

VLR- 9/15/99

NRHP- 12/22/99

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Judge William J. Robertson House other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 705 Park Street N/A not for publication city or town Charlottesville N/A vicinity state Virginia code VA county Charlottesville (city) code 540 zip code 22902

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally X statewide locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date 11/15/99

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is: Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

- entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet. determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet. determined not eligible for the National Register. removed from the National Register. other (explain):

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category	Subcategory
DOMESTIC	single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category	Subcategory
DOMESTIC	single dwelling
DOMESTIC	secondary structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Italianate
- Gothic Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

- foundation Brick
- walls Brick
- Stucco
- roof Asphalt
- other Wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
X B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past fifty years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

LAW

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

Ca. 1859-1898

Significant Dates

Ca. 1859

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Robertson, William Joseph

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approximately 1.232 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	17	721500	4212720	3	17	
2	17			4	17	

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title J. Daniel Pezzoni and Leslie A. Giles  
organization Landmark Preservation Associates date April 8, 1999  
street & number 6 Houston St. telephone (540) 464-5315  
city or town Lexington state VA zip code 24450

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Annie Harris Massie  
street & number 705 Park St. telephone (804) 971-3542  
city or town Charlottesville state Virginia zip code 22902

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.**

Section number 7 Page 1

---

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION**

**Summary**

The Judge William J. Robertson House stands at 705 Park Street in the National Register-listed Charlottesville and Albemarle Courthouse Historic District in downtown Charlottesville, Virginia. The house stands on a landscaped lot of 1.232 acres in extent, planted with mature specimen trees including oak, magnolia, pine, hemlock, and spruce. Surrounding lots are similar in character, with shaded grounds, large residences from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and relatively little modern construction. A graveled driveway links the house to Park Street, which bounds the lot on the east, and Northwood Avenue, on the south; this driveway may incorporate part of a curved drive that appears in a 1917 photograph of the house. The house itself, built about 1859, combines elements of the Italianate and Gothic Revival styles. The east-facing, two-story, brick dwelling is roughly rectangular in form and has rendered walls scored to simulate ashlar masonry, a hip-and-gable roof with asphalt-shingle sheathing, and one-story wings and porches. The lot slopes away behind the house, allowing for above-grade windows on the west basement elevation. The center-passage-plan interior features simple Greek Revival mantels, plaster walls and ceilings, wood floors, and four- and six-panel doors. A one-story frame garage dating to about 1920 stands behind the house.

**Inventory**

1. House. Ca. 1859. Contributing building.
2. Garage. Ca. 1920. Noncontributing building.

**Exterior**

As noted in the summary, the Robertson House combines elements of the Italianate and Gothic Revival styles. The Italianate influence is most apparent in the broadly overhanging gable eaves, which are supported by large decoratively carved brackets, and the relatively low pitch of the gables. The Gothic influence is most apparent in the double-gabled front elevation.

Other features are illustrated in many of the pattern books published in the 1850s (a probable influence on the design of the house), but are not confined to a specific style. One of the most interesting of these is the rendered and scored exterior. Originally the "blocks" created by this effect were given a grayish mauve color with swashes of brownish purple extending from block to block, suggesting the coloring was integral with the plaster. A 1917 photograph suggests that sometimes the coloration was confined to individual blocks rather than extending from block to block. The scoring was emphasized by black pencilling with dark mauve shadow lines to give the blocks dimensionality. A remnant of this original treatment (which in most places was painted

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 2

**Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.**

---

**Description (continued)**

over in the twentieth century and is now a pale gold in color) survives on a formerly exterior basement wall that is now protected within a basement addition.

Another popular pattern book feature are the decorative valance-like hoods over the four front windows. Unlike most pattern book window hoods, which have concave roof surfaces, these have flat roof surfaces that come to a point in pyramidal fashion. The hoods have scalloped vergeboards and small supporting brackets. The hoods and other wooden exterior elements are presently painted sage green.

A recess on the front elevation flanked by the two gabled projections contains the front entry, which has sidelights, a transom, and double-leaf paneled wood doors with a natural finish. The entry is sheltered by a balcony supported on brackets similar to those in the gables. The balcony features an original balustrade with chamfered square-section balusters, a handrail fascia with a repetitive arch motif, a decorative lower rail, and paneled corner elements. A double-leaf door opens onto the balcony from the second floor.

Two stretcher-bond brick chimneys rise from the interior. Each stack above the roofline has vertical indentations that visually divide the stack into three masses (perhaps a simple evocation of clustered Gothic Revival chimney pots) joined by a continuous corbeled cap. Brackets smaller than the ones in the two front gables but otherwise similar spring from the tops of the two back corners of the house. Projecting from the side and rear elevation eaves are decorative rafter ends.

The house has bay windows that extend from the south side elevation and the west rear elevation. The south bay window is partly incorporated into a polygonal one-story sunroom, a nineteenth-century addition that may have served originally as a conservatory and now functions as a studio/family room. A larger one-story wing--apparently an addition dating to the same period as the sunroom--formerly extended from the north side elevation. Both the north and south wings have (or had) scored rendering, small eaves brackets, and basement levels with large segmental-arched windows. The south wing basement windows appear to be basement windows relocated from the main block when the wing was added. Both wings formerly had roof balustrades similar to the front balcony balustrade. The north wing was replaced between 1917 (the date of a historic photograph of the house) and 1929 (the first Sanborn map to depict the house) by a one-story porch with chamfered square posts and a beaded matchboard ceiling. A smaller porch of similar design shelters a rear entry, and is reached from a basement-level brick patio by a flight of mid-1990s wood steps with chamfered newels and balusters and an arcaded handrail fascia based on the front balcony and north-elevation porch.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.

---

**Description (continued)**

Other exterior features of the house include mostly six-over-six and four-over-four double-hung sash windows--some with steeply pitched sills--and modern cold-frame-like glazed coverings over the sunroom basement windows. The garage has a stuccoed exterior, an asphalt-shingled hip roof, exposed rafter tails, single-sash windows, and paneled garage-bay doors. Behind the garage is a cistern. A 1929 Sanborn map indicates that the garage was built with space for three automobiles, its present configuration.

**Interior**

The front entry opens into a vestibule, roughly square in plan, that connects to a center stair passage through a round-arched opening. The two-run stair has a rotund turned newel post, slender turned balusters, a paneled spandrel, and a walnut handrail. In the passage is a ca. 1920 radiator, one of several in the house. Branching off the stair passage is a transverse passage that once connected to the former north wing. A closet off this passage may originally have contained a dumbwaiter to a basement kitchen. The passage now leads to a ca. 1920 bathroom with white hexagonal tile flooring, several early fixtures, a tall wainscot with a scored tile-effect finish, and a six-panel door with a closed-in transom above it.

The living room (refer to Exhibit B for room locations) features a marble Greek Revival mantel with chamfered pilasters and gray veining on a white ground. This room has the south-elevation bay window, with one window replaced by a door leading into the sunroom (the present family room), which has built-in book cases and two-leaf French doors that connect to the dining room. The dining room, which has the west-elevation bay window, features a Greek Revival mantel of black marble with white and gold veining. The study/guest room has a mantel with semi-hexagonal-section pilasters and a French door that opens onto the north-elevation porch. The kitchen reached from the center stair passage through a butler's pantry with ca. 1930 built-in cabinets, has cabinets and counters dating from ca. 1930 and ca. 1965. The present laundry room off the kitchen has beaded matchboard walls and crude shelving.

The second floor is characterized by four-panel doors with pottery knobs, baseboards that are lower than those on the first floor, and modern picture rails. Most mantels have simple Greek Revival pilaster and frieze compositions, but that in the master bedroom has semi-hexagonal-section pilasters similar to those of the first-floor study mantel. A ca. 1920 bathroom is positioned over the first-floor bathroom and has similar treatments; a modern bathroom has been created out of a part of one of the bedrooms. Closets are either ca. 1930 or modern.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 4

**Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.**

---

**Description (continued)**

The finished basement originally contained work and storage rooms, several of which are amply illuminated by large segmental-arched windows. The basement is reached by a stair under the first-floor center-passage stair. This stair has a square-section newel, rectangular-section balusters, and a closed stringer. At its base is evidence for former wall-mounted gas lights. Typical basement treatments include plaster-and-lath ceilings, plastered brick walls, four-panel doors, stretcher- and herringbone-pattern brick pavements, and some twentieth century concrete pavement. Fireplaces have arched openings; one has a mantel with semi-hexagonal-section pilasters; another has evidence of a former pilaster-and-frieze mantel. A room under the first-floor vestibule has barred vents and may have served as a wine cellar. A room under the first-floor sunroom has several south-facing windows and may have served for overwintering plants. This room is heated by a New York-made cast-iron Richardson & Boynton Co. stove that formerly heated an upstairs room. There is also evidence of what appears to be the shaft of a former dumbwaiter in the basement.

**Integrity Statement**

The Robertson house retains good architectural integrity. The house preserves most of its original character-defining exterior features such as its overall form, gable brackets, window hoods, and front balcony. Losses include the painting over of the original blocked paint scheme (original exterior paint rarely survives from the mid-nineteenth century) and the ca. 1920 removal of the north wing, an addition dating to the period of significance. The interior preserves its original room arrangement, mantels, stair details, and trimwork. Some bathrooms and closets were inserted about 1920; more were inserted at the end of the twentieth century. The grounds too appear to retain their original character of yard areas planted with specimen trees, as portrayed in a 1917 photograph of the property as it was at the tail end of the Robertson family ownership.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 5

**Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.**

---

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

**Summary**

Noted Virginia jurist William J. Robertson had this Italianate-Gothic Revival dwelling built at 705 Park Street in Charlottesville about 1859. Robertson is best remembered as the "acknowledged leader of the Virginia bar" during the second half of the nineteenth century, a distinction that led to his election as the first president of the Virginia State Bar Association in 1888. In the 1850s and early 1860s he served as a Commonwealth's Attorney for Albemarle County and as a judge in Virginia's highest court, the Court of Appeals. Returning to private practice after the Civil War, Robertson earned a reputation as an accomplished corporate lawyer, counting among his clients several of the large railroad corporations that were responsible for transforming the post-war Virginia economy. One of his most celebrated cases during this period was his representation of the Lee family in their efforts to recover their ancestral Arlington estate. Robertson's erudition is reflected in the design of his home, which has a rendered and scored exterior (originally painted a variegated mauve and brownish purple), a double-gable form, projecting bracketed eaves, and canopy-like window hoods that point to the influence of antebellum architectural theorists such as Calvert Vaux and A. J. Downing.

**Justification of Criteria**

The Robertson House is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of Law for its association with William J. Robertson, a prominent figure in Virginia legal circles during the second half of the nineteenth century. The house is also eligible under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a sophisticated example of mid-nineteenth-century pattern-book-inspired architecture. The period of significance for the property extends from its date of construction ca. 1859 until Judge Robertson's death in 1898. The Robertson House is eligible at the state level of significance.

**Acknowledgments**

A number of individuals and organizations assisted in the preparation of this report. Foremost among these was the owner of the property and the nomination's sponsor Anne H. Massie, who also supplied the photographs for the nomination. Others who provided assistance included K. Edward Lay and Margaret O'Brien of Charlottesville, and June Ellis, Marc C. Wagner, and Jack Zehmer of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. The nomination preparer also wishes to acknowledge the work of Lindsay R. Barnes, Jr., whose biographical article in the *Magazine of Albemarle County History* formed the basis for this account of Robertson's life and career.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.

---

Statement of Significance (continued)

Historical Background

William Joseph Robertson (1817-1898) was the son of John Robertson, a Scottish-born schoolmaster in Albemarle and Culpeper counties, and Sarah Brand Robertson. After attendance in a Spottsylvania County academy, Robertson enrolled at the University of Virginia where he concentrated his studies on the classics and law. After receiving a bachelor of law degree in 1841, Robertson practiced law with James L. Gordon of Louisa County, and in 1842 he married Gordon's sister, Hannah Elizabeth (ca. 1818-1861). By early 1845 Robertson had moved his practice to Charlottesville, where he served the legal needs of many in the community. Among his clients was John S. Mosby of later Civil War fame, who was accused in 1853 of shooting a fellow University of Virginia student. Robertson's legal skills commended him for election as Commonwealth's Attorney for Albemarle County, a post he held from 1852 to 1859.<sup>1</sup>

It was during the establishment of his career that Robertson built his house on Park Street, what was then a country road leading northward from the Albemarle County seat at Charlottesville. In 1844 Robertson purchased a thirty-seven-acre tract on the northern outskirts of Charlottesville. Through most of the 1850s the value of buildings on this tract stood at \$500, but in 1859 the value jumped to \$5,700 with the notation in the land tax records: "5200\$ added for impts. [improvements]." The amount of the increase suggests the construction of the present house and probably other buildings as well.<sup>2</sup>

By all accounts the 1850s were prosperous years for the Robertsons. The federal censuses of 1850 and 1860 record an increase in the value of Robertson's real estate from \$3,000 to \$22,000, and in 1860 his personal estate--probably consisting primarily of slaves--was valued at \$33,000. Also on the increase was the size of William and Hannah's family. The couple had four children during the 1840s and added an extra five during the 1850s (two of the latter set appear to have died as children). Two of William J. Robertson's in-laws lived with the family in 1860. The south and north wings of the house were likely added relatively soon after 1859, considering

---

<sup>1</sup> Barnes, "William J. Robertson," 41-49; Robertson, "Robertsons of Virginia," 10.

<sup>2</sup> Albemarle County Deed Book 42, p. 50; Albemarle County tax records. Of other buildings that may have stood on the property during the nineteenth century, the best documented is a two-story weatherboarded frame building of unknown function that was situated to the north of the house, as shown in a 1917 historic photograph.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.

---

Statement of Significance (continued)

their stylistic similarities to the original construction, and considering the space requirements of the growing Robertson family.<sup>3</sup>

In 1859 Robertson resigned his position as Commonwealth's Attorney to run for one of five seats in the Court of Appeals, Virginia's equivalent of a Supreme Court. He won and served until 1865, when Virginia's post-war governor decided not to nominate him for a reorganized Court of Appeals. Robertson returned to private practice where, according to a biographer, he built a reputation as "Virginia's most competent and accomplished corporation lawyer." The decades after the Civil War were a period of consolidation in Virginia's railroad system, and Robertson played a part in the creation of two leading carriers: the Norfolk & Western, for which he was general counsel, and the Chesapeake & Ohio, which he served as a board member. Non-corporate clients also retained Robertson. The most well-known of these was the family of Robert E. and Mary Custis Lee, whose Arlington estate on the heights overlooking Washington, D.C. was seized by the federal government after the Civil War and sold for back taxes. Robertson argued the case before the U.S. Supreme Court, and although Arlington was not returned, Robertson was successful in securing compensation for Lee family heir Custis Lee. In another case of local Albemarle County importance, Robertson successfully defended the testamentary disposition of the estate of philanthropist Samuel Miller, thereby securing funding for the charitable Miller Manual Labor School (listed in the national and state registers).<sup>4</sup>

Judge Robertson's years of experience and contacts with lawyers throughout the Commonwealth placed him at the head of his profession by the 1880s. Consequently, when his colleagues met in Virginia Beach to form the Virginia State Bar Association in 1888, Robertson was elected the bar's first president in absentia and by acclamation. At the bar's second annual meeting, Robertson took the opportunity to argue for reform of the state's legal system. His ideas "fell like a thunderbolt on some of his hearers," reported the editor of the *Virginia Law Journal*. "I doubt that they will recover their serenity in a year." Robertson's reforms involved the streamlining and modernization of legal procedures.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> U. S. census; Robertson, "Robertsons of Virginia," 9.

<sup>4</sup> Barnes, "William J. Robertson," 53-55; *Daily Progress*, May 27, 1898.

<sup>5</sup> Barnes, "William J. Robertson," 55-56; *Virginia Law Journal*, August 29, 1889: 589-590.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.

---

Statement of Significance (continued)

According to one account, Robertson maintained an office during this period in a ca. 1866 small brick building at 220 Court Square in Charlottesville (for a time the headquarters of the Albemarle County Historical Society), but evidence for this is inconclusive. After the death of his wife Hannah in 1861, Robertson married Alice Watts Morris (d. 1914), the widow of Dr. George W. Morris of South Carolina, in 1863, and the couple had five children between 1864 and 1872. William and Alice lived together at their Park Street home until William's death on May 27, 1898, an occasion lamented by the Commonwealth's legal profession. Typical of the tone of comment is the following eulogy from the *Richmond Dispatch*:

"There has been no question during the last twenty five years as to [William J. Robertson's] eminence at the Virginia Bar. His greatness was confessed by all. Nor will time diminish his reputation, it is more likely to increase it, as his opinions and briefs will stand as memorials to his uncommon depth and breadth as an expounder of the law."

The June 1898 issue of the *Virginia Law Register* noted that Robertson was "for many years past the acknowledged leader of the Virginia bar" and continued "in his death the profession of the State sustains a loss that is irreparable." Four years later the journal published two memorials to Judge Robertson, one written by his former law partner, Stephen Valentine Southall, the other written by Lunsford L. Lewis on the occasion of the presentation of a portrait of Robertson to the Court of Appeals.<sup>6</sup>

Alice Watts Robertson inherited the thirty-seven acres on Park Street. After her death in 1914 the property passed to her and William's son, Edward Watts Robertson, who sold the thirty-seven acres to Gordon G. Nelson for \$35,000 in 1920. It was apparently during Nelson's ownership that changes were made to the house such as the addition of radiator heating, the demolition of the north wing and its replacement by the present porch, and the construction of the present garage. The Herr family owned the property from 1928 to 1950, and in 1996 the Robertson House was sold to its present owner, Annie Harris Massie.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Barnes, "William J. Robertson," 44 and 58; O'Brien personal communication; Robertson, "Robertsons of Virginia," 13-14; *Richmond Dispatch*, excerpted in the *Daily Progress*, May 28, 1898; and *Virginia Law Register*, June 1898: 107; and March 1902: 762-766.

<sup>7</sup> Albemarle County Will Book 1, p. 116; Deed Book 35, p. 143; Deed Book 63, pp. 128 and 132; Deed Book 149, p. 218; and Deed Book 665, p. 162.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.

---

Statement of Significance (continued)

Architectural Analysis

Although the architect of the Judge William J. Robertson House has not been identified, the source of the design appears to be one or more of the many pattern books published by architectural theorists during the 1850s. Of these the most likely source is a design from English-born New York architect Calvert Vaux's *Villas and Cottages*, published in 1857. Design no. 16, a "Picturesque Square House" designed by Vaux for a client in Newburgh, New York, shares with the Robertson house a double-gabled front with a recess between the gables, hoods over the principal front windows, bay windows, a partially or entirely above-ground rear basement elevation, articulated chimney stacks, and a modified center-passage plan with a transverse passage and chimney masses rising between the pair of rooms on each side of the passage. The center-passage plan may have appealed to Robertson, who belonged to an era and a culture in which the plan enjoyed great popularity, and the above-ground basement elevation was well suited to Robertson's sloping site. Vaux promoted "hoods to windows" as a protection against wind, rain, and sun, and for their "artistic effect," but it may have been the sun-shade argument that most interested Robertson.<sup>8</sup>

The Robertson house departs from the Vaux design in an important respect, however--it is more Italianate in style rather than the prickly Gothic Revival of the Newburgh house. For style and finish Robertson and his builder may have turned to the works of New York architect A. J. Downing, including the 1850 publication *The Architecture of Country Houses*. Downing presents several examples of the Italianate style, and specifically several designs that feature low-pitched gable roofs with overhanging eaves supported by large and widely spaced brackets. (Low-pitched bracketed gables were a standard Italianate attribute in house designs by other architects of the era such as William Ranlett and Samuel Sloan.) Downing considered projecting eaves first of all a stylistic attribute, but he also proposed them as a sun shade for Southern houses. Stucco scored and tinted to simulate ashlar masonry was another favorite of Downing, and he combines this treatment with bracketed overhanging eaves in Design V, "A Cottage Villa in the Bracketed Mode," in another of his style-books published in 1842 and reprinted in 1981 as *Victorian Cottage Residences*. This design also featured an entry porch with a roof balustrade very similar

---

<sup>8</sup> Vaux, *Villas and Cottages*, 95 and 212-215.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10

Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.

---

Statement of Significance (continued)

to that of the Robertson house balcony balustrade.<sup>9</sup>

The interior treatments of the Robertson house are more conventional than the exterior, and bear little resemblance to the elaborate interiors illustrated by Vaux and Downing. Presumably Robertson hired an accomplished local builder for the construction of his house, one who could adapt the sophisticated designs of the pattern books to his clients needs, but who took a stock approach to the interior. Or it may be that Robertson commissioned a design from an outside architect, one who was acquainted with the pattern books and with up-to-date Italianate and Gothic Revival design in the nation's urban centers. Several wealthy individuals in the neighboring city of Lynchburg went this route during the 1850s, hiring architects from Philadelphia. However the house came into being, it is clear that its first owner played an important role in giving Charlottesville--in the words of the city landmark survey form for the property--the "most architecturally significant ante-bellum house in the downtown."<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Downing, *Architecture of Country Houses*, 92, 112-113, and 313; Downing, *Victorian Cottage Residences*, 89-95.

<sup>10</sup> Chambers, *Lynchburg*, 189-197; Charlottesville survey form for 705 Park Street.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 11

Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.

---

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albemarle County deed, tax, and will records. Albemarle County county offices, Charlottesville, Va., and Library of Virginia, Richmond.

Alex, William. *Calvert Vaux, Architect & Planner*. New York: Ink, Inc., 1994.

Barnes, Lindsay R., Jr. "William J. Robertson, 1817-1898: Modesty and Achievement in Times of Turmoil and Change." *Magazine of Albemarle County History* vol. 43 (1985): 41-61.

Chambers, S. Allen, Jr. *Lynchburg: An Architectural History*. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1981.

Charlottesville, City of. Charlottesville Landmark Survey survey files. Planning Department, Charlottesville, Va.

*The Daily Progress* (Charlottesville, Va.).

Downing, Andrew Jackson. *The Architecture of Country Houses*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969 (reprint of 1850 edition).

\_\_\_\_\_. *Victorian Cottage Residences*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1981 (reprint of 1873 edition of 1842 original).

Greiff, Constance M. *John Notman, Architect, 1810-1865*. Philadelphia, Pa.: The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, 1979.

Loth, Calder, ed. *The Virginia Landmarks Register*. Third edition. Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1986.

McLean Faulconer Inc. real estate brochure on 705 Park Street, Charlottesville, Va., ca. 1995.

Massie, Anne H., personal communication with authors, Charlottesville, Va., 1998-1999.

O'Brien, Margaret (Albemarle County Historical Society), personal communication with authors, Charlottesville, Va., 1999.

Ranlett, William H. *The Architect, A Series of Original Designs*. New York: Dewitt & Davenport, 1851.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 12

Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.

---

**Major Bibliographical References (continued)**

Rawlings, Mary, and Velora Carver Thomson, eds. *Early Charlottesville: Recollections of James Alexander, 1828-1874*. Virginia National Bank, 1963.

Robertson, Lindsay G. "Robertsons of Virginia, 1791-1987." 1987 typescript in the files of the Albemarle County Historical Society, Charlottesville, Va.

Sanborn Map Company. Maps of Charlottesville, Va., 1929 and 1939. Microfilm at Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.

Sloan, Samuel. *Sloan's Victorian Buildings*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1980 (reprint of the two volume *The Model Architect* of 1852).

United States Census. Free population schedules for Albemarle Co., Va., 1850 and 1860.

Vaux, Calvert. *Villas and Cottages*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1968 (reprint of 1857 edition).

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff. "Charlottesville and Albemarle County Courthouse Historic District." National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, 1980.

*Virginia Law Journal*.

*Virginia Law Register*.

Wells, John E., and Robert E. Dalton. *The Virginia Architects, 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary*. Richmond, Va.: New South Architectural Press, 1997.

Wheeler, Gervase. *Homes for the People*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1855.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 13

**Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.**

---

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated parcel corresponds to the present 1.232-acre city lot on which the Robertson house stands, designated section 52 parcel 58 in City of Charlottesville tax maps. The parcel boundaries are shown in Exhibit A.

**Boundary Justification**

The nominated parcel includes the Robertson house and its grounds.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.**

Section number Photo Page 14

---

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

1. 1. Subject: Judge William J. Robertson House (same for all photos)  
2. Location: Charlottesville, Va. (same for all photos)  
3. Photographer: Annie Harris Massie (same for all photos)  
4. Photo date: March 1999 (same for all photos)  
5. Original negative (VDHR #17465) archived at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond (same for all photos)  
6. Description of view: Front (east) elevation of house. View looking west.  
7. Photograph number appears at beginning of entry (same for all photos)
2. 6. Front and north elevations of house. View looking southwest.
3. 6. Detail of balcony balustrade.
4. 6. Garage. View looking northeast.
5. 6. General view of property. View looking west.
6. 6. Center passage stair newel post.
7. 6. Center passage stair.
8. 6. First-floor living room.
9. 6. Dining room mantel.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number Exhibit Page 15

Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.

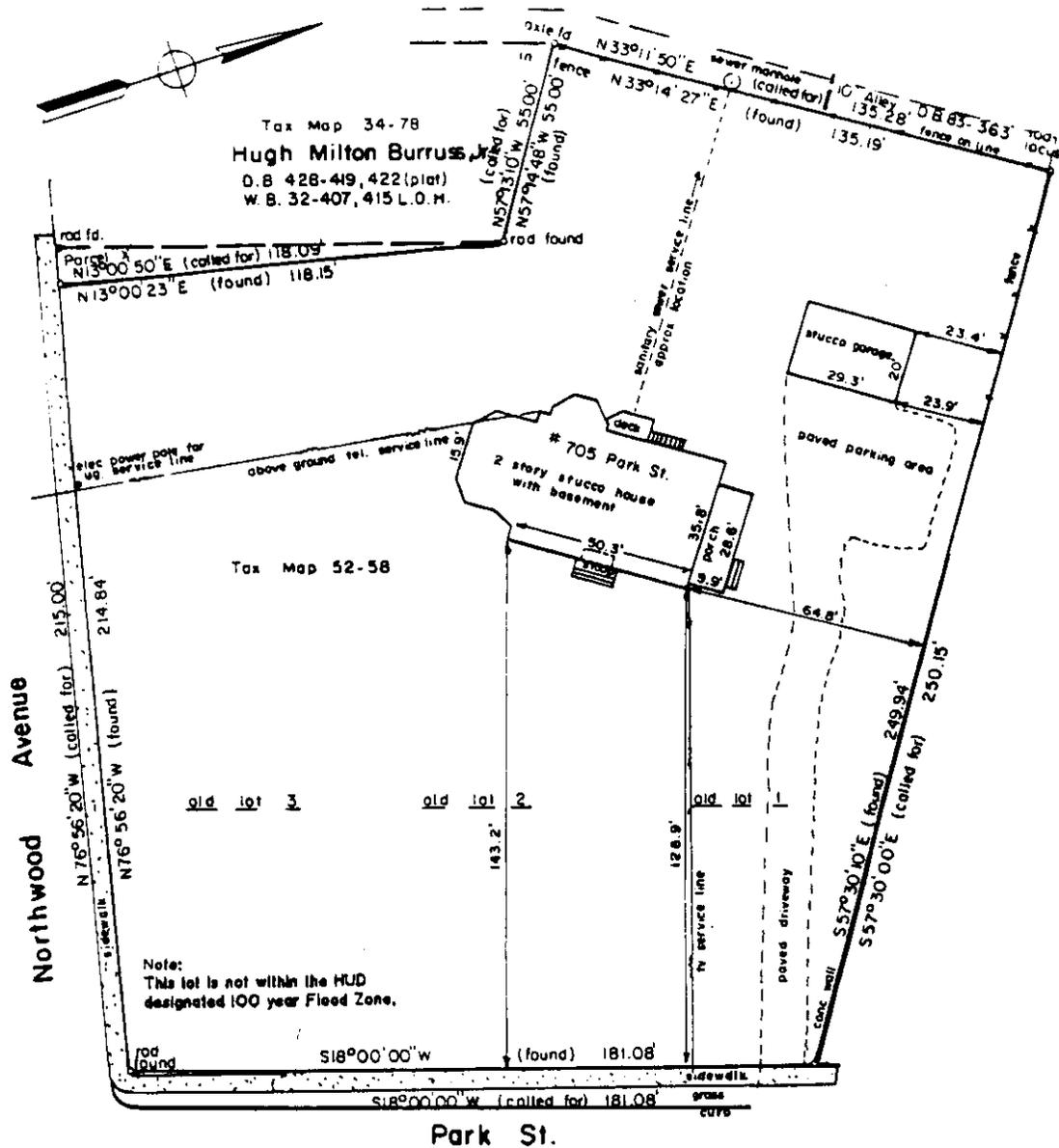


Exhibit A: The Judge William J. Robertson House nominated parcel. Scale: 1" = 50'. North indicated by arrow. Exhibit adapted from a 1995 survey by Thomas D. Blue.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Judge William J. Robertson House  
Charlottesville, Va.**

Section number Exhibit Page 16

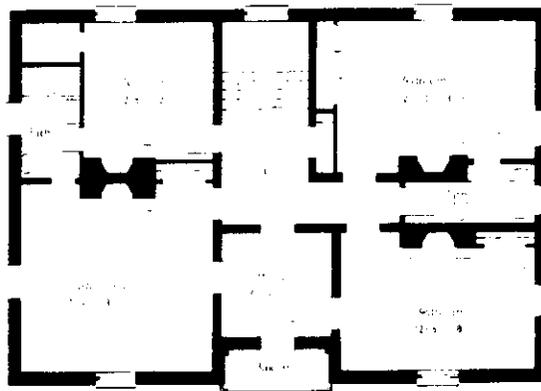
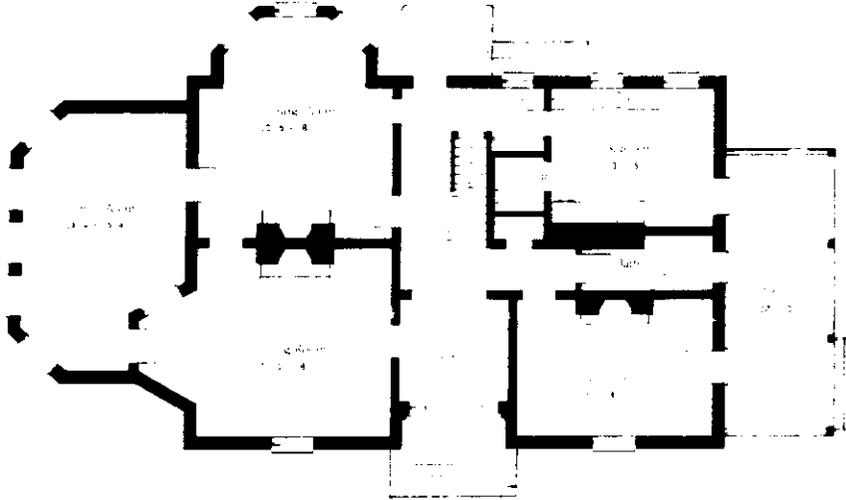


Exhibit B: First-floor plan (*above*) and second-floor plan (*below*) of the Judge William J. Robertson House from a McLean Faulconer Inc. real estate brochure (not to scale).

Judge William J. Robertson  
Charlottesville, Va.  
UTM, elevations (zone 17)  
E721500 N4212720

