

VLR-3/17/87 NRHP-9/21/87

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only

received APR 6 1987
date entered

REVISED AUG. 1987

1. Name

historic Bell House (Preferred) (DHL File No. 199-3)

and or common 821 Irving Avenue

2. Location

street & number 821 Irving Avenue N/A not for publication

city, town Colonial Beach N/A vicinity of

state Virginia code 51 county Westmoreland County code 193

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Robert W. Warsing/Judith A. Jurutka

street & number 821 Irving Avenue

city, town Colonial Beach N/A vicinity of state Virginia zip code 22443

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Westmoreland County Courthouse

street & number N/A

city, town Montross state Virginia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Survey {File No. 199-3} has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date November 1978 federal state county local

depository for survey records Division of Historic Landmarks, 221 Governor Street

city, town Richmond state Virginia

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u>N/A</u>

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Summary Description

The Bell House is located at 821 Irving Avenue in the town of Colonial Beach, Westmoreland County. The 2½-story, wood-frame structure is executed in the Stick Style and was built between 1883-85. The nomination consists of three contributing buildings: the main house, a late 19th-century privy, and a ca. 1930 garage.

Detailed Analysis

The Bell House's main facade faces east with a view across the Potomac River to the Maryland shore. The main elevation, like all principal elevations, is covered in German siding. The first story contains a one-story porch with a shed roof supported by turned posts and sawn brackets. The porch wraps around to the south elevation. It shelters the principal double doorway that retains its original raised-panel doors. The entrance is flanked by four elongated windows with 2/2 hung-sash topped by multi-pane colored-glass transoms. The second-story has a central bay of paired windows flanked by four windows. The hung-sash windows have multi-pane colored-glass lights on the top section and clear-glass double panes on the bottom. Similar windows are found on all the principal second-story openings on the secondary elevations. The attic story has a central projecting tower with a pyramidal roof and balcony overhang. The tower is flanked by projecting gables.

The north elevation is dominated by a recessed brick chimney with a corbeled brick stack. The south elevation also contains a similar chimney. In addition the south elevation has on its attic story a projecting balcony covered by a gable roof. The principal fenestration of both the north and south elevations repeats what is found on the facade. The rear or west elevation is the most asymmetrical, the result of a number of later additions. These additions consist of a 1½-story gable-roof ell and a one-story shed-roof pent. Both additions have German siding. The house is covered with a cross-gable roof with composition shingles.

The Bell House retains original interior detailing. The central passage contains the main stair. The dog-leg stair has a turned newel, turned balusters and a molded handrail. The stair runs to the attic. The principal openings in the hall and throughout the house are framed by symmetrical architrave trim with bull's eye corner blocks.

To the south of the hall is the parlor and to the north is the present dining room. The most distinguishing features of both rooms are the mantels and overmantels. The mantels have recessed panels, carved pilasters and an overhanging shelf while the overmantels have mirrors. The overmantel in the dining room is further distinguished by cabinets with clear-glass pane doors. To the west of the parlor an original porch has been converted into a bath. To the west of the dining room is found a butler's pantry, now a bath, and the present kitchen.

See Continuation Sheet #1

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1883-85; ca.1930 **Builder/Architect** unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Statement of Significance

The Bell House at 821 Irving Avenue in Colonial Beach is one of the most important examples of Stick-style residential architecture in Virginia. While popular in the northeast, the Stick style is relatively rare in Virginia. The house is also significant as the only building in Virginia directly associated with the inventor, Alexander Graham Bell. Bell's father, Alexander Melville Bell, acquired the house in 1886; the famous inventor inherited the property in 1907 and held it continuously until 1918. Local tradition associates the house with Alexander Graham Bell's experiments with kites and flying machines. One of Colonial Beach's oldest dwellings, it is representative of the many wood-frame cottages that formerly stood on Irving Avenue in the 1880s during the town's subdivision and development as a Potomac River resort.

Historical Background

The Alexander Graham Bell house at 821 Irving Avenue, Colonial Beach, was once part of the property that constituted White Point Farm. In 1882, Henry J. Kintz platted the 650-acre farm and named it as the town of Colonial Beach. Kintz had purchased the property in 1878 from Jesse Hancock with the intention of developing it with other adjoining land. Tracts were offered for sale and, in 1883, Helen Burnside purchased from J. Harry Danforth property on Irving Avenue, "30,000 square feet more or less."¹ Helen Burnside was the wife of Colonel J. O. P. Burnside. After Col. Burnside became involved in a scandal involving the misappropriation of government funds, the U.S. Government confiscated the Burnside's Colonial Beach property and sold it to Alexander Melville Bell of Washington, D.C. "for \$2,500 conveyed by George A. Mushback, Special Commissioner."² The deed noted a "two story and attic dwelling house, a stable and other out buildings."³ The notation of a dwelling would indicate that the house was erected between 1883-85, the period of Col. and Mrs. Burnside's tenure.

At the time of Colonel Burnside and his wife's purchase of the property on Irving Avenue, wood-frame cottages were just beginning to spring up on the White Point Farm subdivision. While few of these early buildings have survived, early views of Colonial Beach show Irving Avenue lined with cottages. Indeed, by the end of the 19th century, the town had taken on a resort-like quality and earned the title of "the playground of the Potomac."

Stylistically, 821 Irving Avenue is rare for its feature of architectural elements derived from the so-called "Stick style." Popular along the east coast from the 1870s to ca. 1890, the style is characterized by steeply pitched gable roofs, cross

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bruce, Robert V. Bell. Boston: Little, Brown & company, 1973.
 Division of Historic Landmarks. "Bell, Alexander G., House." Archives File No. 199-3.
 Norris, Walter Biscoe, Jr., ed. Westmoreland County, Virginia, 1653-1983.
 Montross: Westmoreland County Board of Supervisors, 1983.
 Walker, F. Griffith. Souvenir of Colonial Beach. np., 1905. (See Continuation Sheet #4)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property approx. 1/2 acre

Quadrangle name Colonial Beach, Va.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References South

A

1	8	3	2	8	6	2	0	4	2	3	4	1	3	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

Boundary Justification: The nominated property of approx. 1/2 acre represents a small fraction of the original acreage owned by the Bell family from 1886-1918. It is the lot on which the house and outbuildings sit. (See Continuation Sheet #5)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
-------	-----	------	--------	-----	------

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
-------	-----	------	--------	-----	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Richard C. Cote and staff

organization Division of Historic Landmarks date 1987

street & number 221 Governor Street telephone 804-786-3143

city or town Richmond, state Virginia 23219

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

H. Bryan Mitchell, Director



title Division of Historic Landmarks

date March 27, 1987

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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The second floor contains bedrooms. The two principal rooms which overlook Irving Avenue have symmetrical architrave trim and bull's eye corner blocks and mantels. The mantels have pilasters that support overhanging shelves. The attic rooms on the third floor are plain and lack architectural embellishments.

Located to the north of the main house is a ca. 1930 garage. The hip roof garage is wood-frame, covered with German siding and containing double doors. Because it is more than fifty years old and preserves its integrity, it is regarded as a contributing building.

To the rear (west) of the main house is a gable roof double privy dating to the late 19th century. The privy is covered with weatherboards and presently serves as a woodhouse. Because of its age, state of preservation, and association with the tenure of the Bell family, it is considered a contributing building.

RCC

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Continuation sheet 2

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gables, towers with pointed roofs and large ornamented porches and verandas. While examples of the style are typically found in seacoast towns and cities in the northeast, examples are rare in Virginia with the Bell House most certainly ranking among the best in the state.

The second owner of 821 Irving Avenue was Alexander Melville Bell, father of Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone. The elder Bell was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on March 1, 1819. The son of Alexander Bell, a prominent instructor in elocution in London who educated him largely at home, the younger Bell in 1842 announced the formulation of a new theory of articulation and vocal expression. Bell subsequently taught classes in Scotland, eventually moving to London upon the death of his father. In 1868 he gave his first course of lectures in the United States at the Lowell Institute. At that time he held the appointment of Lecturer on Elocution in University College, London. In 1870 he returned to the United States to deliver a course of lectures at the Lowell Institute, supplementing it by a third course the following year. In 1870 he established residence in Canada where he held a professorship in Queen's College, Kingston. In 1881 Bell took up permanent residence in a house on Thirty-Fifth Street in Georgetown. For the next quarter century Bell remained a Washingtonian, and maintained his summer residence at 821 Irving Avenue in Colonial Beach.

Alexander Melville Bell died in 1905 and on November 11, 1907 the property was deeded to Alexander Graham Bell, Mabel G. Bell, and Harriet G. Bell. The inventor Alexander Graham Bell was certainly the most distinguished owner of 821 Irving Avenue. At the time that Bell owned property at Colonial Beach, he resided in Washington, D.C., at 3131 Connecticut Avenue. According to Bell's biographer, Robert V. Bruce, Bell found one major drawback to life in Washington, D.C.: the hot summer climate. To escape Washington summers Bell usually traveled north, ultimately buying property in Canada. Bruce's biography of Bell does not mention the house on Colonial Beach; however, the fact of its proximity by boat to Washington and its possession by the Bell family for thirteen years after the death of Alexander Melville Bell, suggests that Alexander Graham Bell remained attached to 821 Irving Avenue and continued to enjoy its hospitality. According to tradition Bell experimented with kites or "flying machines" at his Colonial Beach residence, flying them off the balcony.⁴ Bell also gave land in Colonial Beach for the establishment of the Bell Home for underprivileged children. Later the name "Bell" was removed and the house renamed the "Episcopal Home".⁵

In 1918 the Colonial Beach property left the Bell family when it was deeded to Arthur W. McCurdy, Alexander Graham Bell's private secretary from 1888 to 1905. McCurdy undoubtedly came to know 821 Irving Avenue as a guest of the Bell family. Following McCurdy's tenure the house had a variety of owners. It is presently the residence of Robert W. Warsing and Judith H. Jurutka who are in the process of restoring it.

See Continuation Sheet #3

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Notes:

1. Westmoreland County. Deed Book. J. Harry Danforth and wife to Helen W. Burnside, Feb. 6, 1883.
2. Westmoreland County. Deed Book. John B. Hammond and wife to Melville Bell, Aug. 23, 1886. The record here notes Mushback as "Spec. Commissioner."
3. Ibid.
4. Division of Historic Landmarks Archives File No. 199-3, "Reminiscences of Bertha Byron to Corrine Hilton", Nov. 5, 1877.
5. Ibid.

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Westmoreland County. Deed Book, 1846-1918.

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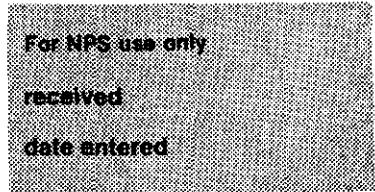
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Verbal Boundary Description:

Beginning at a point at the NW corner of the intersection of Irving Avenue with Thackary Street; thence extending approx. 300' W along N side of Thackary Street; thence approx. 100' N along E side of Lossing Avenue; thence approx. 300' E to a point on the W side of Irving Avenue; thence approx. 100' S along said side of Irving Avenue to point of origin.

USGS 7.5' quadrangle (scale:1:24000)
Colonial Leach South, VA-MD 1963

THE BELL HOUSE
821 Irving Ave., Colonial Beach
Westmoreland County, VA

UTM References: 18/328620/4234130

