

VLR-9/20/88 NRHP 11/19/90

1925

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Col Alto

other names/site number DHL # 117-3

2. Location

street & number Nelson & Spottswood Drive

city, town Lexington

state Virginia

code VA

county/independent city

code 678

zip code 24450

N/A not for publication

N/A vicinity

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private public-local public-State public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s) district site structure object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, and Total.

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official VA Department of Historic Resources

Date 9/29/89

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Single Dwelling
Domestic: Secondary Structures

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Single Dwelling
Domestic: Secondary Structures

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Georgian/Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick
walls Brick

roof Metal
other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

COL ALTO

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Col Alto occupies a seven-acre tract atop a hill on the eastern edge of the old part of Lexington. Originally part of a large plantation, the surrounding lands have been developed with residential and commercial structures over the years. The focal point of the property is a brick, two-story Classical Revival mansion of formal architectural character which has been enlarged enlarged with additions by various owners. The resulting structure thus reflects regional architectural tastes for a period of over a century. The original section, though modified, retains its architectural integrity, preserving the basic original plan and much of its original woodwork. An important later element is the Palladian-style veranda designed by William Lawrance Bottomley. Located on the grounds are formal gardens and several outbuildings including a small barn, a log cabin, a modern, non-contributing single-family residence, and an arcaded garage. The present layout of the grounds was designed by landscape architect Rose Greely in the 1930s, incorporating many early trees in the park-like front lawn.

ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

Built in 1827, the original portion of the Col Alto residence is a two-story, double-pile, three-bay structure laid in Flemish bond on the principal elevations. It is crowned by a full entablature with a dentil molding, above which is a hipped roof. The architectural style of the house is formal Georgian in character but with somewhat freely interpreted classical detailing typical of fine houses in the Valley of Virginia dating from the early decades of the 19th century. The highlight of the facade is a handsome three-part fanlight doorway with intricate tracery and Ionic colonettes. The elegant Ionic porch sheltering the entrance is a 1934 reworking of the original porch. The original columns were reused but raised on short pedestals. Also the original straight-fronted roof was replaced with one with an entablature of similar character but with concave corners. As part of the same alterations the second-floor window sash on either side of the center bay was replaced with French doors; the original frames were retained.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture _____
Politics _____

Period of Significance

1827-1939 _____

Significant Dates

1827 _____

c1930 _____

Cultural Affiliation

N/A _____

Significant Person

James McDowell, Henry St. George Tucker,
Samuel Reid McDowell

Architect/Builder

Wm. Lawrence Bottomley _____

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

Col Alto's stately Classical Revival house with its numerous additions and handsome grounds is one of several important early residences surrounding the historic community of Lexington and is significant as an example of the type of home favored by the region's leading families for over a century. The house is also significant for its associations with two of the area's most prominent citizens: James McDowell (1795-1851), for whom the house was built, and Henry St. George Tucker (1853-1932), whose family has a long tradition of distinguished service to the state and nation. Completed in 1827, Col Alto's design is attributed to the local amateur architect, Samuel Reid McDowell, McDowell's first-cousin. James McDowell represented Rockbridge County in the Virginia General Assembly and served as governor from 1847 to 1849. In 1898 Col Alto was purchased by Henry St. George Tucker, dean of the Washington and Lee University law school and later acting president of the university. From 1921 until his death he represented the district in Congress. Tucker's daughter, Rosa Tucker Mason, who purchased Col Alto in 1932, commissioned the prominent New York architect William Lawrence Bottomley to design one of the most striking features of the house, a Palladian-style veranda which well illustrates Bottomley's sure grasp of the Classical vocabulary. The present layout of Col Alto's grounds, an important example of 1930s taste in landscape design, is the work of Rose Greely, the first student to receive a certificate in architecture from the Cambridge School, in 1919.

JUSTIFICATION OF CRITERIA

Col Alto is qualified for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria B and C. It is eligible under Criterion B because of its association with two men of significance in state and national politics: governor and congressman James McDowell and congressman Henry St. George Tucker. Under Criterion C Col Alto is eligible because it represents a significant antebellum Virginia house type and because it is

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

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

Specify repository:

VA Division of Historic Landmarks
Richmond, VA

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property approximately seven acres

UTM References

A 17 637460 4182390
Zone Easting Northing

B _____
Zone Easting Northing

C _____

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at the southern corner of the intersection of Nelson and Spottswood Streets; proceed southeast 600 feet along the southern right-of-way of Nelson Street; then proceed southwest 600 feet along the northern right-of-way of the entrance drive to Stonewall Jackson Hospital, then proceed northwest 600 feet to Spottswood street, then proceed along the southern right-of-way of Spottswood Street to the point of beginning.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated acreage includes the house, outbuildings and gardens historically associated with Col Alto that retain integrity.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Calder Loth and John Salmon
organization VA Division of Historic Landmarks date August 1988
street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3143
city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23219

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The first major additions to the house were a large three-part or "Scottish" dormer to the roof, a square stair tower on the rear and a wing containing a dining room, both added before 1877. Further additions were made to the rear in 1898 and 1910, mostly containing service areas. In the early 1930s, the then owner, Rosa Tucker Mason, engaged the prominent New York architect, William Lawrence Bottomley to make further additions and modernizations. Bottomley added more service areas to the rear and dressed up two projections on the south side with pediments. The front porch and second-story windows were modified as noted above. Bottomley also removed the top of the stair tower and a large, mid-19th-century, three-bay dormer was taken off front slope of the roof. Although interesting, the tower and dormer were thought by Bottomley not to be in keeping with the classical character of the house. The most conspicuous of Bottomley's additions is a spacious, architecturally dramatic veranda which replaced a 1910 wooden porch on the north side. The veranda is pure Palladian in concept, consisting of three arches supported on paired brick columns. Circular openings above the columns add to the Palladian effect. The whole piece is unusually sophisticated and an important element of the historic fabric of the house.

The interior of the original portion of the house consists of a large entrance hall, somewhat off center so that the room on the south side is smaller than that on the north. Behind the entrance hall, in a passage framed by an arched opening, was originally located the stair. This was removed when the rear stair tower was added. The stair there continues to serve as the main stair and winds in a gentle elliptical curve to the second story. The two large rooms to the north of the entrance hall are treated as double parlors with a handsome fan-light arched opening between them. The opening retains original wide doors. Most of the original mantels throughout the oldest section are in place and are typical of the region being somewhat boldly provincial interpretations of sophisticated Federal mantels. The double-parlor mantels have heavy scrolled consoles above columns. The mantel in the small room to the south of the entrance has a six carved leaves in a radiating pattern in the central patera. The doorways and window frames on the first floor have turned corner blocks and symmetrical architrave trim. The second-floor doorways and window frames have mitered frames. The various rooms in the additions are mostly treated with Federal-revival type woodwork. The paneled chimneypiece in the present dining room was added by Rosa Tucker Mason and may have been salvaged from an early house in the area. The service areas generally retain the flavor of the 1930s and '40s. Although the house stood neglected for a number of years, it underwent a general renovation in 1987-88 and is in excellent condition.

Existing buildings on the the grounds include a log cabin of uncertain age but probably older than the main house. It was used in the past as a servant's house but is currently a rental unit. The small wood-frame barn has likewise been converted to a residential rental unit. A ca. 1955

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cottage of undistinguished character is between the barn and the garage. The garage consists of a four-bay arcaded front designed by Bottomley. Other early outbuildings included a corn crib, stable and carriage house, and ice house all removed in the 1930s.

The present appearance of the grounds is largely the result of the work of a landscape architect, Rose Greely, the first student to receive a certificate in architecture from the Cambridge School. Employed by Rosa Tucker Mason in the 1930s, Miss Greely created the present axial entrance to the house from Spottswood Drive, replacing the original side entrance. The maples lining the Drive and the circle of boxwood at the end were part of the design. Elaborate formal gardens were laid out to the south of the house. The gardens have mostly disappeared but their outlines can be detected in the large boxwood bushes. The basic informality of the lawn to the west and north of the house was retained, preserving some large old trees.

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associated with William Lawrence Bottomley, an individual important in the history of American architecture.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The tract of land upon which Col Alto was constructed was purchased by James McDowell, Sr. (the father of Governor James McDowell), from the heirs of John Hoffman on 13 August 1819.¹ The tract, which contained 328 acres, may have included the log cabin still standing there; at any rate, the structures on the property were valued at only \$100 until 1828, when their value increased to \$1,597.45.² This indicates that the original part of the present structure was completed in 1827, the year that James McDowell, Sr., made a gift of the property to his son, James McDowell, Jr.³

The younger McDowell was born in Rockbridge County in 1796. Educated at nearby Washington College and at Princeton, he settled for a time in Kentucky but returned to his native county in the early 1820s. He served in the House of Delegates of the Virginia General Assembly during the sessions of 1830 through 1834 and 1838.⁴ Throughout his legislative career, McDowell exhibited a strong interest in internal improvements; he proposed that the James River and Kanawha Canal be terminated and a railroad constructed from that point to the Ohio River. During the General Assembly session of 1831-1832, which followed Nat Turner's Rebellion in Southampton County, McDowell was one of Governor John Floyd's lieutenants who led the fight for abolition. McDowell gave what is considered one of his finest speeches during the debate, in which he "maintained that slavery was a cause of national dissension, that separation could not be peaceful, and that the separate existence of the slave states would be disastrous to their own welfare."⁵

McDowell was elected governor of Virginia⁶ in 1842, took office on 5 January 1843, and served until 1 January 1846.⁶ During his tenure he continued to promote internal improvements; he also was the first Virginia governor to ban wine from official receptions.

Shortly after his term expired, McDowell was elected as a Democrat to the United States Congress, in which he served during the sessions from 1846 to 1851. When the Mexican War began he supported it and advocated the creation of the rank of lieutenant general to command the United States army, believing that the position would go to his brother-in-law, Thomas Hart Benton. This act of favoritism resulted in McDowell's defeat when he campaigned for the Senate in 1847. He was, however, returned to the House by his constituents. Known as an eloquent orator, McDowell spoke effectively against the Wilmot Proviso on two occasions. During his congressional career he suffered from poor health and twice suffered strokes. He died on 24 August 1851 at Col Alto.

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After McDowell's death the property changed hands several times. Among the subsequent owners were a minister, a professor of mathematics at Virginia Military Institute, and a New Orleans judge. On 15 October 1898 Col Alto was sold to Henry St. George Tucker.

Tucker was a member of a family with a long history of distinguished public service in Virginia. His father had been a member of Congress and a professor of law at Washington and Lee University; his grandfather had been a member of Congress; and his great-grandfather had been a professor of law at the College of William and Mary.

Henry St. George Tucker was born on 5 April 1853 at his father's home near Lexington. He was educated at Washington and Lee University and began his career as a lawyer in 1876. He was elected to Congress as a Democrat and served two long tenures, from 1889 to 1897 and from 1922 to 1932, as a Democrat. In 1897 he was appointed professor of constitutional and international law and equity at Washington and Lee University, succeeding his father in that position. Between 1899 and 1902 he served as dean of the law school; he also served as the acting president of the university from 1900 to 1902. He resigned in 1902 to become dean of the schools of jurisprudence, law, politics, and diplomacy at Columbia University (now George Washington University), in Washington, D.C. He also served as president of the American Bar Association in 1904 and 1905, when President Theodore Roosevelt appointed him president of the Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition.¹⁰ He and his family resided in Norfolk until the exposition ended in 1907.¹¹

During his terms as congressman, Tucker was "regarded as one of the most ardent exponents of States rights and as one of the zealous defenders of the laissez-faire interpretation of the Constitution in Congress. . . . [He] was opposed generally to the social and economic legislation of that period. . . . [He once said] 'When the power of the Government can be used to settle the question of competition in commercial life, the act becomes tyranny.'"¹²

A conservative and wealthy man, Tucker also was religious and a practitioner of philanthropy at the local level. He served as an elder in the Lexington Presbyterian Church. Among his philanthropic contributions to Lexington was the purchase of a house for use as a nurses' residence by the Stonewall Jackson Memorial Hospital.¹³

Tucker contracted influenza during his last term in Congress in 1932. He returned to Col Alto, where he gradually declined in health until he died on 23 July 1932. He willed Col Alto to his six children; on 26 November 1932 his eldest daughter, Rosa Tucker Mason, purchased her siblings' shares and made the property her home for the next twenty-eight years.¹⁴

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ENDNOTES

1. Rockbridge County, Deed Book L, 1817-1819, Reel 6, pp. 520-523, Archives Branch, Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Va.
2. John F. Pankow, "Col Alto," student paper, University of Virginia, 1986, p. 2; Cary A. Schneider, "'Col Alto': A Study of the Architecture and a Look at the Owners of one of Lexington's Finest Homes," student paper, University of Virginia, 1974, p. 5.
3. Pankow, 3.
4. Cynthia Leonard Miller, comp., The General Assembly of Virginia, July 30, 1619-January 11, 1978: A Bicentennial Register of Members (Richmond: Published for the General Assembly of Virginia by the Virginia State Library, 1978), 355-374, 384-386.
5. Allan Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928-1937), 12:30.
6. Emily J. Salmon, ed., A Hornbook of Virginia History, 3d ed. (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1983), 79.
7. DAB, 12:31.
8. Schneider, 27-31.
9. Ibid., 32.
10. Ibid., 32-34.
11. Pankow, 26.
12. Quoted by Pankow from the Congressional Record, 67 Congress, 2nd Session.
13. Pankow, 29-30.
14. Ibid., 30-31.

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Primary Sources

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Secondary Sources

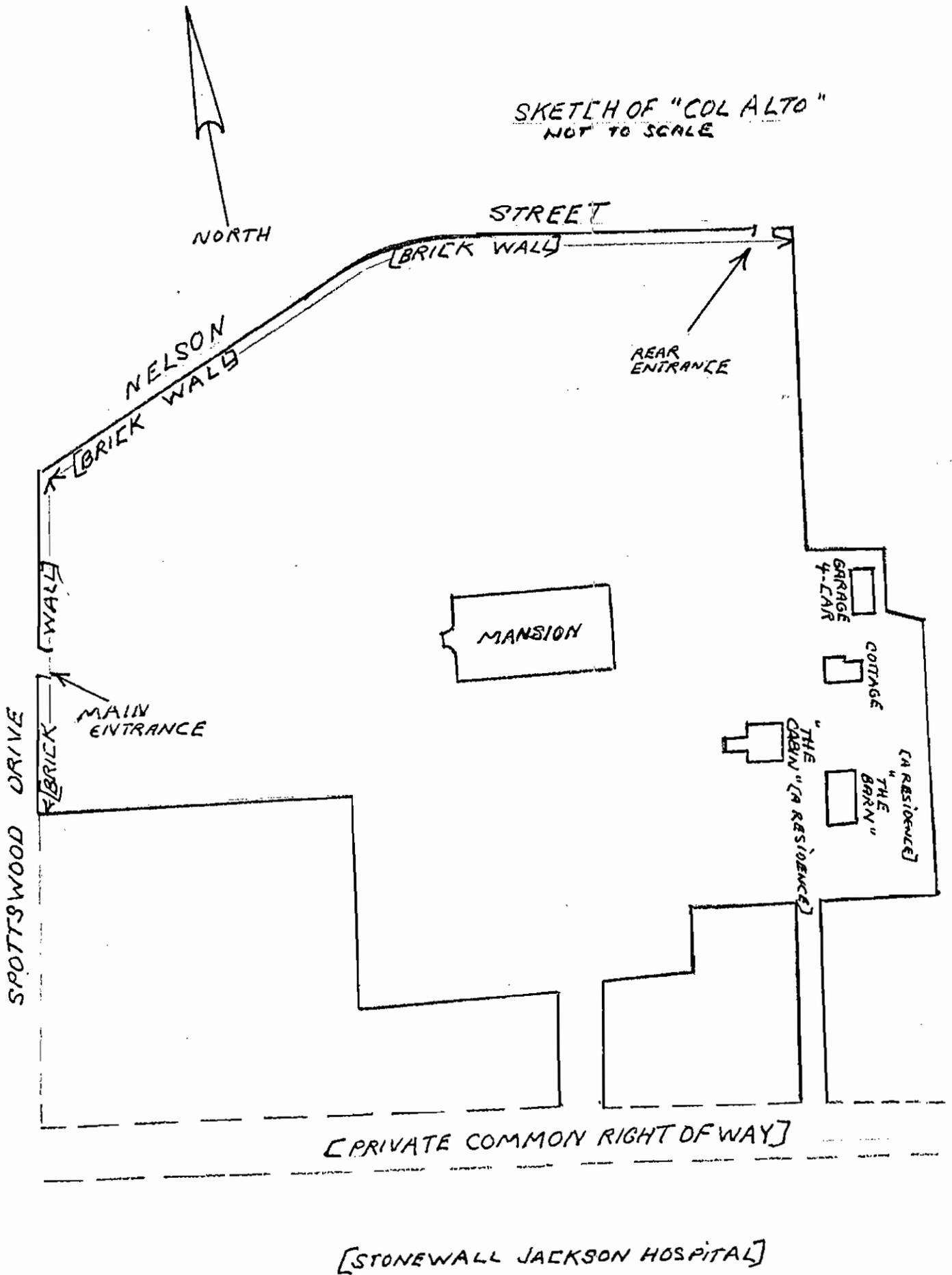
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20 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928-1937.

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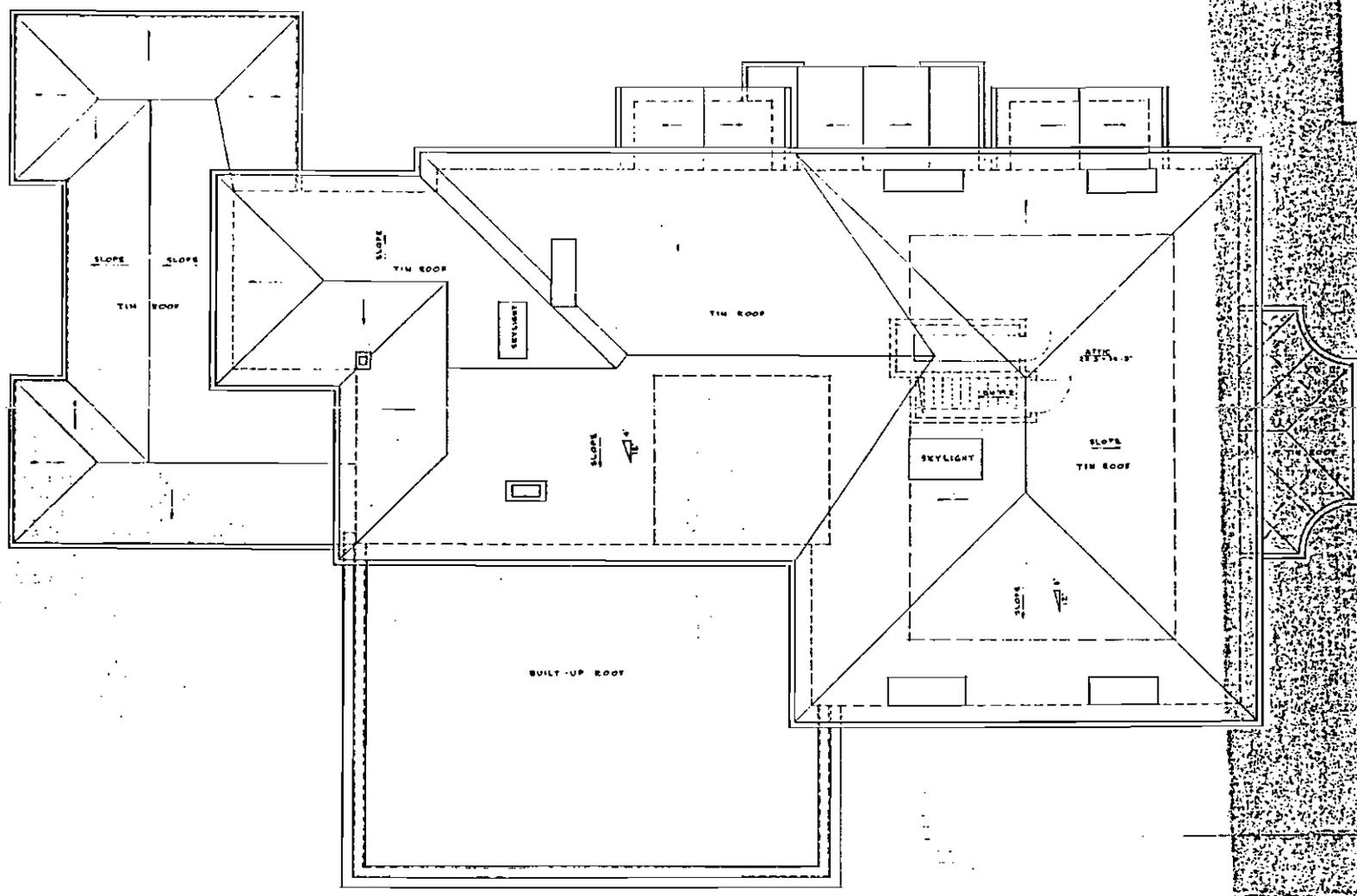
Salmon, Emily J., ed. A Hornbook of Virginia History. 3d ed. Richmond:
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Schneider, Cary A. "'Col Alto': A Study of the Architecture and a Look
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University of Virginia, 1974.



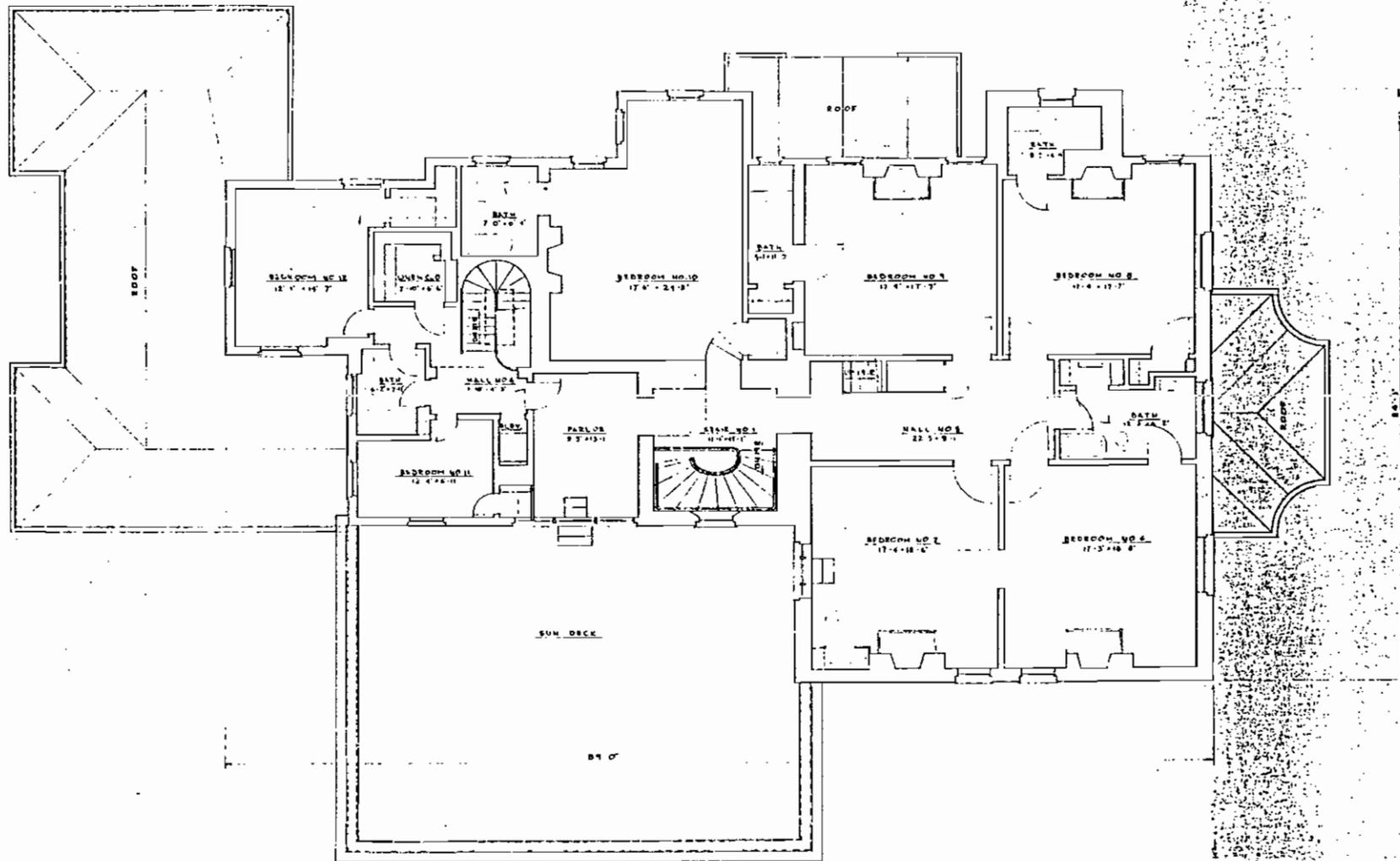
UCI 3

COL ALTO, LEXINGTON, VA



ROOF PLAN
1/2" = 1'-0"

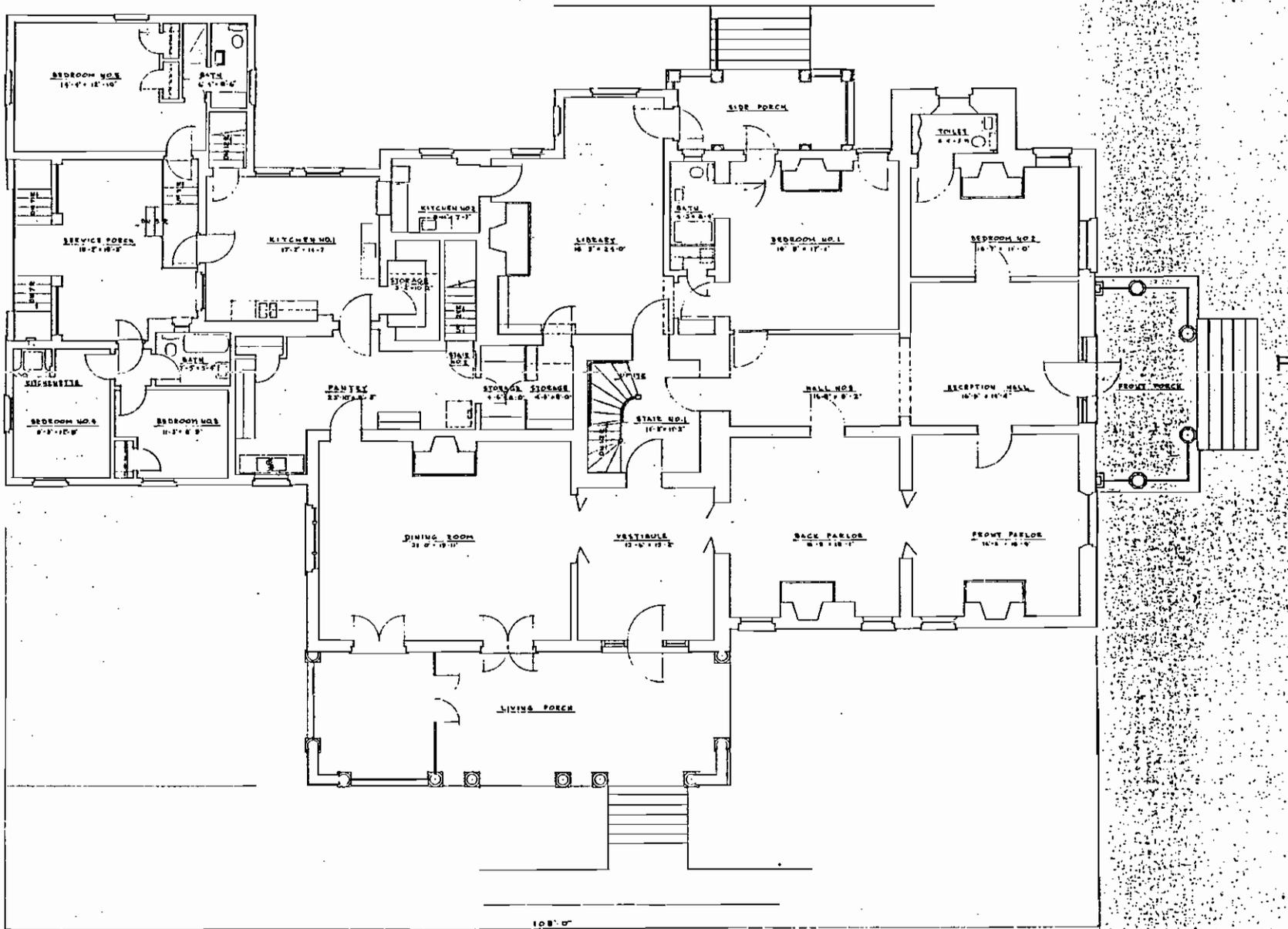
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COL ALTO		LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA	
WASHINGTON & LEE UNIVERSITY		ROOF PLAN	
LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA		A-4	



SECOND FLOOR PLAN
1/4" = 1'-0"

MEASURED DRAWINGS		CLARK, NEESER & OWEN - ARCHITECTS	
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WASHINGTON & LEE UNIVERSITY		SECOND FLOOR PLAN	
LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA		A-	

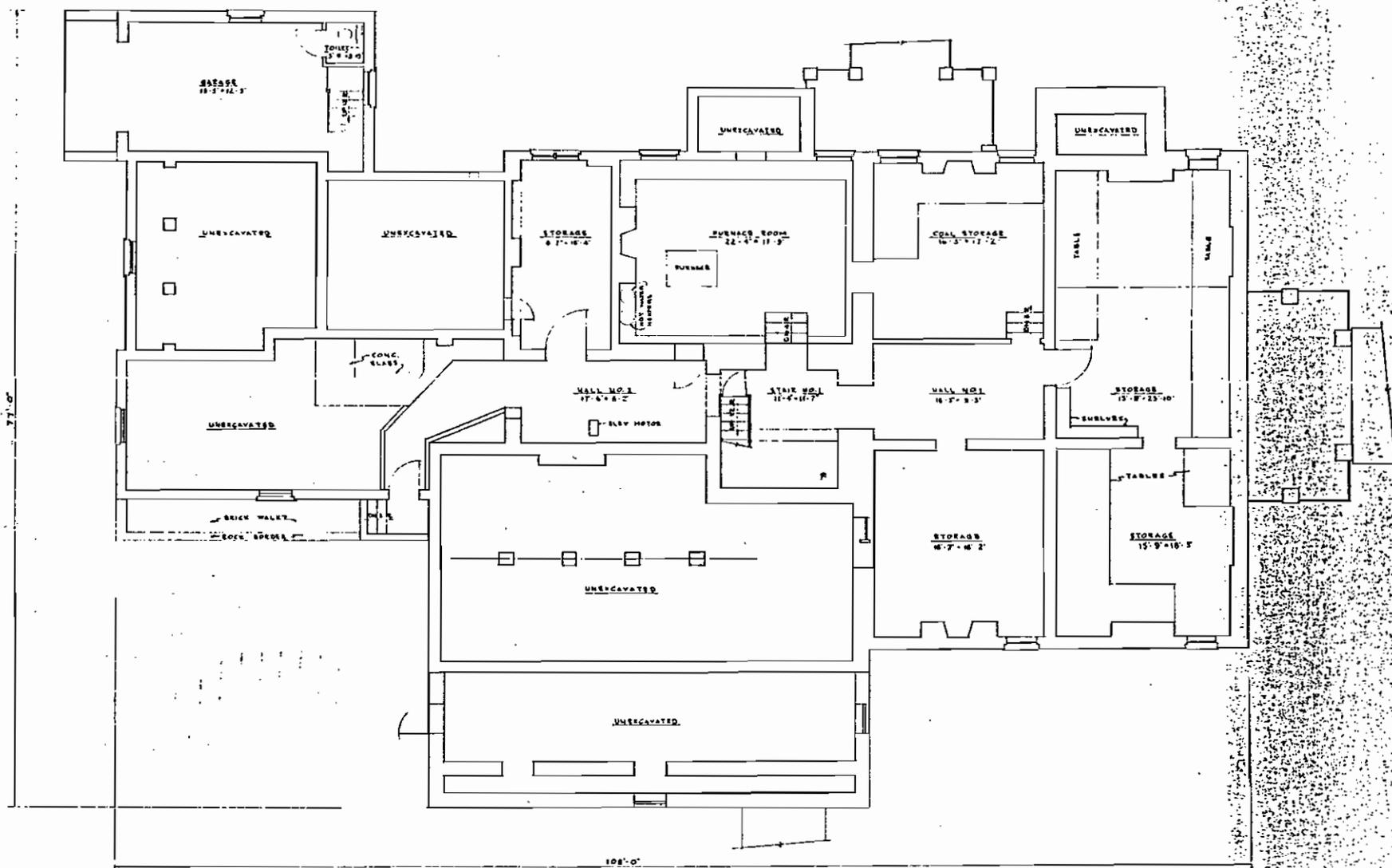
COL ALTO, LEXINGTON, VA



FIRST FLOOR PLAN
1/8" = 1'-0"

MEASURED DRAWINGS COL ALTO WASHINGTON & LEE UNIVERSITY LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA		GLASS, NELSON & OWEN - ARCHITECTS LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA	
FIRST FLOOR PLAN		DATE: 11-1-57	

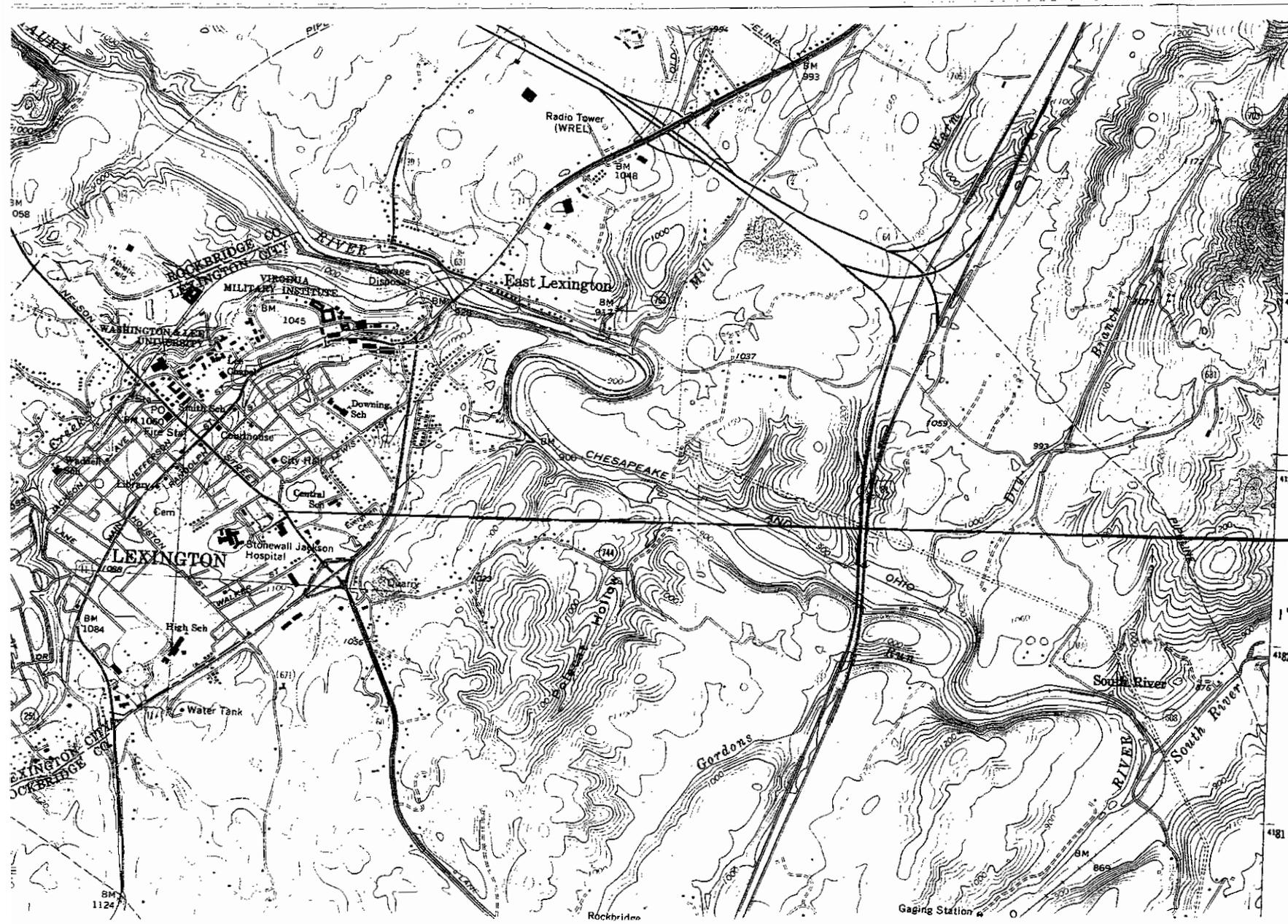
COL ALTO, LEXINGTON, VA



BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN

1/8" = 1'-0"

MEASURED DRAWINGS COL ALTO WASHINGTON & LEE UNIVERSITY LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA		CLARK, NELSON & OWEN - ARCHITECTS LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA	
BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN			
DATE	SCALE	PROJECT NO.	REV.
MAY 1962	1/8" = 1'-0"	100-0	1.0
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4185
4184
47 30'
4183
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COL ALTO
LEXINGTON, VA
UTM REFERENCE:
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