

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

LISTED ON:  
VLR 03/19/2009  
NRHP 06/08/2009

**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 Idlewild  
other names/site number Downman House: VDHR File No. 111-0151

**2. Location**

street & number 1501 Gateway Boulevard not for publication N/A  
city or town Fredericksburg vicinity N/A  
state Virginia code VA county Fredericksburg (Independent city) code 630 zip code 22401

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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] 4/23/09  
Signature of certifying official Date  
Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official/Title 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  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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>  3  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	buildings
<u>  2  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	sites
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	structures
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	objects
<u>  5  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	Total

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 - quarter    
  Domestic     secondary structure - smokehouse    
  Domestic     secondary structure - dairy  

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:   Vacant/Not in Use   Sub: \_\_\_\_\_  
  Vacant/Not in Use   \_\_\_\_\_  
  Vacant/Not in Use   \_\_\_\_\_  
  Vacant/Not in Use   \_\_\_\_\_

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

  GOTHIC REVIVAL    
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation   BRICK    
 roof   SLATE    
 walls   BRICK    
 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)

- X 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)

MILITARY

Period of Significance 1862-1863

Significant Dates 1863

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

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Tongue, James (builder)

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

See attached continuation sheets: Section 8, page 4 through Section 8, page 9.

9. Major Bibliographical References

(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**

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

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia

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**10. Geographical Data**  
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**Acreage of Property** 6.624 acres

**UTM References** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18 280860E	4240830N	2			3			4		

X 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.)

See Attached

=====  
**11. Form Prepared By**  
=====

name/title Erik F. Nelson, Senior Planner  
 organization City of Fredericksburg date November 21, 2008  
 street & number 715 Princess Anne Street telephone 540 372-1179  
 city or town Fredericksburg state VA zip code 22401

=====  
**Additional Documentation**  
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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 City of Fredericksburg, Phillip Rodenberg, City Manager  
 street & number 715 Princess Anne Street telephone 540 372-1010  
 city or town Fredericksburg state VA zip code 22401

**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.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 36 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 National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

Section   7   Page   1  

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**SUMMARY DESCRIPTION**

Idlewild, located in the City of Fredericksburg, Virginia, was originally a two-and-one-half-story, Gothic Revival-style, brick dwelling constructed on an English basement in 1859 by builder James Tongue. A fire in April 2003 destroyed most of the interior and collapsed the roof. The house ruins sit on a hilltop, 2,600 feet south of Plank Road (modern State Route 3) and the dwelling was visible from that roadway during its period of significance, 1859-1865. The northbound lane of Interstate-95 is situated 950 feet to the west of the house. The dwelling had an irregular "T" shape, with a center passage. The walls are brick and remain intact; they are currently braced with steel beams and wooden supports. The steeply pitched gable roof was covered in slate before the fire. The debris from the fire has been removed from the interior of the building and screened for any usable components. Although fire damaged, the house remains a distinctive site on a prominent hilltop. There are three contributing brick dependencies, located to the rear of the house ruins, and a pet cemetery located to the southwest, a contributing site.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION**

Idlewild has a three-bay front elevation. The center hall extended back to the kitchen, at the rear of the house and included the main stairway. A one-story veranda extends across the full width of the front elevation and wraps around both sides of the house. The roof has a side-gable form, with a steep cross gable at the front elevation. There are two end chimneys and one central chimney, which served fireplaces in each principal room as well as two rooms in the finished attic. The center portion of the building includes a side entrance, which provided access to the kitchen and dining area on the first level, a servant's quarter on the second level, with access to a nursery, and to the basement.

Idlewild has a brick English basement with brick interior walls for the basement rooms. The English basement extends the entire width and length of the house. There is a window in each of the basement rooms, with a center front window in the basement hallway. The foundation was not structurally damaged by the 2003 fire.

The exterior walls are brick, laid in a Flemish-bond pattern on the facade. The brick pattern on the sides and rear elevations are five-course American bond. The wall thickness is three bricks deep. Some bricks have fallen as a result of fire-damaged wooden headers in window and door openings, but the openings have been secured with wooden braces. The walls themselves have been braced with steel beams on both the interior and exterior. The three brick chimneys remain intact and some of the chimney pots are still in place.

There are a variety of windows at Idlewild. The first floor includes full length, walk-through windows, with six-over-nine glazing along the veranda (one of which survived the fire). There were wood shutters on these window interiors. Pointed-arched windows are located in the upper gable ends at the northwest, southeast, and southwest elevations, and remain intact. Six-over-six, double-hung-sash, wood windows

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 2

---

with ornamental copper hoods were located at the second floor of the northwest and southeast gable ends. The second level at the front gable also had clustered arch windows with a door that led from the upstairs hallway onto a small balcony. The second-floor windows in the southwest portion of the house (kitchen and service hall) had six-over-six, double-hung-sash, wood windows with rectilinear window crown. None of the second-floor or upper-level windows remain, but portions of the decorative surrounds are present.

The exterior door openings are intact, but have fire-damaged frames. The front entrance door was a single door that had the appearance of a double door. The front door also included sidelights and a transom with stained-glass panels.

The gable ends at the front, northwest, and southeast elevations included decorative vergeboards and finials, no longer intact, consisting of scroll-cut trefoil arches with leaf-shaped cutouts, alternating with paired, half-size trefoil arches. Because of different roof pitches, there was a slight variation in how the elaborate finials tied in with the vergeboards at the end gables and those at the front cross gable.

The one-story, full-width veranda had flattened pointed arches and an ornamental railing. Most of the porch columns and some of the porch roof remain intact. The house experienced internal improvements (electricity and plumbing), but had no exterior additions or alterations.

### **Current Condition**

Although heavily damaged by the 2003 fire, Idlewild remains a good example of American Gothic Revival architecture. There is also sufficient architectural fabric on hand and many drawings and photographs on file to allow a detailed restoration to occur. The building has been stabilized with steel beams that will provide lateral stability until the interior framing can be reestablished. Further, the window openings and surviving floors are supported with wood posts and beams. The building interior has been cleared of debris, which was screened for usable components.

The engineering firm of Froehling and Robertson, Inc. has analyzed a brick from a heavily fire-damaged wall and determined that its strength was not compromised by the fire. This firm also analyzed the mortar that had been subjected to heat from the fire. The lime in the mortar of the interior walls was found to be compromised and these joints will require repointing. The mortar in the exterior walls, however, was not affected by fire exposure.

Most of the interior spaces were destroyed by the 2003 fire, but two sections of the house retain some integrity. The northwest room on the first floor retains its floor, a portion of the ceiling, one intact window, and an intact interior door. Much of the interior trim also survives and could be used to guide restoration of the other sections of the house. The basement room below this intact room is also undamaged. The rear or northwestern portion of the house also retains a semblance of its original layout. The basement room retains its closets, closet doors, brick floor, and first-floor joists.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

Section   7   Page   3  

---

The wraparound veranda remains mostly intact. The porch floor and roof near the front door are fire damaged and the northern side will require reconstruction of the columns and roof. This section had been pulled down by vandals before the fire and the hanging roof actually protected one of the windows from the fire. The decorative railing also needs to be replicated, using surviving components as a template. The stone piers that support the porch have failing mortar, and the piers should be taken apart and rebuilt with the same stone.

Much of the Idlewild farm has been developed as a residential subdivision, but the historic house is still a prominent part of the historic landscape. It is the last surviving Civil War dwelling on the high ground west of Fredericksburg. Because it sits on an intact rise, the building retains its integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association.

**Dependencies**

There are three dependencies at the rear of the main building. They are all constructed of brick, laid in a common bond, with slate roofs. Decorative vergeboards are the same on all three buildings and consist of alternating point and circle design. Although they are in various states of repair, none of these structures was damaged by the 2003 fire that claimed the interior of the main dwelling.

The largest dependency is a two-story building, with three bays and an end-gable roof which may have been used as a servants' quarters. This building has a center passage, but the door on the rear elevation is not centered. There is an interior chimney on each gable end. The building is relatively intact, with a few bricks missing from around the front door and a few missing bricks on the top of one chimney. The mortar is deteriorated overall and the mortar joints need to be repointed. The vergeboards extend along the rakes and the soffits. The building appears to have been renovated with a 1950s kitchen and bath.

The second dependency is a square smokehouse. The pyramidal roof is capped by a copper-flashed apex. There is only one door and no windows. The door itself is missing. The vergeboards are intact. The bricks in one corner of the building are collapsing, but the bricks are on hand to rebuild the corner.

The third dependency appears to be a dairy. It is a one-and-one-half-story building, with an end-gable roof, no chimneys, and vergeboard trim. There are two exterior doors and an interior wall, without openings, separating the two rooms within the building. The larger room has a ladder access to the second floor, which extends the full size of the building. The south exterior wall is collapsing and is currently braced. There are also missing bricks on the east elevation.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

Section   8   Page   4  

---

**Pet Cemetery**

Southwest of the house ruins is an open area surrounded by boxwoods which contains the gravesites of the Downman Family's dogs, as referenced in family papers. William Yates Downman and his wife Mary were the first owners of Idlewild.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

Section   8   Page   5  

---

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The ruins of Idlewild, once an impressive Gothic Revival dwelling, still stands on a prominent hilltop in the City of Fredericksburg. Constructed by builder James Tongue for William Yates Downman and his wife Mary, Idlewild was the center of a 222-acre farm under cultivation by slaves during the Civil War. In April 2003, a fire destroyed much of the interior of the dwelling as well as the slate roof, but the walls remain intact, including the English basement. The now ruinous site is still a prominent landmark in the City of Fredericksburg. Three contributing brick domestic outbuildings with slate roofs, believed to have been constructed in the same period as the dwelling, remain intact and their construction reveals the prosperity of the Downman family. The Downman Family's pet cemetery, a contributing site, is located southwest of the house ruins. The property's period of significance extends from 1862-1863, the date of its association with the Chancellorsville campaign. Idlewild is locally significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of Military history for its importance during the Civil War. As the scene of battle action during the Chancellorsville campaign, Idlewild became a battlefield landmark, noted by troops on both sides. It also served as the headquarters for Confederate General Robert E. Lee on May 4-5, 1863 at the conclusion of the campaign.

**DETAILED HISTORY**

William Yates Downman constructed his house, known as Idlewild, in 1859. Its Gothic Revival architecture was a popular style in the mid-nineteenth century, but more prevalent in New England than in the South. William Downman, however, had been educated at Princeton, in the late 1840s, and would have seen examples of these types of buildings. Further, a popular writer named Nathaniel Parker Willis wrote a book called *Out-doors at Idlewild, or the Shaping of a Home on the Banks of the Hudson*, which was published in 1855 and may also have been an inspiration for the new home in central Virginia. The related farm had 100 acres in cultivation, but included a total of 222 acres. At the time, William Downman owned seven slaves. The Downman farm remained in agricultural use after the Civil War and Idlewild remained in the Downman family until the death of the Reverend John Yates Downman in 1949. The next 30 years saw the house and outbuildings used as a general residence and tenant house, but the house became vacant in 1989 and burned in 2003.<sup>1</sup>

**African-American Slave Associations:** The 1860 Census noted that William Downman owned seven slaves. The enumeration carefully recorded a 43-year-old black female, a 40-year-old mulatto male, a 40-year-old black male, a 40-year-old black female, a 25-year-old mulatto female, a 15-year-old mulatto male, and an 11-year-old black female.<sup>2</sup> Their lodgings are believed to be two of the brick dependencies currently located on the site.

**Established Virginia family:** William Yates Downman, born in January 1830, was descended from a William Downman who is on record in 1649 as owning land in Northumberland County (which later became Lancaster County). Rawleigh Downman, the grandson of this first William Downman, married a Colonel William Ball's granddaughter, Margaret. Margaret was the first cousin of Mary Ball, who would become the mother of George Washington. The Ball and Downman families would intermarry often.<sup>3</sup>

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

Section   8   Page   6  

---

Joseph Henry Downman, born June 23, 1805, married Sophia Elizabeth Chinn, daughter of John Yates and Sarah Carter Chinn. Their son was William Yates Downman, who would build Idlewild. William Yates Downman was educated at Princeton in the late 1840s and married Mary Ann Hayes in Fredericksburg, in 1852. They initially lived with the bride's mother, in Fredericksburg, where their first three children were born. An infant son lived only a few days and is buried in the graveyard at St. George's Church. A fourth child, a son, was born at the ancestral home called Belle Isle, in Lancaster County.<sup>4</sup>

**Confederate Military Service:** William Yates Downman enlisted in the Fredericksburg Artillery on March 19, 1862. Like his father, however, Downman was of frail health and he was discharged from the Confederate army on June 5 of the same year. He would not survive the war, dying of typhoid at Idlewild in December 1864.<sup>5</sup>

Although William Downman's military service was short, the Downman farm helped to support the Confederate war effort. Between January 27, 1862 and October 1, 1863, Confederate troops obtained at least \$2,400 worth of supplies there. The various requisitions included pasturage consumed in June 1863 by 44 animals that belonged to the 14<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry. In March 1862, Confederate cavalry drilled in Downman's fields. For a brief period in May 1862, Federal troops occupied the farm and Union General Marsena Patrick established his headquarters in the house while the main armies campaigned near Richmond.<sup>6</sup>

**Civil War Battlefield:** During the Civil War, Idlewild became a prominent landmark on May 4, 1863, during battle action related to the Chancellorsville campaign. The property was initially occupied that day by Federal troops of the Union Sixth Corps. Artillery posted near the house fired at Confederate units to the south and received Confederate counter-battery fire. Late in the afternoon, a Confederate attack swept past the house and that evening Confederate General Robert E. Lee used the house as his headquarters.

On April 27, 1863, Union General Joseph T. Hooker sent three powerful corps on a wide march that crossed both the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers, putting the Federals on the same side of these river barriers as the Confederate army. On April 30, Hooker joined his gathering force at a crossroads known as Chancellorsville. The Confederate commander, Robert E. Lee, moved his troops out of Fredericksburg to confront the Federals west of town. He left a small force behind in Fredericksburg to watch a large Union force that had also remained while the rest of the Union army marched west.<sup>7</sup>

On May 1, the two main armies collided near Chancellorsville and by May 3 the Confederate army had forced Hooker back to a defensive position, with his back to the Rappahannock River. The Federal troops in Fredericksburg, consisting of the Union Sixth Corps commanded by Major General John Sedgwick, had closed in on the Confederate formations left behind under the command of Confederate General Jubal

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

Section   8   Page   7  

---

Early. On May 3, Sedgwick's Federal force attacked a thin Southern line where the Union army had been resoundingly defeated by Lee's entire force in December 1862. Sedgwick managed to punch through the Confederate line, in what became known as the second battle of Fredericksburg.<sup>8</sup>

Once on the heights beyond town, Sedgwick's corps marched west, toward Chancellorsville. A Confederate force under Cadmus Wilcox, however, left its post at Banks Ford and delayed the Union march through a series of rear guard actions along the Plank Road (State Route 3). The time gained allowed troops detached from the Chancellorsville front to march east and take up a defensive position on a ridge near Salem Church. As Sedgwick marched west, toward the arriving Confederates, Jubal Early's force reoccupied the Fredericksburg heights, closing off the Sixth Corps from its pontoon bridges south of town.<sup>9</sup>

Sedgwick advanced against the Confederates at Salem Church, but could not break through. The Federals subsequently moved back toward Fredericksburg and took up a defensive position on the high ground west of town. Union engineers had begun to lay down a new pontoon crossing to reestablish the Federal line of communications. Union General Albion P. Howe had advanced along Hazel Run on the enemy's right flank, and captured several Confederate guns. That evening, Federal troops took up positions in and around Idlewild.<sup>10</sup>

On the morning of May 4, 1863, the Federal army occupied two strongholds. Hooker, with 80,000 troops, was entrenched just north of the Chancellorsville crossroads, his line of communications extending across United States Ford. Sedgwick, with 19,000 men, held a series of hills just west of Fredericksburg, his line of communications crossing the Rappahannock River in the Banks Ford area, at a site actually called Scott's Ferry. Experience suggested that the Confederates would try to concentrate against Sedgwick's smaller force. Taking advantage of Hooker's inactivity, Lee began to detach troops and send them toward Fredericksburg. Jubal Early, still operating independently, probed the Federal line, but was thrown back. The Union corps may have been isolated, but it was well posted and dangerous.<sup>11</sup>

The Federal line also straddled the Plank Road (State Route 3), with Union General Albion Howe pushing his division as far south as Idlewild and its large plateau, nicely cleared for cultivation and affording an excellent field of fire. Lee arrived to direct the impending Confederate attack because both of his trusted subordinates were absent. James Longstreet and his corps were still in Suffolk, too far away to be useful. Stonewall Jackson had been severely wounded on the night of May 2 and had been evacuated.

Lee saw that preparations were incomplete and a proper reconnaissance had not been conducted. He also wanted three more brigades in place, in addition to the five that were already deployed. Because the Union line cut the Plank Road, the arriving Southerners used an unfinished railway bed along Hazel Run, to the south of Idlewild, to move across the rough countryside. The newly arrived troops were from Confederate General Richard H. Anderson's division and included A.R. Wright's Georgia brigade, Carnot Posey's Mississippi brigade, and E.A. Perry's Florida brigade. When the attack came, later that afternoon, Wright's Georgians would move through the Downman property against Howe's Federals.<sup>12</sup>

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild**

**City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

**Section   8   Page   8**

=====

As both armies prepared for battle, William Downman and his family fled their home. A Union soldier remembered the scene:

In the morning, we found a little brook near our lines; it was a welcome friend; it offered us water for coffee and for a much-needed wash and its bank were speedily lined with chaffing, gossiping, half-dressed soldiers. But the coffee-pots had scarce begun to send their grateful fragrance through the lines when .... From the hills in our rear; which we had victoriously assaulted yesterday, came screaming shells from an enemy's battery. Our breakfast was cut short.... Soon the lines were formed. A pleasant Virginia mansion stood on rising ground near by, and the pretty lawn in front offered a good position which was speedily taken by one of our batteries, the horses ruthlessly trampling down the flowers and shrubbery; and there before that peaceful home the war-dogs began their baying answer to the hostile shots. Meantime the regiments were in motion and as we crossed a field below the house its fleeing occupants went by us. I was near enough to see them closely: an intelligent-looking man with his fair, pale wife and two little children. They were friends of our foes, but every heart ached for them and we let them pass in respectful silence. I noticed that the man's face bore the same set, despairing expression that I had seen the day before in the faces of the wounded men.<sup>13</sup>

The Confederate battery firing at the Federals was Captain Archibald Graham's First Rockbridge Artillery. The Southern gunners dueled with the Federal battery that had taken position on the Downman lawn. Colonel Richard S. Andrews, Graham's superior officer, described the action:

...[A] Battery placed on the right and left of Downman's houses opened upon Graham, their shell, with few exceptions, failing to reach us, whilst his twenty pds. Parrotts reached them very easily and soon silenced their guns, and they limbered up and ran off to the rear. As they had their guns within a few feet of Mr. Downman's house (in fact, as near as the porch would allow them to be placed) it was impossible to avoid damaging his house very seriously.<sup>14</sup>

The Confederates were already tired from the fighting around Chancellorsville and deploying in the rough country west of Fredericksburg took most of the day. It was not until late afternoon when signal guns were fired and the Confederates surged forward. Wright's Georgia brigade swept up from the Hazel Run valley and quickly overran the Federal line at Idlewild. They pressed on. Their objective was to cut off the Federal line of retreat to their pontoons, but they ran into the Federal line along the Plank Road. The Federals held and the Confederate attack slowed. Fighting intensified to the right and the Confederate breakthrough would occur to the north and east.<sup>15</sup>

Confederate General A.R. Wright described how his brigade captured the Downman House that day:

The enemy were in position along the north slope of the ridge upon which Downman's house stands, with a strong line of sharpshooters occupying the crest of the ridge and the

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

Section   8   Page   9  



house and the fencing around Downman’s yard, with heavy batteries on the hills in their rear. At the appointed signal, just before sunset, I moved forward by the right flank around to the right of the hill on which I had formed, and, passing up a ravine came upon the border of the open field in rear of Downman’s house, about 400 yards from it, and here, rapidly forming in line, I charged across the fields, swept by the house, and reached the woods opposite, driving the enemy before me like chaff. Arriving at the skirt of the woods, I halted my command (fearing, if I proceeded further in that direction, I should encounter Wofford’s brigade, which I had been informed would advance in that direction), and sent a messenger to General Anderson informing him of my position, from whom I received instructions to wait in my then position for further orders. During this time the enemy kept up a murderous fire along my whole line, and with considerable effect. I remained in this position until dark, subjected to this murderous fire, without being able to respond to the enemy’s guns.<sup>16</sup>

The Union troops holding this line provided time and cover for Sedgwick to disengage during the night and move his formations to the pontoon bridges across the Rappahannock River. As fighting continued into the night of May 4/5, Lee established his headquarters at Idlewild, which gave him proximity to the ongoing battle action as well as the Plank Road, for critically important communications with the main army still confronting Hooker, near Chancellorsville. By the morning of May 5<sup>th</sup>, Sedgwick had managed to withdraw to the north side of the Rappahannock River, so Lee directed his units to prepare to attack Hooker’s left flank, which was anchored on the Rappahannock River. Before this attack could be launched, however, Hooker had also ordered his force to withdraw and the Chancellorsville campaign came to an end.<sup>17</sup>

**History of Idlewild, From 1865 to Present**

The Civil War owner, William Downman, died of typhoid fever in 1864. His wife Mary continued to reside at Idlewild with her five children. In 1881, the oldest son, John Yates Downman began to purchase the property from his siblings. When he died, in 1949, his older sister Ann inherited the property, but promptly sold it to Nile and Evelyn Straughan. By then, the agricultural use of the property had diminished and the house and its outbuildings were primarily in rental residential use. By 1989, the property was entirely vacant and the destructive fire occurred in 2003. The Downman House is currently braced, in anticipation of eventual restoration.

**Architectural Potential**

Idlewild is an excellent example of Gothic Revival architecture, even in its fire-damaged condition. It is one of only a few representaives of the style in the Fredericksburg area. The brick walls remain substantially intact, including the gable ends and chimneys. In addition, most of the window openings retain their integrity, including the lancet windows in the upper floors. The walls have been braced with steel supports

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

Section   8   Page   10  

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and the openings where window sash and framing are missing have been shored up with new wood bracing. The three-sided veranda is reasonably intact and still exhibits most of its columns, the railings (although without balusters), and the flattened, pointed arches that are so typical of this style of architecture. A few windows are still in place and additional architectural elements are either still intact or available on site or in storage, to guide a sensitive and accurate restoration of the dwelling.

### **Archaeological Potential**

The area around Idlewild is a large plateau that has been subjected to preliminary archaeological testing during the land development process. The area was found to be a multi-component site, with the potential to yield information related to nineteenth-century life, nineteenth-century African-American slaves, and the Civil War. In addition, some prehistoric materials have been found.<sup>18</sup>

A partial Phase II archaeological investigation occurred on the western edge of this area, where a new road was built. There were few artifacts recovered, and most of them had twentieth-century associations. Recovered prehistoric artifacts were recovered in a plow zone, slope wash, or infill horizons and had no contextual integrity as a consequence. Yet, while the resources recovered during this Phase II investigation were considered insignificant, the report notes that the site most likely to yield significant research information is where the Downman House and its three dependencies are located.<sup>19</sup>

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

Section   8   Page  11 

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**ENDNOTES**

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- <sup>1</sup> Noel G. Harrison, *Chancellorsville Battlefield Sites* (Lynchburg, VA: H.E. Howard, Inc., 1990), 187.
- <sup>2</sup> Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, for Spotsylvania County, Virginia. Record Group 29, M-653. National Archives
- <sup>3</sup> Donna L. Chasen, *Preliminary Information Form - Idlewild*, submitted to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, August 26, 2004. Research based on the family papers of Rawleigh William Downman Taylor, II.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> Harrison, *Battlefield Sites*, 187.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, 187, 189.
- <sup>7</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Chancellorsville* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1996), 144-171.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., 253-257.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., 393-394.
- <sup>10</sup> John Bigelow, Jr., *The Campaign of Chancellorsville* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1910), 394.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 406.
- <sup>12</sup> Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 400-403.
- <sup>13</sup> Ira S. Dodd, *The Song of the Rappahannock* (New York, 1898), 24-25.
- <sup>14</sup> Richard S. Andrews, *A Memoir* (Baltimore, 1910), 90.
- <sup>15</sup> Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 414.
- <sup>16</sup> *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series 1, vol. 25, part 1, 869. Report of A.R. Wright, May 13, 1863.
- <sup>17</sup> Bigelow, *Campaign*, 415.
- <sup>18</sup> Thunderbird Archeological Associates, Inc., "Phase I Archeological Investigations of the Idlewild Property, Spotsylvania County, Virginia," 2001.
- <sup>19</sup> Thunderbird Archeological Associates, Inc., "A Partial Phase II Archeological Site Evaluation of Site 44SP381, Spotsylvania County, Virginia," 2003.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

Section   9   Page  12 

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

Section 10 Page 13

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**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**Boundary Description**

The Idlewild property is a portion of a larger farm that has been rezoned for planned residential development. A 2004 recorded deed of subdivision (Plat Book 12, pages 121-131) does not provide a boundary description. Instead, it references a plat with various parcels shown, with metes and bounds noted. The distances between corners are shown on the City of Fredericksburg's tax map 315 (figure 1), and the more specific metes and bounds are shown on the plat (figure 2), both of which are attached.

**Boundary Justification**

The designated boundary encompasses the main dwelling and its outbuildings as well as the open area in front of the house that maintains its historic view toward Plank Road (State Route 3). The open area in front of the house also includes a remnant of the original drive that circled around in front of the building. Since Idlewild was visible from Plank Road on its prominent hilltop during its period of significance, a sufficient amount of open space was included in the property boundary to ensure an integrity of setting. In addition, there is an open area to the southwest of the main house, which is included because it was a cemetery for the Downman dogs. This area is referenced in family papers and is still planted in boxwoods.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Idlewild  
City of Fredericksburg, Virginia**

**Section** PHOTOS/ADDITIONAL MATERIAL **Page** 14

All photographs are common to:

PROPERTY: Idlewild  
LOCATION: City of Fredericksburg, Virginia  
DHR FILE NUMBER: 111-0151  
PHOTOGRAPHER: Erik F. Nelson  
DATE: September 26, 2008  
NEGATIVES STORED: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia

VIEW: Façade of house ruins, looking southwest  
NEGATIVE NO.: 24422:0  
PHOTO: 1 of 8

VIEW: Corner of façade and south elevation, looking west  
NEGATIVE NO.: 24422:1  
PHOTO: 2 of 8

VIEW: Side elevation, looking northwest  
NEGATIVE NO.: 24422:2  
PHOTO: 3 of 8

VIEW: Rear and north elevation, looking east  
NEGATIVE NO.: 24422:15  
PHOTO: 4 of 8

VIEW: Dependency, servants' quarters, looking east  
NEGATIVE NO.: 24422:20  
PHOTO: 5 of 8

VIEW: Dependency, servants' quarters, looking west  
NEGATIVE NO.: 24422:3  
PHOTO: 6 of 8

VIEW: Dependency, dairy, looking west  
NEGATIVE NO.: 24422:4  
PHOTO: 7 of 8

VIEW: Dependency, smokehouse, looking northwest  
NEGATIVE NO.: 24422:9  
PHOTO: 8 of 8

Figure 1. City of Fredericksburg, VA Tax Map 315, showing Idlewild Property as #1501, parcel B.

Figure 2. 2004 Plat of subdivision, village of Idlewild, phase 1, showing Idlewild property as "Downman House".





FREDERICKSBURG US 11 22 M

4241  
17'30"

SALEM CHURCH  
WAVEY VILLAGE  
DHR FILE 10-3-00-01  
UTM REFERENCE  
18/280860E / 4240830N

4239

