

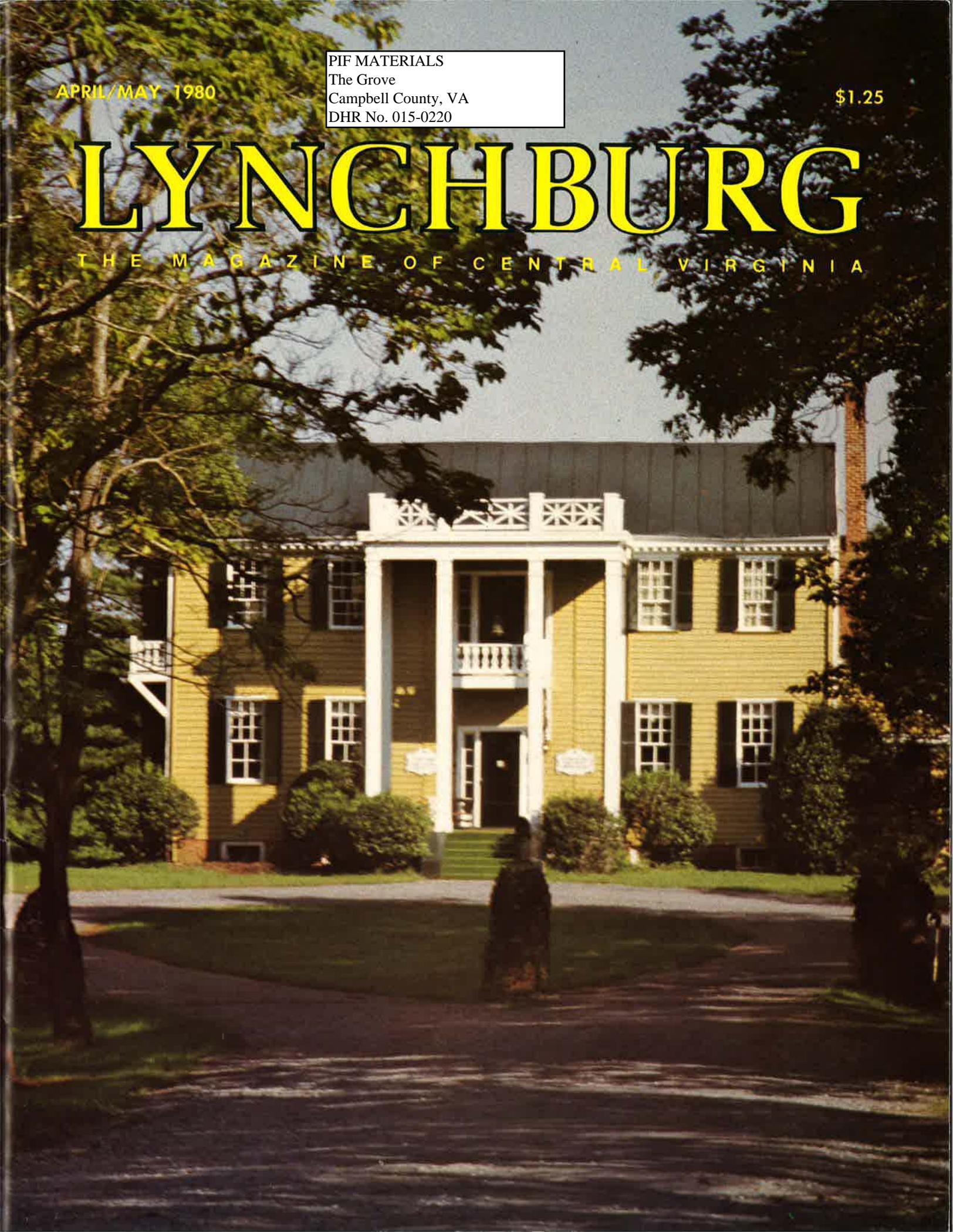
APRIL/MAY 1980

PIF MATERIALS
The Grove
Campbell County, VA
DHR No. 015-0220

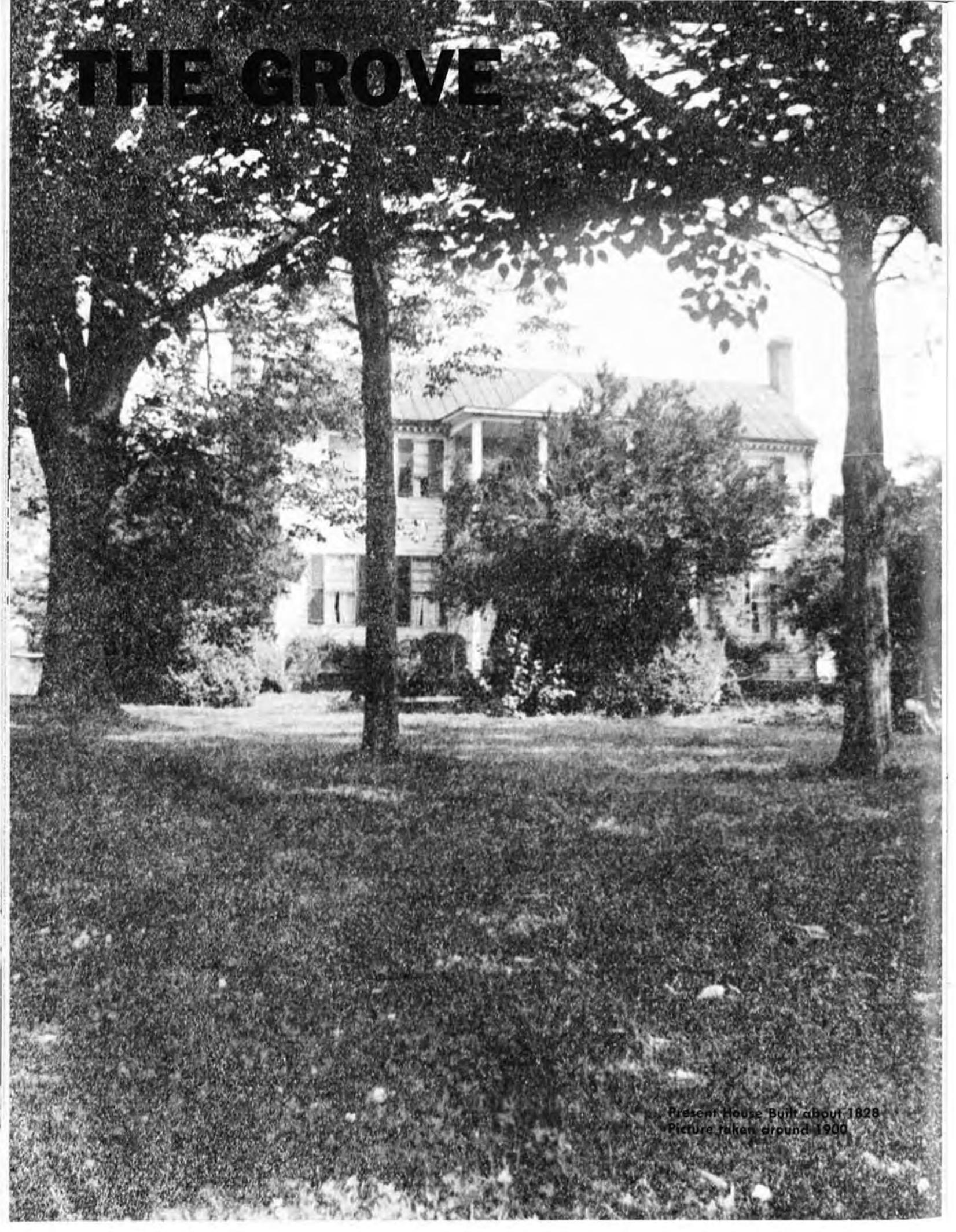
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LYNCHBURG

THE MAGAZINE OF CENTRAL VIRGINIA



THE GROVE



Present House Built about 1828
Picture taken around 1900

The Grove's Illustrious Families Played Important Role In Developing Central Virginia

By JANET SHAFFER

The origins of The Grove, one of the oldest and best preserved colonial plantations in Campbell County and the surrounding area, are rooted firmly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

A plat in the University of Virginia's Alderman Library, drawn and lettered by Thomas Jefferson, indicates that the land on which the house was built, was once part of his Poplar Forest acreage.

It was through his wife, Martha, that the Bedford tract of 4,819 acres had come into Jefferson's possession. She had inherited in all some 40,000 acres following the death of her father, John Wayles, in 1773, the year of Jefferson's first recorded trip to Poplar Forest.

Today, a mansion at The Grove houses The Southland Colonial Galleries, a unique furniture store which specializes in fine reproductions reminiscent of that bygone era.

As early as 1747 the tract of land known as The Grove was owned by Colonel Richard Callaway. Like the other Callaways in the area, Richard, (the sixth of a family of seven sons and two daughters) was highly respected as a leader in the local government and in the community. A surveyor, he was one of the original trustees and, later a justice, of New London Towne, established in 1757 on property given by William Callaway, one of his brothers. Richard was a major in the forces which fought the French and Indian wars, and he was promoted to colonel in the Bedford Militia in 1758.

Richard lived at The Grove with his family for an indeterminate number of years. Then, finding himself in debt around 1773, he was obliged to see the original house and acreage. Times were hard and the Revolutionary War was threatening. Also, he may

have overspent on race horses — land owners prized their blooded racing stock and they ran regularly in the Bedford area. As the father of fifteen children (he was twice married), his domestic demands were also heavy.

At any rate, he arranged an indenture between himself and James and Robert Donald and Company, deeding "a certain tract of land lying on Reedy Creek . . . seven hundred acres more or less" to pay his indebtedness. The deed of transfer included his entire crop of tobacco, corn and fodder reaped from the plantation, as well as such personal items as "six plain chairs, one arm chair, one large cherry tree table, one desk of drawers, my whole stock of hogs being about forty, and all other pieces of household furniture within my House upon said plantation."

Adventure and a new life beckoned, even though he was then 52 years of age. He left New London and Bedford County behind in the winter of 1775 to travel with Daniel Boone, a former acquaintance, to the promising frontier country of Kentucky. He and Boone left from Kingsport, Tennessee to hack a road through the wilderness to Boonesboro, Kentucky. Arriving there, they built shelters and a rough fort. In June of that year Richard and Daniel returned to Virginia to reunite with the families they had left behind with friends. The frontiersmen were back in Kentucky by late September with their wives and children.

Two years later Richard was appointed a colonel in the Kentucky militia and he was selected to represent Kentucky at the Virginia

The Grove from the back about 1900





Mrs. James Beveridge Begg around 1900

Assembly during its meetings in Williamsburg. He and Boone were appointed Commissioners of the Peace in Kentucky County and otherwise took leadership roles in the growing town of Boonesboro and the developing area.

In 1779 Richard led a contingent of trail blazers whose goal was to carve a wilderness road through the Cumberland Gap. That same year he swung back through Virginia to visit friends in Bedford County, and he also sold a piece of property on the James to settle a final debt before heading back to Kentucky. Upon arriving he found that his two daughters Elizabeth and Frances and Jemina Boone had been captured by the Indians. Undaunted by the redskins, he and Boone led a rescue party which succeeded in recapturing the three girls.

Tragically, Richard was scalped by Indians early in 1790 while overseeing the construction of a ferry boat soon to be put into use. Deeply mourned, he was buried in a plot to the rear of the fort he had helped build.

The next chapter in the history of the Grove concerns James Penn, Esq., who lived at the estate with

his family around 1788. The son of Sarah Callaway, Richard's daughter, and Major Gabriel Penn of Amherst County, he was Richard's grandson.

James Penn was one of thirteen original trustees of New London Academy, a "private academy for young men" established in the town in 1798 on an acre of land given by John Callaway. A purchase of additional land brought the academy's holdings to approximately ten acres. Not a great deal is known about Penn or his family, but they lived in the old home until 1815. It seems that after their four daughters married and settled near Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Penn sold the home and acreage to Christopher Clark for the sum of \$30,000 and moved away.

It has not been established whether or not the original Callaway house was destroyed by fire, or simply rebuilt and enlarged after that time. According to court house records, the present house on the property was built around 1828 by Colonel Girard Alexander, an officer in the War of 1812.

Both Alexander and his second wife, Elizabeth, who had Callaway connections, brought children from

place. In addition, they had a spring of their own, so that the home and surroundings must have resounded with the racket of children's activities.

Following his return from war service, Colonel Alexander became treasurer of New London Academy, which eventually came to be known as the oldest high school in the south. He was a vestryman of St. Stephens Episcopal Church in Forest (still in use), where both he and his second wife are buried. His will, executed in 1851, directed that proceeds from the sale of his real estate be divided among his heirs.

The old mansion came to shelter still another family of education, refinement and breeding beginning around 1873 when it was bought by Captain James Beveridge Begg, a great nephew of the famed poet, Robert Burns, and a prominent citizen of Edinboro, Scotland.

A romantic tale about Begg's immigration to the United States and his marriage to a Scottish lass, has been recounted by Dr. Janet Kimbrough, a Begg's granddaughter, who now lives in Tucker House in Williamsburg.

As the story goes, Captain Begg's wife died during the early years of marriage. Her sister, Janet, who had lived with them for a time, stayed on as a member of the household following her sister's death.

Soon the Captain came to love her, but when he proposed marriage, she declined at first, horrified at the idea. The Church of England forbade the marriage of in-laws at that time in history and such a violation of church law was to her unthinkable.

However, as she began to pack her belongings and prepare to go elsewhere to live, she realized that she returned his love and was dismal at the thought of life without him. In short, Janet changed her mind about his marriage proposal, and it was agreed that they would sail to Virginia and Lynchburg and be married within their church.

During the previous months

James Begg had been in communication with friends in the Bedford-Campbell County area who encouraged him to make the move to America and Virginia. The opportunity to buy old plantation estates for a cheap price had attracted a steady flow of people after the war's end. Many were from England, and like Begg, from Scotland. He was easily persuaded. Not only could he marry Janet without interference, but the idea of becoming a gentleman farmer in a new land was appealing, despite the fact that he knew nothing of farming or running a plantation.

Through acquaintances in the area he located The Grove. He was charmed with the house, its spacious acres and the friendly people in the vicinity.

The Captain and his Scottish fiancée traveled to Norfolk, and thence to Lynchburg and soon after their arrival they were married at the old Grace Episcopal Church on Diamond Hill. Afterwards the Captain and his bride went to live at The Grove. Sometime after, Miss Isabella Maldane, Janet's sister, left Scotland for America and she lived with the Begg family as the beloved "auntie" during their years at the estate.

They had three children, May, (or Mary) the eldest, then Isobel and an only son, Robbie (Robert Burns Haldane Begg). All three were tutored at home beginning in their early years. According to Mary, who left behind a manuscript entitled "Reminiscences of the Grove," the house was run "as a regular school." The dining room was their mother's classroom, with their father often in attendance to assist in supplying anecdotes, research notes or legends, while the drawing room was their Auntie Haldane's teaching domain. From their parents they learned the fundamentals of reading, the languages, including French, German and Italian, history, English literature, geography and other basics. Miss Haldane taught them music (she was a pianist and church organist of some skill), drawing lessons, and, as they grew older, advanced foreign language study. Religion was not taught as a sub-



James Beveridge Begg before his death in 1909

ject but was an integral part of their daily lives.

In those days schooling was thought to be more important for boys than for girls. Therefore, when he was twelve, Robbie was enrolled at nearby New London Academy to receive further instruction. He was no longer as free as his sisters to explore the surrounding fields and meadows and dawdle at the streams which intersected the property. However, he liked the opportunities to make new friends and experience "the outside world."

In her book, "New London, Today and Yesterday," Miss Daisy I. Reid, narrates the story of Robbie's first day at the school.

He apparently rode up astride a horse dressed in short pants with a white blouse shirt, a Scottish plaid around his waist tied in a bow at one side, a Scotch cap on his head.

At the noontime recess when Robbie joined the others on the playground, the boys eyed him and his plaid.

"Sissy, sissy," teased one, as he advanced with a taunting air.

At first Robbie did not understand his meaning. Another boy

drew closer, making teasing remarks, and grabbed for the plaid at his waist.

A battle followed, with Robbie fighting in the tradition of his Highland ancestors. He grabbed his scarf, punched the nose of the nearest tormentor, and was prepared to take on the others, who in the meantime, had retreated to the side lines to watch. There was no further need to defend himself that day.

The next morning Robbie rode up dressed in a plain shirt and tie and his acceptance as "a regular fellow" was immediate.

Life at The Grove was leisurely by today's standards, but varied and exciting. The mail-bag brought daily from the village post office at New London was an anticipated event. The postman carried the mail on horseback, a distance of eleven miles from Lynchburg. As he passed the Begg gate "on the highroad," he blew a horn which signaled The Grove houseboy to mount a horse and ride to meet him at the post office at New London.

Traveling the red clay roads that led in four directions was always an adventure. Past Forest Depot the road led up the moun-

tains to the Peaks of Otter and the Blue Ridge Mountain range. Some days the sound of the train could be heard from The Grove, though faintly.

Another road led to Evington where the Begg family attended the Church of the Good Shepherd when the roads were not made impassable by deep mud or snow. They also traveled to Evington and the surrounding area to be sociable with friends whose estates were located off the by-ways. Visiting back and forth between families, entertaining at dinner, and sometimes extended stays that stretched into weeks were popular forms of conviviality and entertainment for children and adults alike.

However, travel was necessarily limited. One reason was that there was often a lack of adequate vehicles and horses. Most members of the community were still suffering from the affects of the war, and, like the Begg family, had to survive on limited incomes, in what was often called "genteel poverty." The most common mode of travel was in one-horse wagons or buggies with collapsible tops. Produce was carried to the markets in Lynchburg by way of canvas-covered "long road waggons."

The occasional journeys the Begg family made to Lynchburg on the old "Rock Road" and the "Mud Road" were probably the most anticipated of all. There was the clop clop of horses' feet on the cobblestones, the sweet, distinctive smell of tobacco in the rows of warehouses, the shops with their treasures.

If one had the leisure, the greatest adventure of all was riding on the old canal boat which connected Richmond with the western part of the state. The journey lasted for hours, as the ark-like packet boat drifted between nearby banks, pulled by horses on the tow-path. Dinner was served aboard in the dining room, or one could carry one's own food along in a basket. Along the bluffs above the river the construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway loomed, forecasting change and a new way of life to come.



Janet and Cynthia, Begg grandchildren

The Grove provided much of its own entertainment and excitement, especially for the Begg children. The old smoke house, which still remains, was the focal point each autumn for the annual hog-killing. There was other livestock in the barns and pastures and the three children kept a multitude of "tame" pets, domesticated and otherwise. Christmas time was, of course, the highlight of the year, observed by the family with old Scottish customs and some which they borrowed from their new American friends and neighbors.

The barns in the oak grove were destroyed by fire which swept through the acreage in later years. Fortunately, the brick cottage where Dolphus, the overseer and his wife, Mary, and flock of children lived, was spared. Also spared were the plantation house and an out-building nearby. According to Mary Begg Coleman's reminiscences there was a row of cottages of cabins in the front yard for the servants and probably an outdoor kitchen, but they are no longer in existence.

The Begg family lived at The Grove until the Captain's death in 1909. His burial was at Good

Shepherd Episcopal Church where the entire family had worshipped so many years.

Mrs. Coleman's charming account of her childhood at The Grove is rich in history, local customs and nostalgic remembrances. She said farewell to the old homestead following her marriage to George Coleman, a member of the widely-known Tucker family of Virginia whose individuals were an integral part of Williamsburg's history.

In time Mrs. Coleman came to be known as "The Great Lady" of Williamsburg, not only for her wide knowledge of the famed seat of government, but for her biography entitled "St. George Tucker; a Citizen of No Mean City," one of several books she authored. Her husband, George, was the grandson of the famed jurist and law professor at William and Mary. Following her husband's death, she presented the jurist's personal manuscripts and legal library to the College of William and Mary.

During the first World War the estate was bought by a Russian Count, Andrei Garrowski, who renamed it Closeburn Manor. He

made necessary repairs, planted hedges and flowering shrubs and is said to have "furnished it beautifully." However, his stay at the house was cut short when he was suspected of being a spy and left in disgrace. The property went into the hands of realtors Craighill and Showalter of Lynchburg. In 1927 they, in turn, sold the home and over forty acres of land to Dr. Lawrence Whitney and family of Gary, West Virginia, who lived in the "big house" at intervals, and until 1947 rented out the former slave headquarters which they had remodeled, as well as the mansion when they lived elsewhere.

Present-day Timberlake was formed from a tract of 325 acres which once belonged to the extensive Closeburn Manor (The Grove) estate. According to the writings of R. H. Early, author of "Campbell Chronicles and Family Sketches," a large lake, "then called Timber Lake with a rear drive and adjoining land was divided into lake front lots." The acreage, intersected by three streams, was purchased by a group of four Lynchburg business men who planned to stock the lake with fish and provide boating and other recreation.

The lake was to cover seventy-five acres and have a six hundred foot dam. Most of their plans were carried out and the pleasure resort was a popular vacation spot for many years. Today it is a year-around residential community. Most of the dwellings boast private docks for boats and swimming and a public dock is available to non-residents. The name itself may have derived from an early settler, Philip Timberlake, who in 1797 apparently owned the land on which the resort was established.

In 1947, the estate which was still known as Closeburn Manor, was bought by Mr. and Mrs. Emory Noell of Lynchburg. Mr. Noell made extensive restorations, both on the exterior and interior of the house, and added needed modernization while retaining its unique historical aspects.

During the period when the property was owned by the Noells, a committee of local citizens made



View from front door of The Grove, 1900

tentative plans for a country club on the premises. The projected plans included a golf course, club house, and a variety of recreational facilities. However, the venture never materialized and the Noells lived there with their family of three children until 1968 when they sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Weaver who continued the restoration process and used the home for a time as a base for their antique business.

In 1971 the home and approximately eight acres of land were bought by Mr. and Mrs. Doug Oldham, who came to Lynchburg from Indiana. The well-known gospel singer added an oversize swimming pool toward the rear of the house and made changes in keeping with its period in history.

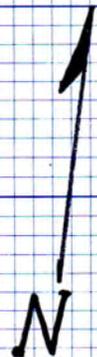
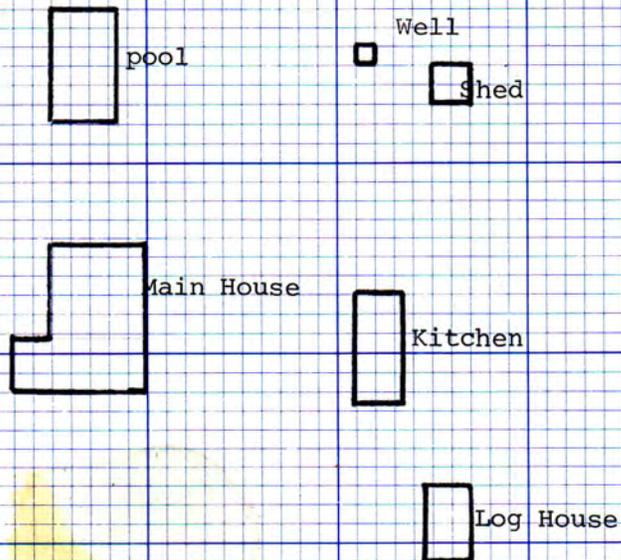
The Oldhams and two of their three young daughters moved to Nashville, Tennessee prior to the sale of the estate in 1979. During the interim years it was occupied by the Oldham's married daughter, Karen, and her husband and several young men connected with Liberty Baptist College and Thomas Road Baptist Church. Twenty acres of the original tract of land which the Noells had bought with the house was put up

for auction during this period. At present Industrial Products Company is now located on a portion of this property.

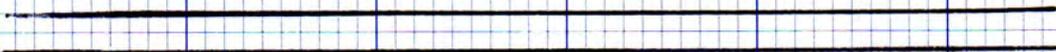
Nyal Vernon, a successful furniture dealer from Lynchburg, bought the old home and eight acres of land in 1979. The mansion with its large, high-ceilinged rooms have been tastefully furnished with handcrafted furniture of highest quality made by such companies as Baker and Hardin. They have kept the early mantels, stairways, moldings and other original features of the house intact and in keeping with its eighteenth century historical charm and authenticity, while adapting it for utilitarian use. Nyal's brother, Don, is the manager of Southland Colonial Galleries, with Eunice Mason serving as the interior decorator and assistant.

The former slave headquarters of the estate overseer which was remodeled and added on to over the years is occupied by Janet and Kit Shaffer. The original smoke house is situated nearby on a portion of the twenty-some acres of land which they bought during the division of the plantation estate in earlier years.

Site plan (Locate and identify outbuildings, dependencies and significant topographical features.)



Rt. 460



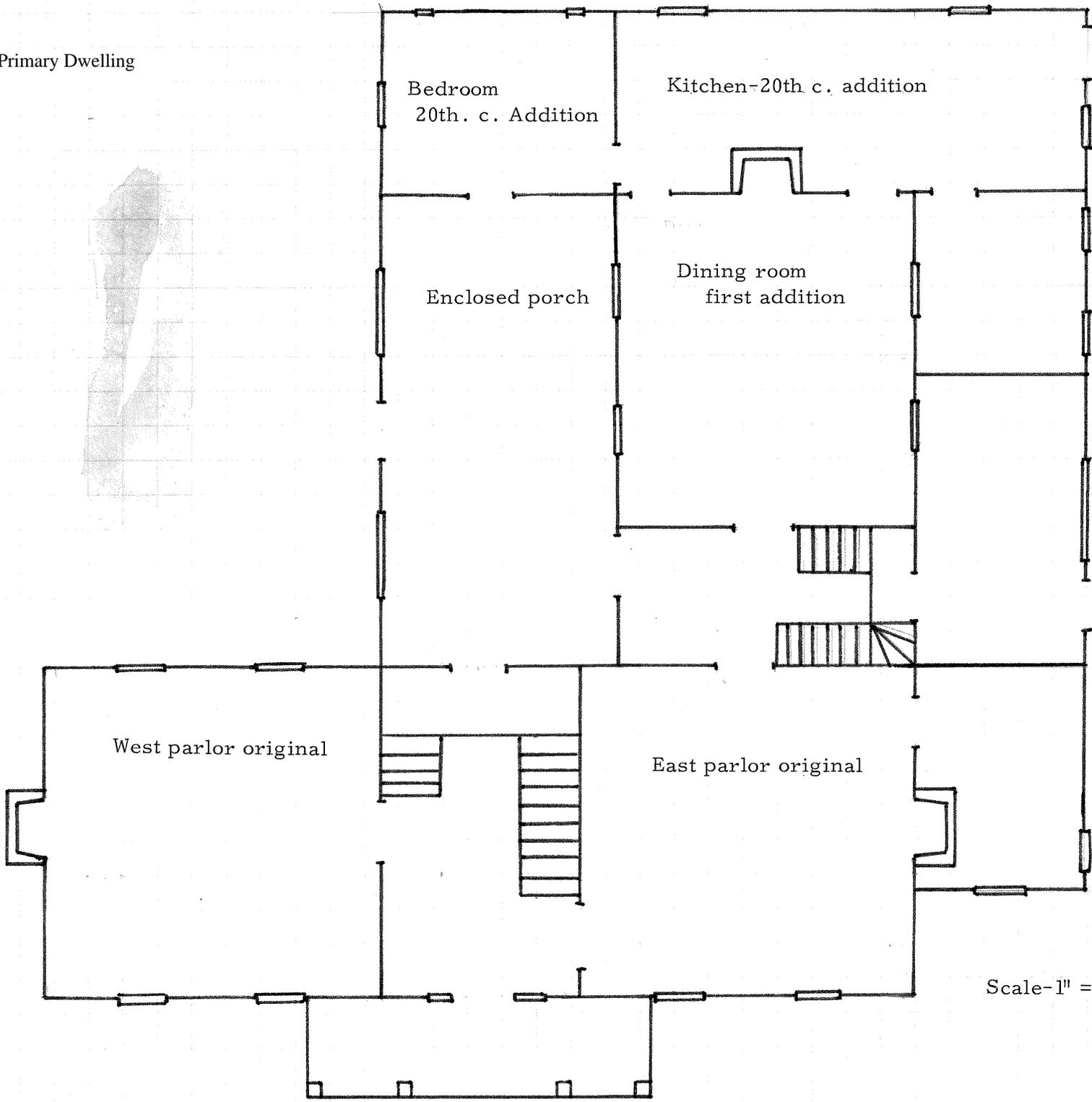
Name, address and title of recorder

David W. Baber, P.O. Box 2526, Lynchburg, VA 24501

Date

1/79

Primary Dwelling



Scale-1" = 8'-0"

Sources and bibliography

Published sources (Books, articles, etc., with bibliographic data.)

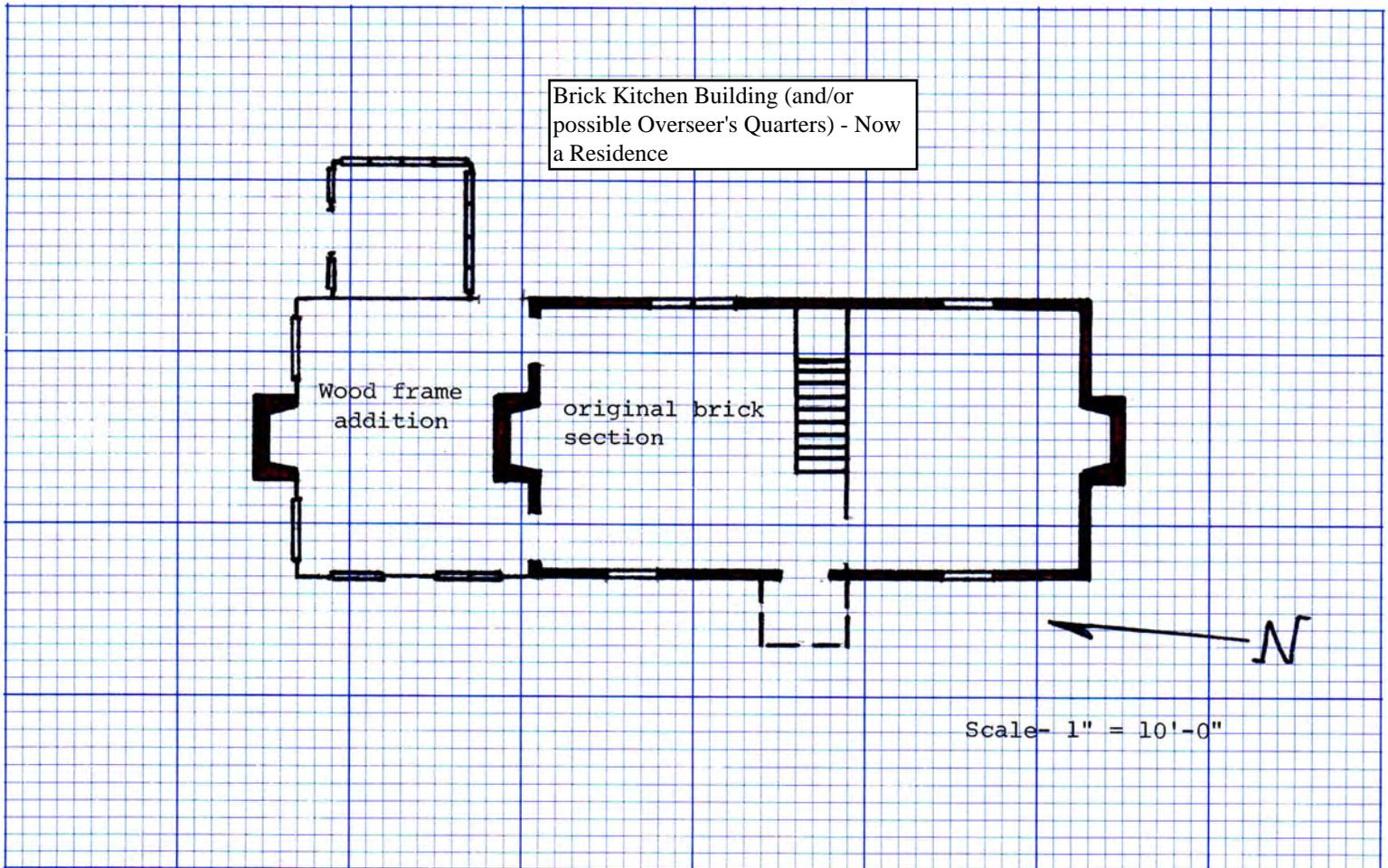
Reid, Daisy, "New London Today and Yesterday"

Primary sources (Manuscript documentary or graphic materials; give location.)

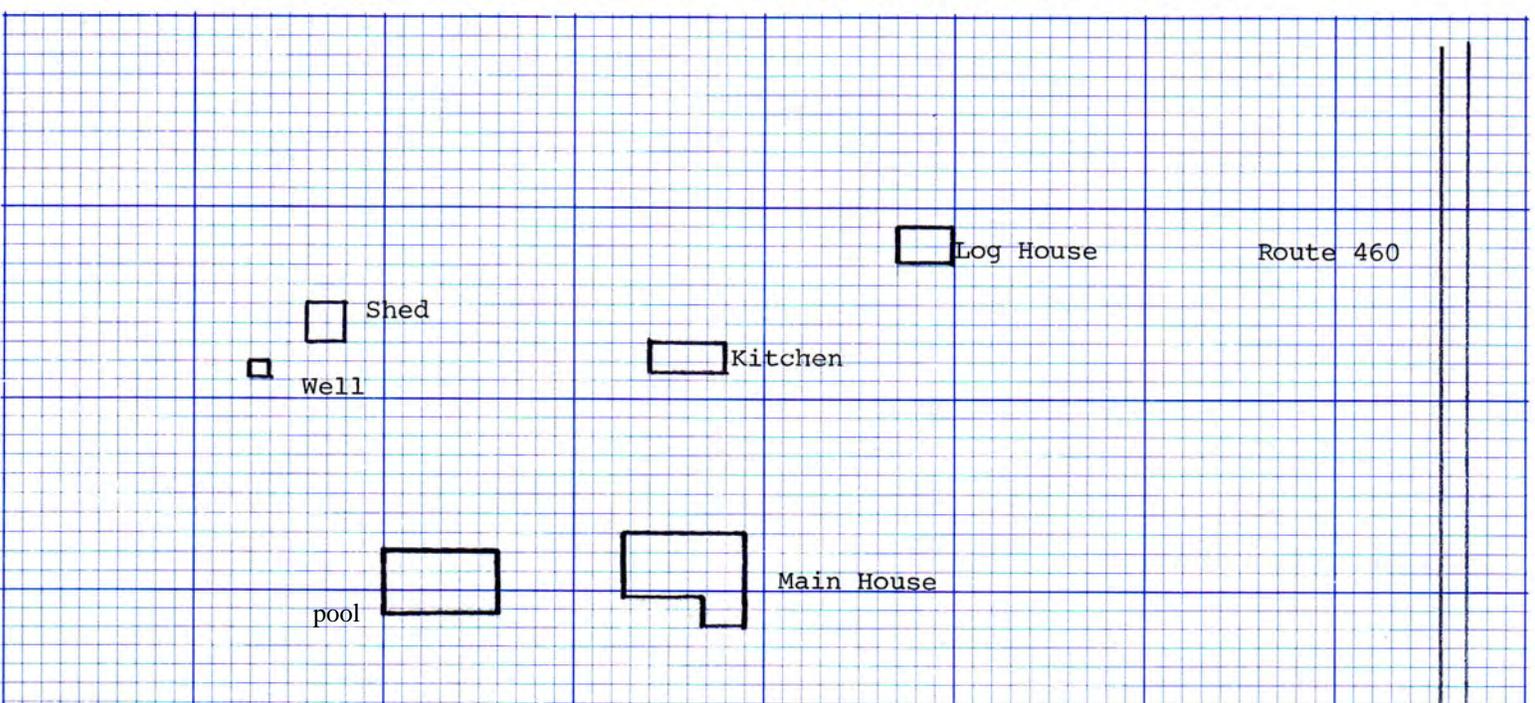
Coleman, Mary Haldene (Bell), "Reminiscences of the Grove, 1943"

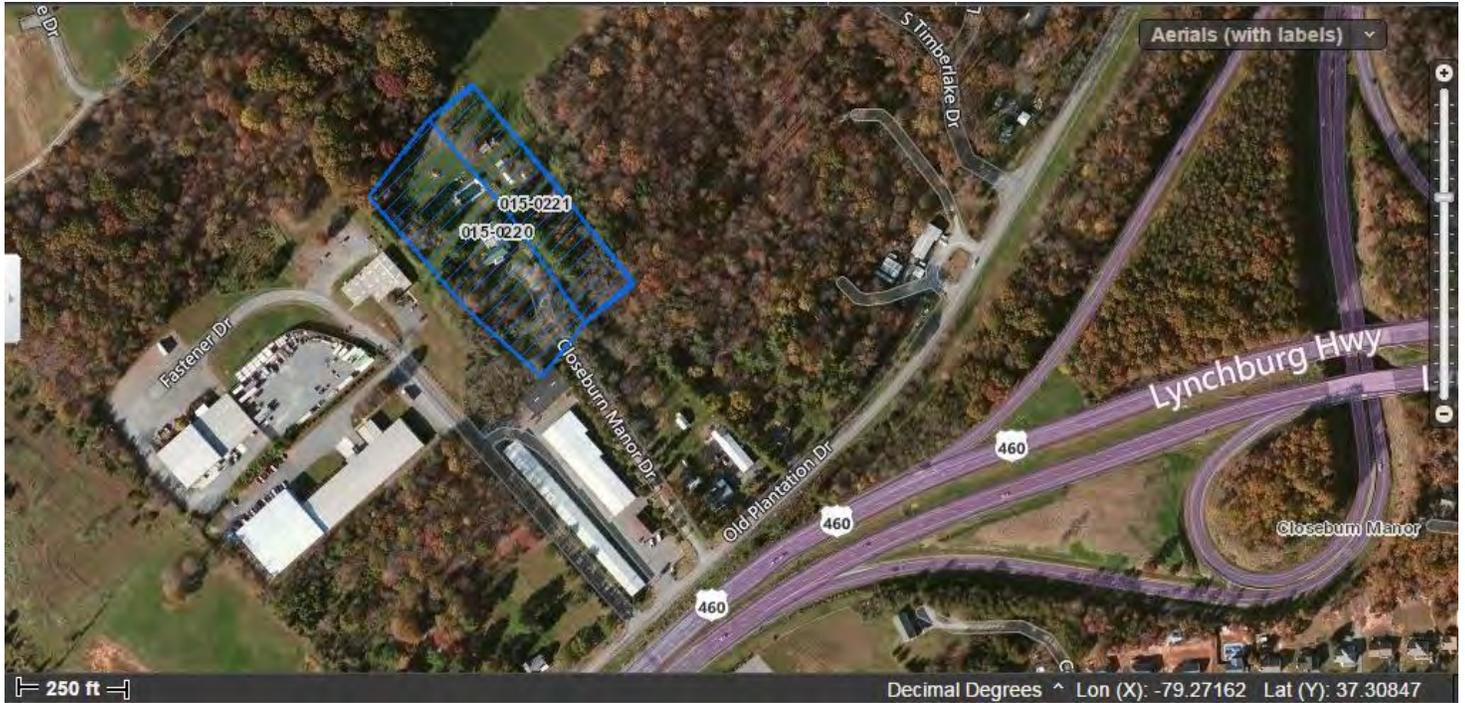
Names and addresses of persons interviewed

Plan (Indicate locations of rooms, doorways, windows, alterations, etc.)



Site plan (Locate and identify outbuildings, dependencies and significant topographical features.)







THE GROVE—OLD PENN HOME

Vintage Image from *New London Today and Yesterday* (1950)



Vintage Image from *New London Today and Yesterday* (1950)