

DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

A sophisticated house which draws influence from its more academic contemporaries, Hobson's Choice represents the vernacular version of a tradition of five-part houses in Virginia. Constructed in the last decade of the 18th century, this late Georgian house is located on Route 606 in Brunswick County, Virginia.

Palladian in plan, Hobson's Choice is a one-story structure composed of a central pavilion with flanking wings connected to the pavilion by hyphens. The exterior brick walls are laid in Flemish bond. While the brick face is in stable condition, substantial cracks in the exterior walls have been crudely patched. As the facade brick does not evidence the presence of an early porch, the house may have been built without one. Brickwork visible in photographs taken during the 1940s indicates that at some point a porch was constructed to shade the facade of the center block. The present porch dates from after 1947 and replicates the earlier one in pitch and perhaps in design. End boards terminate the wooden cornice. The gable ends of the central block and wings project forward; interior end chimneys are found in the gable ends of the wings and in the northern wall of the central block. Chimney caps are corbeled. Entrance is gained through the double doors of the central block and hyphens. The central block doors are flanked by double-hung sash windows with 9/9 lights. All other windows of the original portion are 6/6 with the exception of those found in the northern wall of the salon, which are 9/9. Corners and window joints are defined by queen closers, and jack arches without gauged bricks are found above all window openings of the original structure. The house is set on a rubble stone foundation which has been plastered.

The original structure is nearly intact with additions found at the north and west elevations. Built ca. 1860, the most substantial addition is found at the west elevation. Used as a bedroom/living room, the addition is constructed of stone which has been plastered. A brick room was constructed in 1947 at the rear of the east hyphen, and this enlarged space is used as a bedroom. Finally, in 1953 a frame enclosed porch was built at the north elevation.

In plan Hobson's Choice is nearly identical to the first-floor plan of another notable Southside house, Battersea in Petersburg. No apparent connection between the two structures has been discerned. The central block contains the entrance hall and salon beyond; a small entry and the bath are located in the west hyphen, while the west wing is divided into a living room and kitchen. The east hyphen is comprised of a small entry and a vacant room; two bedrooms fill the east wing.

All interior walls have been plastered and painted, and they are structurally sound. Not all of the flooring is original, but it has been painted in each room. Original moldings which are conservative in design and illustrate a simple interpretation of Georgian influences are found in the five-part portion of Hobson's Choice. Raised-panel wainscoting frames the lower walls of the entrance hall and salon; chair rails encircle the remaining rooms of the original house. The salon contains the most ornate mantel, although it, too, is quite simple. Framing the hearth opening, this mantel has no shelf and is marked by five raised panels. Picture rails run the length of the east and west walls of the salon.

Entry into the attic can be gained from three points. The roofing system is common rafter with horizontal nailing boards.

A number of undistinguished 19th- and 20th-century outbuildings are associated with the structure, including a smokehouse, tobacco barn, tobacco stripping house, corn crib, and a log-frame stable.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES Ca. 1794

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The third quarter of the 18th century saw the construction of an interesting group of Palladian-style Virginia plantation houses characterized by a central block or pavilion with attached wings as illustrated in Robert Morris's Select Architecture, 1755. This form marks a departure from the rectangular structures that are identified as emblematic of the Colonial and Early Georgian periods in Virginia. Discussion of three- and five-part houses usually brings to mind the more laudable examples such as Brandon, Battersea, and the Randolph-Semple house. However, the Palladian mindset filtered through Virginia society and was manifested in many vernacular interpretations. Hobson's Choice is an exceptional example of this interpretive process. Retaining much of its original fabric, Hobson's Choice exemplifies the economic prosperity which Brunswick County experienced at the turn of the 18th century because of its thriving tobacco and cotton industries. The house also reflects the sophistication of its builder, Dr. Richard Feild, who had the Palladian structure built about the time of his marriage to Ann Meade in February 1794. No doubt Feild was aware of the more substantial three- and five-part houses.

Hobson's Choice stands on a tract of land purchased by Feild from his father-in-law, Andrew Meade, in 1794. Rather than referring to an owner or significant person associated with the property, the name "Hobson's Choice" comes from an English phrase meaning "the choice between taking either that which is offered or nothing." According to the Random House Dictionary it is after Thomas Hobson (1544-1631) of Cambridge, England, who rented horses but offered his customers only the horse which stood nearest the stable door. As the name has been associated with the property since its early listing in the county's records, it could indicate that this was not the original owner's first choice for land, but that he had no alternative. In 1794 Feild's father-in-law owned over 4,000 acres. The 676-3/4 acres purchased by Feild may not have been his first choice but was instead all that he was offered - Hobson's Choice.

Feild's accomplishments and extensive inventory reflect the prominent position which he must have held among his peers in Southside Virginia. Born in 1767, Dr. Feild was educated at Edinburgh (his family had settled in the 18th century in Virginia from Scotland) and was well known for his expertise in botany and astronomy as well as in medicine. Feild was also editor of The Intelligencer and Petersburg Commercial Advertiser, and he was a member of the three electoral colleges that sent Jefferson and Madison to the White House.

Feild enlarged his holdings until his death in May 1829. In his will Feild left "the tract of land whereon I live" to be divided among his three daughters. His remaining lands were to be divided among his three sons. The inventory and sale of Feild's property as recorded in the Brunswick County Will Books comprise an extensive account of farm equipment, livestock, slaves, and a sizeable collection of household furnishings. Most impressive is the list of books contained in his personal library which reveals Feild to be a man of

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Hobson's Choice, Brunswick County, Virginia

CONTINUATION SHEET #1

ITEM NUMBER 6,7,8 & PAGE 1

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

- (2) Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey
1968, 1979 State
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission
221 Governor Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

7. DESCRIPTION

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The 5.5 acres which are contained within the bounds of the Hobson's Choice nomination include the house and all outbuildings associated with the structure. Although the nominated acreage is smaller than the total property acreage, it encompasses all significant buildings.

MH

8. SIGNIFICANCE

intelligence and wide interests. Included among the more than 130 titles were works by such diverse authors as Plutarch, Shakespeare, and Erasmus Darwin, as well as many medical texts. While the settlement of Feild's will was not completed until ten years after his death, Hobson's Choice was sold to his son, Theophilus Agricola Feild in 1831. He sold it to his brother, Richard W. Feild, in 1834. His son, George W. Feild, received it as a gift in 1852 from his parents. G. W. Feild retained ownership at least until 1870. At that time the property passed out of the family.

Hobson's Choice is now owned by Mrs. Nan Adams, who plans to stabilize the structure and maintain it as a private residence.

MH/VDS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Virginia Historical Magazine. Vol. 36, pp. 251-252. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. 1928
- Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged, 1965. "Hobson's Choice."

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DIVISION OF MINERAL RESOURCES
JAMES L. CALVER, STATE GEOLOGIST

