

17 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input 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

Burgh Westra is a Gothic Revival cottage located at the end of a small neck bounded by Elmington and Back Creeks in the Mobjack Bay region of Gloucester County. From the house is obtained a splendid prospect of the North River, a scenic body of water separating Gloucester's historic Ware Neck from Mathews County. Both the house and its setting are inspired by a design published in Andrew Jackson Downing's Cottage Residences, a design described as a "Cottage in the Pointed or Tudor Style." Downing notes that this particular design was adapted for a situation on the bank of "one of our boldest rivers." His description of the setting might well be that of Burgh Westra: "From its site the eye wanders over a richly cultivated country, dotted and sprinkled with luxuriant groups of wood; the wide, lake-like expanse of water, the sails floating lazily on its bosom, the tufted fringes of trees and shrubs in the foreground, and the distant hazy summits of blue in the horizon, are all fascinating elements of the beautiful, which make up the view from the point of its location."

Although the design ("Design III") is unquestionably the source for Burgh Westra, the builder made certain modifications that resulted in slight changes of appearance, though the basic romantic character was not diluted. A major change was the use of brick for the exterior walls rather than the regular ashlar indicated by Downing. With brick, the moldings lining the gables were modified so that the house has brick cornices containing projecting bricks resembling dentils. Modifications were also made in the two groups of three chimney stacks on the roof ridge. Downing shows tall octagonal stacks, whereas Burgh Westra's stacks are square and comparatively squat. Brick pilasters are employed at the corners of both the main part of the house and the projecting porch chamber, where Downing has none. Departures from the original design also appear in the treatment of the openings. The first-floor windows have unornamented brick lintels and double-hung sash instead of hood moldings and diamond-pane casements. The front door lacks the recommended Gothic arch, being topped also by a flat arch. Above it there is a simple balcony on brackets rather than the elegant Gothic oriel shown in Downing.

The chief departure from Downing's model is the reversal of the first-floor plan--Burgh Westra's is a mirror image of that in Cottage Residences. This change not only affected the interior arrangement, it resulted in an exterior change. The parlor window, "one of those pleasant nooks," thus projects from the left rather than the right side wall. However, like Downing's example, Burgh Westra apparently was built with the one-story Gothic gallery or "umbrage" across its east front; it has since been replaced by a simple modern porch of similar dimensions. Later additions to the house include a frame pantry wing on the south side and an adjacent low, modern wing of brick containing the kitchen. This wing connects the house with a contemporary outbuilding. Other outbuildings include a much-deteriorated frame smokehouse and a brick garden house that possibly was built as a dairy.

The interior trim of Burgh Westra is relatively simple. Except for the diamond panes in the sidelights and transoms, and in the tops of the second-floor windows, no details that could be described as Gothic are employed. The principal rooms are crowned by plaster cornices of plain moldings, and the door trim is standard architrave molding of the period. The mantels in the parlor and dining room are the usual mid-nineteenth-century examples of light gray marble with rounded openings, ornamented with keystones, and serpentine shelves. The stair has scrolled brackets of a type more commonly associated with houses of the Federal period. Its railing consists of thin, square balusters and rounded handrail. Filling the house is an admirable accumulation of family furniture,

(See continuation sheet #2)

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 type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Medicine
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The great influence of architectural critic and horticulturist Andrew Jackson Downing on American house design is evident in the scores of villas and cottages scattered across the country that are based on illustrations published in Downing's highly popular books. However, only rarely does there appear such clear-cut primary evidence of Downing's impact on one of his contemporaries as is found with Burgh Westra, a Gothic-style cottage on the banks of the North River in Gloucester County. Preserved in the library there is an early edition (the title page is missing) of Downing's Cottage Residences (first edition 1842), one of the most widely distributed pattern books of its day, in which Downing published fifteen suggested designs for houses in various styles. The book originally belonged to Philip Alexander Taliaferro, the person for whom Burgh Westra was built. Its illustrations clearly inspired Taliaferro, for its flyleaves and margins are filled with his sketches and notes for house plans, dimensions, and details. He settled on "Design III", a cottage in the "Pointed or Tudor Style", as his model apparently because Downing suggested this as a house appropriate for a site on a body of water, and Downing's detailed description of the setting could easily be that of Burgh Westra. Although certain obvious modifications were made, the house is a quite literal copy of the Tudor Gothic dwelling in Cottage Residences.

Philip Taliaferro was born into an old Gloucester County family; he was the second son of Warner Throckmorton Taliaferro and Leah Seddon Taliaferro, sister of James A. Seddon, later the Confederate Secretary of War. The family home was Belle Ville, located down the North River from Burgh Westra. Taliaferro was graduated from the College of William and Mary in the 1840s and then studied medicine at the Medical College of Virginia, the University of Virginia, and Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. He then traveled in Europe for two or three years, visiting hospitals and medical schools in London, Paris, and Dublin. His account ledger, still in the possession of the family, shows that he was back in Gloucester County practicing medicine by 1852.

According to the county land tax records, Burgh Westra was completed by 1851. The property on which it was erected was owned by Philip Taliaferro's father and did not officially come into the doctor's possession until 1871. Construction of the house apparently began while Taliaferro was still in Europe and probably was supervised by his father. Dr. Taliaferro's sketches and notes in his copy of Cottage Residences indicate, however, that the choice of the design was clearly his own.

During the War Between the States, Dr. Taliaferro accompanied his step-brother, William Booth Taliaferro, a general in the Confederate army, to serve with General Thomas Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley. Serving as an aide-de-camp rather than a surgeon, he participated in the battles of Cedar Mountain and Groveton, where General Taliaferro was wounded. Dr. Taliaferro then accompanied the general to Richmond for recuperation. Learning there that Gloucester County, then in the hands of Union troops, was without a
(See continuation sheet #3)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Downing, Andrew Jackson. Cottage Residences. 1842.
Farrar, Emmie Ferguson. Old Virginia Houses, The Mobjack Bay Country. New York, 1955.
Unpublished manuscript in Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission archives.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 9 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A

1	8	3	7	1	3	5	0	4	1	4	2	2	2	0
ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

B

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

C

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

D

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

ORGANIZATION Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission DATE March 1976

STREET & NUMBER 221 Governor Street TELEPHONE 804-786-3144

CITY OR TOWN Richmond STATE Virginia

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE *[Signature]*

TITLE Junius R. Fishburne, Jr., Executive Director DATE APR 20 1976
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

#1

ITEM NUMBER 6

PAGE 1

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

- (2) Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey
1968, 1974 State
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission
221 Governor Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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CONTINUATION SHEET

#2

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 1

7. DESCRIPTION

mostly nineteenth-century, which lends the interior a tasteful and comfortable character suitable for what Downing describes as "the more simple and unostentatious habits of country life."

Burgh Westra is maintained in excellent condition by relatives of the builder who make it their permanent home.

CL

In a just setting of both open and tree-covered land, Burgh Westra is centered on the nine acres comprising the easternmost portion of the present owners' property.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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CONTINUATION SHEET

#3

ITEM NUMBER 8

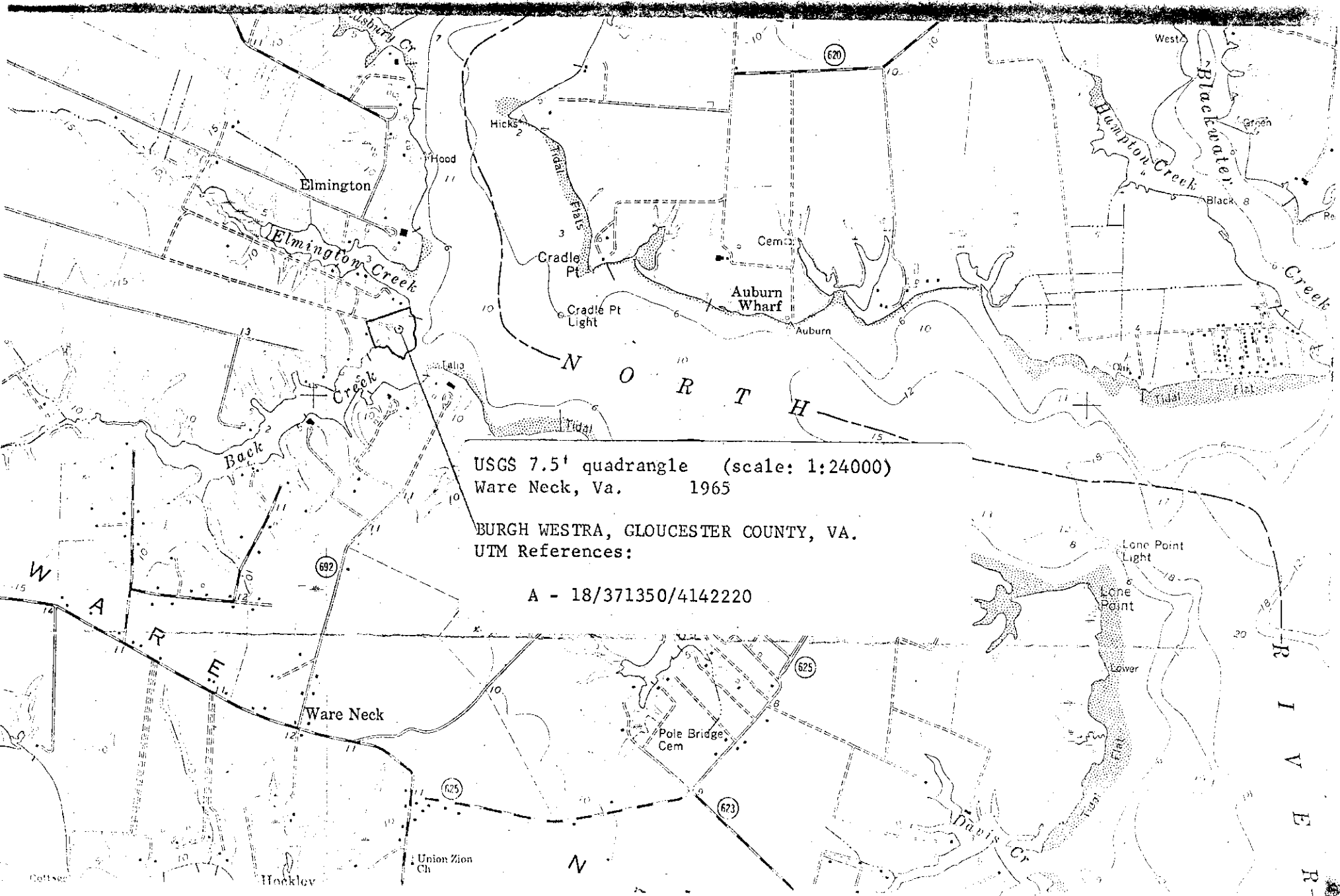
PAGE 1

8. SIGNIFICANCE

doctor, he obtained a special waiver to resume the practice of medicine at his home. He spent the remainder of the war treating his patients, using Burgh Westra as a hospital.

Dr. Taliaferro died childless. He left Burgh Westra to his favorite niece, Susan Taliaferro Wellford Marshall. The property currently is owned by Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Boyd; Mrs. Boyd is the daughter of Susan T. W. Marshall.

CL



USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale: 1:24000)
Ware Neck, Va. 1965

BURGH WESTRA, GLOUCESTER COUNTY, VA.
UTM References:

A - 18/371350/4142220