SOLITUDE

Historic Structure Report

prepared for
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia

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Executive Summary

History

The one-room log house with a garret at Solitude was built in about 1801, either by Philip Barger, Jr., whose grandfather had patented the land around it, or by adjoining landowner James Patton Preston, who purchased the tract at about that time, the deed being recorded in 1803. Preston sold the house in 1807 to his uncle Granville Smith, for whom he may have built the house originally by an informal arrangement. Smith lived there for several years and apparently gave it the name "Solitude", but returned to his native eastern Virginia and the house was rented until his heirs sold it back to Preston in 1822. The house was occupied in later years by Preston's son Robert and his family, who apparently added the log wing in about 1834, adding a passage and an additional room on each floor. At some point after this they added a lean-to shed to the log wing.

Robert and Mary Preston greatly enlarged the house in about 1851, creating a fashionable and comfortable dwelling detailed in the Greek Revival style. They sold the property to form the farm of the new Virginia land-grant college in 1872. After their deaths in the early 1880s and until World War II, the structure served as faculty housing. It was divided into apartments after a brief service as a clubhouse for returning veterans attending V.P.I. Major repairs in the 1950s improved the house's appearance but failed to address serious long-term moisture-related problems. In the 1960s and early 1970s it housed the Hokie Club, an alumni organization. After 1974 the house served as an academic building and suffered from poor maintenance and inappropriate alterations. It is currently being studied for the purpose of restoring it to serve as an Appalachian Studies Center.

Interpretation

The house at Solitude has suffered for many years from delayed and deferred maintenance and insensitive alterations. The repairs that have been made have been superficial and actually conceal the damage caused by moisture-related insect and fungal attack. The roof and exterior have been kept in reasonably good repair and the physical plant staff, with the encouragement of the Appalachian Studies program, has been careful during the last decade not to compound the problems caused in previous years, before the building's importance was established. The structure has been seriously affected by insect and fungal infestations. The interior finishes have been compromised by the installation of inappropriate modern materials, such as dropped ceilings, which damaged the plaster ceilings and walls, surface-mounted electrical wiring and fixtures, wall-to-wall carpet, which has encouraged termite and fungal damage to the flooring. Water damage includes the warping and separating of trim and flooring in the passage caused by a burst radiator supply pipe and a very serious and long-standing humidity problem in the crawl space and basement related less to the nearness of the building to Stroubles Creek and the Duck Pond, and more to clogged downspouts and improper drainage away from the building, which channels water directly under the building.
The restoration of Solitude is to be undertaken to preserve the oldest building on campus, one that holds many important historical associations for the university, and to provide an appropriate home for the Appalachian Studies Program, a use that would be most appropriate for the house. In any historical restoration it is essential to base the work in an appropriate period of interpretation directly related to the building’s historical significance. Decisions about what to remove, what to restore, and what to reconstruct can then be made based on clear criteria. The soundest procedure is to select a period of interpretation that simultaneously corresponds to the period from which most of the sound and usable fabric dates and to the period which has the most significance to the owner and the proposed users.

The principal period of interpretation recommended in this report is that of the years after the acquisition of the farm by Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College in 1872. This would comprise the final phase of the Preston occupancy, when Preston is said to have served as farm manager of this newly acquired college farm, through the early twentieth-century use of the structure as a faculty house. Most of the current decorative fabric and many of the room interiors date primarily from the ca. 1851 enlargement and renovation. Several minor additions made after the Prestons’ deaths, such as the room off the parlor on the rear porch, are important and valuable additions which it would be in the university’s best interest to retain. The existence of an inventory of Mary Preston’s furnishings at her death in 1881 makes it possible to interpret designated portions of the house as it appeared at that time.

Keeping this scheme of interpretation in mind it appears best to restore much of the house to its form in the early twentieth century, removing all modern intrusions, including dropped ceilings, vinyl flooring, and added walls and doors. The needs of the Appalachian Studies Program for meeting rooms, collection display and storage, and office space, will dovetail neatly with this program. Installing the most intrusive modern facilities, such as kitchen and toilets, in the most damaged and altered areas, is consonant with sound preservation policy. The project is proposed in phased segments, to allow funding to be developed, to permit careful study and consideration of the building while under restoration, and to permit the house to remain open as an Appalachian Studies Center during the work.

**Recommendations**

The problems of moisture runoff are one of the main sources of structural problems at Solitude. A rethinking of the drainage patterns on the site will be required to correct longstanding problems. The exterior of the house needs only minor repairs. The paint film is thick and irregular and probably should be removed on much of the beaded sections of weatherboard. The exterior louvered blinds which were removed from the house and stored several years ago should be repaired or (only where necessary) replaced and reinstalled correctly on hinges. New, historically appropriate storm windows on the interior would better serve the historic interpretation. The metal roof of the main house and ell dates from the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, while that on the porches was replaced in recent years. The roof has some problems with leaking and may need limited repair, but replacement can probably be safely
deferred to a future date. New gutters and downspouts are needed. The current subsurface
drains to which the gutters are connected need to be replaced as part of a perimeter drainage
system to keep moisture out of the basement and crawl space.

The chimneys are in need of tuckpointing and masonry repair. The foundation is a
hodgepodge of brick and stone elements which warrants careful inspection and localized repair in
those limited areas where it has been damage or has lost stability. Foundation repair is a delicate
issue in an historic property, because the material contains much valuable information about the
history of the structure and the surrounding soil and builder’s trench contain valuable
archaeological information. The porches have been well preserved, but the porch floors and
columns, which have been inappropriately or temporarily repaired over past years, need
replacement to form a more authentic appearance.

The log structure of the earliest portions of the building does appear to have suffered
from deterioration. The greatest damage is apparently in the 1859 frame addition, which contains
the passage and large parlor and the rooms above them. The weakening of the structure began as
early as the last century and has been exacerbated by the paving of the driveway. Repairs have
been continuous through the years, with added posts and beams supported on the unexcavated
soil beneath.

Every attempt should be made to retain the secure plaster walls and ceilings and the floors
in all historic rooms, although much will be lost when the structural repairs are made. Attention
should be given to the problem of lead paint which undoubtedly exists throughout the house.
Abatement will be an important element of the project. The mechanical, plumbing, and electrical
systems at Solitude are a hodge-podge of additions and makeshifts and are inadequate for any use
of the building, let alone an historical interpretation of the house. The surface-mounted fixtures
and wiring should be concealed in the floors, baseboards, or in the walls and ceilings. The gas­
fired hot water heating system, completely replaced in the last decade, incorporates large and
obtrusive modern radiators and caused much damage to the flooring. The recommended solution
is zoned forced air systems in the attic and basement, utilizing the existing boiler, with the addition
of air conditioning condensing units on the exterior.

The two outbuildings consist of the log pen laundry or kitchen and the log springhouse.
The springhouse is in relatively good repair and can be left alone for the time being, while the
stabilization and authentic restoration of the log outbuilding is pressing and essential if the
interpretation of the house is to receive a full treatment. The structure should be restored in situ
using the most sensitive techniques, given the extreme rarity of this building type in the region.

Phasing

In the phasing of the project it is proposed to begin with the passage, parlor, bathroom,
and bedroom in the two-story, ca. 1859 addition. The first and second floor of this section can
be separated from the rest of the structure, and this section has experienced the highest proportion
of deterioration. Restoration of this portion of the building will further reveal the extent of the problems likely to be encountered in the remainder of the house and will permit the facility to be used and available to the university and community during the project. The second phase would include the log sections and the one-story leanto. The third and final phase would include the exterior restoration.
Introduction

The project to restore Solitude to represent its role as an integral part in the history of Virginia's Agricultural and Mechanical College and the university which grew from it began in 1984 with the request from Jean Haskell Speer, then the coordinator of the Appalachian Studies Program, that the program be housed in the historic structure. The program, now under the direction of Elizabeth C. Fine, took over occupancy of the building and, with the encouragement of the university administration, has instituted a fund-raising program to accomplish the long-term goal of its restoration. This historic structure report for Solitude is an integral step in that process. It is essential that the historic evolution of the building be as fully understood as possible before work is undertaken. The report is intended to evaluate the existing structures, confirm the university's goals for use of them, define necessary restoration activities, and estimate design and construction costs for the project.

Acknowledgments

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I. History Narrative

Original Construction (ca. 1801)

First recorded European exploration of the New River area began in 1671 with the Batts and Fallam expedition sponsored by Abraham Wood and the colonial government. They crossed the Alleghany ridge and described extensive clearing and abandoned Indian corn fields along the New River. Settlement of the area west of the Alleghany Mountains was encouraged by the colonial government beginning in the 1740s. The authorities gave incentives to speculators and settlers. In 1745, the Woods River Land Company was organized by speculators in order to obtain and settle land grants on the Woods or New River. Early settlers were encouraged by James Patton, who controlled the Wood's River Grant, to take up land in the fertile lands drained by Stroubles Creek, a 7,500-acre tract known as Draper's Meadows.

The House of Burgesses encouraged increased settlement on the western waters after 1752, when settlers west of the Eastern Continental divide were permitted freedom from taxes for a period of ten years [Johnson 1975:10]. George Draper, for whom the region was named, was one of the first settlers in the area southwest of the present-day town of Blacksburg. Early highway reports refer to an area near Blacksburg as "the Glades," referring to the open character of the land. Four of the best and most fertile tracts were laid out in a series of nested crescent-shaped boundaries, clearly designed to provide each owner with good land and access to the open water essential for livestock around Stroubles Creek. The early name for the land is recalled in the small branch of Stroubles Creek that drains this area. In 1754, George Draper's son, John, obtained a choice tract. William Ingles received the tract northeast of it and Caspar Barger the next one to the northeast. The fourth tract, obtained by Francis Smith, was located to the extreme southwest, near the foot of Prices Mountain [Kegley 1980: 175-180, 212-213].

In 1755, the massacre of some of the settlers on these tracts, including Casper Barger, by a party of Shawnee Indians, caused those who survived to leave the area. The Ingles and Drapers did not return, but the Barges retained their land. The original locations of settlers' houses have been obscured over time. According to an 1843 account by Letitia Preston Floyd, a former resident of Solitude, "... a party of Indians came up the Kanawha- thence to Stroubles Creek. Ingles and Draper were living at Solitude, the present home of Col. Robert T. Preston" [Ballard 1991: 2]. This account may have led to the misconception, often expressed in the past, that Solitude is the site of the Drapers Meadow Massacre and that the original house at Solitude dates from the 1750s.

The land on which Solitude was built was actually part of the 507-acre tract at the headwaters of Stroubles Creek acquired by Caspar Barger from the Wood's River Company. This was located just southwest of the tract owned by William Lippard which later became the site of Blacksburg. These two tracts were not as fertile and desirable as the smaller Draper and Ingles sites. In 1773, Fincastle County, which included the Draper's Meadow region, was organized. William Preston, James Patton's nephew and the lieutenant and surveyor of the new
county, moved to the region in the same year, purchasing the Ingles, Draper, and Smith farms and forming his "lofty farm," which he named Smithfield. In the mid-1770s, he built a large frame house on the tract which had belonged to William Ingles, utilizing features borrowed from the frame building tradition of eastern Virginia.

In the period before the platting of the town of Blacksburg in 1798, roads through the area ran very differently than they did after that time. The earliest road to the area came from the middle Shenandoah Valley to the New River in 1745. It climbed over the Alleghany Mountain (the early name for the dividing ridge just east of Blacksburg) to the Draper's Meadow section on the New River. [Later a parallel road was developed through the Hans' Meadow locale to the south (now Christiansburg), which came to be known as the Market Road or the Great Road [Kegley 1980: 48-51]. Over time it would carry more traffic than the road through Draper's Meadows.] The road ran north of the present town center, following the course of Prices Fork Road to the southwest, crossing Caspar Barger's land, and skirting the northern edge of the other three tracts toward the New River. By 1775 a "New Road" southwest from the Alleghany Ridge was taken on a course nearer the middle of the four tracts, by now acquired by Montgomery County's leading citizen, William Preston. The road appears to have passed through the future site of Blacksburg and near the present sites of Solitude and Smithfield [Kegley 1980: 179]. A road to Smithfield shows up in the same location on an 1882 map of the V. A. M. C. campus [Blackford 1882]. The late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century John Black house was also located on this road, between Solitude and Blacksburg.

The home of Philip Barger, Caspar's son, was toward the northern end of Caspar Barger's tract. In 1802, upon the death of his father, Philip Barger, Jr. acquired two hundred acres at the lower end directly southwest of the Black holdings around Blacksburg. He sold this soon after to James Patton Preston, William Preston's son who later served as governor of Virginia. The deed is dated 1803 [Kegley 1980: 253]. Dendrochronological studies show that the logs of which the earliest portion of Solitude is built were cut in the four-year period ending with and including 1801. This might indicate that land clearing was proceeding on the tract, providing suitable logs for construction [Heikkenen 1990: 7]. The house was, thus, either built for Philip Barger, Jr. or James Patton Preston. Preston lived with his wife and his mother at Smithfield and may have intended the one-room log house for a tenant or overseer.

Most surviving eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century houses in the upper Shenandoah and New River valleys share features traditionally associated with western settlement, including building materials such as log and, in some cases, stone, which required less time and expense to prepare than did the elaborate frame and brick structures of eastern Virginia. Nonetheless, many employed the finely crafted interior woodwork associated with the rise in the material expressions of respectability on the part of landowners throughout the larger mid-Atlantic region. By the early nineteenth century, prosperous owners often provided log houses with weatherboarded exteriors that resembled the cladding of frame houses and served to distinguish them from the ubiquitous unpainted or whitewashed log exteriors of most buildings in the region. Almost all the
houses that survive had symmetrical or nearly symmetrical facades and full masonry foundations [Worsham 1994].

House form can be seen as an important regional characteristic. The majority of surviving eighteenth- and early-to-mid-nineteenth-century houses in the upper Shenandoah and New River valleys follow one-room, two-room, three-room or central passage plans, each of which were possible floor plans for the dwellings of descendants of the several ethnic groups [McCleary 18 and Worsham 1988: 6-22].

The smallest and originally the most ubiquitous form was the one-room house, where all the family functions took place in one room, a small loft or garret above, and in outbuildings. Of such form was the original house at Solitude. An equally rare and elaborate example of this form, also with an interior chimney, stands in Roanoke County. The two-story stone Harshbarger House, bearing a datestone inscribed 1797, was built for a German Dunkard family.

The less common two-room form, sometimes called the hall-chamber plan, incorporated a pair of rooms, usually of unequal size, one of which served as a hall or general living area and the other as a bedroom. While many later examples have only one chimney, located in the larger room, chimneys at each end provided heat to both rooms in most of the surviving two-room houses from the post-revolutionary period. The few dated examples in the region include the large weatherboarded log John Hoge House, built in 1800 in western Montgomery County (now Pulaski County). Cooking at this house was done in the basement.

 Builders of a three-room house type often placed a hall at one end of the house opposite a pair of small rooms, sometimes equipped with corner fireplaces sharing a chimney, but this form is rare in the region. They were the most substantial houses in the central and upper Valley of Virginia in the years around 1800. A three-room house with a better preserved interior is found in Montgomery County. The stone Howard-Bell-Feather House is built into a bank with basement level service rooms, an arrangement often associated with Germanic ethnic groups, although the house was apparently built for an owner of British ancestry [Worsham 1986].

The central-passage plan rarely materialized in the upper Valley until well into the nineteenth century. The plan took firm root among the vernacular houses of middling planters in eastern Virginia after the middle of the eighteenth century [Upton 1982: 95-119]. In houses incorporating this plan, a passage separated the hall from the chamber, providing an increased level of privacy for the occupants and suggesting to some scholars a selective withdrawal from community life consonant with the transformation of traditional social relationships. [Isaac 302-305]. As vernacular architectural historian Dell Upton suggests, the appearance of these features may not derive, as some scholars have asserted, from Tidewater models. It is more likely connected with "the common submission of . . . traditional forms to an international popular culture" [Upton 1988: 442]. When, in 1834, Solitude was enlarged, then the entire house then took this form and when it was again enlarged in 1851, the new house was also a clear embodiment of the central-passage plan.
One-room houses as the dwellings of substantial persons were not an anomaly, even in 1801. In the mid-eighteenth century the houses of many of the most important of the first- and second-generation western leaders scarcely resembled the large central-passage-plan houses associated with the richest of the eastern gentry. Instead, they lived in one- or two-room stone or log houses that, at that time, represented the region's most ambitious and permanent houses. These are known from documentary sources. John Lewis, one of Augusta County's earliest and most important land agents, occupied a one-room stone house and Greenfield, the dwelling of his influential cousin, William Preston, built after 1761 in Botetourt County, was a one-room log structure [Worsham 1994]. Many middling and more substantial landowners continued to dwell in one-room houses into the early nineteenth century.

The form of the house, of a single room with an interior chimney, is unfamiliar in the region, perhaps due to the relative scarcity of any structures dating from before the second decade of the nineteenth century. Eighteenth-century houses in western Virginia and Kentucky often incorporate a fully or partially inset chimney, often in order to provide space for flanking presses or closets. Two houses of similar date stand in Botetourt County with this kind of chimney form, Rustic Lodge and Promised Land [Worsham 1988: 14-15]. Both had some pretensions to grandeur although they consisted of two log pens joined by a dogtrot or passage. Like them, Solitude probably had a raised garret and was weatherboarded at an early date, to protect and conceal the less desirable and permanent construction material. With its raised foundation, interior chimney, and neat finishes, these houses would have stood in dramatic contrast to the log "cabins" inhabited by the vast majority of local residents. These were of poor construction, and had clapboard roofs, wood chimneys, and earthen floors [Worsham 1988: 8-11].

The original fenestration and detailing of Solitude are difficult to discern through the many changes. The house may have faced southeast, toward the road from Blacksburg to Smithfield. The house probably had a door facing southeast and northwest with flanking windows on the same facades and garret windows in the gable ends. Regional practice suggests that the ceiling joists were probably exposed with decorative corner beading. An enclosed garret stair may have been placed in one of the recessed chimney corners, but the plaster finishes currently prevent view of the ceiling joists, which would reveal its form and location. The house had no basement and the log joists and hewn sills forming the floor structure appear to have been supported on a continuous stone foundation. A porch apparently spanned the northwest front of the house: a stone foundation survives under the present porch corresponding to the width of the ca. 1801 log section, although it may have been added at any time until 1851, when the present porch superceded it.

In 1807, Preston sold the tract he had acquired from Philip Barger, Jr. to his uncle, Granville Smith, who was a native of the Richmond area in Tidewater Virginia [D.B. D, 13, 514]. This would argue for substantial intentions on the part of the house's builder. It is very likely Preston built it for his uncle but did not issue a deed for several years. Smith relocated to the tract and apparently gave it the name Solitude, perhaps more from his perspective as a transplanted easterner than from its location, actually near a busy main road. The name first
appears at the head of a letter from Smith dated December 13, 1808. He used the house regularly, writing one letter headed Solitude to James Patton Preston’s brother, John, usually a resident of Richmond in government posts. He was the heir of the Prestons’ Horseshoe property and Smith wrote him about conditions on that farm twice in 1808 and 1809: once he and James P. Preston had to go to the farm to deal with problems brought by the overseer to him at Solitude [Preston papers, reel 10].

Smith was a source of comfort to his aging sister, Susannah Smith Preston by his frequent visits to Smithfield. In 1808, he wrote that he had invited John Preston’s wife to spend Christmas at Smithfield and Solitude, but if she would not come, he and his wife would go to her at the Horseshoe. The latest letter to survive from Granville Smith at Solitude is from April of 1810 [Preston papers, reel 10]. After that the letters which have been preserved were written in Goochland County, west of Richmond [Preston papers, reel 11], where he apparently resided until his death in 1816. It would appear that Smith’s main reason for leaving his interests and his family in the Richmond area was to assist John Preston in the management of his farm and to be near his widowed sister.

William and Susanna Preston’s daughter Letitia and her husband, Dr. John Floyd, lived there during several years before Smith’s death. According to a descendant, after their marriage the Floyds “lived within a mile of Smithfield at ‘Solitude’ . . . and by this proximity to her mother, learned more of the family history than other members of the family” [Preston 1900: 123]. Letters from them headed "Solitude" were written from 1814 to 1815 [Preston papers, reel 11]. In 1815 and 1816 James Patton Preston applied to the court to erect a grist mill at Smithfield, to be powered by the waters of Stroubles Creek, with a dam and ditch on his land. A jury was to report on the damages to Preston and the heirs of Granville Smith. They attested that the heirs would be benefitted by the pond, which would flood part of their land. The upper pond located adjacent to the house at Solitude may be that pond, although it may have been further downstream, since the dam was to have been on Preston’s land. [Kegley 1980: 190, 253.] The ruins of the mill stand downstream near Smithfield.

In 1816 James Patton Preston was elected governor of Virginia. From then until 1837 he lived most of the time in Richmond, where he also served for years as postmaster [People]. In 1820, Solitude was rented to a tenant named Gull. John Hammet, overseer at the Horseshoe farm during that part of James Patton Preston’s term as governor of Virginia, wrote that Gov. Preston planned to build a distillery in partnership with Mr. Gull. Preston’s wife was said to be opposed to the scheme, saying it would "ruin his negroes" [Preston papers, reel 12]. The heirs of Granville Smith held onto the land for many years, without apparently occupying it. In 1820 their property on Stroubles Creek near Smithfield consisted of a 218-acre tract without improvements and a 6 ½-acre tract containing buildings valued at $250 [Land Book for 1820]. This value represents a modest farmstead with a house like the log, single-pen dwelling which forms the nucleus of Solitude. Although the value for buildings is left blank after 1829, the overall value remains approximately the same. Beginning in 1832, a marginal note in the land books indicates that J. P. Preston will pay the taxes. In the same year the 6 ½-acre tract disappears from the record.
Log Addition (ca. 1834-40)

James Patton Preston and his wife Anne Barraud (Taylor) had three sons, William Ballard Preston, Robert Taylor Preston, and James F. Preston. At the time of the census of 1830, the three sons were at Smithfield with their parents [Yagow 19]. Robert T. Preston (1809-1880) married Mary (Salley) Hart (1810-1881), of Columbia, South Carolina, in 1833 [Dorman 1982: 264-265]. The young couple may have moved into Solitude by arrangement with the Smith heirs and J. P. Preston soon after. Dendrochronological study shows that the wing containing the log pen was constructed after the growing season of 1834 [Heikkenen 1990: 7]. However, land tax records do not indicate any value on the 218-acre Smith property until 1840, when the aggregate improvements are valued at $800, an appropriate value for a farmstead containing a house the size of the expanded house at Solitude. In that year census records show Robert and Mary Preston with their own household near Smithfield, but as yet no slaves of their own [Yagow 19].

The difference in dates between the logs at 1834 and the tax records at 1840 is possibly due to the logs being stored and the wing not being constructed until that year. However, the presence of waney wood (with bark) in the floor structure implies that the wood was not stored outside for a long period of time. It is possible that James Patton Preston was able to include taxes on the house in the Smithfield column until reassessment in 1840. It is also possible that the ca. 1801 part of the house was moved in from another site when the wing was added in about 1839. Exposure of portions of the structure during restoration will help in understanding this complex story. For purposes of the discussion below it is assumed that the ca. 1801 house is in its original orientation on its original site and that the first addition was made in 1834.

The wing consisted of a log pen dating from ca. 1834 and an integral framed hyphen containing a passage joining it to the ca. 1801 section. It is likely that the new wing as finally constituted corresponded to the earlier pen in height and fenestration. New beaded board sheathing provided continuity. Beaded weatherboard covered the ca. 1801 section at this time also: a section from the rear wall is visible in the crawl space below the ca. 1851 rear porch. The addition gave the house a new front, this time facing southwest, with a central door sheltered by a gabled porch, also with a stone foundation. Symmetrically arranged windows probably flanked the doorway. The window bay on the west was replaced by an exterior in ca. 1851.

In fact, the house now resembled, in both elevation and plan, a classic central-passage-plan house like others being built in the western region of the state in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The new principal front may have responded to and faced a road from Blacksburg to Smithfield on the south side of the south branch of Stroubles Creek. The original log pen received a more refined finish, with presses flanking the chimney and elegant Federal-style mantels. The mantel now in the second floor room in the original pen was apparently moved there from the first floor room in ca 1851. It is related in form and detail to the mantel in the second floor of the log pen of 1834. The details are consistent with houses built at that period. The provision of extensive new finishes suggests that the original log pen was very modestly
furnished until this period, when Robert and Mary Preston created a comfortable parlor with new presses flanking a stylish mantel.

An enclosed stair very likely gave access originally to the garret of the 1801 pen. It was probably removed at this time (or possibly not until about 1851), its place taken by one of the presses and its function absorbed by the new open stair in the passage. The first floor probably consisted of a parlor in the original section and a chamber in the new wing. Above were three or more bedrooms, two of which probably were supplied with fireplaces. The oak floor structure of the wing is supported on continuous squared hewn oak log sills. A squared log beam spans the wing under the log partition. The flattened ends of the log floor joists simply rest on the sills. There was no basement under any part of the house, which was supported on a rough, shallow, limestone rubble foundation.

Apparently at a somewhat later date, perhaps as late as 1851, a one-story leanto was built across the rear of the addition. The depth of the element suggests that it was built as an enclosed space rather than as a porch. It is separately framed with an approximately 12-by-12-inch sawn inner sill running beside the sill of the rear wall of the wing, supported on stone piers. A similar beam spans the leanto floor beside the rear passage door in the wing. It may correspond to an early wall or partition, since removed, that divided the leanto into two rooms of unequal size or a room and a porch outside the passage door. The mortised and tenoned and pegged sills support up-and-down-sawn two-by-eight- and ten-inch joists, let into their top edges, contrasting with the log joists under the ca. 1834 wing. Unlike the ca. 1851 wing, this section has a limestone foundation. It is possible that the house received a stone perimeter wall during this period that outlined the exposed sections of the house walls and the edges of the two porches and the leanto. Elsewhere, including behind the porches, the leanto, and where the two sections came together, the walls are supported on rock piers, although the main pier supporting the northeast wall of the wing appears to be part of a continuous foundation.

Cooking may have been performed in the outbuilding that shows up on late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century maps [Blackford] and in the 1904 historic photograph [Gray Jacket]. The springhouse, for which no date of construction has been established, may have served the Prestons at this time, but the other log outbuilding was not built for another twenty years.

James Patton Preston died in 1843, at which time Robert and Mary Preston began paying the taxes on Solitude and the surrounding farm. His two brothers received other portions of the Smithfield acreage but did not record the deeds for many years. Preston, who was commissioned as a justice of the peace in Montgomery County in 1837, achieved the rank of Colonel in the Virginia Militia in 1846. He farmed the land at Solitude and was a member of the Methodist Church [Dorman]. The Prestons had three children-- a girl and two boys.
Antebellum Reorientation (ca. 1851)

James Patton Preston must have purchased back the land from Granville Smith’s heirs in the 1830s, but the deed was not recorded in his name until 1850, years after his death [D.B. O, 605]. In that year Robert Preston possessed twenty-four slaves. In comparison, William, at Smithfield, had forty-nine slaves. James F. Preston, who lived with another lawyer in Christiansburg, had nineteen slaves also on his White Thorne tract [Yagow 19]. While his brothers were leading impressive public careers as lawyers and politicians, Robert Preston stayed closer to home. He served as a founding trustee of the Olin and Preston Institute, a Methodist college on a nearby tract, founded in 1854. It was named, in part, after his brother, William Ballard Preston, who served as Secretary of the Navy in the administration of Zachary Taylor. He was still a trustee when, in 1869, it was renamed the Preston and Olin Institute [Kinnear quoted in Yagow 18].

In the following year, title in hand, Preston was able to further enlarge Solitude, giving it the appearance of a large, frame, center-passage-plan house with the massive scale, large windows, and Greek Revival-style detailing popular among successful landowners in the county, this time facing northwest toward the Prices Fork Road. A very similar frame dwelling with related detailing, known as the George Earhart House, is found several miles away near the village of Ellett [Worsham 1986]. The timbers in the floor and roof structure of the new wing were cut after the growing season of 1851 [Heikkenen 1990: 7]. Addition of the new wing coincided with construction of his brother James Francis Preston’s new house at White Thorne and the modernization of Smithfield by his brother William Ballard Preston. There were similar details at each, in particular at White Thorne, which has a markedly similar stairway, porch, and fenestration. The brothers kept their property in their father’s estate throughout the antebellum period and did not officially divide the property at Smithfield and apparently enjoyed a mutual society and competitive building programs on their interconnecting tracts. This came to an end when both of Robert Taylor Preston’s brothers died in 1862.

The addition involved a substantial reworking of the interior and exterior of the house, in a manner more extensive than many but not dissimilar to the treatment of other similar houses in the region by owners of rising wealth and expectations. The new section included a spacious parlor with a bedroom above, separated from the 1801 section by a large passage containing an elegant stairway. The roof of the 1801 section was removed and the walls extended upwards with brick-nogged framing to match the greater height of the added section. A new hipped roof, continuous plain weatherboard, and a new one-story porch spanned and united the original section and the new wing. The entire house was roofed with wood shingles, visible in an historic photograph dating from the late nineteenth century ["Professor’s House"]. The new foundation of the addition and the new section of the front porch was of brick and the area under the adjacent earlier porch on the ca. 1801 section was infilled with brick. The wall and ceiling under the porch were plastered and given a paneled wainscot, as if maybe an outdoor room. It is almost identical to the porch at the George Earhart House.
The fenestration was reworked so that the log pen was completely disguised behind a nearly symmetrical facade. Any existing doors and windows in that wall were removed and replaced by two windows on each floor corresponding in form and scale to those in the new wing. The interior chimney stack of the 1801 section was removed and new brick chimneys with Greek Revival-style first-floor mantels added at each end of the extended main section. The southern chimney probably blocked a window location in the former southwest gable of the original section. A new window was added beside the southern chimney, probably to compensate for the loss of light and air. The trim in the first floor of the original log pen was replaced with Greek Revival elements, except on the presses flanking the original fireplace. The void left by the removal of the chimney was used for a double door giving access from the new passage.

A porch with plastered ceiling spanned the rear of the new wing. Although the floor structure for most of its length has been replaced, a section of the outer porch sill survives under the adjacent leanto. The butting of the new rear porch sill into the structure of the leanto along the northeast side of the ca. 1834 wing indicates that the porch was inserted into the existing leanto, rather than their being built at the same time, as the type and finish of wood members might suggest. Architectural evidence indicates that the rear porch was fully open originally and that it extended to the rear door of the ca. 1834 passage. Weatherboard is visible on the exterior of the passage partition, beside the northeast door. An integral sill spans the leanto floor structure aligned with the edge of the rear porch and may have supported an early wall. The enclosed section of the porch opening off the new parlor was not part of the original construction of this wing, but may date from the early twentieth century. Notches in the door frame in the parlor show where the original window sill was located. The adjacent window in the gable end was added to compensate for the loss of light.

The exterior changes caused some inconsistencies on the interior, including the lower ceiling height of the first floor room in the ca. 1801 section and the need to step down into the room above when entering from the new passage. The mantel at the new second-floor bedroom fireplace in the original log section dates from the period of the addition. Its scale and form suggest that it came from the fireplace between the presses in the room below. This mantel is similar to the mantel in the second floor of the ca. 1834 pen. The outbuildings during the 1850s included the two outbuildings immediately behind the house, the springhouse, and probably the numerous other structures and farm buildings that show up on late nineteenth-century maps. The log outbuilding that still stands appears to have been built as a secondary domestic outbuilding and/or housing for a slave or slave family employed around the house. Unpublished Dendrochronological studies show the structure was built at about the same date as the frame wing on the house [Heikkenen 1991].

By 1860, Preston was an apparently prosperous landowner. He had real estate valued at $44,830 and personal property worth $37,500 [Dorman 265]. The humble house at Solitude had been improved sufficiently to rank with his brother William’s home at Smithfield and his brother James’ new brick house at White Thorne in the minds of visitors. Robert Preston’s wealth compared favorably with that of his brother, James F. Preston, but both of them were dwarfed by
the $132,000 real and $251,330 personal estate of their brother William [Yagow 19]. Letitia Burwell of Bedford County visited the Prestons and recalled the house in her romantic postwar memoir:

"The houses of [the] three brothers were filled with company winter and summer, making within themselves a delightful society. The visitors at one house were equally visitors at the others, and the succession of dinner and evening parties from one to the other made it difficult for a visitor to decide at whose particular house he was staying . . . . One of these brothers, Colonel Robert Preston, had married a lovely lady from South Carolina, whose perfection of character and disposition endeared her to everyone who knew her . . . . although surrounded by all the allurements which gay society and wealth could bring, she did not swerve an instant from the quiet path along which she directed others." [Burwell 115].

The 1864 Confederate Engineer's Map of Montgomery County shows the principal routes through the area around Smithfield to correspond to the present Prices Fork and Merrimac roads. The Preston brothers reached the main roads and each others' houses through an intricate network of lanes between Smithfield, White Thorne, and Solitude. The road between Solitude and Smithfield followed the northwest bank of Stroubles Creek, a route that was labeled "old road" on an 1882 map [Blackford]. Solitude was connected to the outside world principally through a lane opening off Prices Fork Road. Although not shown on the map, later maps suggest that the road crossed Stroubles Creek, traversed the dam of the present upper pond, and was almost exactly centered on the front door of the house. Long, axially designed front drives were a typical feature of the mid-nineteenth-century country house, as opposed to the roadside location of earlier dwellings. The definite alignment of the dam with the house suggests that the pond was added after 1851, perhaps to serve the Smithfield mill as a replacement for the 1826 pond said to be on Smithfield farm but flooding Solitude land [Kegley 1980: 190, 253]. The present upper pond is labeled "Ice Pond" on an 1882 map [Blackford].

College Farm (1872)

Preston served the Confederate Army through the entire Civil War. He was a colonel on the staff of Gen. John Echols until the surrender. He returned to Blacksburg and his family with greatly diminished circumstances. The land book for 1870 the same year shows four hundred acres without buildings: the Solitude tract, with buildings worth $3,000, is, oddly, still listed in the name of Granville Smith's heirs, with Robert Preston paying the taxes. In the following year, when he seems to have sorted out the titles to and amounts of his property, his land totaled eight hundred acres at Solitude, with buildings valued at $2,500, in addition to 250 acres on Tom's Creek. Robert Preston was collectively sued by a number of creditors for lack of payment of a substantial debt accumulated since at least the decade before the war. Including interest, his debts amounted to almost $40,000. Judgment against Preston in Montgomery County Circuit Court
required the sale of his property [Jobin Alexander et al vs Robert Preston et al. Chancery Suit # 667, Montgomery County Clerk's Office].

In 1872, the property was sold to satisfy Preston’s debts. The house and about 250 acres were purchased by the Board of Visitors of the newly formed Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, organized as Virginia's Morrill Act Land-Grant school at the site of the Preston and Olin Institute. The Solitude property was to serve as the college farm, although it was separated from the college buildings by the property of Edward and John Black [Kinnear 58-59]. While some sources suggest that Preston served for some years as the college’s farm manager, others assert that his employment as a farm manager or professor of agriculture was blocked by a board member. He is not listed in those capacities in school catalogs from 1873 to 1878 [Kinnear quoted in Yagow 18]. The Prestons apparently continued to live at Solitude.

When he died in 1880, the appraisers found that he had no property. His wife’s inventory made in the following year showed a value of $913.22. Much of her estate was tied up in livestock and agricultural equipment, but $274.55 of the total represented furnishings [Yagow]. Mary and Robert Preston apparently escaped complete ruin by her refusal to sign the deed relinquishing her dower right in the property, resulting in an eventual settlement on her by the court out of the proceeds of the sale [Jobin Alexander et al vs Robert Preston et al. Chancery Suit # 667, Montgomery County Clerk’s Office]. A study of all county inventories from 1880 to 1882 shows that the Prestons retained one of the most comfortably furnished homes in the county [Yagow]. Of households inventoried during those three years, only Mary Preston's had a sideboard or a sofa and she had more carpets than any other household. Lower values than some on individual pieces suggests that some of the furniture was old or plain, but it was extensive. Farm animals included two work horses, seven heifers, three cows, and 28 sheep.

Analysis of the inventory suggests a movement through rooms, beginning with the parlor, where there was a secretary, two double tables, a sofa, nine cushion chairs, and a cushion arm chair. The next item, twelve split bottom chairs, may have occupied the passage, while a bureau, washstand, split bottom, chair, and clock may have been located in a family living room which may have doubled as a bedroom (beds and bedsteads were omitted from the inventory altogether and added as items off the bill of sale at the end). If the living room was the ca. 1801 log pen, the next three items, a sideboard, fly-leaf table, and six wooden bottom chairs, which would characterize a dining room, may have been located in the ca. 1834 pen. The remaining items at the end of the list are utilitarian elements which may have occupied the leanto, porches and small passage. Bedroom furnishings, carpets, curtains, and cooking and eating utensils are listed in the appended bill of sale and also appear to be organized around a walk-through of the house. Additional analysis of the inventory could help better understand how the house was used and furnished.

The earliest detailed map to show Solitude is a plan of the farm and grounds of the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College drawn in 1882. On it, Solitude is shown east of the Preston mill pond in between two branches of Stroubles Creek. A "lane through farm" runs
between plank fences by a series of angles from Prices Fork Road, in front of the house on the opposite side of what is labeled "ice pond," connecting with the road which runs along the professors' houses in the college's Faculty Row. A "private road to Smithfield" passes close to the house on the south side of Stroubles Creek. This may follow the path of the "new road" of 1776, mentioned above. This road was an extension of College Street, now known as College Avenue. The spring near the house (but not the springhouse) and the extant log outbuilding are shown in their current locations. An additional outbuilding (perhaps a kitchen) is located closer to the house, directly behind the 1851 addition, and three small buildings are shown south of the house, in addition to "cabins" in the orchard and the grove [Blackford]. Two buildings, possibly stables, are shown in a "grass lot" east of the house. A garden and orchard are located to the northeast of the house and a farmyard, with a large barn and three smaller structures, is located across the Smithfield road from the house.

Except for the forested "grove" on the hill to the south, the property appears to have been in fields. The map probably gives a good idea of the nineteenth-century layout of the Solitude farm, both as college property and as private farm. The lane to Prices Fork Road is paralleled by an "old road" that lines up with the pond dam and the front door of the house. An "old road" is shown running toward Smithfield on the north side of the north branch of Stroubles Creek. Both these old roads correspond to the principal farm lanes shown on the 1864 Confederate Engineers Map. No road is shown running across the front of the house, as on later maps.

**Infirmary and Faculty Residence (1882-1945)**

After Mary Preston's death in 1881 the house saw various college-related uses. In 1882-1883 the house was repainted and refurbished to house the infirmary, which stayed there until 1886 [Temple 182 and 213]. The board of visitors met at what was then referred to as the "College Farm House" in 1885 [Temple 204]. An historic photograph from the 1890s is labeled "Professor's House." The house looks much as it does now, with a rough paling fence extending between the log outbuilding and the rear of the main house. A grove of what appear to be locust trees stand in front of the house and ornamental vines are growing on each of the front porch columns. The paneled wainscot on the front porch is painted a color which contrasts with the columns and the lighter plaster wall above (apparently white) and the dark color of the window blinds. There are also shuttered outer doors at the entry. A view from across the pond published in 1904 shows a portion of the now-vanished weatherboarded outbuilding (possibly the kitchen) behind the house and the paling fence [Gray Jacket]. A similar picket or paling fence ran from the road which skirted the edge of the pond back in a line separating the domestic yard from the garden shown on the 1882 map [Blackford].

By 1908 the house at Solitude was occupied by Professor Nourse [Powell]. In 1925 it served as the residence of a cheese specialist, Professor Saunders [Manning]. It was apparently during this period that the crawl space under the ca. 1801 section and the passage in the ca. 1851 addition was excavated to house a coal-fired furnace which served hot water radiators throughout
the house. A poured concrete coal bin was excavated under the back porch with an adjacent exterior cellar stair. An interior stair to the cellar was added under the main staircase. Apparently repairs were done at this time to the enclosed room on the rear porch which also has a concrete foundation. Architectural evidence indicates that the bathroom beside the staircase in the second floor bedroom in the 1851 section and the closet in the first-floor passage between the log pens were added in this period as well. A section of the rear porch opening off the parlor was enclosed during this period. A five-panel door was inserted into the northern window under the porch and a new window with reeded exterior trim was added beside the fireplace to compensate for the loss of light and air. A similar window in the leanto room off the passage in the 1834 wing may indicate that it was enclosed at the same time. The room is said to have been used by the Saunders’ daughter, Dr. Elizabeth Lee, as a medical office (Elmore 1988). Further confirmation of an early twentieth-century date for these alterations might be seen in the reused six-panel door from the 1830s period being used as the porch access door from the enclosed room off the parlor porch. This might be the former rear door from the ca. 1834 passage.

In this region, abandonment of cooking in an outdoor or basement kitchen in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries often necessitated an addition or conversion of a room as part of the main house. The cooking function may have been housed in the leanto of the ca. 1834 wing. The walls of that section have been extensively reworked. At some point in the early twentieth century the former wood shingle roof was replaced with a block tin standing-seam metal roof, which still survives on the upper roof.

A map made in 1908 seems to indicate existing and new or proposed features [Powell]. It shows a road running straight from the front of the house to Prices Fork Road over the dam and the road to Smithfield as an extension of Faculty Row running in front of the house and bridging the south branch of Stroubles Creek in the center of the present duck pond. The present concrete walk leading from the house toward Faculty Row probably dates from that time, as it shows up on the map. By 1925 a small bungalow residence had been built between the drill field and Solitude [Manning].

Veterans’ and Alumni Clubhouse (1946 and 1961)

The Saunders continued to occupy the house until about 1940, when it was remodeled to house two families in two apartments, needed since faculty row had been replaced by academic buildings. At the end of World War II the property around the house was developed to serve as a temporary trailer park for veterans [Kinnear]. The house served as the recreation building or clubhouse. The back porch of the house served as a washroom and dances were held regularly in the front rooms. The trailers began to disappear in the early 1950s and two families moved back into Solitude, the Norman Grovers and the Franklin Elmores. The Elmores enjoyed the beauty of the house but found it very cold and had to work hard to stoke the old furnace [Elmore 1987]. Photographs from the period show the house painted a light shade (probably white) with dark trim on the main and porch cornices, the window blinds, and the stiles and rails of the porch wainscot.
The house may have been under threat of demolition in the postwar period. According to Frank Elmore, John Abbott, who was with the college's buildings and ground department in the 1950s, campaigned to save Solitude in about 1951 [Elmore 1988]. During this period some significant rehabilitation work was done to the house. Replastering in the first floor of the ca. 1801 section exposed window frames flanking the door to the passage joining it to the ca. 1834 pen [Elmore 1988]. The flooring in the first floor of the ca. 1834 log pen and the leanto was replaced. The first-floor mantel in the log pen was probably removed at this time to increase wall space. The hearth and firebox floor were removed and the opening blocked up. A new toilet was added in the second floor of the adjacent passage and a closet was added in the headroom over the 1834 passage stair. Evidence of a fire in the roof of the 1834 pen dates from this era. The fire is said to have been started by children in the added closet over the stair [Ballard 1991].

The room at the eastern end of the leanto on the ca. 1834 pen was redone to serve as a kitchen, with a new door and window. It is possible that it had been enclosed in the early twentieth century to serve in that capacity when the outdoor kitchen was no longer practical, but its condition in the 1950s must have necessitated a complete renovation, leaving almost no trace of earlier material visible. The only early feature is the window beside the chimney, which appears to be the original window from beside the door in the back of the ca. 1834 pen, moved to its current location when the leanto was built in the mid-nineteenth century. The weatherboard in the end of the shed, extending to the chimney of the log section has been reworked in recent years. Most of the present boards have a modern added bead to blend with the older siding and they obscure any joint between the wing and the shed that might have indicated when it was added. It is possible that the kitchen during the Saunders occupancy had been in the mysterious adjacent area now fitted out as a laboratory. The door from the 1834 passage into the lab was carefully restored in ca. 1950, with the molded architrave trim and paneled door carefully copied from the adjacent original doors.

The H. M. McEvers replaced the Elmores in 1961 and the Leinhardtts eventually replaced the Grovers. The shed beside the house served as a doctor's office during this period (McEver 1987). Mac McEver founded the Hokie Club, an alumni fund-raising organization, at Solitude during this period. The club's meetings took place there, hosted by the McEvers. As many as five hundred people would gather on a new brick terrace and on the lawn under large tents. Lack of parking and increasingly numbers led to a relocation of these pre-game and alumni events. The McEvers eventually relinquished their apartment to the Hokie Club and moved out, but the club remained in the house until 1974. The McEvers recalled later that the basement experienced frequent flooding and water problems [McEver 1987]. Members of the Buildings and Grounds staff during those years recall that department head Howard Price took care that the house was treated carefully, including insisting on whitewash on the outbuilding.
Academic Building (1974)

The house was developed in the mid-1970s for use by the College of Human Resources. The ca. 1834 pen and the adjacent passage was used as a Human Nutrition and Food Laboratory and the rest of the building adapted as interior design studios and offices. The added room off the passage between the two log pens was fitted out as a laboratory with fume vents. The adjacent room continued to be used as a kitchen. The flooring in the first floor of the ca. 1834 passage was replaced with plywood: original sections survive only along the back wall of the passage and under the stair. Bathroom fixtures were replaced. The first-floor rooms in the front of the house received dropped ceilings and fluorescent lighting. The bedroom in the 1851 wing was subdivided with inexpensive materials into two offices and a passage. The shed room of the 1851 parlor was fixed up for use as a darkroom. Water damage from burst pipes disfigured the passage floor and the radiators and pipes were replaced with inappropriate fixtures. Surface-mounted wiring was run through most of the house at this time. The springhouse was repaired.

Appalachian Studies Center (ca. 1988)

Since the departure of the College of Human Resources in the late 1980s, Solitude has been used as a headquarters of the Appalachian Studies program, which has attempted to secure funding for a complete restoration of the building. Insect damage and other moisture-related deterioration continue to plague the house, in spite of careful monitoring and regular treatment. The exterior has been kept in repair and painted, but the interior is unsightly and, in the case of the 1851 parlor, unstable due to decades of decay. The exterior blinds were removed and placed in storage pending repair. The log outbuilding fell into extreme decay and was temporarily stabilized after preparation of an historic structure report and H.A.B.S. record drawings in 1989 gave suggestions for its restoration. Shortage of funds did not permit this, so the building was stabilized recently by the construction of a shed over the entire original structure, although the added room was demolished. Vulnerable items that were removed, such as trim and porch elements, are in storage.
II. Architectural Description

Site

The house at Solitude is situated in a landscaped park adjacent to the central campus at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The park, created in the 1920s, contains two shallow bodies of water which surround the house and its lawns from the northwest to the southwest. The upper pond to the southwest may be the same as the Smithfield mill pond of ca. 1816. The waters of Stroubles Creek border the grounds on the south. The house was, until recent construction of a new parking lot some distance away, reached by an asphalt-paved drive off South Campus Road, with parking along both sides and a small lot for parking near the house. The drive and parking was removed recently and seeded, and access from the new parking lot is by foot only. Two historic outbuildings remain, a small log springhouse with a stone foundation and a one-room log dwelling and/or domestic support structure. Landscaping includes large trees and overgrown, modern shrubbery around the house, of no historic value.

Exterior

The house today consists of a large, two-story, weatherboarded structure with a hipped roof and conventional box cornice with a tall ornamental frieze below. The almost symmetrical five-bay facade faces southwest across the dam of the upper pond, across which the historic drive ran from Prices Fork Road. Matching seven-course, common-bond, brick exterior chimneys rise at each end of the main block. The lower, gabled two-story wing sheathed with weatherboard extends to the rear from the southeast end of the rear (northeast) wall as do many service ells in the region. The house is covered with standing-seam metal roofing. That on the main house appears to date from the early twentieth century, while the roofing on the rear porch and lean-to was recently replaced. Galvanized half-round gutters (recently replaced) and round downspouts carry away water from the roofs. Those on the northeast and northwest empty into underground conduits but those facing the Duck Pond mostly spill onto the ground. The house originally had no gutters, but the half round have been on the house for most of this century.

The floor plan, with a central passage containing an open staircase and flanked by rectangular rooms, was popular among wealthy landowners in the county by the time the house took its current form, in the early 1850s. However, the regular features of the exterior and the conventional plan conceal a long and varied history within. The southern third of the main section contains a rectangular log pen dating from ca. 1801 with a log and frame wing dating from the 1830s. It was integrated into a frame addition to form the present structure in about 1851. The ca. 1851 section has a low brick foundation and the earlier sections have a continuous, shallow, coursed limestone rubble foundation. Concealed parts of the 1801-1834 sections are supported on sections of shallow stone foundation wall and rock piers. The missing sections of foundation appear to have been robbed to construct walls under newer sections on the exterior.
The southwest facade is spanned by a one-story, five-bay, hip-roofed porch supported on square columns, replaced, along with the treated plank flooring, apparently in the 1970s. The double-leaf central front door is provided with sidelights and two three-panel doors. Applied square pilasters flank the door, and paired square pilasters stand to each side of the sidelights, creating a frontispiece crowned by an unusual Greek Revival entablature with a raised central tablet and end blocks like those found on mantels of the period, from which the design appears to derive. Above the door and the porch roof is a window with a similar tripartite composition. This opening contains a full casement assembled with a central bar to resemble the meeting rail of the adjacent second-floor sash windows and flanked by slender pilasters made of built up molding. The sidelights are flanked on the outside by square, paneled pilasters with a simple Greek meander decorative element just below the capital, derived from period pattern books. Three large sandstone blocks form a step at the center of the front porch.

The four windows on each floor contain six-over-six sash windows. The first-floor windows, like the door, are flanked by pilasters of a related but slightly taller form, with similar entablatures. The first-floor wall and floor is plastered on wood lath, just like an interior surface, and more remarkably, the porch is provided with a low wainscot with two tiers of horizontal panels. Each first-floor window sill is close to the floor and features a low, paneled apron. The second-floor windows, which have square architrave surrounds, protrude into the tall frieze of the main cornice of the house. Almost all of the windows possess original louvered exterior blinds, hung on cast iron lull-and-porter hinges, but they were in poor repair and have been placed in storage pending restoration of the building.

The end walls are similar to each other. Fully exterior, two-story, common-bond brick chimneys rise in the center with corbeled shoulders and caps. An added two-over-two sash window with a reeded exterior frame lights the parlor on the east side of the north chimney. Windows in the same position beside the south chimney light both floors: a six-over-six sash on the first floor and a taller nine-over-six sash on the second. The rear (southeast) wall of the main section is treated much like the opposite wall, with the same high frieze, plain weatherboard, and six-over-six sash windows, without, however, any elaborate trim. A gabled one-story porch, supported on square columns, extends across the facade, intersecting with the shed addition on the ca. 1834 wing. The enclosed section at the north end of the porch has small six-over-six sash windows and an reused, older, six-panel door with transom opening onto the porch. The rear porch has a mid-twentieth-century poured concrete foundation. A fragment of a porch column was retained at the corner of the enclosed section to visually carry the porch roof.

The two-story wing was built of log in about 1834. When it was built, the house apparently presented a symmetrical front to the southwest. The eastern two-thirds of this wall, sheathed with beaded weatherboards, is intact. The (originally) central door is sheltered by a wide, one-story, one-bay porch with a flush beaded-board gable and square posts. The six-panel door, with a four-light transom, is flanked on the east by a six-over-nine sash window on the first floor and a six-over-six sash window above, both with quarter-round exterior architrave trim. The porch has a stone foundation, replaced square posts, and an original railing with round top rail.
and square balusters carried on a diamond-section bottom rail. A small six-light casement window was apparently added in the early twentieth century just to the west of the door to light the closet. At some point in the past the passage light was improved by the replacement of the upper four panels in the door with glass. The western third of the southwest front was altered in 1851 with the raising of the roof and addition of an exterior chimney where a window probably was located and is described above, but sections of the beaded weatherboard remain in the area to the east of the chimney.

The rear (northeast) facade of the ca. 1834 wing is partially obscured by the added lean-to across the first floor. Second-floor windows with six-over-six sash and quarter-round trim correspond to those on the southwest front. The first-floor facade of the lean-to contains mid-twentieth-century door and window serving the kitchen at the east end. A seam between the wall of most of the lean-to and that under the ca. 1851 back porch merely indicates that the rooms in the lean-to have been heavily reworked. An engaged square column divides the wall under the edge of the porch roof. The wall contains a door beside the porch column and a small sash window with a reeded frame to the west. A small four-over-four sash window on the east side of the porch column, outside the porch, lights the same room on the interior. Architectural evidence of the evolution of this area is inconclusive without exposing the framing.

The southeast gable end of the ca. 1834 wing has a central, two-story, exterior, four-course common-bond, brick chimney with corbeled shoulders and a tapered, beaded rake board. The first-floor room is lit, on this wall, by an early six-over-nine sash window, possibly relocated from elsewhere in the first floor to compensate for the light and air lost when the lean-to was added. An adjacent window lighting the lean-to is identical and seems to have been similarly relocated. Speculation suggests that they may have been moved from two window bays which lighted the rear wall of the room in the ca. 1834 log pen. If these window bays existed, one is not visible and the other may have been replaced by the current doorway from the pen into the lean-to. The lean-to carries a small one-story exterior end chimney. The six-course common-bond brick chimney appears to date from the same period in the mid-nineteenth century as the lean-to.
III. Room-by-Room Description

General Interior

The interior of the main block of the house mostly dates from the mid-nineteenth-century reworking. All the rooms have plastered walls and ceilings. The wiring and the heating pipes and modern radiators are exposed throughout. Room designations are based on the 1995 drawings by Jun Zhu.

Basement

The basement was created, probably in the early twentieth century, to house a coal furnace. The central area of the shallow crawl space was excavated under the ca. 1851 passage and the ca. 1801 pen, leaving the piers and foundation walls supported on mounds of dusty earth. Concrete block and poured concrete block knee walls prevent the earth from subsiding. The ceiling joists, beams, and floorboards overhead were painted white. The structure under the ca. 1801 section consists of oak log joists carried on large squared sills and stone piers and sections of foundation wall. The floor structure under the ca. 1834 wing is continuous below the passage and the log pen. Large squared oak log sills carry oak log joists. The leanto has up-and-down sawn two-by-eight and two-by-ten sills morticed and tenoned into similar sills, with a cross sill or beam aligned with the exterior edge of the rear porch on the 1851 section. It is supported on a stone foundation wall. A remaining section of the floor structure of the rear porch, visible in the leanto crawl space, is similar. The outer sill extends past the outer leanto sill, which apparently butts into it. Closer inspection during restoration may reveal that the porch and the leanto were built at the same time.

The floor structure under the ca. 1851 wing consists of sawn timbers and sills supported by numerous posts and jacks added as they began to fail. The earth in the crawl space shows evidence of a long history of water flowing under the floor.

First Floor

Room 7

The principal room in the house today is the parlor in the north end of the ca. 1851 frame section. The room features the most elaborate woodwork in the house. The windows are framed by fluted Greek Revival-style surrounds with square architrave crossettes (or ears) at the upper corners, and base blocks, and have low sills with paneled aprons. The trim at the door to the passage is similar. The four-panel has molding on both sides, a twentieth-century rimlock, and a modern deadbolt. The butt hinges are of an early date. The matching trim around the door to the enclosed room on the rear porch shows notches indicating where it was altered from its original use as a window. The door is a late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century five-panel door with a mortised knob and latch and a modern deadbolt. There is a high molded baseboard.
The parlor mantel, with fluted supporting pilasters flanking the firebox and supporting an enriched shelf, is slightly more elaborate than the mantel in the room on the opposite side of the passage. This, like the graduated levels of elaboration in the door and window trim, indicates that the rooms were executed with a subtle sense of their relative positions in a hierarchy expressed in the architectural ornamentation. The hearth is of concrete. Original random-width flooring survives. A four-panel door gives access to the passage. The room has a dropped lay-in ceiling with fluorescent lighting, added in the 1970s just below the early plaster ceiling.

Room 6

The wide passage contains a broad stair that rises from beside the parlor door, traverses a landing at the back of the hall, and ascends to the edge of the second floor, which returns back to the parlor partition in a wide curve. The carved scroll at the end of the unpainted railing rests on a turned newel and is supported on two turned balusters per step, with turned newels at the corners of the landing. The skirt below the lower flight is paneled. The space under the stair originally contained a closet. When the crawl space was excavated in the early twentieth century, the closet door was moved out to form a landing at the head of the new basement stairs, but the old door frame remains in place. Early peg rail for hanging coats extends from the rear door frame to the former closet door.

The door trim in the passage is similar to that in the parlor, with a sloping top over the door with a raised central element, as well as crossettes and square base blocks. There is a high molded base. The double-leaf front door retains early butt hinges, an early rimlock, and mismatched iron up- and down-bolts in addition to modern locks. The wide, four-panel, original rear door has an early rimlock like the front door, added deadbolt above, an early twentieth-century faceplate and knob on the exterior, and added early twentieth-century steeple hinges.

Room 5

This room is contained within the original (ca. 1801) log pen and has a lower ceiling height due to the retention of the original ceiling joists in the renovation of ca. 1851. The room contains mostly Greek Revival-era woodwork. The mantel has pilasters supporting the frieze and shelf and a concrete hearth. The double doors from the passage to the room occupy the space of the early interior chimney, removed in ca. 1851. These doors have molded panels on one side only. They have later been rehung on the inside of the room but previously opened into the passage. They retain early butt hinges and an early escutcheon, but the large, ca. 1851 rimlock has been replaced with an early twentieth-century rimlock (now broken) with porcelain knobs and a modern deadbolt has been added. The door is flanked by presses which originally stood to each side of the now-vanished fireplace. The presses retain raised-panel, six-panel doors with quarter-round trim, and early added three-light transoms with contrasting trim. Both presses and their door trim appear to date from the same era as the ca. 1834 wing and retain plastered interiors and beaded baseboard inside. Both had three tiers of early shelving, some of which has been removed.
The doors and windows in the room all have plain, ca 1851 trim with crossettes, stepped base block, and pointed tops. The door to the ca. 1834 addition contains a four-panel door without molding, apparently dating from the mid-nineteenth century and fitted with a late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century rimlock with one metal and one porcelain knob. Additional original window openings in the log pen are undoubtedly concealed behind the plaster. The floor is original and is of random-width boards. The room has a dropped lay-in ceiling with fluorescent lighting, added in the 1970s immediately below the early plaster ceiling.

Room 4

The passage in the wing added in ca. 1834 is apparently framed in between the two log pens to either side. The passage contains a narrow, open-stringer, winder stair rising steeply just beside the front (south) passage door with a chamfered, square newel carrying a spherical finial knob at the top and bottom. The top newel has a cut out semi-circular "drop finial." The round rail is supported by two square balusters per step. A closet located under the stair is equipped with a small early six-panel door with modern hinges and a twentieth-century rimlock. The woodwork throughout the four first- and second-floor rooms in the wing consists of a beaded base, horizontal flush wainscot surmounted by a molded chairrail, and quarter-round molded architrave door and window trim. As elsewhere in the ca. 1834 section, the chairrail consists of a board with a beaded lower edge topped by a cyma supporting a bullnose.

The six-panel front (southwest) door has had glass substituted for wood in its upper four panels but it retains an early rimlock with a manual deadbolt unlike those in the ca. 1851 section. The door to the room in the log pen (Room 2) has been replaced with a modern, hollow-core door, but the trim survives. The door at the rear of the passage, giving access to the lab in room 3, as well as the door to room 5, has been completed reconstructed for some unknown reason in the mid-twentieth century, with trim carefully modeled on the adjacent historic doorways. A new door also matching the historic doors nearby, was installed in the opening to Room 3. A closet and a window to light it were added in the west corner of the passage in the early twentieth century. The reeded window trim dates from about that period. A chase in the corner conceals the plumbing descending from the upstairs bathroom. The floor is covered with vinyl flooring.

Room 2

The room in the ca. 1834 log pen has many original finishes. The flooring has been removed and a modern, narrow hardwood floor inserted, probably in the 1950s to replace sagging flooring as part of a general repair of the house. The doors to the passage and the rear lean-to and the windows retain the quarter-round architrave molding found throughout the wing. The door to the lean-to holds a modern hollow-core door. The mantel has been removed, most likely as part of the 1950s repair. The seams in the beaded baseboard reveal the mantel's width.
Room 1

The kitchen may represent an early twentieth-century kitchen location, but little evidence is visible of what form the two rooms in the lean-to took before the mid-twentieth century, when the current finishes were added, including plaster walls, a glass-panel door, and a six-over-six sash window on the northeast. The chimney in the gable end is not visible inside, but a large vent from the laboratory in the next room spanned the room to exit out the chimney until it was removed recently. The early six-over-nine-light window beside the chimney has a plain square architrave trim without a bead. The flush panel beneath may indicate that this was formerly a door.

Room 3

The room opening off the rear of the passage in the first floor of the ca. 1834 wing was fitted out as a laboratory in the mid-1970s. Little evidence of its earlier appearance is available.

Room 8

The small added enclosed room on the rear porch opening off the parlor (Room 7) was fitted out as a darkroom in the mid-1970s. The room is now plastered.

Second Floor

Room 9

The second-floor bedroom over the parlor in the ca. 1851 wing retains most of its historic features in spite of additions during the room’s 1970s use as an office. The room had been previously reduced in size when a bathroom and closet were inserted at the south end in the early twentieth century. An indirect lighting channel was added on the walls around the entire room in the 1970s. Then an inexpensively detailed partition divided the room into a small office and a workroom. The room retains a Greek Revival-style mantel similar to the mantel in the parlor below. It has a modern replacement hearth incorporating old brick. The square window trim incorporates crosettes, steeped base blocks, and flat paneled aprons. There is a high square baseboard. The closet and the door to the small passage past the bathroom, dating from the early twentieth century, are equipped with trim dating from that period, with molded base blocks and bulls-eye corner blocks. The closet door is missing. The floor throughout the former bedroom is of random-width wood.

Room 10

The bathroom and the passage outside it each contain a former bedroom window with corresponding trim. The bathroom walls are treated with a vertical tongue-and-groove wainscot. A small closet is located in the corner of the room beside the door. Both the door to the bathroom and the closet door have early-twentieth-century four-panel doors with period rimlocks,
bulls-eye corner blocks, and molded base blocks. The fixtures and plumbing are modern. The small passage created when the bathroom was installed contains an access panel to the attic in the ceiling.

Room 11

The second-floor passage in the ca. 1851 section is a wide room with trim like that in the adjacent bedroom. The stairwell curves broadly across the room. The staircase is lit by a window at the same level as the other windows. The area below it to the landing floor is filled with a decorative paneled apron. A modern wood rail follows the stair to the first floor. The random-width flooring slopes toward the stairwell due to severe subsidence in that area.

Room 12

The second-floor room in the original log pen has Greek Revival details dating from when its ceiling was raised. The floor level is three steps down from the passage, however, because the original floor was not raised (as it sometimes was in similar remodelings from this period recorded by the author). The four-panel door from the passage retains an early rimlock like those on the first floor with later metal knobs and a modern deadbolt. The window and door trim is less elaborate than elsewhere in the house, with a small corner block applied at the intersection of the square side and top architraves on the plain board surround. The window sills are very high on the front to give an exterior consistency and to clear the porch roof, and the area beneath is infilled with flat paneled aprons. Low window seats with hinged lids are an early addition and provide a platform from which small persons may see out the windows more readily. The window beside the mantel is given a nine-over-six sash so that it reaches more closely to the floor. The vertical trim elements show seams near the bottom as if the window was lengthened, but no other evidence of alteration is visible. The door to the ca. 1834 wing has been blocked and concealed by cabinets since the 1970s, when the room was used as a library.

Although the floor and hearth are not visible at this time, the mantel in the room is one of the most important in the house. Its dimension and form suggest that it was moved here at the time (ca. 1851) that the original internal chimney was removed. The new fireplace was added at the opposite end of the room, and since the first floor room had a new and fashionable Greek Revival mantel, the old mantel was probably relegated to the second-floor room which received the least important moldings. The six-foot-wide Federal-form mantel, which is related in form and style to the mantel in the second floor of the ca. 1834 log pen, has fluted pilasters supporting a high entablature with a central tablet and end blocks and a breakfront shelf.

Room 13

The rooms at the head of the stair in the ca. 1834 wing have been reworked. The passage at the head of the stair may have initially served as a passage between the room in the original pen, a small adjacent room (room 14), and the stair. The stair rises with an open rail to the top,
enclosed on the west by a partition with wainscot and chair rail. A seam in the wainscot suggests that the wall may have ended at its intersection with the partition dividing rooms 13 and 14, so that room 13 and the stair were in the same space. The partition between the two rooms may have been removed at an early date and the doorway inserted between the stair and room 13. The chair rail and baseboard on that wall are simply butted into those elements on the exterior wall at the head of the stairs. The same joint at the wall between the stair and the room in the log pen are carefully mitred, indicating that the latter may have been inserted later. The door to the stair is missing but the woodwork throughout consists of a low beaded base and quarter-round architrave trim. The flooring is of random-width wood boards throughout the second floor.

Room 14

The room was fitted as a bathroom with modern fixtures in the mid-1970s. It retains elements of the wainscot and chair rail on the exterior wall near the window. The partition appears to have been added in the 1970s, although a fragment of chair rail beside the door in room 13 may represent a survival of an earlier wall. The seam in the stair enclosure referred to above seems to indicate that there was a partition there originally. The floor is covered with vinyl tile.

Room 15

The room in the ca. 1834 log pen is well preserved. The door to the room preserves its quarter-round trim and six-panel door with raised panels on both sides and unusual added rimlock with a separate bolt and latch mechanism in the same unit. The windows retain the quarter-round architrave trim and the flush wainscot, molded chair rail, and beaded baseboard are like those on the first floor. The mantel consists of plain square pilasters supporting a high frieze with end blocks and center tablet and a molded breakfront shelf. A closet with a modern door was added in the third quarter of the twentieth century in the space over the lower section of the stair.

Attic

The unfinished attic in the ca. 1834 wing is framed with lapped and pegged common rafters. The raised frame section of the wall over the ca. 1801 section is visible and is infilled with coursed brick often known as brick nogging. This treatment, which may continue around the exterior of the room, is not unusual in the mid-nineteenth century in fully framed dwellings. It may have been done, in this case, to give a similar insulation value to the wall as the logs immediately below. The entire hip-roofed section over the ca. 1801 and 1851 sections is consistently framed with conventional common rafters added in about 1851. Neither section was ever intended for use for occupation or storage. Access is through a ceiling hatch in the passage at Room Ten and a small modern ceiling hatch in the closet off Room Fifteen.
IV. Analysis

The restoration of Solitude is to be undertaken to preserve the oldest building on campus, one that holds many important historical associations for the university, and to provide an appropriate home for the Appalachian Studies Program, a use that would be most appropriate for the house. In any historical restoration it is essential to base the work in an appropriate period of interpretation directly related to the building's historical significance. Decisions about what to remove, what to restore, and what to reconstruct can then be made based on clear criteria. The soundest procedure is to select a period of interpretation that simultaneously corresponds to the period from which most of the sound and usable fabric dates and to the period which has the most significance to the owner and the proposed users.

The principal period of interpretation recommended in this report is that of the years after the acquisition of the farm by Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College in 1872. This would comprise the final phase of the Preston occupancy, when Preston is said to have served as farm manager of this newly acquired college farm through the early twentieth-century use of the structure as a faculty house. Most of the current decorative fabric and many of the room interiors date primarily from the ca. 1851 enlargement and renovation. Several minor additions made after the Prestons' deaths, such as the room off the parlor on the rear porch, are important and valuable additions which it would be in the university's best interest to retain. The existence of an inventory of Mary Preston's furnishings at her death in 1881 makes it possible to interpret designated portions of the house as it appeared at that time.

Keeping this scheme of interpretation in mind it appears best to restore much of the house to its form in the early twentieth century, removing all modern intrusions, including dropped ceilings, vinyl flooring, and added walls and doors. The needs of the Appalachian Studies Program for meeting rooms, collection display and storage, and office space, will dovetail neatly with this program. Installing the most intrusive modern facilities, such as kitchen and toilets, in the most damaged and altered areas, is consonant with sound preservation policy. If necessary, the project should be phased to allow the building to be restored over time and be used during that period.

The proposal for reuse of the structure, detailed in the attached floor plans, calls for the main entrance to the house for seminars and classes to be through the rear door of the ca. 1851 passage (Room Six). The porch outside this door will be provided with a low ramp to make it also serve as the handicapped entrance. Staff entry to the Appalachian Studies Center will be through the rear door of the leanto of the ca. 1834 wing. The receptionist for the center will be located in the ca. 1834 passage (Room Four). The director's office will be in the ca. 1834 log pen (Room Three), with a staff office in the second-floor room above (Room Fifteen). The leanto will contain a small workroom/kitchen and two handicapped-accessible toilet rooms.

The ca. 1802 log pen (Room Five) will be the principal meeting and gathering room for
the center. It will be furnished as a dining room with durable, historically compatible furniture for use for regular seminars, meetings, and exhibits relating to the function of the Appalachian Studies Center. The ca. 1851 parlor (Room Seven) and passage (Room Six) will be furnished as accurately as possible to represent the period of the Prestons’ occupancy at the advent of Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College. The parlor and passage will be used for receptions and exhibits. The second floor of the ca. 1801 pen (Room Twelve) will house the permanent object displays of the Appalachian Studies Center, based on the current holdings in the Earl Palmer Collection.

The room above the ca. 1851 parlor (Room Nine) will house the offices of the Center for Preservation Technology, which will share the building with the Appalachian Studies Center. The adjacent bathroom (Room Ten), added in the early twentieth century, will remain for use on the second floor. The fixtures in the second-floor bathroom in the ca. 1834 wing (Room Fourteen) will be removed and the space used as a graduate office or workroom.

The outbuilding should be given a function to insure its preservation. A good use would be as an office and information for students about Solitude and for students in Appalachian studies.

In all areas the philosophy expressed in the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Preservation Projects should be followed:

1. Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property which requires minimal alteration of the building, structure, or site and its environment, or to use a property for its originally intended purpose.

2. The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.

3. All buildings, structures, and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged.

4. Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure, or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.

5. Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize a building, structure, or site shall be treated with sensitivity.

6. Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, wherever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the
material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplication of features, substantiated by historic, physical, or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.

7. The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic buildings materials shall not be undertaken.

8. Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archaeological resources affected by, or adjacent to any project.

9. Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, neighborhood or environment.

10. Whenever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done such a manner that if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired.
V. Condition and Recommendations

General Notes

The study of the building's fabric is of necessity somewhat superficial until much more material is removed from the interior or exterior during actual repair work. Until such time the full extent of moisture- and insect-related damage will remain unknown. Extrapolation from visible evidence suggests the most damage has been in the frame addition of 1859, and may extend up the walls to the second story.

Sitework

The problems of moisture runoff are one of the main sources of structural problems at Solitude. A rethinking of the drainage patterns on the site will be required to correct long-standing problems. The paved driveway is not an historic feature of the house and consideration should be given to its removal and replacement with gravel. Extensive landscape plantings are also not historically appropriate. Any work done should include consideration of the role to played by the surrounding landscape and the two outbuildings. Any excavation should involve archaeological sampling.

Exterior

The exterior of the house consists, for the most part, of the weatherboard, windows, doors and trim original to each part of the house. Most of these elements are in fair to good condition and need only minor repairs. The paint film is thick and irregular and probably should be removed on much of the beaded sections of weatherboard. The exterior louvered blinds which were removed from the house and stored several years ago should be repaired or (only where necessary) replaced and reinstalled correctly on hinges. New, historically appropriate storm windows on the interior would better serve the historic interpretation. The metal roof of the main house and ell dates from the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, while that on the porches was replaced in recent years. The roof has some problems with leaking and may need limited repair, but replacement can probably be safely deferred to a future date. New gutters and downspouts are needed. The current subsurface drains to which the gutters are connected need to be replaced as part of a perimeter drainage system to keep moisture out of the basement and crawl space.

The chimneys are in need of tuckpointing and masonry repair. The foundation is a hodgepodge of brick and stone elements which warrants careful inspection and localized repair in those limited areas where it has been damage or has lost stability. Foundation repair is a delicate issue in an historic property, because the material contains much valuable information about the
history of the structure and the surrounding soil and builder’s trench contain valuable
archaeological information. The porches have been well preserved, but the porch floors and
columns, which have been inappropriately or temporarily repaired over past years, need
replacement to form a more authentic appearance.

Building Structure

The log structure of the earliest portions of the building does appear to have suffered
from deterioration. The floor structure in the earliest section shows evidence of insect attack and
later alterations, and has received temporary supplementary support, but careful reinforcement of
weakened elements needs to be added, particularly at the ends of joists. The recent extermination
program has probably been effective, but termite damage in the floor and trim elements of the wall
has been as recent as last summer. The sills and joists in the ca. 1834 section are for the most part
strong in spite of a long history of termite infestation. Termite trails can, however, be seen on the
stone piers in the crawl space, so concealed damage in the walls above is to be expected. One
section of the log sill at the rear of the ca. 1834 passage has been completely destroyed, but this
appears to be an isolated instance, perhaps caused by a leaky pipe when laundry equipment was
located above it. A former tenant remembered holes in what is now the laboratory floor from the
laundry pipes [Elmore 1988]. The floor structure below the lean-to is in very poor shape. Some
wall areas on the interior or exterior will need to be opened up for inspection throughout the
building.

The greatest damage is apparently in the 1859 frame addition, which contains the passage
and large parlor and the rooms above them. The weakening of the structure began as early as the
last century and has been exacerbated by the paving of the driveway. Repairs have been
continuous through the years, with added posts and beams supported on the unexcavated soil
beneath.

Interior

The interior needs extensive and carefully planned restoration to provide an interpretation
of the building to the era of the acquisition of the house as the “farm house” of Virginia
Agricultural and Mechanical College which would best serve its history, current form, and
proposed use. In portions of the building visited by the public that interpretation would be most
complete, while subsidiary areas used as offices and support spaces would not receive as detailed
a treatment. These public rooms would include the parlor in the 1859 wing, the original log pen,
and the two entry passages. The rooms on each floor in the log ell would be used as offices, as
would the bedroom in the 1859 wing. The bathroom in the 1859 wing should be retained and
new bathrooms and other service elements placed in the shed addition to the ell, which could be
effectively gutted for that purpose. All added modern elements must be removed.
Every attempt should be made to retain the secure plaster walls and ceilings in all historic rooms, although much will be lost when the structural repairs are made. The flooring in the first floor is in rough shape due to insect damage and the addition of two generations of radiator heating systems. The flooring and joists in the parlor will have to be replaced in their entirety. The flooring in the 1859 passage on both stories and in the first floor of the original log pen will need careful repair and refinishing if it is to be retained. Wood trim is generally in good shape with the exception of the elements around the second-floor passage front window, which are badly warped from water damage. The stair rail in the 1859 addition is not stable enough to ensure safety in its present form.

Attention should be given to the problem of lead paint which undoubtedly exists throughout the house. Abatement will be an important element of the project.

The basement, which was created from original crawl space to provide room for a furnace, is the source of the humidity which has plagued the house for years. Adequate ventilation has never been possible, given the lack of vents. If the house is to be completely air conditioned, which may be required for modern comfort and the care of historic collections, ventilation and control of condensation will be even more of a problem year-round. Air conditioning can cause tremendous stresses due to the variation of humidity from interior to exterior in the summer as well as in the winter. The basement should be used only as a mechanical space.

**Basement Moisture Control**

A recent termite infestation at Solitude further raised the issue of adequate basement ventilation. Aside from adequately eliminating the termites through extermination, the best protection from insect and fungal attack will be to reduce the moisture in the air in the house, most particularly in the basement. Tests performed by the author and Joseph R. Loferski several years ago and repeated by another researcher in 1995 indicate that the airborne moisture content was high in the basement and worst under the parlor (the frame wing), which has caused deterioration of the sills and floor structure over many years. A moisture meter gave a reading of 18% in many of the logs in 1995 [Zhu 43]. This may be in part because of the drainage of storm water into the basement beside the parlor chimney, but is most apparent because of the lack of any moisture barrier in the unexcavated crawl space in that area allowing moisture from the damp soil to rise into the structure. This is a major problem chiefly due to the lack of sufficient ventilation in that area. The rest of the basement also has severe water infiltration problems around the perimeter, although it receives better ventilation due to the cracks in the back porch floor over the former coal bin and the similar open condition in the area under the side porch facing the Grove. While the areas under the parlor and under the leanto have the largest ventilation problem, the entire area under the main house could be more open that it is.

An existing vent under the front porch has been kept closed. Opening this seasonally will help, although that opening ought to be provided with an operable shutter for the winter and an
insect and animal screen. The addition of a vent in the area to the rear of the parlor chimney, where there is evidence of surface water infiltration either in the past or at this time, would be an important solution to the problem. This would make it possible to add a shallow grated areaway that could contain a vent and a drain and allow inspection and possible repair of the structure in that location. In addition, a vent can be added in the floor of the rear porch when that is rebuilt (at present the floor and structure incorporate more than enough!). Other vents could be opened under the front porch and perhaps in the area where the small chimney stands on the 1834 wing's lean-to. They would provide sufficient venting without seriously compromising the appearance or historic fabric of the house.

**Mechanical Systems**

The mechanical, plumbing, and electrical systems at Solitude are a hodge-podge of additions and makeshifts and are inadequate for an historical interpretation of the house. The surface-mounted fixtures and wiring should be concealed in the floors, baseboards, or in the walls and ceilings. The plumbing and fixtures in the historic bathroom in the 1859 addition have been replaced so that the pipes protrude into the parlor below. The bathroom in the log ell could be dispensed with if new toilets on the first floor are provided in the ell shed addition and the space used more productively. The gas-fired hot water heating system, completely replaced in the last decade, incorporates large and obtrusive modern radiators and caused much damage to the flooring. The boiler is modern and oversize, however, and should many more years of service. The recommended solution is zoned forced air systems in the attic and basement, utilizing the existing boiler, with the addition of air conditioning condensing units on the exterior.

**Outbuildings**

The two outbuildings consist of the log pen laundry or kitchen and the log springhouse. The springhouse is in relatively good repair and can be left alone for the time being, while the stabilization and authentic restoration of the log outbuilding is pressing and essential if the interpretation of the house is to receive a full treatment. The structure should be restored in situ using the most sensitive techniques, given the extreme rarity of this building type in the region. Please refer to the historic structure report for that building for complete recommendations.
Phased Outline of Work

Phasing

In the phasing of the project it is proposed to begin with the passage, parlor, bathroom, and bedroom in the two-story, ca. 1859 addition. The first and second floor of this section can be physically separated from the rest of the structure, and this part of the building has experienced the highest proportion of deterioration. Restoration of this section will further reveal the extent of the problems likely to be encountered in the rest of the house and will permit the facility to be used and available to the university and community during the project. The next phase or a concurrent separate project should include restoration of the outbuilding, which cannot be delayed much longer. The second phase would include the log sections and the one-story leanto. The third and final phase would include the exterior restoration.

PHASE I

Building Structure

- Reinforce and repair the floor structure of the 1859 passage.

- Reinforce and raise (if possible) the partition between the 1859 passage and parlor to level the second floor and doorways.

- Replace the plates and floor joists in the 1859 parlor and augment other structural elements as required.

Interior

- Remove added modern elements throughout the 1859 section.

- Obtain analysis and recommendation for dealing with the lead paint in the house and abate the lead paint throughout house as recommended.

- Repair and paint the secure plaster walls and ceilings in the entire 1859 wing.

- Install and paint new plaster where existing is already compromised or is removed during repairs.

- Install new flooring in the parlor.
-Repair and refinish the flooring in the 1859 passage on both stories.

-Uncover and refinish or repaint floors in the second-floor bedroom and add other flooring material as appropriate in the service areas.

-Replace the concrete hearths in the section with brick hearths (two hearths).

-Repair and paint wood trim throughout the section. Rebuilt the elements around the second-floor passage front window. Consult with a paint conservator early in the project for authentic color selection.

-Replace existing doors.

-Replace added door hardware with period rimlocks and other appropriate hardware, supplemented by inconspicuous new dead bolts at most doors.

-Install new, historically appropriate storm windows on the interior.

-Add discreet reinforcing to the stair rail in the passage.

-Rework interior basement entry to restore its original appearance.

-Add adequate ventilation to the basement under the 1859 section.

**PHASE II**

**Sitework**

-Correct the water drainage patterns on the site. Add french drains, culverts and new subsurface conduits for all of the downspouts.

-Remove all current foundation planting (none of which is historic) to promote drying of the foundation and soil.

-Utilize testing to avoid disturbing important archeological remains.

**Building Structure**

-Reinforce and repair the lower structure of the earliest (log) portions of the building including the joists.
-Replace failed elements of the floor structure in the leanto. Excavate under the floor to improve ventilation.

**Interior**

-Remove existing walls as necessary and install new partitions to incorporate toilet rooms and other service elements in the shed addition to the ell.

-Remove added modern elements throughout the remaining portions of the house.

-Obtain analysis and recommendation for dealing with the lead paint in the remaining portions of the house and abate the lead paint as recommended.

-Repair and paint the secure plaster walls and ceilings in all historic rooms.

-Install and paint new plaster where existing is already compromised or is removed during repairs or in newly created rooms.

-Repair and refinish the flooring in the first floor of the original log pen.

-Uncover and refinish or repaint floors in the remainder of the public and office portions of the house and add other flooring material as appropriate in service areas.

-Replace concrete hearths throughout the remainder of the house with brick hearths (4 hearths).

-Repair and paint wood trim throughout the remainder of the house. Consult with a paint conservator early in the project for authentic color selection.

-Replace two modern doors in the first floor of the log ell with reproductions of historic doors.

-Repair existing doors.

-Replace added door hardware with period rimlocks and other appropriate hardware, supplemented by inconspicuous new dead bolts at most doors.

-Install new, historically appropriate storm windows on the interior.

-Remove the added closet in the first-floor passage and the window serving the closet.

-Add adequate ventilation to the basement.

-Add vapor barrier in crawl spaces.
- Add insulation with moisture barrier in walls and second-floor ceiling as appropriate.

**Mechanical Systems**

- Conceal electrical wiring in the floors, baseboards, or in the walls and ceilings.

- Add new lighting fixtures as needed in the non-public areas. Add minimal wall- and ceiling-mounted lighting in the historic areas, except as required for emergency and service purposes. Rely on lamps and concealed lighting in those areas. Install flexible and inconspicuous track lighting in exhibition and meeting areas.

- Remove the bathroom in the second floor of the log ell.

- Provide new handicapped accessible toilets and a kitchenette in the ell shed addition.

- Remove the radiators and the pipes which serve them.

- Retain the existing boiler and integrate it into a zoned forced air heating and air-conditioning system in the attic and basement.

**Outbuilding**

- Stabilize and restore the log outbuilding in situ using the most sensitive techniques following the recommendations in the historic structure report for that building:

  - Return the building to a level position.

  - Splice in new logs where original material is missing.

  - Support the structure on its original piers.

  - Rebuild the chimney based on archaeological findings.

  - Consider rebuilding the frame addition to add to the functionality of the building.

  - Reconstruct the porch using original materials as much as possible.

  - Reconstruct the roof and cornice using original material as much as possible.

  - Restore the wood shingle roof.
- Repair the second floor structure, saving as much as possible in situ.
- Repair wood trim and stair.
- Plaster interior to match original.
- Reconstruct missing window elements and exterior louvered blinds.
- Reinstall whitewashed weatherboard.
- Install minimal electrical service and fixtures.
- Extend hot water lines from the existing boiler in the main house for heat, which has the capacity, but only if the building will be regularly occupied.

PHASE III

Sitework
- Repair the brick terrace.
- Add gravel walkways where needed for circulation.
- Add appropriate fencing based on historical photographs and maps.
- Add limited planting as appropriate for the period of interpretation.

Exterior
- Repair exterior trim elements (window sills, sashes, and surrounds, cornices, and decorative details) and weatherboard as necessary.
- Restore weatherboard where damaged or removed during structural and interior restoration.
- Repair and reinstall the original exterior louvered blinds. Replace only where necessary. Install correctly on hinges.
- Remove extant storm windows.
- Repair the metal roof of the main house and ell.
- Install new gutter and downspouts.

- Tuckpoint and repair the four chimneys using approved techniques and mortar recipes.

- Repair the foundation in those areas where it has been damaged or has lost stability.

- Replace the porch floors and columns to provide a more authentic appearance.

- Remove exterior basement entry and provide a removable panel in rear porch floor for boiler service access.

- Remove paint on exterior where large areas have been blistered.
VI. Preliminary Cost Estimate

PHASE I

Building Structure

- Reinforce and repair the floor structure of the 1859 passage.
- Reinforce and raise (if possible) the partition between the 1859 passage and parlor to level the second floor and doorways.
- Replace the plates and floor joists in the 1859 parlor and augment other structural elements as required.

Total $47,000

Interior

- Remove added modern elements throughout the section. $500
- Obtain analysis and recommendation for dealing with the lead paint in the house and abate the lead paint in the ca. 1859 section. $7,000
- Repair and paint the secure plaster walls and ceilings in the ca. 1859 section. $6,000
- Install and paint new plaster where existing is already compromised or is removed during repairs. $4,000
- Install new flooring in the parlor. $4,000
- Repair and refinish the flooring in the 1859 passage on both stories. $3,000
- Replace concrete hearths in the section with brick hearths (two hearths). $1,000
- Consult with a paint conservator early in the project for authentic color selection throughout the house. $2,000
- Repair and paint wood trim throughout the section. Rebuild the elements around the second-floor passage front window. $14,000
- Repair existing doors. $1,000
- Add discreet reinforcing to the stair rail in the 1859 addition. $500
- Rework interior basement entry to restore its original appearance. $500

Total $45,500

### Plumbing, Mechanical, and Electrical Systems

- Remove the plumbing and fixtures from the historic bathroom in the 1859 addition. $200

Total $200

### PHASE II

#### Sitework

- Correct water drainage patterns on the site. Add French drains and culverts. $20,000
- Utilize testing to avoid disturbing important archeological remains. $5,000

Total $25,000

#### Building Structure

- Reinforce and repair the lower structure of the earliest (log) portions of the building including the joists.
- Reinforce and repair the floor structure of the leanto.

Total $20,000
Interior

- Remove added modern elements throughout the remainder of the house. $3,000

- Gut the shed addition to the log wing of ca. 1834 and install new partitions to incorporate toilet rooms and other service elements in the shed addition to the ell. $2,000

- Abate the lead paint throughout remainder of the house. $7,000

- Repair and paint the secure plaster walls and ceilings in all historic rooms. $6,000

- Install and paint new plaster where existing is already compromised or is removed during repairs or in newly created rooms. $6,000

- Repair and refinish the flooring in the first floor of the original log pen. $2,000

- Uncover and refinish or repaint floors in the remainder of the public and office portions of the house and add other flooring material as appropriate in service areas. $5,000

- Replace concrete hearths in the remainder of the house with brick (4 hearths). $2,000

- Repair and paint wood trim throughout the house. $20,000

- Replace two modern doors in the first floor of the log ell with reproductions of historic doors. $800

- Repair existing doors. $2,000

- Replace added door hardware with period rimlocks and other appropriate hardware, supplemented by inconspicuous new dead bolts at most doors. $2,500

- Install new, historically appropriate storm windows on the interior. $4,000

- Add insulation with moisture barrier in walls and second-floor ceiling as appropriate and possible. $2,000

Total $64,300
Plumbing, Mechanical, and Electrical Systems

- Remove the radiators and the pipes which serve them and retain the existing boiler and integrate it into a zoned forced air heating and air-conditioning system in the attic and basement serving the entire building. $45,000

- Conceal electrical wiring in the floors, baseboards, or in the walls and ceilings of the entire house and add new lighting fixtures as needed in the non-public areas. Add minimal wall- and ceiling-mounted lighting in the historic areas, except as required for emergency and service purposes. Rely on lamps and concealed lighting in those areas. Install flexible and inconspicuous track lighting in exhibition and meeting areas. $16,000

- Remove the bathroom in the log ell and provide new toilets and a kitchenette in the ell shed addition. $12,000

Total $73,000

Subtotal Phase II $182,300
Contingency (10%) $18,230
Phase II Total $200,530

PHASE III

Sitework

- Reconstruct the brick terrace as a memorial/dedication fundraising project. $10,000

- Add gravel walkways where needed for circulation. $5,000

- Add appropriate fencing based on historical photographs and maps. $8,000

- Add limited planting as appropriate for the period of interpretation. $3,000

Total $26,000
Exterior

- Remove lead paint from exterior of building. $50,000
- Remove and patch window serving the closet in the log ell passage (removed as part of another item below). $800
- Repair exterior trim elements (window sills, sashes, and surrounds, cornices, and decorative details) and weatherboard as necessary. $15,000
- Repair and reinstall the original exterior louvered blinds. Replace only where necessary. Install correctly on hinges. $12,000
- Repair the metal roof of the main house and ell. $2,000
- Install new gutter and downspouts. $15,000
- Tuckpoint and repair the three principal chimneys using approved techniques and mortar recipes. $12,000
- Repair the foundation in those areas where it has been damaged or has lost stability. $20,000
- Add foundation vents as specified. $4,000
- Replace the porch floors and front porch columns to provide a more authentic appearance. $16,000
- Remove exterior basement entry and provide a removable panel in rear porch floor for boiler service access. $3,000

Total $149,800

Subtotal Phase III $175,800

Contingency (10%) $17,580
Phase III Total $193,380

PROJECT TOTAL $493,680
Outbuilding

$50,000 to $75,000

-Stabilize and restore the log outbuilding in situ using the most sensitive techniques following the recommendations in the historic structure report for that building:

- Return the building to a level position.
- Splice in new logs where original material is missing.
- Support the structure on its original piers.
- Rebuild the chimney based on archaeological findings.
- Consider rebuilding the frame addition to add to the functionality of the building.
- Reconstruct the porch using original materials as much as possible.
- Reconstruct the roof and cornice using original material as much as possible.
- Restore the wood shingle roof.
- Repair the second floor structure, saving as much as possible in situ.
- Repair wood trim and stair.
- Plaster interior to match original.
- Reconstruct missing window elements and exterior louvered blinds.
- Reinstall whitewashed weatherboard.
- Install minimal electrical service and fixtures.
- Consider extending hot water lines from the existing boiler in the main house for heat, since it has the capacity, but only if the building will be regularly occupied.
VII. Bibliography


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Robertson, Jenkins Mikell. *Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Historical Data Book*. Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1972.

"Shower for Blacksburg Couple is Brilliant." *Roanoke Times*, 29 May 1927.


**Photographs and Maps.** Located in the Special Collections Dept., Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University unless otherwise noted.


Historic Photograph. Late 1940s. Aerial view from over drill field to southwest.


Map. 1882. Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College Farm and Grounds, Col. Wm. W. Blackford.

Map. 1908. V.P.I. Campus and Farm, J. Dalrymple Powell.

Map. 1911. Campus of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, E.A. Livesay.

Map. 1921. Sanborn Map Company. In files of the Planning and Engineering Department, Town of Blacksburg, Virginia.
VIII. Appendix


4. Historic Photograph. Late 1940s. Aerial view from over drill field to southwest. Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.


