper instructions about a slaves duty to his master. Charles Bruce's slaves nevertheless held prayer meetings in their own houses, posting lookouts to warn the others if the overseer approached.[49]

James Bruce, however, embraced his slaves's desire for a separate place of worship and in 1846 he built them a chapel. His own butler Ellick Pamplin preached regularly in this chapel until it was torn down in the late 1880s, and perhaps it was Pamplin who convinced Bruce to build it. The location of the chapel, however, was very near Bruce's own residence, just beyond the stone wall and within earshot of the overseer's house. For visitors to the main house, the chapel announced Bruce's enlightened benevolence. Its location so close to white surveillance also sent a message to the slaves who worshipped there that at least in large gatherings they were being observed.[50]

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[48] JCB to EWB, March 7, 1835, BFP, UVA. JCB to EWB, Nov. 7 1844, BFP, UVA.

[49] Weevils in the Wheat, 226-233. Levi Pollard, a former slave tells this story.

[50] Scholars debate the function of religion in the slave community. Some scholars maintain that Christianity served to oppress the slave by teaching them that holy scripture required them to be obedient to their masters, thus disempowering them. See E. Franklin Frazier, Negro Church, (New York: Schoken Books, 1963); Carter Woodson, History of the Negro Church, (Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, 1921); Benjamin E. Mays, The Negro's God as Reflected in his Literature, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1968); Benjamin E. Mays and William Nicholson, The Negro's Church, (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969. Mechal Sobel has shown that Christianity was transformed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by shared experiences among blacks and whites. Sobel has evidence that blacks and whites worshipped together in evangelical churches and that slaves with grievances often called their masters to reckoning before the congregation. In this way, says Sobel, Christianity ameliorated the slave experience. See Michal Sobel, The World They Made Together, 180-203. For a similar study and conclusions on the Awakening in South Carolina and its affect on white and black interaction see Alfloyd Butler, The Africanization of American Christianity, (New York, 1980). The case for Christianity's influence on slaves may be overstated. Eugene

Bruce's butler Ellick also presided over funerals for Berry Hill slaves, many of whom were buried on the southeast side of the plantation where sixty graves, marked only by stones, have been identified near five of the stone slave houses. In this remote corner of the plantation, Bruce's slaves might conduct their own rituals of mourning or of celebration unobserved by any in the white community. Although the chapel stood under James Bruce's gaze, the cemetery was a place where slaves celebrated and made manifest the preaching they heard in the chapel. The message that his slaves received in the chapel from one of their own helped them to build a protective landscape that was emotional and psychological -- one that might shield them from the terrible if latent implications of Bruce's world. When Bruce's slaves retired to their own stone dwellings or gathered near the cemetery, they entered a realm of their own making -- removed and yet always parallel to the world that James Bruce occupied.

James Bruce recognized that his slaves traversed a terrain over which he had little actual control. Indeed, events in Virginia during the first decades of the nineteenth century indicated that despite their best efforts, slaveholders could never rest safely. Slave resistance occurred not only in distant Southampton County. In Bruce's own neighborhood, slaves regularly worked at disrupting the orderly world that slaveholders sought to portray. On a cold and lonely February night Eliza wrote her husband that she had not seen another white face

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Genovese contends that only about one-sixth of adult slaves were Christian. See Genovese, Roll Jordon Roll, 184. Genovese bases his assertion on W.E.B. DuBois "and other scholars." W.E.B. DuBois noted in The Negro Church that there were 468,000 black church members in the South in 1859. See W.E.B. DuBois, The Negro Church: Report of a Social Study for the Eighth Conference for the Study of Negro Problems, (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1903). John C. Willis extrapolates these figures with census records for 1860 and comes to the conclusion that about twenty-five percent of adult slaves were Christian. See John C. Willis, "From the

in over a week. In the same letter she also reported that Mrs. Sowers's slave girl had tried to poison her mistress by putting white lead in her coffee. Mrs. Sowers survived, but fear and suspicion lurked in every white household of Halifax County.[51]

The prescriptive literature that Bruce read reinforced his notions of paternalism, but Bruce's slaves called him to a reckoning. They did not move through their master's plantation as passive functionaries. Rather, they challenged Bruce about crucial aspects of their lives and forced him to accommodate them. The landscape of Berry Hill plantation was not modeled on ideal forms suggested by the agricultural press. It evolved over a period of time as James Bruce and his slaves negotiated the ground they both occupied.

Berry Hill slaves created a world of their own by successfully manipulating a paternalistic system. James Bruce's slaves seem to have inverted the model of paternalism by disempowering the slaveholder. Although Berry Hill slaves effectively negotiated many aspects of their lives including crucial family ties and aspects of their material comfort, slave resistance was ultimately futile. Paternalism was imperfect, but it insinuated its way into every aspect of a slave's life and each slave at Berry Hill knew that James Bruce could at any time harm or destroy the most fragile space of all -- that of a slave's very presence.

This is a hard fact that one Berry Hill slave, Edgar, discovered. The nature of Edgar's offense is not known, but he had broken some rule that both James

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Dictates of Pride," in Ed Ayers, ed., The Edge of the South, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 37-55, especially note 5.

[51] For accounts on slave resistance and slave revolts and their effect on white attitudes toward their slaves, see Genovese, Roll Jordon Roll, 587-621. For a discussion on the larger landscapes that slaves occupied, see Upton, "Black and White Landscapes," and Vlach, Big House, 13-16. EWB to JCB, Feb. 10, 1838, BFP, UVA.

and Eliza Bruce considered beyond the pale. James wrote Eliza: quote "I am sorry for the trouble and am agreed that we should sell Edgar. It will have a good moral effect in the quarters." James Bruce calculated his actions to send messages to his slaves -- and the message was, of course, that he was unequivocally the master of their fate as well as their space, both personal and communal. The havoc that Edgar's sell created for his family and for the larger slave community of Berry Hill is a matter for speculation.[52]

The master's crucial role as guardian of his slaves's welfare is poignantly illustrated by another incident within the Bruce family. When James Bruce and his brother-in-law John Wilkins bought two sugar plantations in Louisiana they agreed that each would send 60 slaves south. Wilkins arranged the transport and when he wrote to Bruce of the exodus: "I am compelled to travel several days in the company of my servants to convince them that I am really going with them. They say that they are perfectly willing to go provided that I go with them. If I do not start with the people, I think it probable that some would leave their drivers."[53]

Bruce and Wilkins were not unusual in seeking economic opportunities in the deep South. In the 1840s and 1850s Virginia became a major exporter of slaves and one planter in southwest Virginia told James Bruce that, during a three-month period, twenty thousand slaves passed his doorstep on their way to the cotton and sugar plantations of the great Mississippi Delta. Forced

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[52] JCB to EWB, Letter Book, 1838-1849.
[53] John Wilkins to EWB, Sept. 13, 1835, BFP, UVA.

migrations such as these had profound disruptive effects on plantation communities.[54]

Slaves spent their lives building a relationship with their masters -- negotiating a terrain that was as psychological as it was topographical and architectural. The personal and communal space that slaves created --- the space that gave their lives order and continuity, memory and security --- could vanish in a moment. The slaves who followed John Wilkins to Louisiana knew that the process of negotiations would begin anew in a distant and strange land, and, for all they knew, with an unknown master. Indeed, four years later James Bruce sold his sugar plantation and he sold his slaves with it. In Louisiana, Bruce's slaves, fresh from their homes in Virginia, were compelled to lay new and uncertain foundations that would create yet another landscape, another architecture of slavery.

[54] Philip Troutman, Carter Woodson Center.

Conclusion

The landscape that James C. Bruce created at Berry Hill has come to represent in the popular imagination a typical southern plantation. It was orderly and self-sufficient, and it included all the requisite building types, both domestic and utilitarian, associated with plantation architecture. The overwhelming majority of southern planters, however, could never hope to garner the resources required to build a plantation like Berry Hill. In his own travels, James C. Bruce noted that most southern plantations were the scene of "dirt and dilapidation," and the towns through which he passed nothing more than "miserable villages" with no sense of "elegance."[55]

Berry Hill was not a typical plantation -- it was an extraordinary testament to the ambition of James C. Bruce. Drawing on wealth that he accumulated through inheritance, marriage, and his own industriousness, James C. Bruce set out to create his own world -- "a perch [on which] Imagination might rest her weary wings."[56] The Greek Revival house he built was not, however, simply a retreat for contemplation. Both James C. and Eliza Bruce were very interested in fashionable expressions of aesthetics that would connect them to the larger world outside Halifax County. On their tour through the north, the Bruces admired the monumental Greek porticos of public buildings and the well-appointed double parlors in which they were entertained, and they incorporated both architectural features in their new house at Berry Hill. Their admiration for

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[55] JCB to EWB, Oct. 30, 1844, BFP, UVA.

[56] James C. Bruce, "An Address Delivered Before the Alumni and Graduating Class of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill," (Raleigh: North Carolina Standard, 1841), BFP, UVA, #2692, Box 5.

such fashions was complicated, however, by a fear of being perceived as pretentious -- they were concerned, for example, that napkin rings were "too ultra" for their Halifax County peers. Berry Hill can be seen as a desire, albeit at times an ambivalent one, to make an fashionable statement of wealth and social position.

The Bruces's choice of a Greek Revival portico for their house also shows an unmistakable allegiance to the Whig party. The Greek Revival flourished in Whig strongholds throughout the nation, but in Virginia the style was limited to urban centers like Richmond and Petersburg, islands of Whiggery amidst a growing, and restive, democratic majority in the state. Although James C. Bruce withdrew from public office, he did not abandon politics. Bruce maintained his influence by lobbying state legislators, speechifying before local Whig committees, and by encouraging and supporting Whig candidates for office. Berry Hill house was, then, in one sense a statement both of political affiliation and influence.

Fashion and politics drew the Bruces into an extensive social and political network at a time when Virginians were beginning to look beyond their own local and regional concerns. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, national politics began to resonate on a local level. Jacksonian democrats raised issues that affected the everyday life of people across the nation. They challenged political processes that limited the franchise and questioned what they believed to be elite institutions like the Bank of the United States. The Bruces were engaged in a political and social dialogue that extended

well beyond Halifax County; a dialogue that often relied on aesthetics and fashion to communicate meaning.

Berry Hill can be placed within a much larger context of regional and national influences, especially when matters of style and fashion are concerned, and there is no doubt that the Bruces looked beyond Southside Virginia. Ultimately, however, James C. and Eliza Bruce built their house and plantation in response to very local, even personal, concerns. Berry Hill is important not only as a record of local building practices, but as a documentation of the specific needs and particular social arrangements within a society based on slavery. When Bruce decided to build his house, he did not seek out a nationally known architect or consult a pattern book for instruction. Rather, he turned to John E. Johnson, a personal friend with some training in architecture, and to Josiah Dabbs, a reputable local builder. Johnson could draw; Dabbs could build. James C. Bruce neither required nor sought more than the competent skills of local and well-known craftsmen. The building contract and the financial papers concerning the construction reveal a local building practice, typical in early America, that was really a negotiative process among architect, builder, and client. Style and fashion informed, but did not determine, the final form of Berry Hill house.

The true collaborative nature of the building process during this period is revealed in additional instructions that James C. Bruce gave his builder along with personal correspondence between Bruce and his wife. These documents show that Eliza Bruce soon joined in the dialogue between her husband and his builder. The plan of Berry Hill house shows the unmistakable influence of Eliza

Bruce as she considered the way in which she would care for her husband and children and manage the slaves who served her family. Slaves, responding to call bells that summoned them, moved through a series of architectural barriers designed to limit their access to the white household. Slave service, regulated both spatially and aurally, was meant to be discreet and convenient. The plan of Berry Hill house is a manifestation of a social logic -- a logic that anticipated the difficulty of maintaining social order among an enslaved work force, but rarely questioned its continued necessity.

Eliza Bruce intended for the architectural arrangement of her house to help provide efficient and convenient service to her family. The arrangement was also an acknowledgment that slaves were active, if unwilling, participants in a social arrangement. The very need for spatial and aural devices that racially segregated the house was an admission that slaves were not a passive force, but rather an active influence in another negotiative process -- this time a process that sought an accommodation between master and slave. The result of this unspoken agreement can be discerned in the larger landscape of Berry Hill plantation where slaves were less easily observed and regulated in their daily lives.

James C. Bruce freely acknowledged his duty to his slaves as master over their lives, and he instructed the overseers of his seven plantations to treat his slaves humanely. Only at Berry Hill, however, did James C. Bruce embark on a building campaign that dramatically improved the living conditions of his slaves. The contrast between the slave dwellings at Berry Hill and those of his neighboring plantation, Edward's Place is revealing. The buildings at Edward's

Place were valued at six hundred dollars while the stone slave houses at Berry Hill were valued at three thousand dollars. The slaves at Berry Hill proved many times through their resistance that they were a force to be reckoned with, and Bruce acknowledged this when he sought to gain their cooperation by providing them with substantial stone dwellings. Bruce of course wielded ultimate authority over their lives, but without the excuse of overt rebellion, he could not justify in his own mind the use of physical force. The landscape at Berry Hill plantation is not so much a statement of James C. Bruce's kindly disposition toward his slaves as it is an acknowledgment that his slaves had influence over crucial aspects of their lives.

The world that James C. Bruce created at Berry Hill plantation was not of his own making, and the story of Berry Hill is not the story of one man, but of a richly diverse group of people with competing interests and motives. The Greek Revival portico of Berry Hill house speaks to a political and social ambition that reached far beyond Halifax County into a world where men vied for control over a nation's destiny. The room arrangement behind that facade, however, has little, if anything, to do with James C. Bruce's political goals. Rather, the house centers on and revolves around a woman -- Eliza Bruce and her role as wife, mother, and mistress. The entire plantation -- its great house, its outbuildings, barns, and slave houses -- owes its very existence to slaves whose forced labor provided the Bruce family, indeed, an entire society, the means to accumulate wealth enough to build such a world. Berry Hill plantation was, then, a proposition about how that world should work -- who would determine the terms of social relationships; who would have and who would have not; who

would command and who would obey; who would serve whom. Ultimately, Berry Hill plantation is a lesson in the nature of power and of how that power is exerted, mediated, and maintained through architecture.

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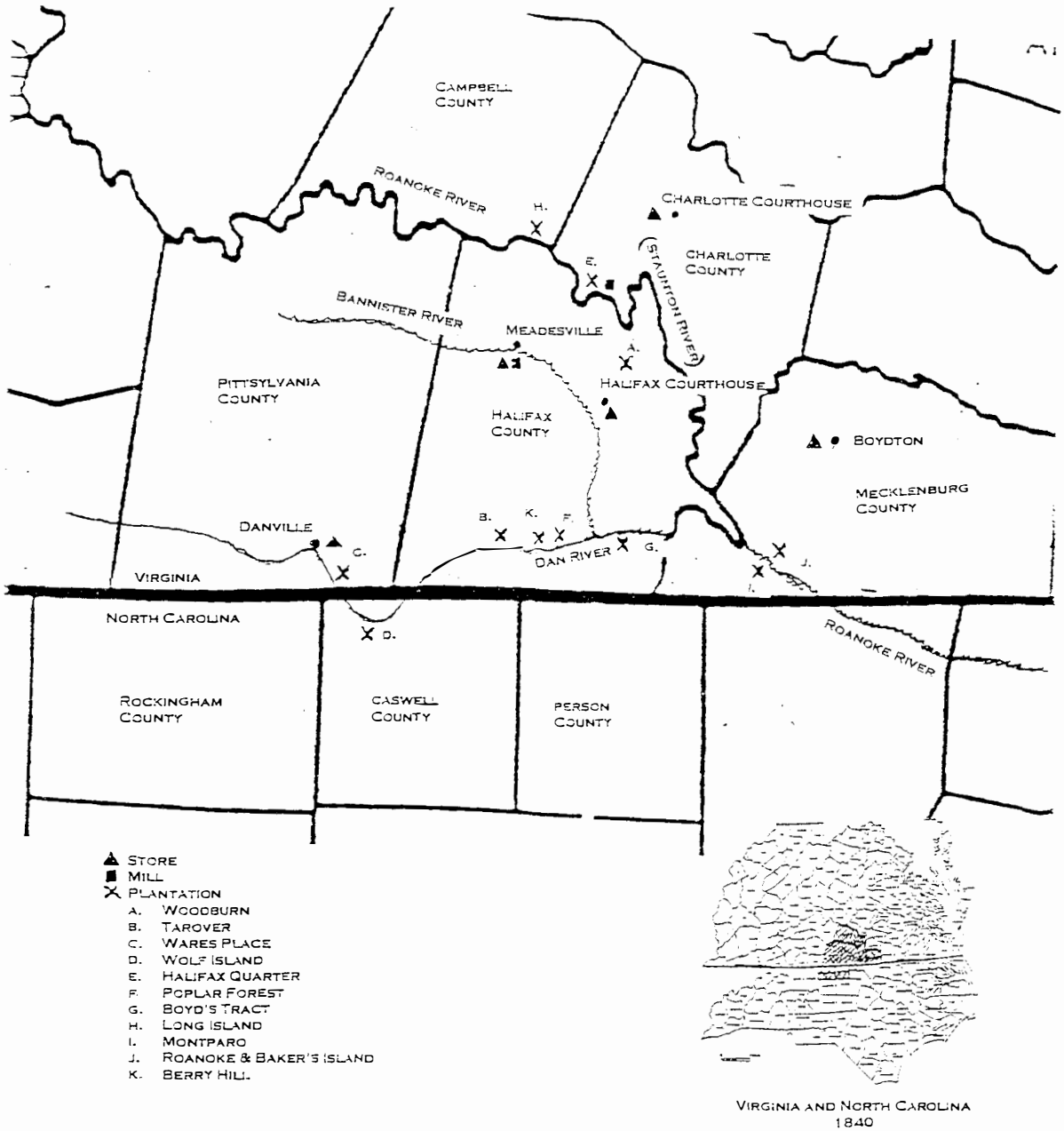
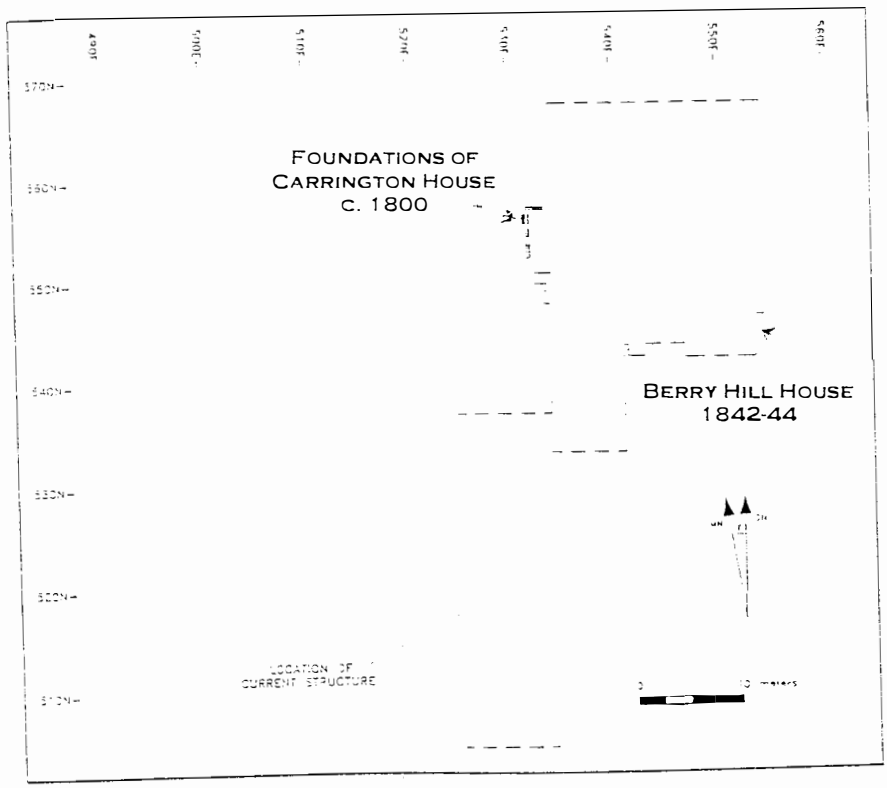
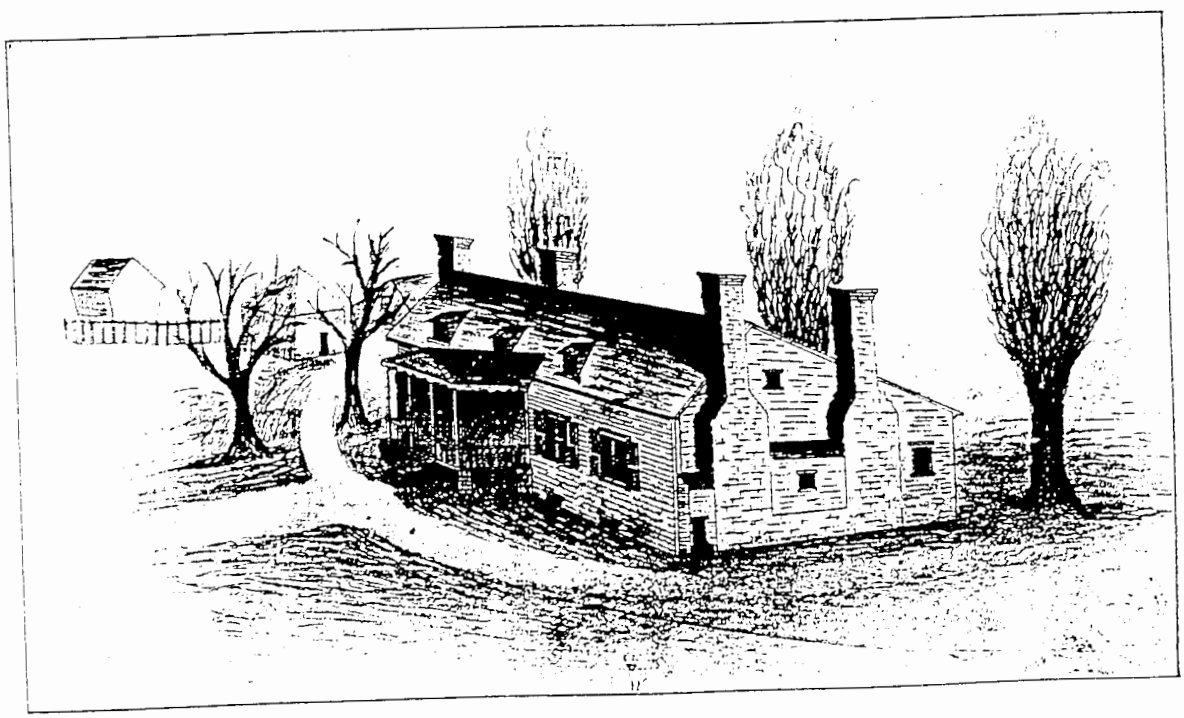


VIRGINIA AND NORTH CAROLINA
1840

Figure 1.1 Map showing properties of James Bruce.

Figure 2.1 St. John's Episcopal Church, Halifax County, Virginia.





Top: Figure 3.1 Archaeological site of the Carrington House.
Bottom: Figure 3.2 Sketch of Tarover.

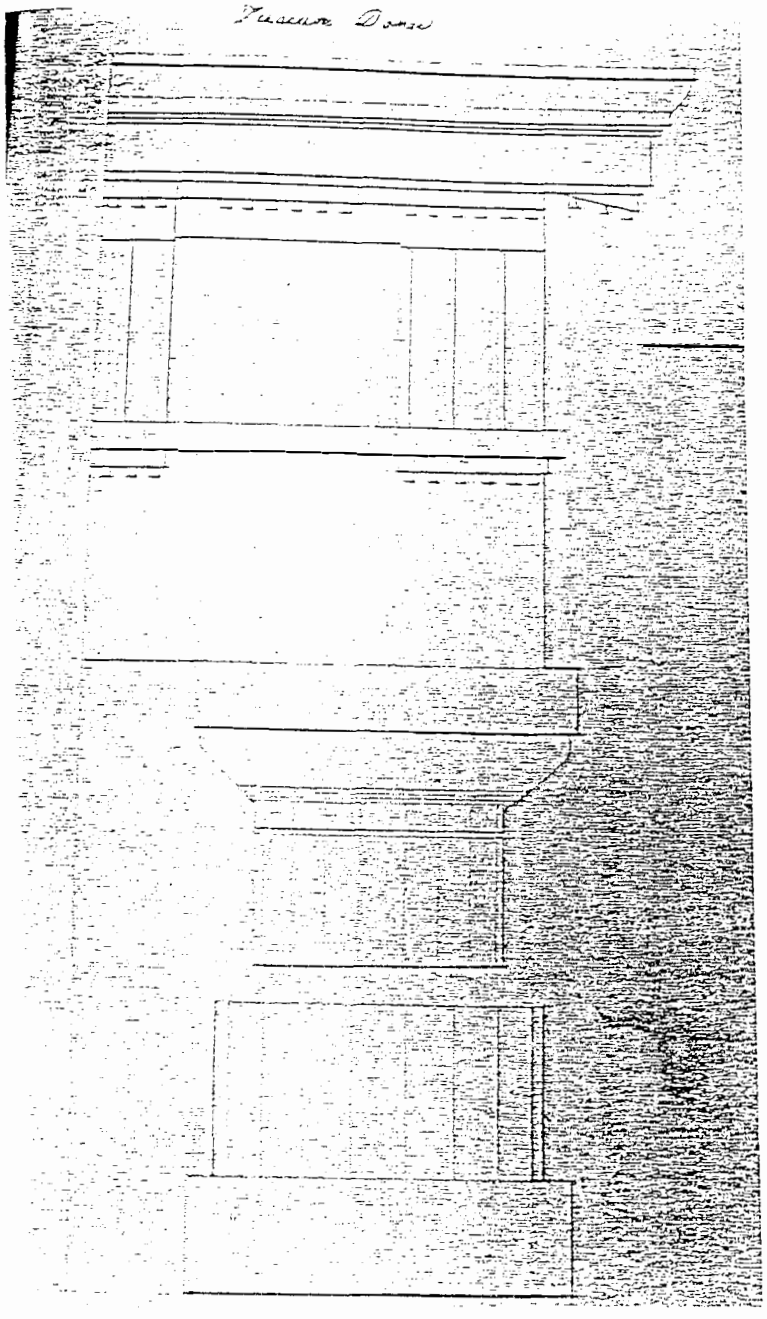


Figure 3.3 Drawings by Philip St. George Cocke.

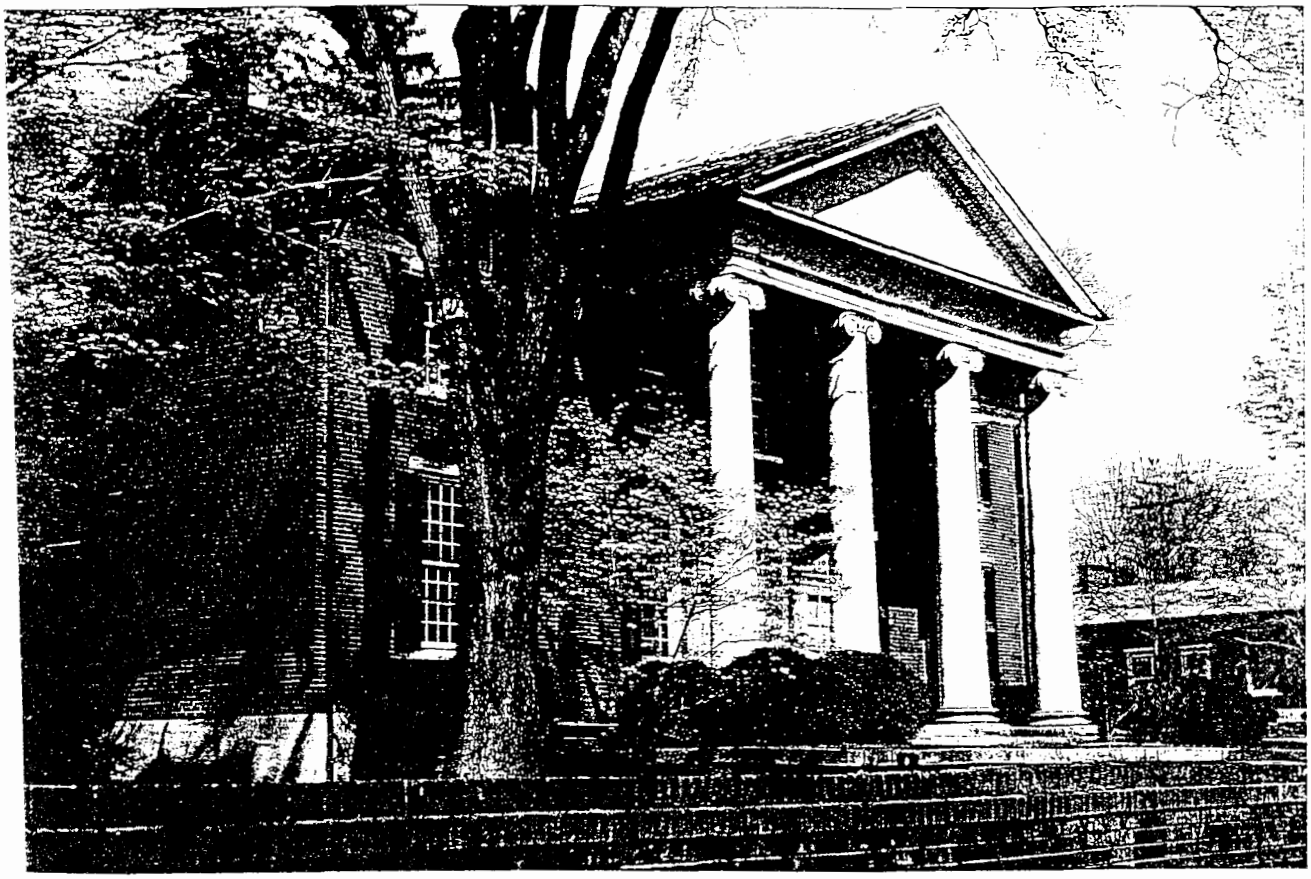
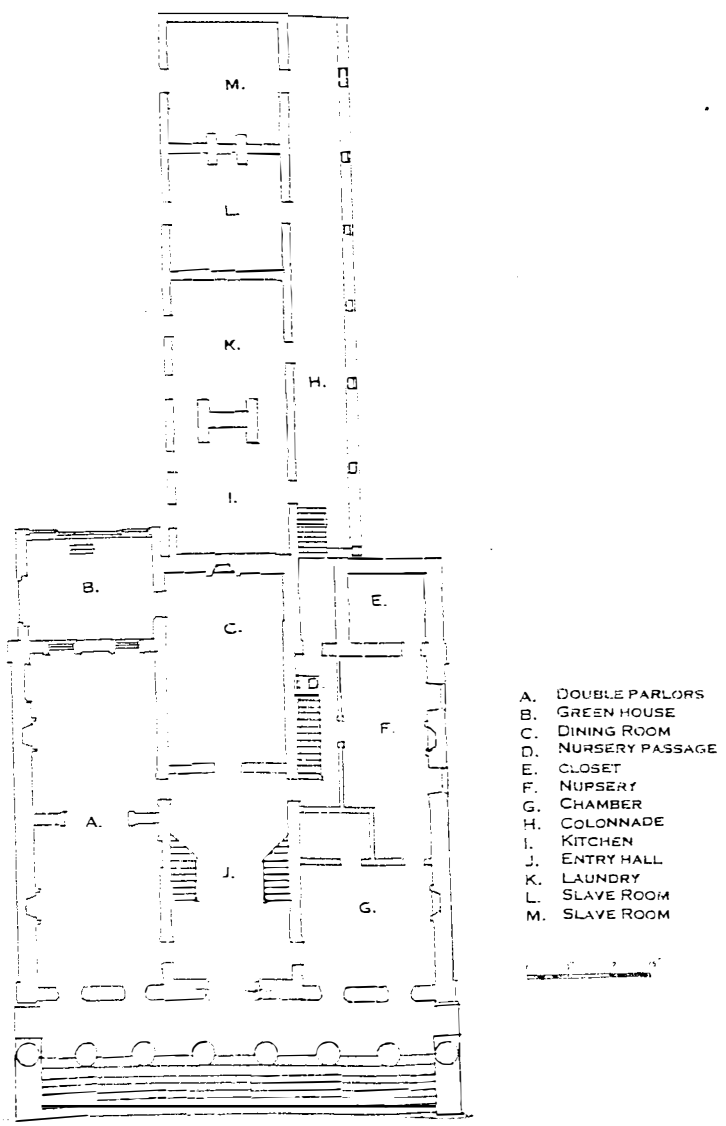


Figure 3.4 Halifax County Courthouse.



Berry Hill House, First Floor
Conjectural drawing of John E. Johnson's Plan based on Building Contract.

Figure 3.5 Conjectural Plan of Berry Hill.

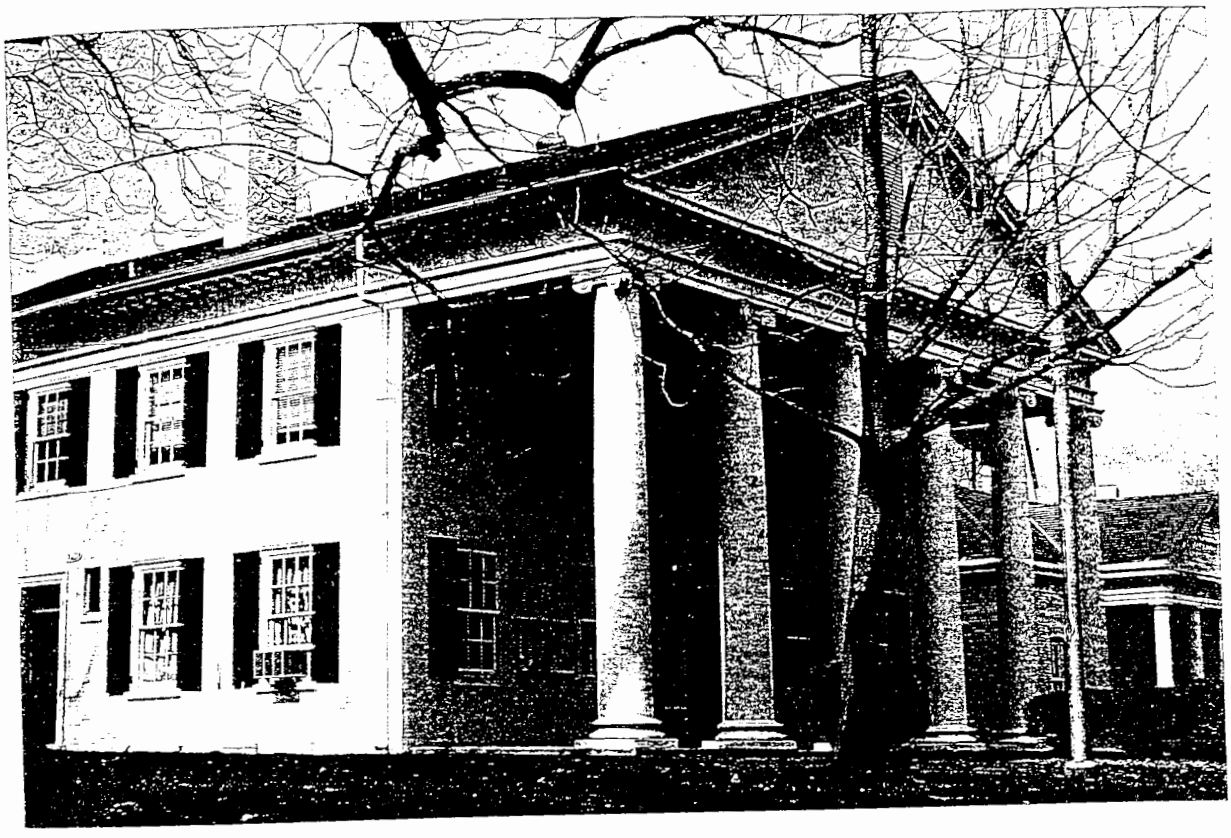


Figure 4.1 Mecklenburg County Courhouse.

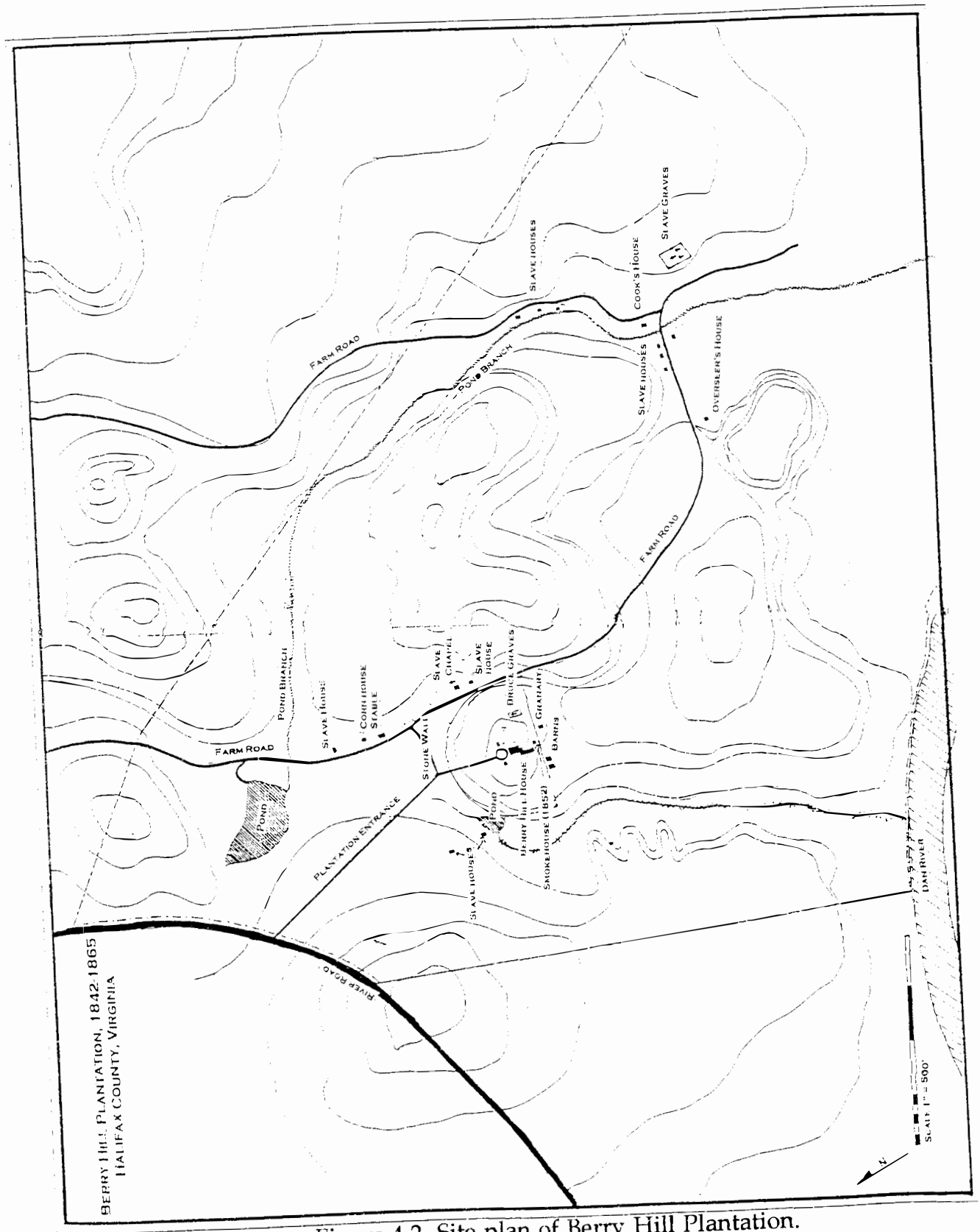


Figure 4.2 Site plan of Berry Hill Plantation.

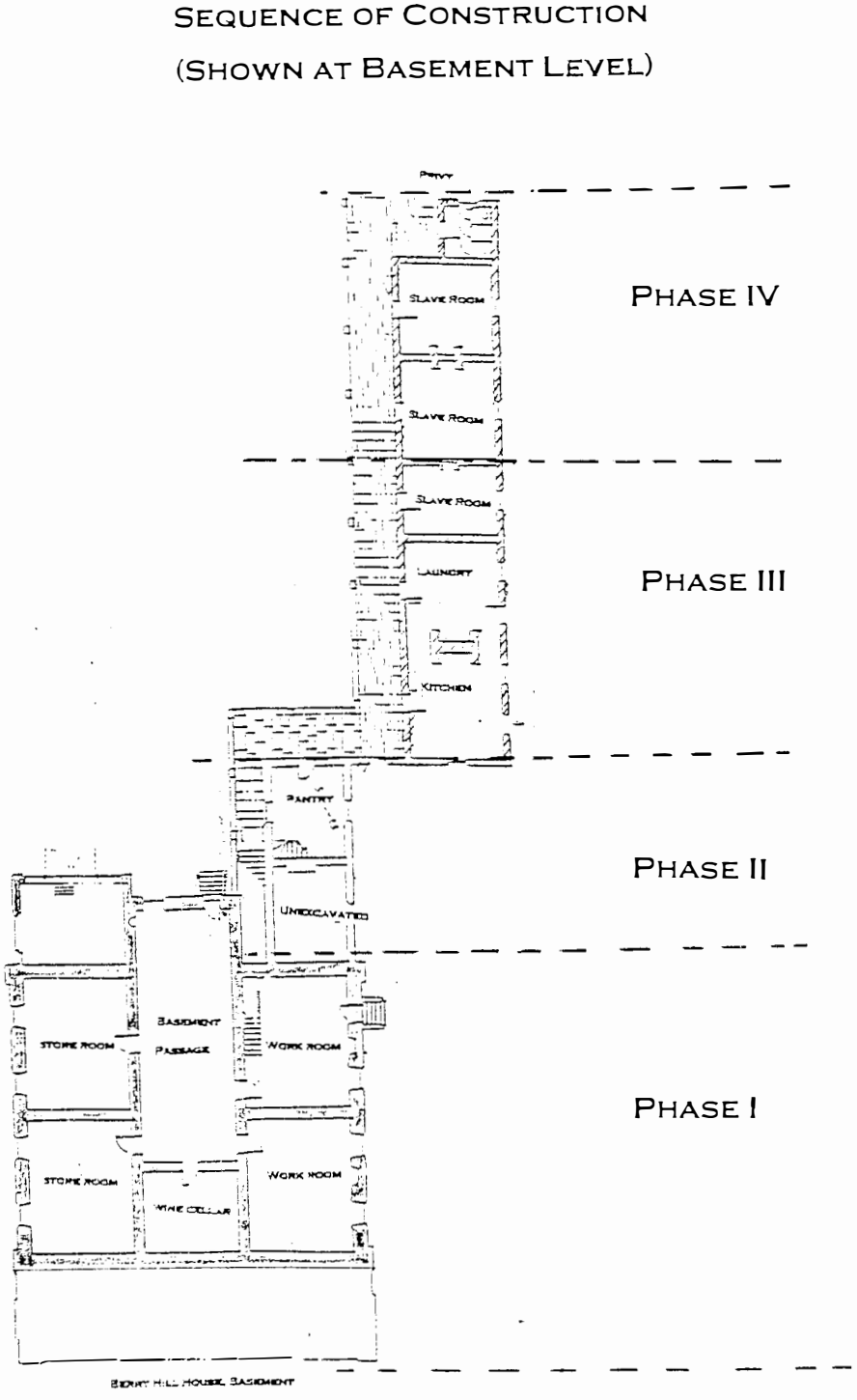


Figure 4.3 Berry Hill House. Plan showing four phases of construction.

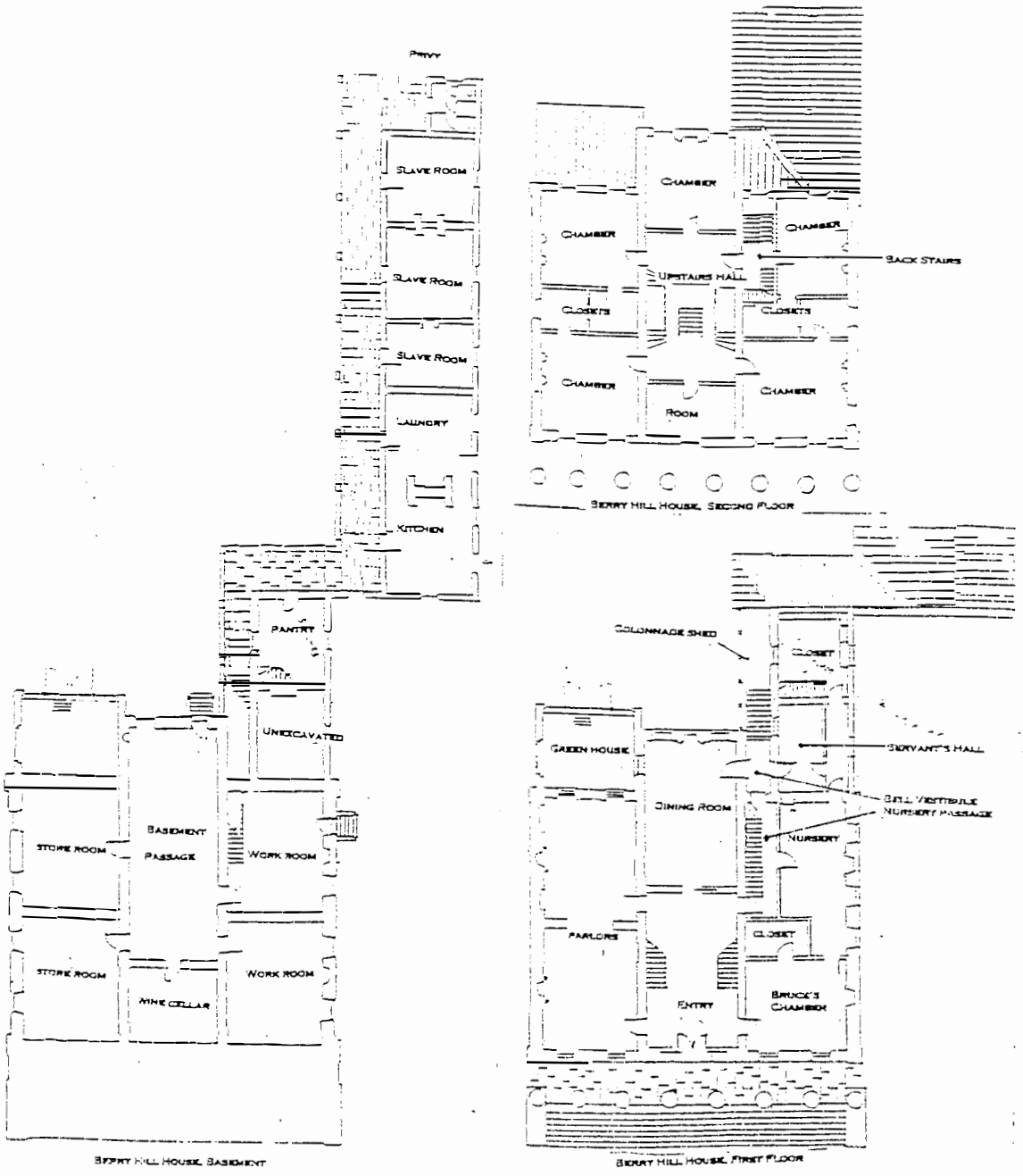
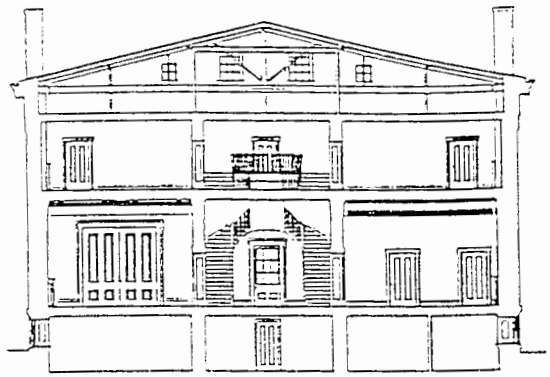
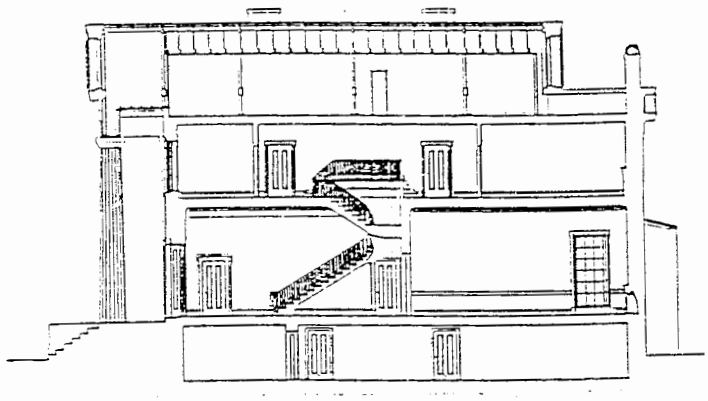


Figure 4.4 Berry Hill House. Plan as built.



TRANSVERSE SECTION - LOOKING SOUTH



LONGITUDINAL SECTION - LOOKING EAST

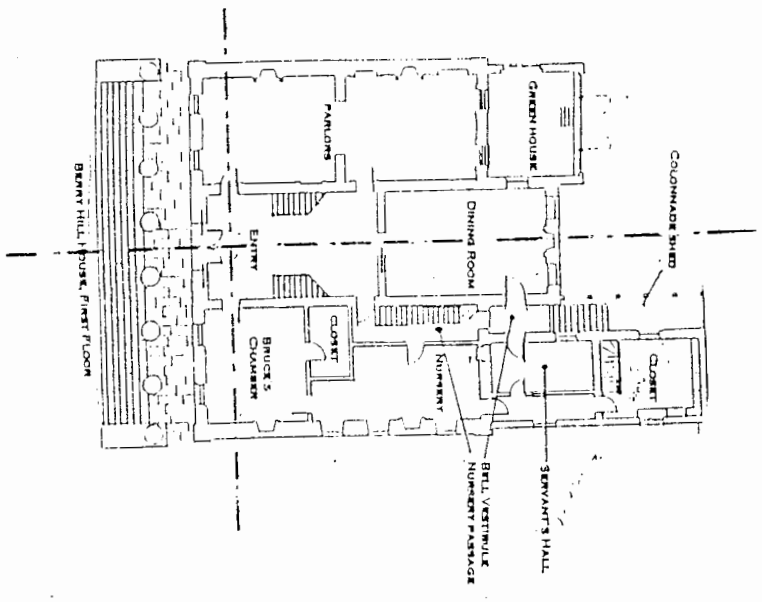


Figure 4.5 Berry Hill House. Plan and Cross Sections.

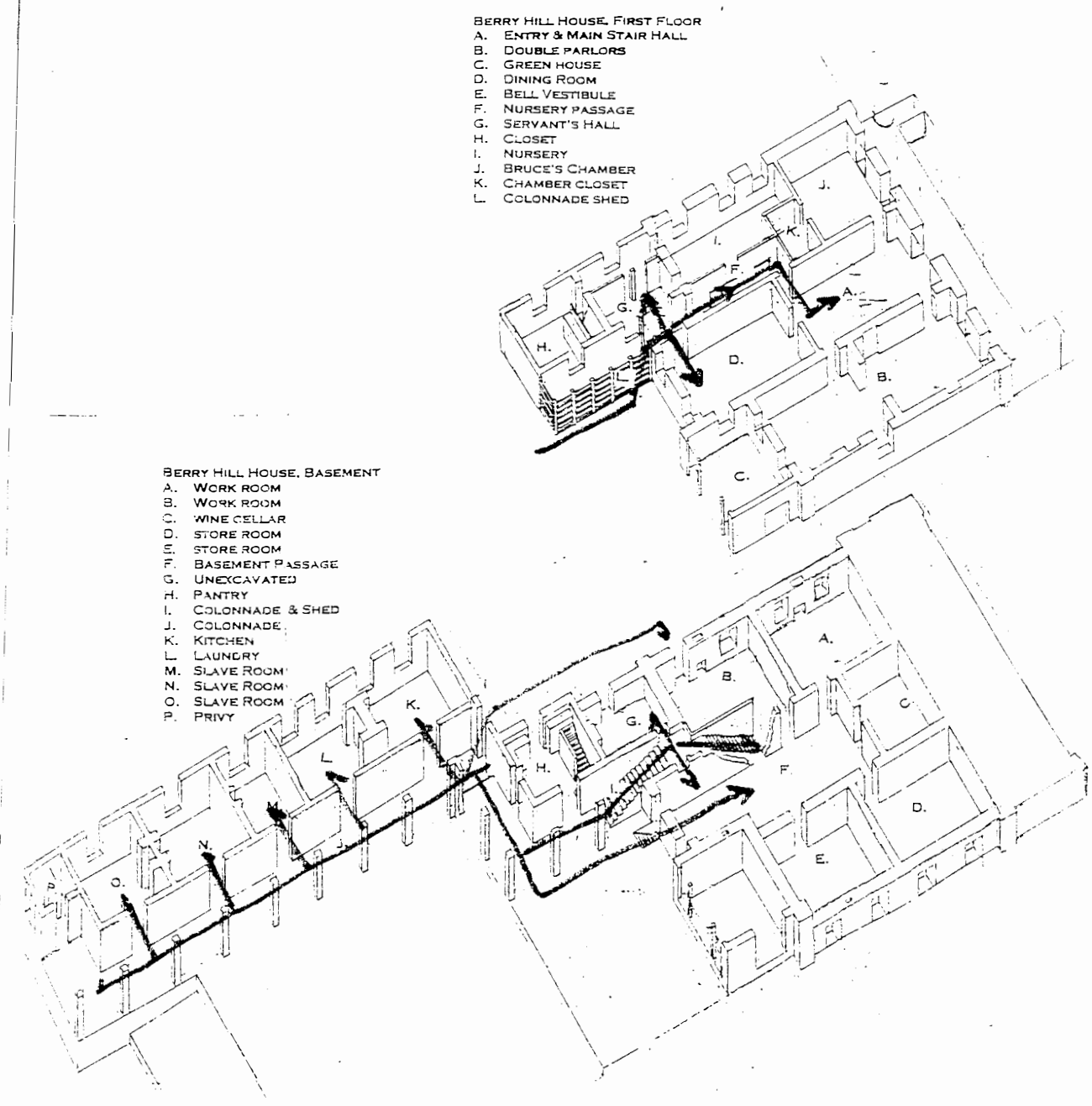


Figure 5.1 Berry Hill House. Axonometric showing slave circulation.

Figure 5.2 Berry Hill House. Colonnade Shed.

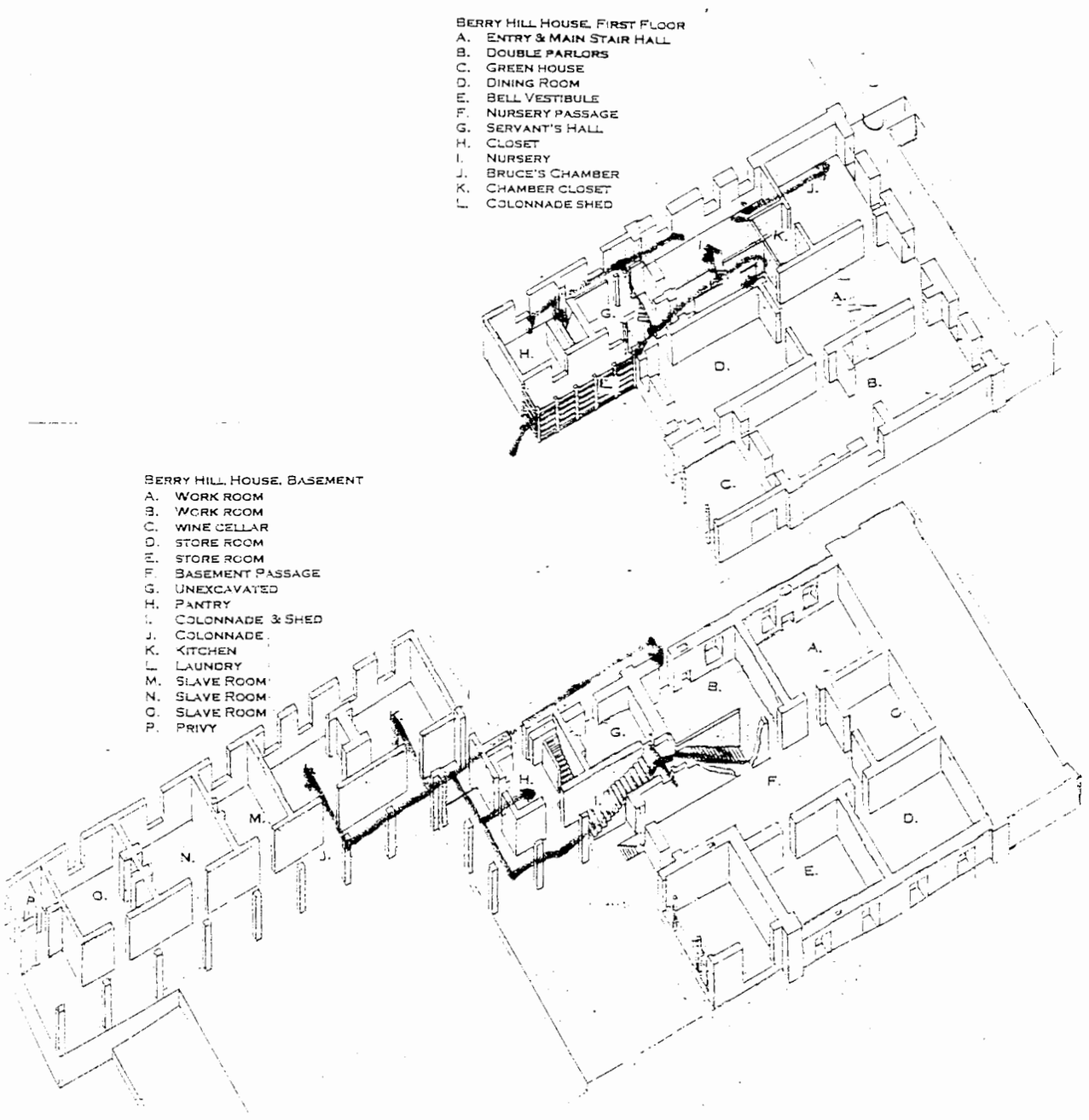
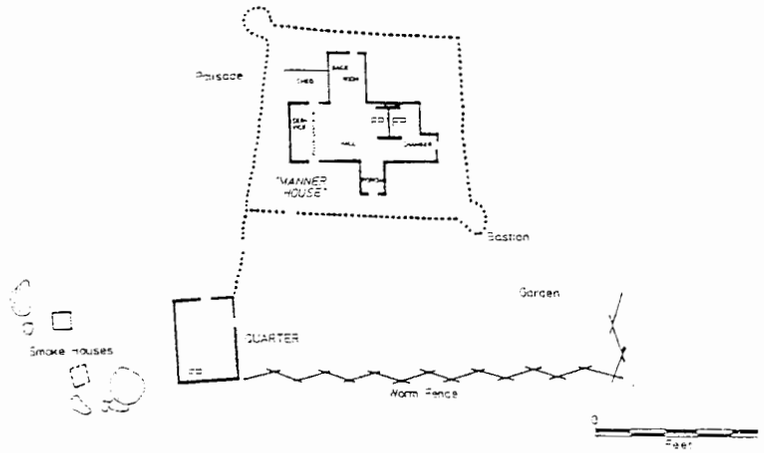
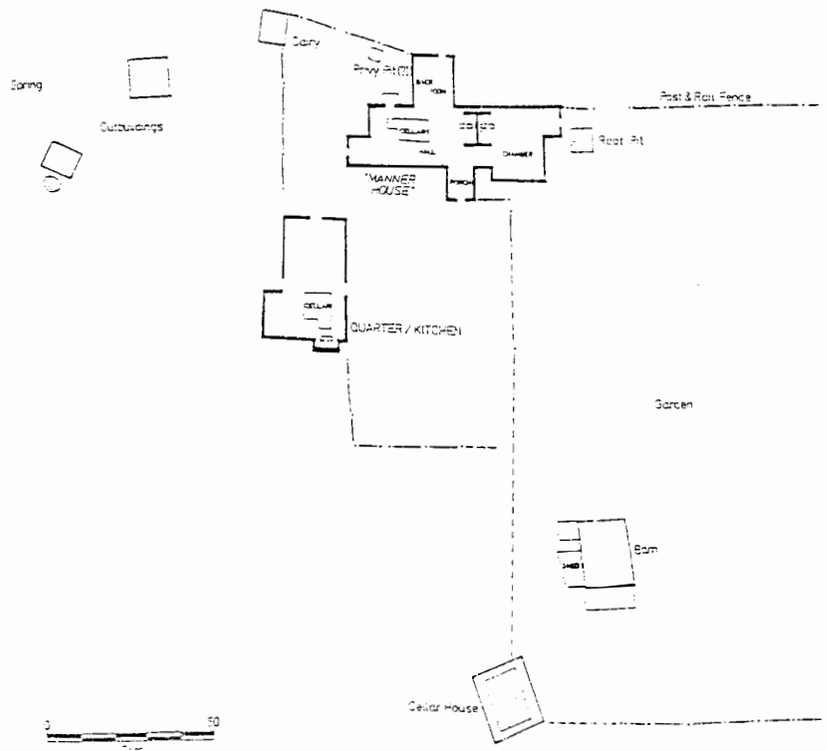
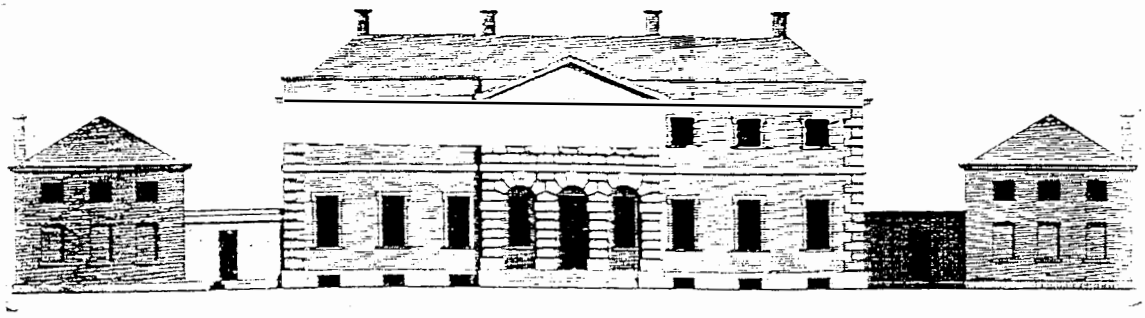


Figure 5.3 Berry Hill House. Axonometric showing Eliza Bruce's daily routes through the house.

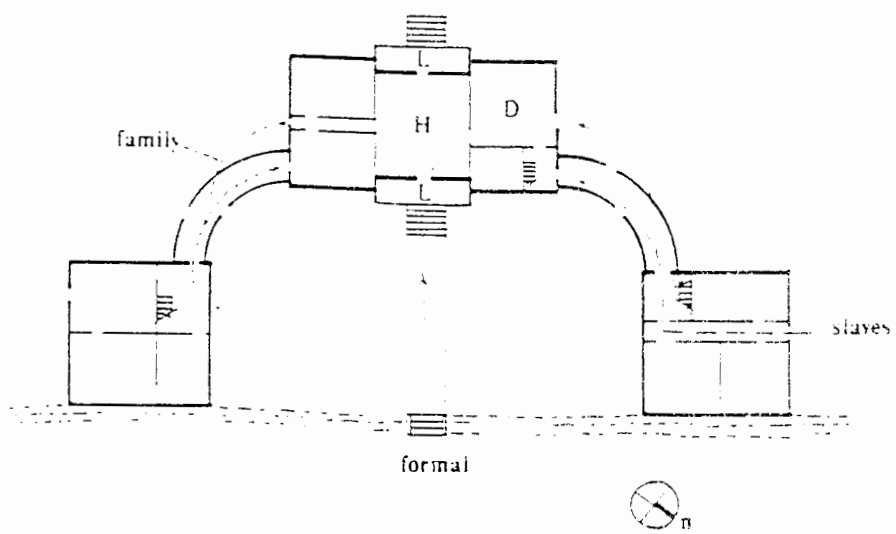




Top: Figure 6.1 Clifts Plantation c. 1675.
Bottom: Figure 6.2 Clifts Plantation c. 1725.

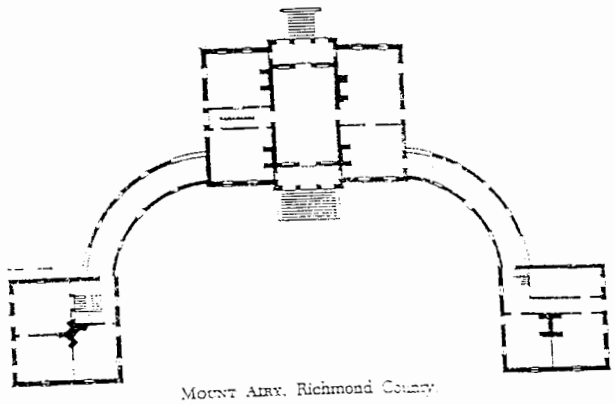


Top: Figure 6.3 Plate LVIII from James Gibbs's Book of Architecture.
Bottom: Figure 6.4 South Elevation, Mount Airy, Richmond County, Virginia.

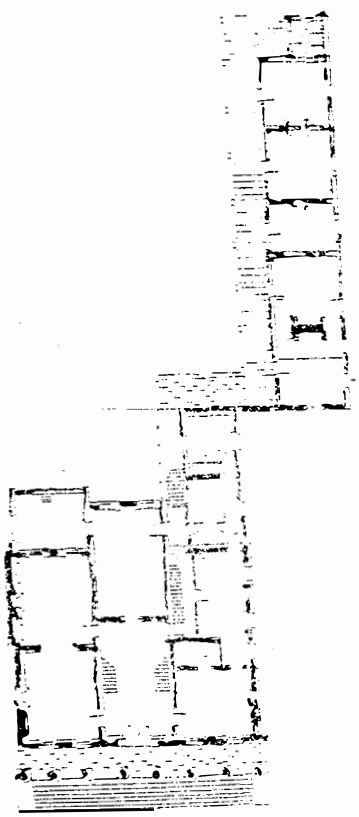


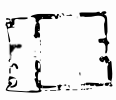
Mount Airy. Sketch plan showing formal, family, and slaves' routes. Key: H = hall; L = loggias, D = dining room. (Drawing, Dell Upton.)

Figure 6.5 Plan, Mount Airy.



MOUNT AIRY, Richmond County





BERRY HILL, HALIFAX COUNTY

Figure 6.6 Plans, Mount Airy and Berry Hill.

Top: Figure 6.7 South Elevation, Mount Airy.
Bottom: Figure 6.8 South Elevatioin, Berry Hill.

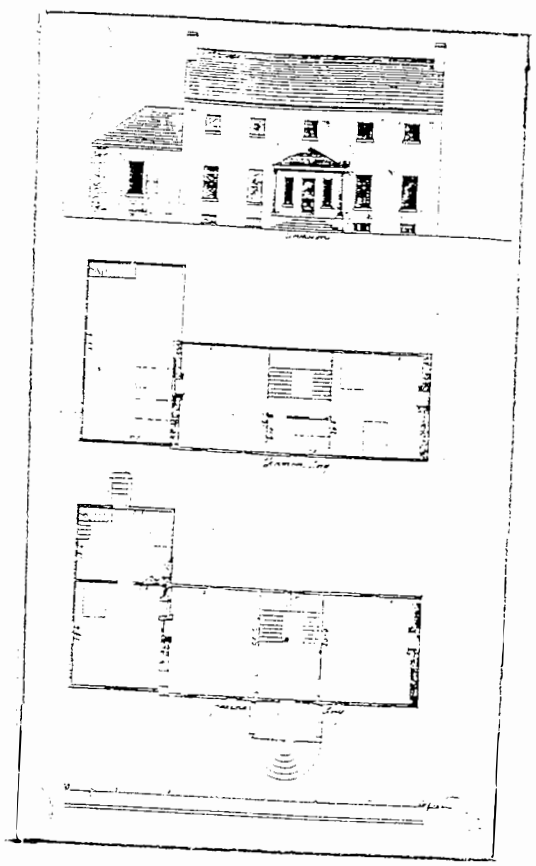


Figure 6.9 Prospect Hill, Spotsylvania County, Virginia.

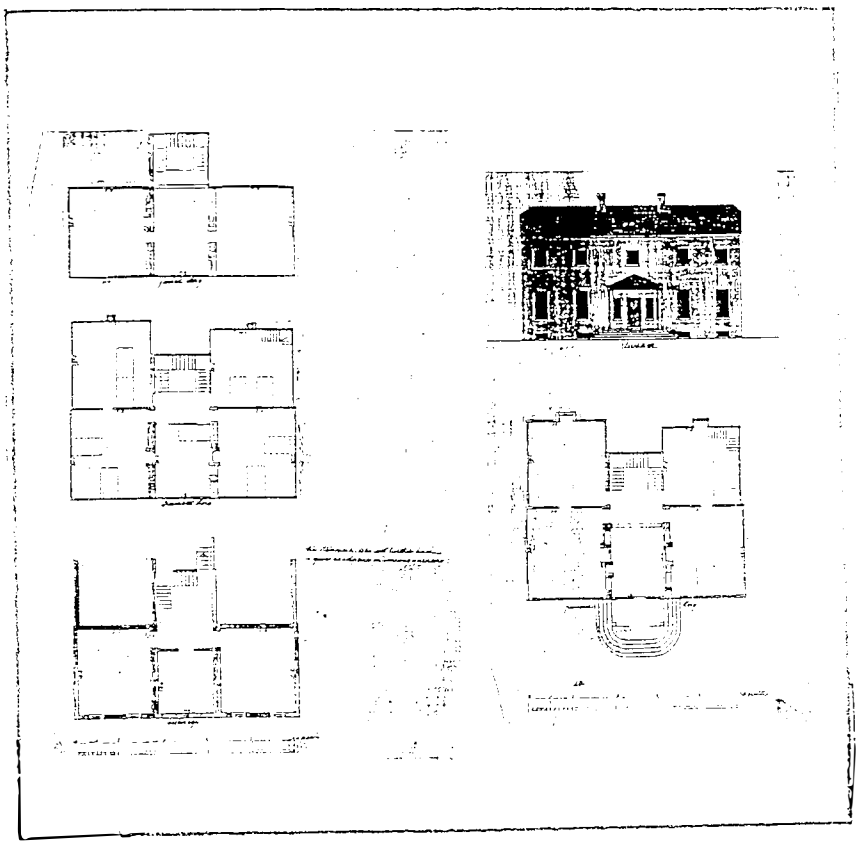


Figure 6.10 Prospect Hill.

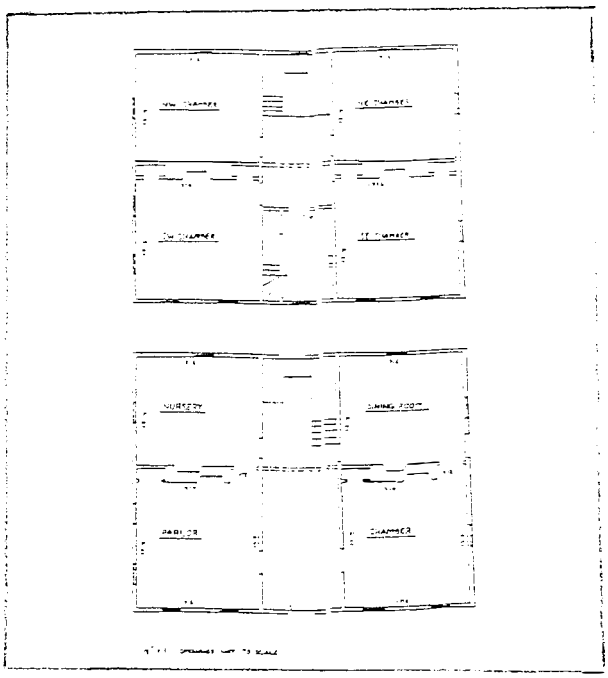
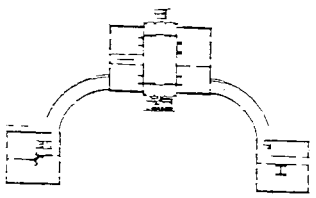
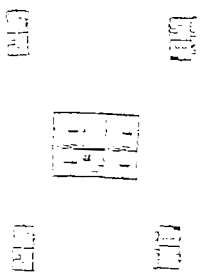


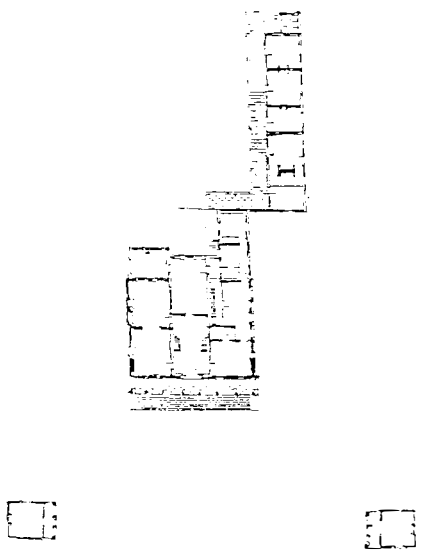
Figure 6.11 Prospect Hill.



MOUNT AIRY, RICHMOND COUNTY

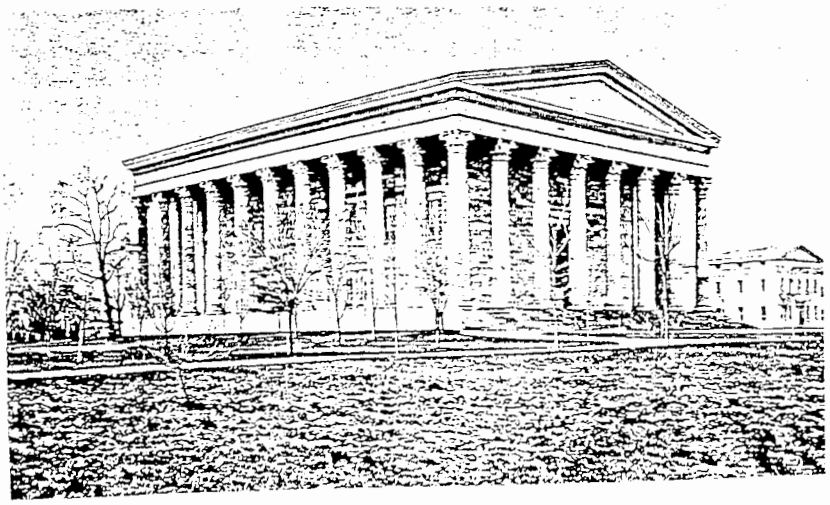


PROSPECT HILL, SPOTSYLVANIA COUNTY

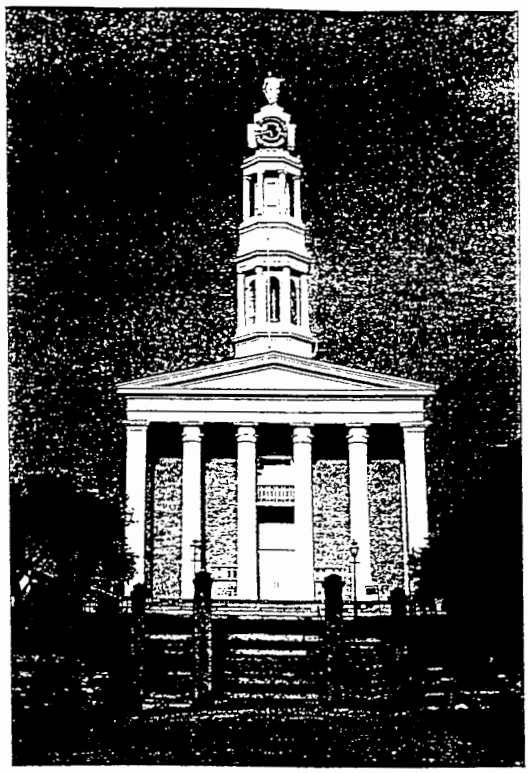


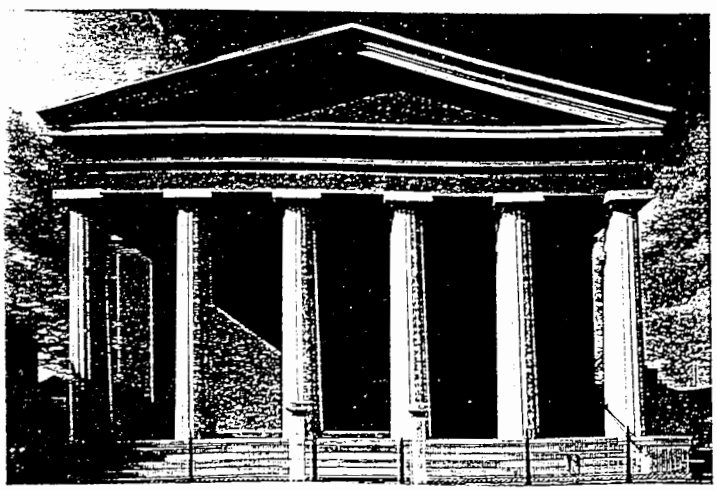
BERRY HILL, HALIFAX COUNTY

Figure 6.12 Plans, Mount Airy, Prospect Hill, Berry Hill.

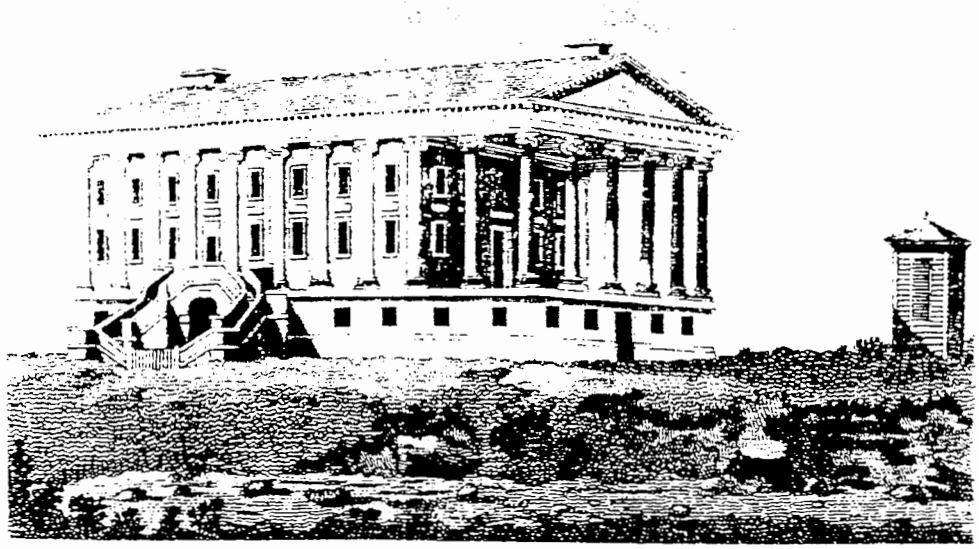


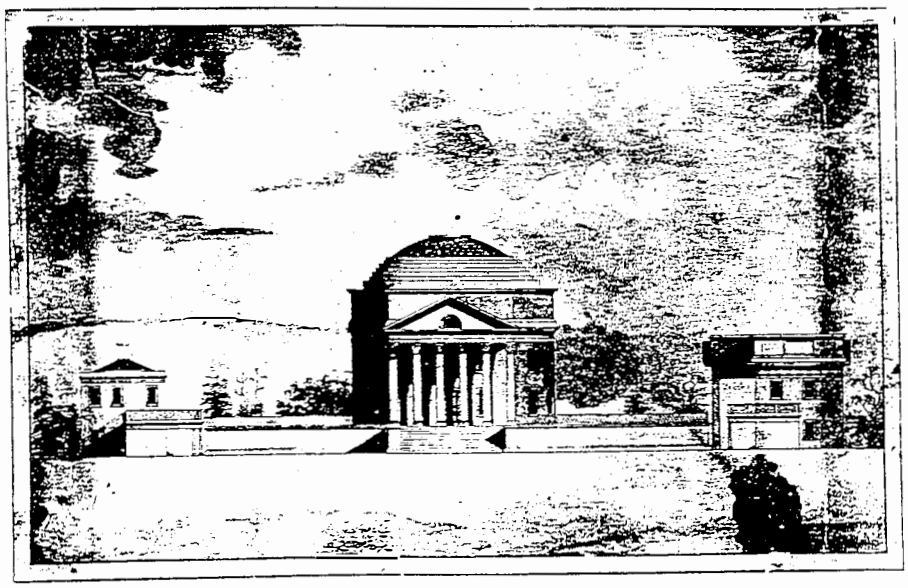
Top: Figure 7.1 North Elevation, Berry Hill.
Bottom: Figure 7.2 Girard College, Philadelphia.



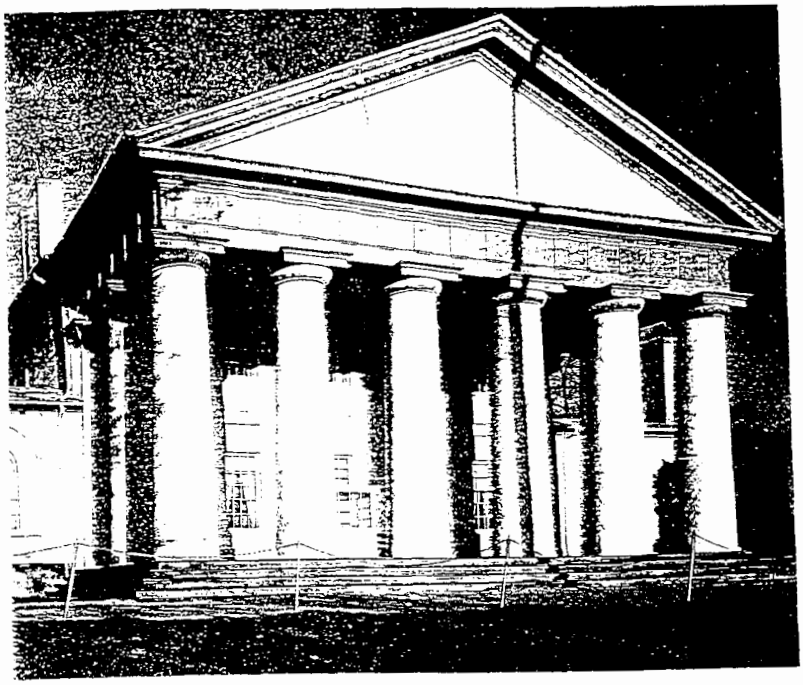


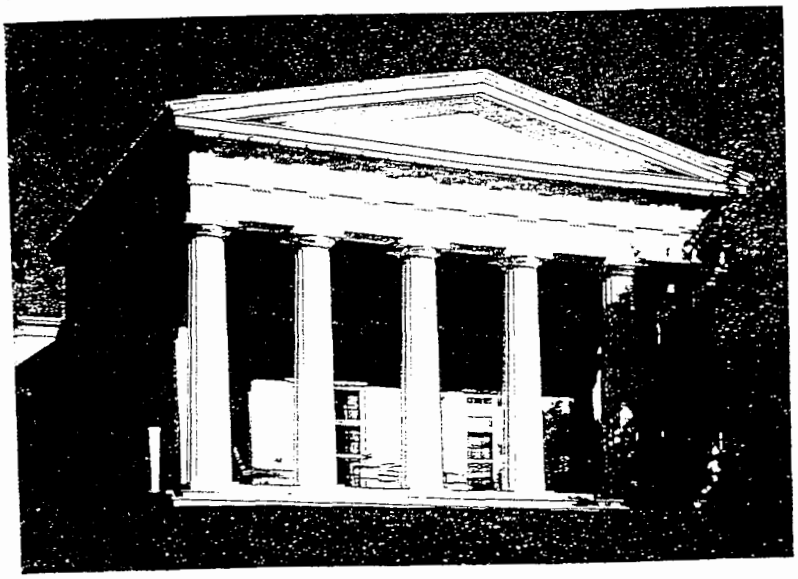
Top: Figure 7.3 Courthouse, Petersburg, Virginia.
Bottom: Figure 7.4 Presbyterian Church, Petersburg, Virginia.





Top: Figure 7.5 Virginia State Capitol.
Bottom: Figure 7.6 Rotunda, University of Virginia.





Top: Figure 7.7 Arlington House, Arlington, Virginia.
Bottom: Figure 7.8 Andalusia, Philadelphia.

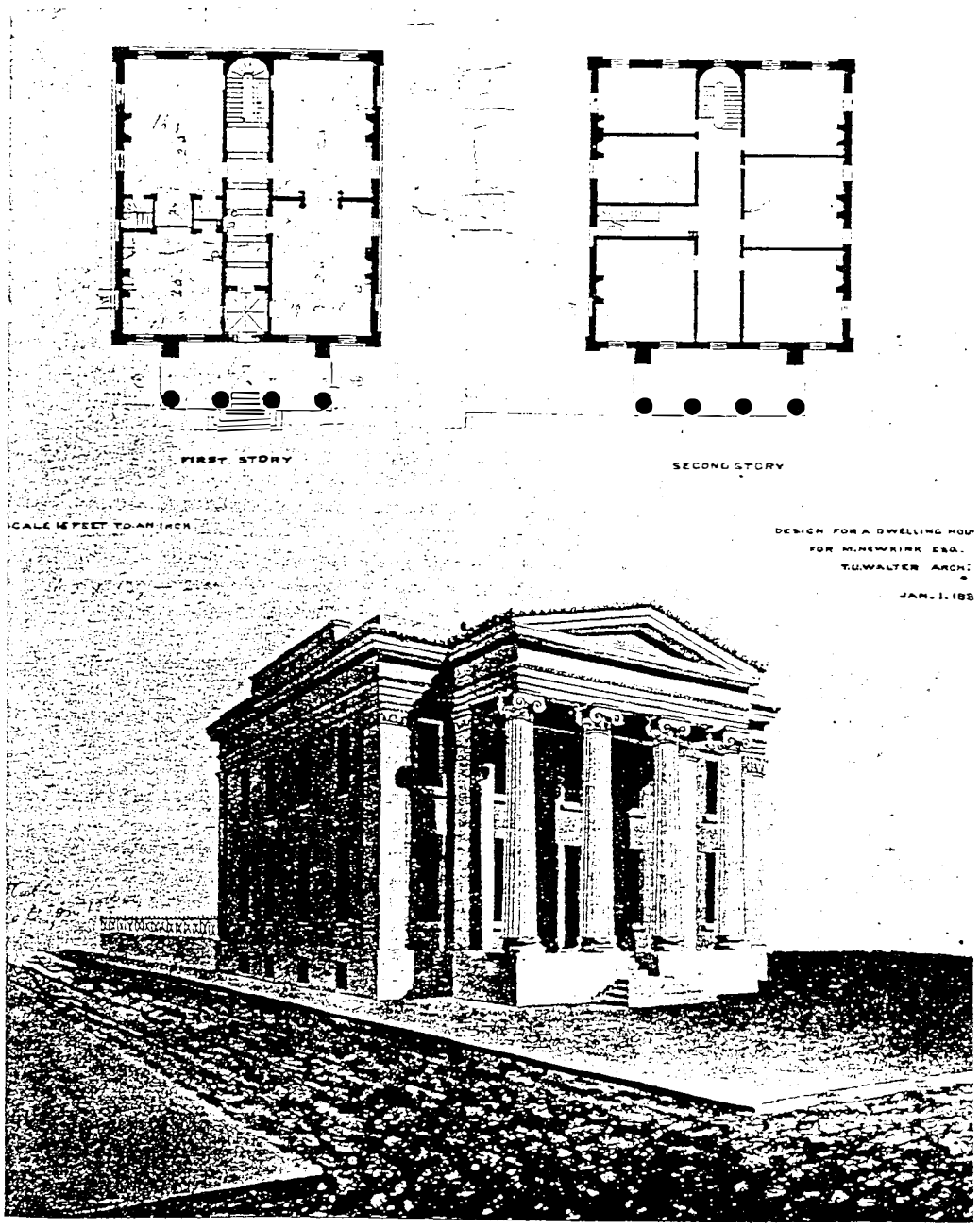
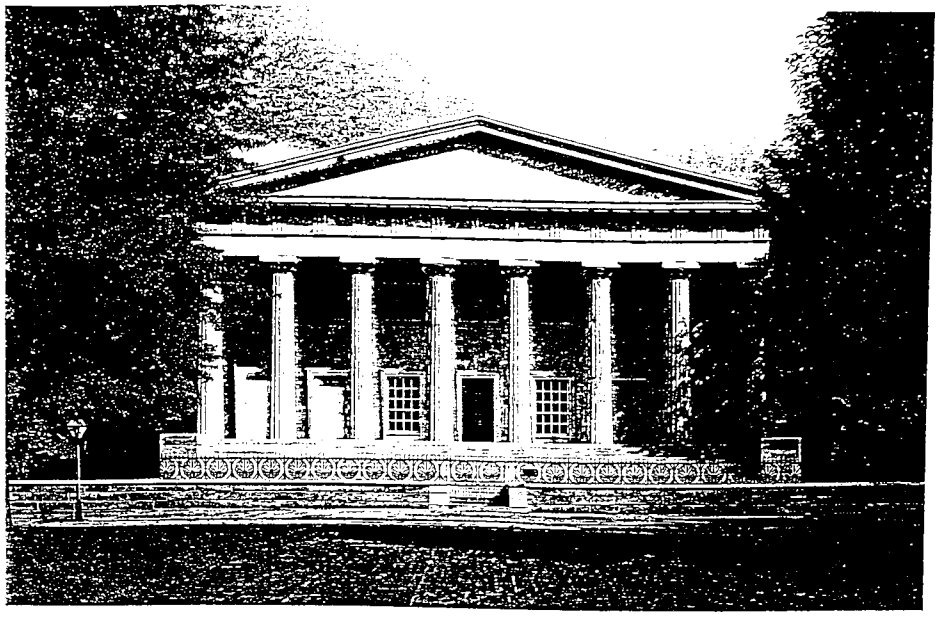
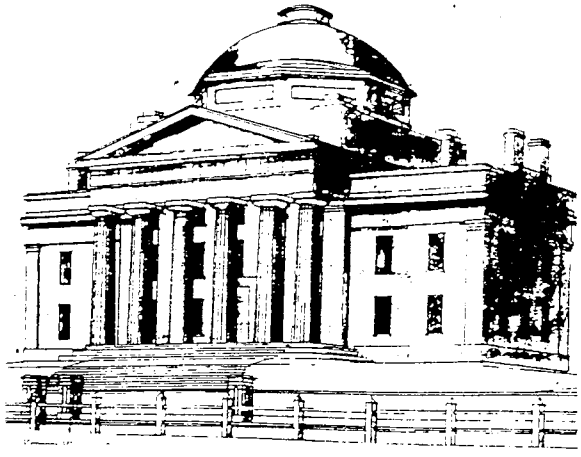


Figure 7.9 Newkirk House, Philadelphia.





Top: Figure 7.10 Bank of the United States.
Bottom: Figure 7.11 Vermont State Capitol.

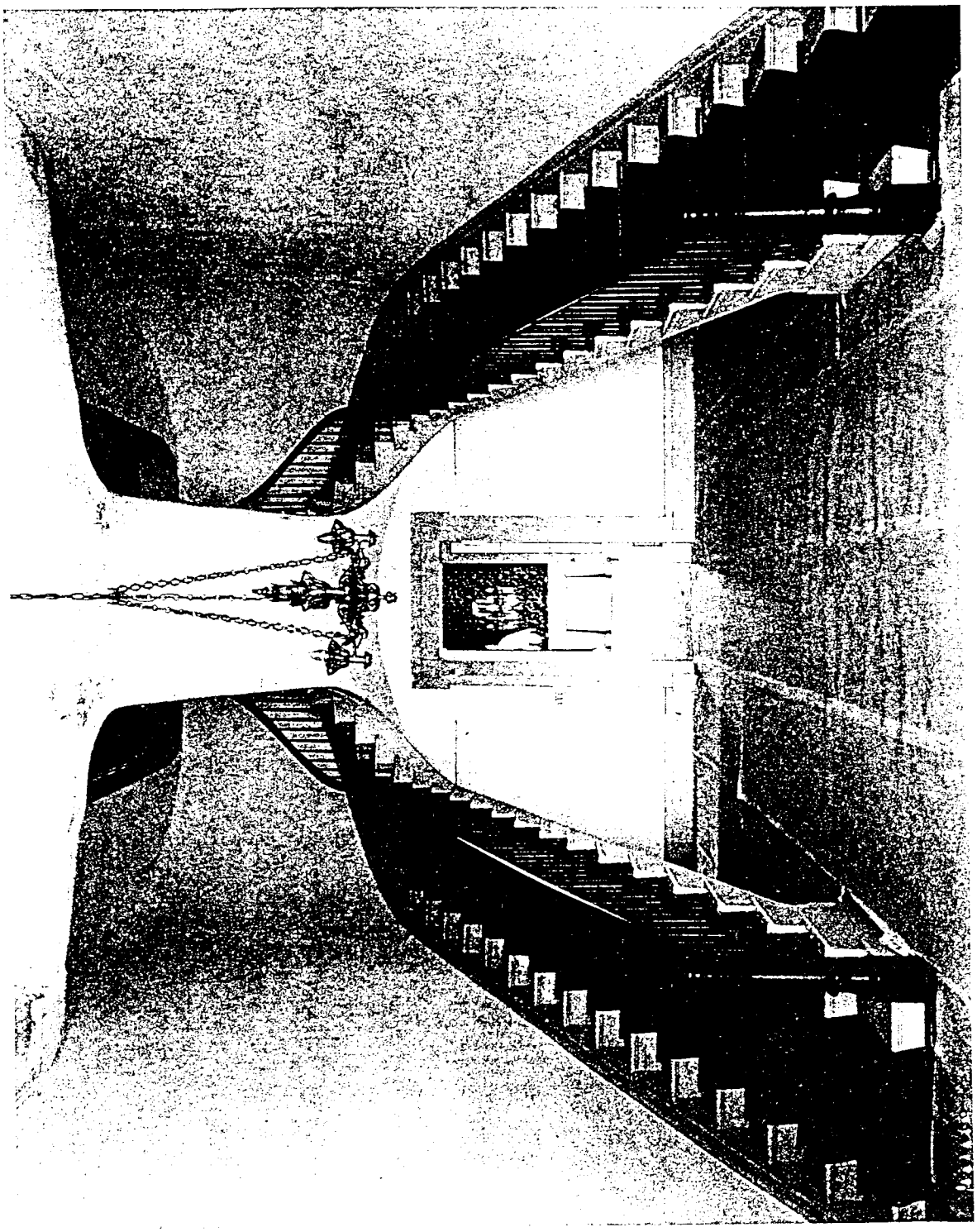


Figure 7.12 Stair Hall, Berry Hill House.

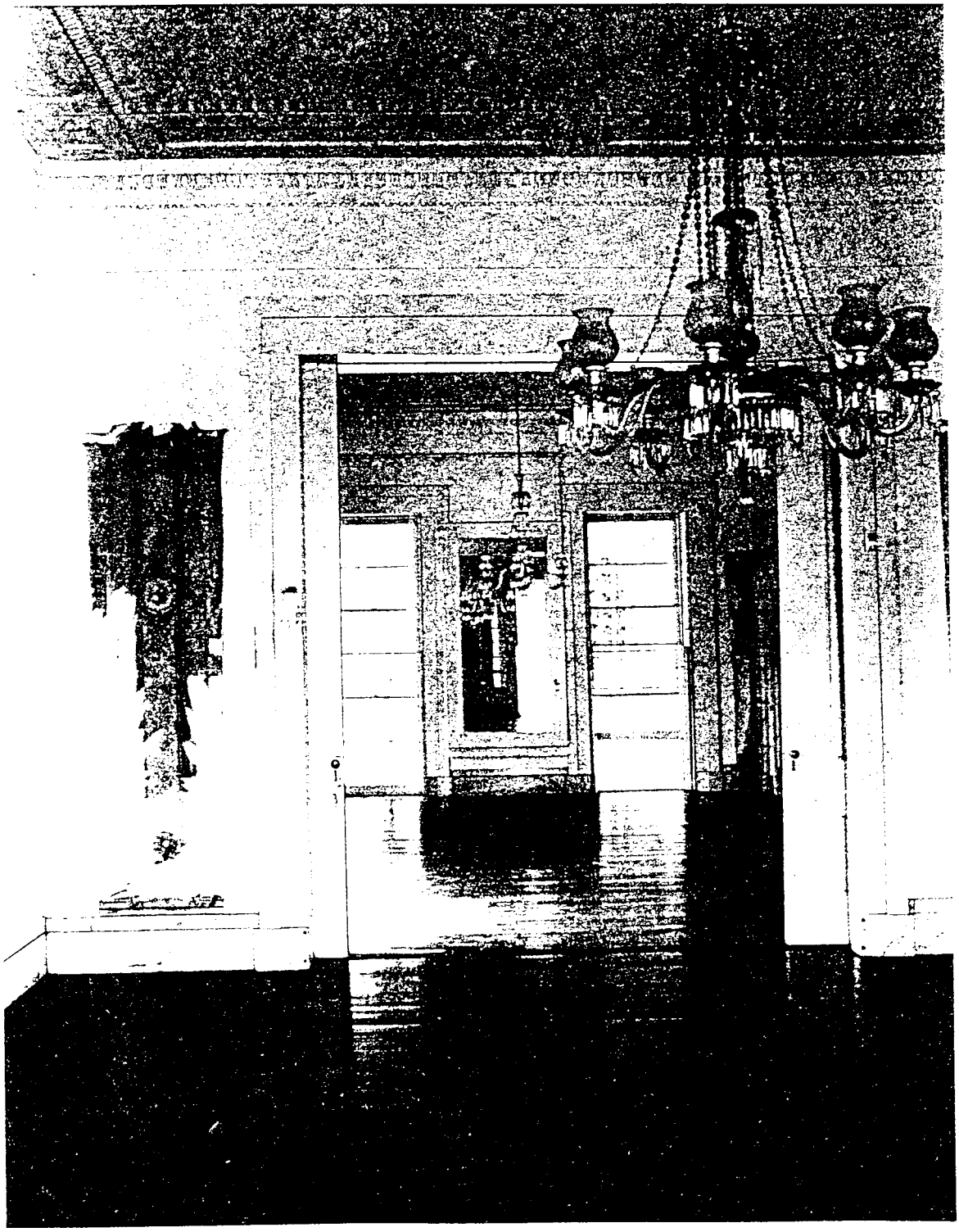
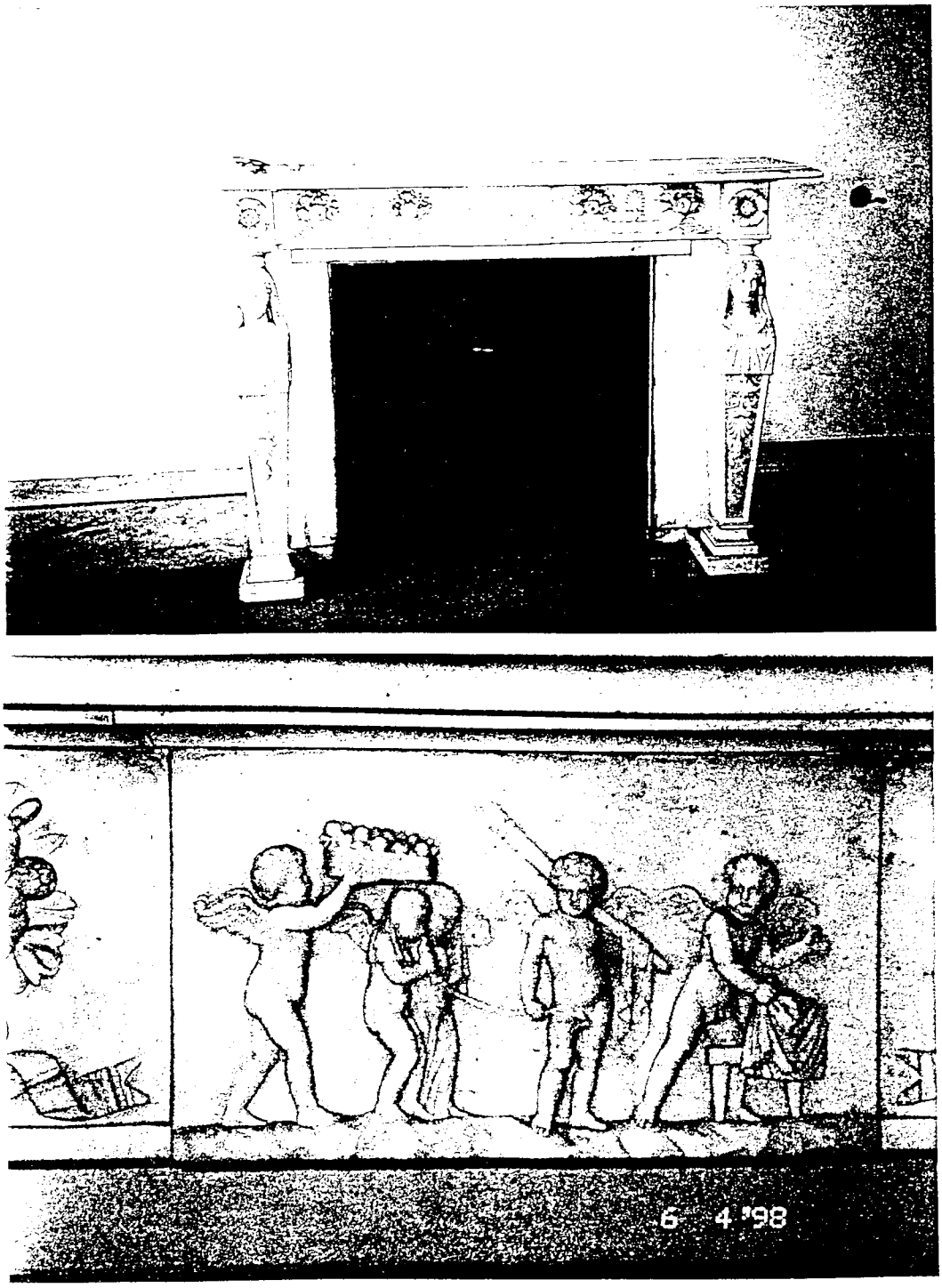


Figure 7.13 Double Parlors, Berry Hill House.



Top: Figure 7.14 Mantelpiece, Berry Hill House.
Bottom: Figure 7.15 Detail, Frieze of Mantelpiece, Berry Hill House.

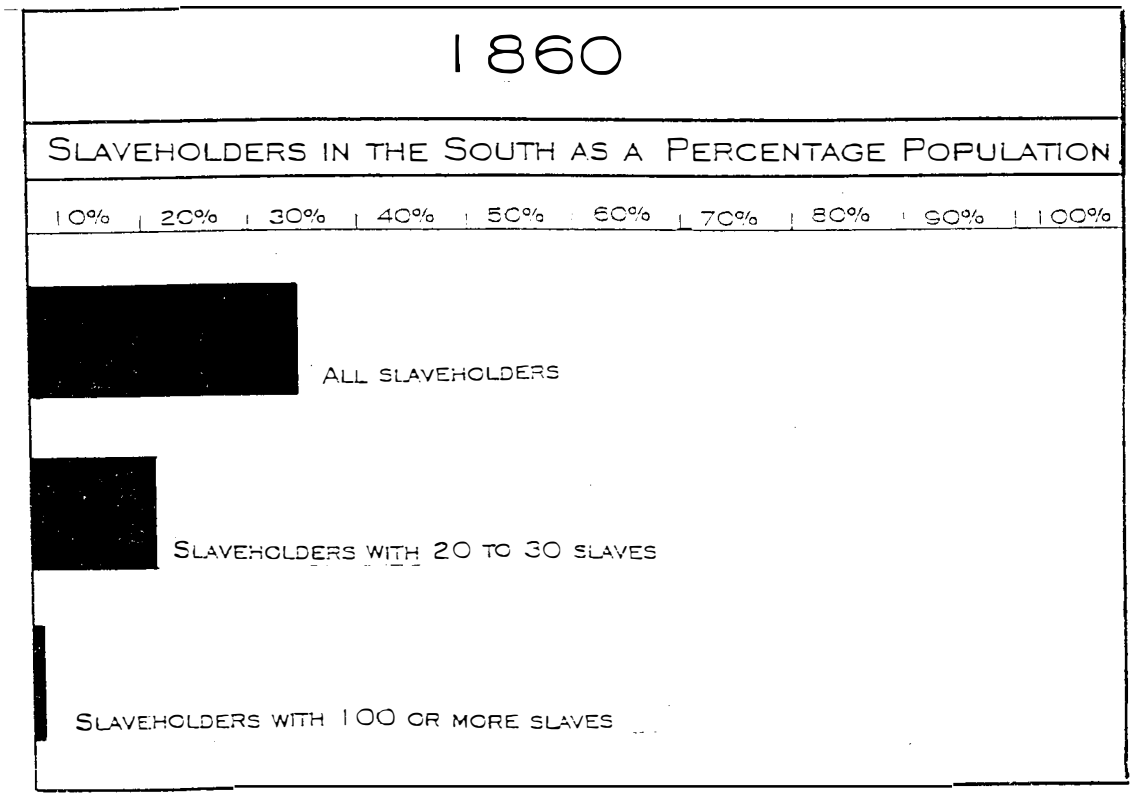
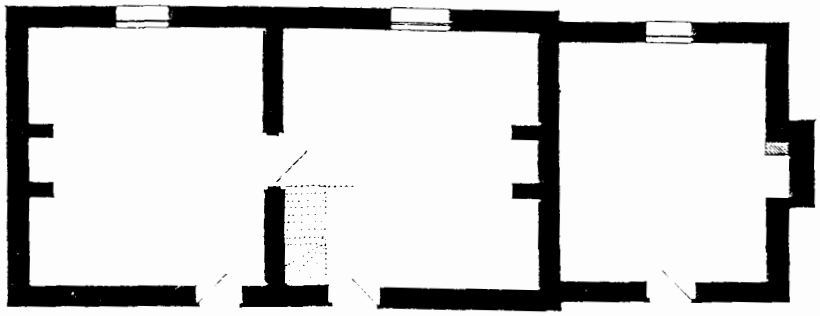
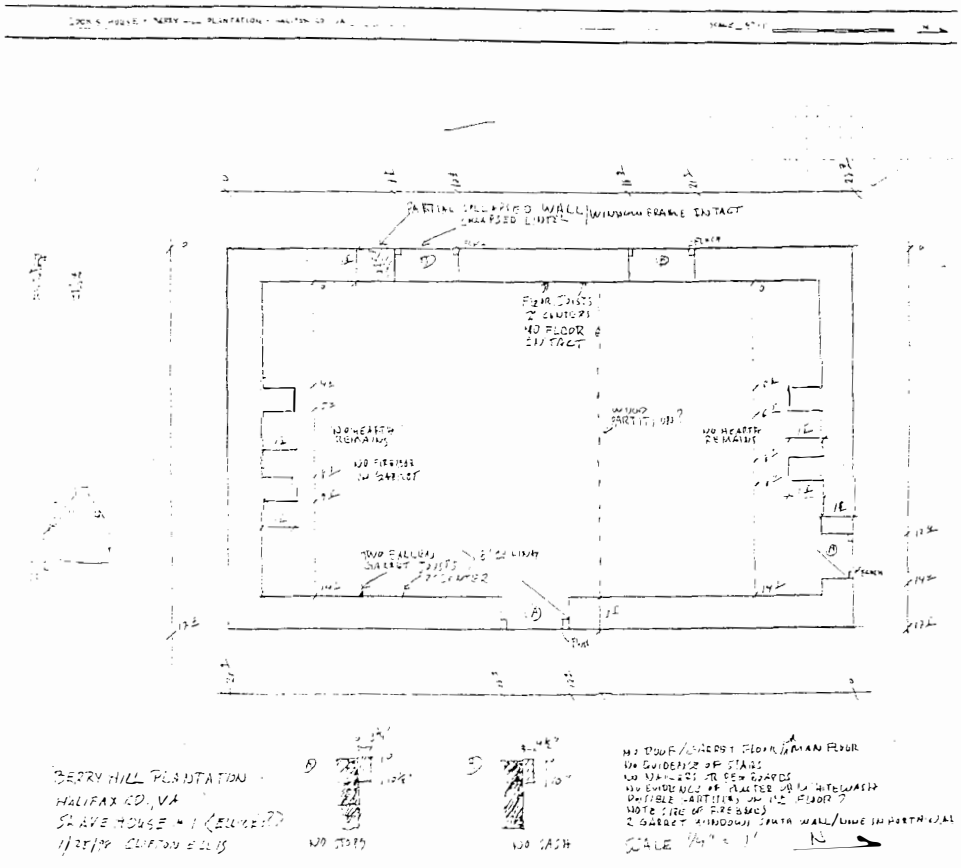


Figure 8.1 Chart showing ownership of slaves, 1860.





Top: Figure 8.2 Plan, Slave House, Type I, Berry Hill Plantation.
Bottom: Figure 8.3 Plan, Slave House, Type II, Berry Hill Plantation.