EARLY GRIGSBY AND RELATED HOMES IN ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY, VA.

By Robert E. Grigsby and Others

The Rockbridge County historian, Dr. E.P. Tompkins, wrote an article (1935) published in the Richmond Times Dispatch titled, "The Seven Hills of Rockbridge" which was later re-published in other newspapers and in book form. The descriptive and informative article told of seven houses in the Natural Bridge district "all approaching the century mark, if indeed have not considerably passed it" that were associated with "Soldier John" Grigsby, his children and grandchildren. "Soldier John" came to Rockbridge County (1779) the year after it was formed from Augusta and built Fruit Hill; other houses listed by Dr. Tompkins carried the names of Rose Hill, Fancy Hill, Clover Hill, Liberty Hill, Cherry Hill and Hickory Hill. The article closed with the following observation: "The ancient city of Rome boasted its location on the seven historic hills; it might be suggested that Rockbridge County had a sort of counterpart --"

Upon closer examination it is found that a number of additional homes associated with the Grigsby family could have been listed by Dr. Tompkins. Other related family homes carried such names as Tuscan Villa, Holly Hill, Cress Hill, Glen Maury, River Vale and Locust Hill, in addition to the William Paxton House and the William McNutt House. For a half century and more the Grigsby kin who lived in this area of Rockbridge

maintained a close relationship before moving on into other areas of the new and growing nation.

To see these fine old homes today is to remember how they were constructed and how they served the families who owned them. Dr. H. Jackson Darst gives this account in his book, The Darsts of Virginia: "The bricks were normally made on the building site and were cast for precise purpose --. The house rests on a limestone rock foundation and contains a wine cellar. (Since a number of these homes had basements well out of the ground, the limestone rock was not far beneath the surface.) To a great extent each farm was required to subsist almost entirely within its own resources and each became a self-contained community. Even after the coming of the rail-road and the major changes following the War between the States, this remained true to large degree. The "village" character of the farms was one of the principal marks of self-sufficiency. Each large farm had its smokehouse, lye hopper, turkey pen, henhouse, barns, pig pens, office, carpenter shop, blacksmith shop, kitchen, granary, corn cribs, springhouse, root cellar, loomhouse, stable, privies and servant quarters."

FRUIT HILL

Fruit Hill was the home of the parents, "Soldier" John Grigsby (1720-1794) and his second wife, Elizabeth Porter Grigsby (1734-1807). This is a brick home, now painted white, two story plus attic and basement, center hall entrance with

stairs to second floor. Second floor rooms are separated by a solid wall. One set of rooms is reached by the front stairs, the other set is accessible by stairs from what may have been the first floor master bedroom. Buildings which housed the kitchen, etc. are not now standing. The initial tract of 460 acres was conveyed to John Grigsby November 1,1779 by his eldest son, James Grigsby, who had come to the Natural Bridge area two years earlier and had begun the purchase and development of several tracts of land. Reuben Grigsby was born here June 6, 1780, and it was here that "Soldier John" died. The home was inherited by son Joseph Grigsby (1768-1820) who married Mary Ashley Warren Scott. Present owner is Effinger Herring of Natural Bridge, Va.

FANCY HILL

Fancy Hill was the home of Sarah (Sally) Grigsby Welch (1757-) and Thomas Welch II (1755-1821). This is a large, impressive, two story brick home that has been restored and well maintained. Rear of house is visable from I-81. This land was transferred to Sarah and Thomas Welch II by James Grigsby, her brother, September 7, 1779, and it was then that construction on the home was first begun. Following the death of Thomas Welch, II Fancy Hill was inherited by son Benjamin Welch (1792-1844) who married Charlotte Pitzer (1798-1839). For a time Benjamin Welch operated a tavern and stage stop here known as Welch's Tavern, but sold the property in 1830.

At a later date it became a boys preparatory school, conducted by David E. Laird and was known as Fancy Hill Academy. At one period, probably before and during the Civil War, Fancy Hill was the home of a daughter of Reuben Grigsby of Hickory Hill, Lucy Maria who married Norborne E. Chandler. Lucy and Norborne had 11 children, and Norborne served in the 1st Virginia Calvary and was wounded at the battle of first Manassas, 1861. A son, Reuben Grigsby Chandler, recalled being instructed as a 12 year old boy to hide the livestock in the woods while the Yankees were in the neighborhood, probably during Hunters raid in 1864. Present owner of Fancy Hill is Mr. Elmer Knick.

ROSE HILL

Rose Hill was the home of Elisha Grigsby (1774-1847) and Elizabeth Hawkins Porter Grigsby (-). This home of all brick construction and a full 2½ stories has a chimney at either end, basement and porches. The grounds around the house have been frequently described, and the formal garden with its walks of brick between the boxwoods and flowers were a significant feature. A teahouse stood at the rear and was surrounded by lilacs and boxwoods. Elizabeth and Elisha were married in 1796 and had seven children born to them. During the War of 1812 he served in the Third Regiment of Cavalry. On March 30, 1834, their daughter Frances Jane Grigsby married Jacob Mohler. One of those to attend was 13½ year old Elizabeth Glasgow whose account of the wedding has come down through the years, and whose comments are reprinted in the "Life at Hickory Hill" article. Present owner of Rose Hill is Mr. J.C. Kostelni.

CLOVER HILL

Clover Hill was the home of Hannah Ingram Grigsby and David Greenlee. This brick house is large, 2½ story, with several wings and out-buildings intact. The center hall, stair, and ornamental woodwork are a typical feature of the fine homes of the period. When she was 18, Hannah, daughter of Elisha and Elizabeth Grigsby of Rose Hill, married "young" David Greenlee - called young to distinguish him from his uncle of the same name. Twelve children were born to them. In August, 1829, Hugh Blair Grigsby, then 22 and later to become a noted Virginia historian and Chancellor of the College of William and Mary, visited Rockbridge County keeping a diary of his visits with family members. "Today -- rode to cousin Hannah's at Clover Hill where we met Aunt Mary. We dined together and had an amusing controvery with (not legible) on the subject of the Temperence Society." In this century, 1926-1970, Clover Hill - known as Herring Hall - was operated as a dining room and public accommodations for guests. Operated by Misses Frances and Catherine Herring, the former Clover Hill was often the residence of William Grigsby McCormick (related to both Grigsby and Cyrus McCormick - of reaper invention - families) on visits to Rockbridge Co. Present owner is Miss Frances Herring.

LIBERTY HILL

Liberty Hill was the home of Eliza Porter Grigsby (1806-1840) and Thomas Welch,III (1794-1853). Eliza, daughter of Elisha Grigsby of Rose Hill and sister of Hannah Grigsby Greenlee of Clover Hill married Thomas Welch III when she was 19. Thomas, son of Thomas Welch II, inherited Liberty Hill from his father who also owned and developed Fancy Hill. Dr. Tompkins in 1935 had this to say in the article "Seven Hills of Rockbridge": "We visited Liberty Hill, the home for many years of Thomas and Eliza, and inspected the great rooms with their wealth of ornamental woodwork, the carved and embellished mantels, and elaborately panelled wainscoating, we learned something of their tastes and the refinement of their surroundings; when we descend to the large kitchen, with its immense fireplace, fitted with enormous crane, we go back to the day when the competent and alert mistress of the household directed the labor of her slave women; when we peep into the little wine-cellar discreetly tucked in back of the main cellar and guarded from unauthorized approach by a heavy barred oaken door, we shrewdly suspect that the occupants of this household were not unaccustomed to all the creature comforts."

Three children were born to Eliza and Thomas. Dr. Tompkins made further reference to fact that Eliza and Thomas were buried in a little enclosure at the edge of the orchard. Her stone reads, "Sacred to the memory of Eliza P. Welch, beloved

consort of Thomas Welch. That word "consort," while it has become in a sense archaic, has a touch of quaintness and a sort of dignity which is pleasing in its sound. Its connotation is a companion, an intimate partner, one whose wish, and taste and judgment is consulted in little things as well as great." Present owner is Mr. Max Genet.

HICKORY HILL

Hickory Hill was the home of Reuben Grigsby (1780-1863) and Verlinda Alexander Porter (1793-1846). Although somewhat larger than some of the "Hills," Hickory Hill was constructed along the same classic lines. High verandas with Doric columns were a feature of the house which was owned for a period in the 1930's by Chauncey Y. McCormick of Chicago who added the beautiful silver chandelier that hangs in the front hall. Reuben was born at Fruit Hill, son of "Soldier" John and Elizabeth Porter Grigsby. His marriage in 1817 to Verlinda A. Porter followed a period of education at Washington College, membership in the Virginia House of Delegates for Rockbridge County, and service as a captain in the Third Regiment of Calvary. Eleven children were born to them at Hickory Hill including Mary Ann who married William Sanderson McCormick, a brother of Cyrus Hall McCormick (1809-1884) of Rockbridge Co., Va. who, in conjunction with Robert (his father), Leander (a brother) and possibly others is credited with the invention of the reaper and other farm machinery. "Life at Hickory Hill" is a separate

article which contains many insights to the life and times of those who lived here in the pre-civil war period. Present owner of Hickory Hill is Mr. W.H. Trimpi.

HOLLY HILL

Holly Hill was the home of Martha Grigsby (1772-1868) and Alexander Trimble (1762-1816). A description of this home is not available but it still stands. No children were born to Martha G. and Alexander Trimble. She lived to be 96 years of age and was mentally alert until her death. Born before the Revolution she had seen much of the early history of the country unfold and carried in her memory the original impressions including the Civil War. Present owner is Mr. Bruce Dixon.

WILLIAM PAXTON HOME

William Paxton Home was the home of Jane Grigsby (1769-1832) and William Paxton (1757-1838). A description of this home is not available but it still stands. Married when she was 18, Jane and William Paxton had ten children. They were prominent members of the Falling Spring Presbyterian Church, where he was a ruling elder, and both are buried there. When William lost his eyesight he was known for many years as "Blind William" Paxton. Mr. Stoner is the present owner.

WILLIAM McNUTT HOUSE

(same house as "Rivervale" p. 70)

William McNutt House was the home of Elizabeth Grigsby (1776-1842) and William McNutt (1771-1836). This is a full

2½ story, all brick home constructed along the same lines as Rose Hill. Outbuildings include a small former slave cabin, and a building used as a doctor's office during the Civil War. From the site of the house it is possible to see the Falling Spring Church about one mile distant. Eight children are recorded as having been born to them. Mr. Preston Brown of Lexington recently purchased this home and plans to restore it.

TUSCAN VILLA

Tuscan Villa was the home of Rachel Grigsby (1771-1841) and Alexander McNutt (1754-1812), a brother of William. This is a large 2 story brick house close to South River. Married in 1788 when she was 17, Rachel and Alexander McNutt had 13 children before his death left her a widow at 41. Rachel continued to operate the plantation with success, and reared and educated her children. She was active in both politics and the Falling Spring Church, and saw to her daughters' marriages and her sons being successfully established in professions or business. Her death was due to an accidental fall in her 70th year. She has been described as being 5'8', gray eyes, flaxen hair and a fair complexion. Alexander McNutt was a soldier at the battle of Cowpens during the Revolution. Present owner of the home is Dr. David W. Sprunt.

GLEN MAURY

Glen Maury was the home of Margaret (Peggy) McNutt (1792-1856) and Elisha Paxton (1785-1867). Margaret was a daughter

and Alexander McNutt, and a granddaughter of "Soldier John" and Elizabeth Porter Grigsby. The fine home was a large 2 story with basement and attic, built probably before 1835 since that date was placed on a brick on a second floor porch by Alexander McNutt Paxton before leaving for Mississippi. Very handsome carved mantels and woodwork are a feature. The side porches were added at a later date. A child of Margaret and Elisha was General Elisha Franklin Paxton, CSA. The home, originally called Palmyra, is now owned by the City of Buena Vista.

LOCUST GROVE

Locust Hill was the home of Elizabeth (Betsy) McNutt and John Hamilton. Elizabeth was a daughter of Rachel Grigsby and Alexander McNutt of Tuscan Villa. Soon after his marriage, John Hamilton purchased 500 acres of land, five miles east of Lexington. In 1825 he built a brick residence, "Locust Hill," The basement was of limestone, the house itself 2½ floors in front, with a center staircase going to the third floor. The kitchen was off from the house. In the front rooms were large windows both north and south sides, with fan windows on either side of the two chimneys on the third floor. The windows and front entrance resemble "Beaumont" at 109 Lee Street in Lexington. All of the interior woodwork was of fine mahogany. However, in 1854 the interior was burned; after this it was restored very plainly.

Henrietta Hamilton McCormick, a daughter of John and Elizabeth Hamilton, planted beautiful French lilacs in purple

and white on either side of the house down to the road. (The road to Lexington was at the foot of the hill until 1930, but is gone now.) The original rose bushes were there also.

Alexander McNutt Hamilton inherited the house, but changed the name to "Kalopha." He then sold it to (his nephew?) John Hamilton Krebs in about 1880, with the request that they use nothing but candles to light the house. The house was restored completely in 1915 when owned by Robert and Ruth Anthony Krebs. The property has recently been sold to Dr. Coleman of Lexington.

CRESS HILL

Cress Hill was the home of Hannah Francis Grigsby (1825-1887) and John Gilbreath Hamilton (a nephrew of John Hamilton of Locust Hill.) Hannah Francis was a daughter of Reuben Grigsby of Hickory Hill. This is a two story brick house, with two rooms, plus a kitchen on the first floor, and three bedrooms on the second floor. Of interest is the store room next to the kitchen. It still has the original iron bars on the window and was where all the food and provisions were kept.

(Information on Locust Hill and Cress Hill courtesy of Mrs. Robert Newton Krebs of Thaxton, Virginia.)

RIVERVALE (see p. 67)

River Vale was the home of William (Squire) Paxton (1803-1879) and Sarah Petit Burks (1816-1876). William was the son of William and Jane Grigsby Paxton (William Paxton Home) and a

grandson of "Soldier John" Grigsby. References to this home say it was located in the James River Valley and it is quite possible that River Vale no longer stands.

CHERRY HILL

Cherry Hill was the home of David Greenlee and Jane White, and was probably constructed about 1790 with a later addition bearing a dated brick over the door, June 15, 1804 and the initials "D.G." Two long rows of cherry trees once graced the entrance to make good the name. David Greenlee was an uncle of "young" David Greenlee who married Hannah Ingram Grigsby of Clover Hill, and there was no direct relationship with the family of "Soldier John" Grigsby. Cherry Hill was one of the "seven" hills mentioned in the article of Dr. E.P. Tompkins. Present owner of Cherry Hill is Mr. John G. Locher.

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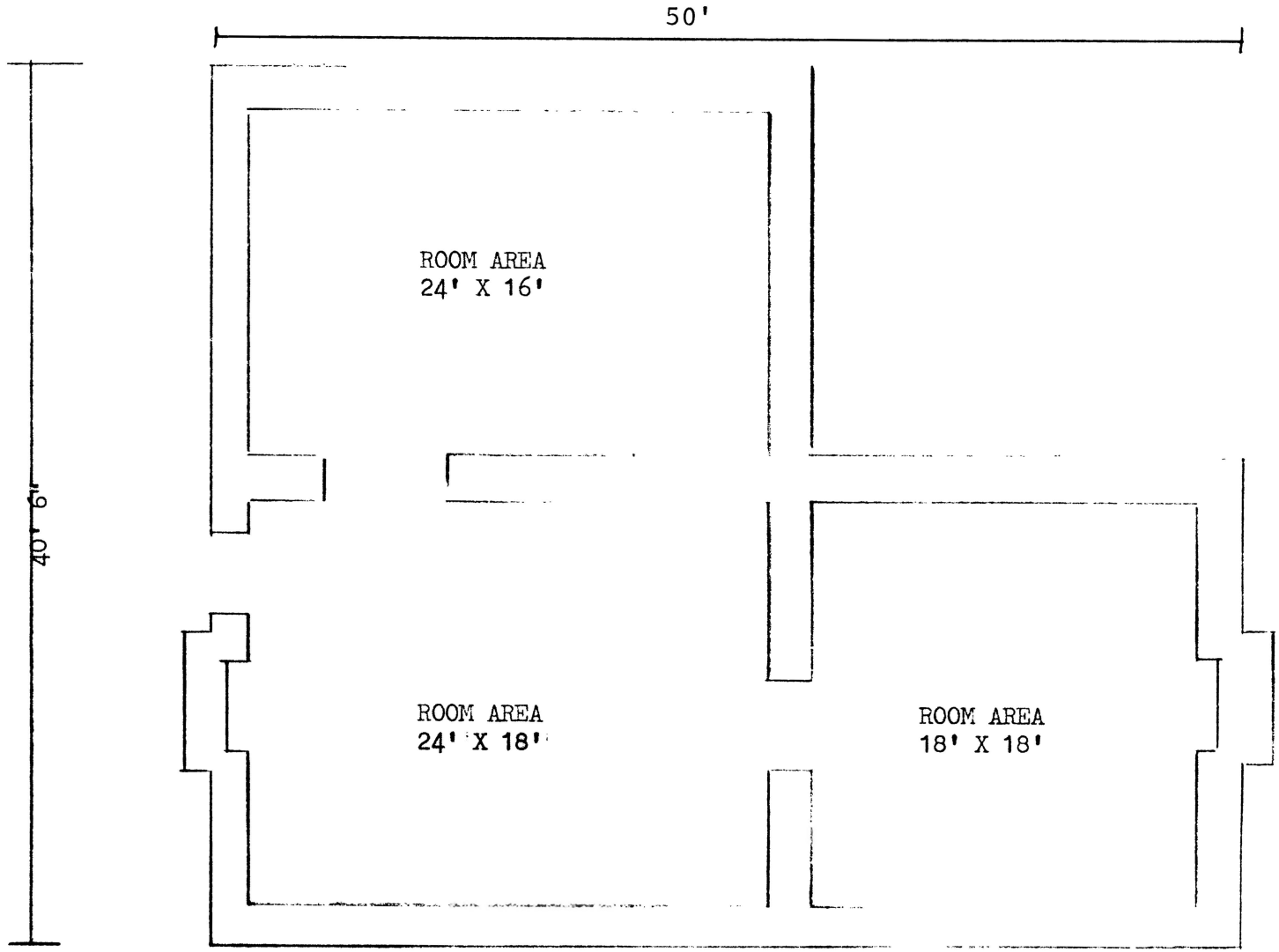
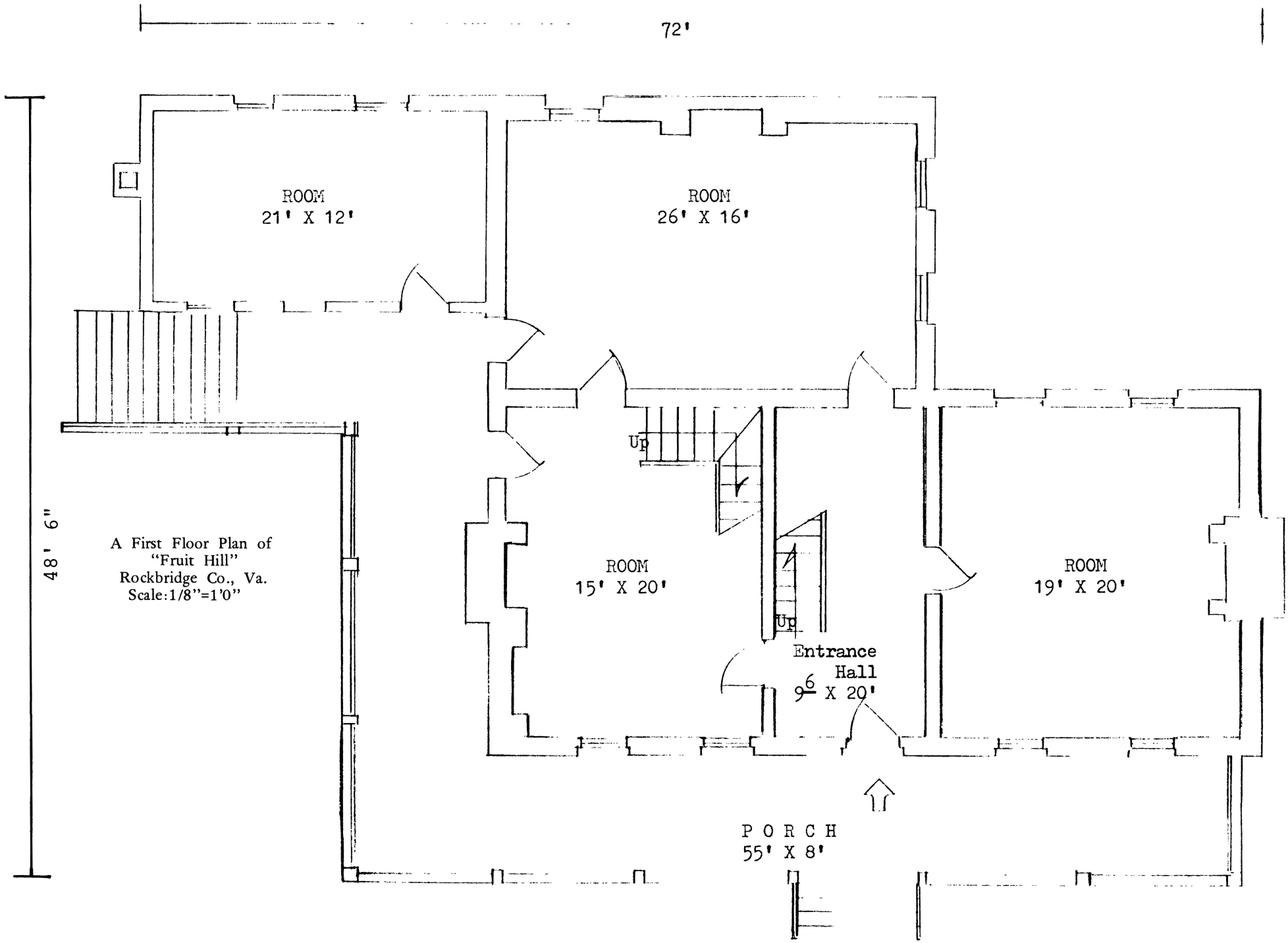
There may be more houses in Rockbridge County associated with the family of "Soldier John" Grigsby. The foregoing is an "updating" and is by no means complete. It does offer an opportunity for further research and detailed information, for each of these fine old homes has its own history and its own story to tell. We who made notes on the "Hills" hope to see more study made to complete the record.

Another home on which there is scant knowledge or record is that of the hostelry or ordinary operated by James Grigsby, eldest son of "Soldier John" and Rosanna Grigsby. It was in

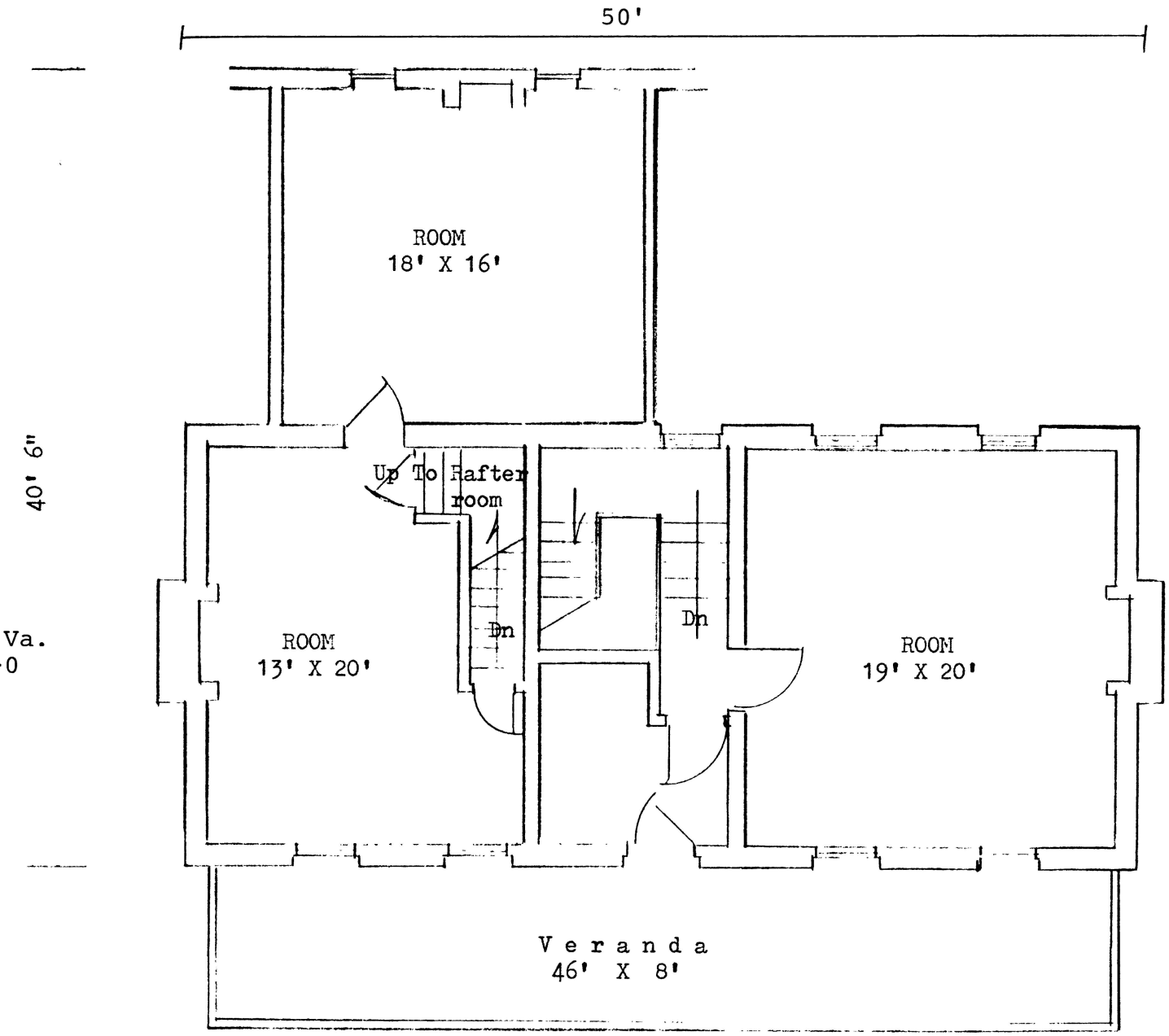
the year 1782 that James Grigsby encountered the party of travelers headed by the French Major General, the Marquis de Chastellux, and after leading them to the site of the Natural Bridge which they were seeking, brought them back to his home for food and lodging. The only reference to the site of the ordinary, for which the 1781 licence has been preserved, was made by W.H. Grigsby in his 1878 Genealogy of the Grigsby Family as the "farm first below Fancy Hill where his sister Sally lived."



1/8" = 1'-0
Cellar Floor Plan
FRUIT HILL
Rockbridge Co., Va.



A First Floor Plan of
"Fruit Hill"
Rockbridge Co., Va.
Scale:1/8"=1'0"



2nd Floor Plan
FRUIT HILL
Rockbridge Co.,Va.
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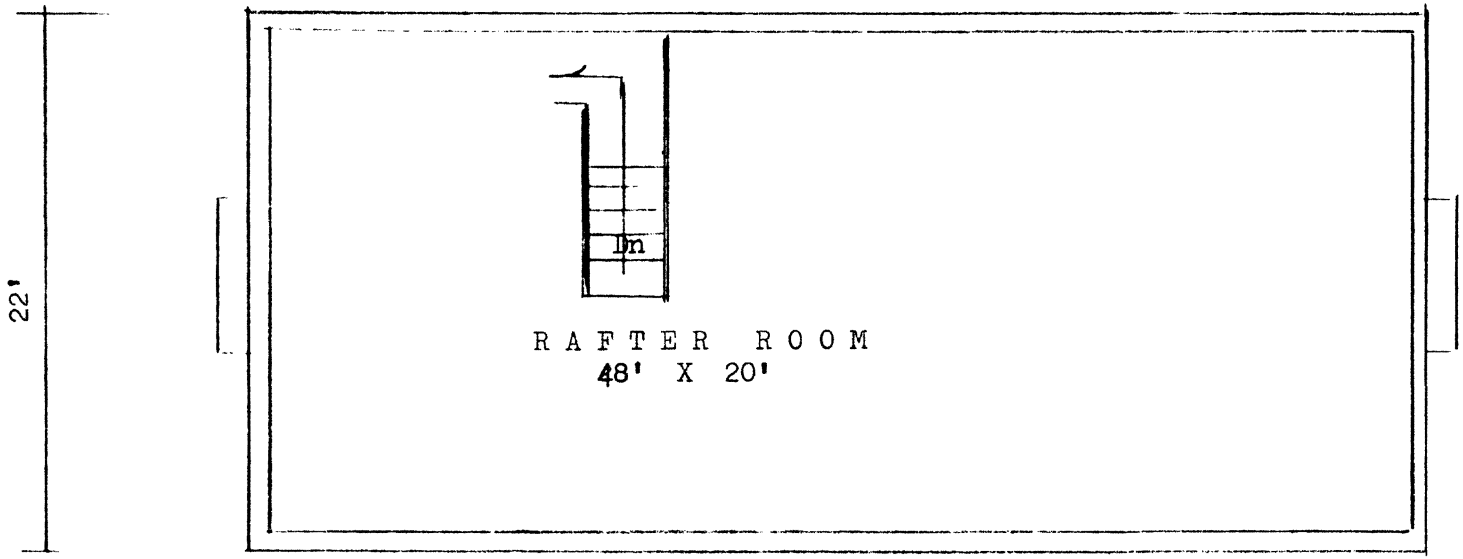
FRUIT HILL
Rockbridge Co., Va.
third floor
1/8" = 1'-0