

INTERPRETATION

The house and property at 520 Jamestown Road has served a number of occupants during its one hundred twenty-three year history. Successive owners changed the house both structurally and cosmetically to create an environment suitable to their needs. As in many vernacular houses, the design-type alterations were not thorough, so the existing house traces architecture through several periods. These adaptations reflect the changing concerns of the occupants.

In the first half of the Nineteenth-Century, the property stood as farm land on the outskirts of Williamsburg.¹ The city's population had not yet reached levels which made subdividing profitable. The traceable history of the Jamestown Road property began in 1854. The land belonged to a 147 acre tract which was subdivided to a 14 and 7/8's acre farm.² By the 1860's, housing had become a valuable aspect of farm land. The 1869 deed of sale to William Durfey records two brick houses on the property he purchased.³

The surviving inventory of Durfey's possessions at his death reveals what objects might have been at the 520 property during

¹ Deed of Sale, July 6, 1859, James City County Deed Book 1, 349.

² Deed of Sale, November 23, 1854, James City County Deed Book 1, 61.

³ Deed of Sale, August 24, 1869, James City County Deed Book 2, 258-59.

his life.⁴ Depending upon the relationship between Durfey and Sarah Adams, his possessions may have been solely on his property or may have been spread over both lots. Also, a deed from another land sale documents that Durfey had lived in yet another house in the area.⁵ It is difficult to pinpoint where the articles listed in his inventory were located.

The items fall into three categories: carpentry tools and supplies, farm equipment and produce, and home furnishings and supplies. Durfey had shingles, glass, plaster, header posts, nails, carpentry tools, pine rails, and a white wash brush in his possession. These seem abundant building supplies for anyone not expecting to do repair or construction work in the future. They also show that Durfey maintained a middle upper class way of life. His house had plaster walls and he kept extra glass to repair broken panes. The farm equipment included 25 beehives, a wagon, 2 plows, a corn planter, 2 cultivators, a wheel barrow, hay rack, hoe, shovel and spade, one corn shelter, corn produce, 3 horses, 3 cows, one calf, and one heifer. To feed so many animals, Durfey must have owned a moderately sized corn farm. The house furnishings included a cooking stove, a bedstead and feather mattress, an old bedstead, and six wooden chairs, in addition to Durfey's buggy and cart. Durfey was a well established man with a mysterious female beneficiary next door.

⁴ see appendix A, James City County Will Book 1, 354-55.

⁵ Deed of Sale, July 24, 1882, James City County Deed Book 4, 292.

Sarah Adams paid \$300 to buy the house from Durfey.⁶ As a single woman, Adams would have had no need to add to the brick house. Little is known about her life. She seemed to follow Durfey's housing choices, moving next door, to the house he had occupied once she sold 520 to Sallie Bryant. Some unusual circumstances must have surrounded the relationship between Durfey and Adams. She may have been a cousin, an in-law, or a simply particularly good neighbor. A note on Durfey's estate settlement indicates that Adams promptly distributed the spoils of Durfey's will to his heirs, (who included herself). She maintained the estate account for six years after his death.⁷ She was a capable, respected woman. Whether she was independent is an issue of speculation.

Adams sold 520 to another single woman, Sallie Bryant, in 1882.⁸ Bryant later married, and she and her husband lived in the house. Legally, the property was in trust for Sallie's use, but she shared the right of survivorship with her husband. Living there almost twenty-nine years, it is likely that the couple raised a family and needed additional space. Aspects of the addition show some of the Bellamy's concerns in this Victorian Period. The addition included a front parlor, a dining room, and a kitchen downstairs, as well as three upstairs

⁶ Deed of Sale, July 22, 1870, James City County Deed Book 3, 496.

⁷ see appendix B, James City County Will Book 1, 364-65, 456-57.

⁸ Deed of Sale, March 16, 1882, James City County Deed Book 4, 251-52.

bedrooms.

There is a striking resemblance between the Bellamy's floor plan design and one published in Woodward's National Architect in 1869.⁷ The major difference in Woodward's plan is a side staircase hall which did not appear in the Bellamy's house. The similarities between the plans include the first story bay window, the central hall, the protruding front room, and a rear kitchen with entry porches. One of the most curious aspects of the Wesson's house today is the rear entrance through the dining room. While this could be explained by a rear detached kitchen, more likely, this room has changed function and did serve as the Bellamy's kitchen. Supporting this theory is the currently unused chimney which climbs the modern dining room wall. This stove chimney reaches down into the cellar. Had this back room been a privileged dining room, the windows would have been regularly spaced and of more uniform size. Instead, the windows mimic the locations recommended in Woodward's kitchen diagram.

The Bellamy's design emphasized separating spaces according to use. The first floor defines areas of entering, entertaining, dining, cooking, and living. Four distinct upstairs bedrooms allowed children to have their own space, or perhaps share space among the younger siblings. The notion of private spaces was important in the Victorian concept of child rearing.

⁷ (see appendix C, page 2) George E. Woodward and Edward G. Thompson, Woodward's National Architect (New York: Korff Bros., 1869), plate 3.

The Bellamy's house plan also well represents the family to the community. The spacious front parlor, with a large bay window, protrudes from the body of the house and impresses visitors and people who pass by on the street. The clapboard exterior appears modest beside the brick portion of the house, yet it kept the period pattern book styles.¹⁰ The decorative front gable shows stickwork also from design book literature.¹¹ The second story window treatment draws attention to that window, and the decorative elements continue to the east gable. Decorative molding in this room combines the motifs used in public and private areas of the house. This room may have been an upstairs parlor, because it seems unusual for interior and exterior window treatment to draw attention to a bedroom. The Bellamy's home featured stove heating, which replaced fireplaces as the preferred method of heating in the late 1800's. They also put plumbing upstairs in the house. A central bathroom would have been used by all the occupants.

The Bellamy's sold their home to Norwood Apperson in 1911.¹² In the two and one-half years that the Apperson's lived in the house, there is no indication that they modified the property. Whether this lack of change was the result of satisfaction,

¹⁰ Palliser, Palliser & Co., Palliser's New Cottage Homes and Details (New York: Palliser, Palliser & Co., 1977), plate 3.

¹¹ Herbert Gottfried and Jan Jennings, American Vernacular Design 1870-1940 (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1985), 77.

¹² Deed of Sale, February 13, 1911, James City County Deed Book '12, 491.

disinterest, or economy is speculation. The Apperson's sold the house to A.L.G. Stephenson, who did have money to make improvements or modifications because he did not have enough money to pay his bills. He put the house in a trust under T.H. Geddy in order to secure \$1600 to pay Apperson. When Stephenson defaulted on the payments, Geddy auctioned the house and Apperson bought it back.¹³ Apperson immediately sold the house to Frank Powell, the second of the house's owners to live there more than twenty years.

Powell moved to Williamsburg from Newport News.¹⁴ His family lived in Williamsburg on York Lane.¹⁵ One of Powell's sisters, however, married W.B. Burns who had lived on the lot south of 520 since 1904.¹⁶ Powell must have been a wealthy man. At his death in 1941, he left \$15,000 to his nephews and nieces. Powell never married, and never had children of his own. He willed the house to his sister Mattie.

An aerial photograph of Williamsburg in 1929, shows the house.¹⁷ There was no chimney at the west end of the brick room. The stove chimney was visible, and a porch of some kind protruded

¹³ Deed of Sale, April 20, 1915, James City County Deed Book 15, 171.

¹⁴ Deed of Sale, May 1, 1915, James City County Deed Book 15, 182.

¹⁵ City of Williamsburg tax records, 1920-1926.

¹⁶ Will of Frank Powell, James City County Will Book 5, 86.

¹⁷ see appendix D, photograph #79-1397, 1929, State Conservation and Development Commission of Virginia, from Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library.

from the current dining room. A lean-to roof projected from an addition in the back corner of the L. The first addition was roofed separately from the main cross gables that the Bellamy's built. Most likely, the Bellamy's also built this addition to accommodate plumbing and a bathroom. A lean-to roof sheltered Powell's new kitchen. A small structure close to the house had a monitor roof. This original kitchen had been converted to storage. In the photograph, a brick house stands east of Powell's house on the McClellan lot. This presents difficulties. No structure is ever noted on that property in deeds that carefully site all brick structures in the vicinity. It seems likely that this was one of the two brick houses originally purchased by Durfey, yet the deeds state this second house was west of 520. The roof line of the original buildings shared the same axis. In any case, this building looks much like what the original brick part of the house would have looked like.

The 1992 tax assessment of 520 Jamestown Road dates it to a 1938 remodelling.¹⁸ While the 1929 photograph shows alteration since the Bellamy's residency, Powell must have under taken some renovation in the late 1930's. The 1940 tax records indicate that the house values jumped from \$1,350 in 1939 to \$3,250. Probably this included adding the closets around the fireplace in the Bellamy's dining room, and the china cupboard in his own dining room. Powell changed the old kitchen into a dinning room and moved the kitchen to a new addition, leaving some

¹⁸ City of Williamsburg Utilities Office Records, tax assessment, 1992.

incongruities in the house. Where the front hall vestibule, which separated the hall from the kitchen, used to lead outside, it now leads straight into the back of the refrigerator. The private room off the front hall became closet-like.

Powell sold the house to Thomas Brantley Henderson in 1941.¹⁹ Powell died one month later, in the house, so the Henderson's must have not moved in immediately. The Hendersons had five children, the youngest being 17 when they moved in.²⁰ They would have easily filled the house. Perhaps these first years were happy for the family. Mrs. Henderson handwrote her will in 1962, and she stressed that her estate should be settled with cooperation between her children. She double underlined the word "agreeably." Apparently, large altercations had taken place in the house during Maude Duke's lifetime.

The Hendersons responded to the post-war housing shortage and the growing popularity of Williamsburg by expanding the capacity of their property. A structure on the back of sixty-five feet of the lot was converted to housing and conveyed to the Henderson's youngest son, Horace by 1950.²¹ A building permit dated September 1, 1950, approved \$300 of work on a two family dwelling.²² This improvement transformed the west ground floor

¹⁹ Deed of Sale, June 17, 1941, City of Williamsburg Deed Book 19, 85.

²⁰ City of Williamsburg Will Book 18, 192.

²¹ City of Williamsburg tax records, 1950, on microfiche, page 13.

²² City of Williamsburg Building Permit #156, September 1, 1950, permit office.

room into an apartment by adding a kitchen, repairing the fireplace, panelling the room, and building an extra closet. The small room behind the stairs must have been used during this period because the addition features an expensive cubby hole to let light into a window of that room. Otherwise the window would have been covered by the addition. The pocket would have been unnecessary if the Hendersons had used that room for storage. The shelves in the parlor and the kitchen fixtures also date to this period. The Hendersons built a second story kitchen to facilitate upstairs borders, who moved in as the Henderson children moved out. Perhaps Mr. Henderson became attached to a guest, because he divorced Mrs. Henderson in 1952, to move to Florida with Helen Aironimus.

In November of 1952, Mrs. Henderson became the single home owner.²³ The divorce settlement gave her the house with back tax payments and any rents she collected. The city directories list "widowed" Mrs. Henderson as a provider of furnished rooms.²⁴ Mrs. Henderson took annual borders in the apartment, who were listed in the directory, as well as temporary borders in the upstairs rooms. For security, Mrs. Henderson installed dead bolt locks on the upstairs bedroom doors. Maude Duke did not own many furnishings. At death, the value of all her possessions, excluding her diamond ring, totalled \$500.²⁵

²³ Deed of Sale, November 14, 1952, City of Williamsburg Deed Book 25, 319.

²⁴ Williamsburg City Directories 1959-1967.

²⁵ City of Williamsburg Will Book 18, 313-14.

Maude Duke Henderson died early in 1976, leaving the house to her daughter, Rosalind Westgate. At her death two of Henderson's daughters, both over sixty, lived in the house.²⁶ Rosalind sold the house to Robert and Dorothy Stevick who found the house did not suit their needs.²⁷ They added the bathroom and closet to the master bedroom, and then sold the house to the Wessons in July.²⁸

The Wessons have not structurally altered the house for their use. They have made cosmetic changes by refinishing the floors, removing the decaying shutters, and painting and wall papering the interior. The Wessons rent the downstairs apartment to William and Mary students. They are redecorating the parlor. The Bellamy's old dining room serves a modern need as the television room, and the back room functions as it did in Powell's day. It is their dining room. They use the small room behind the stairs is used as a storage closet, which compensates for the eight inch deep closets throughout the house. Upstairs, the Wessons occupy the bedroom on the west side of the house. Their daughter uses the two front rooms on the east side, as well as the central bathroom. In the rear bedroom, the former kitchen now contains the laundry machines and a large wash sink. The rest of the room serves as storage space which could easily be

²⁶ City of Williamsburg Will Book 18, 189-192.

²⁷ Deed of Sale, February 16, 1977, City of Williamsburg Deed Book 54, 739.

²⁸ City of Williamsburg Building Permit # 2532 and Deed of Sale, July 11, 1977, City of Williamsburg Deed Book 55, 264.

cleared for a guest. Despite the fact that no changes have been made to the lot and house, the property value has doubled in the twenty-five years that the Wessons have owned 520 Jamestown Road.

The house has developed to fit the needs of its occupants. As the decades passed, housing styles, family structure, lifestyles, and population have changed, placing emphasis on different aspects of domestic architecture.