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Cultural Landscape Report for the Nelson House Grounds

Colonial National Historical Park

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Colonial National Historical Park

Yorktown, Virginia

Site History

Existing Conditions

Analysis and Evaluation

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Cover Image: The Nelson House grounds looking southwest from Main Street and Nelson Street, January 2010. (State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry.)

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INTRODUCTION

Along Yorktown's quiet Main Street of mostly small colonial buildings, the Nelson House and its two-acre walled grounds occupy a prominent place (fig. 0.1). Initially acquired in 1706 by Thomas "Scotch Tom" Nelson, the property reflects the village's eighteenth century prosperity and its early twentieth century revival. Scotch Tom built the existing Georgian-style house in ca. 1730, and during the Revolutionary War and its final major battle, the 1781 Siege of Yorktown, it was the home of Governor Thomas Nelson Jr. His descendents remained through the nineteenth century during a period of marked decline in Yorktown. In 1914, the property was purchased by wealthy industrialist George Preston Blow and renovated into a Colonial Revival-style country place known as York Hall. Charles Gillette, one of Virginia's most prominent early landscape architects, designed the grounds.

Figure 0.1. The Nelson House grounds looking south across Main Street, January 2010. The open lawn in the foreground (outside of project area), perimeter brick wall, and plantings date to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Much of the foreground was occupied by buildings during the colonial period. (SUNY ESF.)

In the 1970s, after acquiring the York Hall estate in 1968, the National Park Service restored the Nelson House to its colonial appearance. Due to a lack of historic documentation and desire to retain some York Hall estate features, the park did not complete a corresponding restoration of the colonial landscape. Instead, it removed features that were overtly twentieth century in character, leaving the major structures, organization, and plantings of the Colonial Revival landscape. Today, the Nelson House grounds reflect three centuries of changing use and design. Over the years, this layered landscape has posed challenges for park interpreters and managers.

This cultural landscape report is the first comprehensive documentation of the Nelson House grounds, undertaken to inform planned rehabilitation of the formal garden as well as maintenance and interpretation of the entire two-acre site. Through documentation of the landscape's physical history and existing conditions, and evaluation of its historic character, this report establishes a sound basis for management and clarifies the relationship between the eighteenth-century origins of the landscape and its twentieth-century Colonial Revival overlay.

PROJECT SCOPE, ORGANIZATION, AND METHODS

In the National Park Service, a cultural landscape report is the principal treatment document for historic landscapes and the primary tool for their long-term management. The park service defines a cultural landscape as a geographic area that includes both built and natural resources, and is associated with a historic event, activity, or person.[1] A cultural landscape includes not only landforms, roads, walks, and vegetation, but also buildings, views, and small-scale features, such as fences, signs, and benches.

This report has been developed according to methods outlined in *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques* (National Park Service, 1998). It encompasses Part I of a cultural landscape report, including site history, existing conditions, and analysis and evaluation. Part II, treatment, which provides recommendations for changes to the cultural landscape to enhance historic character and contemporary park operations, is anticipated as a future phase of the cultural landscape report

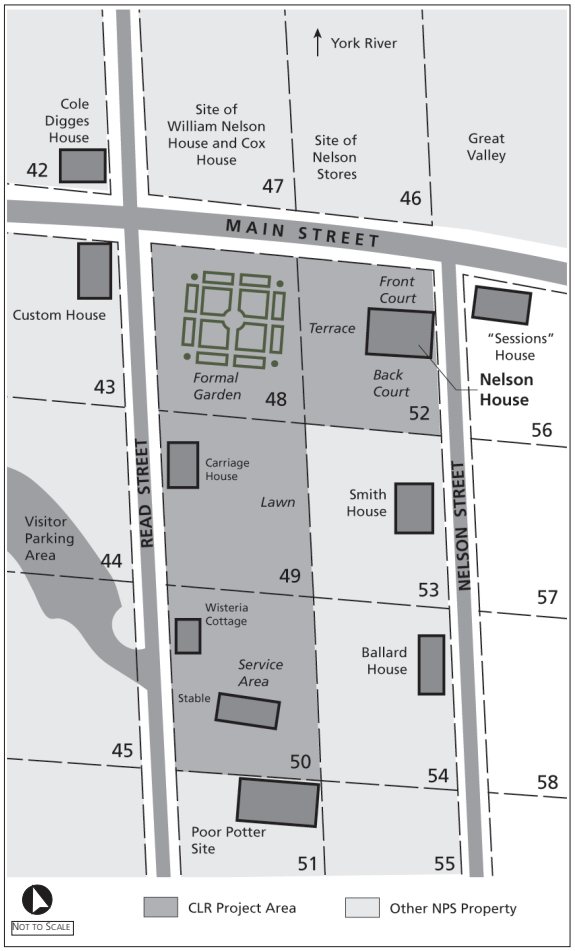


Figure 0.2. Map of the project area for the cultural landscape report showing Yorktown lots, adjoining National Park Service property, and landscape character areas within the Nelson House grounds labeled in italics. (SUNY ESF.)

The first chapter of this report, Site History, provides a narrative overview of the history of the Nelson House grounds from prior to European settlement to the present. The chapter emphasizes the physical history of the landscape and addresses related historical contexts to the extent that they inform understanding of the landscape. The history is organized into five periods defined by changes in ownership, use, and landscape character. Chapter 2, Existing Conditions, provides a narrative and graphic overview of the present character of the landscape and its administration and use. Chapter 3, Analysis and Evaluation, assesses the historic significance and integrity of the landscape based on the National Register Criteria, and evaluates the landscape's historic character according to National Park Service cultural landscape methods.

This report includes graphic plans that document and evaluate the cultural landscape. These include four period plans in the site history that illustrate historical change; an existing conditions plan that depicts the landscape in its present condition; and an analysis and evaluation plan that documents changes since the historic periods.

The project area for this report focuses on two acres surrounding the Nelson House that are contained within Yorktown village lots 48, 49, 50, and 52 (fig. 0.2).

These lots formed the core of Thomas Nelson Jr.'s home during the colonial period through the Siege of Yorktown in 1781, an era that forms the park's interpretive period. Adjoining properties, including the Smith and Ballard Houses on lots 53 and 54, and lots 46 and 47 across Main Street historically occupied by the William Nelson House and Nelson stores, are addressed to the extent they inform the history, setting, and management of the Nelson House grounds. These and other lots were part of the Blow family's York Hall estate during the twentieth century.

Landscape character areas, which are distinct sections of the landscape defined by common characteristics, serve as the basic organizational structure for much of the report, including the landscape summaries at the end of each site history period, the existing conditions chapter, and the analysis and evaluation. The Nelson House grounds consist of six character areas (see fig. 0.2): the front court between the Nelson House and Main Street; the back court between the house and the Smith House lot boundary; the terrace between the house and the formal garden; the formal garden bounded by the terrace and the perimeter wall along Read and Main Streets; the lawn between the formal garden and the service area, including the carriage house and Wisteria Cottage; and the service area to either side of the stable at the south end of the grounds bordering the Poor Potter Site.

Research for this report has been undertaken at an overall "thorough" level of investigation as defined in the National Park Service Cultural Resource Management Guideline (NPS-28), primarily involving holdings at the park archives in Yorktown, papers of landscape architect Charles Gillette at the Library of Virginia, and photographs at the Library of Congress.[2] These repositories provided site-specific and contextual documentation on the Nelson House grounds through photographs, aerial images, histories of the Civil War, county atlases, property surveys, insurance maps, deeds, published histories, and park management documents. Other sources included county land records, architectural journals, published histories, and websites. Interviews with Blow family members and National Park Service staff also provided documentation on historic and existing conditions.

PROJECT SETTING

The Nelson House is located in Yorktown, a small unincorporated village at the lower Chesapeake Bay estuary between Williamsburg and Hampton in the Virginia Tidewater region (fig. 0.3). Also known as Historic Yorktown, the village is on the south side of the York River near the eastern end of the Colonial Parkway, a limited-access road connecting Yorktown Battlefield with Colonial Williamsburg and Jamestown. The village is a part of the Yorktown Battlefield

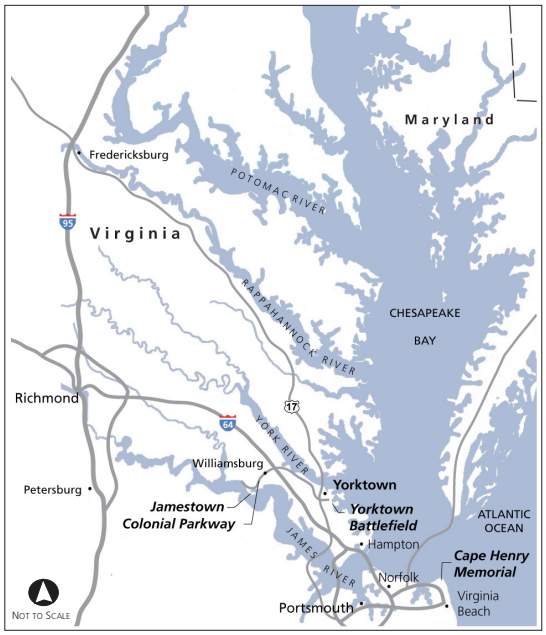


Figure 0.3. Map of Yorktown's location in the Virginia Tidewater. The units of Colonial National Historical Park are labeled in italics. (SUNY ESF.)

unit of Colonial National Historical Park that also includes the units of Jamestown, Cape Henry Memorial, and the Colonial Parkway. The Yorktown Battlefield unit features a visitor center and park headquarters east of the village, across a wooded ravine historically known as Tobacco Road, adjoining the Revolutionary War battlefield (fig. 0.4).

Unlike nearby Colonial Williamsburg, Historic Yorktown is not a living history museum, but rather a mix of historic and contemporary uses. It includes buildings and open land owned by the National Park Service and others, side streets lined by private residences and offices, a recently redeveloped commercial waterfront area, and a long sandy bathing beach (see fig. 0.4). The west side of the village is bordered by US 17 (George Washington Memorial Highway), a four-lane divided highway that spans the Southeastern coastline from Florida to Virginia. The Colonial Parkway skirts the south side of the village and ends at the Yorktown Battlefield visitor center.

Figure 0.4. Aerial photograph of Yorktown showing the setting of the Nelson House and relationship to Yorktown Battlefield, Colonial Parkway, and historic buildings and sites within the village. Historic sites owned by the National Park Service and open to the public are underlined. Colonial buildings not owned by the park service are labeled in italics. (Commonwealth of Virginia photograph, 2010, annotated by SUNY ESF.)

Yorktown's Main Street, the spine of the historic village that parallels the York River, contains just over a dozen buildings remaining from a once urban streetscape that was partially restored to its colonial appearance during the early and mid-twentieth century (fig. 0.5). A large amount of land along the street, mostly former building sites, is undeveloped. The park service-owned buildings and sites along and near Main Street that are open to the public include, from east to west: the Yorktown Victory Monument (Monument to the Alliance and Victory), a tall granite column completed in 1883 to commemorate the centennial of the Siege of Yorktown; the restored Dudley Digges House, Cole Digges House (Carrot Tree restaurant), and Somerwell House; and the reconstructed Medical Shop and Swan Tavern complex (see fig. 0.4). The park-owned archeological site of the William Rogers pottery, known as the Poor Potter Site, is south of the Nelson House grounds along Read Street. The colonial Smith and Ballard Houses on Nelson Street are owned by the park, but are used as private staff residences and are not open to the public.

Figure 0.5. Looking west along Yorktown's Main Street west of the Nelson House, 2010. The brick house at right is the park-owned Somerwell House. The cupola in the right background is the former county courthouse built in 1955. (SUNY ESF.)

Privately-owned colonial buildings near the Nelson House include the Custom House at the corner of Read and Main Streets, owned by the Comte de Grasse Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and open to the public. At the corner of Nelson and Main Streets is the so-called Sessions (Sessions-Pope-Shield) House, a private residence, and a block to the northwest is Grace Episcopal Church and cemetery.

The former county courthouse known as York Hall, a Colonial Revival building completed in 1955 two blocks west of the Nelson House, is the largest building along Main Street.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

SITE HISTORY

The five historic periods of the Nelson House grounds include the years prior to settlement by the Nelson family in 1706; the early period of Nelson ownership from 1706 until Thomas Nelson Jr.'s death in 1789; the late period of Nelson ownership to 1914 (including ownership by the Bryan family and R. A. Lancaster);

Blow family ownership from 1914 through 1967; and the period of National Park Service ownership from 1968 until the present.

Overall, available documentation provides rich detail on the development of the Nelson House grounds as the York Hall estate during the early twentieth century, but relatively little on the character of the landscape during the colonial period through the Siege of Yorktown in 1781. While photographs and accounts from the nineteenth century and more recent archeological investigations provide documentation on a number of eighteenth-century features, many details of the colonial landscape of the Nelson House grounds remain unknown.

Pre-1706

Prior to the arrival of Europeans in the seventeenth century, the Nelson House grounds and surrounding area were part of the homeland of the Powhatan people, who lived in numerous villages throughout the region. The site was most likely part of a hardwoods forest, although the Powhatan people may have made clearings for agriculture and to attract wildlife.

Following the first permanent European settlement at nearby Jamestown in 1607, the lands of the Virginia Peninsula were granted to settlers who established plantations, primarily for the tobacco trade. In 1631, Nicholas Martiau received a patent for 1,300 acres of land on the south side of the York River, including the future Nelson House site. In 1691, the village of Yorktown was laid out on a part of Martiau's plantation, then owned by his descendents, the Read family, as eighty-five half-acre lots, with a strip of common land along the York River. The Nelson House grounds corresponded with lots 48, 49, 50, and 52 on the south side of Main Street. By 1706, no buildings were on these lots, although several houses existed nearby.

Early Nelson Period, 1706–1789

Thomas "Scotch Tom" Nelson, a native of England, purchased lot 52 in 1706, and as stipulated in his deed, built a house there within a year. He also acquired adjoining lots 48, 49, and 50 as a place for his gardens. Scotch Tom also bought a number of other village lots, including those across Main Street, where he built stores for his mercantile business. He amassed enough wealth by the 1720s to construct a prominent brick house on lot 52 (present Nelson House), which was completed in ca. 1730. Along with the new house, he maintained a number of outbuildings that enclosed a service yard on the west side of the house. These included a kitchen–wash house, servant (slave) quarters, smokehouse, spinning house, and a dairy. There may have been secondary houses on lots 48, 49, and 50 built to satisfy the same stipulations as contained in the deed for lot 52. A board

fence enclosed the property along Main Street and most likely extended along the other street boundaries as well.

Upon his death in 1745, Scotch Tom left his property along Main Street, including the Nelson House, to his oldest son, William, known as President Nelson. Around this time, William built a large, 'H'-shaped brick house on the north side of Main Street (present field northwest of the Nelson House). Scotch Tom's younger son, Thomas, known as Secretary Nelson, built another large house at the east side of the village (on Zwybrucken Road near the Victory Monument). In ca. 1766, William's son, Thomas Nelson Jr. (the suffix was to distinguish him from his uncle, the Secretary), moved into the old Nelson House built by Scotch Tom. Upon William Nelson's death in 1772, he left his 'H'-shaped brick house to his younger son, Hugh, and the old Nelson House to Thomas Nelson Jr.

Thomas Nelson Jr. was a prominent figure in colonial Virginia and the young United States who signed the Declaration of Independence and served as governor of Virginia in 1780–1781. It was during his ownership of the Nelson House that American patriots won the final major battle of the Revolution, the Siege of Yorktown, in 1781. This battle resulted in heavy damage to Yorktown, including destruction of the Secretary Nelson House, but relatively minor damage to the Nelson House. Thomas Nelson Jr. repaired the house and continued to live there occasionally until his death in 1789. There is little record that he made significant changes to the landscape, which may have included a boxwood hedge enclosing the front court, presumably a formal garden at the rear of the house, and domestic gardens on the lots bordering Read Street.

Late Nelson Period, 1789–1914

The Nelson House and its four lots passed to successive generations of the Nelson family after the death of Thomas Nelson Jr. in 1789. In 1814, a widespread fire in Yorktown destroyed the William Nelson House and Nelson stores, but spared the Nelson House and its outbuildings. The Marquis de Lafayette stayed at the Nelson House during his triumphal return visit to the United States in 1824. Nelson family occupancy was briefly interrupted during the Civil War, when Confederate and Union forces occupied Yorktown and used the Nelson House as a field hospital.

Shortly after the Civil War, a brick retaining wall was built around the front court, and a tenant house was erected along Main Street on lot 48. The family subsequently made few other improvements over the course of the next five decades, and continued to use the garden and open lots (lots 48, 49, and 50) for cultivation and pasture, lined by a variety of wood and wire fences. In the yard, the servant quarters and poultry house may have been removed during or soon after the Civil War, while the others came down by 1900, except for the kitchen–wash house. In 1896, ownership of the Nelson House passed to Mary

and Elizabeth Bryan, whose stepmother, Martha Bryan, was a Nelson by her first marriage. In 1908, the Bryans sold lot 52 that included the Nelson House to R. A. Lancaster, but retained ownership of the garden lots. For much of the next six years, the house stood vacant. Only the brick foundation and massive chimney of the kitchen–wash house remained from the group of colonial outbuildings that defined the service yard. By 1914, the house was in poor condition with broken windows, peeling paint, and ivy covering much of the front.

York Hall Estate Period, 1914–1968

In 1914, wealthy business executive and retired Navy officer George Preston Blow, a resident of LaSalle, Illinois and a native of Norfolk, Virginia, purchased lot 52 with the Nelson House as his family's country place. This became the center of an estate named York Hall that included the Nelson garden lots, the eighteenth-century Smith and Ballard Houses, the lots across Main Street where the William Nelson House and Nelson stores had stood, and lots 44 and 45 on Read Street, among other nearby properties.

Greatly interested in history and preservation, Blow undertook a thorough renovation of the house according to the design of architects Griffin and Wynkoop of New York City, in which he retained much of the historic fabric and concealed modern utilities. On the outside, the only major change was the addition of dormers. Blow commissioned the architects to design three Colonial Revival-style outbuildings on the Read Street side of the Nelson garden lots, including a garage (carriage house), gardener's cottage (Wisteria Cottage), and stable. Blow also renovated the Smith House as a guest cottage and moved its entrance to face the interior of the property, and updated the Ballard House, known as Pearl Cottage, into a staff residence. A high brick wall was built around the perimeter of the old Nelson, Smith, and Ballard lots, replacing a variety of fences that existed in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

George Preston Blow carried his interest in historic preservation to the landscape surrounding the Nelson House. He retained the old overgrown boxwood hedges around the front court and rear property line, an old stone walkway at the front entrance, and a number of aged specimen trees, including a decrepit laurel tree in the front court that stood during the 1824 visit of the Marquis de Lafayette. At the rear of the Smith House, Blow retained an old boxwood allee as well as a line of linden trees along Nelson Street, then known as Pearl Street. With little else remaining, in 1915 he commissioned landscape architect Charles Gillette, of Richmond, to redesign the landscape in the Colonial Revival style. Gillette united the original Nelson property with the Smith and Ballard lots around a central open lawn framed by trees and shrubs. The lawn was crossed by stepping-stone paths that connected the buildings. He designed an entrance drive loop in the

back court, and two terraces stepping down from the west side of the house where the service yard had stood.

With the overall form of the landscape complete, Blow commissioned Gillette to design a number of new features in the landscape beginning in 1921. Some of these features were completed after Blow's death in September 1922 under the oversight of his wife, Adele. The front court was redesigned into a garden with a brick patio and reflecting pool, requiring the removal of the Lafayette tree and old stone entrance walk with its entrance from Main Street, making the front court into a private garden. The Blows did, however, retain the aged boxwood hedge. Three formal flower gardens were added to the landscape, based on the design of eighteenth-century gardens at Groombridge Place in Kent, England. The largest was a foursquare garden occupying most of lot 48 west of the house that featured clipped boxwood borders, grass walks, figural sculptures, Chinese-style covered benches, piers with urns, and an antique English column at the center, with a screen of evergreen trees and mixed shrubs along the perimeter brick wall. To provide room for the garden, the slope adjacent to the house was rebuilt as a raised terrace with a brick wall and paired flight of stairs facing the garden. In 1923, after George P. Blow's death, Gillette designed two gardens between the Smith and Ballard Houses, the larger of which was a rose garden that was laid out as half of the foursquare garden and was lined by an arbor along the perimeter wall. Adjacent to the Ballard House, Gillette designed a small flower garden named the Garden of Pleasant Associations. In 1927, Mrs. Blow commissioned architect William Bottomley to redesign the west entrances of the Nelson House facing the formal garden.

Upon Adele Blow's death in September 1929, the family established the York Hall Memorial Trust to maintain the Nelson House as a museum. After five years, the four Blow children dissolved the trust and in ca. 1936, George W. Blow bought out his siblings' interest in the property. For the next thirty years, he maintained York Hall as his family's permanent year-round residence. He commissioned Charles Gillette to make several minor changes to the landscape, including a tennis court built behind the stable in 1936, a small swimming pool, patio, and fireplace built adjoining the formal garden in ca. 1946, and a pansy garden laid out next to the Smith House around the same time.

After George W. Blow's death in 1960 and his wife Katherine's death in 1965, York Hall passed to the couple's children, who maintained the estate for two years despite limited resources. This led them to offer the estate to the National Park Service for incorporation into Colonial National Historical Park, established in 1930. Prior to the sale, the family removed most of the site's garden furnishings.

National Park Service Period, 1968–Present

In 1968, the National Park Service purchased York Hall for incorporation into Colonial National Historical Park, and began planning for restoration of the estate to its colonial character. This required dividing York Hall back into its colonial parcels consisting of the Nelson House grounds, the Smith lot, the Ballard lot, and the William Nelson lots. In preparation for opening as a house museum during the national Bicentennial, the park restored the Nelson House to its colonial appearance. Restoration of the Smith and Ballard Houses as staff residences was undertaken shortly thereafter. Due to inadequate historical documentation, costs, and public interest in retaining the estate outbuildings and walls, the park service did not restore the landscape. Instead, it removed features that were overtly twentieth-century or required high maintenance, including the oval drive, flowerbeds, foundation shrubs, stepping-stone paths, swimming pool, and pool in the front court. Features that evoked a colonial character or served a contemporary park purpose were retained or replaced in-kind, including the perimeter brick wall along Main and Read Streets, boxwood hedges in the formal garden, outbuildings, and trees. The park also replaced the aged boxwood hedge around the front court. Most of this work in the landscape was completed by 1981 in time for the Bicentennial of the Siege of Yorktown. After this time, the park maintained the Nelson House grounds with few changes aside from removal and replacement of vegetation and fences, and removal of the ca. 1921 top courses on the front court perimeter wall in ca. 1983. South of the site, the park built a new shelter building over the Poor Potter site in 2003.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

This chapter documents the existing conditions of the Nelson House grounds and the setting formed by adjoining properties. The landscape consists of the four village lots historically associated with the Nelson House at the time of the 1781 Siege of Yorktown, fenced off from the adjoining Smith and Ballard Lots. These two lots are private residences for park staff, but form part of the landscape setting of the Nelson House grounds. On lot 55 south of the stable is a large frame building that shelters the Poor Potter Site, connected to the Nelson House grounds by a walk through the stable. The twentieth-century residences along Nelson Street are visible from within the Nelson House grounds. The lots across Main Street, historically the site of the William Nelson House and Nelson stores, provide an open-space setting for the Nelson House. Successional woods along the crest of the bluff and in adjoining Great Valley block most of the York River view from the Nelson House. Civil War earthworks remain on the bluff above the York River.

The primary public entrance to the Nelson House grounds is at a pedestrian gate along Main Street at the terrace; the colonial-period main entrance, on axis with the front door, was closed off in the early twentieth century. The grounds are also accessible from Nelson Street at the back court. The front door is maintained as an entrance to the grounds, and a door on the west side of the house, once used as the service and garden entrance by the Nelson and Blow families, is not used by the public. There is no universal access into the house or the formal garden, but the garden can be viewed from the terrace, which is accessible from the back court. Public parking is provided in a National Park Service lot across Read Street on lots 44 and 45 that once contained a nursery and garden for the York Hall estate.

The Nelson House is maintained as a house museum, and the garage as a park ranger station. Wisteria Cottage is vacant. The grounds are open to the public and are maintained largely by volunteers. Some of the plant materials, walks, and drives are in poor condition. The wood fences were replaced in 2008. The few public amenities within the Nelson House grounds include three benches and an interpretive wayside along Main Street. Individual picnic tables are located near the garage and Ballard House for staff use.

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

This chapter addresses the historic significance of the Nelson House grounds based on the National Register criteria, defines the cultural landscape's historic character according to National Park Service methods, and evaluates features that contribute to, or detract from, the landscape's historic character.

The Nelson House grounds, along with the Smith and Ballard Houses and William Nelson lots across Main Street, were administratively listed in the National Register of Historic Places upon their incorporation into Colonial National Historical Park in 1968. In 1973, these properties were listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register as contributing resources of the Yorktown Historic District, which includes both park and private property, primarily along Main Street.

In 2006, the Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with findings of the park service's Cultural Landscape Inventory for the Village of Yorktown that identified the 129.50-acre district as having historic significance for its association with the Revolutionary War, Civil War, colonial-era commerce, and the early historic preservation movement of the 1930s and Mission 66 period under National Register Criterion A; for its association with George Washington, Lord Cornwallis, John D. Rockefeller, and Charles E. Peterson under Criterion B; for embodying the distinctive characteristics of early town planning and eighteenth

and nineteenth-century architecture in Virginia under Criterion C; and for its potential to reveal information under Criterion D.

Within this National Register context and evaluations completed through the park's List of Classified Structures, this cultural landscape report recommends that the landscape of the Nelson House grounds be considered significant under Criterion A for its association with the Revolutionary War and Civil War, and under Criterion C for embodying the distinctive characteristics of Colonial Revival-style landscape architecture during the Country Place Era. These contexts and existing resources define a period of significance spanning two centuries, from construction of the Nelson House in ca. 1730, to completion of the last of the Colonial Revival-style landscape improvements designed by Charles Gillette in ca. 1930. Additional information is needed to evaluate the Cornwallis plaque, which was originally installed on the Nelson House in 1931 and moved to the formal garden in ca. 1974.

The landscape of the Nelson House grounds retains historic character to the Revolutionary War period (1775–1781) and the York Hall estate period (1914–1930). The front court and back court to either side of the house retain the overall spatial organization, buildings and structures, and view and vistas characteristics of the Revolutionary War period, as reestablished by the National Park Service in the 1970s. The terrace, formal garden, lawn, and service area retain their overall spatial character, circulation, vegetation, buildings and structures, and views and vistas characteristics from the York Hall estate period.

ENDNOTES

1 Robert Page, Cathy Gilbert, and Susan Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resource and Stewardship and Partnerships, Park Historic Structures and Cultural Landscapes Program, 1998), 129.

2 According to *NPS-28: Cultural Resource Management*, a thorough level of investigation is defined as reviewing "published and documentary sources of known or presumed relevance that are readily accessible without extensive travel and that promise expeditious extraction of relevant data, interviewing all knowledgeable persons who are readily available, and presenting findings in no greater detail than required by the task directive."

1. SITE HISTORY

The Nelson House grounds, overlooking the Yorktown River not far from the Chesapeake Bay, have long been a favored site. For centuries, it was part of the homeland of the Powhatan people before Europeans granted the land as an agricultural plantation in the seventeenth century. Following the establishment of Yorktown in 1691, the land became part of a bustling port. Among the village's many substantial merchant houses, one of the most prominent was the Nelson House, built by Thomas "Scotch Tom" Nelson in ca. 1730. This house, which became the residence of Thomas Nelson Jr., Yorktown's most famous statesman and signer of the Declaration of Independence, witnessed the height of Yorktown's prosperity, the Siege of 1781, and the town's long decline into the early twentieth century. In 1914, the fortunes of the property were revived by wealthy executive George Preston Blow who, working with architects Griffin and Wynkoop and landscape architect Charles Gillette, preserved and redesigned the Nelson House and its surrounding grounds into a country estate known as York Hall. Five decades later, York Hall was transformed again with its incorporation into Colonial National Historical Park. Although the National Park Service accurately restored the Nelson House to its colonial appearance, the surrounding grounds reflect three centuries of history.

BEFORE THE NELSONS, PRE-1706

NATURAL HISTORY AND POWHATAN HOMELAND

The setting of the Nelson House grounds, amid alluvial uplands along the York River, traces back to the last ice age 20,000 years ago, when ice up to one mile thick stretched as far south as Pennsylvania. At the time, the Chesapeake Bay did not exist and animals such as mammoths, mastodons, and bison roamed an area dominated by coniferous woods and marshy tundra. As the ice sheets retreated about 12,000 years ago, meltwaters deposited sediments across a vast area, creating a coastal plain later known as the Tidewater. The present landforms emerged after this time, when a widely branching network of river channels were flooded as melting glaciers raised sea levels, creating the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries, including the York River (fig. 1.1). These waterways divided the Virginia Tidewater into four major peninsulas, with Yorktown on the so-called Virginia Peninsula defined by the York River on the north and James River on the south. The landscape once dominated by conifers transitioned to a mix of hardwood species that included oak, cypress, maple, and hickory.[1]

Figure 1.1. A seventeenth century Dutch map showing natural landforms of the Chesapeake Bay region and the homeland of the Powhatan Confederacy. The approximate future site of Yorktown, near the Powhatan village of Kiskiack, is indicated by the black dot. (Joan Vinckeboons, attributed, "Pascaert van Nieuw Nederlandt Virginia...," ca. 1639, Library of Congress American Memory Collection, digital ID g3300 ct001068, annotated by SUNY ESF.)

Humans arrived in this moderating environment and initially lived by hunting and gathering in nomadic tribes. By the Late Woodland cultural period (1,200 to 350 years ago), people had begun to practice agriculture, which enabled the development of villages and political organization.[2] The Powhatan Chiefdom, a large alliance of Algonquian-speaking people with a population of between 14,000 and 21,000 by the time of European arrival, occupied most of the Virginia Tidewater. Most lived in an estimated 150 villages clustered along the rivers. The Virginia Peninsula, between the *Powhatan* (James River) and *Pamunkey* (York River), was the homeland of the Kiskiak (also spelled Chiskiak) people, one of the over 32 Powhatan sub-chiefdoms. The tribe's chief village, identified by European explorers in the early seventeenth century as Kiskiak, was north of the present site of Yorktown (see fig. 1.1).[3]

EUROPEAN COLONIZATION AND SETTLEMENT OF YORKTOWN

Although Spanish Jesuits arrived in the Virginia Tidewater in ca. 1570 and were followed by English settlers at Roanoke Island in 1585, the first permanent European settlement in Virginia did not occur until 1607 at Jamestown, on the south side of the Virginia Peninsula. Written accounts of the Chesapeake Bay area by the first European settlers described a rich estuary flanked by marsh and swamplands, intertwining waterways, and a forested plains. The land consisted

of diverse forest resources and wildlife, such as black bear, timber wolf, mountain lion, bobcat, and animals now extinct, including the passenger pigeon and the Carolina parakeet. With abundant timber resources and clay, the colonists built boats, homes, and farm buildings.[4]

The arrival of European settlers led to a mostly hostile relationship with the Powhatan over competition for land and resources, and introduced diseases to which the Powhatan had no natural resistance. Eventually, the determination of the colonists to stay forced the weakened Powhatan Chiefdom to reach a peace agreement with the colonists and seek protection from outlying tribes. The Powhatan, however, continued to weaken and lost control of all of their Tidewater lands to the Virginia colonists by 1677, when they succumbed to a treaty that required forfeiture of their lands along the coast and relocation to small inland reservations.[5]

With this relocation, the number of colonial settlements increased and the landscape was transformed with the development of large-scale agriculture based on the tobacco trade and slave labor. Tobacco led to amassing of great wealth in vast farms known as plantations that were served by port villages established along the rivers through the Act for Ports of 1691. One of these ports was York (later Yorktown), acquired by the Virginia colony for 10,000 pounds of "merchantable sweet scented tobacco and cask," from a 1,300-acre plantation patented by Nicolas Martiau 60 years earlier. At the time, the land was owned by his descendents, the Read family. Benjamin Read, Martiau's grandson and heir to his estate, agreed to the 1691 sale of the property for the new Yorktown port. [6]

The Yorktown village tract was laid out on a protected bluff above the York River in a prime site for commerce, at the farthest point upriver for deep-water navigation, yet easily accessible from the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean. As surveyed, the village was approximately one-half mile east to west and consisted of 85 half-acre lots laid out in a grid on the top of the bluff, parallel to the river (fig. 1.2). The main road through the village, known as Main Street, was most likely a pre-existing road that connected Williamsburg to the west, designated the Virginia capital in 1699, and Hampton at the tip of the Virginia Peninsula on the Chesapeake Bay. Main Street had a 30-foot right-of-way and the village plan included eight cross streets, each approximately 28 feet wide. The first cross streets built were those that provided access between Main Street and the waterfront through natural ravines, which included the Great Valley and another along the future Read Street. The shorefront along the York River was reserved as "Common Shore," and was a focus of activity in the early port town. Village lots on the top of the bluff cost 180 pounds of tobacco, and sales contracts carried forfeit provisions if the development of one building did not occur within a year. On November 24, 1691, the first day of sale, 36 lots were sold, and within a year, 61 had been sold.[7]

Figure 1.2. A ca. 1705 plat of Yorktown by Lawrence Smith showing the 1691 subdivision into half-acre lots and annotated to ca. 1712. The map is oriented with the York River (north) on the bottom. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, map 2261, annotated by SUNY ESF.)

Yorktown's earliest development included residential, commercial, and civic buildings. The York County Courthouse, built ca. 1697, and the York Parish Church (later Grace Church), built in 1697, were the primary buildings in the young village. Residential buildings on Main Street included houses and outbuildings that typically consisted of kitchens and quarters for servants and slaves. Commercial structures located in the core area of village and along the waterfront stored goods transferred from the ships anchored in the York River.

Many of the village lots in Yorktown remained undeveloped at the turn of the eighteenth century, including the future site of the Nelson House grounds that comprised lots 48, 49, 50, and 52. Village trustees first conveyed Lot 52, the lot that would later contain the Nelson House, to James Darbishire in July 1699. He failed to build on the lot in the required one-year timeframe and ultimately forfeited his title back to the village. None of the other three lots had been built upon by 1705.[8]

LANDSCAPE SUMMARY, 1705

In 1705, on the eve of its acquisition by the Nelson family, the future site of the Nelson House was most likely an indistinguishable part of the developing village, a void along Main Street between several houses and other buildings that had been erected since the founding of the village fourteen years earlier (fig. 1.3). Main Street was well established, but many of the cross streets were most likely not yet built, except for those leading to the river.

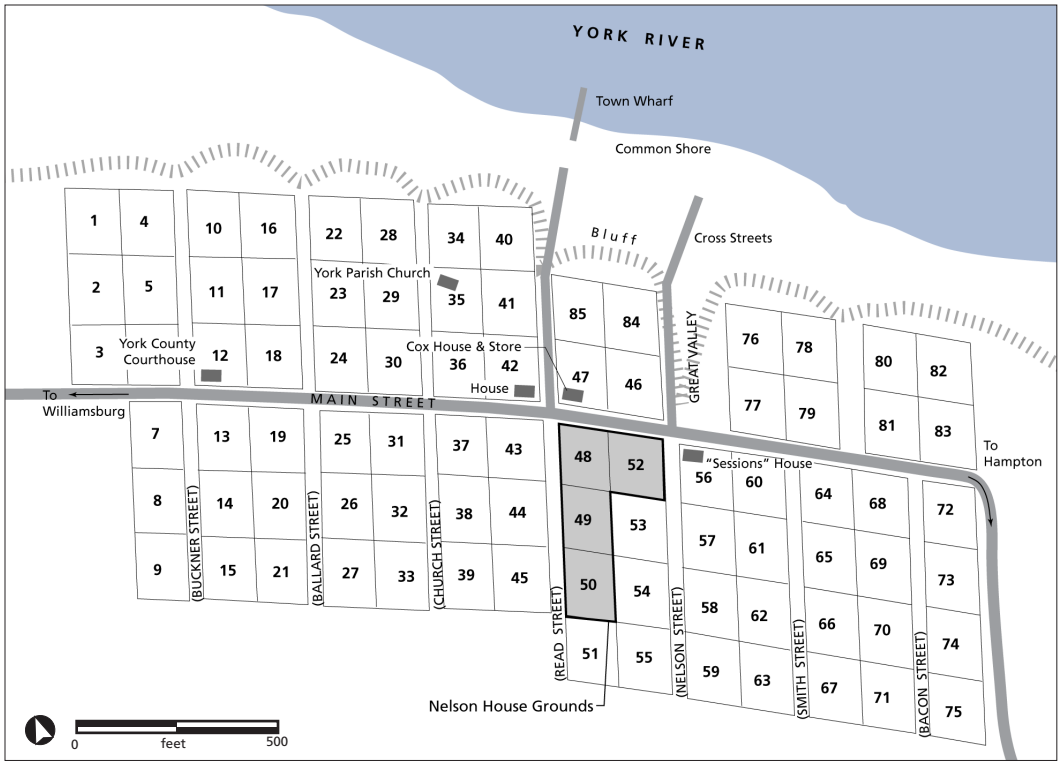


Figure 1.3. Map showing relationship of the Nelson House grounds to the village lots, streets, and buildings in ca. 1705. The map does not show all buildings or streets that existed at the time. (SUNY ESF.)

Immediately to the east of the Nelson site on lots 56 and 57 facing the Great Valley was a house built by Thomas Sessions, a carpenter, in ca. 1692, and acquired by merchant John Martin in 1705.[9] The lot included two outbuildings at the rear. Another house was on lot 42 along the north side of Main Street at the corner of what is now known as Read Street, at the later site of the Cole Digges House. It was built in ca. 1699 by a ferryman and tavern keeper.[10] Across the street to the east was lot 47, purchased by Charles Cox in 1705, who built a house, store, stable, and servants quarters.[11] Each property most likely included domestic gardens, livestock pens, and yards enclosed by wood fences.

Little is known about the character of the Nelson lots in 1705 or the adjoining undeveloped lots 53 and 54, later owned by the Smith and Ballard families. The highpoint of the land along Main Street was on lot 52, where the Nelson House later was built. Given the need for lumber in the growing village and longstanding agricultural uses in the region, the site in 1705 was mostly likely cleared of its timber, which may have included oak, cypress, maple, and hickory.[12] From lot 52, this open landscape provided views north toward the York River, with the waterfront readily accessible through the Great Valley ravine and a smaller ravine to the west along present Read Street. In the decades to follow, this landscape would be transformed into a stately merchant home, part of a village streetscape defined by frame and brick houses and stores.

ENDNOTES

1 Keith Egloff and Deborah Woodward, *First People: The Early Indians of Virginia*, 2nd edition (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press in association with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, 2006), 44–45; Dennis Blanton, "Jamestown's Environment," http://www.virtualjamestown.org/essays/blanton_essay.html (accessed August 2010).

2 Egloff and Woodward, 44–45.

3 Egloff and Woodward, 44–45.

4 George Percy, David B. Quinn, ed., *A Discourse of the Plantation of the Southern Colony in Virginia by the English 1606. Written by that honorable gentleman, Master George Percy*, (Charlottesville: Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, University Press of Virginia, 1967), 17.

5 Robert S. Grumet, *Bay, Plain, and Piedmont: A Landscape History of the Chesapeake Heartland from 1.3 Billion Years Ago to 2000* (Annapolis, Maryland: The Chesapeake Bay Heritage Context Project, National Park Service, ca. 2002).

6 Edward M. Riley, "Yorktown During the Revolution" (Unpublished manuscript, July 13, 1948*),* 10. The extent of vegetation Martiau cleared to establish his home and plantation is unknown, but colonial settlers typically used old fields previously cleared by Native peoples to plant and grow agricultural crops.

7 Riley, 10.

8 Charles E. Hatch, Jr., *The Nelson House and the Nelsons General Study* (National Park Service report, August 1969), 61–64.

9 This was the first Sessions house, prior to the existing brick house that was built in the mid-eighteenth century. It is not known whether the Sessions family owned the property when the brick house was built. Despite this, the house is today known as the Sessions House.

10. Edward A. Chappel, "Cole-Digges House, A Historic Structure Report" (Prepared by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation for the National Park Service, July 2003, revised June 2004), Introduction. This house was replaced in ca. 1720 by the existing Cole Digges House.

11 Charles E. Hatch, Jr., *Historic Resource Study, Yorktown's Main Street (from Secretary Nelson's to the Windmill) and Military Entrenchments Close In and Around the Town of York, Colonial National Historical Park, Virginia (*Denver, CO: National Park Service, March 1974, web version, http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/colo/yorktowns_main_street/chap1-4.htm), chapter 4, section "Lots 46 and 47."

12 Egloff and Woodward, 44–45.

EARLY NELSON PERIOD, 1706–1789

In 1706, the founder of one of Yorktown's most famous families, Thomas Nelson, arrived in the young village from England. Known as Scotch Tom, Nelson established a mercantile trade and developed it into one of the leading businesses in Virginia. With his wealth, he became the largest landowner in the village and built a prominent house along Main Street, surrounded by gardens, service buildings, and stores. His sons William and Thomas expanded the family business and constructed their own prominent houses in the village. Although both sons were statesmen, it was William's son, Thomas Nelson Jr., who became most famous as signer of the Declaration of Independence, governor of Virginia, and commander of the Virginia militia during the 1781 Siege of Yorktown, the last major battle of the American Revolution. The Nelson House and its grounds suffered from military occupations and warfare during the siege.

SCOTCH TOM YEARS, 1706–1745

During the early to mid-eighteenth century, Yorktown prospered as one of the major ports in the southern English colonies. British domestic goods, sugar, and African slaves arrived through Yorktown, and tobacco from the region's plantations fueled a strong export trade. These port activities attracted tradesmen, artisans, merchants, and established planters to set up businesses and build homes in the village.

By the 1730s, Yorktown had outgrown its original 85 half-acre lots and additional subdivisions were made along the southern interior and within the former commons along the York River. In 1738, Gwyn Read, the son of Benjamin Read and heir to the Martiau plantation, subdivided a large tract of land south of the original village lots (fig. 1.4). The new lots were accessed by extensions of the original cross streets and a street parallel to Main Street, known as the "back street." Development, primarily smaller houses for tradesmen and artisans, quickly spread across this area.[1] Meanwhile, much growth was occurring along Yorktown's waterfront on the old commons, concurrent with the rise of the village as major port. In 1739, the port area along the river was incorporated into the village and became known as York under the Hill. The area, which included tobacco warehouses, public wharves, dwellings, stores, taverns, and a prison, developed along a street parallel to the shoreline known as Water Street, and at the base of the major cross streets, including Read Street and Great Valley.[2]

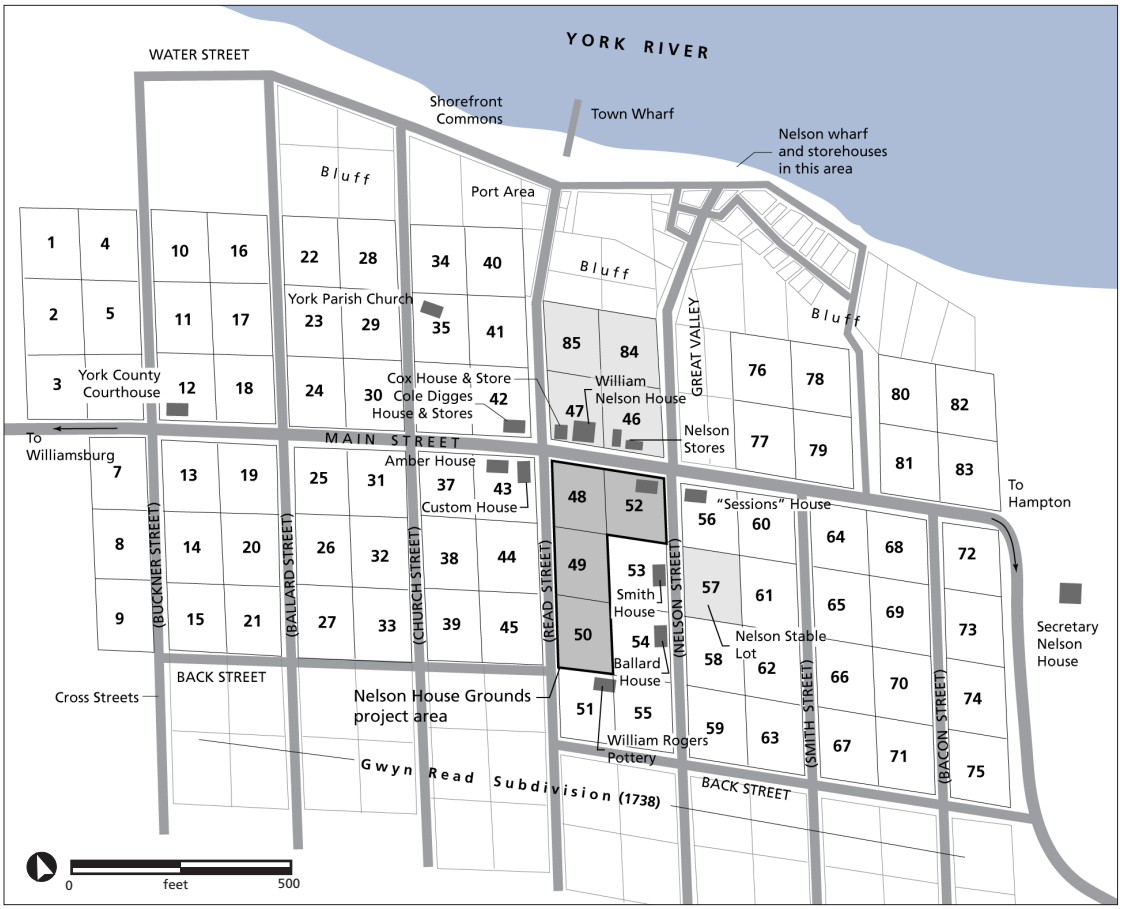


Figure 1.4. Map of Yorktown during the early Nelson period showing expansion of village lots in the Gwyn Read Subdivision, and development neighboring the Nelson House grounds. (SUNY ESF.)

Scotch Tom and the Nelson House

Scotch Tom Nelson was born in 1677 and raised in Penrith, England near the border with Scotland. His father, Hugh Nelson, was a successful cloth merchant from whom Scotch Tom inherited business acumen and wealth.[3] In 1705, at the age of twenty-eight, Scotch Tom sailed to Virginia in search of opportunity, eventually making his way to Yorktown.[4] Shortly after arriving, he established a successful mercantile business and by 1720 was engaged in the West India trade. In 1728, he positioned himself to dominate trade in Yorktown by leasing an 80-foot section of the waterfront. On this land, Scotch Tom erected a pier and built warehouses to secure bulky trade items that were difficult to transport up the steep incline of the Yorktown bluff.[5] In addition to his business interests, Scotch Tom embraced various leadership roles in Yorktown. During his first years in the young village, he joined the ranks of the York County court, where he worked his way up to the position of presiding justice. By 1716, Scotch Tom became a trustee for York County, and between 1722 and 1723, he served as York County sheriff.[6]

Four years after his arrival in Yorktown, Scotch Tom married Margaret Read and had three children: William, born 1711, Mary, born 1713, and Thomas, born 1716. In ca. 1718, Margaret passed away, and in ca. 1721, he married Frances Houston, a

widow from Norfolk, who had two children of her own from a previous marriage. In 1722, Scotch Tom and Francis had a daughter, Sarah.[7]

Scotch Tom's success in commerce provided him the means to purchase significant land holdings in and around Yorktown. One of his first investments was the purchase of lot 52 on August 2, 1706 from Colonel Thomas Ballard and Major William Buckner, trustees of the town, for 180 pounds of tobacco (see fig. 1.4, table 1.1). The lot was located on the south side of Main Street and the cross street opposite Great Valley, later known as Nelson Street. A year later, Scotch Tom acquired lots 46 and 48 from the town trustees after their owners forfeited the properties, suggesting that neither had built the required buildings on their lots. Lot 46 provided a strategic location for the Nelson business interests with its ready access to the commercial waterfront through the adjoining Great Valley. In 1712, Scotch Tom purchased lot 49 (to the south of lot 48), another forfeited lot. In 1715, he purchased the next lot to the south, lot 50, which, unlike the others, had been owned for five and a half years by Edward Powers, a Yorktown carpenter. Scotch Tom's purchase must have therefore included a standing house on the lot.[8] The following year, he acquired lot 57 south of the Sessions House, where he developed his stable yard. This was the last of Scotch Tom's acquisitions along Main Street until 1729, when he purchased lot 47 including the Cox House, built in ca. 1705, and two years later, lots 84 and 85 to the rear that extended to the top of the bluff above the York River. In total, Scotch Tom's nine lots comprised approximately four and a half acres.[9]

Lot 52 formed the core of Scotch Tom's village property, with his house and outbuildings on a rise and with ready access to the river through the Great Valley. According to the stipulations of the deed, Scotch Tom agreed within twelve months of his purchase in July 1706 "to build and finish on ye sd Lott ... a good house to Contain at Least Twenty foot Square."[10] This house was on the west half of the lot with its long side parallel to Main Street (fig. 1.5).[11] At the rear of the house was a stone retaining wall that created two terraces, stepping down toward lot 48. Two sets of stone steps

Table 1.1. Nelson Property History, 1706-1781
Nelson House Grounds and Adjoining Nelson Property (see fig. 1.4)

	LOT	DESCRIPTION	SCOTCH TOM ACQUISITION	2nd GENERATION NELSON OWNERSHIP (1745)	3rd GENERATION NELSON OWNERSHIP (1772)
Nelson House Grounds	52	Nelson House Lot	1706	To William Nelson	To Thomas Nelson Jr.
	48	Garden and Open Lot	1707	To William Nelson	To Thomas Nelson Jr.
	49	Garden and Open Lot	1712	To William Nelson	To Thomas Nelson Jr.
	50	Garden and Open Lot	1715	To William Nelson	To Thomas Nelson Jr.
	51	Stable Lot (east side Nelson Street)	1716	To William Nelson	?
Wm. Nelson Lots-Stores	46	Nelson Stores	1707	To William Nelson	To joint ownership by Thomas Jr. and Hugh
	47	Cox House, William Nelson House	1729	To William Nelson	Hugh Nelson
	85	Bluff	1731	To William Nelson	Hugh Nelson
	84	Bluff	1731	To William Nelson	Hugh Nelson

at the wall provided access between the terraces, which most likely contained outbuildings such as a kitchen, dairy, and smokehouse.[12] By 1716, Scotch Tom presumably had three other houses, one each on lots 48 and 49 to satisfy the deed stipulations, and the presumed house on lot 50 built by the previous owner, the Powers family.[13] A well near the main house along Main Street was another early feature of the site. On the east side of the cross street, south of the Sessions House, Nelson built his stable yard on lot 57. Other buildings that Scotch Tom constructed during initial development of his village property were two stores in ca. 1710. These were located on lot 46 across from the main house, close to the river access through the Great Valley.[14]

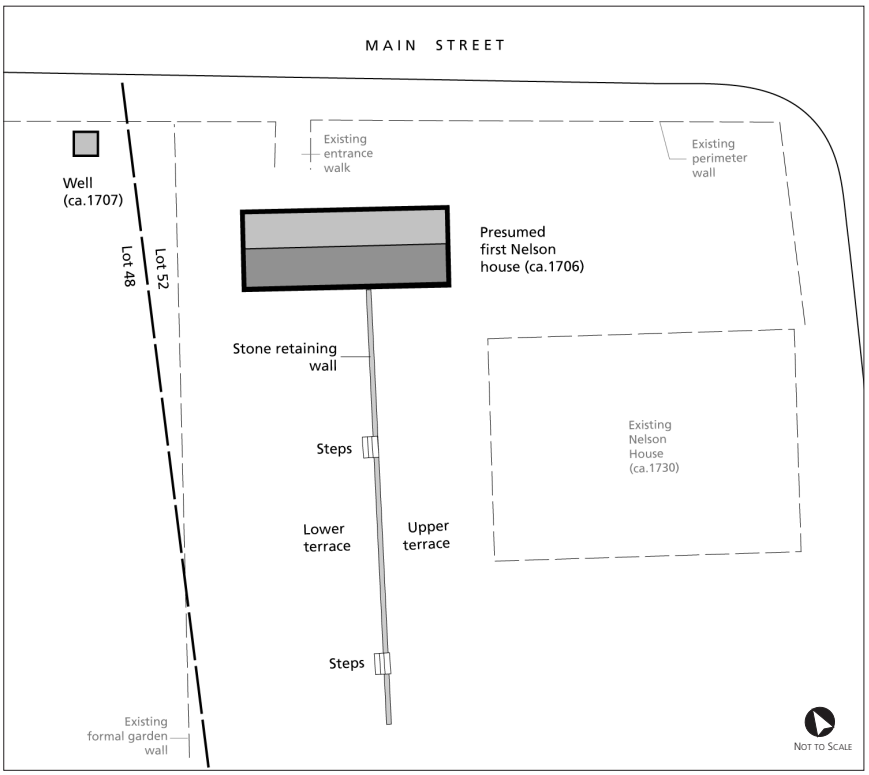


Figure 1.5. Plan showing presumed location of Scotch Tom's first house built in ca. 1706 in relation to the existing Nelson House, perimeter wall, and lot line. (SUNY ESF based on Norman F. Barka, "Archeology of the Nelson, Smith and Ballard Houses, Yorktown, Virginia," 1978.)

Scotch Tom established gardens soon after his purchase of his Main Street property to provide vegetables, fruits, and other produce for domestic consumption.[15] The gardens were probably initially close to the house on lot 52 and gradually expanded west and south as Scotch Tom acquired the adjoining lots 48, 49, and 50 between 1707 and 1715.[16] He most likely planted a variety of vegetables, herbs, and flowering perennials.[17] Common types of vegetables grown at this time included cabbage, onions, peas, beans, cauliflower, melons, celery, turnips, beets, carrots, artichokes, parsnips, radishes, potatoes, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kale, garlic, leeks, peppers, cucumbers, and spinach.[18] A 1738 *Virginia Gazette* article noted that Scotch Tom grew extraordinarily large cucumbers in his garden, some three feet or larger.[19] Herbs typically planted during this time included catnip, ginger, mint, nutmeg, parsley, rosemary, saffron, sage, and thyme.[20] The gardens may also have included native grapes, strawberries, huckleberries, blackberries, and raspberries.[21] Scotch Tom also likely planted ornamental shade trees, perhaps native tulip trees and oaks, as well as fruit trees. Most cultivated fruit trees during the time came from Europe and included apple, quince, plum, pear, peach, cherry, apricot, and nectarine.[22]

Scotch Tom would have enclosed the entire property with fences to protect his gardens from stray livestock and wild animals. The importance of such fences was

reflected in local ordinances, such as one in Williamsburg that required property owners to fence their land. It is not known if Yorktown had a similar ordinance.[23]

By the late 1720s, his frame house reflecting poorly on his growing wealth and prestige, Scotch Tom embarked on construction of a prominent new house. Completed in ca. 1730, the two-story Georgian-style brick house, with timbers cut from native old-growth tulip trees and fine brick purportedly shipped from England, was positioned east of the old frame house at the corner of Main Street and the cross street (Nelson Street), where it held a commanding position on elevated ground facing north toward the York River (see fig. 1.5).[24] This location was also close to the Nelson's stable yard on lot 57. Not unlike larger houses on rural plantations, the new Nelson House featured a symmetrical five-bay façade with a center entrance, segmental arched windows, two prominent offset ridge chimneys, and such decorative classical details as dentils, quoins, and keystones (fig. 1.6).

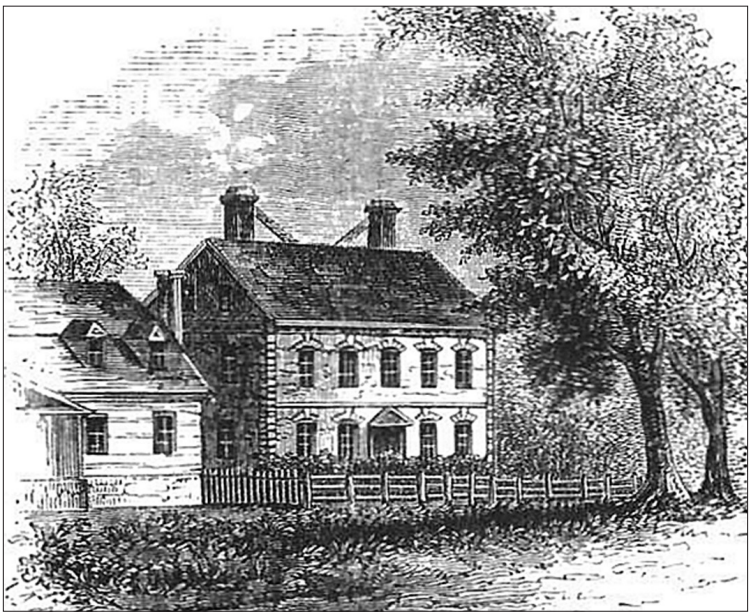


Figure 1.6. The ca. 1730 Nelson House, from the earliest known detailed illustration made in 1848. At left is the "Sessions" House. It is not known whether the fence and hedge in the front court existed in the eighteenth century. The service buildings to the right of the Nelson House are not shown. (Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*, 1850.)

The new house was set back 30 feet from Main Street, creating a shallow front court that was most likely bordered on the east and west sides by low retaining walls that made up the drop in grade along the cross street (Nelson Street) and toward lot 48 (fig. 1.7).[25] There was also a defined space at the rear of the house, known as the back court, which was surveyed in 1796 as being 60 feet from north to south.[26] While no other details of the back court landscape have survived, the area may have contained a drive providing access from the cross street and Nelson stable on lot 57 to the rear entrance of the house.

The size and location of the back court suggest it may have also been the site of the Nelson formal garden. During the early eighteenth century, such grand Virginia houses typically featured ornamental gardens laid out in the Anglo-Dutch style, characterized by geometric symmetry, axial walks, flowerbeds, and enclosures of hedges and other plantings. The garden may have been ornamented by native flowering trees such as dogwood, redbud, magnolia, and catalpa, and shaded by elm, chestnut, poplar, sycamore, oak, and pecan.[27] A hedge of boxwoods that existed in the nineteenth century along the Smith lot boundary may have been a remnant of this formal garden that provided a visual screen and definition to the south side of the back court.[28]

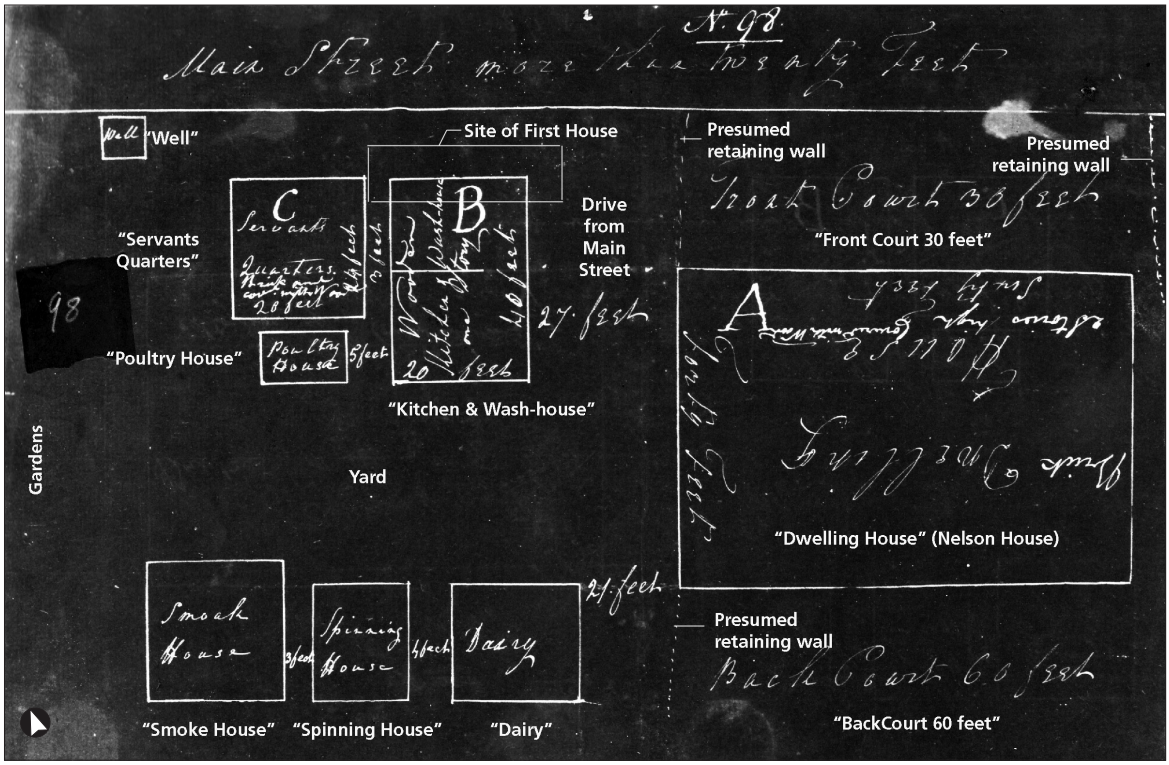


Figure 1.7. A 1796 insurance survey of the Nelson House showing buildings and structures that most likely existed during the colonial period. This is the earliest plan of the outbuildings associated with the second Nelson House built in ca. 1730. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, map 122B, annotated by SUNY ESF.)

After completing the new house, Scotch Tom removed the old frame house and the stone retaining wall, which provided room for a larger single terrace and service yard on the west half of lot 52. Accessed from a short drive off Main Street, the marl-surfaced yard contained six outbuildings: a kitchen–wash house (the largest building), servants quarters, and a poultry house on the north side; and a dairy, spinning house, and smoke house on the south. All were frame except for the servants quarters, which was brick. These buildings were not arranged with the formal symmetry that characterized the new house, but rather reflected their utilitarian purposes.[29]

Scotch Tom's Neighbors

Scotch Tom's house was one of many buildings that were being constructed or improved along Yorktown's growing Main Street during the first half of the eighteenth century. Richard Ambler built a large, eight-room brick house on lot 43 west of Scotch Tom, and in ca. 1720, built a two-story brick warehouse at the corner of the cross street (Read Street) (see fig. 1.4). Because Ambler served as the collector of custom fees for the port of York, the warehouse became known as the Custom House. With Yorktown as the largest deep water port between Charleston, South Carolina and Philadelphia, the Custom House became one of the most important in colonial Virginia. Over the next few years, Ambler purchased lots 44, 45, and 34, where, together with lot 43, he maintained his residence, store, kitchen, stables, washhouse, privies, and garden. [30]

Along the cross street south of the Nelson House were two small houses on lots 53 and 54 (see fig. 1.4). The house closest to the Nelsons on lot 53 was home to three generations of the Smith family, beginning with Lawrence Smith, who purchased the lot in February 1706, six months prior to Scotch Tom's purchase of lot 52. Smith, a surveyor for York and Gloucester Counties, built a frame house within the first year of his purchase, and resided on the lot for 28 years with his wife and children until his death in 1734. The lot then passed to his son, Edmund.[31] Lot 54, south of the Smith's, was owned by Edward Fuller, who built a frame house, stables, and storehouse there in ca. 1709. The lot passed through four owners until John Ballard inherited it in 1727. In ca. 1730, he removed the old outbuildings and most likely enlarged the house.[32] Around the same time, Ballard built a dairy, smokehouse, and kitchen at the rear of the house. In ca. 1744, Ballard willed the property to his second son, Robert, who resided there for the next seventeen years.[33] The landscape of the Smith and Ballard lots included yards, service buildings, and domestic gardens most likely at the open back parts of the lots. Ballard also had a small orchard of fruit trees. [34]

Beyond the Ballard lot to the south, William Rogers developed a pottery complex on lots 51 and 55. Rogers immigrated to Yorktown around 1710 and a year later built a brewery as his first enterprise. By 1720, he had founded a large pottery operation that included two kilns and supporting work areas. In addition to marketing his earthenware and stoneware products locally, Rogers sold his goods in the Potomac River region, New England, and the West Indies.[35]

A conspicuous addition to Main Street in the vicinity of the Nelson House occurred in the 1740s, around the time Scotch Tom died, when his son William built his own house on lot 47. Scotch Tom had purchased this lot, which included the old Cox House, in 1729. The new house, which was larger than Scotch Tom's house, was an H-shaped two-story brick building located close to the street in the space between the Nelson stores and the Cox house. The new house had gardens, a service yard, and outbuildings to the east and south. [36]

SECOND AND THIRD GENERATION NELSON OWNERSHIP, 1745–1775

Scotch Tom lived through five decades of Yorktown's early heyday by the time of his death in 1745. However, the height of the town's growth did not occur until the following decade, when the village grew to an estimated 250 to 300 buildings and a population of 1,800.[37] Its waterfront was a dense complex of warehouses, stores, ordinaries, wharves, and small homes of storekeepers (fig. 1.8). Stately brick and frame houses, stores, and civic buildings lined Main Street. Large tobacco plantations occupied the lands around the village, some owned

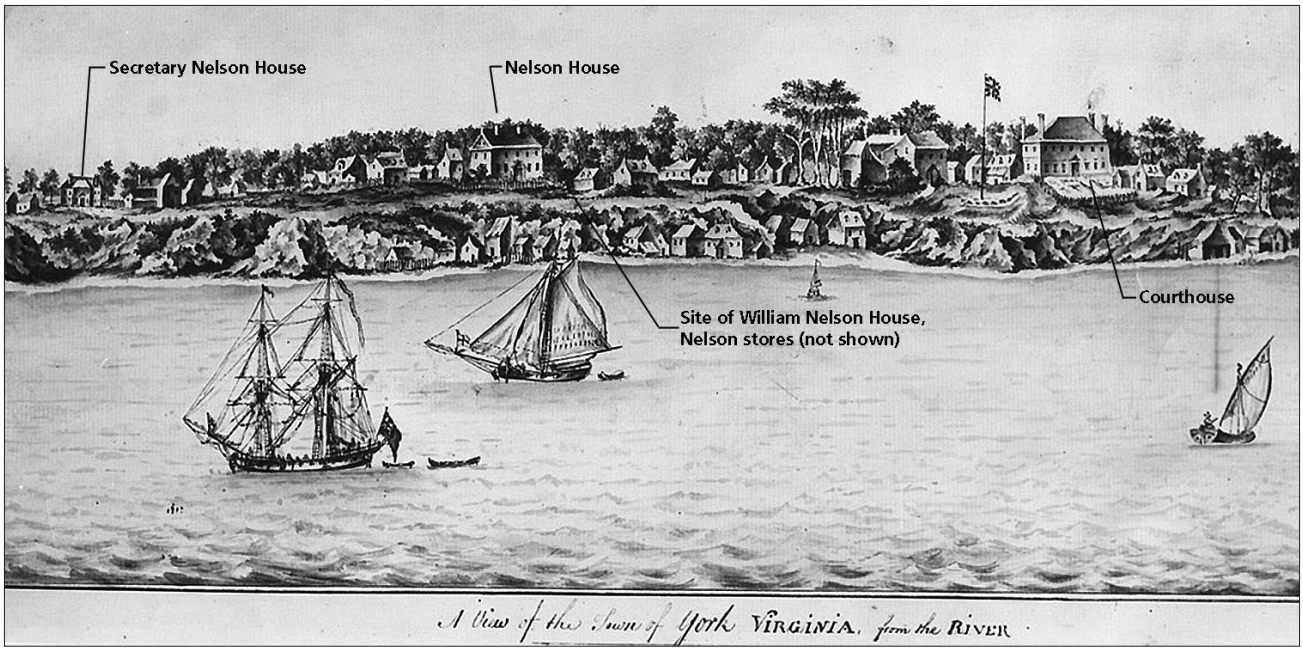


Figure 1.8. A drawing of Yorktown looking south across the York River showing the village at the height of its prosperity, ca. 1755. (Detail, John Gauntlett, "A View of the Town of York Virginia from the River," ca. 1755, The Mariner's Museum, Newport News, Virginia, annotated by SUNY ESF.)

by Yorktown residents. To keep up with the growth of the area, the village made improvements to its infrastructure, including widening roads to the waterfront.[38]

By the 1760s, Yorktown started to decline as production of its main export, tobacco, began to wane. Decades of tobacco agriculture had depleted soils in the region and led to reduced quality and yield, while the opening of new and more fertile lands to the south and west increased competition. Ultimately, the waning agricultural prosperity forced abandonment of the land, first by small farmers and then by larger plantation owners, and reduced trade. By the years leading up to the Revolutionary War, Yorktown was no longer a port of major significance for the Virginia colony.[39]

Scotch Tom's Sons

During Yorktown's prosperous years of the mid-eighteenth century, Scotch Tom's eldest son William and his brother, Thomas, expanded the family mercantile business and served important political positions. Because of these duties, the brothers spent much of their time in Williamsburg, while also tending to the family business in Yorktown. William, who lived in the house across Main Street from the Scotch Tom Nelson House, guided the family fortune and was a long-time member of the Council of Virginia, which he also headed on occasion. Because of this position, residents of Yorktown often referred to him as "President Nelson." He also served as governor of colonial Virginia in 1770 and 1771. Thomas, known as "Secretary Nelson," also had a significant public service career. He lived in a large brick house at the east side of Yorktown (see figs. 1.4, 1.8). In 1743, the British King appointed him Secretary of the Virginia Colony, one

of the most important and lucrative posts in the colony. Later he held positions in the York County Court and Council of State.[40]

When Scotch Tom died in October 1745, he left most of his estate to his son William, including the Nelson House and its associated lots. However, Scotch Tom gave his second wife, Frances, the right to life estate in the house, where she continued to live for the next two decades. William lived in the H-shaped house across Main Street on lot 47 that he built around the time of his father's death. Here, he and his wife Elizabeth "Betty" Burwell raised their children: Thomas Jr. (1738–1789; the suffix "Junior" was used to distinguish him from his uncle, Secretary Nelson), Robert (1743–1818), William (?–1813), Hugh (1750–1800), Nathaniel (?–?), and Elizabeth (?–?).[41] Following Frances Nelson's death at the age of 84 in 1766, William Nelson arranged to have his oldest son, Thomas Jr., move with his wife Lucy Grymes, whom he married in 1762, into the Nelson House. Here, the couple raised eleven children.[42]

Third Generation Nelson Ownership

Upon his death in 1772 at the age of 61, William Nelson left his Yorktown property to his sons Thomas Jr. and Hugh (see fig. 1.4, table 1.1). Thomas received the Nelson House, where he had lived with his wife Lucy since ca. 1766, and lots 48, 49, 50, and 52. Hugh received his father's H-shaped house across Main Street and lots 46, 47, 84, and 85. Each of the sons inherited equal share of the Nelson stores located on lot 46, and jointly assumed control of the Nelson family mercantile business. Thomas Nelson Jr. received additional lands in and around Yorktown, as well as Offley Hoo, a Nelson plantation in Hanover County, north of Richmond.[43]

Thomas and Hugh managed the family mercantile business during the period of economic decline in Yorktown. Thomas, however, was also busy with public service since his return to America in 1760 upon his graduation from Cambridge University. In 1761, he won election to the House of Burgesses for York County. He was active in Yorktown civic affairs, overseeing construction of a new public wharf and warehouse on the waterfront, as well as repairs to the jail. Later, as political discord between the colonies and Britain escalated, he joined the first convention that met in Williamsburg in 1774 to consider the matter of England's taxation on the American colonies. That same year, Virginia's colonial militia appointed him colonel of the 2nd regimental infantry.[44]

In the years leading up to the Revolution, Thomas Nelson Jr. continued to live in the house built by his grandfather, Scotch Tom. He and his wife Lucy had renovated the house prior to moving there in ca. 1766. Work involved numerous interior alterations, including changing the parlor into a dining room.[45] The extent of changes to the exterior of the house or to the grounds is unknown.

With Thomas's political prominence, however, the Nelsons certainly maintained the property to a high standard, with its back and front courts, group of service buildings, and domestic gardens on lot 48, 49, and 50. They may have also maintained ornamental gardens begun by Thomas's grandfather. A visitor in 1777 observed, presumably referring in part to the Nelson House, "…there are several very good Gentlemen's houses built of brick and some of their gardens are laid out with the greatest taste of any I have seen in America."[46]

Nelson Neighbors

In the decades following Scotch Tom's death in 1745, some of the village lots surrounding the Nelson House were improved. In ca. 1760, the old frame Sessions house built in ca. 1695 across the side street from the Nelson House was replaced by a new brick house.[47] Around the same time, Edmund Smith began construction of a new brick house on lot 53, to the south of the Nelson House, to replace the earlier frame building, but died during its construction in 1750. The lot transferred to his daughter Mildred and her husband David Jameson, who completed the house.[48] In ca. 1755, the Jamesons added a new set of outbuildings, including a laundry, kitchen, dairy, smoke house, and stable. These outbuildings were clustered around a yard area adjacent to the southern side of the house.[49] A garden with an allee of boxwood hedges most likely extended from the rear of the house. The next lot to the south remained the home of Robert Ballard until 1761, when he sold it to John Thompson. Thompson, a merchant, held the lot until 1770, when he sold it to Dr. Thomas Powell.[50]

THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR ERA, 1775–1789

The early years of the Revolution were restless times in Yorktown, which continued to suffer economically due to the decline of its port trade. These hardships were compounded by the hostilities with Britain. Many residents left Yorktown while American forces built defensive earthworks in the area. British troops, however, did not appear in the area until six years after the start of the Revolution, when British general Lord Cornwallis arrived with troops to establish a naval base. The troops immediately began to fortify Yorktown and Gloucester Point across the York River. Ultimately, the British fortifications created an arc-shaped series of earthworks and redoubts surrounding the southern border of Yorktown (fig. 1.9). These fortifications extended across lots 51 and 55 south of the Nelson House grounds (fig. 1.10).[51]

During their occupation, the British troops commandeered local homes. General Cornwallis made the home of Secretary Nelson his headquarters. On a daily basis, British troops scavenged the landscape between Yorktown and Williamsburg for any type of vegetation that could provide fuel, food, and shelter materials. The

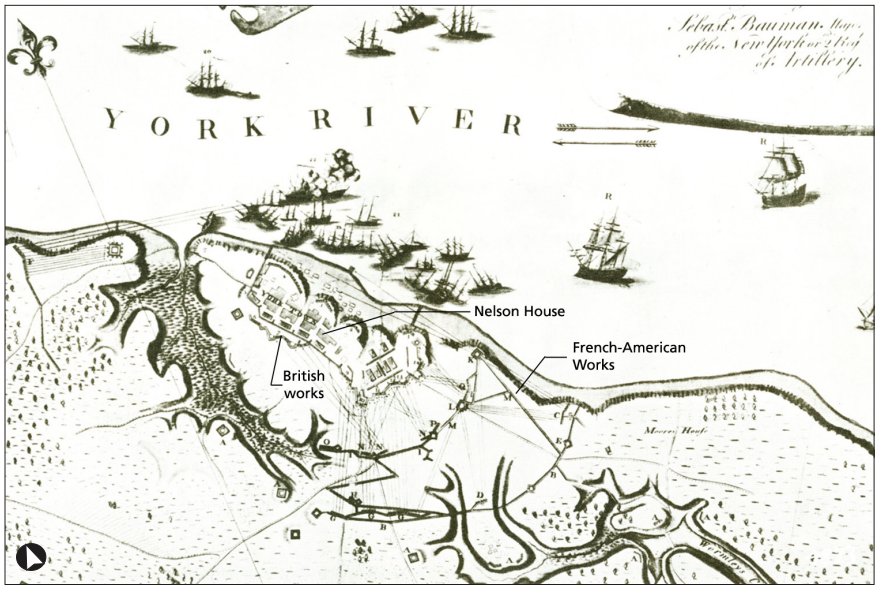


Figure 1.9. Detail, map of Yorktown during the Siege of 1781 showing location of British and Allied (French-American) defensive works around the town. (Detail, Sebastian Bauman, "Plan of the Investment of York and Gloucester," 1781, Colonial National Historical Park archives, annotated by SUNY ESF.)

troops also removed wood from demolished homes and felled trees to block approach roads and to reinforce their defensive earthworks.[52]

The British occupation ended with the 1781 Siege of Yorktown by the allied French and American forces. Between October 9 and 17, General George Washington and French commander General Comte de Rochambeau led an intense, round-the-clock bombardment on the village, which resulted in the destruction of numerous buildings, including Secretary Nelson's house. Baron von Closen, a member of the French army at Yorktown, recalled the condition of Yorktown after the Siege:

> I will never forget how frightful and disturbing was the appearance of the City of York from the fortifications on the crest to the strand below. One could not take three steps without running into some great holes made by bombs, some splinters, some balls, some half covered trenches with scattered white or negro arms or legs, some bits of uniforms. Most of the houses riddled by cannon fire and almost no window-panes in the houses.[53]

After a failed attempt to escape across the York River, General Cornwallis requested a cease-fire to discuss surrender terms. Two days later, on October 19, 1781, he formally surrendered his army, thereby ending the American Revolution. Yorktown remained occupied by French military forces two years after the British surrender. Private residences throughout the village served as billeting posts for the French garrison until August 1782. The population stood at just 661, less than a third of what it was before the war (but more than three time's today's population). Only seventy buildings remained from the mass destruction of the 1781 siege. A map made by the French in 1781 showed the remaining buildings

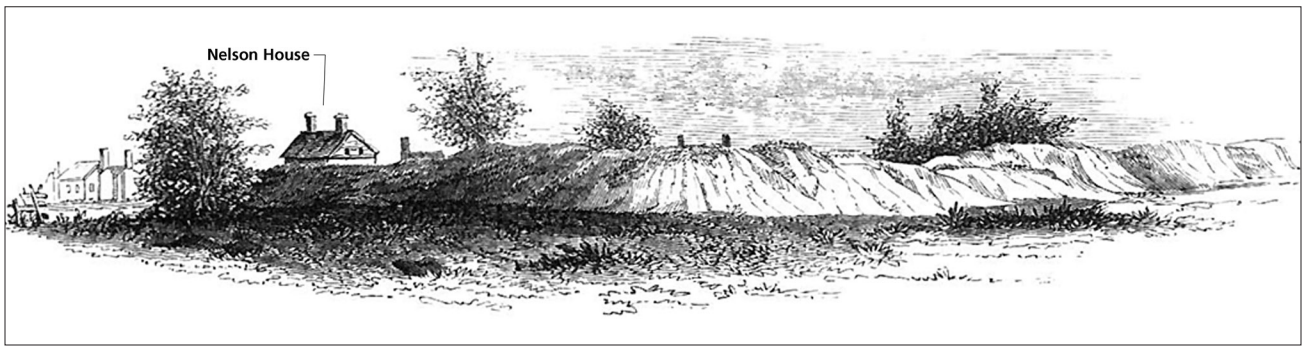


Figure 1.10. A nineteenth-century depiction of the British earthworks south and east of the Nelson House, visible in the background, drawn in 1848. (Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*, 1850, annotated by SUNY ESF.)

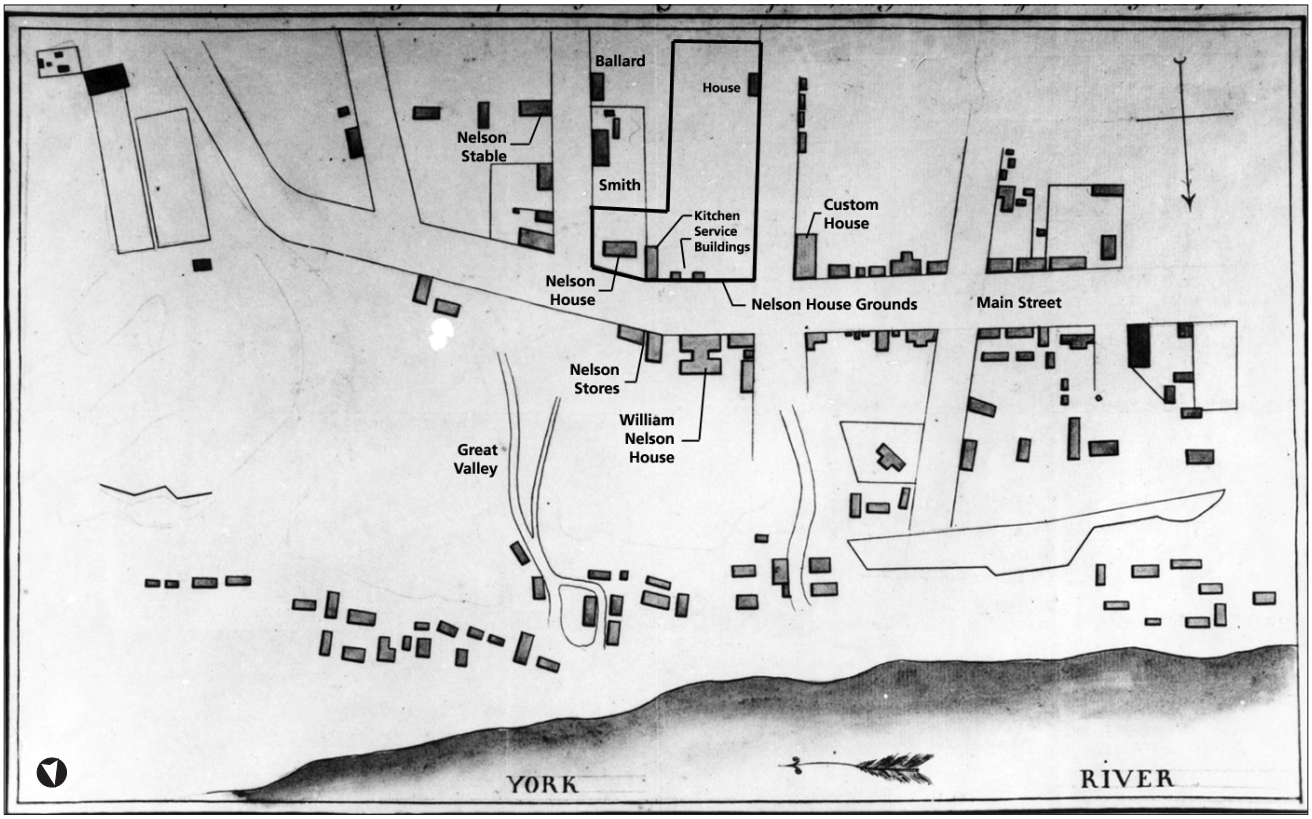


Figure 1.11. Map of Yorktown made in 1781 to identify remaining buildings suitable for use by French occupational troops following the Siege of 1781. The plan is diagrammatic and does not show actual scale and location of buildings in many cases. The meaning of the lines within the lots is not known. ("*Plan d' York...1781.*" Colonial National Historical Park archives, image 2250, annotated by SUNY ESF.)

that were suitable for use by French troops (fig. 1.11). Upon the departure of the French, Virginia-based militia forces controlled the defense of Yorktown. The militia remained in Yorktown until 1783, when the Treaty of Paris ended hostilities between the American colonies and Britain.[54]

The Nelsons During the Revolution

The Revolution increased the financial problems of the Nelson family's mercantile business that began well before the war. They could not collect on debts and repay loans with British merchant suppliers. Finally, mounting losses forced the closure of the business in 1777. Despite the economic problems, Thomas Nelson Jr. continued in his political and military roles. From 1775 to 1777 and again in 1779, he was a delegate to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia where he was an outspoken proponent of severing ties with England. Representing York County in the Virginia Convention of 1776, he presented resolutions to the Continental Congress to declare the colonies free and independent from Britain, and later signed the Declaration of Independence. Due to declining health, he resigned from Congress in spring 1777, but remained active in Virginia, where he achieved the rank of brigadier general in the militia and won election to the lower house of the legislature. In the spring of 1778, Nelson, partially at his own expense, outfitted and trained a light cavalry unit. He returned to Congress for a short time in 1779, but poor health forced him to retire once more. The next year he

gained enough strength to obtain munitions and supplies for the militia, command troops, attend the legislature, and raise money to help subsidize the war.[55]

When the British invaded Virginia in 1780, civilian control seriously hampered Nelson's effectiveness as a militia commander. After voicing his concerns in the spring of 1780, the legislature elected him governor and granted him military powers, which he used to command Virginia's defense in the Siege of Yorktown, overseeing approximately one-third of the American troops. According to family tradition, he ordered troops to shell his own house when he learned it would be occupied by British officers. Overwhelmed by the war and the burdens of the office, Nelson resigned the governorship in November 1781.[56]

Unlike the Secretary Nelson House that was destroyed during the Siege, the Nelson House remained standing, although cannon fire pierced its gable walls. The warfare and subsequent months of billeting by French troops also battered the landscape. After the war, Governor Nelson retired to his Offley Hoo plantation in Hanover County, but continued to live on and off at the Nelson House. Over the next few years, he repaired the house and grounds, but with financial problems and failing health, most likely invested in few enhancements. Work would have likely included repair of the buildings, replanting of the domestic gardens, and filling in cannon ball craters. The planting of trees and ornamental vegetation likely occurred to a limited extent, as well as repairs to fencing destroyed during the siege.[57]

The lots neighboring the Nelson House experienced similar damage, but none were destroyed. The President Nelson House (residence of Hugh Nelson), the Nelson stores, the Custom House, and the Cole Digges, Cox, "Sessions," Smith, and Ballard Houses all remained and were returned to active use. With the Nelson mercantile business closed, the Nelson stores may have stood vacant. To the south, the Ballard lot underwent some changes during and after the war. Dr. Thomas Powel, who had occupied the property since ca. 1770, put it up for sale in 1776 at the outbreak of the Revolution when deteriorating circumstances in Yorktown caused him to relocate his practice to Fredericksburg. Merchant William Cary then purchased the property, including the house and three outbuildings, in 1777. During the Siege, the kitchen outbuilding was destroyed, but Cary rebuilt it soon after the conflict in the same approximate location, south of the house.[58]

In 1789, eight years after the Siege of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson Jr. died at Offley Hoo at the age of fifty. His family buried him in Yorktown at the York Parish (Grace) Church graveyard, a few hundred feet northwest of the Nelson House. Although his death largely marked the end of the Nelson family's political fortunes, the Nelson House and its grounds would remain in the family for more than another century as a prominent reminder of Yorktown's colonial heyday and the American battle for independence.

LANDSCAPE SUMMARY, 1706–1789 (DRAWING 1.1)

At the time of Governor Nelson's death in 1789, the residents of Yorktown had repaired much of the wartime damage, but the village had not regained its mid-century prosperity. The area immediately surrounding the Nelson House grounds remained little changed in overall character from that prosperous period. The Ambler House and Custom House, Cole Diggs House, Cox House, William Nelson House, Nelson stores, "Sessions" House, Nelson stable yard, Smith House, and Ballard House were all still standing. As shown on the 1781 French billeting map of Yorktown (see fig. 1.11), there was a group of four buildings along the west side of the west cross street (Read Street), but there is no record of their use or ownership. Two other unidentified buildings, probably outbuildings to the "Sessions" House, existed along the east cross street (Nelson Street). Much of the wartime change had occurred south of the Nelson House grounds, where the British built their earthworks that extended in part across the Ballard property on lots 51 and 55. The William Rogers pottery that had stood on these lots disappeared well before the war.

Although damaged during the war, the Nelson House grounds by 1789 had most likely returned to much of their pre-war character as a well-maintained, prominent village residence. The 60-year-old Nelson House, on its rise overlooking the York River to the north, had changed little in outward appearance since it was built in ca. 1730. The 30 foot-deep front court, probably lined by two low retaining walls along the sides and a low boxwood hedge bordering a board fence along the street, created a sheltered entranceway. The back court, extending sixty feet from the back of the house, may have contained a formal garden and a drive leading to the rear door, with a hedge of boxwood along the boundary with the Smith lot.

At the west side of the house, on a terrace slightly lower than the front court, was the service area, accessed by a marl-surfaced drive off Main Street that broadened into a yard approximately forty feet wide. The yard consisted of an irregular grouping of six closely-spaced service buildings, the closest just 21 feet from the west side of the Nelson House. The largest of the buildings was the kitchen–wash house, a one-and-one-half-story gabled frame building with a brick foundation and massive center chimney. It was located on the south side of the yard, 27 feet west of the house and closer to Main Street. Next to it was a two-story brick building used as servants quarters, and a small poultry house. The north side of the yard contained three small frame buildings from twelve to sixteen feet square, including a dairy, spinning house, and smokehouse.

Down a low embankment off the west side of the service yard on lot 48 were the Nelson gardens where vegetables, fruits, and other produce were raised for domestic consumption. These gardens may have extended to the south boundary

of the property, across lots 48, 49, and 50, which were referred to as the "Nelson garden and open lots" in a later insurance survey.[59] Much of this landscape was probably open field, with outbuildings and wood fences along outer boundaries and streets. By 1789, only the house on lot 50, probably built by the previous owner, Thomas Powers, remained; the presumed houses on lots 48 and 49 no longer stood, since they do not appear on the 1781 French billeting plan of Yorktown (see fig. 1.11).

ENDNOTES

1 Edward M. Riley, "The Founding and Development of Yorktown, Virginia 1691–1781" (PhD. Dissertation, University of Southern California, June 1942), 65–68; Draft National Register nomination, Yorktown Historic District, 1973.

2 Draft National Register nomination, Yorktown Historic District.

3 Lothrop Withington, *Virginia Gleanings in England : Abstracts of 17th and 18th-century English Wills and Administrations Relating to Virginia and Virginians : A Consolidation of Articles from The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1980), 402–403.

4 York County Records, *Orders and Wills, 1720–1729, Part II* "Deposition 18 November 1728," in Mark Wenger, ed., "Architectural Analysis of the Nelson House Yorktown, Virginia Volume III: Research Assessment" (Unpublished National Park Service report, 2003), 1.

5 H.R. McIlwaine, ed., *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, vol. IV (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1925–1966), 184. In 1728, Scotch Tom received a lease from the town council for an 80-foot square parcel on Yorktown's waterfront below his own town lots, but above and adjacent to a landing he was using for shipping. His lease included the right to build his own wharf; the location is unknown.

6 Emory G. Evans, *The Nelsons: A Biographical Study of a Virginia Family in the Eighteenth Century* (PhD. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1957), 3ff.

7 Evans, 3ff.

8 Charles E. Hatch, Jr. *The Nelson House and the Nelsons, General Study* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service Office of History and Historic Architecture, August 1969), 63.

9 York County Records, *Deeds & Bonds,* No. 2: 225, 326, No. 2, 141,271, and No. 4: 101, in Wenger, 40, 41, 44. Scotch Tom also acquired several other Yorktown lots, including 12, 18, 25, 31, 40, and 57. These lots were not part of the Nelson House grounds or adjoining lots.

10 Wenger, 46.

11 Norman F. Barka, "Archeology of the Nelson, Smith, and Ballard Houses, Yorktown, Virginia" (Unpublished report prepared for the National Park Service by Southside Historical Sites, Inc., July 1978); Evans, 1ff. It is presumed that the foundations below the ca. 1730 kitchen–wash house are those of the first Nelson house. There is no record of the appearance of this house.

12 Rebecca M. Rogers, *Historic Structure Report Architectural Data Section, the Dependencies of the Nelson, Smith and Ballard Houses, Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown, Virginia* (Denver Service Center Mid Atlantic/North Atlantic Team, Branch of Historic Preservation National Park Service, 1979), 13–17.

13 The Powers house on lot 50 appears on the 1781 "Plan d'York" (see fig. 1.11). There is no documentation indicating the presumed houses on lots 48 and 49 remained after the Siege of Yorktown.

14 Hatch, *The Nelson House and the Nelsons,* 63–64.

15 Barbara Wells Saurdy, *Gardens and Gardening in the Chesapeake 1700–1805* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 1998), 115.

16 Barka.

17 Saurdy, 6.

18 M. Kent Brinkley and Gordon W. Chappell, *The Gardens of Colonial Williamsburg*, (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1996), 7.

19 W. Parks, *Virginia Gazette*, September 01, 1738, 16, through Colonial Williamsburg Rockefeller Digital Library, http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/VirginiaGazette/VGIssueThumbs.cfm?IssueIDNo=38.P.37 (accessed June 2008).

20 Ann Leighton, *American Gardens in the Eighteenth Century* (The University of Massachusetts Press Amherst, 1986), 189–216.

21 Brinkley and Chappell, 7.

22 Brinkley and Chappell, 7.

23 Brinkley and Chappell, 4.

24 Dendrochronology Inc., "Final Report: The Last Year of Tree Growth for Selected Timbers Within The Nelson House As Derived By Key-Year Dendrochronology" (Unpublished report prepared for the National Park Service, March 1995). This study found that selected structural members within the Nelson House were taken from tulip trees (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) cut down after the growing season of 1729. These would have required time for drying and curing before being used in construction.

25 Marilyn M. Harper, "What It Ought to Have Been: Three Case Studies of Early Restoration Work in Virginia" (M.A. Thesis, The George Washington University, 1989), 8–9.

26 The front and back courts are named on Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia, Nelson House *Policy No. 98* (1796), in Wenger, 57.

27 Brinkley and Chappell, 1–2.

28 An old boxwood hedge was located along the south boundary of the back court at the time of George Preston Blow's purchase of the property in 1914.

29 Barka, 34–39, 46–48; Mutual Assurance *Policy No. 98* (1796). Outbuildings, such as kitchens, seldom connected to a main house because mild winters and warm and humid summers, required ample air circulation.

30 National Park Service, "Outline of Development, Colonial National Monument" (Unpublished report, 1933), 100–101; Daughters of the American Revolution, Comte de Grasse Chapter, "Yorktown Custom House," http://www.comtedegrasse-dar.org/customhouse.html (accessed May 2011).

31 Charles E. Hatch Jr., "The Edmund Smith House: A History" (Unpublished report, Colonial National Historical Park Division of History, August 1969), i, 1–7.

32 Riley, "The Founding and Development of Yorktown," 97–102; Barka, 97–102, 121–122; park interpretive wayside for the Ballard House (2010).

33 Riley, "The Founding and Development of Yorktown," 121–122.

34 Barka, figure 32, "Ballard House Location of Dependencies, 1796 Mutual Assurance Society Policy."

35 Martha W. McCartney and Edward Ayres, "Yorktown's 'Poor Potter': A Man Wise Beyond Discretion," Chipstone Foundation website, http://www.chipstone.org/publications/CIA/2004/mccartney/mccartneyindex.html (accessed June 2008).

36 Lisa Fischer, "Yorktown Archaeological/Historical Overview and Assessment" (Unpublished report, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Department of Archaeological Research, 2004), 89; "Plan d'York," ca. 1781, COLO 2250; Hatch, *The Nelson House and the Nelsons*, 76. No graphic record of the William Nelson House survives aside from its footprint shown on the ca. 1781 map (fig. 1.11).

37 National Park Service, "Yorktown Battlefield History and Culture," Yorktown Battlefield website, http://www.nps.gov/york/historyculture/index.htm (accessed June 2008).

38 Charles Hatch, *Historic Resource Study, Yorktown's Main Street (from Secretary Nelson's to the Windmill) and Military Entrenchments Close In and Around the Town of York, Colonial National Historical Park, Virginia (*Denver, Colorado: National Park Service, Mar. 1974). In 1757 and again in 1760, the roads in Yorktown were widened and improved to prevent them from being damaged by storm events. No mention is made in the description of the improvements of using any sort of pavement, sidewalks, curbs or gutters.

39 Riley, "The Founding and Development of Yorktown," 321–324.

40 Hatch, *The Nelson House and the Nelsons*, 11–26.

41 William Nelson of Cumbria England genealogy, William Nelson – Elizabeth Burwell, DHDdata website, http://www.hdhdata.org/cgi-bin/showpage.pl?d0037&f00008 (accessed May 2011).

42 Letter, William Nelson to William Cookson, cited in Hatch, *The Nelson House and the Nelsons*, 74.

43 Emory G. Evans, "The Nelsons: A Biographical Study of a Virginia Family in the Eighteenth Century" (PhD. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1957), 258.

44 Wenger, 22, 27.

45 Jane Sundberg, Cultural Resource Management Specialist (retired), Colonial National Historical Park, communication to authors, March 21, 2011. No documentation has been found on the architect-builder of the existing brick house.

46 Journal of Nicolas Cresswell, quoted in Hatch, *The Nelson House and the Nelsons*, 76.

47 Sundberg, March 21, 2011.

48 Hatch, *The Edmund Smith House,* 1–14. The Jamesons leased the lot to James Tarpley in January 1753 but resumed residence on the lot the following October.

49 Barka, 110–112. The earliest available Mutual Insurance Policy showing the outbuildings of the Smith House is dated 1819.

50 Riley, 97–102.

51 Erwin Thompson, *Historic Resource Study The British Defenses of Yorktown Colonial National Historical Park Virginia* (Denver Colorado: National Park Service, 1976), 17.

52 Thompson, *The British Defenses of Yorktown,* 17.

53 "The Journal of Baron Von Closen," Evelyn M. Acomb, ed., *The William and Mary Quarterly,* Third Series, vol. 10, no. 2 (April 1953), 230.

54 Riley, "The Founding and Development of Yorktown," 97–102.

55 Evans, 281.

56 National Park Service, "Brigadier General Thomas Nelson Jr." biography, Yorktown Battlefield website, http://www.nps.gov/york/historyculture/nelsonjrbio.htm (accessed June 2008).

57 No primary documentation was found on specific wartime damage to the Nelson House grounds.

58 Barka, 34–39, 46–48, 110–112.

59 Mutual Assurance Society, Policy no. 17298 (Colonial National Historical Park archives).

60 W. Parks, Virginia Gazette, September 01, 1738, Colonial Williamsburg Rockefeller Digital Library, http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/VirginiaGazette/VGIssueThumbs.cfm?IssueIDNo=38.P.37 (accessed June 2008).

Cultural Landscape Report
Nelson House Grounds

Colonial National Historical Park
Yorktown, Virginia

Early Nelson Period
1706–1789

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

in partnership with
Department of Landscape Architecture
SUNY College of Environmental
Science and Forestry, www.esf.edu/la/

SOURCES

1. Archaeological Study, Norman F. Barka, 1978
2. NPS GIS File, Colonial National Historical Park
3. Mutual Assurance Policy surveys, 1796
4. Berthier, Plan d'York, ca.1781
5. Field inspection, October 2008, January 2010

DRAWN BY

Bryne D. Riley, John Auwaerter, Illustrator CS5, 2011

LEGEND

- Building
- Conjectured deciduous tree
- Conjectured boxwood hedge
- Turf
- Garden or cultivated field
- Public street (earth or gravel)
- Road or walk (earth or marl)
- Brick wall
- Conjectured fence and gate
- Period property line / Yorktown lot line
- 2' Contour line / embankment
- (1762) Date feature added or removed during period
- Feature removed during period (dashed line)

NOTES

1. All features shown in approximate scale and location.
2. Plan shows landscape in 1789 at end of period.
3. CLR project area consists of lots 48-50, 52; landscape details outside of project area not illustrated except at Smith and Ballard lots.

Plan North
True North

0′ 35′ 70′

Drawing 1.1

LATE NELSON PERIOD, 1789–1914

After Thomas Nelson Jr.'s death in 1789, the Nelson House grounds passed through several generations of the extended Nelson family into the early twentieth century. For much of this time, the family maintained the property, while Yorktown grew smaller and quieter in its continued decline. Despite increasing interest in the town's history by the late nineteenth century, the Nelson House, like many of its neighbors, was falling into disrepair. In 1908, the extended Nelson family sold the house and lot 52 out of the family, but retained ownership of the garden lots. The house subsequently stood vacant, while the surrounding landscape became overgrown and marred by ruins of the service buildings. The garden lots (48–50), however, were still used as pasture and cropland.

ANTEBELLUM YEARS, 1789–1860

In the years between the Revolution and the Civil War, Yorktown never revived the prosperity of its colonial years and continued to decline into a remote, sleepy Tidewater town. The relocation of the Virginia capital from Williamsburg to Richmond in 1780, and shift of settlement and agriculture into western parts of the state furthered the economic decline of the region. By 1800, only one-third of Yorktown's houses and commercial buildings that existed before the Revolution still stood. Tobacco had become an insignificant commodity for Yorktown's port and most of the once busy waterfront had dwindled to only a few fishing huts and stores.[1] Despite this, the village retained its status as the county seat and maintained some strategic importance, as evident during the War of 1812 when American forces were stationed in Yorktown. Unlike previous battles, however, Yorktown did not play a major role in the conflict.[2]

Although Yorktown saw little physical impact from the War of 1812, a widespread fire in March 1814 at the end of the war devastated the town. The fire destroyed the county court house, Grace Church, and a significant number of buildings along the waterfront. Most were never rebuilt, adding to the already large number of vacant lots. The Nelson House and its adjacent outbuildings on the south side of Main Street escaped the 1814 fire, but the north side of the street did not fare well. William Nelson's House was destroyed along with the Nelson stores, but the Cox House survived. [3]

Nelson House Ownership

After Thomas Nelson Jr.'s death, his eleven children shared ownership of the estate, which also included large land holdings of more than 6,000 acres in plantations outside of Yorktown. Nelson left the house and grounds to his eldest son, William, subject to the life estate of his widow, Lucy Grymes Nelson. William,

who married Sally Burwell Page in 1790, resided in the Nelson House with his mother and three children until his death in 1800. The house then passed to his eldest son, Thomas Nelson, who died in 1824 at the age of thirty-four, leaving no heirs. Subsequently, the Nelson House passed to Thomas's younger brother William Nelson Jr.[4] Through these generations of ownership, Lucy Grymes Nelson continued to live at the Nelson House until her death in 1830 at the age of 87.[5]

William Nelson Jr. married Catherine Moss Fox and had three daughters before Catherine's death in 1840 at the age of 39. In ca. 1844, he was remarried to widow Martha Shield Whiting, who had two children from her previous marriage. William and Martha had two children together, William Nelson III and Fannie Nelson. When the elder William Nelson Jr. died in 1849, he left the Nelson House to William III, who was only four years old, so responsibility for the property remained with his mother, who sold some Yorktown lots outside of the Nelson House grounds to support her family.[6] In 1855, Martha was remarried to George W. Bryan, a widower and farmer from York County with four children of his own.[7] The combined family made the Nelson House their home.[8]

Although the Nelson family did not enjoy wealth and prominence during the first half of the nineteenth century, their house on Main Street remained a widely recognized Yorktown landmark and a symbol of the Revolution. It was known not only as the home of the Virginia governor and signer of the Declaration of Independence, but also as a war relic.[9] For these reasons and as the most prominent remaining colonial house, it was designated as the lodging place for the Marquis de Lafayette upon his triumphal tour of the United States in 1824. A local newspaper reported upon the procession of the marquis to the Nelson House:

> With introductions over now came the procession to the Nelson House... Here a double row of officers of Militia, acting as a guard of honor, were ranged on each side of the walk from the court gate to the door of the mansion house, through which the General was conducted. The throng of spectators in front of the house was immense...[10]

These spectators purportedly broke off branches from a laurel tree (variety unknown), which the Nelson family had planted in the front court east of the entrance to the house, to weave a crown for the marquis. The laurel was later known as the Lafayette tree.[11]

In the decades after the marquis' visit in 1824, the Nelson–Bryan family made few major changes to the house and grounds. An insurance survey made in 1830 documented the same outbuildings that were surveyed in 1796 and that most likely stood during the colonial period (fig. 1.12). As noted in the newspaper account of Lafayette's visit, the front court retained its front walk and a fence along Main Street with a gate. The popular nineteenth-century historian Benson

Lossing visited the Nelson House in 1848 for his *Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution*, published in 1850. He included a drawing of the Nelson House, showing the front court lined by a plank fence and a hedge that may have existed since colonial times (see fig. 1.6).

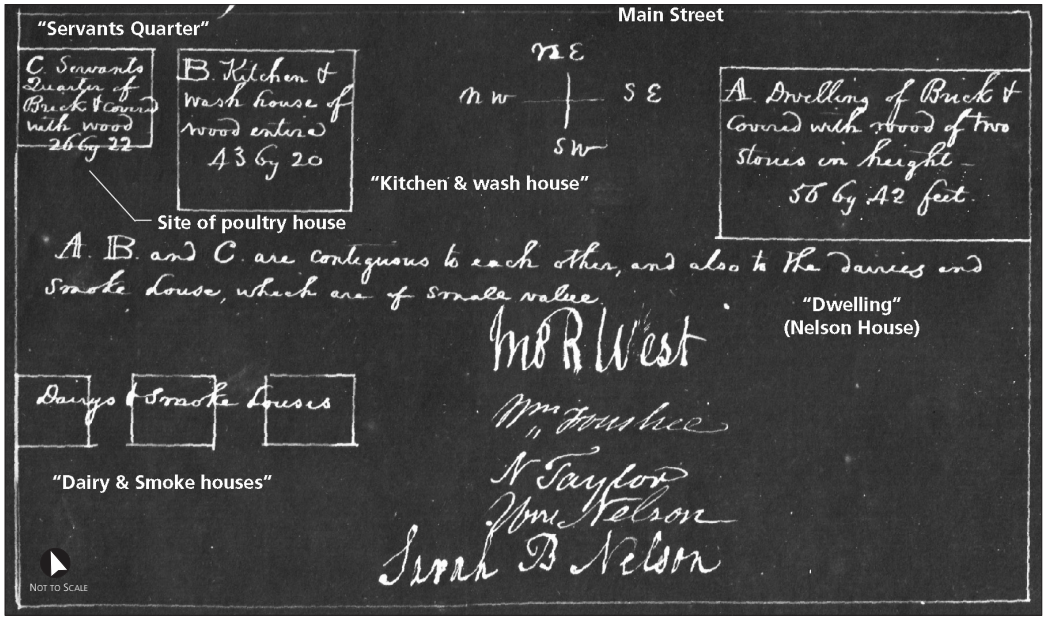


Figure 1.12. An insurance survey of the Nelson House made in 1830 showing retention of all outbuildings except for the small poultry house that previously stood next to the servants quarters. (Colonial National Historical Park archives image 7612, annotated by SUNY ESF.)

Adjacent Lots

William Nelson, Thomas Nelson Jr.'s brother, continued to reside on the north side of Main Street opposite the Nelson House grounds until his death in 1800. He left his H-shaped brick house and the adjoining Cox House with its four outbuildings to his wife, Judith. After the devastating 1814 fire, only the Cox House and its outbuildings remained. The Nelsons removed the foundations of the destroyed buildings and maintained the land as lawn, where some of the Lafayette celebrations took place in 1824. As reported by the local newspaper,

> On a beautiful lawn forming the summit of a loft eminence, in front of the mansion [Nelson] house was pitched a spacious marquee, with a front of nearly 100 feet, surmounted by a large dome in the center, at the top of which waved the "star spangled banner"…This splendid canopy was appointed for the dining place of the Guest and other distinguished personages…[12]

In 1826, Judith Nelson sold the four lots (lots 46, 47, 84, 85), containing the Cox House and site of the William Nelson House and Nelson stores, to Filmer M. Hubbard, who a year later sold lots 47 and 85 to Baker P. Lee, who used the Cox House as a residence and store. Lee also built additional outbuildings, including a dairy, wood house, fowl house, corncrib, and carriage house. In ca. 1850, Lee sold his lots to William Rowell, who resided in the Cox House until ca. 1865.[13]

The Smith House, on lot 53 to the south of the Nelson House, changed owners several times prior to the Civil War. It remained in the Jameson family until ca. 1815 when Major Thomas Griffin, a representative in Congress, purchased the lot. Griffin owned the lot until his death in 1836. The next two owners used the Smith House as a tavern and a residence. Throughout these years, the colonial dairy, laundry, kitchen, and a smoke house remained, and in ca. 1820, a wood-frame stable was added south of the kitchen. In ca. 1852, William S. Mallicote purchased

the Smith lot. It was around this time that several new outbuildings were erected, including a kitchen, dairy, smokehouse, and corn crib.[14]

The Ballard lot also had several owners in the antebellum years. It remained in the ownership of the Cary family until 1812 when Anne Burt bought it. She retained ownership until ca. 1838 when Samuel Shield acquired the property. Shield sold the lot in ca. 1860 to Henry Ruben. The kitchen rebuilt after the Siege of Yorktown remained along with the colonial smoke house, but the old dairy was removed in ca. 1850. A new outbuilding was erected around the same time.[15]

CIVIL WAR, 1861–1865

Yorktown was again the site of major military operations with the outbreak of hostilities between the North and South. In 1861, during the preparation for a Union offensive known as the Peninsula Campaign, the Confederate Army began constructing defensive lines across the Virginia Peninsula. In Yorktown, the British earthworks built during the 1781 siege were strengthened and improved, and new ones constructed, forming a ring around the village and lining the bluff overlooking the York River (fig. 1.13). In April 1862, one year after hostilities began with the attack on Fort Sumter, the Union Army prepared to lay siege to Yorktown from Fort Monroe at the tip of the Peninsula. When the Union army was finally ready to open an artillery barrage from land and from gunboats on the York River, Confederate forces quietly retreated to Williamsburg where they joined other forces and later helped beat the Union Army back from the gates of Richmond and thwart the Union's first Peninsula Campaign. While the Union army regrouped, they established a base in Yorktown and commandeered the defensive earthworks for their own use. In 1863, forces from Yorktown participated in the Second Peninsula Campaign. The following year, almost 40,000

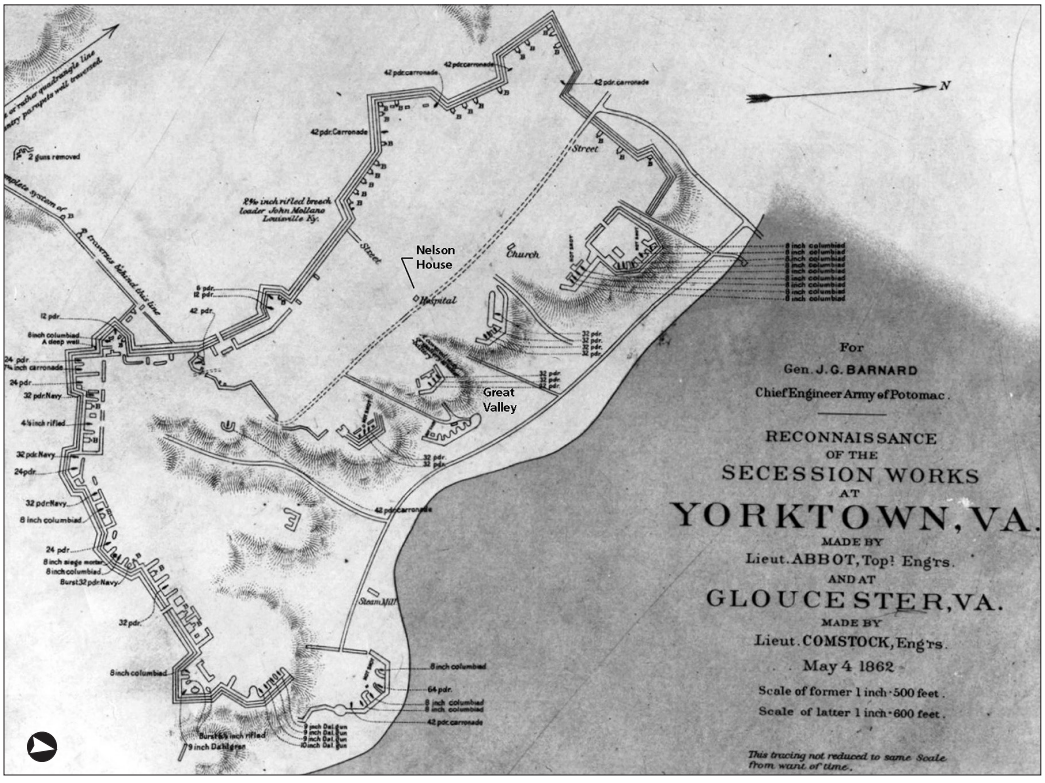


Figure 1.13. An 1862 map showing the extent of Confederate earthworks constructed around Yorktown, including on the bluff north of the Nelson House, labeled as a hospital. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, map 2265, annotated by SUNY ESF.)

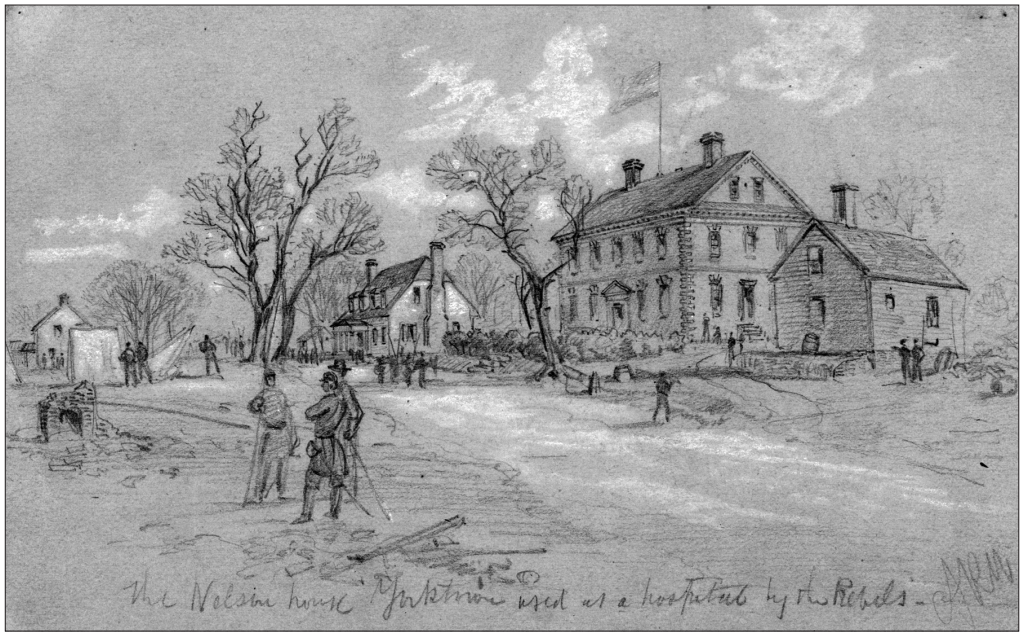
Figure 1.14. Main Street looking west from the Nelson House, 1862. Tree stumps are visible along Lot 48 of the Nelson House grounds at left. The small building is the Nelson wellhouse. Beyond it at left is the Custom House, and across the street is the Cox House. (Library of Congress American Memory Collection, digital ID cwpb 01609.)

Figure 1.15. Looking west at a Civil War battery on the bluff above the York River north of the Nelson House, 1862. The large building in the background is Grace Church. (Library of Congress American Memory Collection, digital ID cwpb 00188.)

Union troops used Yorktown and Gloucester Point as a staging area for the Bermuda Hundred Campaign. Later in 1864, Major General Ulysses S. Grant ordered his troops to withdraw from Yorktown, but the area remained under the army's control until 1867, when a national cemetery was completed in the battlefield east of the village.[16]

Although no warfare occurred within Yorktown proper during the Civil War, the military activities significantly affected the village. The occupation by Confederate forces and then by the Union Army compelled most of Yorktown's residents to vacate their homes. Naval gunboats, supply ships and transports filled the port and soldiers populated its streets and homes. Tent camps and wartime supplies also spread throughout the village. Buildings were damaged, wagon ruts from the heavy military equipment filled the earthen town streets, and trees were cut down (fig. 1.14). The extensive earthworks cut through the town and lined the bluff, extending through the former William Nelson lots north of the Nelson House (fig. 1.15). The soil for these works was excavated from nearby land, with some of it apparently removed from lots 46 and 47, and possibly from the back court and service yard around the Nelson House. Portions of Main Street may have been excavated during the war years as well, leaving a cut along the front court and around the trees along the former William Nelson lots across the street. The purpose of this grade change is not known for certain, although it may have also been related to construction of the earthworks or reducing the slope at the head of the Great Valley.[17]

During the war, George and Martha Nelson Bryan left Yorktown to seek refuge from the military occupation. William Nelson Jr., Martha's son and heir to the Nelson House, was away serving in the Confederate Army. In the family's absence, the Confederate and Union Armies used the house as a military



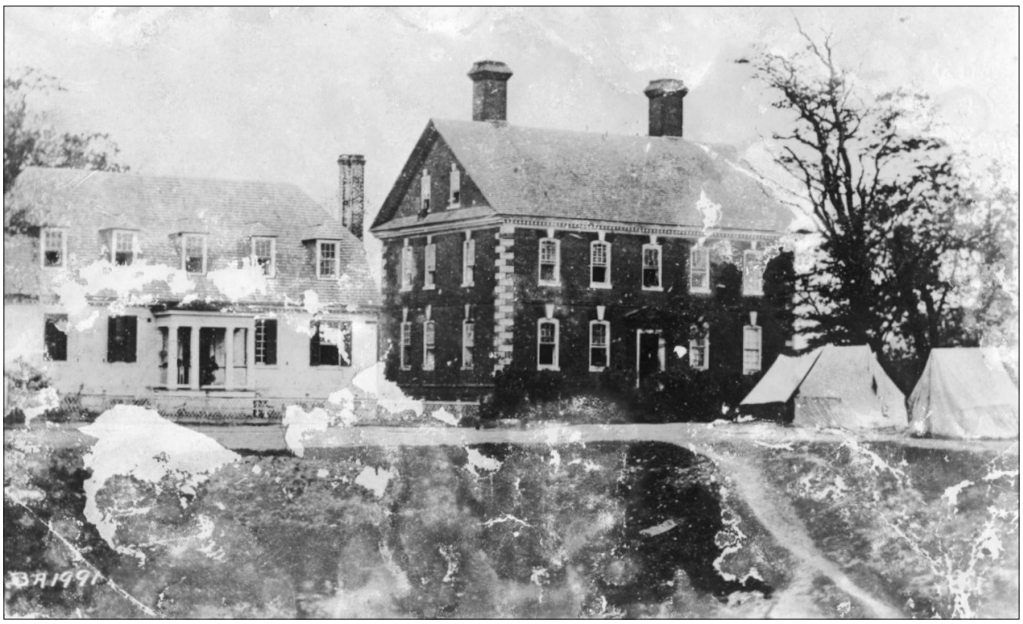


Figure 1.16 (top). Sketch of the Nelson House by Alfred Waud published in *Harpers Weekly*, May 24, 1862, showing its use as a field hospital. At the right of the house is the Nelson kitchen–wash house. This drawing also shows the cut bank along the front court, and the boxwood hedge. (Library of Congress, digital ID 20885u.)

Figure 1.17 (bottom). A wartime photograph of the Nelson House and "Sessions" House looking southwest from the Great Valley showing tents pitched near the site of the old Nelson stores, 1862. (Colonial National Historical Park, image 1875.)

hospital (fig. 1.16). Tents, probably associated with the hospital, were set up across Main Street (fig. 1.17). For a time during the war, Dorothy Dix, Superintendent of Union Army Nurses, oversaw the hospital at the house.[18] Harriet Douglas Whetten, a volunteer Sanitary Commission nurse, wrote about the hospital in 1862. In her letter, she refers to the decline of the village and the legend of the Nelson House's use by Lord Cornwallis during the Revolution:

> You would be surprised to see how small Yorktown is. One street facing the water with a few, perhaps a dozen, good old houses, and the ruins of a few others. I send you a sprig of boxwood from Lord Cornwallis' [sic, Nelson] garden—Miss Dix's headquarters—an old brick house [with] a wide hall in the middle, paneled, with a handsome staircase.[19]

Ms. Whetten may have taken the sprig from the boxwood hedge around the front court, or perhaps from another hedge in the back court that could have been a remnant of the Nelsons' colonial formal gardens.

POST-CIVIL WAR YEARS, 1865–1908

Yorktown remained largely undisturbed from its post-war slumber until the national centennial in 1876, which raised great interest the country's colonial history. At Yorktown, this interest led to a three-day Centennial Celebration in 1881 commemorating the 1781 siege and surrender of British forces in Yorktown. The celebration brought national attention to Yorktown with an address by President Chester A. Arthur, military inspections, and a ground breaking for the Monument to the Victory and Alliance, a monumental column designed by Richard Morris Hunt at the east end of Main Street that was completed in 1883. As part of the centennial celebrations, the Yorktown Centennial Association repaired the Moore House at the east side of the village, where the British had negotiated their terms of surrender. A similar effort was proposed for the Nelson House, and in 1887, a bill was introduced in Congress, but never passed, proposing that it be acquired to serve as a residence for the keeper of the monument. Another bill was introduced in 1894 for federal acquisition of the Nelson House, but it also failed.[20] Portending the distant future of the house as well as its precarious physical condition, the House bill noted,

> . . .such monuments of those eventful days are fast passing away before the corroding touch of time, and it is eminently proper that they should be preserved as memorials more precious than any that art could produce and should become the common property, even as the memories they recall are the common heritage, of the American people.[21]

Despite the Congressional attention, the Nelson House and many of its Yorktown neighbors continued to languish over the course of the next two decades. The village retained its desolate character, with its rutted main street lined by deteriorating colonial buildings, a picturesque landscape that became the subject of numerous postcards around the turn of the century (fig. 1.18).

Although in decline, many of Yorktown's buildings remained in use during the decades after the Civil War. Despite the ravages of war, the Nelson–Bryan family returned to the ancestral home, where Martha Nelson Bryan lived until her death in 1881 at the age of 63. Her son, William Nelson III, had moved away and only occasionally visited Yorktown before he died in 1877 in St. Louis, Missouri. Having no children of his own, he left his oldest sister Kate (Catherine or Catharina) Nelson, "$5,000 and my interest in the house at York Hall."[22] Kate lived in the Nelson House with other extended Nelson–Bryan family members until her death in 1896 at the age of 60.[23] Ownership of the Nelson House then

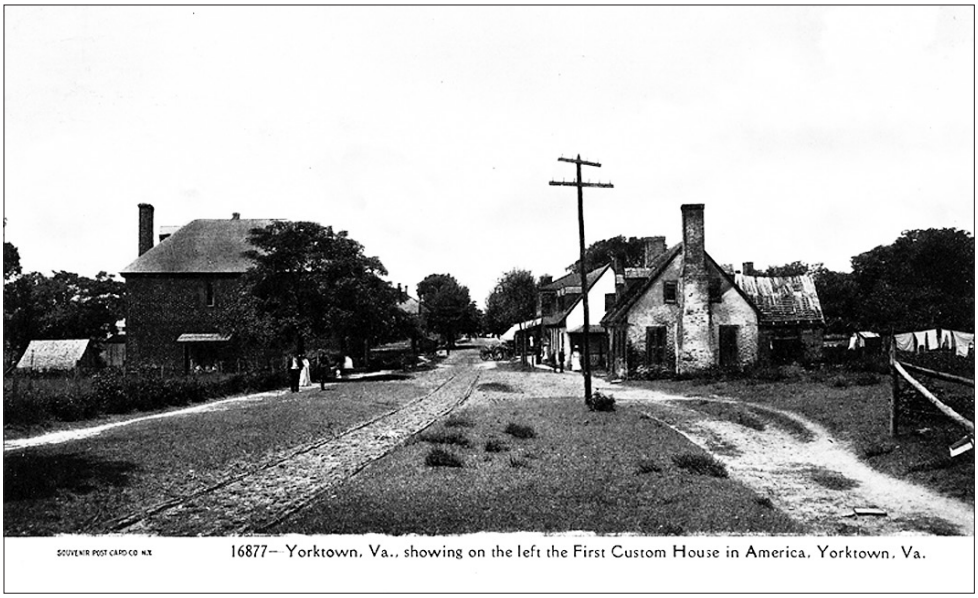


Figure 1.18. A ca. 1907 postcard of Main Street looking west from in front of the Nelson House, with the Custom House at left and Cox House at right. This is the same view as the 1862 photograph in figure 1.14. (National Park Service Library, Harper's Ferry, Virginia.)

passed to Mary and Elizabeth Bryan. Having already established their own homes and families, the sisters rented the Nelson House when they could. Tenants during the 1890s included the Cruikshank family, who were originally from Pennsylvania. By 1900, the house was described as being without tenants.[24]

During the post-war years, the Nelson–Bryan family oversaw a number of changes to the Nelson House grounds. To replace the cut bank along Main Street that existed during the Civil War, a new brick retaining wall was constructed around the front court in ca. 1870 (fig. 1.19). This wall incorporated or replaced earlier low walls along the east and west sides of the court, and included new or rebuilt steps to the front entrance walk.[25] With the new wall, which was upwards of five feet high, there was no need for a fence, but the family maintained a picket gate at the top of the entrance steps.[26] The grade of the service yard and back court had also been lowered by this time, probably occurring during the Civil War. This left exposed the foundation blocks on the west and a portion of the south sides of the Nelson House, as well as the brick foundation of the kitchen–wash house.[27]

Figure 1.19. Looking south at the Nelson House showing the brick retaining wall and front steps at the front court added soon after the Civil War, photographed ca. 1890. At right is the kitchen–wash house and behind it, the dairy. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, YOR_006.)

Around the time the wall was constructed, the Nelson–Bryans also built a house on lot 48 facing Main Street, near where Scotch Tom may have built a house in ca. 1707 to satisfy his purchase requirement for the lot. The new house was a two-story, three-bay frame house with clapboard siding and a low-pitched gable roof (fig. 1.20).[28] They may have erected this as a tenant house, or to replace the old brick servants quarters in the service yard that was removed after the Civil War. The Nelson House retained most of its other eighteenth-century outbuildings, including the kitchen–wash house, dairy, smokehouse, and spinning house. Over the next three

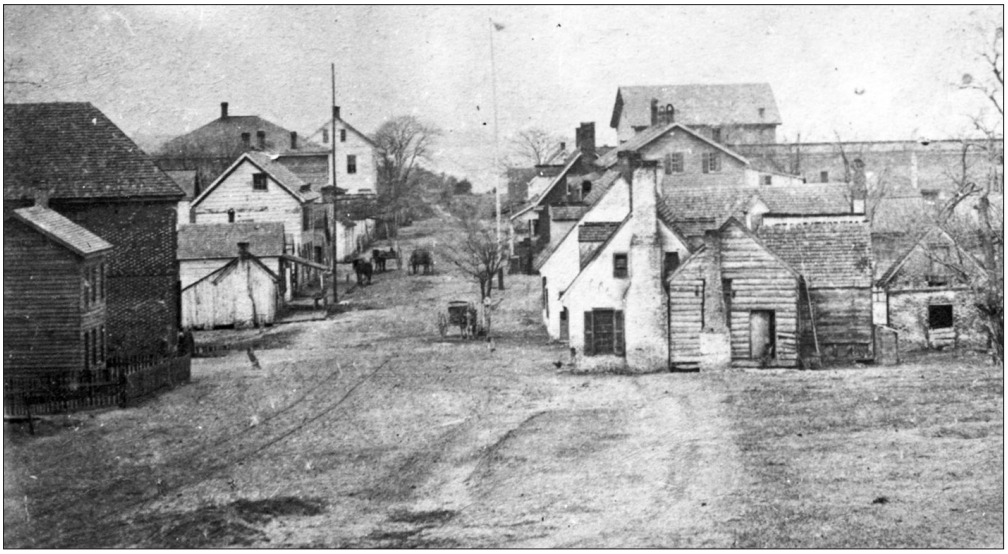


Figure 1.20. Looking west along Main Street showing the two-story tenant house on lot 48 at left (in front of taller Custom House), photographed ca. 1880. The first house on the right is the Cox House. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, YOR_2115.)

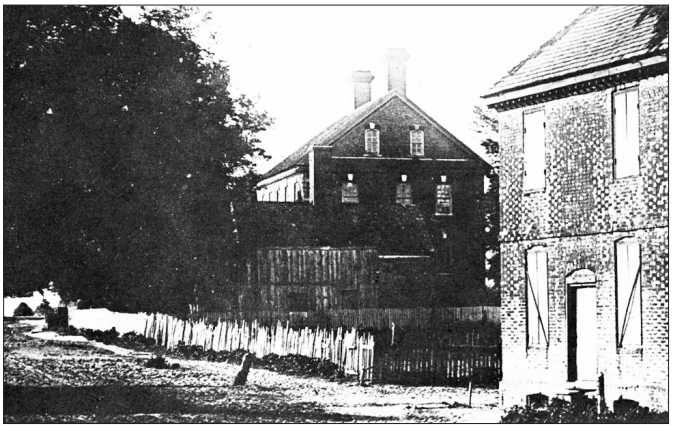


Figure 1.21. Looking southeast toward the Nelson House showing removal of the tenant house and most of the outbuildings, ca. 1900. At right is the Custom House. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Huestis-Cook negative.)

decades, however, these building all disappeared except for the kitchen–wash house, concurrent with the family's declining fortunes and shift toward rental uses in the late 1890s (fig. 1.21).

By the turn of the century, the Nelson House and its surrounding grounds were becoming dilapidated. While the structure was sound, windows were broken, the steps to the front court were falling apart, and weed trees were growing out of the overgrown boxwood hedge (fig. 1.22). The painted clapboard siding on the kitchen–wash house was peeling and its west wall was bowing out (fig. 1.23).

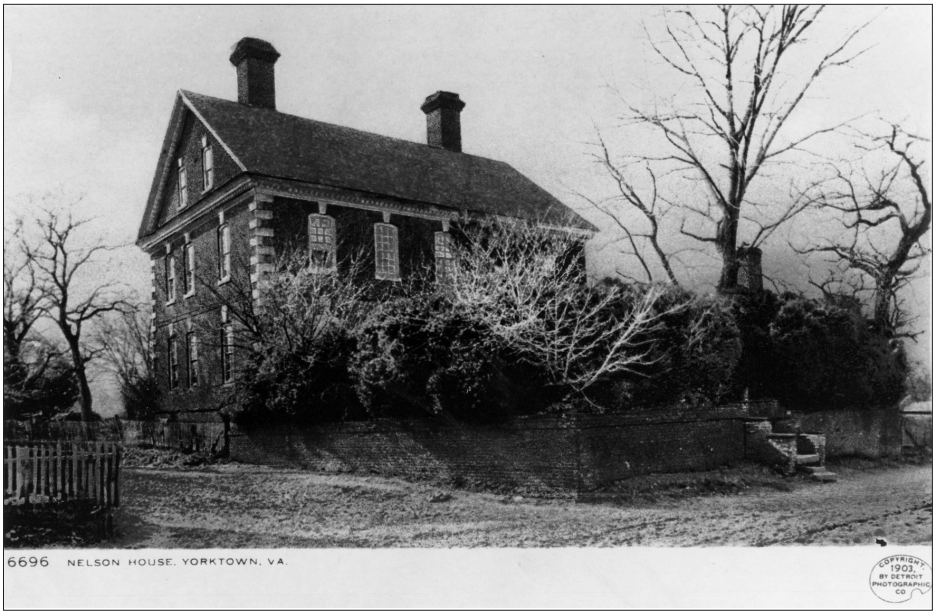


Figure 1.22. A 1903 postcard of the Nelson House looking southwest showing poor and overgrown conditions. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, YOR_6696.)

Figure 1.23. The Nelson House and kitchen–wash house looking southeast from Main Street showing dilapidated conditions, ca. 1900. The west side of the front court brick wall is visible at left. The fence enclosed the former service area and adjoining gardens or pasture on lot 48. (Interpretive wayside, Colonial National Historical Park.)

THE LANCASTER YEARS

In 1908, Mary and Elizabeth Bryan sold the Nelson House and lot 52 to R. A. Lancaster of Richmond for $3,000. Lancaster was a historian of colonial Virginia houses and churches and served at one time as Secretary of the Association for the Protection of Virginia Antiquities. He purchased the property as an agent for Thomas P. Bryan, a relative of Mary and Elizabeth, and Allmand Blow, who was the older brother of George Preston Blow, a wealthy industrialist from LaSalle, Illinois who grew up in nearby Norfolk. The reasons for Lancaster's purchase are not known for certain, but he may have been holding the property for a buyer interested in its rehabilitation.[29] Mary and Elizabeth Bryan retained ownership of the garden lots (lots 48, 49, and 50), which they either used themselves or leased for cultivation and grazing.[30]

Figure 1.24. The dilapidated Nelson House and its front court showing signs on the house and Lafayette tree, ca. 1914. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Photographs, album 16B.)

For the next six years, R. A. Lancaster rented the Nelson House to various individuals, including Nelson–Bryan family members.[31] The house also served during this time as a meeting place for the Yorktown Historical Society, and it remained a point of historical interest to residents and visitors. Signs in the front court identified the house and explained the history of the

Figure 1.25. Looking east at the ruins of the kitchen–wash house, with fenced pasture on lot 48 in the foreground, ca. 1914. The dark area at left is the front court boxwood hedge. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Scrapbook.)

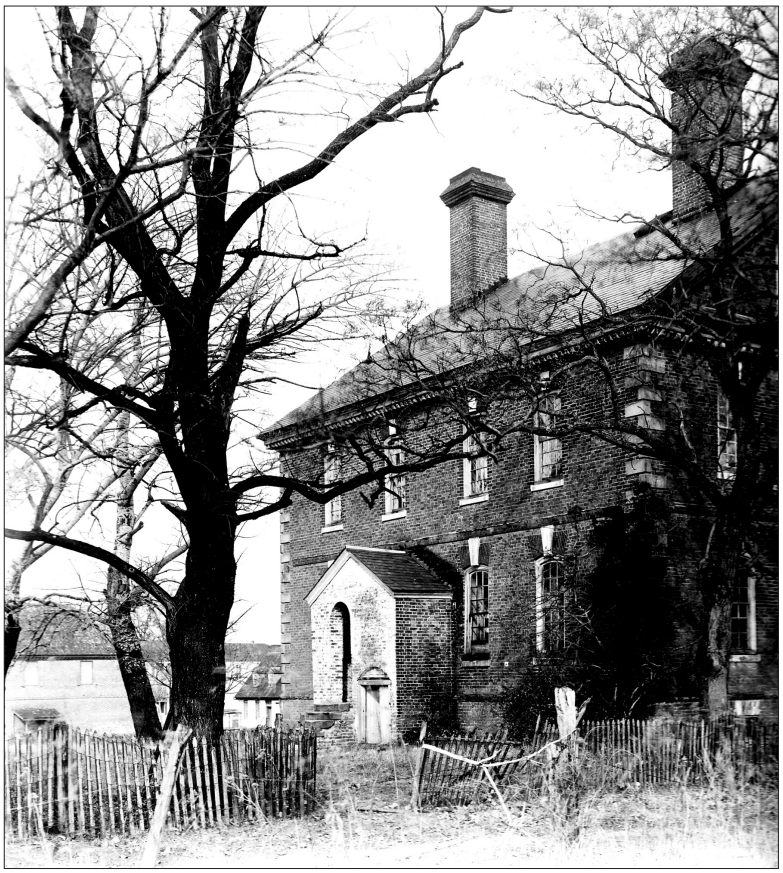


Figure 1.26. Looking northeast across the back court with the Custom House in the left background, ca. 1914. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Scrapbook.)

laurel tree that purportedly stood during the visit by the Marquis de Lafayette in 1824 (fig. 1.24).[32]

R. A. Lancaster made an initial investment in the preservation of the Nelson House by installing a new slate roof in 1909.[33] After this, the house was not maintained, leading to continued peeling paint and loss of window glass. In ca. 1910, the last of the colonial service buildings, the kitchen–wash house, burned, leaving just the ruins of the massive center chimney and the brick foundation (fig. 1.25). The back court, which by this time was just open ground with scattered old trees and the boxwood hedge along the Smith lot, was used as pasture, with a temporary wood slat and wire fence lining the cross (Nelson) street (fig. 1.26).

Most of the neighboring lots were in a similar condition. The Custom House was

boarded up, and the Cox House, which had begun to fall apart in the previous century, burned in ca. 1913 and was demolished, leaving the entire block across from the Nelson House, formerly site of the William Nelson house and Nelson stores, as open field.[34] The Smith House, which had served for a time around 1890 as a school, was in a similar condition to the Nelson House, with its outbuildings gone and the house apparently uninhabited, but with a sound roof and walls (fig. 1.27). In contrast, Henry Ruben maintained the Ballard House as a residence, although the kitchen that was rebuilt after the Siege of 1781 had been removed, leaving a smokehouse and larger unidentified outbuilding that were built prior to the Civil War.[35]

Figure 1.27. Looking northwest at the Smith House with the Nelson House in the background, ca. 1914. The dark shrubs in the right background are the old boxwood hedge along the property line, and at the rear of the Smith House is the old boxwood allee. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Scrapbook.)

LANDSCAPE SUMMARY, 1789–1914 (DRAWING 1.2)

In 1914, on the eve of its transformation into a country estate, the Nelson House and its four lots were in derelict condition. Like much of the village, the landscape was an evocative but deteriorating relic of Yorktown's colonial heyday. Despite its condition and loss of all outbuildings, the Nelson House grounds retained the overall organization that had characterized it during the colonial period, with the notable exception of the service yard. The property also retained a number of aged trees and hedges that dated back well into the previous century, if not earlier.

In contrast, the setting of the Nelson House grounds had changed considerably between 1789 and 1914. The once busy Main Street, lined by widely-spaced buildings to either side of the Nelson House, was a narrow dirt road with much of its old bed covered in grass, while the west cross street (Read Street) was just a set of dirt tracks. Where the Cox House, William Nelson House, and Nelson stores had stood, there was field extending to the bluff with its Civil War earthwork remnants. This open character allowed for expansive views of the York River from the Nelson House. To the east and south of the grounds, the character had changed less, with the Smith, Ballard, and "Sessions" Houses still standing, but the Nelson stable lot and outbuildings were gone. Linden trees lined the cross street (Nelson Street).

One of the few additions to the village landscape was the Monument to the Alliance and Victory, designed by Richard Morris Hunt and completed in 1883, which was visible from the Nelson House, rising high above the widely scattered houses along the east end of Main Street. Several new houses had been built on

the cross streets to the south of the Nelson House after the Civil War, including one on lot 51 at the site of the colonial William Rogers pottery works.

In 1914, the Nelson House had numerous broken windowpanes, peeling paint, cracks in the exterior brick walls, and vines covering much of the facade. The steps from Main Street, part of the brick retaining wall around the front court built after the Civil War, were crumbling. A walk paved in four rows of square stone slabs, possibly dating to colonial times, led through the front court to a set of circular steps at the front entrance. To the left of the entrance walk was a decrepit laurel tree that purportedly existed during the Marquis de Lafayette's visit in 1824, marked by a small sign. Another sign was on the house, to the left of the front door. Surrounding the front court was the overgrown, unclipped boxwood hedge that reached the second floor of the house and had weed trees growing through it. The back court was a grass-covered lot used as pasture, surrounded by wood-slat and wire fence. The only trees and shrubs were several mature elm and poplar, and an overgrown boxwood hedge along the boundary with the Smith lot. The grade sloped down to the west to expose the Nelson House's unfinished foundation walls, a condition most likely resulting from grade changes made around the time of the Civil War.

The service buildings on the west side of the house disappeared during this period, except for the ruins of the kitchen–wash house, comprised of a massive brick chimney and foundation. The former marl drive and yard were covered in grass, and the steps leading up to the house's west entrance were a pile of rubble. As with the back of the house, the unfinished foundation walls were exposed along the west side of the house, presumably a result of Civil War-era grade changes. The perimeter wall around the front court extended along the west side, facing the service yard (present terrace).

The Nelson garden and open lots (lots 48, 49, and 50) that were still owned by the Bryan sisters (stepdaughters of Martha Nelson Bryan) did not have the same derelict appearance as lot 52 due to the absence of buildings, but nonetheless did not have a well-maintained character. These lots were used as pasture and for cultivation. In 1914, lot 48 was enclosed by a ramshackle assortment of fences, including wood plank, barbed-wire, wood post, and the same temporary wood-slat and wire type that existed around the back court. The "tenant" house that was built on lot 48 after the Civil War no longer stood, nor did the earlier wellhouse. Except for a few widely scattered trees, the landscape was open field, with a post-Civil War house on the adjoining lot 51 to the south.

ENDNOTES

1 Isaac Weld, *Travels through the States of North America* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., reprint of 1799 edition, 1968), 158.

2 H.L. Garrett, "Colonial National Historical Park, War of 1812" (Unpublished report, National Park Service, August, 1934), 4.

3 Garrett, 5.

4 York County Records, *Wills and Inventories, No. 23:* 171, in Mark Wenger, ed., "Architectural Analysis of the Nelson House Yorktown, Virginia, Volume III: Research Assessment" (Unpublished draft report prepared for the National Park Service, 2003), 100; Richard Channing Moore Page, *Genealogy of the Page Family in Virginia Condensed Account of the Nelson, Walker, Pendleton, and Randolph Families* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: C. J. Carrier Company, 1983), 174ff.

5 Wenger, 100.

6 Wenger, 116. The lots sold by Martha Nelson Bryan included 12, 18, 19, and a portion of 13.

7 Wenger, 118.

8 Wenger, 116.

9 Charles E. Hatch, Jr. *The Nelson House and the Nelsons, General Study* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service Office of History and Historic Architecture, August 1969), 94–95; Jane Sundberg, Cultural Resource Management Specialist (retired), Colonial National Historical Park, communication to authors, March 21, 2011. The Nelson House also became mistakenly known as the headquarters of the British General Cornwallis. His actual headquarters were in the Secretary Nelson House, which was destroyed during the Siege.

10 *Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald,* October 22 and 25, 1824, quoted in Hatch, *The Nelson House and the Nelsons*, 100.

11 Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution; or Illustrations, By Pen and Pencil, of the History, Biography, Scenery, Relics, and Traditions of the War For Independence* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1850), 315, fn 3.

12 *Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald,* October 22 and 25, 1824, quoted in Hatch, *The Nelson House and the Nelsons*, 101.

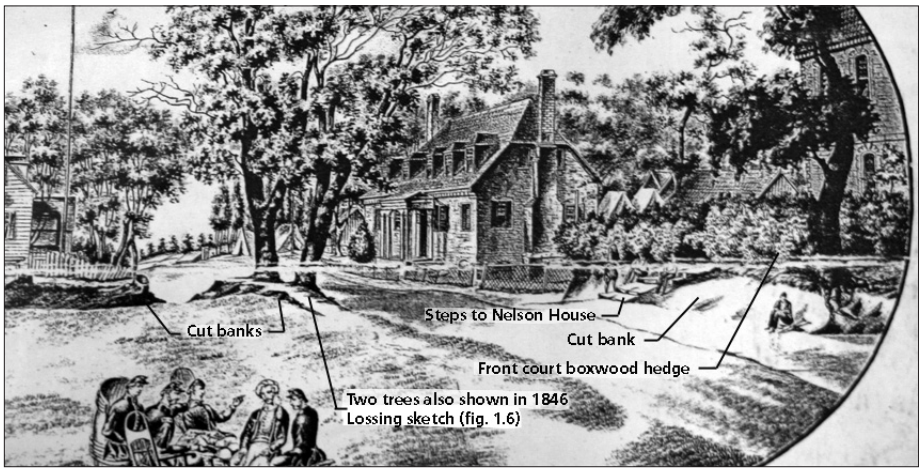
13 Lisa Fischer, "Yorktown Archaeological/Historical Overview and Assessment" (Unpublished report, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Department of Archaeological Research, 2004), 89.

14 Charles E. Hatch Jr., *The Edmund Smith House: A History* (Colonial National Historical Park Division of History Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, August 1969), 22.

15 Norman F. Barka, "Archeology of the Nelson, Smith and Ballard Houses, Yorktown, Virginia" (Unpublished report prepared for the National Park Service by Southside Historical Sites, Inc., July 1978), 104.

16 Civlwar.com article, "Battle Summaries," http://www.civilwar.com/content/view/1976/39/ (accessed June 2008).

17 The cuts along the front court of the Nelson House and around the trees across the street are also visible in a lithograph of Main Street looking east from the Nelson House, ca. 1865, COLO image 38951.2141 (detail below).



18 Paul H. Hass, ed., "A Volunteer Nurse in the Civil War: The Letters of Harriet Douglas Whetten," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* vol. 48, no. 3 (spring 1965), 217.

19 Quoted in Hatch, *The Nelson House and the Nelsons*, 95.

20 National Park Service, *Outline of Development Colonial National Monument Yorktown, Virginia (*July 12, 1933), 14; Hatch, *The Nelson House and the Nelsons*, 114–115; Marilyn Harper, "What it Ought to Have Been: Three Case Studies of Early Restoration Work in Virginia" (M.A. Thesis, The George Washington University, 1989), 12. A monument to the Siege of 1781 was authorized on October 29, 1781 just ten days after the terms of surrender were signed.

21 Quoted in Hatch, *The Nelson House and the Nelsons*, 115.

22 Will of William Nelson, in Wenger, 121–122. This is the earliest documentation of the family's use of the name York Hall for the Nelson House.

23 Wenger, 124.

24 Lucy Hudgins O'Hara, *Yorktown, As I Remember* (Verona, Virginia: McClure Print Company, 1981), 16; Harper, 11–12. Mrs. Lucy Hudgins O'Hara recalled, during the years of 1893 to 1898 while her family resided near the Nelson House, that the Cruikshank family of Pennsylvania occupied the Nelson House. She also recalled elaborate Christmas decorations at the Nelson House and parties given for the local children by the Cruikshanks.

25 The earlier retaining walls on the east and west sides of the front court are indicated on the 1796 insurance survey (see fig. 1.7).

26 Hatch, *The Nelson House and the Nelsons*, frontispiece (ca. 1900 photograph).

27 Photographs of the Nelson House, ca. 1914, Blow Family Photographs, Colonial National Historical Park archives.

28 Documentation of the date of construction for this house, often referred to today as the Nelson tenant house, is found in a comparison of an 1862 photograph showing no house (fig. 1.14) and a ca. 1880 photograph showing the house (fig. 1.18). By ca. 1907, as shown in a period postcard (see fig. 1.8), the tenant house was gone.

29 Wenger, 124; Harper, 12.

30 Per deeds of sale to George Preston Blow, 1915; photographs of Nelson House, ca. 1914, Blow family scrapbook, Colonial National Historical Park archives.

31 Wenger, 124. Adele Chatfield-Taylor, the daughter of then prospective owner George P. Blow, recalled that when she first visited the Nelson House with her parents in 1912, Nelson descendants were still living there.

32 Photograph of the Nelson House with the Lafayette tree, ca. 1914. The text on the sign is not visible in the photograph, but is assumed to explain the Lafayette connection.

33 Harper, 15.

34 Comparison of Yorktown postcards, 1903–ca. 1915, Jane Sundberg collection.

35 Barka, 104.

Cultural Landscape Report
Nelson House Grounds

Colonial National Historical Park
Yorktown, Virginia

Late Nelson Period
1789–1914

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

in partnership with
Department of Landscape Architecture
SUNY College of Environmental
Science and Forestry, www.esf.edu/la/

SOURCES

1. Archaeological Study, Norman F. Barka, 1978
2. Blow Photograph Collection, Colonial National Historical Park
3. Colonial National Historical Park Archival Photographs
4. NPS GIS File , Colonial National Historical Park
5. Mutual Assurance Policies, 1796
6. NPS, Grounds Development plan, 1975
7. Field Survey, October 2008, January 2010

DRAWN BY

Bryne D. Riley, John Auwaerter, Illustrator CS5, 2011

LEGEND

- Building / Conjectured building
- Deciduous tree, shrub mass
- Evergreen shrub, hedge
- Turf or undetermined groundcover
- Garden or cultivated field
- Public street (earth, gravel)
- Road or walk (earth, marl)
- Fence and gate
- Brick wall
- Period property line / Yorktown lot line
- 2' contour line / Embankment
- (1918) Date feature added or removed during period
- Feature removed during period (dashed line)

NOTES

1. All features shown in approximate scale and location.
2. Plan shows landscape at end of period in 1914.
3. Features without dates built in prior period.
4. Vegetation species identified where known.
5. CLR project area consists of lots 48-50, 52; landscape details outside of project area not illustrated except at Smith and Ballard lots.

Plan North
True North

0' 35' 70'

Drawing 1.2

YORK HALL ESTATE PERIOD, 1914–1968

From 1914 to 1968, the derelict Nelson House grounds were transformed into a refined country place estate that incorporated a number of surrounding village lots, including the adjoining Smith and Ballard Houses and the sites of the Cox House, William Nelson House, and Nelson stores. Known as York Hall—a name also used by the Nelson family during the nineteenth century—the estate was the seasonal home of Adele and George Preston Blow, and later, the full-time residence of their son, George W. Blow. One of the first to resurrect a colonial Yorktown house, George P. Blow had a keen interest in history and preserved much of the old fabric of the house and grounds, working closely with architects Griffin and Wynkoop and landscape architect Charles Gillette. The Blow family maintained the York Hall estate into the late 1960s during a six-decade period that witnessed the private restoration of Colonial Williamsburg and the National Park Service's restoration of Yorktown's colonial buildings and battlefields.

George Preston Blow's arrival in Yorktown during the second decade of the twentieth century marked the beginning of an economic revival in the town and the surrounding region. Much of this revival was due initially to the U.S. military, which expanded its long-time presence at Hampton. Among many developments in the region, the military acquired a 4,000-acre tract west of Yorktown in 1918 for a naval weapons station designed to service the entire Atlantic seaboard.[1] In addition to this regional development, the advent of automobiles and paved roads made Yorktown, which had become isolated during the nineteenth century without railroads and due to the decline of shipping, into a readily accessible place within easy reach of Richmond, Hampton, Norfolk, and other cities in the region.

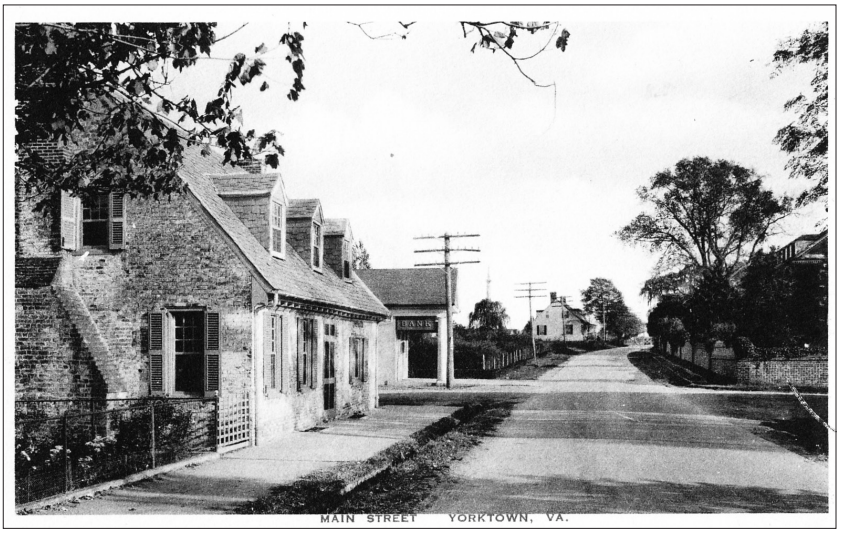


Figure 1.28. Looking east along Main Street showing the new bank building beyond the restored Cole Digges House in the foreground, ca. 1925. In the distance is the Dudley Digges House and at right is the perimeter wall of the York Hall estate. (Postcard, ca. 1930, courtesy of Jane Sundberg.)

By the 1920s, after the Blows had completed their initial work at the Nelson House, many of the adjoining lots were undergoing improvements. In ca. 1923, a small Colonial Revival-style building with a front portico was erected at the corner of Main and Read Streets, at the site of the Cox House, by the Peninsular Bank and Trust Company (figs. 1.28, 1.29). Two years later, owners of the Cole Digges House across Read Street completed restoration of the building as a private residence. Across Main Street, Adele Blow purchased the dilapidated Custom

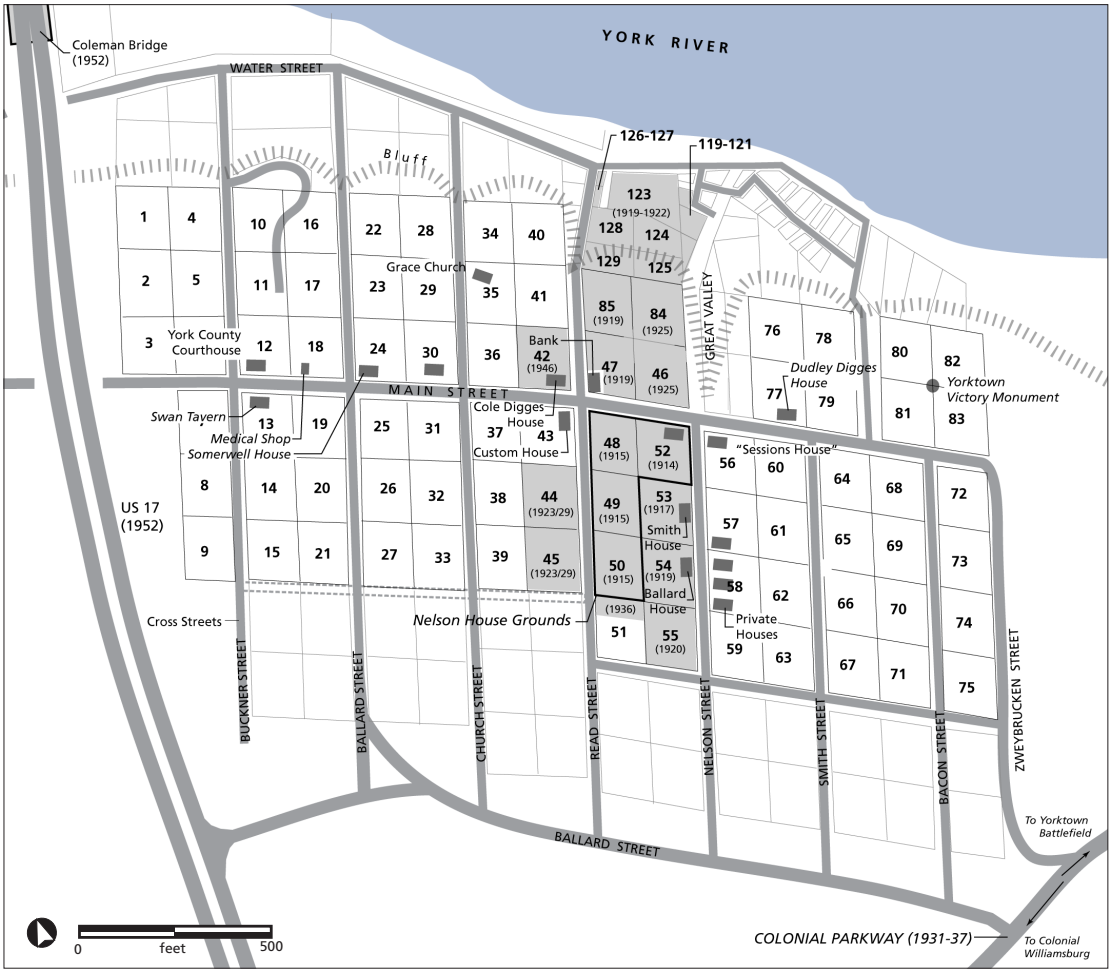


Figure 1.29. Map of Yorktown illustrating location of restored buildings and new construction along Main Street, and property acquired as part of the Blow family's York Hall estate between 1914 and 1946 (shaded in gray with dates of acquisition). The map also shows changes to Yorktown's road through 1968, notably addition of the Colonial Parkway and US 17. Italicized building labels indicate National Park Service property. (SUNY ESF.)

House in 1922 from the heirs of the McNorton family, who had purchased the property in 1882 and had overseen its use as a medical office and school for African-Americans. The Yorktown Comte de Grasse Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, founded in 1922, then purchased the building from Mrs. Blow in 1924 and undertook a major restoration that was completed in 1930. The work included reconstruction of outbuildings and creation of a colonial-style walled garden at the rear. On the corner of Pearl (Nelson) and Main Streets at the other side of the Nelson House grounds was the "Sessions" House, which had remained in good condition over the years as a private residence. To the south, new single-family houses were being constructed along Pearl Street, across from the Smith and Ballard Houses.[2]

GEORGE P. AND ADELE BLOW

Although a resident of the Midwest at the time of his purchase of the Nelson House, George Preston Blow's roots were in the Virginia Tidewater, where he claimed a Yorktown ancestor, John Camm, who was rector of Grace Church at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Born in Norfolk in 1860, George

P. Blow enrolled in the United States Naval Academy at the age of fifteen and graduated in 1881 as one of the first Southerners to matriculate after the Civil War. In 1893, he married Adele Matthiessen of LaSalle, Illinois and went on to have an impressive career in the Navy. He served as captain during the Spanish-American War, established the U.S. Hydrographic Bureaus in Cleveland and Chicago, and invented several naval devices, including the depth charge. Following his retirement from the Navy in February 1900, he moved to LaSalle to manage the estate of his father-in-law, Frederick W. Matthiessen. In this capacity, he became the president of the Western Clock Company (later renamed Westclox), the Matthiessen & Hegeler Zinc Company, and the LaSalle Machine and Tool Company, which he ran successfully for the next twenty years. Of his many interests, he was a founder and director of the International Chamber of Commerce, a pioneer and government representative in the proposal for a shipping channel from the Great Lakes to the St. Lawrence River, and a member of many clubs and associations, including the Society of Colonial Wars and the Virginia Historical Society.[3]

DEVELOPMENT OF THE YORK HALL ESTATE, 1914–1929

Acquisitions and Initial Improvements

America's growing industrial wealth and increasing congestion in its cities led many wealthy families during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to establish country places in the outskirts of major cities. In this context, George and Adele Blow were characteristic of a larger trend, but their choice for a location was not typical. Unlike established country-place enclaves such as the North Shore of Long Island or Richmond's Windsor Farms, Yorktown in the 1910s not only lacked country estates, but it was poor and its historic village context did not provide the preferred expansive setting for country places. Despite this, George Preston Blow's interest in history and family ties to the region led him to settle in the village.

In 1914, Blow finalized his purchase of lot 52 with the Nelson House from R. A. Lancaster, who had bought the property from the Nelson heirs in 1908. Blow may have been planning this purchase years earlier, if indeed his brother Allmand Blow, for whom Lancaster was serving as an agent at the time of the 1908 purchase, was serving as George P. Blow's proxy.[4] Soon after the purchase, George P. Blow began to acquire adjoining lots to establish the designed landscape that was an essential part of country estates (see fig. 1.29). Three months later, he signed a lease for lots 46 and 84 across Main Street where the Nelson stores once stood, which secured much of the York River view from the house.[5] In March 1915, he purchased the Nelson garden lots (lots 48, 49, and 50) from the Bryan sisters. To complete the block between the two cross streets, he acquired the

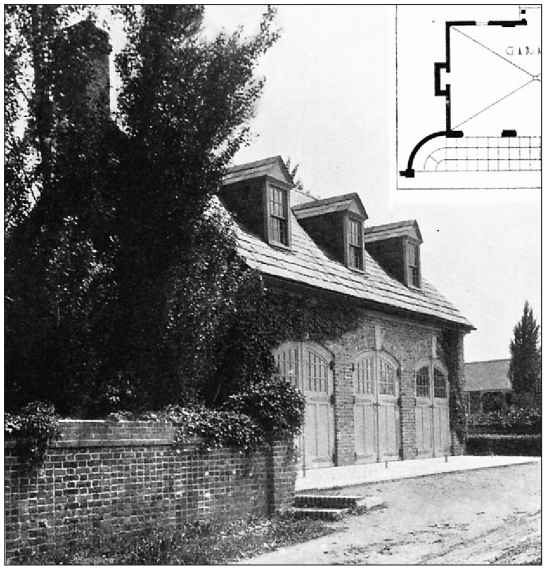
Figure 1.30. The Blows' renovation of the Nelson House nearing completion, ca. 1916. The photograph shows the addition of dormers and a perimeter brick wall along Pearl (Nelson) Street. The property in the foreground, at the rear of the "Sessions" House, was apparently used as a staging area. (Laurence Hall Fowler photograph, Johns Hopkins University Special Collections, photograph LHF-0151.)

Smith lot (lot 53) in 1917 from G. and H. Smith (unrelated to the original Smith family), and the Ballard lot (lot 54) in 1919 from Losetta Beer. By the early 1920s, Blow had acquired thirteen additional lots, including lots 47, 55, 85, and waterfront lots 120 through 129.[6]

Soon after his purchase of the Nelson House in 1914, Blow commissioned Griffin and Wynkoop, an architecture firm with offices at 50 Church Street in New York City, to renovate the house and design the outbuildings. Construction on the house began in 1915 after Blow had it photographically documented (see figs. 1.24–1.27). Reflecting a progressive approach toward historic preservation, Blow preserved much of the historic building fabric and screened modern utilities, such as heating pipes and electrical wires. The windows were repaired, interior paneling was sent out for fumigation and reinstalled, and paint analysis was undertaken to determine the original color schemes. On the exterior, major changes were limited to the roof, which was outfitted with dormers and sheathed in multi-colored slate in place of wood (fig. 1.30). The dormers, added to convert the attic into guest and servants' quarters, were designed to recall those on the adjoining "Sessions" House. The entrance porch at the back court was also modified with removal of a basement entry and addition of a new door and windows.[7]

Figure 1.31 (below left). A ca. 1921 photograph of the garage and perimeter wall looking southeast at the Read Street façade. ("Restoration of a Southern Colonial Estate 'York Hall,'" *Architectural Forum*, December 1921.)

Figure 1.32 (below right). A ca. 1918 photograph of the garage looking north showing the residential character of the interior façade. The stepping stone paths connected the outbuildings with the main house. A lamppost is located at the center of the photograph. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Photographs, album #12.)



Three new outbuildings, completed in 1916, consisted of an automobile garage, gardener's cottage (later known as Wisteria Cottage), and stables. Blow had the buildings sited along the west edge of the grounds along Read Street, near where Scotch Tom Nelson may have had secondary houses during the early eighteenth century on lots 49 and 50. All three Colonial Revival-style outbuildings had brick facades and slate roofs, and faced the interior of the grounds. The garage on lot 49 had a shallow setback from Read Street and a brick-paved apron in front of its three garage bays (fig. 1.31). The front of the building facing the interior grounds was designed in a residential character, with a symmetrical center entrance sheltered by a small porch and flanked by windows (fig. 1.32). The basement of the garage, accessed from an exterior subgrade entrance, housed most of the estate's central utilities.[8] A Chinese temple bell was later hung on the chimney on the north side, beneath a gable shelter.[9] The gardener's cottage was similar in character to the garage, but featured an asymmetrical façade and a large offset ridge chimney, designed to recall old cottages along the Yorktown waterfront (fig 1.33).[10] The house had no entrance to the street. Approximately fifty feet southeast of the cottage was the stable, accessed by a new service drive off Read Street. Built of brick with clipped gables, it featured a slate roof, hay mow, central ventilating cupola, small six-light windows, and a recessed porch (fig. 1.34). The stable housed a carriage room, saddle and tack room, dog pens, four horse stalls, and a hayloft in the attic.[11]

Figure 1.33 (below, top). The gardener's cottage (Wisteria Cottage) looking west, ca. 1920. At left are plantings that screened the stable. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Photographs, album #14.)

Figure 1.34 (below, bottom). The York Hall stable looking southeast from Wisteria Cottage, ca. 1916. The Blows had not yet built the brick wall along the perimeter of the grounds. The buildings in the background are houses on adjoining lots. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Photographs, album #14.)

Along with the buildings, George Blow had a brick retaining wall constructed along the perimeter of the property on Main, Pearl (Nelson), and Read Streets (see figs. 1.28, 1.30–1.33). Presumably designed by Griffin and Wynkoop and constructed over a number of years beginning in ca. 1915, the wall replaced dilapidated fencing along the roadsides and tied into the existing retaining wall at the front court, which was raised several courses. Incorporating old bricks

from ruins of houses in town, the new wall stepped with the slope of Main Street, and tied into the roadside corners of the garage and gardener's cottage.[12] Along Pearl (Nelson) Street, the wall stepped in around an old tree. Openings included pedestrian gates at the site of the old Nelson service drive west of the house and next to the garage, vehicle gates at the service drive off Read Street, and an entrance drive into the back court off Pearl Street, plus the original opening for the front entrance walk.

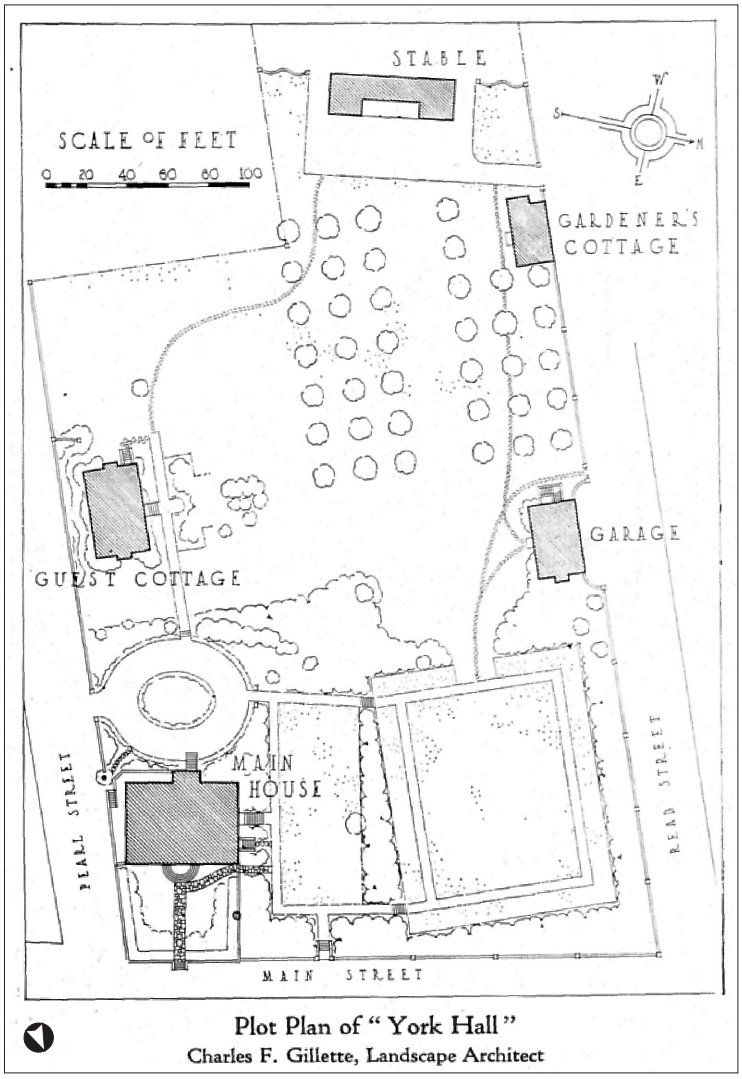
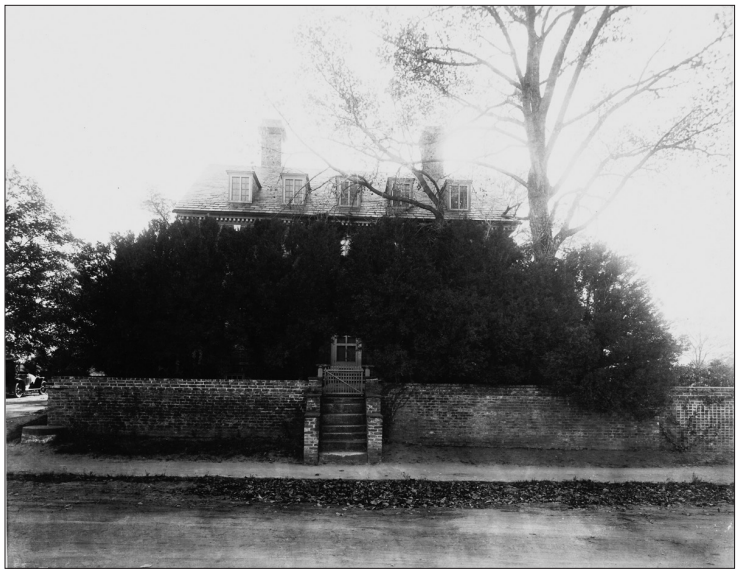


Figure 1.35. An early plan of York Hall by Charles Gillette dated August 13, 1917. Most of the plan was implemented by 1917, except for walks around the perimeter of the lower terrace (later formal garden) and orchard south of the stable. The Smith House (guest cottage) was acquired in 1917; the Ballard House is not shown because it was not acquired until 1919. ("Restoration of a Southern Colonial Estate 'York Hall,'" *Architectural Forum*, December 1921.)

As work was underway on the buildings and walls in 1915, George Blow commissioned the young landscape architect Charles Freeman Gillette to design the grounds.[13] At the time, Gillette was working for the well-known landscape architect Warren Manning, but was contemplating opening his own office. Gillette had been with Manning since 1909, working on a variety of projects from country estates to the new campus for Richmond College, where he served as on-site supervisor. Gillette did not have a formal education in landscape architecture, but by 1915 had six years of practical experience and had spent time in Europe studying gardens, building on his love of nature and plants from growing up with a father who was a farmer and herbalist.[14] Gillette's plan for York Hall was one of his first independent residential commissions, and one of his longest, lasting into the 1960s.[15]

Working around the previously designed buildings and perimeter wall, Gillette developed an initial plan that formalized the smaller areas closest to the house through plantings and circulation, and established an informal character to the landscape on the former Nelson open and garden lots, with winding paths and a proposed orchard (fig. 1.35).[16]

In the front court, George P. Blow initially made few changes, apparently considering it the one part of the estate where he would preserve the preexisting landscape. He retained a large tulip tree on the west side, the overgrown boxwood hedge, stone-paved entrance walk, vines on the house, and even the spindly laurel tree near the entrance that purportedly witnessed the 1824 visit by the Marquis de Lafayette (figs. 1.36, 1.37). The only significant change was the addition of a walk connecting with the terrace to the west.



In contrast to the front court, the back court, which the Blows called the forecourt, was transformed from a barren pasture into a formal entrance to the estate, organized around an oval loop drive (fig. 1.38). The entrance, within the perimeter brick wall along Pearl (Nelson) Street, was marked by tall brick piers topped by ball finials. A pair of unpainted wood gates were soon added across the opening. The drive had a marl surface edged by staggered, upright brick and bordered by a low clipped boxwood hedge, surrounding an oval island of lawn. The outer perimeter of the court was heavily planted with shrubs and groundcover. An informal walk of stepping stones led north from the drive to a pedestrian gate along Pearl (Nelson) Street at the narrow space between the perimeter wall and the house. A below-grade brick wall along the west and rear sides of the house created a long well for basement windows. Along the south side of the forecourt was the old boxwood hedge parallel to the Smith lot boundary, the one preexisting feature that George Blow retained aside from several mature trees (fig. 1.39). At the west side of the drive was a brick walk that stepped down toward the former Nelson service area west of the house. A pair of goddess statues on pedestals was added to mark this main entrance

Figure 1.36 (top). The front court looking south from Main Street showing retention of the old boxwood hedge, ca. 1918. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Photographs, album #13.)

Figure 1.37 (middle). The renovated interior of the front court showing retention of the old walk and steps, Lafayette tree, and vines on the house, ca. 1918. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Photographs, album #13.

Figure 1.38 (bottom). The redesigned forecourt (back court) looking west from Pearl (Nelson) Street across the marl-surfaced circular entrance drive, ca. 1918. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Photographs, album #13.)

into the grounds in ca. 1920, around the same time an arched window was added to the rear entry porch (fig. 1.40).

The old Nelson service yard on the west side of the house was transformed into a lawn terrace that sloped gently toward lot 48 (fig. 1.41). This area required filling over the remains of the kitchen–wash house to restore the grade that had been lowered around the time of the Civil War. Marl walks edged by staggered upright bricks framed three sides of the terrace and connected to the entrance drive and front court. Brick steps led down a steeper slope that was planted in shrubs to a lower lawn terrace on lot 48 (see fig. 1.39). This rectangular area, later site of the formal garden, was framed by tree and shrub plantings along the perimeter walls and across the open area to the south (fig. 1.42). Although Gillette had designed rectilinear walks to frame this lawn, similar to those on the upper terrace, these were never built.

In the interior of the landscape on lots 49, 50, 53, and 54, Gillette laid out stepping-stone paths linking the service buildings and cottages, but the orchard shown in his initial plan was not planted. The service area to the south of the stable was screened by serpentine brick walls built to either side of the building, with the west wall tying into the perimeter wall along Read Street. These curving walls followed a design similar to what

Fig. 1.39 (top). The old boxwood hedge along the south side of the forecourt, looking northeast, ca. 1918. This photograph also shows the original steps to the upper terrace at left and old specimen trees that were retained. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Photographs, album #14.)

Fig. 1.40 (middle). The goddess figures at the walk to the terrace from the entrance drive, looking northeast, ca. 1920. The arched window in the porch is to the right of the doorway. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Photographs, album #16B.)

Fig. 1.41 (bottom). The original terrace on the site of the Nelson service yard, looking north toward Main Street, ca. 1920. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Photographs, album #13.)

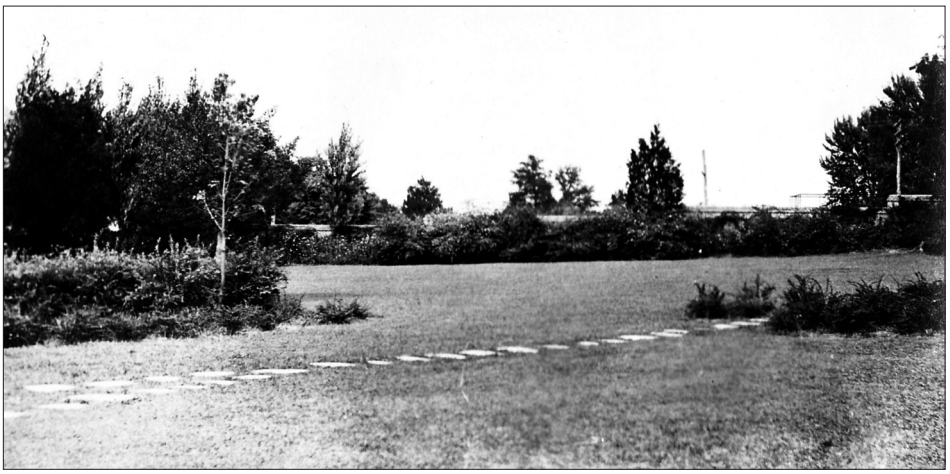


Figure 1.42. The lower terrace (future site of the formal garden), looking southeast toward Main Street, ca. 1920. In the background is the perimeter wall. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Photographs, album #14.)

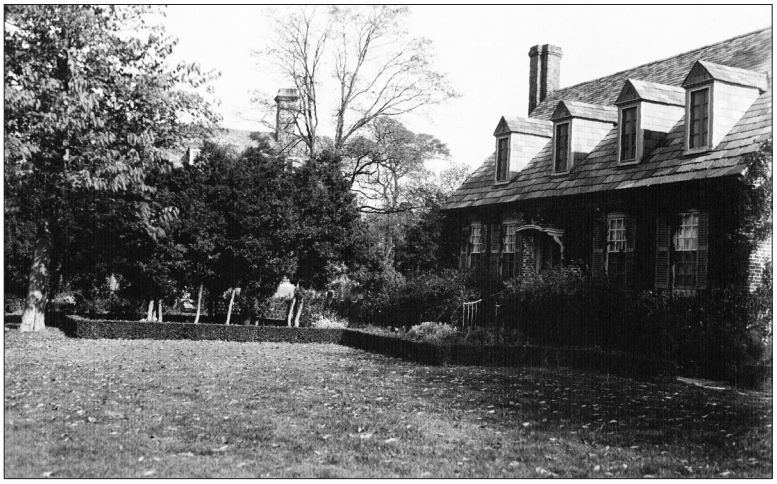


Figure 1.43 (middle). The renovated Smith House and boxwood shelter garden, looking north toward the Nelson House, ca. 1920. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Blow Family Photographs, album #12.)

Figure 1.44 (bottom). The renovated Ballard House and hedge-enclosed yard to the south, looking north toward the Smith and Nelson Houses, 1924. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, Bagby photographs.)

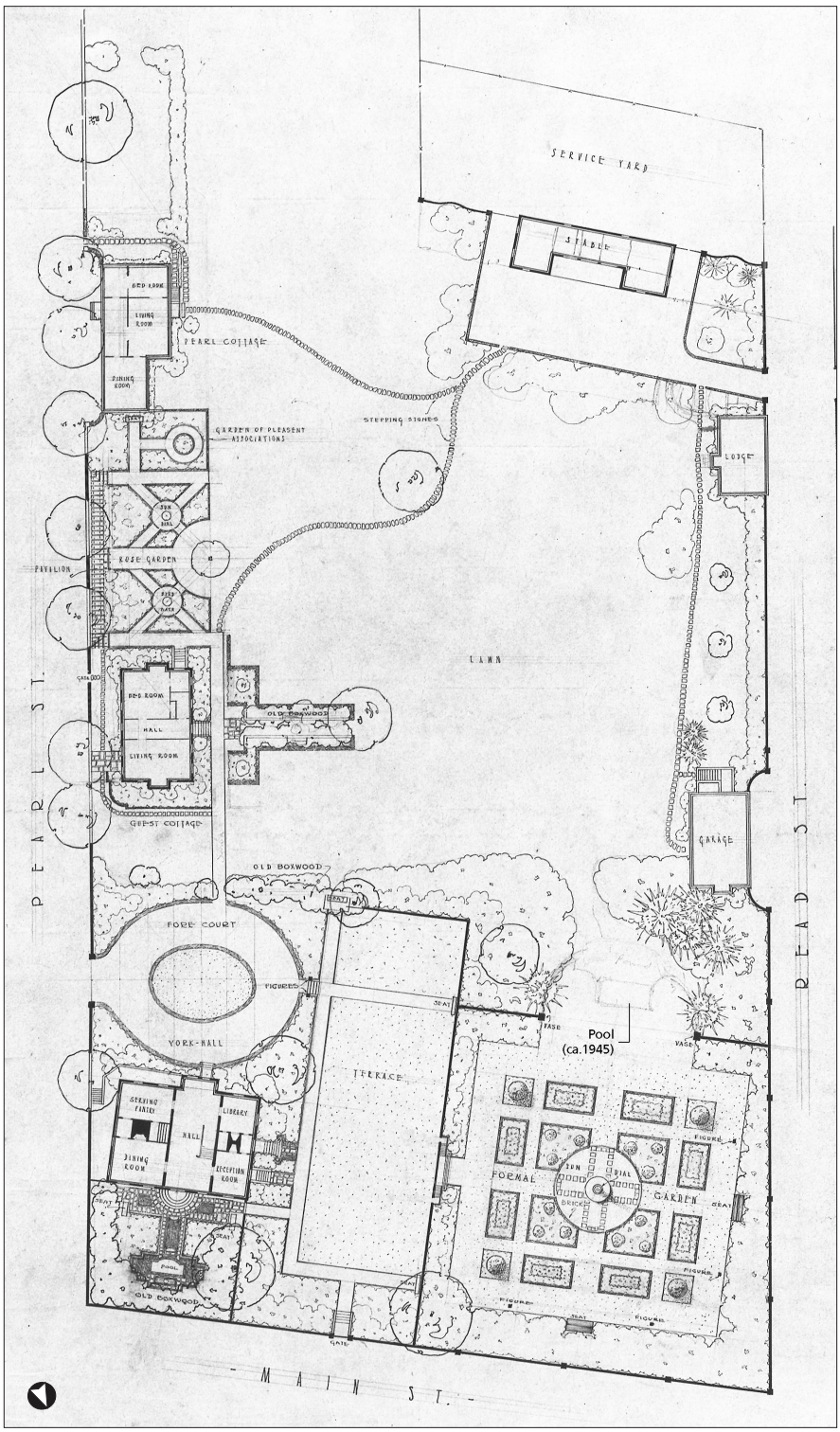
Thomas Jefferson used at the University of Virginia.

When the Blows acquired the Smith lot in 1917, they converted the old brick house into a guest cottage according to plans by Griffin and Wynkoop. The extensive renovation included rearrangement of windows, addition of dormers, removal of paint from the brick walls, and reorientation of the front entrance to the west side facing the interior of the estate, away from Pearl Street (fig. 1.43). A marl walk edged in brick and with brick steps was extended south from the oval entrance drive in the forecourt (back court), intersecting the preexisting boxwood allee that was on axis with the relocated front entrance of the Smith House. Gillette renovated the allee, with its parallel rows of aged boxwood and mature deciduous tree at the end (species unknown), into an intimate garden space known as the boxwood shelter, edged in clipped boxwood borders and furnished with cast-iron benches.

George P. Blow's acquisition of the Ballard lot in 1919 completed the interior of the estate landscape. The Ballard House, which served as a staff residence known as Pearl Cottage, remained largely unchanged on the exterior with its original entrance facing the street. The two remaining outbuildings were removed, and the perimeter brick wall was extended along Pearl Street to the northeast corner of the house. The area south of the house was planted with an unclipped hedge that enclosed a small yard (fig. 1.44).

Formal Gardens and Landscape Refinement, 1921–1929

With the overall structure of the York Hall landscape well established, George P. Blow commissioned Charles Gillette in 1921 to design a number of enhancements, including several formal flower gardens. Most of the work was completed within the short period before Blow's death in November 1922 at the age of 66.[17] After his death, Adele Blow remained at York Hall and oversaw completion of the improvements, as well as several additional changes of her own, including acquisition of additional property. In March 1923, she leased lots 44 and 45 located south of the Custom House for the development of the estate's tree nursery and domestic gardens (see fig. 1.29). She bought these lots six years later. In October 1925, Mrs. Blow purchased lots 46 and 84, the two lots her late husband had earlier leased. These lots bordered the Great Valley across from the Nelson House and once contained the Nelson stores.[18]



In ca. 1923, Gillette prepared a new plan of the estate that showed the major improvements, which included a large formal garden on the lower terrace, two smaller formal gardens between the Smith and Ballard Houses, and redesign of the front court (fig. 1.45). These gardens, which

Figure 1.45. Plan of the York Hall estate by Charles Gillette, ca. 1923. This plan show implementation of the improvements begun in ca. 1921. The pencilled annotation south of the formal garden was for a pool added after World War II. ("York Hall...A Sketch of General Plan of Arrangement, Charles F. Gillette, Landscape Architect, Richmond, Virginia." Colonial National Historical Park archives.)

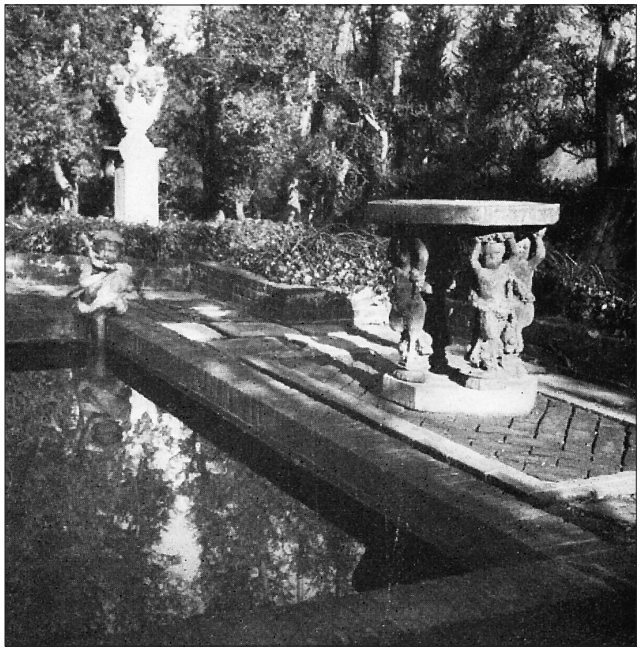


Figure 1.46. Detail of the front court garden looking northwest with the preexisting boxwood hedge in the background, 1921. The old entrance from Main Street was approximately where the cherub table is shown. ("Restoration of a Southern Colonial Estate, 'York Hall,'" *Architectural Forum*, December 1921.)

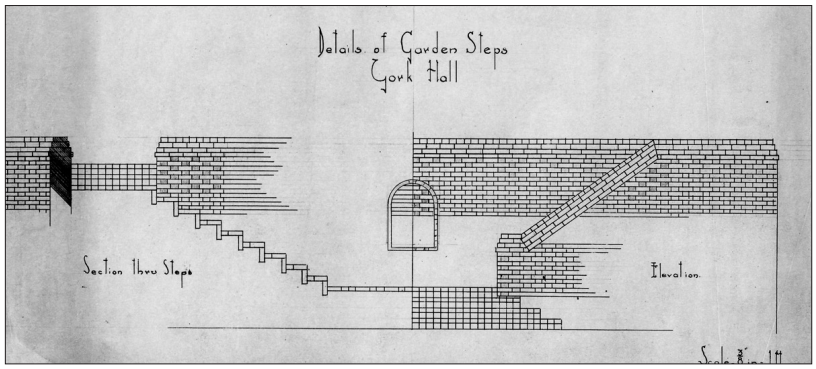
included flowerbeds, sculpture, water features, and Asian and European antiques, added ornament that had been largely absent in the initial phase of improvements. The plan also showed Gillette's redesign of the open interior into an expansive lawn that unified the buildings along the periphery of the estate.

The first project to be completed in Gillette's new plan was the garden in the front court, completed in 1921. George Blow, perhaps convinced by Adele or Charles Gillette, agreed to do away with much of the old landscape, except for the boxwood hedge that was retained as a perimeter screen. The Lafayette tree, stone walk, and entrance steps from Main Street were removed. This left the entrance to the terrace as the only access from Main Street (see fig. 1.45). The new garden, a complete redesign of the interior of the front court, was centered around a small reflecting pool surrounded by a brick patio edged by plantings (fig. 1.46). The secluded garden was ornamented with urns, cherubs, a cherub table, and benches of cast-iron and stone, in stark contrast to the simplicity of the earlier landscape.

In 1922, the year after completion of the front court garden, Gillette finalized his design of the formal garden, which required changes to the upper terrace into what was initially referred to as a bowling green.[19] In its raised, expanded, and leveled configuration, the new terrace created a platform to view the formal garden. The raising of the grade required construction of a brick retaining wall dividing the two terraces.[20] Gillette settled upon the garden wall concept by January 1922 and recommended to George P. Blow that:

> …the terrace slope now covered with shrubs should be eliminated and that the wall should come down to the level of the lower terrace and be just like the wall on Main Street. This will allow an attractive planting against the wall and I would bring the steps straight out from the middle...[21]

Figure 1.47. Charles Gillette's east-facing section showing the flight of steps in the wall between the terrace and formal garden, ca. 1922. (Colonial National Park archives.)



Construction of the garden wall involved the removal of the brick steps on the slope and relocation of the shrubs to the Ballard lot and other areas within the estate.[22] Two symmetrical flights of steps led through the middle of the garden wall (fig. 1.47). These met at a small landing, from which three more steps descended to the lower terrace. For

ornament, Gillette set a decorative lion's head fountain in a niche on the garden wall above the landing.

In addition to the garden wall, the grade changes to the upper terrace required the addition of a knee-high brick retaining wall around the southern and eastern perimeter. This wall extended the upper terrace to the south and protected the roots of existing shrubs and trees, including the old boxwood hedge along the Smith lot.[23] New walks were built on the upper terrace, keeping the rectilinear layout of the earlier ones, but using a brick pavement instead of marl. Seats were added at the ends of the walks on the south and west sides (see fig. 1.45).

Figure 1.48. The York Hall formal garden built in 1922, looking north, ca. 1930. The lawn at right is the terrace, with the stepping-stone walk that was added in ca. 1930. (Yorktown Sesquicentennial Commission, *The Yorktown Sesquicentennial*, 1932.)

On the lower terrace, Gillette's design for the large formal garden used a classical quincunx plan consisting of symmetrically placed beds divided by two central intersecting walks and parallel secondary walks (fig. 1.48, see also fig. 1.45). Gillette based his design on the formal garden at Groombridge Place in Tonbridge, Kent, England that was the ancestral home of Mrs. Blow's family.[24] The design required the addition of low brick retaining walls around the north and west sides to retain the pre-existing grade around the perimeter trees and shrubs that had been planted during the initial development of the landscape.[25] The main east-west axis of the garden was aligned with the steps to the upper terrace and

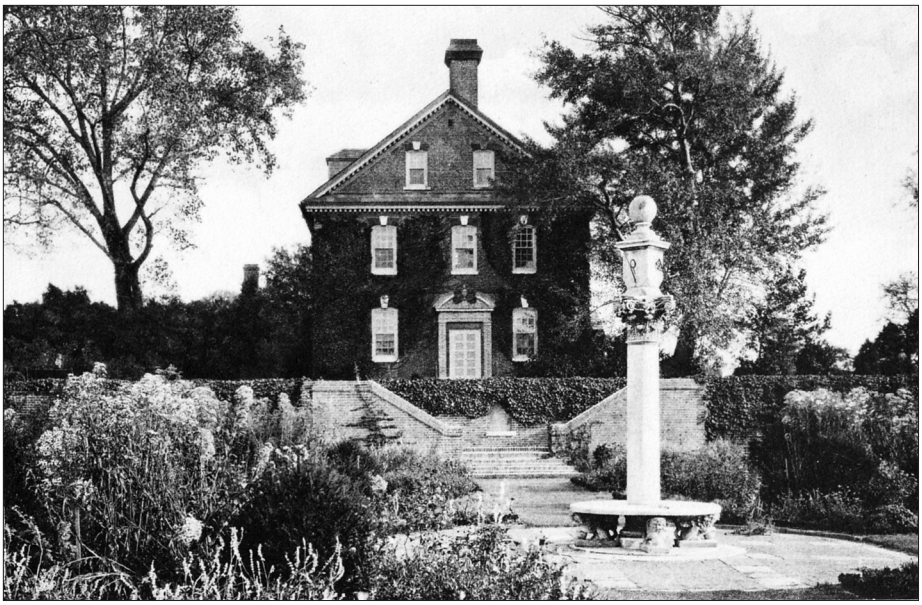


Figure 1.49. A ca. 1927 postcard of the formal garden showing the axial relationship with the stairs to the terrace. The broken-pediment door surround on the Nelson House was added by Mrs. Blow in 1927. (Courtesy of Jane Sundberg.)

west entrance of the house (fig. 1.49). Plantings in the beds were an informal, old-fashioned mixture of flowering perennials and roses contained by borders of clipped dwarf boxwood and brick edging. The Blows obtained an extensive assortment of plants from historic places across Virginia, including Monticello, Westover and Tuckahoe Plantations, Mount Vernon, Bruton Parish Church, the President's House at the College of William and Mary, and Evelyn Byrd's Garden (see Appendix B). The beds were also planted with a profusion of flowering spring bulbs (see Appendix C). In the middle of the center beds were groups of four yews, and the outer corner beds each contained a single specimen tree boxwood. The other beds contained one or two deciduous shrubs in the center. [26]

In addition to the plantings in the formal garden, Gillette's design included a number of built ornamental features. In the center of the garden was an antique stone column sundial and circular bench that the Blows obtained in England (see fig. 1.49). This was surrounded by circular brick and stone paving.[27] Other ornamental furnishings included two Chinese-style covered benches at the north and west ends of the central walks, and stone cherubs on pedestals at the north and west ends of the secondary walks (see fig. 1.48). Two urns on brick piers marked the wide opening to the lawn at the south side of the garden.[28]

Figure 1.50. The rose garden and arbor between the Smith and Ballard Houses built in 1923, looking southeast toward the Ballard House, ca. 1925. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, YOR 016.)

The smaller formal gardens between the Smith and Ballard Houses, completed in 1923 after George P. Blow's death, included a parterre rose garden that was modeled after another garden at Groombridge Place (figs. 1.50, see also fig. 1.45).[29] The rose

garden consisted of symmetrical beds bordered by clipped boxwood and defined by crisscrossing marl paths. At the center of the northern half was a sundial, and in the south half, a birdbath. On the east side of the Rose Garden parallel to the perimeter brick wall, Gillette designed a white-painted wood arbor over a brick walkway to further screen the gardens from the street and provide a structure for climbing roses and other vines.[30] On the south side of the rose garden adjoining the Ballard House, Gillette designed a small, hedge-enclosed garden called the Garden of Pleasant Associations. The interior of this garden consisted of marl paths terminating in a circle. According to a February 1923 plant order from the Philadelphia nursery Henry A. Dreer, the two gardens were planted with 1,000 boxwood plants, fifteen varieties of roses, and eight types of vines, including jasmine, akebia, clematis, wisteria, porcelain berry (ampelopia), sweet pea, and climbing hydrangea, plus climbing roses.[31]

With acquisition of the lots north of Main Street across from the Nelson House between 1919 and 1925, the Blow family improved the landscape into an informal lawn that formed an open-space setting for the house, without formal gardens or major built structures (fig. 1.51, se also fig. 1.48). A clipped privet hedge was

Figure 1.51. Looking east across the York Hall estate showing the tennis court and gazebo on the land east of Main Street, ca. 1925. The gazebo is on top of a Civil War earthwork. In the background is the Yorktown victory monument. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, YOR 1701.)

established along Main Street, with an opening across from the entrance to the terrace. The steep bank down to the river, and the Great Valley along the east side of the property, were left as brush and woods, but the Civil War earthworks were mown. The only structures that the Blows introduced were a fenced tennis court in the middle of the lawn, and a gazebo on top of the earthworks, placed to take advantage of the view across the river.[32]

Figure 1.52. The Nelson House looking north along Pearl (Nelson) Street showing urn finials added to the entrance gates in the 1920s, photographed ca. 1930. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, YOR 018.)

Aside from overseeing completion of the gardens and other landscape improvements, Adele Blow made several changes to buildings and structures at York Hall following her husband's death. At the west entrance of the house, facing the terrace and formal garden, she commissioned New York architect William Lawrence Bottomley to redesign the original doorway, resulting in the addition of an elaborate broken pediment surround of molded brick (see fig. 1.49). Mrs. Blow may also have been responsible for replacing the simple ball finials on the main entrance gate with more elaborate garlanded urns (fig. 1.52).[33]

SECOND-GENERATION BLOW OWNERSHIP, 1929–1968

In September 1929, Adele Blow died and left the York Hall estate to the York Hall Memorial Trust held by her children Adele, George, Frederick, and Richard. For the next five years, the children operated the Nelson House as a museum open to the public, while occupying the Smith House as a seasonal residence. To view both the house and the gardens cost $1.00, or if visitors just wanted to see the gardens, the cost was 50¢. The Blows were not the only ones to open their historic house to the public during this time; the owners of the neighboring "Sessions" and Cole Digges Houses also allowed the public to visit, for a 25¢ admission fee.[34] Under management by the trust, the York Hall landscape was maintained largely as George P. and Adele Blow had developed it over the preceding two decades. A minor change was the addition of a stepping-stone path to the terrace along the wall above the formal garden in ca. 1930. This path provided a paved surface to the flight of steps from the oval entrance drive, perhaps added to facilitate public access (see fig. 1.48).

In ca. 1930, Frances Benjamin Johnston photographed the York Hall estate as part of her Carnegie Survey of the Architecture of the American South. She captured the maturation of Gillette's original landscape design for George P. and Adele Blow, and the character that visitors saw during the estate's brief history as a museum during the early 1930s (figs. 1.53–1.62).

Figures 1.53-1.57. Frances Benjamin Johnston photographs of the York Hall landscape, ca. 1930. Left top: formal garden looking southeast; left middle: formal garden looking west; left bottom: the terrace looking south toward the walk from the oval entrance drive, with the old boxwood hedge in the background. Right top: Looking north along the Smith House (Guest Cottage); right bottom: looking south from the oval entrance drive toward the Smith House. (Library of Congress, Carnegie Survey of the Architecture of the South, images 05724, 05725, 05752, 05753.)

Figures 1.58-1.62. Frances Benjamin Johnston photographs of the York Hall landscape, ca. 1930. Left top: looking west through the boxwood shelter at the Smith House (Guest Cottage); left bottom: looking north through the rose arbor between the Smith and Ballard Houses. Right top: looking north across the rose garden; right middle: the Ballard House (Pearl Cottage), with the Garden of Pleasant Associations at left; right, bottom: the front court garden, looking northeast. (Library of Congress, Carnegie Survey of the Architecture of the South, images 05729, 05731, 05732, 05733, 05749.)

Historic Preservation in Yorktown

The 1930s were a decade of significant change in Yorktown as the federal government joined earlier private restoration and improvement efforts begun by the Blows, Daughters of the American Revolution, and others. The broadening attention to Yorktown's history developed out of the country's increasing interest in its colonial history, and more particularly, by the unprecedented privately-funded restoration and reconstruction of nearby Colonial Williamsburg that began on a large scale in 1927. The sesquicentennial of the Siege of Yorktown in 1931 also bolstered interest in the village's historic buildings and battlefields.

These developments culminated in passage of federal legislation establishing Colonial National Monument in 1930 under the provisions of the Antiquities Act of 1906. The monument, administered by the National Park Service, was subsequently redesignated Colonial National Historical Park in 1936. The purpose of the park was to protect and preserve the colonial buildings and sites in the Historic Triangle of Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Yorktown. The boundaries of the far-flung park encompassed the island of the former Jamestown Colony, portions of the City of Williamsburg, and Yorktown Battlefield including Gloucester Point (across the York River from Yorktown) and Yorktown village. The park's primary mission for Yorktown was commemoration of the Siege of 1781 and America's victory in the Revolutionary War. The park gave secondary consideration to Yorktown's role in the Civil War.[35] A major component of the new park was the limited-access Colonial Parkway linking Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Yorktown. The parkway was completed from Yorktown to just outside Williamsburg by 1937, extending west from the Yorktown Battlefield, with access roads at the southeast end of the village (see fig. 1.29).[36]

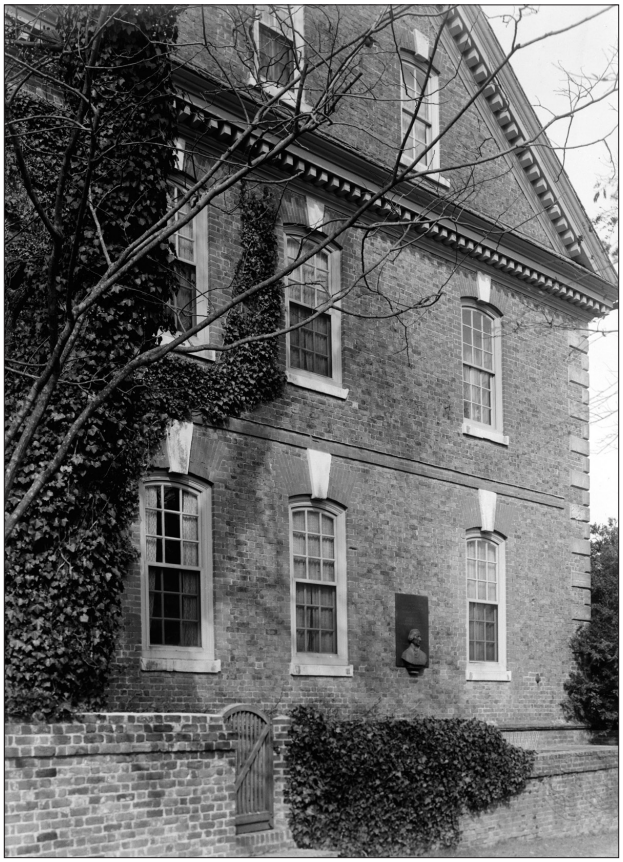


Figure 1.63. The Cornwallis plaque installed on the east side of the Nelson House for the Yorktown sesquicentennial in 1931, looking northeast from Pearl (Nelson) Street, ca. 1931. (Blow photograph, reproduced from Historic American Building Survey, York Hall, HABS VA-100.)

Within Yorktown, federal development of Colonial National Historical Park during the 1930s corresponded with a number of other preservation-related initiatives. Private efforts included the previously mentioned opening of the Nelson House (York Hall), Custom House, "Sessions" House, and Cole Digges House to the public.[37] The Yorktown Sesquicentennial Commission also played a major role in preservation and commemoration efforts, including the installation of a bronze plaque on the east side of the Nelson House, facing Nelson Street (fig. 1.63). The plaque, which featured a bas-relief sculpture of Lord General Cornwallis designed by the American sculptor F. William Sievers (1872–1966), was commissioned to

commemorate the house's purported use by the general during the Siege of Yorktown (a fact that has since been discounted).[38]

The National Park Service originally planned to restore much of the colonial village, but due to funding constraints and limited documentation, instead focused efforts primarily on Main Street and a segment of the waterfront between Read Street and Comte de Grasse Street. During the 1930s, the park service removed nearly all structures from Main Street built after the eighteenth century, adding to the number of vacant lots.[39] Between 1934 and 1935, the park reconstructed the Swan Tavern complex and Griffin Medical Shop, and restored the Somerwell House to its colonial appearance.

Figure 1.64. View looking east above Main Street with the Dudley Digges House undergoing restoration (white building on left of Main Street) the Yorktown Battlefield visitor center under construction in the background, ca. 1960. The York Hall estate is along the lower part of the photograph (Colonial National Historical Park archives, YOR 1655.)

During the post-World War II period, the park largely abandoned plans for major reconstruction in the village, and instead focused on restoration of the Dudley Digges House east of the Nelson House, and construction of a large visitor center on the edge of the battlefield west of the village built as part of the National Park Service's Mission 66 improvement program (fig. 1.64). The other primary colonial buildings along Main Street—the Nelson House, Custom House, Sessions House, and Cole Digges Houses—remained privately owned. The Cole Digges House was acquired in 1946 by the Blow family. [40]

George W. Blow and Katherine Cooke Blow

In ca. 1935, the Blow children dissolved the York Hall Memorial Trust after about five years of existence, and split the remaining endowment. George W. Blow, the eldest son, then bought out his siblings' interest in the property.[41] Like his father, George W. Blow was highly educated, served in the military, and was a successful businessman. He received a bachelor of science in chemistry and architecture, and a master of business administration from Harvard Business School. While in the Navy, he held the rank of Second Lieutenant during World War I and Lieutenant Commander during World War II. Prior to World War II, he worked for the New York architectural firm of Huzhak and Hill, and later became a partner in the firm of DeVaulchier, Blow and Wilmet. After World War II, he worked for his father and then succeeded him at the Matthiessen Hegeler Zinc Company in Illinois. He married Katherine Rowland Cooke in December 1922. They had four children, George, Michael, Anthony, and John.[42]

Katherine Cooke Blow also had an impressive business and public service career, beginning as a staff writer for the *New Yorker*. During World War II, she served as publicity director for the women's division of the Virginia War Finance Committee, and was a member of the International Secretariat of the United Nations Conference on International Organization held in San Francisco in 1945. Mrs. Blow was a member of the Virginia Democratic State Central Committee, a trustee for the Town of York, a member of the Yorktown Day Association, and a member of the board of trustees of the Williamsburg Community Hospital. She unsuccessfully ran for seats in the Virginia House of Delegates in 1949 and the U.S. House of Representatives in 1950. Continuing the family's interest in history and preservation, she served as a trustee of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which was chartered in 1949.[43]

Design Refinements and Additions, 1935–1968

After George W. Blow consolidated his ownership in York Hall, he converted the estate from a seasonal country place and museum to a full-time residence for his family, and periodically rented the Smith House, Ballard House, and Wisteria Cottage to family members and friends.[44] During their ownership, George and Katherine Blow maintained the York Hall landscape much as the elder Blows had left it, including the elaborate plantings in the formal gardens. They did, however, add a number of features that reflected the shift toward recreation and outdoor living in residential landscapes during the mid-twentieth century. These changes also related to the family's four children and year-round use of the property. The Blows retained Charles Gillette, who continued to maintain a busy Richmond practice, to design their improvements and manage seasonal plantings throughout their ownership into the 1960s.

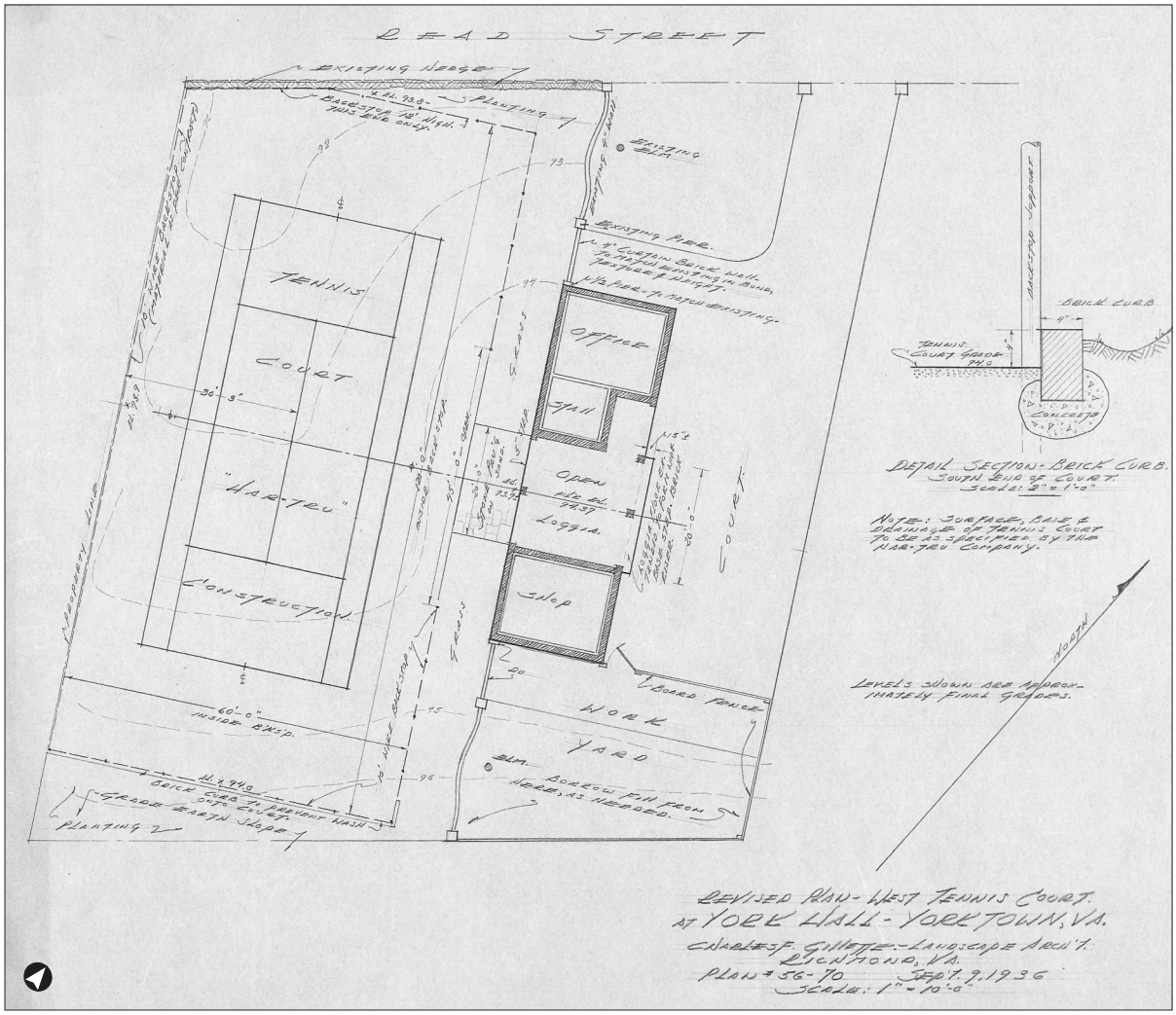


Figure 1.65. Charles Gillette's plan for a tennis court at the former service yard south of the stable, 1936. Brick walls were subsequent built to create smaller work yards at the sides of the stable. (Colonial National Historical Park archives, 990341.)

One of the Blows' first improvements was the construction of a one-car garage south of the main entrance on Pearl (Nelson) Street in ca. 1935. This building, which required an opening in the brick perimeter wall, allowed Katherine Blow easy access to her car from the house.[45] The following year, plans were underway for building a new tennis court in the service yard south of the stable to replace the tennis court north of Main Street.[46] To provide a buffer to the south of the new tennis court, George W. Blow purchased the north half of lot 51 in August 1936 (see fig. 1.29). By September of that year, Charles Gillette had finalized his design for the tennis court, which featured a paved surface (marketed under the name "Har-Tru") and a perimeter wire-fence backstop, with a brick curb along the east side to direct drainage (fig. 1.65). A preexisting hedge was kept along Read Street and new plantings were made on the east end of the court. Along the south side of the stable, Gillette specified small lawn panels with stone paving leading into the building. The open center bays of the stable were used as a loggia that provided a passage from the service drive and main part of the estate, and the former service drives to either side of the stable were closed off by extensions of the brick serpentine walls. As a replacement for the lost service yard, Gillette designed a

Figure 1.66. Looking southeast across the ca. 1946 swimming pool and flagstone patio south of the formal garden during annual maintenance, ca. 1960. The identity of the person is not known. The murals were purportedly painted by artist Pierre Bourdelle. (Courtesy of Anthony Blow.)

smaller work yard off the east side of the stable.[47] At a later date, two even smaller yards were created to the north and south of the stable through the addition of brick walls, creating enclosed spaces framed by the older serpentine walls to the south. The final addition to this area was two small lean-to greenhouses along the south side of the stable that were completed in ca. 1950.[48]

The Blows undertook a number of other landscape changes in the years after World War II. In ca. 1945, they removed the two Chinese-style roofed benches in the formal garden and extended and expanded the brick pad from the west bench into a circular brick patio surrounding a red-cedar tree. A fireplace was installed against the perimeter wall, and there was most likely casual furniture set out on the patio. The next year, the Blows built a small rectangular swimming pool at the entrance to the formal garden from the lawn (see pencil annotation on fig. 1.45). The concrete pool walls were painted with murals and a flagstone patio was laid along the south side (fig. 1.66).[49] A crape-myrtle hedge was planted south of the pool, blocking views from the main lawn. As one of his last garden designs on the estate, Charles Gillette laid out a small pansy garden north of the Smith House, off the south walk from the entrance drive.[50] Completed in 1946, the pansy garden was shallow sunken rectangular terrace, two steps below the level of the access walk and enclosed by brick retaining walls. A set of steps led to a side door on the Smith House.[51]

Over the two decades following completion of the swimming pool and pansy garden, the Blow family made relatively few changes to the York Hall landscape. Charles Gillette continued to advise the family on maintenance issues and plant selection.[52] By the 1960s, changes in family dynamics and finances portended the demise of York Hall as a private residence. In October 1960, George W. Blow died at age 70, and Katherine passed away five years later in March 1965 at 68. For the following three years, their son Tony lived at York Hall while he and his siblings made plans to sell the property to its future steward, the National Park Service.[53]

LANDSCAPE SUMMARY, 1914–1968 (DRAWING 1.3)

By 1968, the landscape of the Nelson House grounds had undergone extensive change since its acquisition by the Blow family in 1914, transformed from a vacant and derelict house surrounded by overgrown grounds into a highly designed Colonial Revival-style country place that resurrected a Nelson family name for the property, York Hall. Although not an academic restoration, the Blows' treatment of the house and landscape preserved many of the property's historic features. The surrounding landscape of Yorktown's Main Street had also been transformed through private efforts and National Park Service work that demolished many

buildings, reconstructed several lost colonial buildings, and restored a few others. The addition of the Colonial Parkway south of the village in the 1930s, and the addition of US Route 17 and its bridge across the York River in 1952, integrated the once isolated village into a growing metropolitan area that included Williamsburg, Hampton, and Newport News.

The York Hall estate in 1968 included the lots north of Main Street that historically contained the William Nelson House and Nelson stores, as well as the Civil War earthworks along the bluff above the York River. Although the Blows had maintained a tennis court here in the early twentieth century, it was removed after the 1930s—probably after the new tennis court was built behind the stable in 1936—and the landscape maintained as open space, lined by trees, shrubs, and a clipped hedge along Main Street. Woods had grown up along the Great Valley ravine, limiting the once expansive view of the York River from the Nelson House. It is not known if the pavilion on the Civil War earthwork still stood in 1968.

Along Read Street, the Custom House, owned by the Daughters of the American Revolution, was one of Yorktown's primary restored colonial buildings. A walled colonial-style garden extended from the back of the building, bordering Read Street. To the south were the York Hall estate nursery and garden lots (lots 43 and 44) acquired by the Blows in the 1920s. These were most likely no longer used for their original estate purpose by the 1960s. Along Nelson Street, then known as Pearl Street, a row of private houses lined the east side of the street, opposite the Smith and Ballard Houses. These were built between 1920 and 1949. Separating these houses from the "Sessions" House on Main Street was a cultivated field.

The Smith and Ballard lots (lots 53 and 54) remained a part of the York Hall estate in 1968 and formed an integral part of the overall landscape, defining the east side of the central lawn and connected to the Nelson House and the other estate outbuildings by brick, marl, and stepping-stone walks. The former lot lines were no longer evident, except the old Smith-Nelson boundary that was bordered by a line of old boxwoods in the back court. In contrast to its colonial setting, the Smith House faced away from the street, separated by the perimeter estate wall, and with its main entrance facing west toward the lawn. The three formal gardens around the Smith and Ballard Houses—the pansy garden, rose garden, and Garden of Pleasant Associations—remained, although by 1968 they were most likely no longer maintained to their former high standards following the death of Katherine Blow.

The remainder of the York Hall landscape within the Nelson House grounds retained its Charles Gillette-designed landscape, an inward-oriented property separated from the village by high brick walls, trees, and shrubs. The central lawn served as a unifying space to the formal gardens and buildings along the perimeter. The main parts of the landscape included the forecourt, the former

back court that contained the main entrance drive to the estate, with its entrance on Pearl (Nelson) Street framed by tall brick piers with urn finials. The oval drive led to the rear entrance to the house and intersected walks leading to the terrace and formal garden, and the Smith House. The clipped boxwood borders, shrubs, and groundcover around the drive gave the landscape a lush character. The most recent addition was Mrs. Katherine Blow's garage built south of the drive gates in ca. 1935.

At the Main Street front of the Nelson House was the front court garden that was built in 1921 and was still enclosed by aged boxwood hedges that may have dated back to the eighteenth century. These hedges screened much of the Nelson House from Main Street, and the original entrance walk from Main Street no longer existed. Within the garden was a small reflecting pool surrounded by a brick terrace and garden furnishings. A walk led west to the terrace on the west side of the Nelson House that was built on the site of the old Nelson service yard. Brick walks framed the perimeter of the terrace, which provided views across the formal garden, accessed by a paired flight of steps in a buttressed brick wall.

The formal garden, built in 1922, retained much of its original design and plantings, although by 1968 it was most likely not maintained to its former high standards following the death of Katherine Blow. The garden may have lost some of its dwarf boxwood borders and the center yews had become quite large, covering parts of the herbaceous beds. The small brick patio and fireplace at the west end of the garden, an addition from ca. 1946, replaced one of two original Chinese-style covered benches. The other was also removed, leaving the underlying brick pad. At the south approach to the garden was the swimming pool, flagstone patio, and a hedge of crape-myrtle that blocked the originally open transition to the lawn. The groundcover in this area had expanded, leaving just a narrow walk between the formal garden and the lawn.

Aside from these changes near the formal garden, the lawn retained much of the character that Charles Gillette had designed in the early 1920s. Located within the old Nelson garden and open lots, the lawn was bordered on the west by the garage (carriage house) and gardener's cottage (Wisteria Cottage), and on the east by the Smith and Ballard Houses. Scattered specimen trees and shrubs filled out the perimeter. The south side of the lawn was planted with trees and shrubs to screen the service area with its stable building, accessed by a drive from Read Street. Originally a utilitarian landscape, the service area in 1968 featured a tennis court added in 1936 on the south side of the stable. This replaced the original service yard that was screened by serpentine brick walls to either side of the stable. These walls framed two small service yards added in ca. 1945, and at the back of the stable were two lean-to greenhouses added in ca. 1950.

ENDNOTES

1 U.S. Naval Department, Naval Weapons Support Facility webpage, http://www.cnic.navy.mil/Yorktown/AboutCNIC/GeneralInformation/MineDepot/index.htm (accessed August 2010).

2 Comte de Grasse Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, "Yorktown Custom House," http://www.comtedegrasse-dar.org/customhouse.html (accessed May 2011); 1922 aerial photograph showing bank building, photograph YOR 1701, Colonial National Historical Park archives; "Outline of Development, Colonial National Monument, Yorktown, Virginia" (Unpublished National Park Service report, July 12, 1933), 100, 102, 106.

3 Arlington National Cemetery, "George P. Blow Lieutenant United States Navy" http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/goblow.htm (accessed June 2008).

4 Marilyn Harper and John Blow, ed., "What it Ought to Have Been: Three Case Studies of Early Restoration Work in Virginia" (Abridged M.A. Thesis, The George Washington University, 1989), 12.

5 Harper, 12. At the time, George P. Blow was only able to attain a lease for the two lots because a rumor was circulating that the railroad was coming to town and several land holders wanted to retain their lands in the hopes their property values increased.

6 Annotated Yorktown lot map showing Blow property acquisitions, Colonial National Historical Park.

7 Harper, 17; Blow Family Photographs, Colonial National Historical Park archives. No information was found on Griffin & Wynkoop; neither partner nor the firm are listed in the American Institute of Architects Historical Directory of American Architects, http://communities.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/Wiki%20Pages/Find%20Names.aspx (accessed August 4, 2011). In 1913, just prior to the Blow commission, the firm had completed a neoclassical-style building for the United Hospital of Port Chester (New York).

8 Harper, 17. By 1917, all of the buildings on the estate had water, electricity, and gas service through a connection in the garage basement. Also installed on the buildings was a system of copper gutters, downspouts, and drain tiles that carried water to a cistern located within the garage, a shallow well east of the garage, and a septic tank and leach field located west of the Nelson House.

9 George P. Blow to Charles F. Gillette, 1922, copy in Charles Gillette Papers, Record Group 56, George P. Blow Correspondence folder n.d., Architecture Division, Library of Virginia (hereafter, "Gillette Papers"); George and Anthony Blow, interview by Bryne D. Riley, March 8, 2008. George and Anthony Blow believed the bell that hung on the chimney of the garage was actually a ship's bell from one of the Naval ships their grandfather commanded. They also assumed that a clock in the Nelson House was wired to the bell so that it would chime out the time.

10 Harper, 23.

11 Griffin and Wynkoop, "Stable for Mrs. George Blow," June 21, 1916, Colonial National Historic Park archives, COLO 990341.

12 Harper, 27.

13 Library of Virginia, "Gillette Client Description Search Results." A 1915 grading plan is the first dated Charles Gillette plan found for York Hall.

14 George C. Longest, *Genius in the Garden Charles F. Gillette & Landscape Architecture in Virginia* (Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Virginia, 1992), 3–15, 27–28.

15 Charles Gillette's association with the Blow family and York Hall began ca. 1915, with his last known plan for the estate dated December 6, 1946. His personal and professional correspondence with the Blow family continued until 1967, two years after Katherine Blow's death. Gillette died two years later in March 1969.

16 Charles Gillette, "Plot Plan" in "Restoration of a Southern Colonial Estate 'York Hall' the Residence of Captain George P. Blow, Yorktown, Va.," *Architectural Forum,* vol. 35, no. 6 (December 1921), 212; Blow Family Photographs, ca. 1915–21.

17 Gillette Papers, George P. Blow Correspondence. This correspondence between Charles Gillette, George P. Blow, numerous suppliers and workmen, members of the Blow and Gillette staff, and many others concerned the development

of York Hall between 1922 and 1968. A photostat of Charles Gillette, *York Hall, Yorktown, Va. A Sketch of General Plan of Arrangement*, ca. 1922, also aided in the description of the landscape.

18 Dates of lot purchases are based on an annotated Yorktown lot map, Colonial National Historical Park.

19 Harper, 26.

20 Charles F. Gillette to Charles A. Alpin, March 21, 1922, copy in Gillette Papers, George P. Blow Correspondence folder 1922-March. An invoice from the Clay Products Corporation of Hampton, Va. indicates an order for 35,000 bricks for use at York Hall. The bricks were likely intended for use in the construction of the terrace retaining wall and steps, the formal garden's southern wing walls, the terrace's brick paths, and the southern knee walls of the terrace.

21 Charles F. Gillette to George P. Blow, January 13, 1922, Gillette Papers, George P. Blow Correspondence folder 1922-January.

22 Gillette to Blow, January 13, 1922.

23 George P. Blow to Charles F. Gillette, March 29, 1922, Gillette Papers, George P. Blow Correspondence folder 1922-March. Blow drew a rough sketch of his idea of retaining walls around the boxwood trees. He felt the wall would help protect the roots of the trees and keep the roots well covered and moist.

24 Groombridge Place Gardens and Enchanted Forest, "The Groombridge Timeline" http://www.groombridge.co.uk/his_time.htm (accessed March 2008).

25 Charles A. Alpin to Charles F. Gillette. October 30, 1922, Gillette Papers, George P. Blow Correspondence folder 1922-October-December.

26 George P. Blow to Charles F. Gillette, 1922, Gillette Papers, George P. Blow Correspondence folder n.d. No plant orders or other record of plant species in the original development of the formal garden was found.

27 George P. Blow to T. Growther & Son, March 31, 1922, Gillette Papers, George P. Blow Correspondence folder 1922-March.

28 Montague Manufacturing Company Lumber & Woodwork in Richmond, Virginia to George P. Blow Estate, invoice no. 40488, December 2, 1922, Gillette Papers, George P. Blow Correspondence folder 1922-October-December.

29 Charles F. Gillette to George P. Blow, January 13, 1922, Gillette Papers, George P. Blow Correspondence folder 1922-January.

30 Library of Virginia, "Gillette Client Description Search Results" http://www.lva.virginia.gov/findaid/gillette/clientnameresults.asp?clientname=blow&Submit=Search+within+Client+Name.

31 Harper, 20; Blow Estate order from Henry A. Dreer, Inc., February 23, 1923. The rose varieties included *General McArthur, Los Angeles, Old Gold, Hermosa, Moss Gracilis, Moss Princess Adeliade, American Pillar Climbing, Dr. Van Fleet, Gloire de Dijon, Lady Ashton, Emily Gray, Taugendshon, Caroline Teacut,* std*, Frau Karl Druschki,* and *Gruss an Teplits*.

32 Charles F. Gillette to the Heffelfinger Company, November 8 1922, Gillette Papers, George P. Blow Correspondence folder 1922-October-December.

33 Blow Family Photographs, ca. 1916–30.

34 July 1, 1930 Indenture between Adele Blow and her children Adele Blow Chatfield-Tyler, George W. Blow, Frederick Matthiessen Blow, and Richard A. Blow, Colonial National Historical Park Library; Harper, 24; National Park Service, "Outline of Development Colonial National Monument Yorktown, Virginia" (Unpublished National Park Service report, July 12, 1933), 100, 106. The cited admission fees are from 1933.

35 B. Floyd Flickinger, "Historical Methods Used in the Development of Colonial National Monument," *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine*, 2nd Ser., vol. 16, No. 3 (July 1936), 353.

36 "Outline of Development Colonial National Monument," 25–26. In 1932, a Sesquicentennial Celebration of the Allied victory at Yorktown took place in the park.

37 "Outline of Development Colonial National Monument," 25–26, 100, 106.

38 Kathleen Manley, *History of Yorktown and its Victory Celebrations* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2005), 50.

39 National Park Service and Heritage Landscapes, Inc., "Cultural Landscape Inventory [CLI], Yorktown" (Unpublished National Park Service report, 1999, Revised 2006), 18–22.

40 Yorktown CLI, 18–22.

41 Charles F. Gillette to John J. Melrose, August 27, 1945, Gillette Papers, George W. Blow Correspondence folder 1942-1946.

42 Arlington National Cemetery, "George W. Blow Lieutenant Commander United States Navy," http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/gwblow.htm (accessed September 2010).

43 Arlington National Cemetery, "George W. Blow Lieutenant Commander United States Navy," "Katherine Blow, 68, Ex-Magazine Writer."

44 Katherine Blow to Charles F. Gillette, August 31, 1944, Gillette Papers, George W. Blow Correspondence folder 1942–1946.

45 George and Anthony Blow, interview by Bryne D. Riley, March 8, 2008. No photographs of this building were found.

46 Charles F. Gillette to Mr. John Melrose, August 27, 1945, Gillette Papers, George W. Blow Correspondence folder 1942–1946.

47 Charles Gillette, "West Tennis Court at York Hall, Yorktown, Va." (plan), 1936, Colonial National Historical Park archives, COLO 990341.

48 Jane Sundberg, Cultural Resource Management Specialist (retired), Colonial National Historical Park, communication to authors, March 21, 2011. The National Park Service removed these greenhouses in ca. 1980. They do not appear on the 1922 Gillette plan of York Hall, or the 1936 Gillette plan of the tennis court and stable.

49 George and Anthony Blow, interview by Bryne D. Riley, March 8, 2008. Noted muralist Pierre Bourdelle (1903–1966), an assistant of August Rodin, purportedly painted the murals on the pool walls. Katherine Blow was a patron of Bourdelle's and had a painting of the Nelson House made by him prior to the pool construction.

50 George and Anthony Blow, interview by Bryne D. Riley, March 8, 2008.

51 Black Line Print, Eugene George and Southside Historical Sites Inc., "Grading and Drainage Plan" in "Grounds Development Smith, Ballard Nelson Houses" (NPS Project No. 4290-5242), Yorktown Battlefield Maintenance files. No photographs of the Pansy Garden have been found.

52 Gillette Papers, George W. Blow Correspondence folder 1942–1946, 1942–1967.

53 Mark Wenger, ed., *Architectural Analysis of the Nelson House Yorktown, Virginia Volume III: Research Assessment, Draft* (National Park Service, Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown, VA., 2003), 124.

Cultural Landscape Report
Nelson House Grounds

Colonial National Historical Park
Yorktown, Virginia

York Hall Estate Period
1914–1968

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

in partnership with
Department of Landscape Architecture
SUNY College of Environmental
Science and Forestry, www.esf.edu/la/

SOURCES

1. Blow Photograph Collection, Colonial National Historical Park
2. Colonial National Historical Park Archival Photographs
3. NPS GIS File , Colonial National Historical Park
4. NPS, Grounds Development plan, 1975
5. Gillette, York Hall General Plan, ca.1915, 1923
6. Aerial photographs, 1951, 1963
7. Field Survey, October 2008, January 2010

DRAWN BY

Bryne D. Riley, John Auwaerter, Illustrator CS5, 2011

LEGEND

- Building
- Deciduous tree / Tall shrub
- Evergreen tree / Shrub
- Low shrub or woody groundcover
- Turf / other groundcover
- Garden or cultivated field
- Paved street
- Road or walk (earth/gravel, marl, or brick)
- Fence
- Brick wall
- York Hall property line / Yorktown lot line
- 2' contour line
- (1923) Date feature added or removed during period
- Feature removed during period (dashed line)

NOTES

1. All features shown in approximate scale and location.
2. Plan shows landscape at end of period in 1968, prior to removal of garden furnishings.
3. Features without dates built in prior period.
4. Plan does not show all species or changes in vegetation.
5. CLR project area consists of lots 48-50, 52; landscape details outside of project area not illustrated except at Smith and Ballard lots.

Plan North
True North

0' 35' 70'

Drawing 1.3

Key to Garden Furnishings

1. Sundial - bench (ca.1922)
2. Site of Chinese-style covered benches (ca.1922–1945)
3. Cherub statues on pedestals (ca.1921)
4. Urns on piers (ca.1921)
5. Lion's-head fountain (ca.1930)
6. Cherub table (ca.1921)
7. Front court benches (ca.1921)
8. Goddess statues on pedestals (ca.1920)
9. Cast-iron benches (ca.1917)
10. Bird bath (ca.1923)
11. Sun dial (ca.1923)
12. Garden seat (ca.1923)
13. Chinese temple bell (ca.1923)

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PERIOD, 1968–PRESENT

In 1968, the National Park Service acquired the York Hall estate from the Blow family for $2,777,000, beginning a period of major changes to the Colonial Revival landscape in its new use as part of Colonial National Historical Park.[1] Soon after acquisition, the park studied the history of the buildings and developed a strategy to return the estate to its colonial-era appearance. Most of the major rehabilitation work occurred in time for the Bicentennial of the 1781 Siege of Yorktown and British surrender. This work involved the removal of several features installed by the Blow family and reestablished the division of the William Nelson, Smith, and Ballard lots. These changes, at present, depict a landscape with a mixture of colonial and Colonial Revival character.

Figure 1.67. Main Street looking northeast from the Nelson House showing park features including lights, street signs, fences, and interpretive signs, 2007. The fencing is at the head of Great Valley. (SUNY ESF.)

Park restoration and rehabilitation in Yorktown continued along Main Street during this period, primarily focused on the York Hall properties. Interpretative signage, benches, trash cans, stacked-rail fences, street signs, and colonial-style lights provided visitor amenities and reinforced Main Street's identity as a historical park area within the village (fig. 1.67). Outside of Main Street, Yorktown remained a mix of past and present during this period—a partially restored Main Street within a largely residential community and a redeveloped commercial area along the waterfront.

THE NELSON HOUSE IN COLONIAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

The York Hall estate provided the National Park Service with the property it needed to maintain colonial-era continuity in the core of Yorktown's historic district along Main Street.[2] The park purchased the entire estate from lots 42 to 85 along Main Street, and lots 119 to 129 along the waterfront (fig. 1.68). The Nelson lots, in particular those along Main Street, secured one of the most important village blocks under park control. The remaining lots also allowed the park to expand its interpretation opportunities and visitor amenities. The 1970 unearthing of William Rogers' colonial-period pottery works on lot 51, for instance, provided more detail about Yorktown's colonial history. In addition, the park's acquisition of lots 44 and 45 gave the park space for visitor parking close to the core of the village. The parking lot was completed in ca. 1980 and extended onto the adjoining lots to the west fronting on Church Street. The park leased the Cole

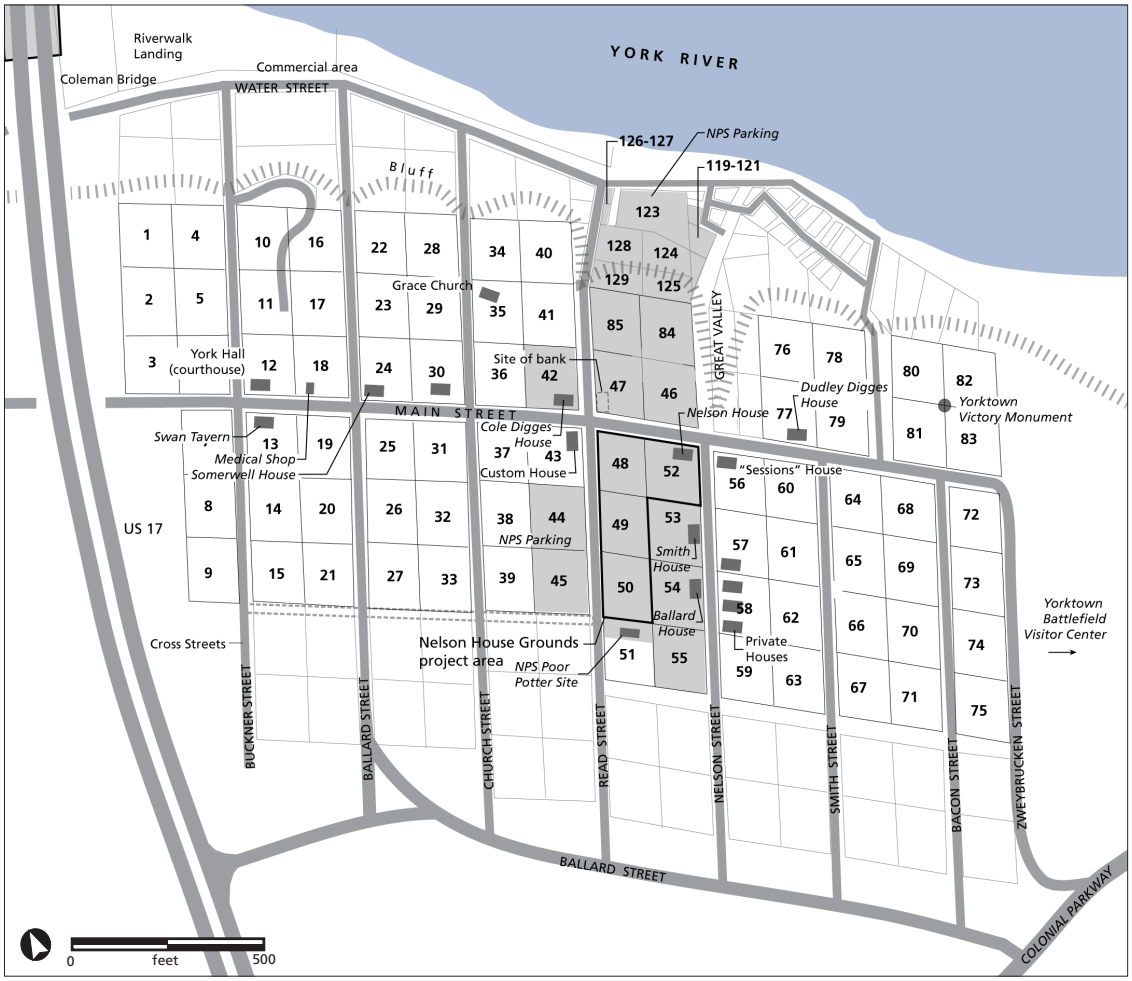


Figure 1.68. Map of Yorktown showing the York Hall property acquired by the National Park Service in 1968 (shaded gray), and location of the parking area and Poor Potter Site developed near the Nelson House grounds. The labels in italics indicate park service-owned property. (SUNY ESF.)

Digges House on lot 46, also then known as the Pate House, to a concession for use as a restaurant.

The sale did not include Blow family furnishings in the house or landscape. Prior to the closing, the Blows removed the garden ornaments and either sold them at auction or donated them. Features removed from the core of the estate included urns, sculptures, and furniture located in the front and back courts, formal garden, and rose garden.[3]

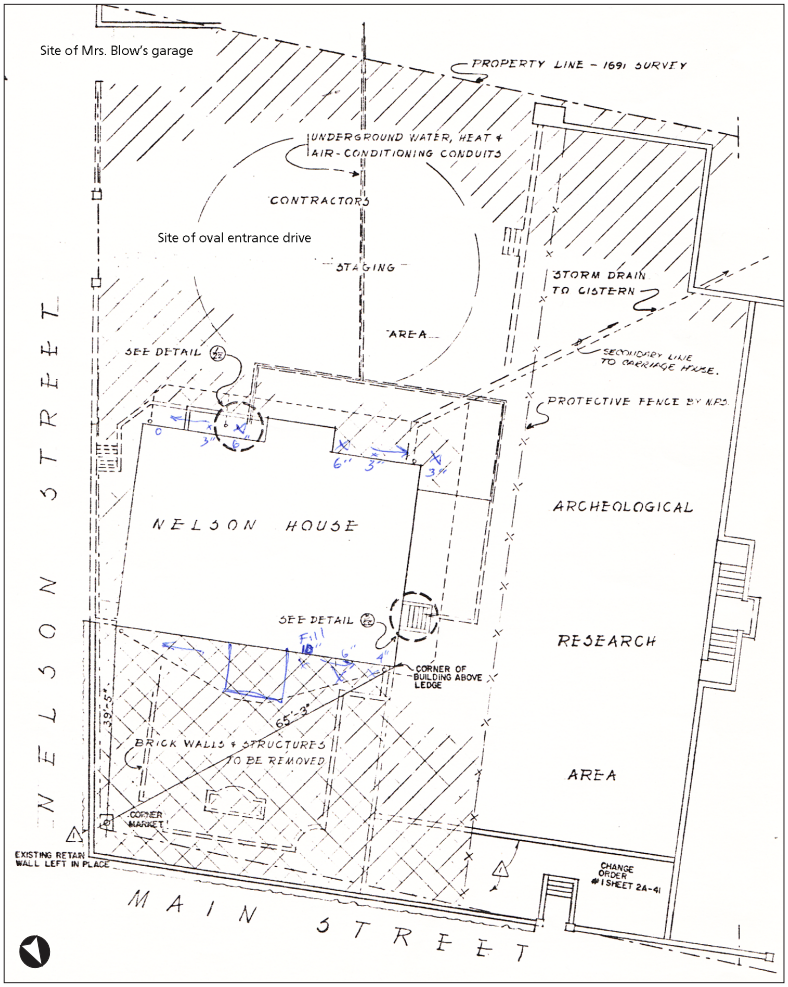
REHABILITATION OF THE NELSON HOUSE AND LANDSCAPE, 1968–1981

Work on the Nelson House property occurred in two phases that began soon after park acquisition in 1968 and were completed prior to the bicentennial celebration of the Siege of Yorktown in 1981. Some of the work was completed in time for the 1976 national bicentennial, when the Nelson House was opened to the public, with tours provided by colonial-attired actors (see fig. 1.71).

The first phase, encompassing research, archeological investigation, and partial conversion to park use, occurred between 1968 and 1974. During this time, the

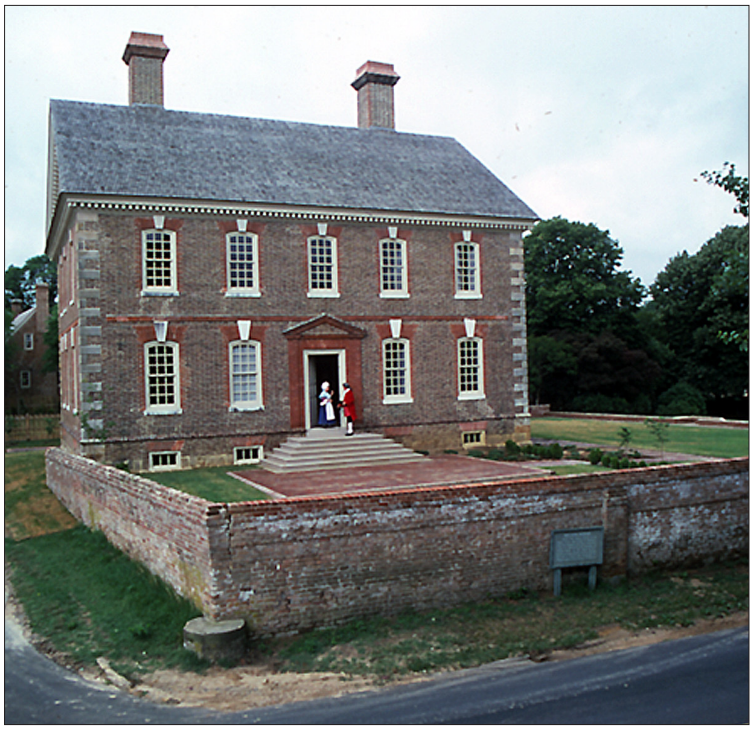
Figure 1.69. The Nelson House and lowered boxwood hedge looking south across Main Street, June 1972. At the front of the ivy-covered wall is a park interpretive sign. (Richard Frear, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center.)

Figure 1.70. National Park Service plan dated 1974 showing the terrace as the site of archeological research, and the extent of planned and completed removals in the front and back courts. The blue notations are later annotations. (Colonial National Historical Park maintenance files, annotated by SUNY ESF).



garage became offices for park rangers, which involved removal of the original garage doors, paving of the apron, and installation of a steel fire escape on the south side of the building. During this time, the park maintained the landscape and made some minor changes, such as removing or pruning portions of the old boxwood hedge in the front court to open views of the house from Main Street (fig. 1.69). Between 1972 and 1974, the park completed several studies for the property, beginning with Historic Structure Reports for the Nelson, Smith, and Ballard Houses.[4] These reports documented the history and existing conditions of the buildings and determined a treatment strategy to restore them to their colonial appearance. In 1974, the park completed an archeological study of the terrace to understand the colonial service yard (fig. 1.70). This study uncovered several historic building foundations, wall fragments, and traces of marl drives. No testing was undertaken in the front court, where the garden pool and walks were to be removed, or in the back court, which was designated as a contractor staging area for the restoration of the house.[5]

Upon completion of the studies, the park developed a rehabilitation strategy for the Nelson House grounds and the adjacent York Hall lots. In 1974, the park hired architect Eugene George, AIA, of Austin, Texas, and Southside Historical Sites at the College of William and Mary, to prepare a rehabilitation plan.[6] The plan called for an accurate restoration of the exterior of the house, and redesign of the front court, back court, and terrace to provide a compatible, contemporary landscape setting. Due to lack of documentation,



restoration of these areas was not considered feasible. After receiving public input, the plan recommended that the park keep most of the York Hall estate perimeter walls and outbuildings except for the ca. 1935 garage, retain the formal garden and terrace, remove landscape features not overtly twentieth-century in character, and make modern infrastructure improvements. The plan also recommended that the park convert the stable into storage and park office space, and rehabilitate the Smith and Ballard Houses into residences for park staff.

The first phase of construction involved removal of the entrance drive, Mrs. Blow's garage, wall along Nelson Street, and walks in the back court and terrace (see fig. 1.70). Around the same time, the park removed much of the vegetation surrounding the house, including the remaining boxwood hedges in the front court and in the back court along the Smith lot boundary.

At the Nelson House, the restoration removed the dormers, slate roof, and the basement door on the west side of the house. At the front court, the park removed the brick terrace and pool, and also lowered the grade

Figure 1.71. The recently restored Nelson House with its front court showing the new steps, walks, and boxwood hedge, looking southwest, ca. 1976. The perimeter brick wall had not yet been lowered. (Richard Freer, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center.)

Figure 1.72. The back court and south side of the Nelson House looking northwest showing restored openings in the brick porch, wood fences, and initial plantings, May 1977. (Richard Freer, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center.)

Figure 1.73. The restored west entrance and adjoining terrace with new plantings, looking northeast, ca. 1977. The fence at right delineated the back court. (Colonial National Historical Park).

to reveal the full height of the basement windows, which required removal of the circular stone steps (fig. 1.71). The change revealed foundation blocks that were most likely below ground in the colonial period. New rectangular stone steps were installed along with a large brick landing and a brick walk to the terrace. The park did not reestablish the walk to Main Street, but instead maintained the terrace entrance as the main pedestrian access to the site. Boxwood shrubs were planted to reestablish the hedge, and the rest of the court was sodded. Later, the park lowered the brick wall around the front court to its original, ca. 1870 height.[7]

At the back court, the park restored the steps and arched openings in the entry porch, and erected unpainted wood fences to set the area apart from Nelson Street and the terrace (fig. 1.72). On the Nelson Street side of the house, the park relocated the 1931 Cornwallis plaque to the inside of the perimeter wall in the formal garden. On the west side of the house, the park replaced the entry steps and removed the 1927 pedimented entrance surround to restore the original flat brick arch (fig. 1.73). At the adjoining terrace, the grade was lowered, requiring removal of the top of the garden wall and steps on the walks to the back court and Main Street. New brick walks were installed in a layout similar to the York Hall design, providing access to Main Street, the front court, back court, and formal garden.[8]

In the formal garden, the park removed plantings and some built features, but maintained the basic structure of the landscape (fig. 1.74). The swimming pool and flagstone patio were removed, along with the sundial base and the ca. 1946 fireplace, leaving its iron base. The circular brick patio was retained as a platform to view the relocated Cornwallis plaque. In the garden beds, the park removed

Figure 1.74. The formal garden looking west from the terrace showing replaced boxwood hedges and flowering plants in the beds, September 1979. The groups of yews in the center of the beds were later replaced with rose of sharon shrubs. (Fred Bell, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center.)

the boxwood borders and the overgrown yew shrubs in the center of the beds. New boxwood hedges were planted around the beds, in place of the original dwarf boxwood hedges, and the yews were replanted in the center of the beds. Perennials, including iris, peonies, and narcissus, were retained. Initially, new flowering plants were maintained in some of the beds.[9]

In the York Hall lawn, the park divided the space by erecting colonial-style paling (picket) fences along the boundaries of the Smith and Ballard lots (fig. 1.75). The stepping-stone paths were removed along with many of the shrubs along Read Street. The ca. 1946 crape-myrtle hedge was retained, presumably to screen the lawn area, which was intended as the park's utility area, from the formal garden. The park installed underground electrical conduits and sewer connections across the lawn from Read Street to the Nelson House, and air conditioning condensers and a below ground propane tank were placed south of the garage adjoining the perimeter wall. These units were screened by a new lattice brick wall.[10]

Figure 1.75. Fences erected along the colonial boundaries in the York Hall lawn, looking southwest toward the Ballard House, 1979. The roof of the reconstructed Ballard dairy is visible at far right. (Fred Bell, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center.)

At the York Hall service area, the park retained the small brick-enclosed service yards to either side of the stable, the service drive, and the shrubs and trees that screened the area from the lawn. The passage through the stable was retained, but the 1936 tennis court and ca. 1950 greenhouses were removed and the area kept as lawn as part of the adjoining Poor Potter Site.[11]

The park undertook rehabilitation of the William Nelson, Smith and Ballard lots at the same time as work was underway at the Nelson House grounds. At the William Nelson lots, the park demolished the ca. 1923 bank building and returned the lot to open field, but kept the York Hall clipped privet hedge along Main Street. At the Smith lot, the park removed all of the Colonial Revival garden features, including the boxwood shelter, the brick walk, stepping stone paths, perimeter brick walk along Nelson Street, the pansy garden, rose garden, and the rose garden arbor. On the Ballard lot, the park removed the Garden of Pleasant Associations, the stepping stone path, the remainder of the perimeter brick wall, and the hedge that enclosed the yard north of the house.

Rehabilitation of the Smith and Ballard lots involved restoration of the building exteriors, including returning the Smith House front entrance to the Nelson Street facade, and removal of an exterior basement entrance at the Ballard House. New features were added to the landscape to accommodate planned uses as staff residences and enhance the historic setting. These features included patios at the backs of the houses and paling fences along the historic lot boundaries. Small,

one-story frame buildings with hipped roofs were built at the rear of the Smith and Ballard Houses, one representing a dairy, and the other a smokehouse (see fig. 1.75). These buildings were not accurate reconstructions, but were located on the sites of historic outbuildings.

SITE MAINTENANCE, 1981–PRESENT

In the years after the 1981 Yorktown Bicentennial and completion of work on the Nelson House grounds, the National Park Service faced budget cuts and staff attrition. As a result, the park limited maintenance and sought the help of volunteers to complete basic needs. Over the past thirty years, these volunteers assisted with weekly lawn mowing and the monthly trimming of formal garden vegetation under the guidance of National Park Service staff. The beds retained few herbaceous plants, primarily long-lived peonies, iris, and narcissus remaining from the Blow years. The beds of flowering plants initially introduced by the park were not maintained. Volunteers instead planted some Yorktown onion and roses, but most of the beds were kept in mown cover (grasses and weeds). In ca. 1985, the park replaced the boxwoods in the middle of the four central beds with single rose of sharon shrubs. Canna bulbs were relocated to the west garden beds from the Cole Digges House gardens when that building was renovated for use as a restaurant.[12]

Since the 1980s, most work in the Nelson House grounds has involved routine maintenance. The landscape feature that was substantially changed was the front court perimeter wall. In ca. 1983, the park removed the top courses added in ca. 1915 to return the wall to its ca. 1870 height.[13] During this time, the park also added benches, signs, and exterior light fixtures to improve visitor comfort and enhance interpretation. Most were a colonial style used by the park throughout Yorktown.

LANDSCAPE SUMMARY, 1968–PRESENT (DRAWING 1.4)

The Nelson House grounds are today a different landscape from the one that the Blow family sold to the National Park Service in 1968. Most of the formal Colonial Revival features are gone, including the entrance drive and gates, front court garden, formal gardens around the Smith and Ballard Houses, extensive ornamental plantings around the Nelson House, and furnishings in the formal garden. Once a highly-maintained private estate, today the grounds are a public historic site with an accurately restored house and a landscape that reflects park service design and remnants of the York Hall designed landscape. Despite these changes, the Nelson House grounds retain character from the York Hall estate as designed by Charles Gillette in the 1910s and 1920s, especially in the terrace,

formal garden, lawn, and service area. The overall organization of the landscape also still reflects its colonial origins in its front and back courts, and open space on lots 48, 49, and 50.

(For further description of the existing landscape, refer to chapter 2, Existing Conditions.)

ENDNOTES

1 Mark Wenger, ed., "Architectural Analysis of the Nelson House Yorktown, Virginia Volume III: Research Assessment, Draft" (Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Colonial National Historical Park Yorktown, Va., 2003), 124. The United States Congress responded to the park's request for acquisition of the York Hall estate in 1967 by approving an amendment to the 1931 property appropriation fund by increasing its limit from $2,000,000 to $2,777,000. This increase in funds permitted the acquisition of lots 42A, 44 through 55, 84, 85, and 120 through 129.

2 National Park Service, "Outline of Development Colonial National Monument Yorktown, Virginia" (Unpublished National Park Service report, July 12, 1933), 234–237. In the early 1930s, the National Park Service outlined a development plan for the William Nelson lots. The plan proposed a reconstructed Hugh (William) Nelson House and outbuildings, and a reconstructed warehouse on the waterfront for use as a public auditorium. By 1968, these plans had been abandoned.

3 George and Anthony Blow, interview by Bryne D. Riley, March 8, 2008. George W. Blow's children each retained one of the statues from the formal Garden after the sale of the York Hall estate. Some items were donated to museums. According to Anthony Blow, the sundial was donated to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

4 Wenger, 124.

5 National Park Service, Nelson House plan of archeological research area, 1974, Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown Battlefield maintenance files.

6 Eugene George and Southside Historical Sites Inc., "Grounds Development Smith, Ballard Nelson Houses, 1975" (NPS Project No. 4290-5242), Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown Battlefield maintenance files. Eugene George is an architect and educator whose career spanned almost fifty years (1957–2003). He was a leading preservation architect in the state of Texas and completed a large number of restoration projects for the National Park Service.

7 Robert Freer, photograph of the rehabilitated front court, ca. 1976, National Park Service Harpers Ferry Service Center; Jane Sundberg, Cultural Resource Management Specialist (retired), Colonial National Historical Park, communication to authors, March 21, 2011.

8 Gordon Whittington, "Nelson House Restoration" (Unpublished National Park Service report, May 30, 1980), 1–2. Colonial National Historical Park had intended to remove additional walls around the Nelson House, but due to strong public sentiment, the walls were saved and repaired.

9 No documentation was found on changes to the plantings in the formal garden by the National Park Service aside from the 1979 photograph in figure 1.74.

10 National Park Service Historic Preservation Team, Denver Service Center, "Central Heating and Cooling Plant for Nelson, Smith and Ballard Houses," 1974 (NPS Project No. 4290-1247/4873), Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown Battlefield maintenance files.

11 Eugene George and Southside Historical Sites Inc., "Plan of Archaeological Investigations," in "Grounds Development Smith, Ballard Nelson Houses, 1975;" Sundberg, 2011.

12 Dorothy Geyer, Landscape Architect, Colonial National Historical Park, interview by Bryne D. Riley, March 2008; Fred Bell, photograph of the formal garden, September 1979 prior to replacement of the hedges and shrubs, NPS Harpers Ferry collection; Dorothy Geyer, communication with authors, March 21, 2011; photograph of the formal garden, ca. 1960, showing narcissus in the beds, Virginia Historical Society.

13 Jane Sundberg, Cultural Resource Specialist (retired), Colonial National Historical Park, comments on 95% draft report, March 21, 2011.

Cultural Landscape Report
Nelson House Grounds

Colonial National Historical Park
Yorktown, Virginia

National Park Service Period, 1968–Present

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

in partnership with
Department of Landscape Architecture
SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, www.esf.edu/la/

SOURCES

1. Colonial National Historical Park Archival Photographs
2. NPS GIS File , Colonial National Historical Park
3. NPS, Grounds Development plan, 1975
4. Aerial photograph, ca.2008
5. Field Survey, October 2008, January 2010

DRAWN BY

Bryne D. Riley, John Auwaerter, Illustrator CS5, 2011

LEGEND

- Building
- Deciduous tree / Tall shrub
- Evergreen tree / Shrub
- Low shrub or woody groundcover
- Turf
- Mulched bed
- Paved street
- Road or walk (earth/gravel or brick)
- Fence
- Brick wall
- NPS property line / Yorktown lot line
- 2' contour line
- (1975) Date feature added or removed during period
- Feature removed during period (dashed line)

NOTES

1. All features shown in approximate scale and location.
2. Plan shows landscape at end of period in 2010.
3. Features without dates built in prior period.
4. All features removed between 1974 and 1976, except where noted.
4. Plan does not show all species or changes in vegetation.
5. CLR project area consists of lots 48-50, 52; landscape details outside of project area not illustrated except at Smith and Ballard lots.

Plan North
True North

0′ 35′ 70′

Drawing 1.4

Key to Sites of Garden Furnishings
(All removed ca.1968)

1. Sundial - bench
2. Masonry formal garden benches
3. Cherub statues on pedestals
4. Urns on piers
5. Lion's-head fountain
6. Cherub table
7. Front court masonry benches
8. Goddess statues on pedestals
9. Cast-iron benches
10. Bird bath
11. Sun dial
12. Garden seat
13. Chinese temple bell

2. EXISTING CONDITIONS

From the surrounding streets, the Nelson House grounds are a largely inward-focused landscape defined by tall brick walls and perimeter buildings that are a legacy of the site's changing use and ownership over the course of nearly three centuries. The restored Nelson House, the most prominent feature of the site, conveys the landscape's colonial origins, while the grounds to the west still reflect their early twentieth-century redesign as part of the Blow family's York Hall estate. Adjoining properties, notably the colonial Smith and Ballard Houses and the open land across Main Street, define the immediate setting of the Nelson House grounds.

This chapter provides a narrative and graphic overview of the existing landscape, including its setting and use. Documentation is based on field observation, aerial photographs, tax maps, and construction drawings from the 1970s National Park Service rehabilitation. Existing conditions are graphically documented through photographs, diagrams, and an existing conditions plan (drawing 2.0).

LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

The Nelson House is located in the unincorporated village of Yorktown in York County, within the Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News metropolitan area that also includes the cities of Williamsburg and Hampton. As of 2010, the population of Yorktown was 195, and York County, 65,464.[1] Although the area surrounding the village retains a largely rural setting consisting of fields and woods, suburban development occupies a large part of the county. Much of the county's growth has been from the region's military and tourism economy that includes the so-called Historic Triangle comprised of Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown, and the Naval Weapons Station Yorktown, which stretches almost fourteen miles along the York River to the north and west of Yorktown.[2]

The Nelson House is administered as part of the Yorktown Battlefield unit of Colonial National Historical Park (fig. 2.1). The unit include Historic Yorktown (Yorktown village), the battlefield, and Yorktown National Cemetery. The Yorktown Battlefield visitor center and park headquarters, located near the southeast side of the village, is at the terminus of the Colonial Parkway, the 23-mile-long limited-access National Park Service road that connects Yorktown and Jamestown. The battlefield features two automobile tour routes, one accessing American and French defenses and encampments, and the other, the British encampments. Within Yorktown village, the National Park Service owns

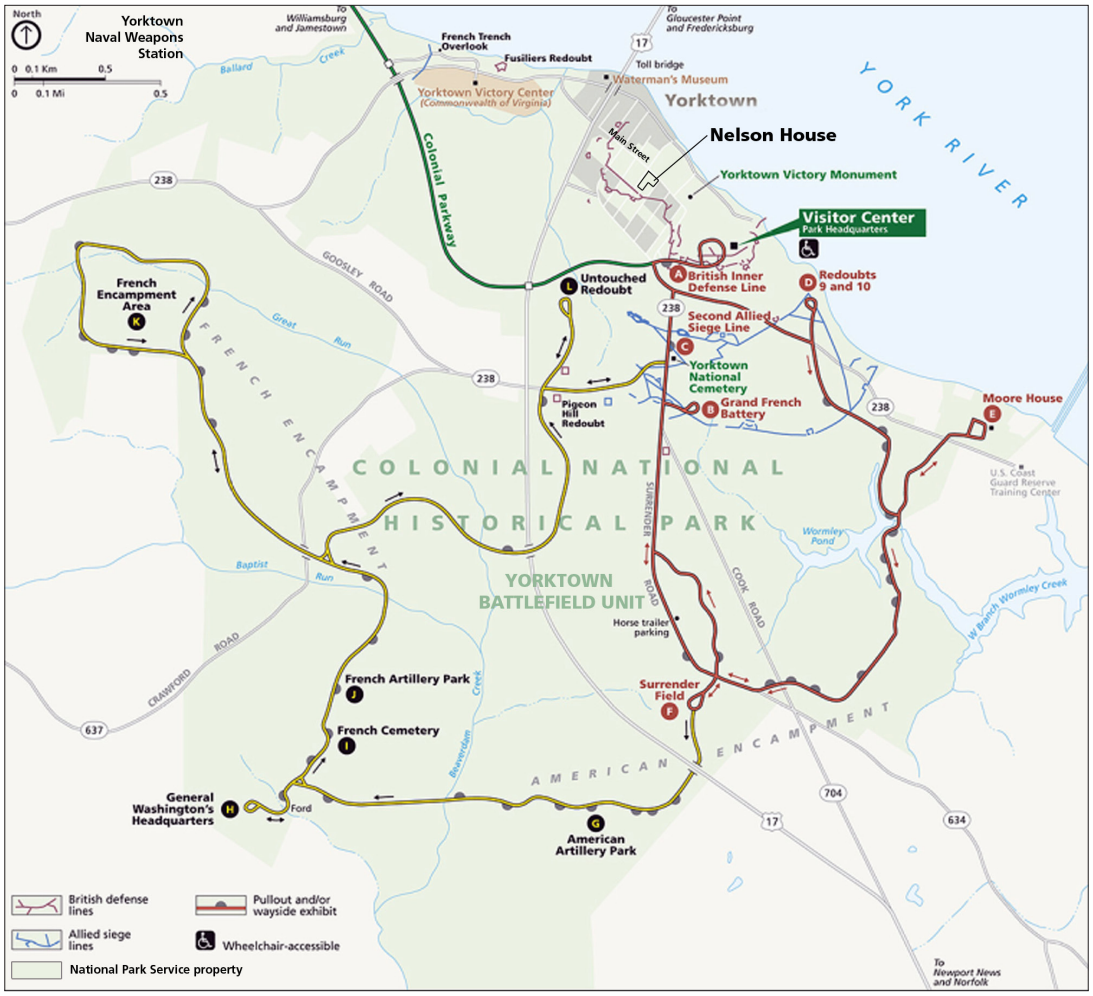


Figure 2.1. Map of the Yorktown Battlefield showing context and relationship of battlefield lands to Yorktown village and the Nelson House grounds. Lands owned by the National Park Service are shown in green. The gray areas within Yorktown are property not owned by the park. (Colonial National Historical Park, annotated by SUNY ESF.)

approximately 130 acres, including much of the property along Main Street.[3] Adjoining the park are two related historic sites: the state-owned Yorktown Victory Center west of the village and the privately-owned Waterman's Museum on the Yorktown waterfront. Colonial Williamsburg is sixteen miles east of Yorktown, along the Colonial Parkway.

Yorktown is laid out in a grid of half-acre lots aligned along Main Street, with detached houses, house museums, commercial buildings, and civic buildings. To the south of Main Street are single-family houses dating from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, where most of Yorktown's residents live. North of Main Street, the side streets descend to Water Street and the York River, where there is a long public beach, retail businesses, piers, and a recently developed commercial area, Riverwalk Landing, with shops and restaurants.

The following is an inventory of properties that make up the setting of the Nelson House grounds, discussed by street location (fig. 2.2). All properties along Main Street and those owned by the park service are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. All properties are also within the local Yorktown Historic District designated in 2003.[4]

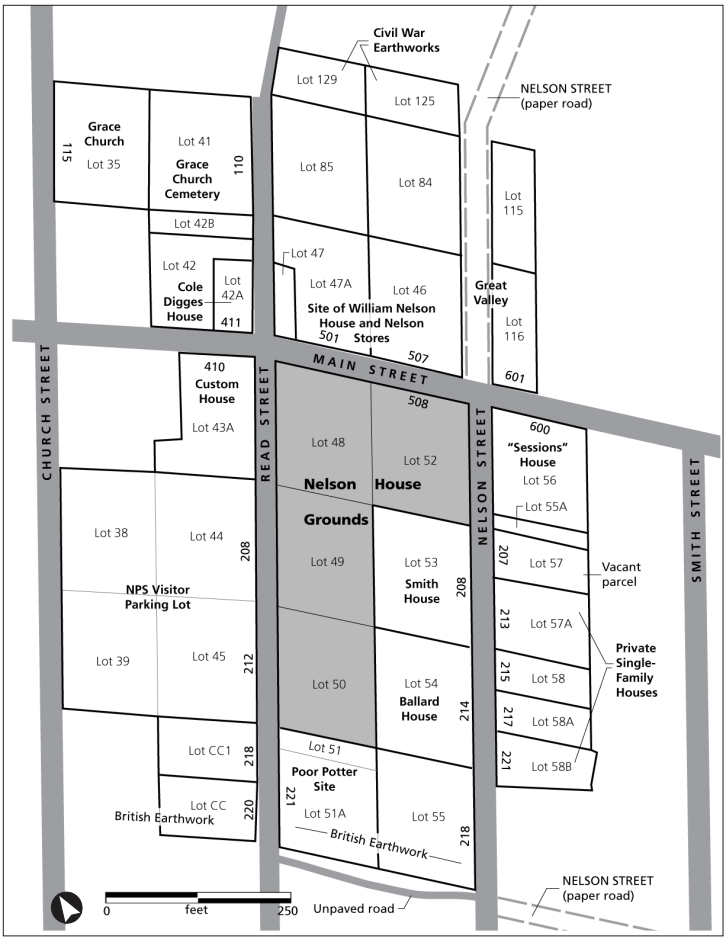


Figure 2.2. Map of properties comprising the immediate setting of the Nelson House grounds. (SUNY ESF based on York County tax maps, 2008.)

MAIN STREET

Main Street, part of the original 1691 plan of Yorktown, is a two-lane asphalt road that forms the spine of Historic Yorktown. The approximately 30-foot-wide road is not striped and has earthen pull-offs along the mostly grass shoulders. There are no street trees and the utility lines are underground. Existing light standards, based on a park design of the 1930s, are colonial-style lanterns on 9-foot-high chamfered wood posts with attached street signs. The portion of Main Street west of the Nelson House contains most of the colonial buildings, several of which are open as museums, and others that house shops, offices, and restaurants (fig. 2.3). The park closes off the block between Read and Church Streets, west of the Nelson House grounds, during peak visitor days during the summer and fall. The section of Main Street east of the Nelson House contains two colonial houses and the park's most conspicuous feature, the Monument to the Alliance and Victory, also known as the Yorktown Victory Monument (fig. 2.4).[5]

Custom House (Lot 43A), 410 Main Street

The Custom House, at the corner of Read and Main Streets, is a two-story brick building constructed as a warehouse in ca. 1720 by

Figure 2.3 (below left). Looking west along Main Street from in front of the Nelson House, October 2007. At right is the Cole Digges House. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.4 (below right). Looking east from the Nelson House with the park's Monument to the Alliance and Victory in the distance, January 2010. The building in the foreground is the private "Sessions" House, and beyond it is the park-owned Dudley Digges House. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.5. The Custom House (left) and Cole Digges House (right), looking southwest with the site of the Cox House and Peninsular Bank and Trust Company in the foreground, January 2010. The trees at left are within the Nelson House grounds. (SUNY ESF.)

Richard Ambler. From this building, Ambler and his son collected custom duties for the port of Yorktown during the colonial period. The building is believed to be the oldest standing custom house in the country. The lot features a walled garden at the rear and a reconstructed summer kitchen that were built during the early twentieth century by the Daughters of the American Revolution Comte De Grasse Chapter, which has owned the property since 1924. The building is open to the public as a museum and contains chapter offices.

Cole Digges House (Lot 42A), 411 Main Street

The Cole Digges House, also known as the Pate House, is a park-owned one-and-one-half story brick house at the corner of Read and Main Streets (see fig. 2.5). Built in ca. 1720 and restored in 1925, the building presently houses the Carrot Tree Restaurant. The house was owned by George W. Blow as part of the York Hall estate between 1946 and 1968. The adjacent lot 42 is an undeveloped park-owned subdivision of the historic Cole Digges property.

Site of William Nelson House and Nelson Stores (Lots 46, 47, 47A, 84, 85)

These five lots along the north side of Main Street were part of the York Hall estate and were acquired by the federal government in 1968. The lots comprise the foreground of the view of the York River from the Nelson House (fig. 2.6). Trees near Main Street and woods in the Great Valley and along Read Street obscure part of the view. Much of this land is maintained as lawn, with a low clipped privet hedge along Main Street that was established as part of the York Hall estate in the 1920s. During the colonial period, these lots were the location of the William Nelson house (lot 47A) built in ca. 1745, the Nelson stores (lot 46) built in ca. 1710, and the Cox House (lot 47) built in ca. 1720 on the site of an earlier house.

Figure 2.6. The open lots north of Main Street, view north from the Nelson House with the York River in the distance, January 2010. At the far end of the field are Civil War earthworks. The clipped hedge dates to the York Hall estate. (SUNY ESF.)

A small temple-front bank building was constructed on the site of the Cox House in ca. 1923 where a white post and rail fence now exists (see fig. 2.5). On lots 84 and 85, the Blows maintained a tennis court and gazebo. Only the gazebo foundation remains from these structures.

Civil War Earthworks (Lots 125, 129)

At the crest of the bluff overlooking the York River north of the William Nelson House site is a park-

Figure 2.7 (top). The York River, looking north from the brush-covered Civil War earthwork on lots 125 and 129, October 2007. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.8 (above, bottom). The Great Valley, looking north from Main Street, 2008. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.9. The "Sessions" House, looking east from Main Street in front of the Nelson House, 2007. The white building across the street is the park-owned Dudley Digest House. (SUNY ESF.)

owned Confederate Civil War earthwork dating to 1861. The earthwork rises approximately five feet above the level to the south and is covered with brush and scattered trees (fig. 2.7). On top of the earthwork is the foundation of a small gazebo erected by the Blows in the 1920s. From here, there are expansive views across the York River.

Great Valley

The Great Valley is a natural ravine between Main Street and Water Street northeast of the Nelson House that contains a public right-of-way (Nelson Street paper road) and several undeveloped lots owned by the National Park Service, including lots 115 and 116. The area is a mix of woods and mown lawn, with a trail extending from Main Street down to the river (fig. 2.8, see also fig. 1.67). The trailhead, which begins at the right-of-way and descends northeast into the valley, is marked by stacked-rail fences and an interpretive wayside.

Sessions-Pope-Shield House (Lot 56), 600 Main Street

The privately-owned Sessions-Pope-Shield House, located across Nelson Street from the Nelson House, was constructed in ca. 1760 on the site of an earlier house built in ca. 1692 (fig. 2.9). Generally known simply as the "Sessions" House after the builder of the original house on the site, it is a one-and-one-half story brick building with brick walls lining Main and Nelson Streets. At the rear (south) side of the house is a separately owned subdivision, lot 56A, that contains a garage built after 1968 and now used a residence.

NELSON STREET

Nelson Street is a narrow, approximately 15-foot-wide paved side street that borders the east side of the Nelson House grounds and the Smith and Ballard House lots (fig. 2.10) The layout of

Figure 2.10. Nelson Street looking north from the Ballard House (at left), June 2007. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.11 (middle). The Smith House looking northwest from Nelson Street, April 2010. (Colonial National Historical Park.)

Figure 2.12 (bottom). The rear of the Smith House looking north from the Ballard lot with the Nelson House in the background, January 2010. The small building is the Smith dairy. (SUNY ESF.)

Nelson Street dates to the Yorktown plan of 1691, although its present name dates to the twentieth century. It was known as Pearl Street during the Blow ownership of the Nelson House. The street is lined by several aged American linden trees that date to the nineteenth century. Utility lines are underground and there are no street lights. There are two rights-of-way named Nelson Street that are paper roads, one extending north through the Great Valley, and the other a side street parallel to Main Street south of the Nelson House grounds.

Smith House (Lot 53), 208 Nelson Street

The Smith House is park-owned colonial house on a half-acre lot bordered on two sides by the Nelson House grounds. Built in ca. 1750, the restored house is a one and one-half story, four-bay brick building with exterior end chimneys, a wood shingled gable roof with dormers, and nine-over-nine sash windows (fig. 2.11). At the rear is a frame dairy with a pyramidal roof that was built by the park in ca. 1976 (fig. 2.12). The grounds, which are visible from the Nelson House, are open lawn with scattered mature trees. Along the boundary of the lot are wood paling (picket) fences rebuilt in 2008. The Smith House served as a guest cottage for the York Hall estate and was acquired by the federal government in 1968 as part of Colonial National Historical Park. The house is a park staff residence and is closed to the public. An interpretive wayside along Nelson Street provides an historical overview of the property.

Ballard House (Lot 54), 214 Nelson Street

The Ballard House is a park-owned colonial house on a half-acre lot bordered on one side by the Nelson House grounds. Initially built in ca. 1706, the restored house is a narrow one and one-half story, asymmetrical five-bay frame building with two chimneys, a wood shingled gable roof with dormers, clapboard siding, and nine-over-nine sash

Figure 2.13 (top). The Ballard House looking southeast from Nelson Street, June 2007. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.14 (bottom). The rear of the Ballard House looking east from the Nelson House grounds, June 2007. The smoke house is behind the trees at right. The fence has since been replaced; see fig. 2.12 for the new fence. (SUNY ESF.)

windows with louvers on the first floor (fig. 2.13). At the rear is a smoke house with a pyramidal roof that was reconstructed by the park in ca. 1976 and is now used for storage. The grounds, which are visible from the Nelson House grounds, are open lawn with scattered mature trees (fig. 2.14). A brick patio is at the back of the house. Along the boundary of the lot are wood paling fences rebuilt in 2008. The Ballard House served as a staff cottage for the York Hall estate and was acquired by the federal government in 1968 as part of Colonial National Historical Park. The house is a park staff residence and is closed to the public. An interpretive wayside along Nelson Street provides an historical overview of the property.

Lot 55, 218 Nelson Street

Lot 55, adjacent to the Ballard House, is a partly wooded park-owned parcel that contains British earthwork remnants from the Siege of 1781 and paved walks linking Nelson Street with the park's Poor Potter Site. The lot was part of the York Hall estate and was purchased by the federal government in 1968 as part of Colonial National Historical Park. The earthworks, which also extend onto adjoining Lot 51A (Poor Potter Site), as well as east of Nelson Street, have been partially cleared and are visible from the walk to the Poor Potter Site. A clipped privet hedge, established by the Blow family, extends along the street-front perimeter of the lot.

Lot 57, 207 Nelson Street

207 Nelson Street is a privately-owned vacant lot across from the Smith House that is a subdivided portion of the original half-acre lot 57 that was site of the Nelson stables. The lot is presently covered in old-field successional woods. The location of the stable building within the lot is not known.

Four Private Residences (Lots 57A, 58, 58A, 58B), 213–221 Nelson Street

Along the east side of Nelson Street across from the park-owned Smith and Ballard Houses are four early-to-mid-twentieth century privately-owned single-family houses. All are on approximately quarter-acre lots. 213 Nelson Street on lot 57A contains a one-and one-half-story frame house built in 1949 (fig. 2.15). The

Figure 2.15. The private house at 213 Nelson Street, looking east across the Smith lot, January 2010. The house in the right background is 215 Nelson Street, and at right is the Ballard House. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.16 (middle). Read Street looking north with the York River in the distance, October 2007. At left is the Custom House and Cole Digges House, at right, the perimeter wall of the Nelson House grounds. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.17 (bottom). Read Street looking south with the National Park Service visitor parking lot at right, October 2007. At left is the garage (ranger station) on the Nelson House grounds. (SUNY ESF.)

lot is a subdivided portion of the original half-acre lot 57 that was the site of the Nelson stables. 215 Nelson Street is a two-story frame house built in ca. 1920, 217 Nelson Street is a one-story frame and brick bungalow built in ca. 1925, and 221 Nelson Street is a two story brick house built in ca. 1920. British earthworks border the south side of this property. All four face the park-owned Smith and Ballard Houses on the west side of Nelson Street, and are also visible from the Nelson House grounds.

READ STREET

Read Street is a narrow, approximately 15-foot-wide paved one-way side street that borders the east side of the Nelson House grounds (fig. 2.16). Read Street was one of the original streets in the 1691 plan of Yorktown, although it was not named until later. It is one of the few side streets that connects Main Street with the York River waterfront. A brick sidewalk and low hedge border the west side of the street between the Custom House and the National Park Service parking lot (fig. 2.17). Utility lines are underground and there are no street trees, although neighboring trees shade parts of the road.

Poor Potter Site (Lots 51, 51A), 221 Read Street

Lots 51 and 51A contain the Poor Potter Site, a park-service owned and interpreted archeological site containing the partially excavated remains of the eighteenth-century William Rogers pottery works. The excavated portions of the site are contained within a frame building constructed in 2006 to replace an earlier Quonset-style enclosure (fig. 2.18). Paved walks connected to Read Street and the Nelson House grounds. Lots 51 and 51A were part of the York Hall estate and was sold to the federal government in 1968 as part of Colonial National Historical Park.

Figure 2.18. The Poor Potter Site looking southeast from Read Street, October 2007. At left is the perimeter wall on the Nelson House grounds. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.19. The National Park Service parking lot south of Main Street looking west from Read Street, October 2007. The cupola in the distance is the old (1955) county courthouse. (SUNY ESF.)

218–220 Read Street (Lots CC, CC1)

These two mostly wooded park-service owned lots on the west side of Read Street across from the Poor Potter Site contain remnants of British earthworks. The lots are part of the Gwyn Read subdivision that expanded the original 1691 limits of Yorktown in ca. 1738.

National Park Service Visitor Parking Lot (Lots 38, 39, 44, 45)

These four lots, which span the block between Read and Church Streets, contain the National Park Service public parking lot for Historic Yorktown (fig. 2.19). The property was used by the Blow family beginning in 1923 for the estate gardens and nursery, and was acquired by the federal government in 1968 as part of Colonial National Historical Park. The parking lot was built in ca. 1980.

Grace Church Cemetery (Lots 41, 42B), 110 Read Street

The Grace Church Cemetery, established in the late seventeenth century, borders Read Street across from the William Nelson House site and north of the Cole Digges House. The cemetery is the burial place of the Nelson family, including "Scotch" Tom Nelson (1677–1745), William Nelson (1711–1772), and Thomas Nelson Jr. (1738–1789). A fence and wall separate the cemetery from Read Street. Grace Church, originally built in 1697, faces Church Street on lot 35 west of the cemetery. It is not visible from the Nelson House grounds.

NELSON HOUSE GROUNDS (DRAWING 2.0)

The two-acre landscape of the Nelson House grounds on lots 48, 49, 50, and 52 forms the largest and most prominent domestic property in Yorktown. From Main Street, the landscape is dominated by the Nelson House, located at the northeast corner of the grounds, and brick walls that extend along Main and Read streets. These walls, generally six to eight feet tall, consist of a retaining

Figure 2.20 (top). The front court of the Nelson House looking southwest from Main Street showing the perimeter wall and boxwood hedge, June 2007. The historic function of the circular feature at the corner of the wall is not known. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.21 (middle). The Main Street perimeter of the Nelson House grounds around the formal garden looking east from Read Street, January 2010. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.22 (bottom). The Read Street perimeter looking north showing brick wall and two York Hall outbuildings, October 2007. (SUNY ESF.)

wall along the front court dating to ca. 1870, and a mixed retaining- and free-standing wall with brick piers along the rest of the property that was built as part of the York Hall estate between ca. 1916 and 1920 (fig. 2.20, 2.21, 2.22). Incorporated into the perimeter wall along Read Street are two Colonial Revival-style York Hall estate outbuildings, the carriage house (garage) and Wisteria Cottage (gardener's cottage). Remnants of a low galvanized pipe and wire-mesh fence are on top of the wall along Read Street at the formal garden.

The Nelson House is a two-story, five-bay, Georgian-style brick building with a gable roof, two prominent chimneys, a denticulated cornice, pedimented center entrance, and segmental-arched windows with keystones and nine-over-nine sash. A side entrance faces west to the formal garden and another entrance in a brick porch is at the rear. Although the house has been restored to its colonial (ca. 1781) appearance, the landscape reflects the character of its redesign as a country place during the early twentieth century by Charles Gillette and its rehabilitation as a historic site in the 1970s. There are no known landscape features existing from the colonial period aside from the house.

The following description of the landscape is organized by six landscape character areas: the front court, back court, terrace, formal garden, lawn, and service area (fig. 2.23).

FRONT COURT

The front court is the small colonial-period rectangular yard at the front (north) side of the Nelson House defined by the ca. 1870 brick retaining wall along Main and Nelson Streets (see fig. 2.20). The strip of land between the brick wall and the asphalt of Main and Nelson Streets is maintained as lawn. Within the front court is a large rectangular brick patio at the base of the front entrance steps that dates to the park service

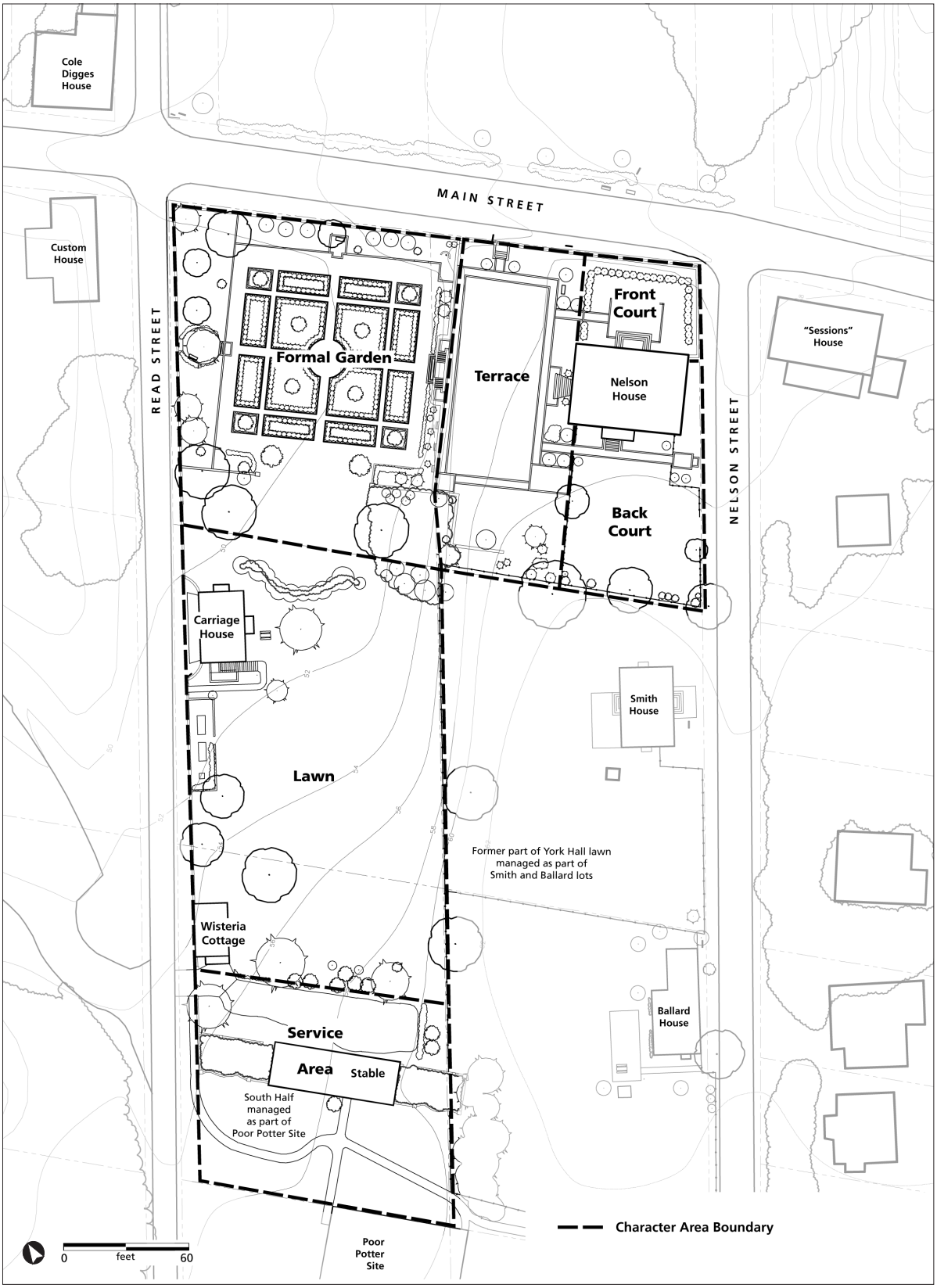


Figure 2.23. Map of the Nelson House grounds illustrating boundaries of six character areas used to inventory existing conditions of the cultural landscape: front court, back court, terrace, formal garden, lawn, and service area. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.24. The front court looking southeast showing the brick terrace, steps, and lawn, June 2007. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.25. View from the front door of the Nelson House across the front court toward the obscured view of the York River, June 2007. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.26 (middle). The back court looking northwest from near Nelson Street, January 2010. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.27 (bottom). The back court looking southwest from Nelson Street, October 2007. The opening provides access for park vehicles. The wood paling fences have since been replaced in-kind. (SUNY ESF.)

rehabilitation of the grounds in the 1970s (fig. 2.24). A brick walk connects the patio to the terrace; there is no walk from the front door to Main Street. A low and irregularly-clipped boxwood hedge, a park-service replacement of boxwoods that may have dated back to the eighteenth century, frames the perimeter of the front court. Three floodlights, designed to light the house but presently inoperable, are in the lawn. The hedge has several gaps, including one at the east corner of the house where a desireway leads to Nelson Street. There are no trees within the front court. The view from the front entrance toward the York River, which looks out across undeveloped land north of Main Street, is partially obscured by trees (fig. 2.25).

BACK COURT

The back court is a small, colonial-period space that consists of the grounds between the Nelson House and Smith House lot characterized by lawn with wood paling (picket) fences and scattered trees along the periphery (figs. 2.26, 2.27). The space, formerly the location of the York Hall estate oval entrance drive, provides access to the site from Nelson Street. The perimeter fences contain openings along a park-service brick walk parallel to the Nelson House, and at a larger unpaved access for

Figure 2.28 (top). The terrace looking north with the Nelson House at right and steps to the formal garden at left, June 2007. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.29 (above, bottom). The entrance to the terrace from Main Street, looking south, January 2010. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.30. Looking west across the formal garden from the second floor of the Nelson House, January 2010. The terrace is in the foreground. (SUNY ESF.)

park vehicles from Nelson Street. Another opening on the west side leads to the terrace. There are no walks to the adjoining Smith House. Vegetation includes a mature Kentucky coffee-tree that may date to the York Hall estate, and a golden-rain-tree, several small trees along the outer perimeter, and dogwood trees near the house that date to park ownership.

TERRACE

The terrace is a rectangular lawn along the west side of the Nelson House that was built as part of the York Hall estate (fig. 2.28). During the colonial period, this was the site of the Nelson outbuildings and service yard. The terrace is on the same elevation as the front court, approximately six feet above the formal garden, and is bordered by brick walls. A paired flight of steps leads down to the formal garden, and a single flight of steps to Main Street serves as the main visitor entrance (fig. 2.29). Park service-built brick walks with soldier-course edging frame a large rectangular lawn centered on the side entrance to the house. These connect to brick walks leading to the front and back courts. Plantings, most of which date to park service ownership, are located along the periphery of the terrace and include rose of sharon, dogwood, boxwood, and crape-myrtle, along with a tulip tree at the northwest corner that replaced an earlier tulip tree in the same location.

FORMAL GARDEN

The formal garden, occupying lot 48 at the corner of Main and Read Streets, is a Colonial Revival-style garden designed by Charles Gillette in 1922. The center of the foursquare garden is a quincunx plan consisting of a central circle and four surrounding rectangular panels, with an outer row of rectangles and individual shrubs at the corners (fig. 2.30). The garden walks are mown turf with wood and brick edging. The east–west central walk is on axis with

Figure 2.31 (top). The formal garden looking east showing axis with the terrace steps and entrance to the Nelson House, June 2007. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.32 (middle). One of the main formal garden beds looking southwest showing center shrub, perennials, and mown cover, June 2007. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.33 (bottom). The north perimeter of the formal garden showing low brick retaining wall and mulched bed with trees and shrubs, October 2007. (SUNY ESF.)

the steps to the terrace and the west entrance of the Nelson House (fig. 2.31). Most of the garden shrubs were replaced by the park service in the 1970s and 1980s. These include informally clipped boxwood hedges around the beds, boxwood shrubs in the outer corner beds, and rose of sharon in the middle of the large center beds (fig. 2.32). The beds contain scattered perennials and flowering spring bulbs, including peonies, iris, and narcissus dating from the York Hall estate, and more recently planted canna and Yorktown onion (allium). Most of the beds are maintained with a mown cover.

The perimeter of the formal garden is enclosed on the east, north, and west sides by mature plantings and brick walls, and opens toward the south. Most of the trees and shrubs date to the York Hall estate. The perimeter bed along the terrace wall is planted with roses, viburnum, and boxwood, most of which are below the height of the wall. The north bed, parallel to Main Street, is bordered by a low brick wall and contains a red-cedar tree and tall quince and crape-myrtle shrubs. Most of this bed is bare or mulched ground (fig. 2.33, see also fig. 2.30). The west perimeter along Read Street, also bordered by a low brick wall, contains a border of mature trees, including Southern magnolia, red-cedar, and a single American beech, set in mostly bare or mulched beds. A high canopy allows views beyond the perimeter wall.

On axis with the central north–south garden walk is a rectangular brick pad that contains a modern wood bench, where a Chinese-style covered bench stood until ca. 1945. Near the wall is a cedar tree that has heaved the brick pad. At the west end of the east–west walk is a circular herringbone-brick patio added in ca. 1946 that surrounds an earlier red-cedar tree and is enclosed by a boxwood hedge (figure 2.34). An iron plate remains from a ca. 1946 fireplace along the perimeter wall, below a bronze bas-relief plaque commemorating Earl Cornwallis, Commander of the British Forces during the 1781

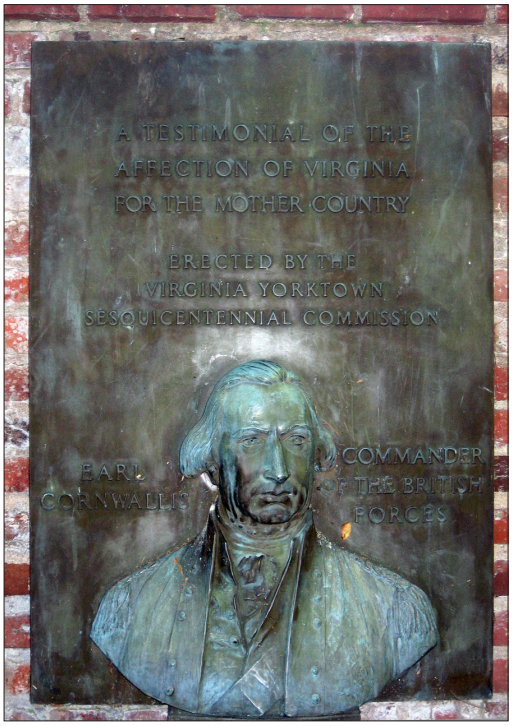


Figure 2.34 (top left). The circular brick patio at the west end of the east-west central garden walk, looking west with the Custom House in the background, October 2007. Just visible behind the cedar tree is the Cornwallis plaque. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.35 (right). The Cornwallis plaque on the perimeter wall in the formal garden, October 2007. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.36 (lower left). View looking southeast into the formal garden from the lawn, June 2007. The area in the foreground was the site of the ca. 1946 swimming pool. (SUNY ESF.)

Siege of Yorktown (fig. 2.35). This plaque was designed by sculptor F. William Sievers and originally installed in 1931 on the east side of the Nelson House.

The south side of the formal garden consists of a shrub and tree border to either side of a 40-foot-wide opening in the lawn that was the site of the York Hall swimming pool built in ca. 1946. This opening is flanked by two Burford holly shrubs, with a row of Japanese maple and specimen American linden trees to either side, all dating to the initial development of the York Hall landscape prior to 1930 (fig. 2.36). The former view across the lawn to the south is blocked by a hedge of crape-myrtle added in ca. 1946.

LAWN

The lawn is the large open space on lots 49 and 50 south of the formal garden. It was designed by Charles Gillette in ca. 1920 and was the site of the Nelson gardens during the colonial era. On the west, the lawn is framed by mature trees, the garage, Wisteria Cottage, and perimeter wall, and on the south by trees and shrubs along the service drive (fig. 2.37). Trees and shrubs surrounding the lawn include Southern magnolia, willow oak, red-cedar, and crape-myrtle. The eastern

part of the lawn space is within the lots belonging to the Smith and Ballard Houses, which historically defined the eastern edge of the York Hall lawn. A wood paling fence without plantings delineates the colonial boundary of these two lots through the eastern third of the lawn (fig. 2.38).

The York Hall garage, now known as the carriage house, was built in ca. 1916 to the design of Griffin and Wynkoop and houses a park ranger station and communications center. It is a three-bay, one-and-one-half story Colonial Revival-style brick building that faces inward toward the lawn (fig. 2.39). This façade has a residential character with a center entrance, classically-detailed entry porch, and flanking six-over-six sash windows. Three dormer windows line the wood-shingle gabled roof. The Read Street façade contains three garage bays with segmental arch openings with infill that replaced the original doors in ca. 1975 (fig. 2.40). An exterior steel staircase on the south side of the building leads to the second floor, and there is an antenna mounted on the chimney. The perimeter wall curves

Figure 2.37 (top). The lawn looking south from near the formal garden with the stable in the background and Wisteria Cottage at right, September 2010. (Colonial National Historical Park.)

Figure 2.38 (second from top). The lawn looking northeast from the service area and stable, January 2010. The picket fence divides the eastern part of the lawn along the boundary of the Smith and Ballard lots. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.39 (bottom left). The front of the carriage house (garage) looking northwest from the lawn, June 2007. At left is the lattice brick wall added by the park to screen utilities. In the background is the National Park Service parking lot. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.40 (bottom right). The Read Street side of the carriage house (garage) with curved sections of the adjoining perimeter wall, October 2007. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.41 (top). The front of Wisteria Cottage looking southwest from the lawn, June 2007. The large tree is a willow oak dating to the York Hall estate. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.42 (above, bottom). The Read Street side of Wisteria Cottage looking northeast, October 2007. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.43. The entrance to the service area looking east from Read Street with the stable at right and Wisteria Cottage at left, March 2008. The red building in the background is the Ballard House. (SUNY ESF.)

inward around the apron to engage either end of the building. The park's central cooling units, screened by a lattice-bond brick wall added in ca. 1975, are south of the building along the perimeter wall (see fig. 2.39).

Wisteria Cottage, built in ca. 1916 to the design of Griffin and Wynkoop as the gardener's cottage, is a three-bay one-and-one-half story Colonial Revival-style brick building that faces inward toward the lawn (fig. 2.41). This façade, shaded by a large willow oak, has a center door with a trellised entry porch and separate sidelight, and asymmetrical flanking casement and double-hung multi-paned windows with shutters. A frame shed-roof enclosed porch dating to the York Hall estate period shelters the service entrance on the south side. The Read Street façade, which is integral with the perimeter brick wall, contains three windows and no doors (fig. 2.42). The wood-shingled gable roof has hipped-roof dormers and a large corbelled offset-ridge chimney. There are presently no wisteria vines growing on the building.

SERVICE AREA

The service area, developed as part of the York Hall estate beginning in ca. 1916 and part of the Nelson garden lots during the colonial era, occupies the south half of lot 50 and is screened from the lawn by shrubs and trees. The entrance to the service area is by a drive from Read Street flanked by brick pillars in the perimeter wall (fig. 2.43). The drive has an asphalt and concrete-block apron at the entrance and widens into a gravel surface along the front of the stable. A row of shrubs and trees, including a clipped privet hedge, crape-myrtle, deutzia, rose, Southern magnolia, and red-cedar, frames the north and east sides of the yard.

Built in ca. 1916 to the design of Griffin and Wynkoop, the stable is a one-story brick building that faces north toward the service drive and lawn

Figure 2.44 (top). The service drive and stable looking southwest, June 2007. Pictured are staff from the National Park Service and SUNY ESF. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.45 (middle). The stable looking north from the Poor Potter Site, June 2007. At right is the Poor Potter shelter. (SUNY ESF.)

Figure 2.46 (bottom). The interior of the brick wall-enclosed yard on the east side of the stable, view looking east, March 2008. At right is the serpentine wall built in ca. 1916; the other walls date to ca. 1945. (SUNY ESF.)

(fig. 2.44). It features a wood-shingled roof with clipped gables, hay mow, and a center ventilating cupola with a pyramidal roof. The front has stable doors in the east bay, and a recessed three-bay porch that contains a passage to the rear of the building. The rear wall is lit by four, six-light windows and contains movable doors on tracks that close off the center bays (fig. 2.45). To either side of stable are small yards enclosed by approximately 6-foot-high brick walls that are overgrown with Virginia creeper vines and vinca (fig. 2.46). Both yards are enclosed on the south side by serpentine walls and have openings in the north wall adjacent to the building. The east yard extends onto lot 54 (Ballard House lot).

The mown ground south of the stable within lot 50 is managed as part of the Poor Potter Site on adjoining lots 51/51A (see fig. 2.45). This area was the site of the estate service yard that was replaced by a tennis court in 1936. A paved walk leads from the stable to the Poor Potter building.

OPERATIONS OVERVIEW

The National Park Service maintains the Nelson House as a museum that interprets the colonial period in general, and the life of Thomas Nelson Jr. and the 1781 Siege of Yorktown in particular. The first floor of the house is open for self-guided or docent-led tours from mid June to mid August from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and in the spring and fall from 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Orientation is provided at the Yorktown Battlefield visitor center, where a 15-minute film and exhibits tell the story of the 1781 Siege of Yorktown and colonial life.[6]

The Nelson House is a popular attraction in the park, but generally receives less than ten percent of visitors to Yorktown Battlefield during its open months. In 2008, approximately 55,000 visitors

passed through the Yorktown visitor center, and roughly 5,200 people toured the Nelson House.[7]

The Nelson House grounds are open to the public during the open hours of the house and at other times. The public generally visits the front and back courts, terrace, and formal garden, although visitors are welcome throughout the grounds. Furnishings related to visitor use include three contemporary wood benches within the formal garden, an entrance sign along Main Street, and another sign at the back court entrance. Park staff, when present, provides verbal interpretation of the grounds, but there are no interpretive devices or brochures to inform self-guided tours, aside from interpretive waysides along Main and Nelson streets in front of the Nelson, Smith, and Ballard Houses.

Visitors enter the Nelson House grounds by one of two entrance walks: one along Main Street leading to the terrace and front entrance of the house, and one along Nelson Street leading to the back court and rear entrance. Due to steps, these walks, along with the house, are not universally accessible. The service drive at the back (south) end of the grounds does not have steps or steep slopes, but there are no universally accessible walks connecting it with the formal garden or house.

In addition to the site's primary function as a public museum, the Nelson House grounds also serve park operations. The carriage house (garage) on Read Street serves as a park ranger station and communications center for Yorktown Battlefield. Park vehicles are typically parked along the adjoining street. Wisteria Cottage is presently vacant, and the stable is used for maintenance storage. The Smith and Ballard Houses along the east side of the Nelson House grounds are private residences for park staff. The patios at the backs of these houses contain contemporary outdoor furniture, grills, and ornamental plants that are partly visible from the lawn of the Nelson House grounds.

Landscape maintenance is carried out by park staff and volunteers, and through contractual services. Park staff manage the operation of the Nelson House and overall maintenance of the grounds. Park maintenance operations are housed southeast of Yorktown along Route 17, with some equipment and supplies stored in the stable.

LANDSCAPE CONDITION

Condition refers to the state of physical repair and not the historic integrity of the landscape. The Nelson House grounds are in overall fair-to-good condition based on the health of the vegetation and repair of the built structures including the building exteriors, brick walls, and walks. All of the wood fences were replaced in 2008, and the outbuildings have relatively new wood roofs. Limited maintenance

staffing and funding during the growing season, however, has led to a poorly maintained appearance at times due to growth of weeds and inadequate pruning, especially in the formal garden and on the brick walks and service drive. Notable condition issues include the following:

Front Court

- Boxwood hedge is missing individual plants
- A desireway cuts through the hedge from Nelson Street
- Bricks in the retaining wall are spalling
- Bottom tread of the front steps is cracked
- Floodlights are in poor condition

Terrace

- Grass is worn or thin along sections of the walks and beneath trees
- Portions of the walk are uneven and have broken bricks and weeds

Formal Garden

- Boxwood borders are overgrown, damaged from snow load, missing individual plants, and suffering from die-back
- The brick pad at north–south central walk is heaved
- Brick edging around beds is missing or covered
- Garden (terrace) wall needs repointing and repair of parged top
- Wood benches are missing slats and are covered in biological growth

Service Area

- Work yards are overgrown
- Service drive surface is weed-covered

ENDNOTES

1 MuniNetGuide, "Yorktown Demographics," http://www.muninetguide.com/states/virginia/yorktown/ (accessed August 2011).

2 Global Security.org, "Naval Weapons Station, Yorktown, Virginia," http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/yorktown.htm (accessed September 2010).

3 National Park Service and Heritage Landscapes, Inc, "Cultural Landscape Inventory, Yorktown, Colonial National Historical Park" (National Park Service database and unpublished report, 1999, revised 2006), 2.

4 "Yorktown Historic District and Design Guidelines" (Report prepared for the York County Board of Supervisors, Adopted December 2, 2003). Ownership and lot designations are based on York County Tax Assessment Records, updated to 2007.

5 National Park Service, List of Classified Structures (National Park Service database), Structure 36Y095S3, updated to 2006.

6 National Park Service, Yorktown Battlefield website, Operating Hours & Seasons, http://www.nps.gov/york/planyourvisit/hours.htm; Information at Yorktown Battlefield visitor center.

7 National Park Service Public Use Statistics Office, COLO YTD Report (May 2008) <http://www.nature.nps.gov/stats/viewReport.cfm (accessed September 2010).

Cultural Landscape Report
Nelson House Grounds

Colonial National Historical Park
Yorktown, Virginia

Existing Conditions

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

in partnership with
Department of Landscape Architecture
SUNY College of Environmental
Science and Forestry, www.esf.edu/la/

SOURCES

1. Colonial National Historical Park Archival Photographs
2. NPS GIS File , Colonial National Historical Park
3. Aerial photograph, 2010
4. Field Survey, October 2008, January 2010

DRAWN BY

Bryne D. Riley, John Auwaerter, Illustrator CS3, 2010

LEGEND

- Building
- Deciduous tree / tall shrub
- Evergreen tree / shrub
- Low shrub or woody groundcover
- Turf / mulched bed
- Mulched bed
- Paved street
- Road or walk (earth/gravel or brick)
- Fence
- Brick wall
- NPS light standard / bench
- NPS property line / Yorktown lot line
- 2' contour line

NOTES

1. All features shown in approximate scale and location.
2. Plan shows landscape in 2011.
3. Plan does not identify minor shrubs and herbaceous plants.
4. CLR project area consists of lots 48-50, 52; landscape details outside of project area are not comprehensive.

Plan North
True North

0' 35' 70'

Drawing 2.0

VEGETATION SPECIES

American beech	*Fagus grandifolia*	Little-leaf linden	*Tilia cordata*
Boxwood	*Buxus sempevirens*	Linden	*Tilia europaea*
Burford holly	*Ilex cornuta 'Burfordi'*	Mock orange	*Philadelphus sp.*
Carolina cherry-laurel	*Prunus caroliniana*	Osmanthus	*Osmanthus sp.*
Chaste tree	*Vitex agnus-castus*	Privet	*Ligustrum sp.*
Cherry	*Prunus sp.*	Quince	*Chaenomeles speciosa*
Cornelian-cherry	*Cornus mas*	Red-cedar (Eastern)	*Juniperius virginiana*
Crape-myrtle	*Lagerstroemia indica*	Rose	*Rosa sp.*
Deutzia	*Deutzia sp.*	Rose of sharon	*Hibiscus syriacus*
Dogwood	*Cornus florida*	Southern magnolia	*Magnolia grandiflora*
Eastern redbud	*Cercis canadensis*	Thornelss honey locust	*Gleditsia triacanthos inermis*
English box	*Buxus sempevirens 'Suffruticosa'*	Tulip tree	*Liriodendron tulipifera*
English yew	*Taxus baccata*	Viburnum tinus	*Viburnum tinus*
Golden rain tree	*Koelreuteria paniculata*	Vinca	*Vinca minor*
Japanese maple	*Acer palmatum*	Virginia creeper	*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*
Kentucky coffee tree	*Gymnocladus dioicus*	Willow oak	*Quercus phellos*

3. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Although the Nelson House has been restored to its colonial appearance, the cultural landscape still reflects multiple layers of history, from construction of the house in ca. 1730 to redesign of the property as a country place in the early twentieth century and rehabilitation as a historic site in the 1970s. These layers have long presented park managers with challenges in managing and interpreting the landscape.

Based on the findings of the site history and existing conditions, this chapter evaluates the historical significance and character of the cultural landscape within the existing two-acre Nelson House grounds project area. The first section of the chapter provides an evaluation of the cultural landscape according to the National Register Criteria, including a summary of existing National Register documentation and recommendations for future revisions to address the cultural landscape. The second section is a detailed evaluation of landscape characteristics and features according to National Park Service methods outlined in *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques* (National Park Service, 1998). While the cultural landscape evaluation is property-wide, it does not encompass all historic resources at the site.[1]

NATIONAL REGISTER EVALUATION

SUMMARY

The Nelson House grounds are historically significant under National Register Criteria A, B, and C at the national, state, and local levels during an overall period of significance from ca. 1730 to 1930. The site is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of Colonial National Historical Park, and is a contributing component of the Yorktown Village Historic District listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register, and the local Yorktown Historic District (York County ordinance). While the site is documented on the National Park Service List of Classified Structures and Cultural Landscape Inventory for Yorktown, the landscape of the Nelson House grounds is at present not adequately documented for the purposes of the National Register.[2]

REVIEW OF EXISTING NATIONAL REGISTER DOCUMENTATION

Upon its acquisition by the National Park Service in 1968, the Nelson House property, encompassing lots 48–50 and 52, was administratively listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of Colonial National Historical Park.

The Smith and Ballard Houses and other lots acquired by the park from the York Hall estate were administratively listed at the same time.[3] The listing identified significance for the park as a whole in the areas of military and maritime history, archeology, architecture, and engineering. No comprehensive National Register documentation has since been finalized for Colonial National Historical Park (only for Colonial Parkway).[4]

In 1973, the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission prepared a draft National Register nomination for the Yorktown Historic District that encompassed both private and National Park Service properties within the village, including the Nelson House. This nomination was listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register on April 17, 1973, but not in the National Register.[5] Since that time, three private properties within the district have been individually listed in the National Register: the "Sessions" House (Sessions-Pope-Shield House), Old Custom House, and Grace Episcopal Church. The village district was advanced at the local level in 2004, when the York County Zoning Ordinance was amended to include a larger Yorktown Historic District to protect the historic and architectural character of the entire village.[6]

Although National Register documentation for the village has not been accepted, the National Park Service has received concurrence from the Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer on the eligibility of individual park resources for listing in the National Register. Eligibility determinations for resources within the Nelson House property have been completed through the List of Classified Structures (LCS) and the Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) for Yorktown village, both updated to 2006. The LCS inventoried the Nelson House, Wisteria Cottage, carriage house (garage), Stable, Garden Wall, and Formal Garden Walls as eligible, along with the park service light standards along Main Street. The CLI also identified the formal garden and fences at the Nelson House (and adjoining Smith and Ballard Houses) as eligible.

The CLI identified the 129.5-acres of park service property within Yorktown village district has having significance under all four National Register Criteria:

> Criterion A, for association with the Revolutionary War, Civil War, commerce, and historic preservation efforts during the 1930s and the Mission 66 period (1950s); Criterion B, for association with General George Washington, General Lord Cornwallis, and John D. Rockefeller;
>
> Criterion C, as an early example of town planning in Virginia and collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings; and
>
> Criterion D, for archeological sites with potential to reveal information about the village.

The CLI identified the period of significance for Yorktown village as 1691 to 1960, with significant dates of 1781, 1861–1864, 1881, 1920–42, and 1955–1960 (these dates are not inclusive of all significant dates, and not all apply to the Nelson House grounds). The Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with the findings of the CLI on September 7, 2006.[7]

NATIONAL REGISTER RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations for National Register documentation of the landscape of the Nelson House grounds are based on and expand upon the Cultural Landscape Inventory for Yorktown, and the findings of the site history and existing conditions sections of this cultural landscape report. These recommendations pertain to the cultural landscape as a component of the entire Nelson House property, and do not address archeological resources, interior architecture, and museum collections that may have other areas or periods of significance. These recommendations are intended to inform National Register documentation for the entire Colonial National Historical Park that is now being planned.

Recommended Statement of Significance (National Register Section 8)

Architecture (ca. 1730, ca. 1916)

The Nelson House grounds are significant at the state and local levels under National Register Criterion C in the area of architecture for the Nelson House (built ca. 1730) as a distinguished example of Georgian-style colonial architecture, and for the three York Hall estate outbuildings (carriage house, Wisteria Cottage, and stable built ca. 1916) as representative examples of early twentieth-century Colonial Revival-style architecture.[8]

American Revolution and the Siege of 1781 (1776–1781)

The Nelson House grounds are primarily significant at the national level under National Register Criterion A for association with the American Revolution and the Siege of Yorktown (September–October 1781), the last major battle of the war prior to British surrender of Yorktown Battlefield. The two-acre, four-lot landscape was a prominent part of the village during the Revolution and was depicted in war-period paintings and maps. The Nelson House was shelled during the war.

The Nelson House grounds reflect their significance associated with the American Revolution and Siege of 1781 through the Nelson House and the four lots that were historically associated with it. Except for the loss of a cluster of outbuildings on the west side of the house and the addition of a brick perimeter wall, the

grounds maintain a setting similar to what existed during the Revolution. The grounds retain much of their open space on lots 48, 49, and 50, as well as their historic orientation to Main Street and perimeter along two cross streets known today as Read and Nelson Streets.

Governor Thomas Nelson Jr. (1767–1781)[9]

The Nelson House grounds are nationally significant under National Register Criterion B for association with Governor Thomas Nelson Jr. He was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, organized a Revolutionary militia, was a member of the Continental Congress, and served as the third governor of Virginia, succeeding Thomas Jefferson in 1781. The property was the primary family home of Governor Nelson, the grandson of the builder, Thomas "Scotch Tom" Nelson, from 1767 until before the British occupation of the town during the Siege of 1781, when the family relocated to one of the their plantations in Hanover County named Offley Hoo. After the siege, Governor Nelson probably lived only intermittently at Yorktown.

Civil War (1861–1865)

The Nelson House grounds are nationally significant under National Register Criterion A for their association with the Civil War, when Yorktown was occupied by both Confederate and Union armies and was the scene of the Battle of Yorktown, April 5 to May 4, 1862. The Nelson House was utilized by both armies as a hospital. The landscape retains the Nelson House and four-lot site that existed during the Civil War, but has lost the outbuildings that stood west of the house. The boxwood hedge in the front court that existed during the Civil War remains, but the individual plants have been replaced.

Landscape Architecture (1916–30)[10]

The Nelson House grounds, redeveloped as a country estate known as York Hall in the early twentieth century, are significant at the state and local levels under National Register Criterion C for embodying the distinctive characteristics of Colonial Revival landscape design during the Country Place Era. This was the period between 1880 and 1930 when the design of large country estates dominated the American landscape architecture profession.[11] Spurred by the national centennial in 1876, the Colonial Revival was a movement that looked for inspiration to the colonial and early Federal periods in American design. In landscape architecture, the Colonial Revival is a broad term that reflects a number of influences, including neoclassical styles popularized during the 1892 Chicago World's Fair; old-fashioned cottage gardens interpreted by Arts & Crafts designers such as Gertrude Jekyll in Britain and Ellen Biddle Shipman in the United States;

and academic approaches to landscape restoration undertaken at Mount Vernon in the 1910s and at Colonial Williamsburg beginning in the 1920s.

The Nelson House grounds are the work of Charles Gillette (1886–1969), a Fellow of the Society of American Landscape Architects (elected in 1933) and among the foremost landscape architects in Virginia between the 1910s and 1960s. He was a student of Warren Manning (1860-1938), one of America's pioneering landscape architects who began his career under Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and is best known for designing country estates, college campuses, and park and open-space systems in many American cities. In his own work, Charles Gillette became widely known as the interpreter of Southern gardens and developer of the so-called Virginia Garden style, as well as a garden restoration expert. [12] He worked on the restoration of the colonial gardens at Kenmore in Fredericksburg beginning in the late 1920s and the Victorian gardens at the birthplace of Woodrow Wilson in Staunton, Virginia, in the 1930s.[13]

Gillette adopted the integration of natural and formal styles favored in the Manning office, but also drew heavily on eighteenth-century English and colonial American precedent. His designs were noted for their classical design, attention to detail, and use of informal herbaceous plantings based upon study of English gardens.[14] Axial walks, brick walls, boxwood borders, and garden ornamentation including sculpture, piers, urns, and shelters were also characteristic of Gillette's work.[15]

In 1914, wealthy industrialist George Preston Blow acquired lot 52 with the Nelson House as the first parcel in his country place named York Hall (a name also used by the Nelson family as early as the 1870s). Beginning in 1916, Blow commissioned Charles Gillette to redesign and improve the grounds. The York Hall estate was one of Gillette's first independent commissions following his arrival in Richmond in 1913, where he would practice for the next five decades. The wealthy Blows, owners of the Western Clock Company (Westclox) and other industries in LaSalle, Illinois, were typical of Gillette's early clientele.

Working around the main house and five outbuildings designed by the New York architectural firm of Griffin and Wynkoop, Gillette planned a landscape of formal and informal elements that, after several years of evolution, were organized around a central lawn in the middle of the property that incorporated the adjoining Smith and Ballard lots. The landscape was largely focused inward away from the streets, with tall brick walls and buildings lining the perimeter. Reflecting Blow's interest in historic preservation, Gillette retained an old stone walk to the front of the Nelson House, an old boxwood hedge around the front court, and aged trees including a laurel in the front court that purportedly existed during a visit by the Marquis de Lafayette in 1824. Gillette employed materials used locally during the colonial period, including red brick and marl (a marine sediment

composed of clay and calcium carbonate) for the walks and drives. He designed an oval entrance drive at the back court of the house off Nelson Street, and a service drive at the south end of the property. The house retained views of the York River to the north across open lawn (outside of project area).

In 1922, Gillette designed a Colonial Revival quincunx-plan formal garden at the northwest corner of the property that he modeled after seventeenth-century gardens at Groombridge Place in Kent, England. The garden featured grass walks edged by brick, and herbaceous beds bordered by clipped dwarf boxwood hedges and accented by groups of yews in the centers. Around the perimeter of the garden were trees and shrubs that, together with the perimeter brick wall, sheltered the garden from the outside. The garden was outfitted with an antique English sundial column at the center, statuary, and Chinese-style roofed benches. A double flight of brick steps led from the adjoining terrace next to the house, with the east entrance on axis with the garden's central walk. To the south, the formal garden opened onto the lawn, which was designed in the informal style of English landscape gardens, with irregular beds of groundcover, winding walks, and scattered specimen trees.

Charles Gillette continued to provide design services for the second generation of the Blow family into the 1960s, well after the end of the Country Place Era. The last major new additions to the York Hall landscape occurred during the mid-1930s and shortly after World War II, when George W. Blow had Gillette design several new features within the Nelson House grounds, including a tennis court, small circular brick patio in the formal garden, and a swimming pool. Gillette most likely also made other changes to the plantings at York Hall in the two decades after the war, but little record of these remains. These post-1930 features, most of which no longer exist, are not significant because they represented a marked change in use toward active recreation and outdoor living after the end of the Country Place Era. Although designed by Gillette, they were discreet additions and were not part of an overall design for the landscape.

Between the park service acquisition of the Nelson House grounds in 1968 and completion of rehabilitation work between ca. 1970 and 1980, several major elements of the York Hall landscape were removed, including walks, the front court garden, and the oval entrance drive in the back court. However, the buildings, perimeter walls, terrace, formal garden, service area, and overall organization of landscape were retained. The park built a fence along the colonial boundary at the Smith and Ballard lots, but the overall space of the lawn remained intact. The formal garden lost all of its furnishings and most of its herbaceous plantings, but retained the perimeter shrubs and trees, layout of the beds, and walks. While overall the Nelson House grounds do not have the character of an early twentieth-century country place, the formal garden, terrace, lawn, service yard, and perimeter wall and outbuildings retain integrity to convey

their significance as an example of Colonial Revival landscape design during the Country Place Era.

Memorialization and Preservation (1931)

The Nelson House grounds contain a single object related to the context of Memorialization and Preservation, as documented in the Yorktown Cultural Landscape Inventory: the Cornwallis plaque installed in 1931 by the Virginia Yorktown Sesquicentennial Commission and now located in the formal garden. The plaque was moved from its original location on the east side of the Nelson House in ca. 1976. Further research is needed to evaluate the plaque's significance in the context of preservation and memorialization in Yorktown, including the effect of relocation on its integrity.

The Nelson House grounds do not otherwise appear significant within the context of Memorialization and Preservation as documented in the Cultural Landscape Inventory for either the Gillette-designed alterations (ca. 1916–1930) or for the park-service rehabilitation (ca. 1974–1980). The Gillette design was not an attempt to restore or recreate the colonial landscape of the Nelson House, although George P. Blow did preserve several aged features in the landscape. The park rehabilitation occurred after the documented period of significance for this context. The park simplified the York Hall landscape through removal of gardens, walks, pools, and furnishings, and added new brick walks and fences. As part of a largely subtractive rehabilitation of an existing landscape, these features do not appear to be significant under other contexts pertaining to park planning, historic preservation, or landscape design.

Recommended Period of Significance

The recommended period of significance for the cultural landscape of the Nelson House grounds, as represented by existing resources, falls into three individual periods: the colonial and Revolutionary War period, ca. 1730 (construction of Nelson House) to 1781 (Siege of Yorktown); the Civil War period, 1861–1865; and the York Hall estate period, 1914 (acquisition of Nelson House by George P. Blow) to 1930 (height of development of the York Hall landscape during the Country Place Era).[16] Significant dates include 1781, the Siege of Yorktown, and 1862, the Battle of Yorktown.

Description of Resources (National Register Section 7)

All resources within the Nelson House grounds that existed during the period of significance are contributing. The primary landscape resources are the Nelson House (1 building) and four lots (1 site) that existed during the Revolution and Siege of 1781. The secondary resources, which all date to the York Hall estate

(1914–ca. 1930), include the carriage house (garage), Wisteria Cottage (gardener's cottage), and stable (3 buildings); formal garden (1 site); perimeter wall (1 structure), and formal garden wall (1 structure). Other resources that should be inventoried for future National Register documentation include the stable courtyard serpentine walls (1 structure). Associated landscape features, such as specimen trees and boxwood hedges, are inventoried in the cultural landscape evaluation (see section 2 of this chapter, table 3.2).

NATIONAL REGISTER INTEGRITY EVALUATION

According to the National Register, integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance through physical resources. The National Register program identifies seven aspects of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.[17] Retention of these qualities is necessary for a property to convey significance; however, not all seven must be present for a property to retain integrity. A basic test of integrity is whether a participant in the historic period—in this case, a colonial resident of Yorktown or George P. Blow—would recognize the Nelson House grounds as they exist today.

The following section evaluates each of the seven aspects of integrity as applied to cultural landscapes, comparing the Nelson House grounds for comparative purposes at the end of the historic periods: in 1781 at the Siege of Yorktown, in 1865 at the end of the Civil War, and in 1930 at the height of development of the York Hall estate. Overall, the landscape retains integrity of location, design, setting, and association, but has lost integrity of materials, workmanship, and feeling.[18] Table 3.1 summarizes integrity findings according to the three periods.

Table 3.1. National Register Integrity Evaluation Summary
NELSON HOUSE GROUNDS, HISTORIC YORKTOWN, COLONIAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

DATE	LOCATION	DESIGN	SETTING	MATERIALS	WORKMANSHIP	FEELING	ASSOCIATION
1781	Retains	Retains	Retains	Lost	Lost	Retains	Retains
1865	Retains	Retains	Retains	Lost	Lost	Lost	Retains
1930	Retains	Retains	Retains	Retains	Lost	Lost	Retains

Location

Location refers to the place where the cultural landscape was constructed or where the historic event occurred.

1781: The existing four Nelson lots (48, 49, 50, 52) formed the Nelson House grounds during the Siege of 1781, although Thomas Nelson Jr. owned interest in

several adjoining lots. The Smith and Ballard lots were separately owned in 1781.
Evaluation: Retains integrity of location

1865: Lots 48, 49, 50, and 52 formed the core of the Nelson House property during the Civil War.
Evaluation: Retains integrity of location

1930: Lots 48, 49, 50, and 52 formed the core of the York Hall estate in 1930, although the estate also included the adjoining Smith and Ballard Houses (lots 53, 54) and site of the William Nelson House and Nelson stores (lots 47, 46) now managed as separate park properties.
Evaluation: Retains integrity of location

Design

Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a cultural landscape.

1781: Details of design lost or altered from this time include removal of the front entrance walk from Main Street, back court landscape (possibly including a formal garden), and service yard west of the house, and addition of perimeter walls, formal garden, and service buildings. Despite this, the overall design of the Nelson House grounds during the Siege of 1781, with the house and front court on lot 52 and open space (former Nelson garden and open lots) on lots 48–50, remains largely intact.
Evaluation: Retains integrity of design

1865: Details of design lost or altered from this time include removal of the front entrance walk from Main Street and service yard west of the house, and addition of perimeter walls, formal garden, and service buildings. Despite this, the overall design of the Nelson House grounds during the Civil War, with the house and boxwood-hedge enclosed front court on lot 52, remains largely intact.
Evaluation: Retains integrity of design

1930: Details of design from this time that have been lost or altered include removal of the front court garden; the oval entrance drive, plantings, perimeter wall, and entrance gates in the back court; brick walks on the terrace; herbaceous plants, shrubs, dwarf boxwood hedges, and furnishings from the formal garden; stepping-stone paths in the lawn; and service yard south of the stable. A fence has been added across the lawn, and new walks have been installed in the front court and terrace. While the design of the front and back courts has been significantly altered, the design of the majority of site comprised of the formal garden, lawn, terrace, and service area remain largely intact.
Evaluation: Retains integrity of design

Setting

Setting refers to the physical environment within and adjoining the cultural landscape.

1781: The setting of the Nelson House grounds has changed since 1781 through removal of the Nelson stores, William Nelson House, and Cox House across Main Street, and the addition of the formal garden, service buildings, and perimeter wall from the York Hall estate. Growth of successional woods in the Great Valley has obscured view of the York River from the Nelson House. Former open fields along Nelson and Read Streets have been developed with houses and a parking lot, or grown into woods. The Nelson stable on Nelson Street has been lost, as have several unidentified buildings along Read Street. Despite these changes, the Nelson House grounds retain their relationship to Main, Read, and Nelson Streets, and are still flanked by three colonial-period buildings (Custom House, "Sessions" House, and Cole Digges House).
Evaluation: Retains integrity of setting

1865: Since 1865, the setting of the Nelson House grounds has changed through the growth of successional woods in the Great Valley that have obscured view of the York River, loss of the outbuildings west of the house, and the addition of York Hall perimeter walls, formal garden, and service buildings. Former open fields along Nelson Street and Read Street have been developed with houses and parking lots or have grown into woods. Despite this, the overall setting in 1865, with the Nelson House and boxwood-hedge-enclosed front court, remains intact. The Nelson stores and William Nelson House were lost in 1814 well before the Civil War, leaving the open field that exists today, where military tents were pitched during the war.
Evaluation: Retains integrity of setting

1930: Since 1930, the setting of the Nelson House grounds has changed through the loss of the Colonial Revival-style bank building at the corner of Read Street (built ca. 1923), the addition of a parking lot on the former York Hall nursery and fields along Read Street, and construction of houses along Nelson Street and the Poor Potter Site shelter on lot 51. The setting has also changed through subdivision of the Smith and Ballard Houses into separate lots delineated by fences. Despite these changes, the setting of the Nelson House grounds within Yorktown has remained substantially intact since 1930.
Evaluation: Retains integrity of setting

Materials

Materials are the physical elements, both natural and constructed, that existed historically within the cultural landscape.

1781: Materials within the Nelson House grounds remain similar to those that existed in 1781, but all have been replaced, except in the house. There may have been marl walks, a material that does not presently exist. Wood as a building material, found in the outbuildings, is no longer present. There is no record of tree and shrub varieties, although there were most likely boxwood hedges and native trees that exist today, such as tulip tree and Eastern red-cedar.
Evaluation: Does not retain integrity of materials

1865: The materials of the landscape in 1865 were largely the same as those in 1781. A boxwood hedge that existed around the front court during the war was replanted by the park in the 1970s. All other materials in the landscape outside of the house either post-date the Civil War or have been replaced. The existing brick retaining wall at the front court was built after the war.
Evaluation: Does not retain integrity of materials

1930: Since 1930, materials within the Nelson House grounds have changed through removal of stone statuary and paths, concrete and stone in the pools, marl in the entrance drive and garden walks, and flowering plants in the gardens. Some perennials remain in the formal garden beds, including peonies, iris, and narcissus. The existing unpainted wood of the paling fences erected by the park were not characteristic of the York Hall estate. The boxwood hedges in the formal garden are replacements of dwarf boxwoods. Despite these changes, the landscape retains materials dating to the York Hall estate, including brick in the walls, walks, and bed edging; and lawn, trees and shrubs, including Eastern red-cedar, tulip tree, linden, and crape-myrtle.
Evaluation: Retains integrity of materials

Workmanship

Workmanship refers to the physical evidence of the crafts in the construction of and use of the landscape.

1781: Colonial-period workmanship is still evident in the Nelson House, but has been lost from the landscape. There are no above-ground built features existing from this time except for the house.
Evaluation: Does not retain integrity of workmanship

1865: The workmanship of the landscape in 1865, which was largely the same as that in 1781, has largely been lost outside of the house. The brick wall along the front court retains its historic workmanship, but it was built shortly after the war.
Evaluation: Does not retain integrity of workmanship

1930: Workmanship of the York Hall landscape has changed with removal of brick walks and garden furnishings, and the decline in maintenance that once characterized the well-tended landscape. The existing brick walks, fences, and

signs were installed by the park after 1975. Some workmanship is still evident in the brick walls and service buildings, but overall, workmanship of the York Hall landscape has been lost.
Evaluation: Does not retain integrity of workmanship

Feeling

Feeling is an expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time in a cultural landscape.

1781: The dominance of the restored Nelson House in the landscape imparts a strong feeling of colonial character, despite the loss of the adjoining outbuildings, marl drives, and gardens. The addition of later brick walls, service buildings, and formal garden is compatible with the overall feeling of a colonial landscape.
Evaluation: Retains integrity of feeling

1865: Although the Nelson House today appears much as it did in 1865, overall the landscape does not impart the feeling of the Civil War period due to changes in the outbuildings and Yorktown village setting.
Evaluation: Does not retain integrity of feeling

1930: The feeling of the landscape as a designed early twentieth-century country place, derived from its highly-maintained character with extensive ornamental plantings and garden furnishings, has been lost.
Evaluation: Does not retain integrity of feeling

Association

Association refers to the direct link between the important historic event or person and the cultural landscape.

1781: The Nelson House grounds retain the house and property that embody its association with the Revolution and the Siege of 1781.
Evaluation: Retains integrity of association

1865: The Nelson House grounds retain the house and property that embody its association with the Civil War.
Evaluation: Retains integrity of association

1930: The Nelson House grounds retain the major designed features—the house, terrace, lawn, formal garden, service buildings, perimeter walls, and many trees and shrubs that reflect its association with the York Hall estate.
Evaluation: Retains integrity of association

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE EVALUATION

This evaluation of the Nelson House grounds determines the extent to which the cultural landscape retains historic character from the periods of significance (ca. 1730–1781, 1861–1865, 1914–1930). The cultural landscape evaluation process consists of a comparison of historic conditions with existing conditions according to the findings of the site history and existing conditions chapters. While the cultural landscape evaluation is similar in concept to the preceding National Register evaluation, it is organized by landscape characteristics and features, rather than by resources, and assesses character rather than integrity.[19]

Landscape characteristics are tangible aspects that define a landscape's overall appearance and aid in understanding its cultural value. Landscape features are the aspects that make up the characteristic and are the smallest unit in the evaluation process. The following is a list of landscape characteristics associated with the Nelson House grounds cultural landscape:

Natural Systems are the natural aspects that have influenced the development and physical form of the landscape. These include geology, hydrology, climate, flora and fauna. The woods in the Great Valley (outside of the project area) are an example of a natural feature (existing managed trees and shrubs are addressed under the Vegetation characteristic).

Spatial Organization is the three-dimensional organization of a landscape created by the ground, vertical, and overhead planes. The front court is an example of a spatial feature in the Nelson House grounds.

Land Use is defined as the principal human activities that form, shape, and organize a landscape. While land use is a characteristic in the Nelson House landscape, there are no associated land-use features. An example of a land-use feature would be a picnic area.

Topography is the three-dimensional configuration of the landscape surface characterized by built changes (natural landforms are addressed under Natural Systems and Features). Topographic features at the Nelson House include the terrace; the British earthworks just south of the project area are another example.

Vegetation is composed of deciduous and evergreen trees, shrubs, vines, ground covers, and herbaceous plants introduced in the landscape. Examples of vegetation at the Nelson House grounds include the boxwood hedges in the formal garden and specimen trees (natural, unmanaged vegetation, such as the woods in the Great Valley, is covered under Natural Systems and Features).

Circulation consists of systems of movement in the landscape. Circulation at the Nelson House grounds includes the brick walks on the terrace and the turf walks in the formal garden.

Buildings and Structures are the three-dimensional constructs in the landscape; building are for human shelter, while structures are not designed for human shelter. Wisteria Cottage is an example of a building, and the perimeter wall is a structure.

Views and Vistas are the prospect created by a range of vision in the landscape. The primary view is from the Nelson House looking north toward the York River.

Small-Scale Features are the elements that provide detail and diversity in response to functional and aesthetic concerns. At the Nelson House grounds, small-scale features include fences and benches.

Archeological Landscape Features are above-ground remains related to historic or prehistoric land use. An example of an archeological landscape feature is the iron plate in the formal garden remaining from a fireplace. Subsurface archeological remains are generally not evaluated as part of the cultural landscape.

The cultural landscape evaluation determines how characteristics and associated features have changed since the end of the historic periods: in 1781 (Revolutionary War period, Siege of Yorktown), in 1865 (end of the Civil War), and in 1930 (height of the York Hall landscape). The first of two sections in the evaluation provides an overview of changes to the landscape organized by landscape characteristics. The second section provides an evaluation of all existing landscape features organized by the six character areas within the Nelson House grounds: front court, back court, terrace, formal garden, lawn, and service area (fig. 3.1). Each feature is evaluated to determine whether it contributes to the historic character of the cultural landscape. Findings include the following three categories:

Contributing: Features that were present during the historic period, retain their historic character, and are associated with the historic significance of the cultural landscape. Those that add prominently to the historic associations and qualities for which the landscape is significant are described as character defining. Features unique to the historic period are described as distinctive. Features typical of those extant during the historic period are described as characteristic.

Non-Contributing: Features that were not present during the historic period and are not associated with the landscape's historic significance. Non-contributing

features that are incompatible with the historic character of the landscape, particularly in relation to historic materials, size, scale, proportion, and massing, are described as detracting. Features distinguishable from the historic character of the landscape but related to historic materials, size, scale, proportion, and massing, are described as compatible.

Unevaluated: Features for which physical or historical documentation is insufficient or inconclusive. Further research and evaluation may provide an evaluation of either contributing or non-contributing.

Table 3.2 at the end of the chapter provides a summary of the feature evaluations organized by characteristic. All evaluated landscape features are labeled on the analysis and evaluation plan (drawing 3.0), which contrasts historic (contributing) and non-historic features, and also locates character-defining features lost since the historic periods. Photographs of the existing landscape are in chapter 2.

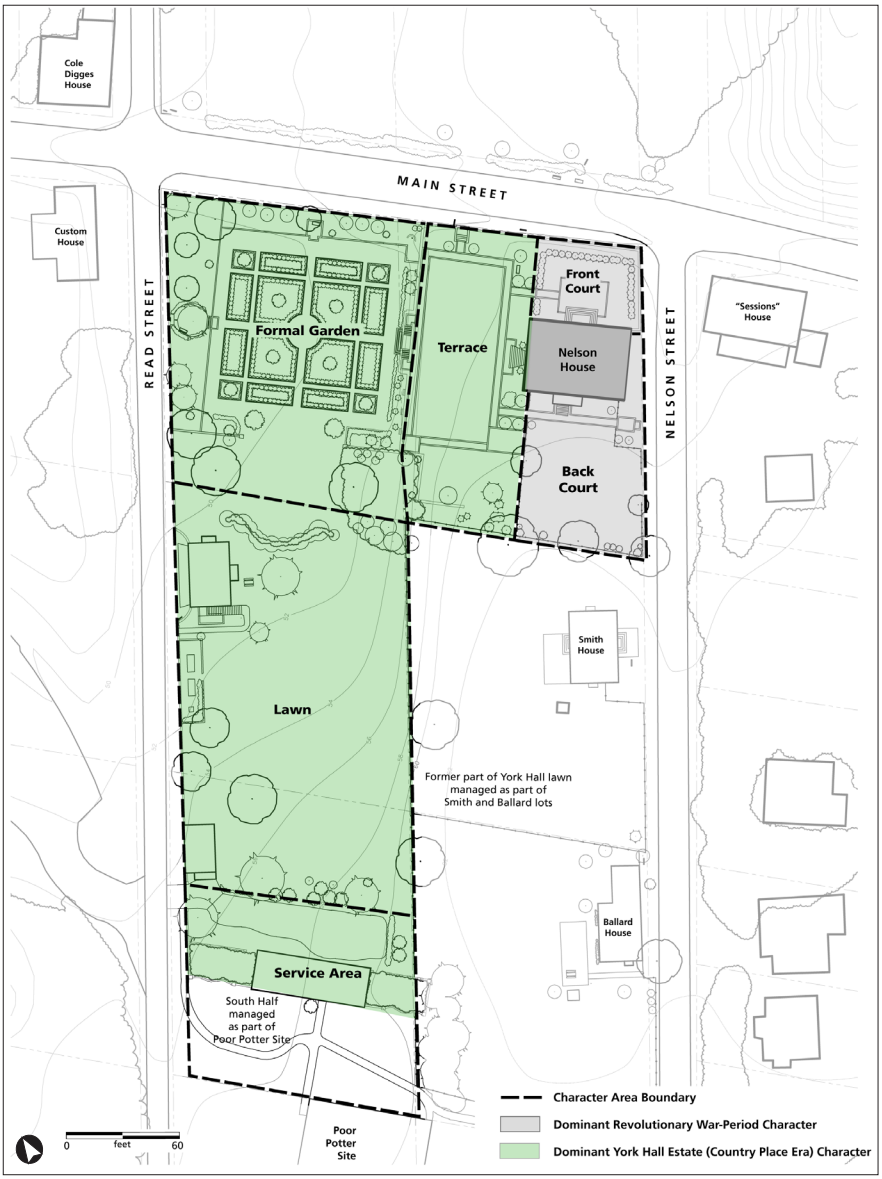


Figure 3.1. Plan of the Nelson House grounds showing dominant historic character in each of the character areas. For the purposes of the cultural landscape evaluation, Civil War-period character is the same as the Revolutionary War-period character (SUNY ESF.)

LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTIC EVALUATION

Overall, the existing character of the Nelson House grounds reflects layers of historic development and non-historic National Park Service rehabilitation. The character from the historic period of the colonial and Revolutionary War period (ca. 1730–1781) is evident in the spatial organization created by the house and its front and back courts, the architecture of the Nelson House, and the setting defined by the open-space of lots 48–50; boundary with Main, Nelson, and Read Streets; view of the York River; and setting of adjoining colonial buildings including the Smith, Ballard, Sessions, and Cole Digges Houses, and the Custom House. Circulation, vegetation, and small-scale feature characteristics from the Revolutionary War era have largely been lost. The character of the landscape remained largely unchanged through the Civil War (1861–1865), although the surrounding setting changed due to the loss of buildings, notably the William Nelson House and Nelson stores across Main Street.

From the historic period of the York Hall estate (1914-1930), the cultural landscape retains its overall spatial organization created by the house and its front and back courts, terrace, formal garden, lawn, and service area; buildings and structures including the Nelson House, three outbuildings, and the perimeter brick wall; and layout of the formal garden. Some of the circulation and vegetation characteristics of the landscape remain, especially in the formal garden. The front and back courts, and the terrace received the bulk of the National Park Service rehabilitation and thereby lost much of their historic character from the York Hall estate period.

Overall, the historic character of the landscape from the Revolutionary War period is dominant in the front and back courts (see fig. 3.1). This is the result of National Park Service rehabilitation in the 1970s that removed most of the York Hall estate features from these areas. The historic character from the York Hall estate is dominant in the terrace, formal garden, lawn, and service area, except for the south half of the service area, which is now managed as part of the Poor Potter Site.

Natural Systems

As a developed village property, natural systems were not a prominent characteristic of the Nelson House grounds during the historic periods. The natural landform of the site, with its high point along Main Street at lot 52 near the head of the Great Valley, most likely influenced Scotch Tom's decision to locate his new house there in ca. 1730. The change in elevation from lot 52 to lot 48 also influenced the location of the terrace overlooking the formal garden during the York Hall estate period. The lower and largely level land along the garden and open lots (lots 48, 49, and 50), with their naturally fertile, deep, and well-drained

Slagle fine sandy loam soils, made them well suited for the gardens that the Nelson family maintained there around the time of the Revolution.

Figure 3.2. Changes in spatial organization within the Nelson House grounds from the end of the historic periods to the present. Gray shading indicates planted areas, and dashed lines show the limits of major spaces. The area outside of the Nelson House grounds is masked. (SUNY ESF.)

Spatial Organization

The existing spatial organization of the Nelson House grounds is characteristic of the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and York Hall estate periods (fig. 3.2). During the Revolutionary War, the landscape was oriented to Main Street, with three-quarters of the site maintained as open fields. Small defined spaces were at the front and rear of the house on lot 52 at the front court and back court. The back court, measuring 100 feet deep (historic insurance surveys identified it as 60 feet deep, perhaps the space between the house and boxwood hedge), may have contained a formal garden (see Vegetation characteristic). The Nelson outbuildings, including kitchen and servants quarters and four other buildings, formed a partially enclosed yard located apart from the house, as was typical in eighteenth century Virginia towns.[20] The Nelson yard was approximately 30 feet west of the house at the west side of lot 52. West of the service yard, at a lower elevation, were the garden and open lots (lots 48, 49, and 50) that most likely contained kitchen gardens, with a house along the perimeter of Read Street on lot 50. Little is known about how trees and shrubs defined spaces in the landscape during this period, although there may have been a boxwood hedge around the perimeter of the front court, and another hedge along the south boundary of the back court. The grounds were most likely enclosed by fences.[21] This spatial organization remained largely intact through the Civil War. Photographs show that a mature boxwood hedge, approximately four feet high, enclosed the front court, without a fence.

During the York Hall estate period, George Preston Blow worked with architects Griffin and Wynkoop and landscape architect Charles Gillette to redesign the Nelson House grounds into a largely enclosed, inward-oriented landscape that incorporated the adjoining Smith and Ballard lots. A perimeter brick wall was erected around the grounds, and much of the perimeter was heavily planted with trees and shrubs. The front court became enclosed to a greater extent through growth of the preexisting boxwood hedge upwards

of fifteen feet tall. New spaces were defined, including an open rectangular terrace at the site of the Nelson service buildings and yard; a partly enclosed formal garden at the north end of the Nelson garden and open lots; an open lawn at the central part of the garden and open lots and the Smith and Ballard lots; and a service area at the south end of the grounds.

The spatial organization of the Nelson House grounds presently reflects a layered character resulting from changes made during the National Park Service rehabilitation of the 1970s. The front court was returned to the mostly open character that probably existed during the Revolution, and the Smith and Ballard lots were set off as separate spaces with the addition of wood fences along the colonial lot lines (although the area still appears as a continuous open lawn). Despite this, the landscape overall retains the spatial organization of the York Hall estate period with the terrace, formal garden, lawn, and service area spaces remaining largely intact.

Land Use

The existing primary land use of the Nelson House grounds, as a public house museum and park offices, is a contemporary change to the historic landscape. Domestic and agricultural uses during the Revolutionary period at the Nelson House and garden lots are no longer evident, but existing public uses perpetuate the York Hall estate's historic function as pleasure grounds within the terrace and formal garden. For a brief period between ca. 1930 and 1935, the York Hall estate was open to the public as a museum, but this use did not lead to significant physical changes in the landscape, which returned to private use in 1936 as the year-round home of George W. Blow. The service yard, used by the park for maintenance storage, has a utilitarian function similar to its historic use, as does the carriage house (garage), which serves as a park ranger station. Despite the contemporary changes, the existing land use is generally compatible with the historic character of the landscape. An exception is at the carriage house (garage), where an exterior steel staircase, antennae, and park service vehicles along Read Street related to the building's use as a ranger station detract from the landscape's historic domestic use.

Circulation

Existing circulation within the Nelson House grounds is characteristic of the York Hall estate period and the non-historic park service period (fig. 3.3). During the Revolutionary War and Civil War periods, formal circulation within the grounds was limited to an axial walk from the front entrance of the Nelson House to Main Street and a service drive to the yard west of the house. If the site had a formal garden (most likely in the back court), there may have been garden walks. Informal

dirt paths would have crossed the landscape to access the garden and open lots and other outbuildings.

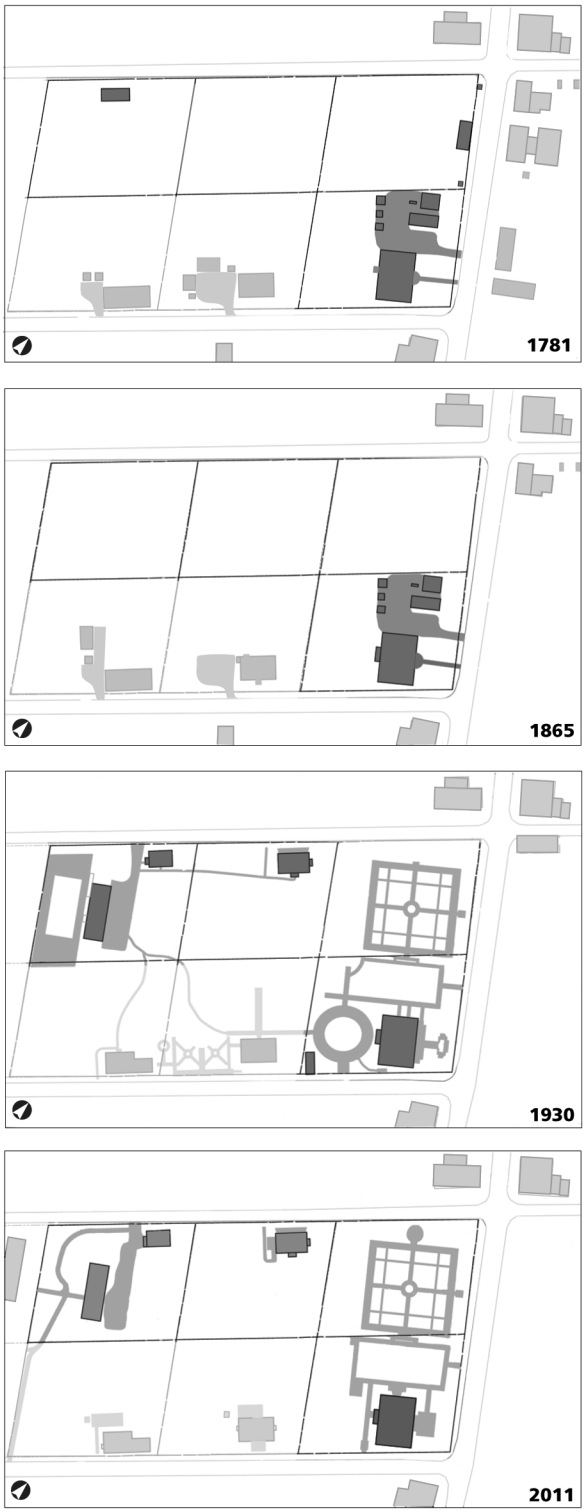


Figure 3.3. Changes in circulation within the Nelson House grounds from the end of the historic periods to the present. The area outside of the Nelson House grounds is masked. (SUNY ESF.)

During the York Hall estate period, circulation was completely redesigned according to plans by Charles Gillette. The old front entrance walk, which remained through ca. 1921, was replaced by a new entrance off Main Street from the terrace, and a walk and patio were built in its place. A set of orthogonal walks bordered the terrace at the site of the old Nelson yard and led down a double flight of steps to grass walks within the formal garden. Access to the garage, Wisteria Cottage, and stables from the house and garden was by a series of informal, winding stepping-stone paths. Two drives, both designed for automobiles, were built into the property: a formal oval entrance drive at the back court off Nelson Street and a utilitarian service drive to the service area off Read Street.

In the National Park Service rehabilitation of the 1970s, the York Hall estate circulation was changed through removal of the oval entrance drive, redesign of the terrace walks, and addition of a brick landing and walk at the front court. The park did not restore the front entrance walk that existed during the Revolution and Civil War. The grass walks in the formal garden and service drive were retained, but the stepping-stone paths were removed. Existing circulation thus reflects the York Hall estate only in the formal garden and service area. There is no trace of circulation from the Revolutionary War and Civil War periods.

Topography

The existing built topography of the Nelson House grounds is characteristic of the York Hall estate period. The natural landform, with its rise along the east side of the site and lower area long the west, was modified by the Nelson family to create a building platform for the house and yard to the west. The grade at the yard was initially terraced with a cobblestone wall parallel to the house and slope, but this was most likely removed following construction of the existing house in ca. 1730. The grade was subsequently made into a

wider terrace that extended to the west boundary of lot 52, where it transitioned to the lower grade on lot 48 with an embankment.

Around the time of the Civil War, the grade around the front court and in the yard was lowered, revealing the foundation blocks along the west side of the Nelson House and the brick foundation of the kitchen–wash house in the yard. In response, a brick retaining wall was built around three sides of the front court in ca. 1870.

During the York Hall estate period, the topography of the front court was retained, but the terrace of the service yard was raised and expanded between ca. 1916 and 1922 to create a level expanse extending outward from the house, above the formal garden. The site of the formal garden was leveled, requiring the addition of low walls along three sides. The grade of the back court was also raised. Changes in grade elsewhere on the grounds were minor.

In the National Park Service rehabilitation of the 1970s, the York Hall topography was retained in large part, except for lowering of the terrace that required removal of steps and sections of the surrounding retaining wall. The existing topography thus reflects the York Hall estate period, with little remaining from the Revolutionary War and Civil War periods.

Constructed Water Features

Constructed water features are not presently characteristic of the Nelson House grounds. During the Revolutionary War and Civil War periods, there is no documentation of constructed water features in the landscape, although there was a well house on lot 48 along Main Street (the water was not visible in the landscape). Constructed water features, designed by Charles Gillette, were characteristic of the York Hall landscape. At the front court, a small reflecting pool constructed in ca. 1921 formed the centerpiece of the surrounding forecourt garden, and a lion's head fountain was installed in ca. 1930 on the formal garden wall at the landing of the stairs from the terrace. A swimming pool was built at the south entrance to the formal garden in ca. 1946 after the end of the Country Place Era. These water features were all removed during the National Park Service rehabilitation of the landscape in the 1970s.

Vegetation

Existing vegetation on the Nelson House grounds is characteristic of the York Hall estate period and the non-historic park service period (fig. 3.4). The Country Place Era character is evident in large-scale vegetation in the formal garden, lawn, and service area. The remaining vegetation with the exception of the front court

boxwood hedge, which was replaced in-kind, was designed by the park service as new additions in the character of the colonial period.

Figure 3.4. Changes in vegetation within the Nelson House grounds from the end of the historic periods to the present. The area outside of the Nelson House grounds is masked. (SUNY ESF.)

Little is known about vegetation during the colonial period through the Revolutionary War. Thomas Nelson Jr. maintained vegetable gardens on some portion of lots 48, 49, and 50 that were referred to in nineteenth-century deeds as the Nelson "garden and open lots." There is no record of a formal garden, but a town property of this stature most likely had one, as did similar eighteenth-century Georgian-style houses in nearby Williamsburg. Such houses typically had formal gardens at the back of the property, typically designed in the Anglo-Dutch tradition popular in England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. These gardens were characterized by geometric symmetry, axial walks, flowerbeds, and enclosure of hedges and other plantings.[22] A possible location of the Nelson formal garden is the back court. The garden and open lots were probably too removed from the house for the formal garden, and the west side of the house was occupied by the service yard. The shallow front court probably had ornamental plantings as well.

Some of the aged trees and shrubs evident in drawings and photographs from the Civil War and early twentieth century may date back to the Revolutionary War period. These included a tulip tree on the west side of the front court, boxwood hedges around the front court and on the south boundary of the back court (perhaps originally framing a formal garden), an unidentified specimen tree along Main Street at the boundary of lots 52 and 48, and several additional specimens in the back court.

During the York Hall estate period, George W. Blow retained the old overgrown boxwood hedges and aged specimen trees presumably for their historic character and possible colonial origin. He also kept an aged laurel tree in the front court that purportedly witnessed the 1824 visit by the Marquis de Lafayette. The remainder of the landscape was heavily planted with new trees, shrubs, vines, and herbaceous plants according to the design of Charles Gillette. Trees and shrubs were planted along the Main and Read street perimeter of the grounds, and to screen the service area from the lawn. Species were primarily native or traditional to the South, including Eastern red-cedar, tulip tree, willow oak, European

linden, Southern magnolia, American beech, boxwood, crape-myrtle, mock-orange, osmanthus, and yew. Gillette also used Asian species, including Japanese maple, photinia, and gold-dust tree (acuba). These plantings were unified in many areas with groundcover, including common periwinkle, and English ivy grew on the brick walls surrounding the formal garden, where Gillette designed flowering herbaceous beds. Detailed planting plans have not been found, but records show that Gillette secured plants from a variety of historic gardens in Virginia (see appendix B). Photographs taken in 1930 and other documentation indicates the beds were maintained with a profusion of roses and old-fashioned perennials, including ajuga, columbine, sweet william, foxglove, coral bells, German iris, and salvia, which were framed by dwarf boxwood hedges and surrounded groups of clipped yews and deciduous shrubs. The formal garden also was planted with spring bulbs (see appendix C).

Following its acquisition of the Nelson House grounds in 1968, the National Park Service ceased maintaining the flower beds in the formal garden and removed much of the remaining high-maintenance vegetation. In the front court, back court, and terrace, the park service removed nearly all of the York Hall estate plantings, including the aged boxwood hedges in the front and back courts. The park replanted the boxwood hedge around the front court, and introduced new plantings, including groups of dogwood trees along the walks, paired boxwoods to either side of the west entrance of the house, and scattered other shrubs and trees. Except for the boxwood hedge at the front court, these plantings were a contemporary design. A number of specimen trees remain from the York Hall estate, as well as the border of trees surrounding the formal garden. Some shrubs remain from York Hall, notably crape-myrtle and holly around the formal garden. The formal garden boxwood hedges are a park-service addition in place of the original dwarf boxwood borders. The center yews have been replaced with rose of sharon, and the herbaceous beds are maintained mostly with a mown cover, surrounding remnant bulbs and perennials.

Buildings and Structures

Existing buildings and structures on the Nelson House grounds are characteristic of the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and York Hall estate periods (fig. 3.5). The Nelson House, the second house on the property built in ca. 1730, has remained the most prominent building in the landscape. It is a two-story, Georgian-style brick house measuring approximately 70 feet across the front and 50 feet on the sides. During the Revolutionary War period, it adjoined a complex of five service buildings built around the same time as the house in ca. 1730. The largest of these was the combination kitchen–wash house on the north side of the yard approximately 27 feet west of the house and closer to Main Street. It was a one-story frame building on a brick foundation measuring approximately 40 by 20 feet,

with a gable roof and massive center chimney. Three feet west of the kitchen was the servants quarters, a brick building measuring approximately 20 by 24 feet, and immediately to its south was a small, frame poultry house. On the south side of the yard, 21 feet west of the house, was the dairy, a 12-foot square one-story frame building with a gable roof. Next to the dairy was the spinning house, a 12-foot square building, and west of it was the smoke house, a 16-foot square building. Along Main Street west of the service yard was a wellhouse, and to the west on lot 48 was the site of a frame dwelling that Scotch Tom may have built to satisfy deed requirements that a house be built within one year of purchase. It was most likely removed prior to the revolution Another two such houses were on lots 49 and 50 along Read Street. The house on lot 49 was removed by 1781, and the one on lot 50 was gone by the time of the Civil War. In ca. 1870, a brick retaining wall was built around the front court, and a tenant house was built along Main Street on lot 48 around the same time. This house was removed by 1900.

Figure 3.5. Changes in buildings and structures within the Nelson House grounds from the end of the historic periods to the present. Buildings are gray and solid lines indicate walls. The area outside of the Nelson House grounds is masked. (SUNY ESF.)

At the beginning of the York Hall estate period in 1914, only the Nelson House and brick retaining wall remained, along with the ruins of the kitchen–wash house. By ca. 1916, three new outbuildings had been completed: the garage (carriage house), Wisteria Cottage (gardener's cottage), and the stable, along with a brick perimeter wall. Improvements in the 1920s resulted in the addition of another brick wall in the garden. A garage for Mrs. Katherine Blow was built in the back court in ca. 1935, after the end of the historic period.

In its rehabilitation of the grounds, the National Park Service removed Mrs. Blow's garage and the perimeter wall along Nelson Street, and lowered the front court wall and garden wall between the terrace and formal garden. The restoration of the Nelson House, completed in 1976, returned the house to its appearance during the Revolutionary War period. None of the colonial outbuildings in the yard were reconstructed.

Views and Vistas

Existing views and vistas in the Nelson House grounds are characteristic of the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and York

Hall estate periods (fig. 3.6). During the Revolutionary War, the open landscape surrounding the house, including the garden lots, provided views across the site and surrounding village landscape, except where blocked by adjoining service buildings, William Nelson House, and the "Sessions" House. From the front court, there was a panoramic view of the York River to the north. The Nelson stores on the north side of Main Street on lot 48 may not have obscured the river view due to their elevation that was lower than the house. During the Civil War, the river view became more expansive with loss of the adjoining William Nelson House and Nelson stores during the fire of 1814. The same views existed during the Civil War.

Figure 3.6. Changes in views within the Nelson House grounds from the end of the historic periods to the present. The V-shaped lines indicate the direction and breadth of view. The area outside of the Nelson House grounds is masked. (SUNY ESF.)

During the York Hall estate period, the York River view was blocked by the tall boxwood hedge around the front court, which reached the second floor of the house. Views of the river were only through the second floor windows, and looking from the terrace at the Main Street entrance. A vista along the east-west axis of the formal garden, from the elevated position on the terrace, was introduced during this time, along with a view looking south across the lawn. Within the garden, there were vistas of the central sundial along each of the axial walks.

In the park service rehabilitation of the grounds during the 1970s, the boxwood hedge around the front court was replaced with small plants that reopened the view to the outside. However, the growth of woods and specimen trees in the Great Valley and on lots 46 and 47 north of Main Street blocked most of the York River view. The view of the formal garden was retained, but the view across the lawn was blocked by shrubs planted during late Blow ownership. The internal garden vistas along the axial walks were lost due to removal of the focal point, the sundial column.

Small Scale Features

Existing small-scale features in the Nelson House grounds, which are related to park operations with one exception, date to the National Park Service period. There is little documentation on small-scale features during the Revolutionary War. Wood fences most likely existed along the boundaries of the Nelson property on Main, Read, and

Nelson Streets, and along the Smith and Ballard lots. During the Civil War period, there was no fence around the front court, but there were most likely fences around the back court and the garden and open lots (lots 48, 49, and 50).

During the York Hall estate period, a large number of small-scale features were added to the landscape as part of plans by Charles Gillette. These generally reflected European Renaissance and Chinese styles. In the front court, a cherub statue overlooked the reflecting pool, the corners of the surrounding patio were flanked by urns on piers, and masonry benches were positioned close to the house. The entrance to the terrace from the back court was flanked by goddess statues on pedestals. In the formal garden, the center was marked with a prominent antique English sundial column and bench, and Chinese-style roofed benches were placed at the ends of the center axis walks. Four cherub statues on pedestals were along the west and north sides of the garden, and urns flanked the south opening of the garden onto the lawn. At the north end of the carriage house (garage), there was a Chinese temple bell. In 1931, when the Nelson House was open as a public museum, a bronze plaque honoring Lord Cornwallis was placed on the east side of the Nelson House.

When the National Park Service acquired the Nelson House in 1968, the Blow family removed most of the garden ornaments (the Chinese benches had been replaced in the 1930s with masonry benches). Over the course of the next three decades, the park service added a variety of small-scale features, including signs, interpretive waysides, wood benches, a picnic table, and mechanical systems. The only remaining historic small scale feature is the Lord Cornwallis plaque, which was relocated to the perimeter wall in the formal garden in ca. 1975.

Archeological Landscape Features

As a well-maintained landscape around the time of Revolutionary War (prior to hostilities) and during the York Hall estate period, archeological sites were not characteristic of the landscape. Above-ground remnants of buildings and structures were generally removed from the landscape. The park service also followed this approach during its rehabilitation of the landscape in the 1970s. The only above-ground remnant in the landscape is the iron base of a fireplace added in the formal garden in ca. 1946.

The entire site has not been evaluated for archeological resources. Archeological investigations during the restoration of the Nelson House in the early 1970s documented below-ground building remnants from the Nelson yard in the terrace. It is likely that there are other archeological resources that may provide important information about the history of the site.

LANDSCAPE FEATURE EVALUATION (DRAWING 3.0)

Characteristics Key: SO = Spatial Organization, C = Circulation, V = Vegetation, BS = Buildings and Structures, VV = Views and Vistas, SSF = Small Scale Features, A = Archeological Landscape Features.

Site-Wide Features

The following features define more than one character area within the Nelson House grounds.

BS-1. Nelson House

LCS #00023
Evaluation: Contributing
The Nelson House, built by Thomas "Scotch Tom" Nelson in ca. 1730 and later the residence of Thomas Nelson Jr., is the defining building of the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and York Hall landscapes. It is a two-story Georgian-style brick house that was restored to its colonial appearance by the National Park Service in 1976. Work included removal of dormers and doorways added during the York Hall estate period. Positioned thirty feet south of Main Street and approximately ten feet from Nelson Street, the house defines the front and rear courts and is a focal point of the formal garden. Although restored to the Revolutionary War period, the house maintains the character of the Civil War period and the overall design and massing of the York Hall estate period.

BS-6. York Hall Perimeter Walls

LCS# 006879 (Nelson House – Garden Wall [part])
Evaluation: Contributing
The perimeter brick walls along Main and Read Streets are character-defining structures of the York Hall landscape. These consist of brick retaining and freestanding walls constructed between ca. 1915 and 1922. (The connected brick retaining wall around the front court built in ca. 1870 is evaluated under the Front Court section, BS-5).

The perimeter walls, measuring approximately 1,000 feet in length, are built of red brick in a mix of bonds and with a corbelled brick cap. The approximately six-foot-tall section along Main Street steps down toward Read Street in three sections of header bond, and contains an opening at the entrance walk that leads to the terrace. The wall along Read Street is laid in a mix of common, stacked, and Flemish bond, and contains brick piers with corbelled caps between the sections. The wall curves inward at the carriage house (garage), and terminates at the walls in the north stable service yard. The walls along Nelson Street, which originally

extended to the Ballard House, were removed by the park service in ca. 1975, and the wall along Main Street was lowered in ca. 1983 at the time the wall around the front court (BS-5) was lowered. Aside from these changes, the perimeter wall remains intact from the York Hall estate period (1914–1930).

SSF-4. Wood Fences

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The wood fences around the back court and along the Smith and Ballard lots are contemporary features added by the park service between 1972 and 1974 to define the historic limits of the Nelson, Smith, and Ballard lots. The unpainted wood paling fences have been replaced several times, most recently in 2008. The fences are generally compatible with the Revolutionary War-period character of the village as a whole due to their inconspicuous appearance. Their rough character, however, is not consistent with the refined design of the York Hall landscape or the Georgian-style Nelson House.

SSF-6. NPS Furnishings

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The benches, signs, and picnic tables in the Nelson House grounds are non-historic features added since ca. 1976. The benches include movable wooden picnic table types on the northeastern end of the terrace and on the north brick pad in the formal garden. A teak bench with a slat back is on the circular brick patio in the formal garden. Signs include an interpretive wayside located near the entrance on Main Street; a painted signboard at the Main Street entrance hung on a mast-arm wood post that is removed when the house is closed; and another mast-arm sign in the back court. A yellow fiberglass picnic table is located near the carriage house (garage). Except for this picnic table, these furnishings are compatible with the historic character of the landscape due to their inconspicuous appearance.

Front Court

This is the landscape between the front of the Nelson House and Main Street (see fig. 3.1). Overall, the front court is a contemporary design that does not reflect the character of the Revolutionary War or Civil War landscape due to changes in grade and addition of the perimeter retaining wall. The Country Place Era-character of the front court is no longer evident due to loss of the ornamental pool, patio, tall perimeter hedge, and furnishings.

SO-1. Front Court Space

Evaluation: Contributing

The front court, bordered by the front of the Nelson House and perimeter wall along Main and Nelson Streets, is a defining spatial feature of the Revolutionary War and Civil War landscape. Created with the construction of the Nelson House in ca. 1730, the front court during the Revolutionary War was most likely open to Main and Nelson Streets, with the kitchen–wash house partially framing the west side. The space may have been enclosed by a low plank fence and boxwood hedge. By the time of the Civil War, a large tree, probably a tulip tree, framed the west side, and growth of the boxwood hedge enclosed more of the space. In ca. 1870, a change in the surrounding grade led to the addition of a retaining wall that elevated the front court above Main Street. Through the York Hall estate period, the front court was a sheltered garden space enclosed by the perimeter wall and the boxwood hedge that had grown upwards of 15 feet tall. In 1976, the park service completed rehabilitation of the front court that removed the high boxwood hedge and replanted a low boxwood hedge, thus reopening the space to the surrounding streets. Due to removal of the front court garden and high boxwood hedge, the space does not reflect the character of the York Hall estate period. The interior of the space, surrounded by the house and low boxwood hedge, is similar in character to the spatial character of the Revolutionary War and Civil War periods.

C-1. Front Court Landing and Walk

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The front court landing and walk is a non-historic feature built by the park service as part of the restoration of the Nelson House. During the Revolutionary War period, there was an axial walk connecting the front door with Main Street. This walk, including steps to Main Street, was removed in ca. 1921 as part of a Charles Gillette-designed garden that included a reflecting pool and brick patio. This garden was removed and replaced in ca. 1976 by the existing large, 23 by 30-foot rectangular landing at the front entrance steps. A brick walk connects the landing to the terrace walks, but there is no walk to Main Street. The design of the landing and walk is incompatible with the historic character of the landscape during the Revolutionary War and Civil War because it does not provide the axial connection between the front door and Main Street.

V-1. Front Court Boxwood Hedge

Evaluation: Contributing

The front court boxwood hedge, an in-kind replanting made in ca. 1976, is a defining vegetation feature of the landscape from the Civil War, and possibly the Revolutionary War. Several references to boxwood at the site during the

eighteenth and early nineteenth century suggest the hedge existed during the colonial period. The earliest graphic depiction of the hedge is in a drawing by Benson Lossing made in 1848, showing the hedge at approximately 4 feet tall and behind a plank fence. During the Civil War, the hedge was 4 to 6 feet tall and clipped in an irregular form. George Preston Blow retained the old boxwood hedge in his redesign of the grounds that began in ca. 1915, by which time the hedge was upwards of 15 feet tall. In ca. 1921, the opening in the hedge was closed with removal of the entrance walk. The National Park Service removed the old boxwood in the early 1970s and replanted the hedge in ca. 1976 with the presumed same species (common box) in the same approximate location without the center opening. The hedge is presently maintained with an irregular form at approximately three feet high. The lack of a center opening, along with loss of several plants within the hedge, detracts from its historic character. Due to its small scale, the hedge does not reflect the character of the York Hall landscape.

V-2. Front Court Tulip tree

Evaluation: Contributing

The tulip tree off the west side of the front court, an in-kind replacement made in ca. 2000, is a characteristic vegetation feature of the York Hall landscape. An aged tree, possibly a tulip tree dating from the colonial period, was located on or near this spot during the Civil War. This tree was retained during the York Hall estate period and was lost at some point after 1968. Although not the historic plant, the existing tree maintains the tree feature that existed here during the York Hall estate period and possibly back to the Revolutionary War period.

BS-5. Front Court Retaining Wall

LCS# 006879 (Nelson House – Garden Wall [part])

Evaluation: Contributing

The brick retaining wall surrounding the Nelson and Main Street sides of the front court, built in ca. 1870, is a characteristic structure of the York Hall landscape. The front court may have been bordered by low retaining walls on the east and west sides that were built during the initial construction of the house in ca. 1730. These walls were either removed or enlarged in ca. 1870 into a higher brick retaining wall that extended along three sides of the front court (Civil War photographs and illustrations do not show the present wall). This wall may have been built to address a grade changes made during or shortly after the Civil War. The new wall, approximately two feet high along Nelson Street to six feet high along Main Street, was built of red brick in running bond and featured an opening and set of steps at the entrance walk on axis with the front door of the Nelson House. In ca. 1915, the wall was raised approximately two feet during construction of a new wall to the west (see BS-6, York Hall Perimeter Wall under site-wide features). In ca. 1921,

the entrance walk opening and steps were removed as part of the redesign of the front court into an enclosed garden. The ca. 1915 top courses were removed by the park service in ca. 1983 to restore the original height. Although built outside the periods of significance, the wall was an important part of the landscape during the York Hall estate period.

VV-1. York River View

Evaluation: Contributing

The view of the York River looking north from the front court of the Nelson House is a character-defining feature of the Revolutionary War and Civil War landscape. The view most likely influenced Scotch Tom Nelson's location for his new house in ca. 1730. From here, the Nelsons could watch their ships and trading partners approach the Yorktown waterfront. The view looked across lot 46, with the Nelson stores most likely located out of the viewshed on the western side of the lot on a lower elevation. This view remained intact through the Civil War, by which time it would have become more expansive with the loss of Nelson stores and William Nelson House. Although not visible from the front court during the York Hall estate period due to the high boxwood hedge, the river view was visible from upper floors of the house. The park service rehabilitation of the front court in 1976 reopened the river view through removal of the high boxwood hedge, although the viewshed to the north and northeast has become obscured by growth of woods in the Great Valley and trees on lots 46 and 47. These obstructions detract from the historic character of the landscape.

SS-6. Nelson House Floodlights

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The three sets of floodlights in the front court lawn are not historic features. Added in ca. 1976 to light the restored Nelson House, the above-ground fixtures are not concealed and their light bulbs have been removed. The fixtures detract from the historic character of the landscape due to their visibility within the open lawn.

Back Court

The back court is the landscape between the rear of the Nelson House and the boundary of the Smith House lot (see fig. 3.1). The narrow space between the east side of the Nelson House and Nelson Street is also included in this character area. Overall, the back court landscape is a contemporary park service design of open lawn, brick walks, and scattered trees that reflects a lack of documentation necessary to accurately restore its Revolutionary War-period character.

SO-2. Back Court Space

Evaluation: Contributing

The back court space, the area defined by the Nelson House, terrace, Nelson Street, and Smith House lot, is a spatial feature of the Revolutionary War landscape. It measures nearly 100 feet deep (north to south; historic insurance maps indicate it was 60 feet deep) and approximately 100 feet wide (east to west). Due to lack of documentation, the details of the space, except for the wall of the house, are unknown. A mature boxwood hedge enclosed the south boundary along the Smith House lot during the nineteenth century and possibly dated to the eighteenth century. No documentation has been found on the Revolutionary War-period definition on the west side, where the court transitioned to the garden and open lots and service area, or to Nelson Street on the east. The use of the back court space is also unknown, although it would have been a typical place for a colonial formal garden given its proximity to the house and separation from the service area. During the York Hall estate period, the back court space was transformed into a formal entrance area according to plans by Charles Gillette. His design included an oval marl-surfaced drive with a turf island bordered by dwarf boxwood hedges, perimeter shrubs, a brick wall and gates along Nelson Street, and an entrance from the terrace marked by goddess statues on pedestals. The space also opened along a walk to the formerly separate Smith House lot to the south. During the park service rehabilitation of the grounds in ca. 1976, all of the York Hall estate features were removed except for several trees, and the space was simplified into an open lawn enclosed by wood fences and plantings on the west, south, and east sides. Although lacking its historic details, the back court presently reflects the overall rectangular spatial character of the Revolutionary War period through its restored enclosure at the Smith House lot.

C-2. Back Court Walk

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The brick walk that extends parallel to the Nelson House from Nelson Street to the terrace is a non-historic feature. The 5'-6" wide walk, built of variegated red brick in running bond with soldier-course edges, was designed by Eugene George, AIA and constructed between 1974 and 1976 as part of the rehabilitation of the Nelson House. The walk provides access to the back entrance of the house. At the eastern end of the walk on Nelson Street, the walk widens into a 9' by 12' brick pad that is a step lower than the walk. No documentation exists on circulation in the back court during the Revolutionary War period. Although a contemporary feature, the back court walk is compatible with the historic character of the landscape due to its materials and inconspicuous appearance.

V-3. Back Court Trees and Shrubs

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

Most of the existing trees and shrubs in the back court were added by the park service as part of the rehabilitation of the Nelson House in ca. 1976. While one large Kentucky coffee-tree at the boundary of the Smith lot may date to Blow ownership, overall, the plantings do not reflect the character of the York Hall landscape. Non-historic trees include a group of three flowering dogwoods at the Nelson Street entrance of the back court walk, an eastern redbud along Nelson Street, and a golden rain tree on the former entrance drive. Periwinkle and English ivy groundcover, some of which may have existed during the York Hall estate period, extend along the fence line on the east, south, and west sides of the back court. The non-historic plantings are compatible with the historic landscape because they were species used during the colonial period, except for the golden rain tree, an Asian native that was not introduced into the United States until 1809.[23] While no documentation exists on the vegetation of the back court at the time of the Revolution, an aged boxwood hedge that existed at the time of the Blow purchase in 1914 may have dated back to the Revolutionary War period. Parts of this hedge survived into the mid-twentieth century and were removed during National Park Service rehabilitation of the landscape in the 1970s.

SSF-4. Wood Fences (See Site-Wide Features)

Terrace

The terrace is the area between the west side of the Nelson House and the formal garden, and from Main Street south to near the Smith House lot boundary (see fig. 3.1). Overall, the terrace retains the character of the York Hall landscape despite modifications to its circulation and vegetation by the National Park Service.

SO-3. Terrace Space

Evaluation: Contributing

The terrace space is a defining feature of the York Hall landscape. The terrace is the presumed site of the first Nelson House built in ca. 1706, and the Revolutionary War-period service yard that was built with construction of the existing Nelson House in ca. 1730. The earth or marl-surfaced yard, accessed by a drive from Main Street, was defined by six closely-spaced service buildings, three on the north side and three on the south side. These buildings were removed after the Civil War, with the kitchen–wash house the last standing until it was destroyed in ca. 1910, leaving all but the massive center chimney and foundation.

As part of the initial development of the York Hall estate in ca. 1916, Charles Gillette designed a sloping terrace over the remains of the old service yard, with

the grade along Main Street supported by the perimeter brick wall. Gillette designed marl paths and a mass of shrubs along the lower slope. As part of the construction of the formal garden in 1922, Gillette redesigned the terrace by raising it to a level grade supported by a brick wall along the east side of the garden and additional walls to the north along the lot 53 boundary. The new terrace consisted of an open lawn that overlooked the formal garden, and was bordered by shrubs and trees along the north, east, and south sides. The space was further defined by brick and stone walks along the perimeter. As part of the restoration of the Nelson House, the park service retained the terrace space, but altered its details through lowering of the grade by approximately two feet, removal of perimeter shrubs, and redesign of the walks. Despite these changes, the terrace space remains largely intact from the York Hall estate period. There is no above-ground evidence of the Revolutionary and Civil War-period yard.

C-3. Terrace Walks

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The terrace walks are a non-historic feature built in ca. 1976 as part of the restoration of the Nelson House. During the Revolutionary War period, circulation at the site of the terrace consisted of an earth or marl-surfaced drive and yard. In the initial development of the York Hall estate in ca. 1916, Charles Gillette designed marl walks edged with brick along the perimeter of the terrace to connect the house and entrance drive with the formal garden and lawn. In the redesign of the terrace in 1922, Gillette surfaced the walks in brick, and in ca. 1930, a stone walk was added along the south and west sides of the terrace. In ca. 1976, as part of the restoration of the Nelson House, the park service removed all walks on the terrace and built new brick walks that were similar in character. The new walks, consisting of running bond with soldier-course edging, created a rectangular perimeter around the terrace lawn and connected with walks to the front and back courts. A large brick pad was added near the back court, and a new landing was built at the Nelson House entrance as part of a new flight of steps. Although not historic, the terrace walks are compatible with the historic character of the landscape because they are similar in design and materials to those that existed at the York Hall estate.

C-4. Main Street Entrance

Evaluation: Contributing

The entrance to the Nelson House grounds from Main Street is a characteristic circulation feature of the York Hall landscape. It is an opening in the perimeter brick walk with flagstone at the base and brick steps that lead to the upper terrace. An opening with a wood gate was built in this location as part of the York Hall perimeter wall in ca. 1916. In ca. 1922, Charles Gillette redesigned this opening

as the main entrance to the grounds with removal of the old front entrance walk at the front court. The redesigned entrance included two flights of brick steps to meet the raised grade of the terrace. In its rehabilitation of the Nelson House grounds during the 1970s, the park service did not restore the earlier entrance and retained the York Hall entrance, but removed the second flight of steps and accompanying wing walls to accommodate the lowered grade of the terrace. It is not known whether the existing paired picket gate at the top of the steps is part of the original York Hall entrance, but it is compatible with the historic character of the landscape.

BS-7. East Garden Wall and Stair (see Formal Garden)

V-4. Terrace Trees and Shrubs

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The existing trees and shrubs are non-historic vegetation installed by the park service in ca. 1976 as part of the restoration of the Nelson House. During the York Hall estate period, the terrace had the same central lawn, but was flanked by dense shrub plantings along the north, east, and south sides. The existing trees and shrubs are sparser and consist of traditional Southern species including two groups of dogwoods at the walks to the back and front courts, two pyramidal boxwoods flanking the entrance to the Nelson House, rose of sharon flanking the Main Street entrance, several crape-myrtle, and assorted shrubs and a groundcover of periwinkle at the south end of the terrace. There are no plantings along the garden wall (west side). Although of contemporary origin, the existing trees and shrubs are compatible with the historic York Hall character of the landscape in species and overall placement.

VV-2. Formal Garden View

Evaluation: Contributing

The view of the formal garden from the terrace is a defining feature of the York Hall landscape. Part of Charles Gillette's design for the terrace and formal garden that were built in 1922, the view provides an elevated prospect across the formal garden that is framed by the trees along the south, west, and north perimeter. Although the composition of the garden has changed, the view remains intact from the York Hall estate period.

Formal Garden

The formal garden is the landscape bounded by the perimeter wall along Main and Read Streets, the terrace, and the lawn (see fig. 3.1). Overall, the formal

garden retains the character of the York Hall landscape despite loss of herbaceous flowering plants, shrubs, and garden ornament.

SO-4. Formal Garden Space

Evaluation: Contributing

The formal garden space, covering most of lot 48, is a character-defining feature of the York Hall landscape. During the Revolutionary War and Civil War, lot 48 was field within the Nelson garden and open lots, with a well house along Main Street. The earlier house on lot 48 was removed by the time of the Revolution, and a second tenant house built in ca. 1870 was removed by ca. 1900. Fences historically lined Main and Read Streets, and the east side of the lot were bordered by the service buildings, located on an embankment. Across Read Street was the Custom House. In the initial development of the York Hall estate beginning in ca. 1916, the formal garden space was an open lawn enclosed by the perimeter wall along Main and Read streets, and dense tree and shrub plantings around the perimeter, with an opening to the lawn to the south. Redesign of the space as a formal, quincunx plan garden retained much of the preexisting spatial character, except along the east side where a wall along the redesigned upper terrace created a distinct edge. After 1930, the space was modified by expansion of the shrub border along the south side around a swimming pool, now removed. After its acquisition of the property in 1968, the National Park Service retained the overall spatial character of the formal garden, although the perimeter plantings have thinned. The existing enclosed character contrasts with the open field that most likely existed during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars.

C-5. Formal Garden Walks

Evaluation: Contributing

The grass walks in the formal garden are a defining circulation feature of the York Hall landscape. Designed by Charles Gillette and constructed in 1922, the walks consist of two primary axial walks, approximately six feet wide, that originally met at a center circular area paved in brick and stone around a central sundial column. To either side of these walks were parallel narrower walks approximately four feet wide. Each of the walks were edged by brick and dwarf boxwood borders, and had benches or garden ornament at the western and northern termini along the perimeter of the garden. Since 1968, the National Park Service has maintained the garden walks, but the turf has deteriorated along sections of the secondary walks where the adjoining boxwoods have become overgrown. The edges of the walks have also become less distinct with loss of the brick edging, which has been replaced in sections with wood boards. Despite this, the walks overall retain their historic character from the York Hall estate period.

C-6. Formal Garden Brick Pads

Evaluation: Contributing

The two herringbone-pattern brick pads in the formal garden, at the west and north termini of the primary axial walks, are characteristic circulation features from the York Hall landscape. These pads were originally designed as bases for Chinese-style covered benches installed along the edge of the garden in ca. 1922. These benches were removed after 1930 and replaced with masonry benches in the same spot. In ca. 1946 after the end of the period of significance, the north pad was extended toward the perimeter wall, and the west pad connected to a larger circular patio (see C-7). Although remnant, the two brick pads nonetheless reflect the original Gillette design of the formal garden.

C-7. Formal Garden Circular Patio

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The circular brick patio in the west perimeter of the formal garden, built in ca. 1946, does not contribute to the historic character of the landscape because it was added after the end of the York Hall historic period and reflects a distinct shift toward informal outdoor living after World War II. The roughly 24-foot diameter patio, designed by Charles Gillette, was built adjacent to an existing brick pad (see C-6) and around an existing red-cedar tree. The patio was enclosed by a boxwood hedge and featured a fireplace along the perimeter brick wall (see A-1, page 159). Although not historic, the patio does not detract from the historic character of the formal garden due to its inconspicuous appearance. However, the loss of the Chinese-style covered bench in this location, part of the original landscape design, does detract from the formal garden's historic character

V-5. Formal Garden Boxwood Hedges

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The existing boxwood hedges that enclose the beds of the formal garden and line portions of the perimeter, planted in ca. 1976, do not contribute to the historic character of the landscape because they differ from the historic Gillette design. As laid out in 1922 and maintained through 1930, the formal garden beds were edged by dwarf boxwood hedges. By the 1960s after the end of the historic period, the hedges were no longer maintained and had disappeared in part from the garden. In ca. 1976, larger hedges of common boxwood were planted along the perimeter of the garden beds. Although these irregularly-clipped hedges maintain the overall shape of the beds, they detract from the historic character of the landscape because they contrast in scale with the historic hedges and are in poor condition. They have also grown into the walks and sections historically maintained with herbaceous flowering plants.

V-6. Formal Garden Specimen Boxwoods and Rose of Sharon

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The English box in each of the outer four square corner beds, and the rose of sharon (shrub althea) in the middle of the center beds, do not contribute to the historic character of the formal garden because they differ from the historic Gillette design. The garden historically contained clipped tree boxwood in the same location of the boxwoods in the corner beds. Groups of four upright mounded yews were in the center of the beds until they were replaced with boxwood in ca. 1976 and rose-of-sharon in ca. 1985. These shrubs detract from the historic character of the landscape because they are incompatible in form and appearance to the historic shrubs.

V-7. Formal Garden Herbaceous Plants

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The existing herbaceous plants in the twelve formal garden beds do not contribute to the historic character of the landscape because the do not reflect the character of the historically lush plantings. These beds were designed by Charles Gillette and established in 1922. While planting plans for the garden have not been found, the beds originally consisted of a variety of plant materials that reflected the Blow family's seasonal use of the estate and an old-fashioned style. Many were cuttings or transplants from historic gardens (see appendix B). Plants included roses, ajuga, columbine, sweet william, foxglove, coral bells, German iris, and salvia. The beds were also planted with flowering spring bulbs (see appendix C). The beds were bordered by dwarf boxwood hedges (see V-5) and the center beds had groups of four yews (see V-6). The four corner beds had single tree boxwoods (see V-6). The eight outer beds had one or two deciduous shrubs in the center, including Chinese photinia and Fortunes osmanthus. After acquiring the property in 1968, the National Park Service ceased maintaining the formal garden to the same high standards as the Blow family. Today, the beds are maintained primarily with mown cover around remnant peonies, iris, and spring bulbs that most likely remain from the York Hall estate, along with other plants added by park staff and volunteers, including canna and Yorktown onion. While the beds remain, the vegetation within them detracts from the historic character of the landscape.

V-8. Formal Garden Perimeter Plantings

Evaluation: Contributing

The trees and shrubs in the perimeter beds of the formal garden are a characteristic vegetation feature of the York Hall landscape, originally planted along the perimeter wall in ca. 1916 to the design of Charles Gillette. Gillette's layered planting design featured trees in the back and shrubs and ground cover in front, forming a backdrop for the view from the west terrace (see VV-2). Species

included Eastern red-cedar, American beech, Southern magnolia, gold dust tree (aucuba), Chinese photinia, quince, sweet mock-orange, and crape-myrtle. A boxwood hedge lined the bed above low brick retaining walls. During National Park Service ownership, the perimeter plantings thinned and many of the small shrubs and groundcover were removed, leaving exposed mulch and soil. While most of the trees and the larger shrubs remain, the loss of the small shrubs and groundcover detracts from the historic character of the landscape.

V-9. Formal Garden South Entrance Plantings

Evaluation: Contributing

The plantings framing the south entrance to the formal garden are a characteristic vegetation feature of the York Hall landscape. As designed by Charles Gillette in 1922, the south entrance plantings formed a transition between the rectilinear lines of the formal garden and the informal character of the lawn. The two areas were divided by a low brick wall with urns flanking the opening. The plantings consisted of specimen trees and shrubs, including paired Burford hollies within the garden and little-leaf lindens south of the dividing wall, lined by a border of Japanese red maples. The outer plantings beneath the lindens featured mixed shrubs united by a groundcover of common periwinkle with an irregular, undulating bed edge that extended southwest to the carriage house and southeast toward the back court. In ca. 1946, after the historic period, these plantings were modified as part of the addition of a swimming pool and patio in the lawn of the south opening to the formal garden. The plantings were expanded to enclose the area south of the pool, leaving just a narrow path. The park service removed the pool and most of the expanded plantings after 1968, except for a screen of crape-myrtle (see V-10). Today, the plantings retain the paired lindens and hollies, and the Japanese maples, as well as the groundcover and mixed shrubs in the east half. The loss of the groundcover and shrubs in the west half of the plantings detracts from the historic character of the formal garden.

V-10. Formal Garden South Entrance Hedge

Evaluation: Non-contributing

The hedge of crape-myrtle south of the formal garden and near the carriage house (garage) is a non-historic feature. This hedge was planted in ca. 1946 after the historic period as a screen for the swimming pool at the south entrance to the formal garden. It was part of an expansion of the plantings at the south entrance to the formal garden. Following removal of the swimming pool, the park service retained the hedge to screen views from the formal garden south to the lawn, which was intended as a service area. The hedge detracts from the historic character of the York Hall landscape by blocking the historic view from the formal garden to the lawn.

BS-7. Formal Garden Walls and Stairs

LCS # 006880 (Formal Garden Walls)
Evaluation: Contributing
The brick walls along the east and south sides of the formal garden, including the stairs from the terrace, are a distinctive structure of the York Hall landscape. The east part of the wall, completed as part of the Charles Gillette-designed formal garden in 1922, retains the raised grade of the terrace and serves as the formal entrance to the garden. It is a 6'-6" high brick wall laid in Flemish bond with a corbelled brick cap and brick buttresses. The stairs consists of a double flight with a center herringbone-brick landing and a single flight to the level of the garden. The two sections of the south wall flank either side of the opening to the lawn and contain piers on the ends that were historically ornamented with urns. Much of the wall was covered in English ivy during Blow ownership. Alterations since the historic period include changes in mortar and lowering of the height of the east wall in response to lowering of the terrace grade in ca. 1976, and removal of the urns on the south wall. The existing concrete parging on the cap of the east wall dates to this time.

The tall brick walls that frame the west and north sides of the formal garden (north and west sides) are part of the perimeter wall (see BS-6).

BS-8. Formal Garden Perimeter Bed Walls

Evaluation: Contributing
The perimeter bed walls in the formal garden are a characteristic structure of the York Hall landscape. Completed in 1922 according to the design of Charles Gillette, these low brick walls retain the perimeter bed of shrubs and trees, and extend around nearly the entire perimeter of the garden, except for the opening to the lawn on the south side. They vary from approximately 15 inches tall along the west and north sides to 3 feet at the northeast corner of the garden, and are laid in Flemish bond with a brick cap. There have been no changes to these walls since the historic period.

BS-9. Formal Garden Tree Well

Evaluation: Contributing
A circular brick tree well in the perimeter bed at the northeast corner of the formal garden is a characteristic structure of the York Hall landscape. The well was built as part of the formal garden in ca. 1922 to protect an aged tree (species unknown). The well reflects George P. Blow's interest in preserving the old trees

on the property. Aside from the notable loss of the tree at some point after 1930, there have been no documented changes to the well since the historic period.

SSF-1. Formal Garden Brick Edging

Evaluation: Contributing

The brick edging around the beds of the formal garden are characteristic small-scale features of the York Hall landscape. As designed by Charles Gillette in 1922, each of the sixteen beds in the garden was edged by a single course of red brick. After the end of the historic period, some of the brick edging was removed or has become buried. Today, the edging only remains around parts of the four center beds. The park service has installed wood planks where bricks are missing. Although a fragment, the existing brick edging reflects the original Gillette design of the garden. The wood planks detract from the historic character of the landscape.

SSF-2. Formal Garden Irrigation Fixtures (Not on Drawing 3.0)

Evaluation: Unevaluated

A below-ground irrigation system was installed in ca. 1922 by Charles Alpin, the Blows' head gardener, as part of the construction of the formal garden. This system included galvanized pipe with pressurized sprinkler heads and several zone shut-off valves. Further research is needed to determine if the remaining components date to the York Hall estate period. Although never a conspicuous part of the landscape, the system illustrates the high level of maintenance then characteristic of the landscape.

SSF-3. Cornwallis Plaque

Evaluation: Unevaluated

The Cornwallis plaque was originally installed on the east wall of the Nelson House in 1931 as part of the Siege of Yorktown Sesquicentennial, during the time the house was open to the public as a museum. The plaque was not part of the designed York Hall landscape. It is a bronze tablet with a bas-relief sculpture of Lord Cornwallis sculpted by F. William Sievers of Richmond, Virginia. Sievers (1872-1966) designed the bronze sculptures on the Virginia Memorial at Gettysburg (dedicated 1917) as his first major work. The Cornwallis plaque was moved to the west perimeter wall of the formal garden by the National Park Service in ca. 1975 as part of the restoration of the Nelson House. The plaque does not detract from the historic character of the formal garden due to its inconspicuous location. Further research is needed to determine whether the plaque meets the National Register criteria in the context of historic preservation

and commemoration in Yorktown during the early twentieth century given its relocation.

A-1. Formal Garden Fireplace Base

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

In ca. 1946, after the end of the historic period for the York Hall landscape, the Blows installed a circular brick patio in the formal garden with a fireplace against the perimeter wall. This fireplace featured an iron plate for a base. The fireplace superstructure was removed by the park service after 1968, leaving the iron base that remains today. As a remnant of a non-historic feature, the base does not contribute to the historic character of the landscape.

Lawn

The lawn is the area bounded by the formal garden to the north, the service area to the south, the perimeter wall and outbuildings along Read Street to the west, and the fence along the Smith and Ballard lots to the east (see fig. 3.1). The east half of the lawn from the York Hall estate is presently managed as part of the Smith and Ballard lots. Overall, the lawn retains the character of the York Hall landscape despite modifications to its spatial organization and circulation.

SO-5. Lawn Space

Evaluation: Contributing

The lawn is character-defining spatial feature of the York Hall landscape. During the Revolutionary and Civil War periods, the space was comprised of three separate properties, including the rear yards of the Smith and Ballard lots and the Nelson garden and open lots. The landscape was most likely open field with a fence or hedge along the property boundaries. In his initial plans for the York Hall estate in ca. 1916, Charles Gillette planned an orchard for the site. In his redesign of ca. 1922 that included the formal garden, Gillette made this area into an open lawn that served as the central unifying space for the landscape, onto which the surrounding buildings faced. Reminiscent of the style of English landscape gardens, the lawn featured a broad swath of open turf framed by trees and shrubs bordering the perimeter buildings. Following its acquisition of the York Hall estate in 1968, the National Park Service erected four-foot-high wood fences to reestablish the colonial limits of the Nelson, Smith, and Ballard lots. While this fence disrupts some of the open spatial character of the lawn, overall the space remains discernible.

C-8. Carriage House Driveway

Evaluation: Contributing

The short driveway or apron to the carriage house (garage) from Read Street is a characteristic circulation feature of the York Hall landscape. Constructed as part of the carriage house in ca. 1916, the drive was altered by the park service in 1973 when the building was converted to a ranger station. At this time, a concrete apron was added to the drive along the building, and a ramp was subsequently built on the apron. While these changes detract from the historic character of the carriage house, the driveway retains its overall historic limits and relationship to the building.

C-9. Carriage House South Walk

Evaluation: Non-contributing

The unpaved walk along the south side of the carriage house, a desireway that has evolved since the park converted the building into a ranger station in ca. 1973, is a non-historic feature. The walk provides access to an exterior steel staircase to the second floor of the building. It partly follows the alignment of a stepping-stone path built in ca. 1916 that was removed by the park service. The existing walk utilizes the same opening in the perimeter brick wall. The walk detracts from the historically well-maintained character of the York Hall landscape.

V-11. Lawn Specimen Trees

Evaluation: Contributing

The specimen trees in the lawn are a characteristic vegetation feature of the York Hall landscape. During the Revolutionary War period, the site of the lawn was most likely open field. Some trees were planted during the initial development of the landscape by Charles Gillette beginning in ca. 1916. Gillette redesigned the area in ca. 1922 into an informal lawn in the style of an English landscape garden with scattered specimens and groves of trees along the periphery, including Southern magnolia, Eastern red-cedar, and willow oak. Three of the specimen trees remain within the Nelson House grounds, and three are within the Smith and Ballard lot sections of the lawn. Although several trees have been lost and at least one has been added (a red-cedar near the carriage house), overall the specimen trees reflect the informal design of the lawn in the York Hall landscape. The loss of the perimeter of understory shrubs bordering Read Street detracts from the historic character of the landscape.

BS-2. Carriage House (Garage)

LCS #006883

Evaluation: Contributing

The carriage house, known historically as the garage, is a character-defining building of the York Hall landscape. The one and one-half story gable-roof Colonial Revival-style brick building, located along the perimeter wall, was designed by Griffin and Wynkoop and built ca. 1916 as an automobile garage. The east side facing the lawn was designed with a residential character, while the west side along Main Street featured three arched garage bays. In 1973, the park service renovated the building into a park ranger station. On the exterior, this work included replacement of the original side-hinged garage doors with overhead doors and addition of a steel staircase on the south side, above an original basement entry well. These changes detract from the historic character of the landscape.

BS-3. Wisteria Cottage

LCS #006881

Evaluation: Contributing

Wisteria Cottage, also known historically as the gardener's cottage or lodge, is a character-defining building of the York Hall landscape. The one and one-half story gable-roof Colonial Revival-style brick building was designed by Griffin and Wynkoop and built ca. 1916 as a house for the estate gardener. The building, which faces the lawn, is integral with the perimeter brick wall and adjoins the service area. The park service has made no substantial changes to the building, which has been vacant since 1968.

BS-12. Utility Screen Wall

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The lattice-bond brick wall between the carriage house and Wisteria Cottage is a non-historic feature. It was built in 1976 to screen the site's central cooling plant. During the York Hall estate period, the site was part of a shrub mass along the west perimeter of the lawn. These shrubs were removed by the park service. Because the screen wall is inconspicuous, it is compatible with the historic character of the landscape.

SSF-7. AC Units

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The cooling plant south of the carriage house and the small single air-conditioning unit to the north are non-historic features. The central cooling plant was installed in 1976 as part of the restoration of the Nelson House. The plant originally included two air-conditioning condenser units and a transformer screened by a lattice brick wall (see BS-12). A large propane tank later replaced the condenser units. The single air-conditioning unit north of the carriage house was installed

more recently and is not screened. The units are incompatible with the historic character of the landscape in materials and design, although the lattice brick wall provides an effective screen when viewed from the lawn.

Service Area

The service area is the landscape to the south and north of the stable, bounded by the lawn to the north, Read Street to the west, the Ballard House lot to the east, and the Poor Potter Site to the south (see fig. 3.1). Overall, the service area retains the character of the York Hall landscape, except for the portion south of the stable, historically the estate service yard, that is presently managed as part of the Poor Potter Site.

SO-6. Stable Courtyard

Evaluation: Contributing

The stable courtyard, the space north of the stable building, is a character-defining spatial feature of the York Hall landscape. During the Revolutionary and Civil War periods, this area was part of the Nelson gardens and open lots, adjoining the lot 50 house along Reed Street. The stable courtyard dates back to the initial development of the York Hall estate. Charles Gillette's ca. 1915 plan of the landscape showed it as a rectangular area in front (north) of the stable, enclosed by trees and shrubs that screened the service area from the lawn, and set apart from the service yard south of the stable by serpentine brick walls. In ca. 1945, the areas in front of these walls were separated from the courtyard by the addition of brick walls that defined two small service yards (see SO-8). Since 1968, the National Park Service has maintained the stable courtyard with few changes, except for removal and replacement of the screening vegetation (see V-12).

SO-7. Original Service Yard

Evaluation: Non-contributing

The original service yard, the open space south of the stable building presently managed as part of the Poor Potter Site, does not contribute to the historic character of the York Hall landscape due to extensive changes since the historic period. During the Revolutionary and Civil War periods, this area was the south end of the Nelson gardens and open lots. The service yard was part of the original ca. 1916 design of the estate landscape by Charles Gillette. It was an open area enclosed by a fence (unknown type) on the south, east, and west, and by the stable building and serpentine brick walls on the north. Two drives opened into the stable courtyard. In 1936, the Blow family replaced the original service yard with a fenced tennis court designed by Charles Gillette, and created smaller service yards to the sides of the stable (see SO-8). After 1968, the National Park Service

removed the tennis court and greenhouses that were installed in ca. 1950 against the back wall of the stable, and maintained the former service yard as mown grass that continued onto the adjoining Poor Potter site on lot 51.

SO-8. Stable Yards

Evaluation: Non-contributing

The two walled yards to the east and west of the stable do not contribute to the historic character of the landscape because they were built after the end of the York Hall estate historic period in 1930. During the Revolutionary and Civil War periods, this area was within the Nelson gardens and open lots. In the initial design of the original service yard in ca. 1916, the areas to either side of the stable were part of the stable courtyard. In 1936, Charles Gillette redesigned the original service yard into a tennis court. This work involved extending the serpentine walls to close off the openings for the two side service drives. The area east of the stable was designated as the new service yard. In ca. 1945, two new brick walls were erected in line with the north side (front) of the stable, creating small enclosed service yards on both sides of the building. The east yard was used as a chicken yard and the west yard as a dog run.[24] After 1968, the park service made few changes to the yards aside from removal of a tree. Although later additions, these yards are compatible with the historic character of the York Hall landscape.

C-10. Service Drive

Evaluation: Contributing

The service drive, the road extending from Read Street east to the stable, is a characteristic circulation feature of the York Hall landscape. The road, built in ca. 1916 along with the stable, consists of a narrow, approximately ten-foot-wide section south of Wisteria Cottage that widened north of the stable. Two narrow extensions of the drive to either side of the stable originally connected to the service yard south of the building. The drive had an earth or marl surface; at an undetermined date, the apron from Read Street was paved with concrete. In ca. 1936, after the end of the historic estate period, the drive was altered through removal of the two extensions to the original service yard, which was replaced with a tennis court. The National Park Service retained the rest of the service drive, but lack of maintenance has led to erosion and weed cover on the once well-maintained surface and edges. A section of asphalt was added at an undetermined date near Read Street. The condition of the drive detracts from the historic character of the landscape.

C-11. Poor Potter Walks

Evaluation: Non-Contributing
The Poor Potter walks are non-historic features built in 2006 to provide access to the new Poor Potter Site enclosure building from Read Street, Nelson Street, and the Nelson House grounds. The walks are surfaced in Klingstone, a poly pavement that has the appearance of a traditional gravel surface. Because they are located in a space that has lost historic integrity (original service yard), the walks do not detract from the historic character of the landscape.

V-12. Stable Courtyard Screen

Evaluation: Contributing
The line of trees and shrubs along the north and east sides of the stable courtyard is a characteristic vegetation feature of the York Hall landscape. This screen, designed by Charles Gillette, was planted between 1916 and 1922 to screen the service area from the lawn. The original plants included Eastern red-cedar, Southern magnolia, crape-myrtle, roses, and possibly deutzia. A clipped privet hedge lined the edges of the drive. A second planted area was in the area bordering the perimeter wall; this was partly removed with construction of the walled stable yards in ca. 1945. The National Park Service retained this screen including the clipped privet hedge, but some plants thinned or were removed, allowing views from the lawn. The plantings and hedge along the perimeter wall at Read Street have disappeared except for a red-cedar tree. Despite these changes, the feature overall retains its historic character as a planted screen.

V-13. Stable Yards Vines and Groundcover

Evaluation: Non-contributing
The vines and groundcover in the stable yards, primarily vinca and Virginia creeper, are a non-historic feature added after the end of the York Hall estate historic period. While these may be remnants of plantings in the original stable courtyard, the existing extent most likely dates to after the yards ceased use upon park service acquisition in 1968. Since the stable walled yards are non-historic, the groundcover does not detract from the landscape's historic character. The overgrowth of vines, however, detracts from the landscape's historically well-maintained condition.

BS-4 Stable

LCS # 006882 (Nelson House-Stables)
Evaluation: Contributing
The stable is a character-defining building of the York Hall landscape. Designed by Griffin and Wynkoop and built ca. 1916, the one-story brick Colonial Revival-

style building, measuring approximately 70 feet long by 20 feet deep, and originally contained stables, a tack room, and space for carriages. Lean-to greenhouses were built on the south (back) side of the building in ca. 1950, and removed by the park service after 1968. In 2004, the building was repaired and a new wood roof was installed. The building retains its exterior historic character.

BS-10. Serpentine Walls

Evaluation: Contributing

The serpentine walls to either side of the stable are distinctive structures of the York Hall landscape. Built in ca. 1916 along with the stable, the walls were designed to screen the original service yard (area south of the stable) from the stable courtyard to the north. The walls are in a serpentine shape similar to those designed by Thomas Jefferson at the University of Virginia. In ca. 1936, after the end of the estate historic period, the service drive openings between the serpentine walls and the stable were closed off, and in ca. 1945, additional walls (see BS-11) were added to enclose small service yards. Although these later walls have altered the historic setting, the serpentine walls retain their historic character.

BS-11. Stable Yard Walls

Evaluation: Non-Contributing

The straight brick walls surrounding the stable service yards are non-historic features built after the end of the York Hall estate historic period. These walls were built in ca. 1945 to enclose small service yards after the original service yard south of the stable building was replaced by a tennis court in ca. 1936. Wood gates in the openings to the service yards no longer exist. Although these walls alter the historic spatial character of the stable courtyard, they are compatible with the historic character of the landscape in design and materials.

ENDNOTES

1 This report does not evaluate architectural significance of individual buildings under National Register Criterion C, or archeological significance under Criterion D. Additional research and evaluation would be required to fully document all areas of historic significance for all resources, such as through amended National Register documentation and updates to the park's List of Classified Structures (LCS) and Archeological Sites Management Information System (ASMIS).

2 As of 2008, Colonial National Historical Park staff has written draft National Register Sections 7 and 8 for the Yorktown historic district including the Nelson House, but the documentation has not been advanced.

3 As an historic area of the National Park System, all property within Colonial National Historical Park was administratively listed in the National Register of Historic Places on October 15, 1966 upon creation of the program as part of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

4 National Register Information System, entry for Colonial National Historical Park; John Auwaerter, conversation with Betsy Igleheart, NPS Northeast Region History Program, September 17, 2010.

5 Virginia Landmarks Register, updated through June 17, 2010, http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/RegisterMasterList.pdf (accessed June 2010).

6 "Yorktown Historic District and Design Guidelines" (ca. 2004), http://www.yorkcounty.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=qrXNx%2BZ7z54%3D&tabid=1730 (accessed August 2010). The local district encompasses all of the village, including sections developed during the twentieth century.

7 National Park Service and Heritage Landscapes, Inc., "Cultural Landscape Inventory, Yorktown, Colonial National Historical Park" (National Park Service database and unpublished report, 1999, revised 2006).

8 Further discussion of this area of significance is beyond the scope of this report.

9 This area of significance is not documented in the CLI for Yorktown.

10 This area of significance is not documented in the CLI for Yorktown.

11 Although the York Hall estate was an early and long-standing commission for Charles Gillette, its existing integrity does not fulfill the requirements for listing in the National Register as the work of a master. The landscape no longer epitomizes Gillette's design due to loss of furnishings, alteration of plantings, and changes to circulation.

12 George C. Longest, *Genius in the Garden: Charles F. Gillette & Landscape Architecture in Virginia* (Richmond: Virginia State Library and Archives, 1992), *61, 173–204;* William H. Tischler, ed., *American Landscape Architecture: Designers and Places* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1989), 56-58.

13 The Virginia Historical Society, "Historic Restorations Project Collection," Kenmore and Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library, http://www.vahistorical.org/gardenclub/kenmore.htm, http://www.vahistorical.org/gardenclub/wilsonbp.htm (accessed June 2011).

14 Reuben M. Rainey and R. M. Lilly "The Country Place Era in Virginia: The Residential Site Planning of Charles F. Gillette," *Landscape Journal,* vol. 11, no. 2 (fall 1992), 98–115.

15 Longest, 48, 58–59.

16 For landscape management purposes, the five historic periods translate into a single period because there are no extant landscape features that date to the intervening years, except for the front court perimeter wall (ca. 1870).

17 National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 15, How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1997), 44.

18 This evaluation does not consider integrity of interior spaces, archeological sites, or other resources that do not shape the character of the landscape.

19 Robert Page, Cathy Gilbert, and Susan Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques* (Washington D.C.: U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resource and Stewardship and Partnerships, Park Historic Structures and Cultural Landscapes Program, 1998).

20 M. Kent Brinkley and Gordon W. Chappell, *The Gardens of Colonial Williamsburg* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1996), 4.

21 Brinkley and Chappell, 4.

22 Brinkley and Chappell, 1–2.

23 Monrovia, Golden Rain Tree information, http://www.monrovia.com/plant-catalog/plants/2426/golden-rain-tree.php (accessed September 2010).

24 George and Anthony Blow, interview by Bryne D. Riley, March 8, 2008.

Table 3.2. Landscape Feature Evaluation Summary
NELSON HOUSE GROUNDS, HISTORIC YORKTOWN, COLONIAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

FEATURE KEY (DRAWING 3), NAME, DATE OF ORIGIN	EVALUATION	HISTORIC CONTEXT
Natural Systems and Features		
No associated features		
Spatial Organization		
SO-1. Front Court Space (ca. 1730)	Contributing	Revolution and Siege of 1781, Civil War
SO-2. Back Court Space (ca. 1730)	Contributing	Revolution and Siege of 1781
SO-3. Terrace Space (1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
SO-4. Formal Garden Space (1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
SO-5. Lawn Space (ca. 1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
SO-6. Stable Courtyard (ca. 1916)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
SO-7. Original Service Yard (ca. 1916)	Non-Contributing	
SO-8. Stable Yards (ca. 1945)	Non-Contributing	
Land Use		
No associated features.		
Circulation		
C-1. Front Court Landing and Walk (ca. 1976)	Non-Contributing	
C-2. Back Court Walk (ca. 1976)	Non-Contributing	
C-3. Terrace Walks (ca. 1976)	Non-Contributing	
C-4. Main Street Entrance (ca. 1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
C-5. Formal Garden Walks (1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
C-6. Forma Garden Brick Pads (ca. 1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
C-7. Formal Garden Circular Patio (ca. 1946)	Non-Contributing	
C-8. Carriage House Driveway (ca. 1916)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
C-9. Carriage House Side Walk and Stairs (ca. 1973)	Non-Contributing	
C-10. Service Drive (ca. 1916)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
C-11. Poor Potter Walks (2006)	Non-Contributing	
Topography		
No associated features.		
Constructed Water Features		
No associated features.		
Vegetation		
V-1. Front Court Boxwood Hedge (ca. 1730, ca. 1976)	Contributing	Civil War; Possible colonial origin

FEATURE KEY (DRAWING 3), NAME, DATE OF ORIGIN	EVALUATION	HISTORIC CONTEXT
V-2. Front Court Tulip Tree (pre-1914, ca. 1995)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
V-3. Back Court Trees and Shrubs (pre-1968, ca. 1976)	Non-contributing	
V-4. Terrace Trees and Shrubs (ca. 1976)	Non-Contributing	
V-5. Formal Garden Boxwood Hedges (ca. 1976)	Non-Contributing	
V-6. Formal Garden Specimen Boxwoods and Rose of Sharon (ca. 1985)	Non-Contributing	
V-7. Formal Garden Herbaceous Beds (remnants, ca.1922)	Non-Contributing	
V-8. Formal Garden Perimeter Plantings (ca. 1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
V-9. Formal Garden South Entrance Plantings (ca. 1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
V-10. Formal Garden South Entrance Hedge (ca. 1946)	Non-Contributing	
V-11. Lawn Specimen Trees (ca. 1916, 1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
V-12. Stable Courtyard Screen (ca. 1916)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
V-13. Stable Yards Vines and Groundcover (post-1945)	Non-contributing	
Buildings and Structures		
BS-1. Nelson House (ca. 1730)	Contributing	Architecture, Revolution and Siege of 1781, Civil War
BS-2. Carriage House (Garage) (ca. 1916)	Contributing	Architecture (York Hall Estate)
BS-3. Wisteria Cottage (ca. 1916)	Contributing	Architecture (York Hall Estate)
BS-4. Stable (ca. 1916)	Contributing	Architecture (York Hall Estate)
BS-5. Front Court Retaining Wall (ca. 1870)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
BS-6. Perimeter Walls (ca. 1916)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
BS-7. Formal Garden Walls and Stairs (1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
BS-8. Formal Garden Perimeter Bed Walls (1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
BS-9. Formal Garden Tree Well (ca. 1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
BS-10. Serpentine Walls (ca. 1916)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
BS-11. Stable Yard Walls (ca. 1945)	Non-Contributing	
BS-12. AC Utility Screen Wall (1976)	Non-Contributing	

FEATURE KEY (DRAWING 3), NAME, DATE OF ORIGIN	EVALUATION	HISTORIC CONTEXT
Views and Vistas		
VV-1. York River View (ca. 1730)	Contributing	Revolution and Siege of 1781, Civil War)
VV-2. Formal Garden View (1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
Small-Scale Features		
SSF-1. Formal Garden Brick Edging (ca. 1922)	Contributing	Landscape Architecture (York Hall Estate)
SSF-2. Formal Garden Irrigation Fixtures (ca. 1922)	Unevaluated	
SSF-3. Cornwallis Plaque (1931)	Unevaluated	Memorialization and Preservation
SSF-4. Wood Fences (c.1976, 2009)	Non-Contributing	
SSF-5. NPS Furnishings (Benches, Signs, Picnic Tables) (ca. 1980-2010)	Non-Contributing	
SSF-6. Nelson House Floodlights (ca. 1976)	Non-Contributing	
SSF-7. AC Units (1976, ca.2000)	Non-Contributing	
Archeological Landscape Features		
A-1. Formal Garden Fireplace Base (ca. 1946)	Non-Contributing	

Cultural Landscape Report
Nelson House Grounds

Colonial National Historical Park
Yorktown, Virginia

Analysis and Evaluation

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

in partnership with
Department of Landscape Architecture
SUNY College of Environmental
Science and Forestry, www.esf.edu/la/

SOURCES

1. Colonial National Historical Park archival photographs
2. NPS GIS data, Colonial National Historical Park
3. Aerial photograph, 2010
4. Field survey, October 2008, January 2010

DRAWN BY

Bryne D. Riley, John Auwaerter, Illustrator CS5, 2011

LEGEND

- Building
- Deciduous tree / tall shrub
- Evergreen tree / shrub
- Low shrub or woody groundcover
- Turf / mulched bed
- Paved street
- Road or walk (earth/gravel or brick)
- Fence
- Brick wall
- Light standard / Bench
- NPS property line / Yorktown lot line
- 2' contour line
- Non-historic feature (white fill)
- Site of removed Revolutionary War / Civil War-era character-defining feature (pre-1781, 1861--65).
- Site of removed York Hall estate character-defining feature (ca.1915--1930).

NOTES

1. Landscape evaluation restricted to within CLR project area (lots 48-50, 52) defined by white mask.
2. Historic features are shown in color, non-historic in white; evaluation of trees and shrubs is not comprehensive
3. Historic vegetation that has been replaced in-kind is shown as historic.
4. All features shown in approximate scale and location.
5. Plan shows landscape in 2010.

Key to Sites of York Hall Garden Furnishings
(furnishings outside of Nelson House grounds not listed)

1. Sundial-bench (ca.1922–1968)
2. Chinese-style covered benches (ca.1923–1945)
3. Cherub statues on pedestals (ca.1921-1968)
4. Urns on piers (ca.1921–1968)
5. Lion's-head fountain (ca.1930–1968)
6. Cherub table (ca.1921–1968)
7. Front court benches (ca.1921–1968)
8. Goddess statues on pedestals (ca.1920–1968)
13. Chinese temple bell (ca.1923–1968)

Plan North
True North

0′ 35′ 70′

Drawing 3.0

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
SELECT CHRONOLOGY OF THE NELSON HOUSE GROUNDS

700 b.p.	Village sites are located along the floodplain of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.
1607	The first permanent English Colony founded at Jamestown, Virginia. Captain John Smith explored the region, identifying an Indian village, Kiskiack, near Yorktown. Tribes in the region were primarily affiliated with the Chiefdom of the Powhatan.
1631	Captain Nicholas Martiau became the first settler in the present area of Yorktown, receiving a patent for 1,300 acres on the south side of the York River.
1634	York County established as one of the eight original shires of Virginia.
1691	The town of York (later renamed Yorktown) is established under the Port Act of 1691, which specified the size of towns at fifty acres, and each lot at a half-acre. Each lot purchaser was required to begin construction of one house, to contain "twenty foot square at the least" within a year.
1705	Thomas "Scotch Tom" Nelson immigrates to Virginia and settles at Yorktown.
1706	Scotch Tom buys lot 52 from the Yorktown Trustees after forfeiture by James Darbishire and builds a house within a year.
1706–30	Scotch Tom constructs a terraced landscape with a stone retaining wall and steps on lot 52.
1707	Scotch Tom acquires lot 48 and presumably builds a house there within a year. Lot 50 acquired by John Dunbar.
1709	Lot 50 acquired by Edward Powers, who presumably builds a house there within a year.
1712	Scotch Tom acquires lot 49 and presumably builds a house there within a year.
1715	Scotch Tom acquires lot 50, presumably containing a house built by Edward Powers.
1730	Around this time, Scotch Tom constructs his second home located on lot 52, the present Nelson House. A complex of service buildings is developed on the west side of the house, including a kitchen–washhouse, servants quarters, dairy, spinning house, and smoke house. Lots 48, 49, and 50 reserved primarily for domestic gardens.
1738	Scotch Tom is growing green/white cucumbers in his garden.
1745	Scotch Tom Nelson dies and leaves the Nelson House to his son, William, subject to the life estate of his widow, Frances.

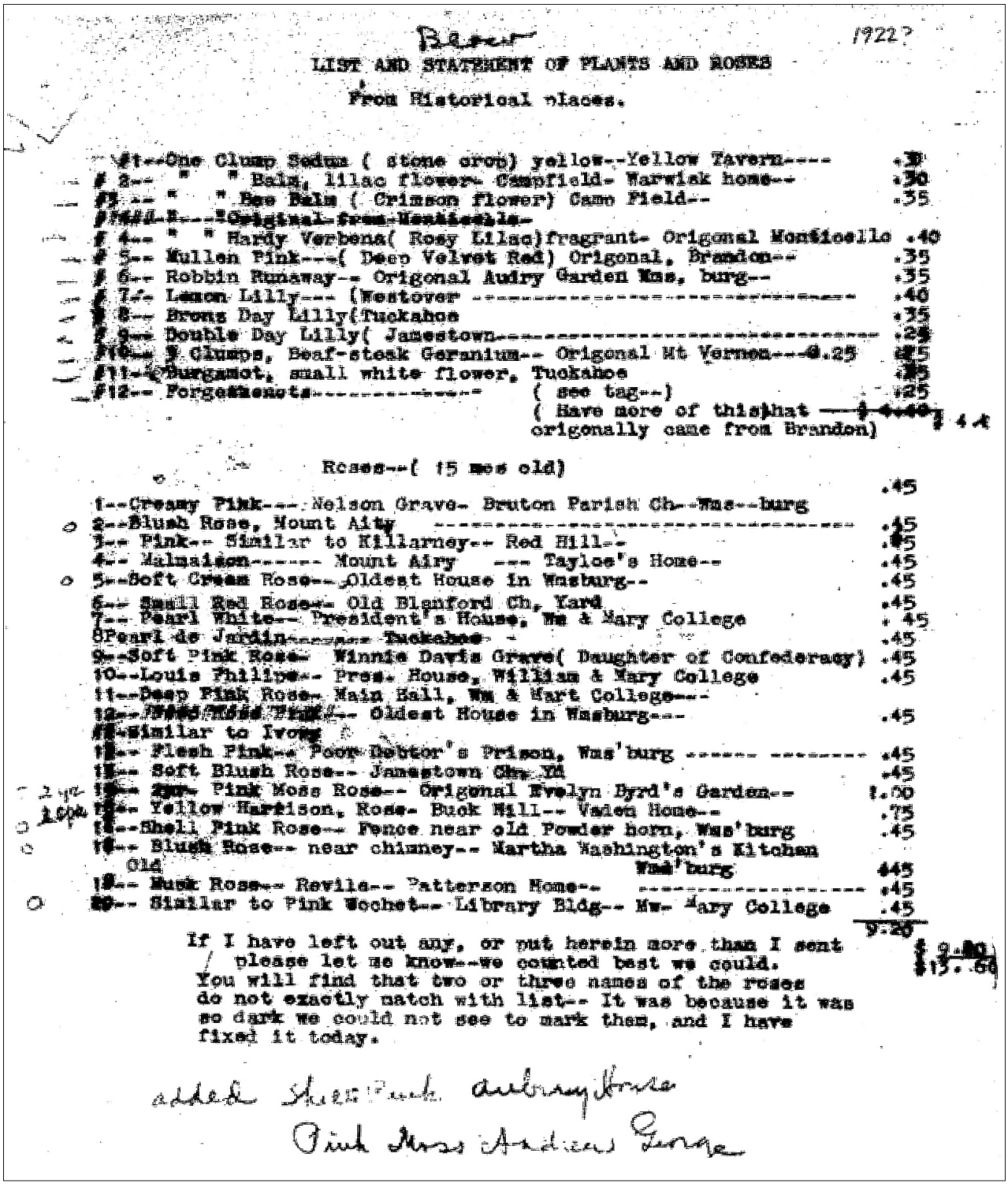
1766	Thomas Nelson Jr., the grandson of Scotch Tom, is given use of the Nelson House by his father, William.
1772	William Nelson dies and leaves the Nelson House to Thomas Nelson Jr.
1781	Siege of Yorktown; the Nelson House is damaged. British surrender to Allied American and French forces.
1789	Thomas Nelson Jr. dies on January 4.
1830	Thomas Nelson (William Nelson's eldest son) dies around this time; Nelson House and grounds transfer to William Jr. (William's second son). By this date, the Nelson spinning house is reused or rebuilt as the "lower dairy."
1848	William Nelson Jr. dies, leaving the house and grounds to his son William with life estate to his widow Martha.
1853	By this date, the Nelson smoke house is reused or rebuilt as a lumber house.
1855	Around this time, Martha Nelson marries George W. Bryan, a middling farmer of York County who has at least four children of his own. The combined family lives in the Nelson House.
1861–65	The Civil War; Confederate Army constructs earthworks in Yorktown.
1862	Peninsular Campaign; the Confederate Army uses the Nelson House as a hospital. The Union Army later occupies Yorktown, continues use of the Nelson House as a hospital.
1870	Around this time a brick retaining wall is built around the front court of the Nelson House, along with a two-story frame house (tenant house) on lot 48 facing Main Street.
1877	William Nelson dies in St. Louis, leaving the Nelson House and the four lots to his sister, Kate.
1890	Around this time, Kate Nelson dies, leaving the house and grounds to her Bryan sisters who rent out the Nelson House.
1893–98	The Cruikshank family rents the Nelson House from the Bryans.
1900	All outbuildings in the yard, except for the kitchen–washhouse, and the tenant house on lot 48 are removed by this time.
1910	Around this time, the kitchen–washhouse burns, leaving ruins of the brick chimney and foundation.
1908	The Bryan sisters sell the Nelson House to R.A. Lancaster of Richmond, Virginia; sisters retain title to the Nelson garden and open lots (lots 48–50).
1914	George Preston Blow acquires lot 52 including the Nelson House from R. A. Lancaster as the core of his planned York Hall country estate. Blow hires Griffin & Wynkoop Architects to renovate the Nelson House.

1915	George P. Blow acquires lot 48, 49, and 50 from the Bryan sisters; construction of outbuildings and perimeter wall begins. Blow hires Charles Gillette to design the grounds of the Nelson House. Initial landscape features built between now and 1920 include the oval entrance drive, sloped grass terrace, stepping stone paths, marl walks, serpentine brick stable walls, and border and foundation plantings; front court landscape with aged boxwood hedge is kept intact.
1916	Stable, garage (carriage house), and gardener's house (Wisteria Cottage) are completed.
1921	Charles Gillette redesigns the front court into a formal garden with a pool.
1922	Construction of the terrace, formal garden, and lawn. George P. Blow dies on November 22.
1923	The gardens around the Smith and Ballard Houses are constructed.
1929	Adele Blow dies on September 15.
1930	Colonial National Monument is established; the Nelson House and gardens are opened to the public as a museum and managed by a trust held by the Blow children.
1931	General Lord Cornwallis bronze plaque dedicated and installed on the eastern façade of the Nelson House during the Sesquicentennial of the Siege of Yorktown.
1935	The Blow children dissolve the trust and cease operation of Nelson House as a museum; George W. Blow buys out his siblings' interest in the York Hall estate and maintains it as a year-round residence. A garage is built for Mrs. Blow in the back court off Nelson Street.
1936	A tennis court is built in the original service yard south of the stable according to plans by Charles Gillette. Colonial National Monument is redesignated Colonial National Historical Park.
1945	Around this time, brick walls are built to enclose small service yards to either side of the stable.
1946	A swimming pool and patio are constructed along the south side of the formal garden; artist Pierre Bourdelle paints murals on inside walls of the pool.
1960	George W. Blow dies.
1965	Katherine Cooke Blow dies.
1967	Congress amends the 1931 appropriation fund for Colonial National Historical Park to enable acquisition of the York Hall estate.
1968	Charles Gillette correspondence with the Blow family ends; the Blow family removes garden statuary, urns, vases, sundial, and other furnishings from the York Hall estate; the National Park Service purchases the York Hall estate from the Blow family on September 24, 1968.
1968–75	During this time, the National Park Service removes the front court garden with the old boxwood hedge, oval entrance drive, Mrs. Blow's garage, stepping stone paths, swimming pool and patio, and tennis court.

1973	Garage (carriage house) is remodeled by the National Park Service as a ranger station.
1973–74	Archaeological and architectural studies are undertaken on the Nelson House and terrace.
1974–76	Restoration and rehabilitation of the Nelson House, and front and back courts; planting of new boxwood hedges in formal garden; addition of fences along colonial boundaries with Smith and Ballard Houses; relocation of Cornwallis plaque to the formal garden.
1985	Around this time, rose of sharon shrubs are planted in the center formal garden beds, where groups of yews existed during the Blow period.
2006	New walks are built south of the stable to connect with the new shelter for the Poor Potter Site.
2009	Wood fences on the grounds are replaced.

APPENDIX B.
YORK HALL HISTORIC PLANT ORDER, CA. 1922

Bessie Berry Grabowskii to Charles Gillette. Source: Charles Gillette Papers, accession 34472, Business Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond. These plants were presumably for the formal garden, which was built in 1922.



Bessie Berry 1922?

LIST AND STATEMENT OF PLANTS AND ROSES

From Historical places.

#1--One Clump Sedum (stone crop) yellow--Yellow Tavern---- .3
2-- " " Balm, lilac flower- Campfield- Warwisk home-- .30
#3 -- " " Bee Balm (Crimson flower) Camm Field-- .35
#[illegible]--Original from Monticello-
4-- " " Hardy Verbena(Rosy Lilac)fragrant- Origonal Monticello .40
5-- Mullen Pink---(Deep Velvet Red) Origonal, Brandon-- .35
6-- Robbin Runaway-- Origonal Audry Garden Wms, burg-- .35
7-- Lemon Lilly--- (Westover ---------- .40
8-- Bronz Day Lilly(Tuckahoe .35
9-- Double Day Lilly(Jamestown---------- .25
#10-- 3 Clumps, Beaf-steak Geranium-- Origonal Mt Vernon---@.25 .75
#11--Burgamot, small white flower, Tuckahoe .35
#12-- Forgetmenots---------- (see tag--) .25
(Have more of this that origonally came from Brandon) 1.40

Roses--(15 mos old)

.45
1--Creamy Pink--- Nelson Grave- Bruton Parish Ch--Wms--burg
2--Blush Rose, Mount Aity ---------- .45
3-- Pink-- Similar to Killarney-- Red Hill-- .45
4-- Malmaison------ Mount Airy --- Taylce's Home-- .45
5--Soft Cream Rose--Oldest House in Wmsburg-- .45
6-- Small Red Rose-- Old Blanford Ch, Yard .45
7-- Pearl White-- President's House, Wm & Mary College .45
8Pearl de Jardin---------- Tuckahoe .45
9--Soft Pink Rose- Winnie Davis Grave(Daughter of Confederacy) .45
10--Louis Philipe-- Pres. House, William & Mary College .45
11--Deep Pink Rose- Main Hall, Wm & Mart College---
12--[illegible]-- Oldest House in Wmsburg--- .45
#[illegible]-Similar to Ivory
13-- Flesh Pink-- Poor Debtor's Prison, Wms'burg ------ ------- .45
14-- Soft Blush Rose-- Jamestown Ch. Yd .45
15-- [illegible]- Pink Moss Rose-- Origonal Evelyn Byrd's Garden-- 1.00
16-- Yellow Harrison, Rose- Buck Hill-- Vaden Home-- .75
17--Shell Pink Rose-- Fence near old Powder horn, Wms'burg .45
18-- Blush Rose-- near chimney-- Martha Washington's Kitchen Old Wms'burg 445
19-- Musk Rose-- Revila-- Patterson Home-- ---------- .45
20-- Similar to Pink Wochet-- Library Bldg-- Wm- Mary College .45
9.20

If I have left out any, or put herein more than I sent please let me know--we counted best we could. 9.80 15.60
You will find that two or three names of the roses do not exactly match with list-- It was because it was so dark we could not see to mark them, and I have fixed it today.

added Shell Pink Aubrey Home
Pink Moss Andrews Grave

2

It forms a compact border and very attractive and old looking& The lot from which mine came they told me came from Martha Washington's Garden.

Please let me know if you want more of these.

I have also the Blue Spider Wort-- Ivy from both James--town tower, and Old Blanford Ch, Petersburg. and several other things, and it being so late I overlooked four more roses which came two from Brandon, and two from Old Blanford Semitary.

The Lads Love--(sweet fern,) and Summer Savory-- have disappeared until spring, as well as the Herbs, Old Woman, and Rosemary.

My rosees from the one 100 years old, and Seven Sisters and Cabbage-- are also too small--as well as my Damask slips, both Red and Pink.

I sent you my only Pink Moss Rose--2 year-- and my only Fragrant Yellow Harrison-- 18 mos.

I wold like also to say that I have four lovely Wall Flowers, seed of which came direct from an old garden in England-- I could spare you these, as I have five left then. I raised them last year from seed. They have only bloomed once.

I believe this is all for now, except to say keep me in mind should you wish any Chrysanthemums-- I have about thirty some varieties, among them, an exquisite Red, single daisy -- beautiful-- and a deeper(aster varitey) than yours you gave me, a deep velvety Garnet. I would like mightily to sell some small plants in the spring.

I beg to say that I have put the prices the best I could find out, regardless of their historic value-- some of which I may never be able to duplicate. I hope these prices meet with your approval-- should they not, or should there be any mistakes-- please let me know and I will remedy it the best I can. I think it was certainly kind of you to encourage me with this order-- and do want it to please you in every way.

Again thanking you, I am

Yours very truly

Bessie Berry Grabowskii

APPENDIX C.
YORK HALL BULB ORDER TO HENRY A. DREER, INC., 1922

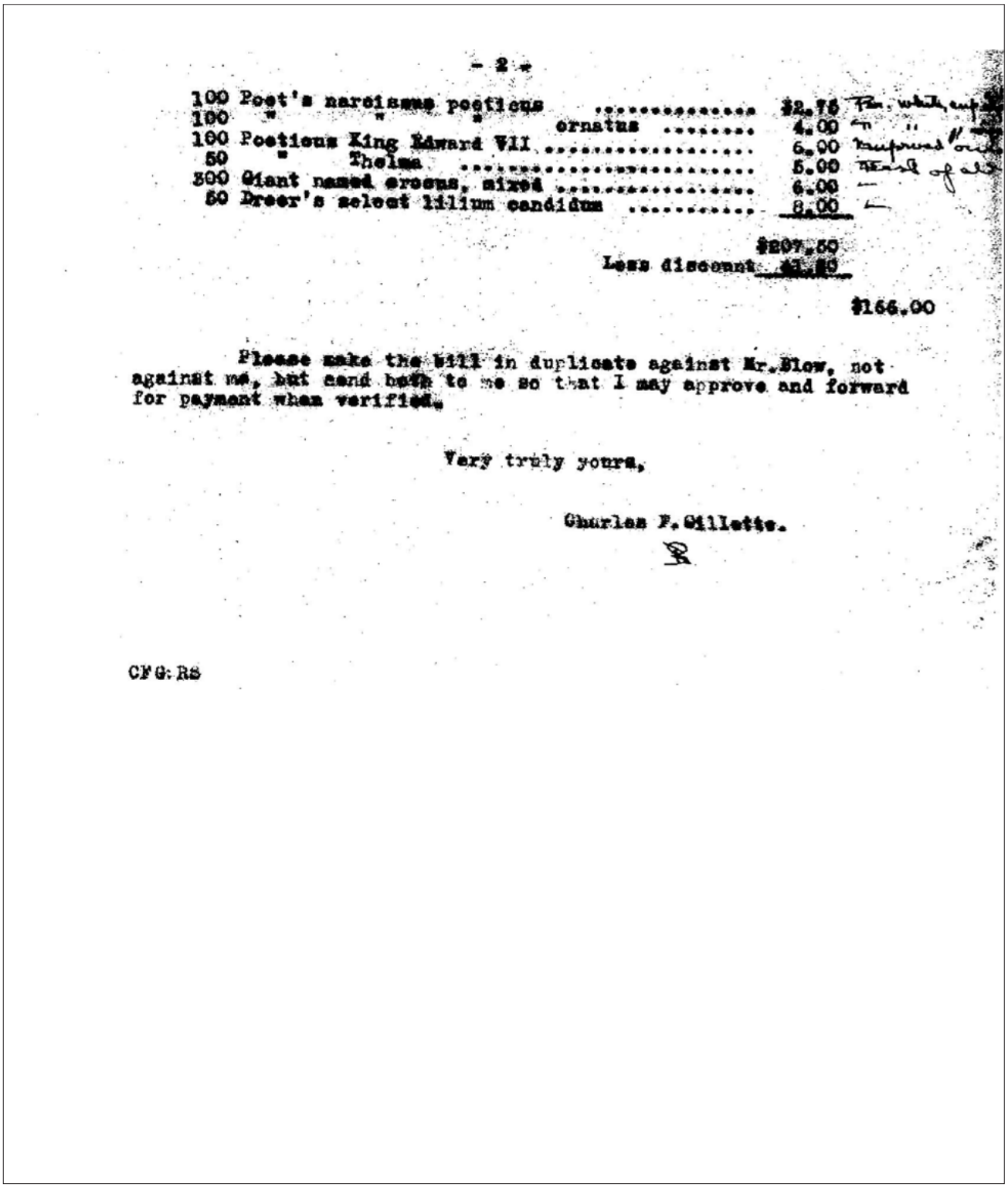
Source: Charles Gillette Papers, accession 34472, Business Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond. These bulbs were presumably for the formal garden, which was built in 1922. The hand-written annotations in the right column indicate the colors of the bulbs.

Henry A. Dreer, Inc.,
714-716 Chestnut St.,
Philadelphia, Penna. 1922

Gentlemen:-

Kindly ship the following order at the proper season to George P. Blow, Yorktown, Virginia, via the York River and Baltimore Line.-

100	Single early tulips, Cottage Maid	$4.25	← W. banded rose pi
100	" " " Joost van Vondel White	4.75	← W.
50	" " " President Lincoln	2.00	← Violet
50	May flowering tulips, Gesneria lutea	2.00	← Golden yellow
100	" " " Picotee	3.75	← W. edged with pi
100	" " " The Fawn	4.00	← Fawn suffused with
50	Double tulips, Couronne d'Or	2.25	← Yellow tinted orang
50	Breeder tulips, Bronze Queen	2.50	← Bronze suffused ye
50	" " Cardinal Manning	2.50	← Maroon and scar
50	" " Godet parfait	3.50	← Plum violet
200	Darwin tulips, Baron de la Tonnaye	7.50	← Vivid rose pink
100	" " Clara Butt	3.75	← Salmon rose
50	" " Madam Krelage	2.50	← Rosy violet
100	" " Rev. Eubank	4.00	← Soft lavender rose
100	Narcissus, Empress	7.00	← pure white; cup yel
100	Giant princeps	4.50	← " sulphur " "
100	Glory of Leiden	6.50	← " pale yellow " "
100	Golden Spur	7.00	← Yellow
100	King Alfred	10.00	← " golden yel
100	Bicolor Victoria	7.00	← pure white; cup yel
100	Emperor	7.00	← " primrose " "
100	Madam de Graaff	6.50	← " white " "
100	Olympia	15.00	← Sulphur-tinted sulphur
100	Trumpet Major	4.50	← Rich yellow
100	Van Waveren's Giant	16.00	← Pale primrose; cup yel
50	Medium trumpet Narcissus, Barii Conspicuous	2.25	← Pale yellow; cup scarle
50	" " " " Lady Godiva	3.00	← white " "
50	" " " Incomparabilis Autocrat	2.25	← yellow " yellow
50	" " " Incomp. Lucifer	2.50	← white " orange
50	" " " " Sir Watkin	2.50	← yellow " yellow
50	" " " " Torch	3.50	← " " orange
50	" " " Leedsii Evangeline	3.25	← white " pink
50	" " " " White Lady	2.25	← " " yellow
100	Jonquils, Single sweet scented	3.00	← Rich buttery yellow
100	" Campernelle	3.25	← Larger than above
100	" " rugulosus	3.75	← Largest
100	" " odorus plenus	4.00	← Double



- 2 -

100	Poet's narcissus poeticus	$2.75	For white cup
100	" " " ornatus	4.00	" "
100	Poeticus King Edward VII	6.00	Improved [illegible]
50	" Thelma	5.00	Head of [illegible]
300	Giant named crocus, mixed	6.00	—
50	Dreer's select lilium candidum	8.00	—
		$207.50	
	Less discount [illegible]	[illegible]	
		$166.00	

Please make the bill in duplicate against Mr. Blow, not against me, but send both to me so that I may approve and forward for payment when verified.

Very truly yours,

Charles F. Gillette.

CFG:RS

APPENDIX D.
YORKTOWN GROWING CONDITIONS

Yorktown has a mild climate moderated by its proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. Summers are typically hot and humid, and winters are generally snow-free but subject to periodic heavy snowfalls. Monthly average rainfall ranges from 3.24 inches in April to 5.34 inches in July. The average January low for the area is 28 degrees Fahrenheit, and the average July high is 89 degrees. Yorktown is in USDA hardiness zone 7b, characterized by minimum temperatures of 5 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit. The frost-free period is 165 to 193 days, and mean annual precipitation is 40 to 55 inches.[8]

Soils within the Nelson House grounds consist of a mix of native and introduced soils used as fill, notably on the terrace. Native soils consist of Slagle fine sandy loam along the west side of the site including the formal garden and lawn, and Pamunkey soils on the east surrounding the house. The Slagle soils, derived from marine terraces, are typically more than eighty inches deep and are moderately well drained. The typical Slagle profile is fine sandy loam, 0 to 9 inches, and clay loam, 9 to 60 inches. Depth to ground water is about 18 to 36 inches. Pamunkey soils, derived from stream terraces, are more than eighty inches deep and are well drained. The typical Pamunkey profile is sandy loam, 0 to 14 inches; sandy clay loam, 14 to 43 inches; and loamy sand, 43 to 75 inches. Depth to ground water is 48 to 72 inches.[9]

Sources:

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Plant Hardiness Zone Map, The United States National Arboretum website, http://www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone/hzm-ne1.html.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Web Soil Survey, Soil Data for James City and York Counties and the City of Williamsburg, Virginia, http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/WebSoilSurvey.aspx.

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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