

✓LE 9/6/6  
NRHP draft

(Rev. 10-90)  
NPS Form 10-900  
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

OMB No. 1024-0018

John Gunnell House  
Fairfax County, Virginia

## 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 John Gunnell House

other names/site number George Coleman House; DHR File No. 029-5525

### 2. Location

Street & number 489 Arnon Meadow Road

Not for publication

city or town Great Falls

vicinity

state Virginia

code VA

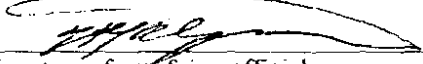
county Fairfax

code 059

Zip 22066

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

  
Signature of certifying official

10/17/06  
Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

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

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

See continuation sheet

determined eligible for the National Register

Signature of Keeper \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register

Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

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**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>buildings</u>
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>sites</u>
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>structures</u>
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>objects</u>
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>Total</u>

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

---

### 6. Function or Use

---

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: single dwelling  
DOMESTIC secondary structure

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: single dwelling  
DOMESTIC secondary structure

---

### 7. Description

---

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions) MID-19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY: Greek Revival

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation BRICK  
roof METAL: Tin  
walls WOOD: Weatherboard  
other \_\_\_\_\_

**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.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- 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.)

- 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 50 years.

---

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURE; ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance** 1851-1946

**Significant Dates** 1852

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

**Cultural Affiliation** N/A

**Architect/Builder** Unknown / John Gunnell

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_









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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**John Gunnell House  
Fairfax County, Virginia**

**Section 7 Page 4**

---

There are no cornices. A broad original baseboard remains in all rooms, and reportedly is chestnut originally finished with oil, then stained and varnished before the house was sold to investors. All woodwork has now been painted white. There is, however, evidence of graining beneath the paint on the hall doors. The original heart of pine floors remain throughout and have been restored.

**Entrance Hall**—Doors, woodwork, and stair are original and remain intact with the exception of the removed interior door knobs. The entrance composition echoes that on the exterior and runs the full width of the hall. The staircase is paneled with an entrance to a basement stair at the rear. The stair string is embellished with simple scroll-work and other detail. The stair itself is an open-well dog-leg stair with half-pace landings. There is a substantial turned newel. The handrail is simple and light, curving gracefully upward and around the open well. Balusters are simply turned at the bottom and attenuated as they reach upward to the handrail. The stair extends in full detail to the attic floor.

**Windows and Doors**—Originally there were two large windows on each side of all rooms. Changes have been discussed above under ‘porches.’ Original interior window frames remain in good condition. All original doors with four raised panels with pegged mortise-and-tenon joinery remain. A small-scale door occurs in the northwest corner of the dining room, giving direct access to the cross-hall and kitchen. Although the door here is not original, this opening may have existed from the beginning, facilitating service during dining. A cold pantry was constructed in the kitchen using an original door when the kitchen was moved upstairs, probably at the turn of the century.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**John Gunnell House  
Fairfax County, Virginia**

**Section 8 Page 5**

---

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The John Gunnell House is a substantial Greek Revival-style dwelling built in 1851-1852<sup>1</sup> in Fairfax County by planter John Gunnell (1793-1874) on land acquired by his father, William Gunnell III, from Bryan Fairfax in 1791. The property remained in the ownership of the descendents of William Gunnell III until 1946. The two-story frame house, clad in weatherboard, and built on a brick English basement in a T-shaped plan, is one of the last surviving dwellings of this form and style in Fairfax County. The house is a five-bay, single-pile dwelling with a central entrance topped by a gable standing-seam metal roof with three gable end exterior chimneys. The interior boasts a notable central dog-leg staircase, paneled doors, woodwork, heart-of-pine floors, and plaster, many of the materials being original to the house. One contributing building exists on the property— a board-and-batten building, now used as a tool shed, that was built in the 1920s on top of an icehouse believed to date to the house. The property possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. John Gunnell House meets the National Register criteria under Criterion A for agriculture and under Criterion C for architecture.

**Justification of Criteria**

**Criterion A:** The John Gunnell House remained in the ownership of descendents of William Gunnell III through four generations until sold to investors in 1946. It exemplifies, through this long tenure by a single prominent family, the transition of agriculture in the Upper Potomac area of Fairfax County from frontier subsistence to large plantations worked by slaves to small family farms. Gunnell's forebears were among the earliest settlers in what is now Fairfax County. The large family rose from indentured servitude to positions of wealth and power.

**Criterion C:** The John Gunnell House is believed to be the largest and one of the last-surviving residences of its kind built here in the mid-nineteenth century. Its design and construction are significant in the evolution of vernacular rural architecture and building practices in the Upper Potomac area of Fairfax County. The innovative personality, wealth, and social standing of its builder are evident in the strict formality of the symmetrical design, the separation of formal and informal areas, the lavish use of brick in the three chimneys and English basement, the eight coal-burning fireplaces, and the use of perhaps the first iron cook stove in the area in the basement kitchen. The weatherboard-clad, timber-framed building with pegged mortise-and-tenon joinery was a traditional building method which persisted here from the mid-eighteenth century through the nineteenth century.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

John Gunnell House  
Fairfax County, Virginia

Section 8 Page 6

---

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The John Gunnell House was built on land which was part of the original 676 acres purchased from Bryan Fairfax by William Gunnell III and his wife, Sara Coleman Gunnell, in 1791 when the entail established by Thomas, Sixth Lord Fairfax, was finally broken.<sup>2</sup> Part of Fairfax's Great Falls Manor, the property was probably occupied by John Gunnell's grandfather earlier while managing Fairfax's farm leases. This land was added to an adjoining 450-acre parcel Gunnell purchased from John Harle in 1785, creating the plantation on which he and his family resided. William Gunnell III was active in Fairfax County politics, serving in many public offices. His surviving heirs included four sons and four daughters.<sup>3</sup> At his death in 1822, his daughter Elizabeth Gunnell Mix inherited the 216-acre parcel where the John Gunnell House would be built.<sup>4</sup> She died in 1824 "bearing an infant son Oscar."<sup>5</sup> Her husband Lewis Mix died soon after, leaving Oscar in the care of his uncles, John and George Gunnell. John married Sarah Ann Spencer in 1825 in the District of Columbia. Oscar conveyed his land to his uncle John in 1844.<sup>6</sup> He went to medical school, as had his uncles, Drs. James S. and William H. Gunnell, and became a respected doctor in Charlottesville.

John Gunnell inherited a part of William Gunnell III's plantation known as Hidden Springs. Here he enlarged a small existing timber-framed house. He was farming large tracts of land at this time and was listed on the Slave Schedule as owning twenty-two slaves—a very great number for this area. Like his father and other men in the family, he followed a tradition of public service. He was recommended for lieutenant in the 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Virginia Militia in 1816, and by his death in 1874, he had risen to the rank of colonel. He also served as a road surveyor, a magistrate, was a member of the School Commission from 1837 to 1845, sheriff from 1847 to 1850, and justice for Fairfax County from 1835 to 1856.<sup>7</sup>

George G. Coleman (1828-77) was the son of John Gunnell's sister, Sarah Gunnell Coleman. His family moved to Missouri during the 1830s. George eventually returned to Fairfax County and in the U.S. Census of 1860 is listed as living with John and Sarah Gunnell. In 1861, he and his uncle John were among the first to sign the Ordinances of Secession. By 1870, George had married Olivia Jackson and had probably moved into the house. George and Olivia had five children—Critchler Coleman Oliver (1870-[ ]), Susan known as Siti (1871-[ ]), Samuel (1873-1927), Gunnell (circa 1875-1941), and George W. (1876-1902). John Gunnell was childless, and, at his death in 1874, named his nephew George G. Coleman as his sole heir and executor. George died soon after in 1877. His widow married Philip Adams who was named the children's guardian in 1881.









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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**John Gunnell House  
Fairfax County, Virginia**

**Section 9 Page 12**

---

**SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Primary Sources**

Fairfax County Personal Property Tax Records  
Fairfax County Deed Books  
Fairfax County Minute Books  
Fairfax County Loose Birth Records  
Fairfax County Will Books  
Loudoun County Deed Books  
Official Record of the War of the Rebellion  
Oral histories of the Great Falls Historical Society

**Secondary Sources**

Canaan, Deborah. *Land Above the Falls*. Great Falls, Virginia: Great Falls Historical Society, 1992.  
Cooke, Elizabeth Miles. *The History of the Old Georgetown Pike*. Annandale, Virginia: Charles Baptie Studios, 1977.  
Netherton, Nan et al. *Fairfax County, Virginia: A History*. Fairfax, Virginia: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, 1978.  
“The Rambler Visits One of the Old Gunnell Homes Near Great Falls,” *Washington Sunday Star*, v. 2, N. 145 (May 26, 1918).<sup>1</sup>  
Tibbetts, Jean. *My land...your land...This Land At Cornwell Farm*. Great Falls, Virginia: The Great Falls Historical Society, 2003.  
Washburn, Karen. “The Gunnell Family of Fairfax County.” *Fairfax County Historical Society Yearbook*. v. 20 (1984-5).

**Standing Files**

Research Files of historian Karen Washburn  
Great Falls Historical Society Archives

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**John Gunnell House  
Fairfax County, Virginia**

**Section 10 Page 13**

---

**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The John Gunnell House is located at 489 Arnon Meadow Road, Great Falls, VA 22066. The property includes the entire 5.0-acre parcel described in Fairfax County Deed Book 08437, page 0234, located in the Fairfax County Courthouse, Fairfax, Virginia.

**Verbal Boundary Justification**

The boundaries of the nominated property are the legal recorded boundaries of the historic site and contain all historic resources associated with the property.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**John Gunnell House  
Fairfax County, Virginia**

**Section**    **Photographs**    **Page 14**

---

**All photographs are common to:**

**PROPERTY:**    **John Gunnell House**  
**LOCATION:**    **Fairfax County**  
**DHR FILE NO:** **029-5525**  
**PHOTOGRAPHER:** **Tanya Edwards Beauchamp**  
**DATE:**    **June 2006**

**All negatives are stored at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia.**

VIEW OF: Front facade, looking north.  
NEG. NO: 22987:10A  
PHOTO:    1 of 8

VIEW OF: Perspective view, looking northeast.  
NEG. NO: 22987:4A  
PHOTO:    2 of 8

VIEW OF: Perspective view, looking southeast  
NEG. NO: 22987:7A  
PHOTO:    3 of 8

VIEW OF: Perspective view, looking southwest; chicken house/icehouse at far right.  
NEG. NO: 22987:18A  
PHOTO:    4 of 8

VIEW OF: Interior, front entrance hall, looking north toward cross-hall..  
NEG. NO: 22987:29A  
PHOTO:    5 of 8

VIEW OF: Interior, front entrance hall, looking south toward entrance door.  
NEG. NO: 22987:31A  
PHOTO:    6 of 8

VIEW OF: Interior, 1<sup>st</sup> floor east room, looking northwest.  
NEG. NO: 22987:26A  
PHOTO:    7 of 8

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**John Gunnell House  
Fairfax County, Virginia**

**Section** Photographs, Supplemental Historic Photographs **Page 15**

---

VIEW OF: Interior, west basement room, looking southwest.

NEG. NO: 22987:32A

PHOTO: 8 of 8

**Historic Photographs**

1. John Gunnell House, showing west rear porch and barn. Artistic license in perspective view and placement of outbuildings. Oil painting by Nancy E. Stevenson, 1950s.
2. Front façade circa 1900, looking north. Courtesy Barbara Smith.
3. Front façade circa 1940, looking north. Courtesy Barbara Smith.
4. 18<sup>th</sup>-century post-and-beam, hand-hewn barn located off Arnon Chapel Road burning after lightning strike in 1988. Structure still largely visible. Thought to be a Gunnell barn. Courtesy Lucy Masemer.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

John Gunnell House  
Fairfax County, Virginia

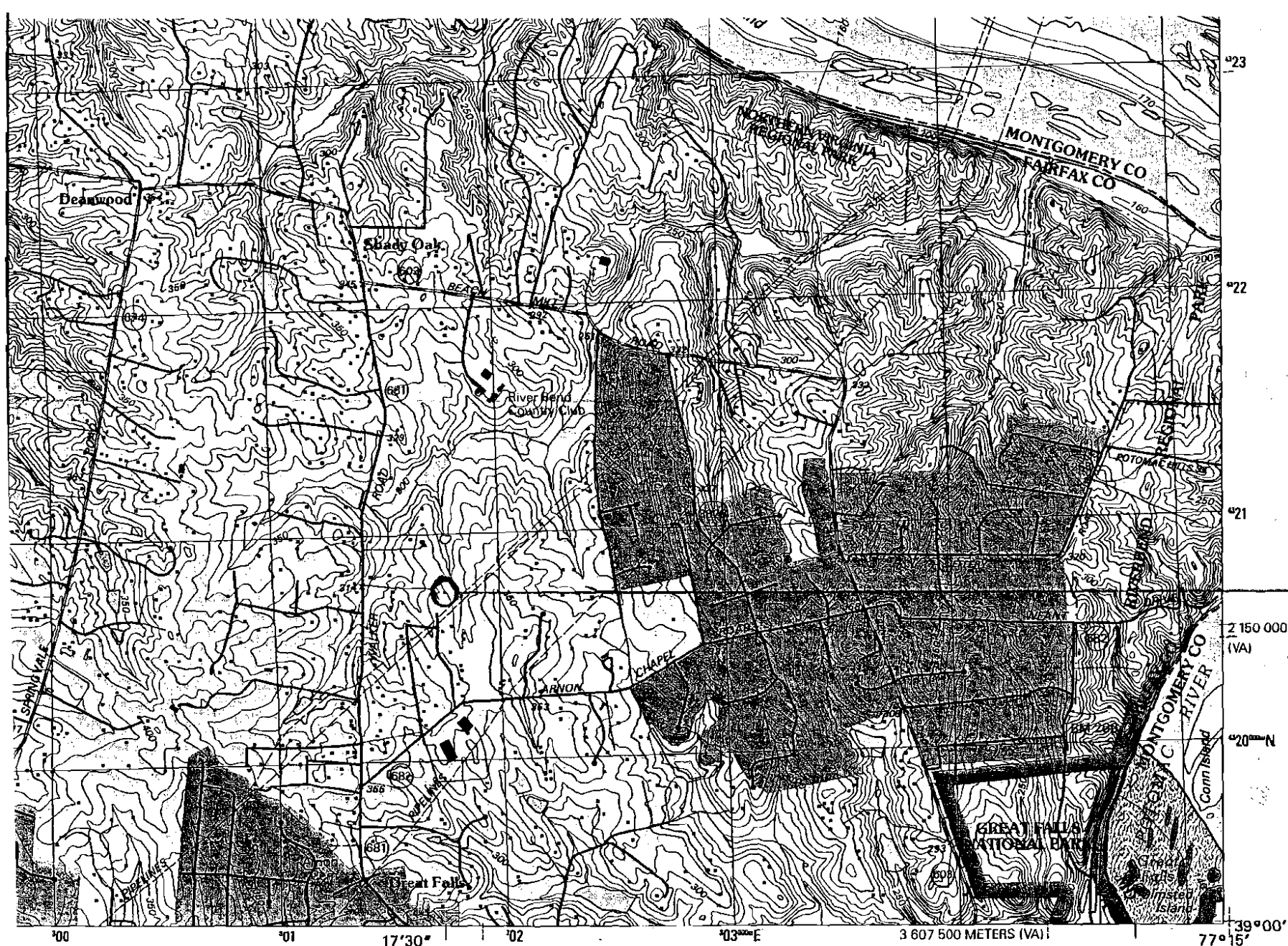
Section 8 Page 11

---

ENDNOTES

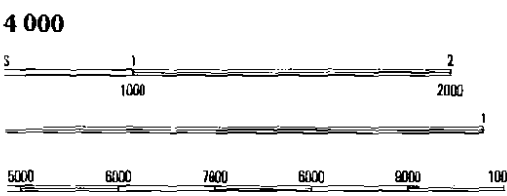
---

1. Fairfax County Personal Property Tax Records, 1853. Improvements. 'New House' written in margin.
2. Loudoun County Deed Book U: 259, 1791.
3. William Gunnell House, VDHR File no. 029-109.
4. Fairfax County Deed Book Z-2: 51-60, 1828.
5. Fairfax County Deed Book Z-2: 59, 1830.
6. Fairfax County Deed Book I-3: 365, 1844.<sup>55</sup>
7. Karen Washburn, "The Gunnell Family of Fairfax County," *Fairfax County Historical Society Yearbook*, v. 20, 1984-5, p 62.
8. Fairfax County Deed Book R-5: 40, 1894.<sup>7</sup>
9. Fairfax County Deed Book V-6: 166, 1901<sup>8</sup>
10. Fairfax County Deed Book P-10: 459, 1930.<sup>9</sup>
11. Fairfax County Deed Book 521: 7, 1946.<sup>10</sup>
12. *Official Record of the War of the Rebellion*.<sup>11</sup>
13. Fairfax County Will Book C-2, 145, 241-43, 285-88.
14. "The Rambler Visits One of the Old Gunnell Homes Near Great Falls," *Washington Sunday Star*, v. 2, N. 145 (May 26, 1918).<sup>12</sup>



JOHN GUNNELL HOUSE  
 FAIRFAX COUNTY  
 → UTM  
 ZONE 18  
 Z 150 000 METERS (VA)  
 301765/432076C

*Seneca Quad*  
*29-5525*



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway hard surface .....	Light-duty road, hard or Improved surface .....
Secondary highway hard surface .....	Unimproved road .....
Interstate Route	U.S. Route
	State Route

1/4" = 10 FEET  
 CAL DATUM OF 1929

1 Poolsville

