

Virginia Slave Housing Project

Building Name: Bush Hill Frame Outbuilding

Evidence Type: Extant

Site ID: 018-5007; 018-0049

Historical Site Name: Bush Hill

City: Charles City

County: Charles City

State: Virginia

Investigators: Douglas W. Sanford, Dennis J. Pogue

Institutions: Virginia Slave Housing Project

Project Start: 6/8/22

Project End: 6/8/22

Summary Description:

The outbuilding at the Bush Hill property is a three-bay, one story, frame structure, with a brick exterior end chimney, and a side-gable roof that is currently covered with asphalt shingles. The structure is supported on low brick piers and measures 20 ft. 2 in. (east-west) by 13 ft. 2 in. (north-south). The doorway is centered on the south façade and is flanked by small four-light, fixed windows; similar windows are centered on the east end wall and in the east gable. Lapped weatherboards, painted white, cover all of the walls, with some of the older, surviving boards having beaded edges. Given the placement of the building near and to the rear of the main house, combined with an 1860 U.S. Census reference to one “slave house” located on the property, this structure likely represents a cabin for enslaved people on the Bush Hill farm, which was later occupied by domestic workers.

The plan consists of a single heated room on the first floor, with a stairway in the southeast corner rising toward the north to a heated garret room above. The walls of the room on the first floor are covered with horizontal, circular sawn, white washed boards. The ceiling is open, with whitewash on the joists and the undersides of the garret floor boards. A brick fireplace is roughly centered on the west end wall, with a second fireplace in the garret room. While heated, the garret was finished with only whitewash on the exposed rafters and roofing boards.

As antebellum buildings erected as quarters regularly were upgraded after slavery days, the presence of circular sawn interior siding could fit into that category, as lining the inner walls with boards was common practice. However, circular sawn material was found to have been used throughout the building in situations indicating that they are original, such as the plate and the false plate, studs, and the garret floorboards. As the use of circular sawn lumber in Virginia is unheard of before ca. 1840, that year provides a *Terminus Post Quem* (date after which) for when the building must have been erected. The nails used are a type (mature headed, cut) that fits after 1840 and for several decades afterward.

The other important factor to consider in assessing the date of the building's construction is the character of the frame. The Bush Hill quarter is framed in the traditional manner, with oversized plates and sills and substantial braced corner posts. The members are joined with mortises/tenons, and/or lapped, and pegged. Not all of the members are circular sawn, as the joists, rafters, and other units have hewn surfaces along with marks from sash sawing. Thus, the framing methods are traditional, and older techniques of preparing the members were also used in some applications.

All of this evidence points to the building having been erected during the period when construction practices were in a period of transition -- introducing the new dimensional lumber combined with heavy timber framing methods. This development occurred in Virginia beginning in the 1840s, and declined precipitously in the decade following the Civil War as modern balloon framing using mass-produced nails became the norm. Therefore, we cannot rule out the possibility that the building was erected soon after the Civil War, but we believe that this is unlikely.

This building has a high proportion of surviving period materials and finishes. In the post-Civil War and modern eras some exterior weatherboards and interior floorboards were replaced, along with the window sash and trim. The first-floor room was electrified, but never had running water.

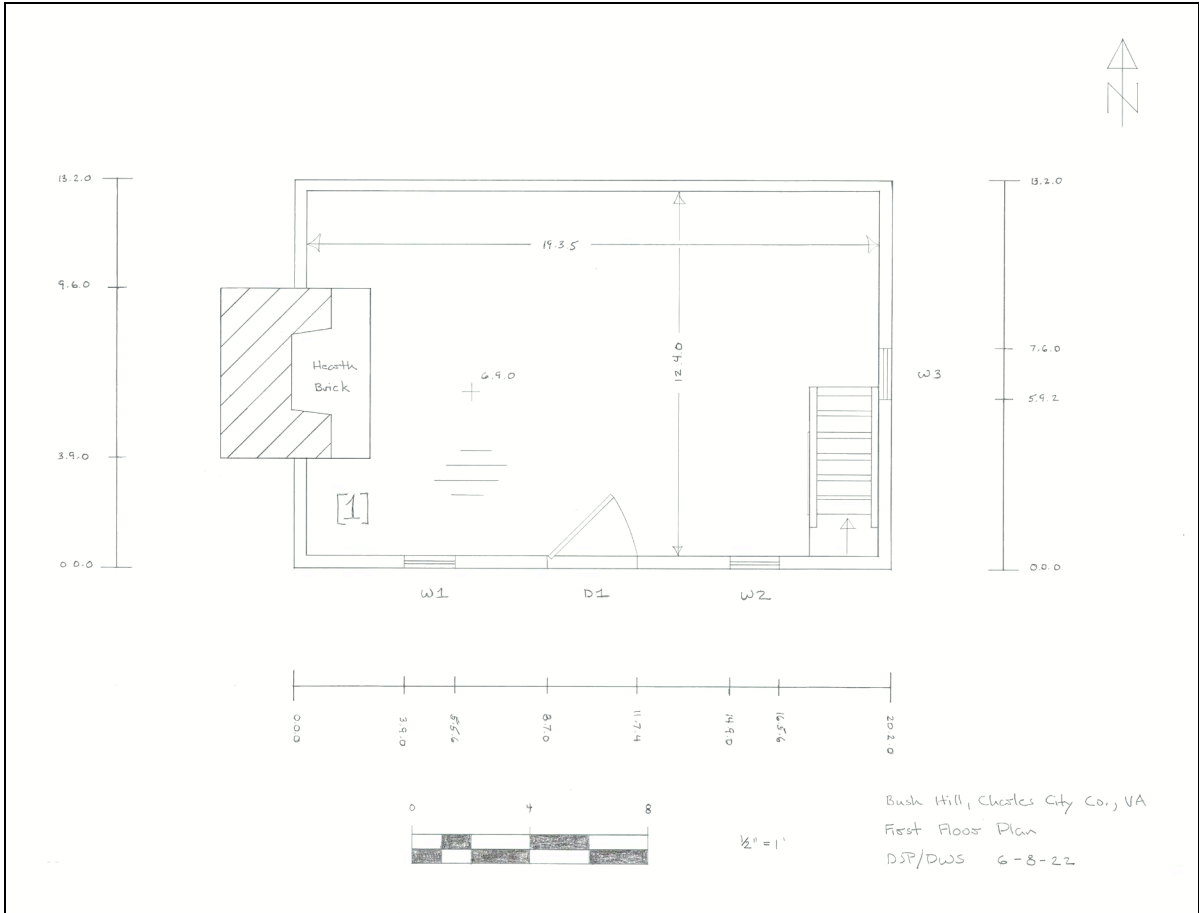
Other Documentation:

In the 1860 U.S. Census, the owner of Bush Hill, Junius Roane (occupation of physician), was listed as owning one enslaved person, a 42-year-old woman, and hiring four other enslaved people, all young males, ages 10, 12, 13, and 17. The census also lists Roane as having one "slave house" on his property.

Principal Construction Type: Frame

One Story – With Garret

Footprint:



Number of Rooms: 2 (1 down, 1 up)

Dimensions: (1) Downstairs: 12.4.0 (N-S) x 19.3.2 (E-W), 6.9.0 (H, to bottom of ceiling joists, 7.5.0 to underside of floorboards above)
 (2) Upstairs: 14.0.0 (N-S, to ends of rafter feet) x 19.3.2 (E-W), 6.1.0 (H, from floor to roof peak)

Doors: 2

	Rm. 1, S (1)	Stairs closet (2)
Type:	4 vertical boards and 2 vertical battens on exterior	3 vertical board, 2 battens
Dimensions:	3.2.0 (W) x 5.10.1 (H)	1.9.0 (W) x 4.6.0 (H)
Hardware:	Pintles and strap hinges (west jamb)	5-knuckle butt hinges
Swing:	In	Out (into Rm. 1)
Replacement:	Possibly.	No

Windows: 4

	Rm. 1, S (1)	Rm. 1, S (2)	Rm. 1, E (3)
Type:	Single sash casement, 2/2	Single sash casement, 2/2	Single sash, 2/2
Dimensions:	1.8.0 (W) x 2.0.0 (H)	1.8.2 (W) x 1.11.3 (H)	1.9.1 (W) x 2.1.0 (H)
Hardware:	3- and 5-knuckle butt hinges (on west side)	3- and 5-knuckle butt hinges (on west side)	None
Shuttered/ Slide/ Swing:	Swing in. On west side of south wall. Interior trim with wire nails.	Swing in. On east side of south wall. Interior trim with wire nails.	Slides up

	Rm. 2, E (4)
Type:	Single sash, 2/2
Dimensions:	1.8.2 (W) x 2.0.1 (H)
Hardware:	None
Shuttered/ Slide/ Swing:	Slides up

EXTERIOR

Foundation:

Masonry Piers: Brick

Number: approximately 10. Difficult to see and measure, partly replaced.

Dimensions: Not obtained.

Height: Not obtained.

Joint: Unknown, too eroded.

Repaired: Yes, with concrete and partly replaced with cinderblocks.

Shed/Porch: No

Roof:

Roof Form: Gable

Roof Covering: Asphalt shingles

Roof Framing:

Exposed: Yes

Form: Common rafters

Rafter Number: 10 pairs (including at gable ends)

Rafter Dimensions: 0.3.0 (W) x 0.3.2 – 0.3.3 (H)

Collar Ties: Yes, but only on 3 rafter pairs, at gable ends and at 1st rafter pair west of the east gable end wall (but removed)

Collar Dimensions: 0.2.0 (W) x 0.3.2 (H)

Method of Joining: Lapped and nailed (2 machine-cut nails at each end)

Height from Roof Peak: 1.2.0 (to bottom collar)

Height to Floor: 4.11.0 (to bottom collar)

Building Height: @ SE corner

Ground to bottom of Soffit: 7.11.2

Ground to Top of Eave: 8.9.0

Ground to Apex: 15.11.0 (@ east gable end)

Walls:

Frame:

Material: Wood

Cladding: Horizontal – Weatherboard/lapped

Beaded: Yes, on a few boards, but mostly flat edges.

Chimney(s):

Chimney (1): @ West end

Material: Brick

Location: Exterior – End

Height: 18.11.0

INTERIOR

Wall Framing: Stud walls covered with horizontal boards (circular sawn)

Wall Finish: Whitewashe

Fireplace (1): Room 1, west end wall

Fireplace Material: Brick

Fireplace Overall Dimensions: 0.10.0 (E-W) x 5.9.2 (N-S)

Fireplace Opening Dimensions: 3.0.0 (W) x 2.8.3 (H) x 1.4.0 (D)

Hearth Material: Brick

Hearth Dimensions: 1.4.0 (E-W) x 5.9.2 (N-S)

Fireplace (2): Room 2, west gable

Fireplace Material: Brick

Fireplace Overall Dimensions: 0.8.2 (E-W) x 4.10.2 (N-S)

Fireplace Opening Dimensions: 2.0.2 (W) x 1.8.3 (H) x 1.2.1 (D)

Hearth Material: Brick

Hearth Dimensions: 1.9.2 (E-W) x 4.9.2 (N-S)

Stairs: Yes

Type: Ladder (original rungs covered by boards to create treads, with additional treads added above rungs). Original ladder is 2.0.0 wide (E-W).

Stairwell Dimensions: 4.8.0 long (N-S) x 2.4.0 wide (E-W).

Number of Treads: 6

Stair Tread Dimensions: 1.8.0 (L) x 0.5.0 – 0.6.0 (W) x 0.11.2 (H)

Subfloor Pit: No

Floor: Wood

Floorboards Dimensions: On 1st and 2nd floors – 0.9.3 to 1.1.0 wide.

Dating:

Dendrochronology: NA

Other dating: 1840s-early 1860s

Dating Evidence:

Saw Marks: Mixture of hewn, sash sawn, and circular sawn material, but original elements (joists, studs, flooring) circular sawn

Nails: Machine headed cut

Comments: Based on the presence of circular-sawn lumber used for framing and wall coverings, and of mature, machine-cut nails, post-1840 but likely before ca. 1865.

Notes

Exterior

A compass reading taken at the southeast corner, looking towards the northeast corner, produced a bearing of 8⁰.

The exterior walls are 0.5.0 thick.

The exterior end chimney has 3-course common bond, and has two sets of shoulders as it narrows to the stack, which is set back from the upper portion of the west gable. The mortar is predominantly sand with some limestone fragments. The chimney as a whole has subsided and tilted to the north, to the point that braces have been installed on the north side.

Interior

In the modern era, the building receiving electrical wiring, but never had running water. All four windows have later interior trim, attached with wire nails. The windows' small sash appear to be later replacements, installed in a single campaign. The windows are a mixture of single-sash casement, hinged on one side and, single sash that slide upwards.

Room 1: The downstairs room has 8 exposed joists that measure 0.2.0 – 0.2.1 wide by 0.8.0 high. Center to center, the joists tend to be about 2.2.0 apart. The joists project 0.6.0 beyond the wall plate to help frame the building's box cornice. The walls are covered with horizontal, butted circular-sawn boards attached with machine-cut nails. These boards measure 0.8.0 to 0.10.2 wide.

The exterior door (Door 1) has iron clasps on the interior side for a sliding, wooden bar.

Stairs: The semi-enclosed stairway is located in the southeast corner of Room 1. The south face of the header is 5.9.0 from the south wall. In the garret, the stairway opening begins 7.2.0 from the rafter feet on the north wall. The stairs were constructed from a ladder with round rungs, to which boards were added to create treads. An outside stringer was attached to the ladder's outside (western) face. Vertical, circular-sawn boards were attached to the outside stringer, on the west face, to enclose a closet, which had a door on the north side. The stair stringers rest on a raised step that is 1.0.0 above the floor.

Room 2: The garret room was a heated space, with a small, brick fireplace at the west gable. The chimney's brickwork in the garret measures 4.2.2 high. Both the exposed rafters and roofing boards in the garret have whitewashed surfaces.

Roof framing

The rafters are predominantly sash sawn, although some have hewn surfaces. The rafters have mortise and tenon joints, with pegs, at the peak. The rafters' feet rest on a false plate supported by the joists.

Some of the roofing boards on the southern side are reused, undercut floor boards, which are narrower than the other roofing boards, around 0.7.0 to 0.8.3 wide. The other boards are 0.9.1 to 1.1.0 wide. The boards have mature, machine-cut nails protruding through, for the original wooden shingle roof (seen in a historic photograph).