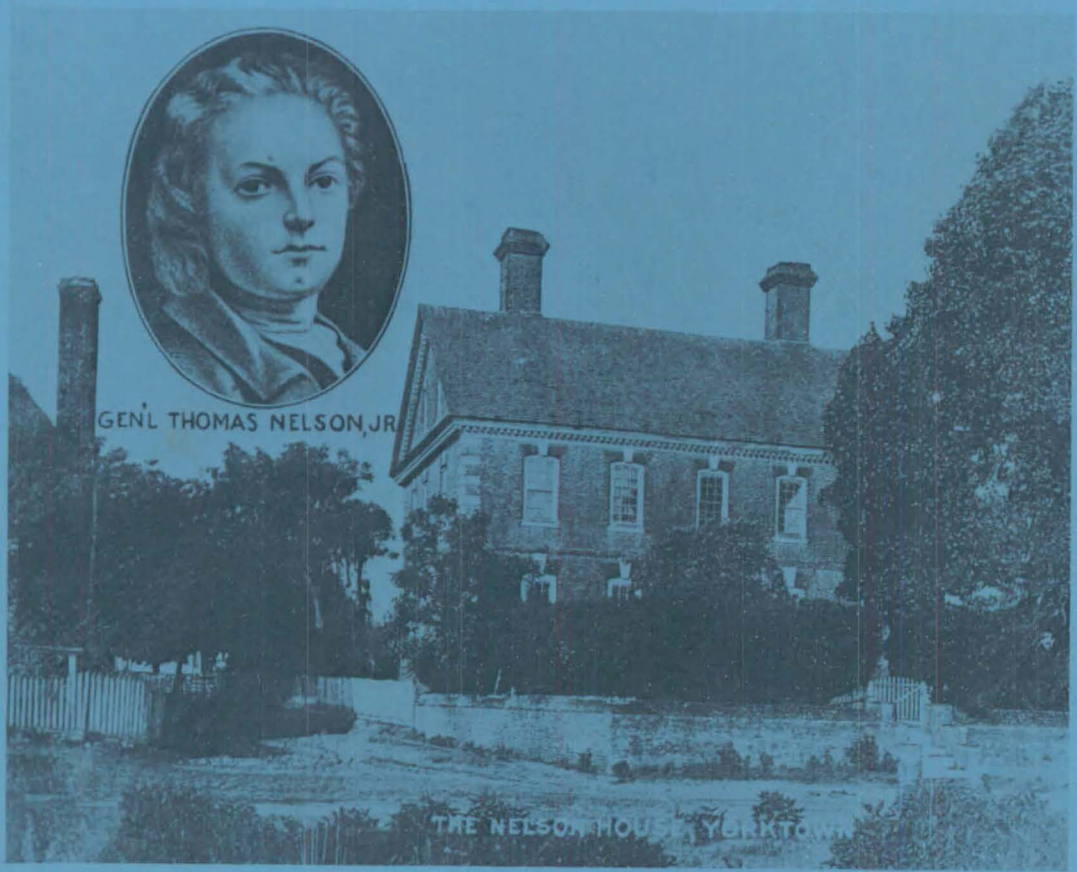
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COLONIAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

THE NELSON HOUSE
AND
THE NELSONS

GENERAL STUDY



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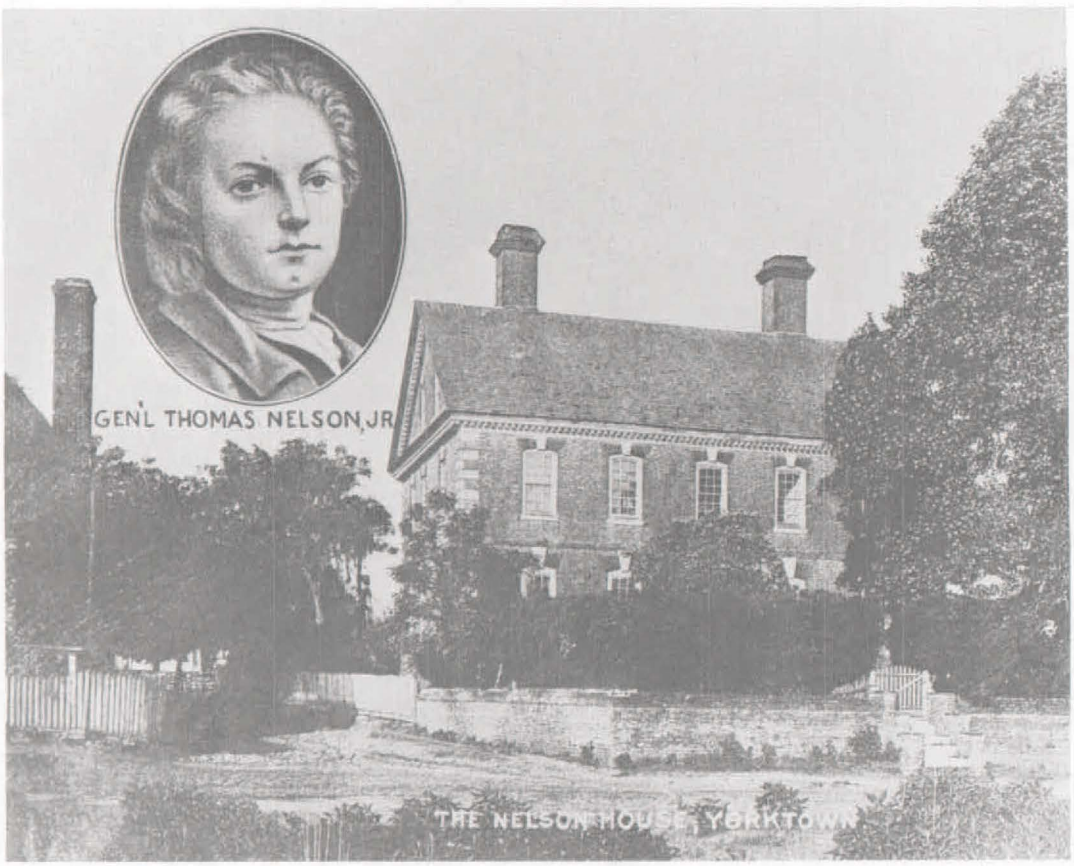
COLONIAL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

THE NELSON HOUSE
AND
THE NELSONS

GENERAL STUDY

by

Charles E. Hatch, Jr.



Office of History and Historic Architecture
Eastern Service Center
Washington, D.C.
August 1969

Preface

The Nelson House in Yorktown was acquired by the Federal government and made a park of Colonial National Historical Park in October 1968. As Historical Resources Study Proposal No. COL-H-12a, which prompted this study, states: "Its architectural and historical qualities combine to make it the most significant building (except the architecturally simpler Moore House) in the Yorktown area of Colonial."

It is planned, as the research proposal relates, that this house will become an exhibit regularly open "to the public and a key interpretive station" in Yorktown. Already it is open on a limited basis. "Consequently this . . . basic research is required to provide as full a fund of knowledge as possible dealing with the house, its furnishings, occupants, grounds and the events, contemporary and later (as Lafayette's visit in 1824)." The report should be a broad point of departure for other researches in archeology, architecture, furnishings plans and the like. These things have guided the direction and make-up of this report.

Surely words of thanks should go, and they do, to Mrs. Frances McLawhorn of the Colonial staff for putting the manuscript into typed draft from its first stage long hand and to Miss Liliane Lykes of the Division of History for preparing the finished manuscript.

Charles E. Hatch, Jr.

Yorktown, Virginia
August 29, 1969

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Illustrations

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Chapter I

Thomas Nelson, the Emigrant

Thomas Nelson, from Penrith, Cumberland, England, came to Yorktown in 1705, evidently with the intent to establish himself here.[1] He was then 28 years of age and a man of some experience in mercantile and maritime matters, and likely too with some inherited and accumulated means. In 1706 he acquired his first property in Yorktown, a half acre parcel "being part of ye Port Land there known by ye Number (52) as by the Plat of Record do appeare."[2] It was here that he built his home and opened business. Here he would live for most of his next 38 years while succeeding admirably in business, community position, and local political life. He would become popularly known as "Scotch Tom" Nelson and would found a strong and vigorous Virginia family.[3]

Thomas was from a family that had succeeded well in merchandizing, and his father Hugh left a substantial estate including shops and warehouses in Penrith.[4] Thomas as the eldest surviving

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1. In a deposition given in a legal matter in York County Court on November 18, 1728, "then Aged 49 Years," he related that "in the Year 1705 this Deponț Came to Settle in York River in Virginia. York County Records, Orders, Wills, etc., 1720-1729, Part 2, pp. 558-59.

2. YCR, Deeds No. 2 (1701-1713), p. 171.

3. Emery G. Evans, The Nelsons: A Biographical Study of a Virginia Family in the Eighteenth Century (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1957), an "O-P Book" copy produced by University Microfilms (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1967) for Colonial National Historical Park, pp. 1 ff.

4. When his father, Hugh, made his will on December 13, 1708 (it was proved two months later on February 16), he put "All

son would inherit well. Even so he felt the call to new things. At age 18 he left his native Penrith near the Scottish border for Whitehaven, a port town on the Irish Sea. From this point he made three voyages to Virginia - in 1696, 1698, and 1700.[5] Seemingly he liked what he had seen in Virginia and five years later decided to try his fortune in Yorktown.

Thomas Nelson was a business success from the beginning. Within two years he was exercising powers of attorney, buying slaves, adding to his town holdings, building a home, and such. Evidently background, experience, and a keen business acumen stood him in good stead. His quick rise and his multiplying activity in the community is amply reflected in the York County Court Records. Soon he was a York County justice and consequently a member of the County Court, which later he headed as presiding justice. In 1716 he became a trustee of the Town of York and for two years, 1722-1723, was the County's sheriff. In the same period

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land and houses in Penrith" which he owned in trust for his wife during her life, "and then I give (the Shops and Warehouses called Redmans excepted) to the trustees for the use of my eldest son now living Thomas Nelson." This inheritance was contingent on Thomas paying £300 to two brothers (John and Hugh) and two sisters (Dorothy and Bridget). The "house and shop called Redmans, and all the rest of my goods" he willed to John, Hugh, Dorothy, and Bridget. "Virginia Gleanings in England," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XIII, 402-03.

5. Thomas related that "about the Year 1695 this deponant came to live at White Haven" and "in Decr 1696 this Dept went to Virginia and Arrived in Rappahanack River the latter end of Jany." Though he also mentioned the years 1698 and 1700, he had no comment on his destination in these voyages. YCR, Orders, Wills, etc., 1720-1729, pt. 2, pp. 558-59.

he busied himself with obtaining supplies for the Yorktown fortifications, supervised repair of the county jail, and engaged in various other projects in the public interest.[6]

Evidently he was ready for marriage and a family of his own in 1710[7] and in the process allied himself with the already old and well-established Read family. He and Margaret Read had their first child, a son William, the following year.[8] Two more children would follow, Mary about 1713 and then Thomas in 1716, but his first marriage would end sometime after mid-1718 with the death of his wife.[9] But he would remarry, the second time on February 22, 1723. Then he brought to Yorktown Frances Tucker and the two children that were with her. She was the widow of Robert Tucker of Norfolk.[10] There would be but one child from this union, Sarah Nelson.[11]

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6. Evans, The Nelsons, pp. 3 ff.

7. John Read in his will proved March 16, 1712, made reference to his daughter Margaret, the wife of Thomas Nelson. John, the eldest son of Col. George Read, had married Mary, daughter of John Lilly. The William and Mary College Quarterly, 1st. Ser., II (1893), 9-10.

8. William was said to be in his 62nd year when he died on November 19, 1772.

9. She was living at the time of Thomas Read's will dated May 21, 1718 (proved on June 15, 1719). As "my Sister Margaret Nelson" she shared in the disposition of his estate along with his mother Mary and his sister Mildred Goodwin and four brothers: John, Samuel, George and Francis. YCR, Orders, Wills & Etc., 1716-1720, pt. 2, p. 453.

10. The Lower Norfolk, County, Virginia Antiquary, III, pt. 1, p. 42. It is of interest that Bishop William Meade in commenting on his first wife had this to note: "At her death he married a widow Tucker whose husband was from Barbadoes, where, and in Bermuda, that name aboundeth." Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia (Philadelphia, 1857), I, 205.

11. Evans, The Nelsons, pp. 16-17.

Thomas Nelson was not content to remain within the local scene, particularly in the business and trading area, though he continued to add to his Yorktown holdings and interests all the while. In 1715 he became a charter member of the Virginia Indian Company looking toward trade to the then-southwest-frontier region. This was a project in which Lieutenant Governor Alexander Spotswood had a particular interest. When the Governor found it necessary to issue a special appeal for subscription to this project, Thomas found himself in a select company of Virginia leaders that included fellow Yorktownian Cole Digges. It is said that Nelson became a favorite and confidant of Spotswood and may have had Council membership in mind. If true, the removal of Spotswood in 1722 diminished any chance he may have had at the time.[12]

He was participating in the West Indian trade at least as early as 1720, when he dispatched a ship with a cargo valued at £1200 for trade in Barbadoes. Later he would have his own ships in the trade. In 1732 he purchased a £500 interest in an iron mine near Fredericksburg along with Governor Gooch and two others, clearly indicating that he was still a business leader in Virginia. In 1719, using headrights for persons brought into the colony, he acquired 3,273 acres up the Pamunkey River.[13]

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12. Evans, The Nelsons, pp. 4-8.
13. Evans, The Nelsons, pp. 14 ff.

Closer home he acquired 600 acres in Charles Parish of York County in 1725, some of it by mortgage foreclosure. In 1738 he secured more land in York-Hampton Parish as well as three town lots in Williamsburg. In 1726 he had brought a second grist mill, this time on the Warwick River. In Yorktown itself he added lots as opportunity came. On Lot 25 purchased in 1719 he and Joseph Walker built the Swan Tavern, which became one of Yorktown's most noted places of public entertainment. Already he was the operator of the established ferry service across the York River to Tindall's (Gloucester) Point.

In 1728 he greatly expanded his trade and mercantile potential by leasing a strategic section on the Yorktown waterfront for warehouses and possibly a pier of his own. He,"Thomas Nelson of Yorktown Merchant," petitioned the Virginia Council for a lot 80 feet square on the "beach" below the bluff "opposite to his own Lotts, and adjoining to the landing he now useth," where he intended "building warehouses for the securing merchandizes of great bulk and weight, which through the steepness and height of the bank, cannot easily be conveyed into the Town." In approving the request the Council also granted him the right "to extend a Wharf of the same breadth from thence into the River," and specified that his plot and its development should be so laid out that it would not "encroach upon the public landings, or

streets leading through the said Town to the River side."[14]

He obviously conducted a large volume of business. For example, in his dealings with Col. Thomas Jones, a planter of King William County, debt accumulated to 2,000 pounds in the 1730-32 period, and Jones found it necessary to mortgage some 3,375 acres of land and 35 slaves. In the next three years Jones' debt increased another 2,500 pounds and foreclosure became necessary, with Nelson getting most of the land and the yearly use of the slaves until the debt had been satisfied.[15]

Thomas concerned himself with the education of his two sons and with the upbringing and marriage of his two daughters. It appears that William went to England about 1722, presumably for training there, and remained for some time. It may have been for a decade, but he had returned by 1732, when he was made a York County justice.[16] The next year son Thomas was in England and entered the Inner Temple in London on June 1 for training in the law. Five years later he was admitted to the English bar. He returned to his home in Yorktown prior to 1743,

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14. Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia, edited by H. R. McIlwaine, IV (Richmond, 1930), 184.

15. Evans, The Nelsons, p. 19.

16. William himself would write in later years about England "For I cannot help interesting Myself in what so highly concerns a Country in which I spent so large a Share of my younger days." (Letter to Cousin William Cookson, November 26, 1767, Nelson Letterbook, photostat in Colonial National Historical Park Library.)

for then he joined his father and brother in the York Court as a justice. Already he had been named Deputy Secretary of the Colony, a lucrative and important post that spoke well for his family connections and possibly as well for his English record.[17]

All of Emigrant Thomas' children married well and established unions with prominent families. It was in 1728 that Mary married Edward Berkeley of Barn Elms in Middlesex County. Fourteen years later Sarah married Robert Burwell of Isle of Wright County, taking with her a 1,500 pound sterling dowry. Robert was the brother of Elizabeth Burwell of Gloucester, whom William had married on February 9, 1738, in a ceremony at Rosewell Mansion in Gloucester.[18] Thomas was the last to marry; his bride in 1745 was Lucy Armistead, of Caroline County.[19]

In his last years Emigrant Thomas, after a full life as merchant, farmer, gentleman, ferry and mill operator, innkeeper, justice, trustee, and an associate of Virginia governors and leaders, began to curtail his activities, though in the public area he retained his post as Church warden for York-Hampton

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17. Evans, The Nelsons, pp. 15-16, 20, 32.

18. As reported in the Williamsburg Virginia Gazette (February 3-10, p. 3, Column 1): "Yesterday was Se'nnight, Mr. William Nelson, eldest Son of Mr. Thomas Nelson, an iminent Merchant in York, was married, at Mrs. Page's in Gloucester County, to Miss Elizabeth Burwell a very genteel, accomplish'd young Lady, of great Merit, and a considerable Fortune."

19. R.C.M. Page, Genealogy of the Page Family in Virginia Also a Condensed Account of the Nelson, Walker, Pendleton and Randolph Families (Second Edition, Bridgewater, Va., 1965), pp. 158-59; Evans, The Nelsons, pp. 18, 23, 36.

Parish. In business his son William had all the while been shouldering more of the load. On August 6, 1745, he made his will, and on October 7 he died:

> Early on Monday Morning last, died, at his House in York Town, in a good old Age, Mr. Thomas Nelson, an eminent Merchant, and 40 Years an Inhabitant of that Place. In his Publick Stations, he acted with Justice, Equity, and Moderation. In his Private, as a just, honest, conscientious Man, and a good Christian; a kind Husband, a tender Parent, a good Neighbour, Charitable to the Poor, and benevolent to all. As he liv'd just, so was he blessed, not only in the Increase of his Wealth, but in the Comfort of his Children, who he liv'd to see (following his good Example) all happily married and settled, and enjoying the greatest Honours and Preferments. As he liv'd truly revere'd and respected, so he died lamented.[20]

Perhaps some measure of the man, Thomas Nelson, and the fortune he amassed in lands, slaves, and trade comes through in his "last Will and Testament" along with some indication of the life he lived and the nature of his establishment.[21] As if proud of his mercantile achievements, he opened his will, "In the Name of God, Amen. I, Thomas Nelson, of Yorktown, in Va., Merchant."

His first thought was to his wife to whom he bequeathed a lump sum of £5,000 out of his personal estate and an annual sum during her life of £150 out of "the profits of my Lands and

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20. Virginia Gazette, October 3-10, 1745, p. 2, column 3.
21. A copy of the will is published in full in The William and Mary Quarterly, 1st. Ser., VI, 143-45.

Negroes." He confirmed to her "all those pieces of Gold, Rings, and Jewells whereof she is now possessed." And there was more:

> And it is also my will and desire that she have during her natural life the use of my Dwelling-House, Kitchens, Gardens, on the same side of the street /Main Street/ with the house, stable, chariot, and chariot Horses, and of all the Furniture at my said house and Kitchens and my Town Cows; also the services of my negroes Grace, Penny, Suckey, Frank, Will, Cesar, Tryal, and Little Davy during her life.

On her decease these things--"home, furniture, chariot, horses, cows, and Negroes"--would descend to his oldest son William along with unnamed "Lands, tenants, slaves and real estate," plus "the residue of my chattels, and other personal estate" after "Debts and Legacies" had been satisfied. For son Thomas there was £4,000, less any payments already made to him, in addition to the estate in King William County already given him and "the houses, Lots, and plantations bought for him of Doctor John Dixon, etc.," in "York Town" and County.

Other cash bequests totaled £1,145. There was £25 for daughter Mary Berkeley, "to buy her a House Wench", and £200 to each of her five children.[22] For daughter Sarah Burwell there was £20 plus "the Negro Wench Belinda, with her increase." Already he had "lately given her fifteen hundred pounds sterling as a portion upon

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22. Edmund, Nelson, Mary, Sarah and Lucy Berkeley.

her marriage with Mr. Robert Burwell."[23] There was a final thought for his first wife who had preceded him in death: "My last will and Desire is that out of my personal estate my executor do cause to be provided and set up, over or near the grave of my first wife, a handsome marble stone or monument, as soon as conveniently may be."[24] He had explicit faith in his "dear son, William" and made him his "sole executor," expressly asking that "he may not be compelled to give any security to the court for the due execution" of his will.

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23. There was a bequest, too, for his two grand-nephews "cousins William Nelson and John Nelson, grandsons of my brother William, late of Barbadoes," £50 each.

24. This may not have been done as there is no trace of it today in Grace Church yard, while a contemporary, ornate tomb structure marks his grave and another that of William, his "elder son," who was given this injunction.

Chapter II

Noted Sons, Especially William

When he died in 1745 Thomas Nelson, the emigrant, left an established family and a prosperous business. His children were married and settled and his two sons, William and Thomas, were even then prominent in local and Colony affairs. He, too, had enjoyed his grandson Thomas Nelson, Jr., for almost seven years, an offspring that would bring lasting fame and note to his family when the struggle of the American Revolution came.

It may well have been that William Nelson considered 1738 as a red letter year since it was in February of that year that he married Elizabeth Burwell and on December 26 that his first child and heir, Thomas Nelson, Jr., was born.[1] It is not known just where William and Elizabeth first set up housekeeping and where young Thomas was born. It might well have been that then all were living in his father's home on Lot 52. He did, however, own other lots in Yorktown, lots 12 and 18 on Main Street near the courthouse, on which there was suitable housing. He had owned this property for more than a decade and he was evidently living on it in November 1741.[2]

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1. It was the year, too, that he was appointed high sheriff of York County and, also, was able to offer land for sale in Hanover County, demonstrating a love for land that would continue.

2. When he mortgaged this property to "Messrs Haswell & Hunt of London, Merchants" in 1741 for something less than 500 pounds sterling it included: "The dwelling house of said Wm Nelson the Elder in the Town of York together with all outhouses, Kitchen,

This, however, would be for a short tenure. William would build a home of his own design very soon, likely just after his father's death on property which involved Lot 47 as well as adjacent Lots 46, 84, and 85. He would remain in residence here the rest of his life, and Thomas, Jr., and the other of William's children would grow up and shape their early characters here. It was just across the street from the "Scotch Tom" home where Francis Tucker Nelson, their step-grandmother, would continue to live for another twenty years. There was much going and coming between these homes and likely that of their uncle, Secretary Thomas Nelson, further down the street.

William Nelson, having been educated in England and trained in his father's business (both in the mercantile and planting areas), was already experienced in community and colony affairs.[3] He had already served well on the county court, as a long-time justice of the peace. There had been good active service as well as a burgess for York County in the Assembly.[4] Besides, he was already a man of wealth and social standing in his own right through the base

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Milkhouse, Storehouse, Stable, Gardens, Orchards, Tenements & Lotts of Land." Involved in the mortgage, also, were "certain slaves" all of which were released from debt in 1747. See YCR, Deeds, No. 5, (1741-1755), pp. 15, 204 and also Deeds & Bonds, No. 3, (1713-1729), p. 505.

3. This narrative is drawn in large measure from Evans, The Nelsons, especially Chapters II, III, and IV, pp. 39-178.

4. Elected to the House in 1742, he was active for a beginner. In the next session he was sponsor for bills laying duties on liquor, for duties on skins and furs to the better support of William and Mary College, and for the relief of creditors. He was, however, unsuccessful in gaining passage of a bill to keep goats and hogs from running loose in Yorktown.

his father had laid. No doubt his father was pleased to see the culmination of his appointment to his "Majesties Council of State," to which he took the oath of office on October 10, 1745.

The Council, made up of a dozen royally-appointed leaders, was a prestigious body. Councilors acted as advisors to the governor, served as the upper house of the Assembly, and functioned as the court of last resort in the colony. William remained a member of this body for 27 years, until his death in 1772, becoming its head, as its President, in October 1770. Consequently, he served as Virginia's interim governor between the death of Lord Botetourt on October 15, 1770, and the arrival of Governor Dunmore in September 1771.[5]

At his father's death William was already the leading merchant in Yorktown, and he would, even as economic and political conditions changed, remain a leader in this field. It was his custom through the years to give meticulous attention to business matters, and he was prompt in the pursuit of accounts involving sales, loans, debts,

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5. Evans, The Nelsons, pp. 33ff. There is a brief sketch of William Nelson in The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography (XXXIII (1925), p. 189ff.) and also a thumbnail sketch and portrait in Alexander Wilbourne Weddell's A Memorial Volume of Virginia Historical Portraiture, 1585-1830 (Richmond, 1930), p. 196. The portrait, by an unknown artist, hung in the Nelson House for decades. Being absent for a time in the Revolution and in the Civil War when "William IV died Mrs. /Corbin W./ Mercer inherited it. When she left Yorktown for Richmond she took it with her ultimately placing it in the Virginia State Library "for safe keeping and public view."

or mortgages as the York County Court records attest. By 1750 he had an extensive wholesale and retail trade, in the former activity ranging as far away as Philadelphia and Baltimore, and in the latter as far west as Louisa County. Goods came primarily from London, Liverpool, and Bristol. He, also, in the absence of banks as we know them, did a considerable account and loan business and often handled financial matter for others.

It is of note that in 1752 he managed two rather large consignments of slaves, one of them in association with his brother Thomas ("The Secretary").[6] Likewise he continued to operate the trading ship Nelson and there was, for time to time, interest in other ships, though in later years he did not see the same profit in shipping activities.

The heart of the retail trade was the family store on Main Street and others on the waterfront. He carried a wide range of merchandise, like his father before him, everything from bar iron to taffeta. As Evans has described the "Scotch Tom" store:

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6. This was likely suggestive of slave sales on which he had worked with his father, as the one reported in 1739: "That the Black Prince, Capt. John Simpson, of London, is lately arrived from the Gold Coast, with a Cargo of choice slaves, the Sale of which began at York Town on the 7th Instant /June/, and is to continue there 'till the whole Cargo is disposed of. She is intended to take Tobacco at Seven Pounds per Ton, for London; will make a reasonable Allowance to those that bring their Tobacco on board, and will sail the first Week in August, tho' but half Loaden. She is but 3 Years old, and is well fitted." Virginia Gazette, June 8-15, 1739, p. 4, c.1.

> The store in Yorktown, conveniently located diagonally across from the custom house and close to the waterfront carried in stock almost every conceivable item. Hoes, nails, plates, dishes, lines, spices, coffee, raisins, buttons, gloves, hose, cotton, silks, cutlery, chamber pots and haberdashery made up only part of the stock from which Virginia planters could choose.[7]

As the years passed the store became the most profitable part of William's business operation. This was certainly true in the early 1770s. At this time tobacco profits had fallen. It was about all that Nelson could do to break even with the eleven English merchants with whom he was doing business.

William, as a merchant and planter, had a primary interest in tobacco, though he did not look with much favor, it seems, on the personal use of it. It was, however, through most of his years the basic commodity with which he dealt. As he did his mercantile accounts, William, in the cultivation of his plantations, paid close attention to the processes and the products. Good tobacco brought better prices, he knew well.

His principal area of tobacco production was on his Hanover holdings where he came to have near 20,000 acres. In good years he would produce as much as 150 hogsheads, though in bad seasons both yield and quality dropped low. In the bumper year of 1770 he made 246 hogsheads. He knew, too that new acres must be available as the old ones wore thin. Consequently, he added tracts

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7. The Nelsons, pp. 18-19.

farther west and north, in the counties of Albemarle, Fauquier, Frederick, and elsewhere. He and his brother Thomas, in 1763, became leaders, too, in continuing efforts to drain and utilize the Great Dismal Swamp to the south of Norfolk.

William, as a matter of fact, was from time to time working in unison with "Secretary Thomas," who, though a little younger, was equally prominent in public service. When only 27, Thomas had been named Deputy Secretary of the Colony. The King had appointed William Adair as Secretary, but Adair did not come to Virginia. Thomas Nelson was named his deputy and empowered to act for him and to carry on the duties of the office in the colony. It was one of the key offices in Virginia and a lucrative one, estimated in 1736 to be worth 900 pounds per annum.

Like William, Thomas had served his Yorktown community and would continue to do so. When William moved into the House of Burgesses, Thomas headed the county court. Likewise, when William went into the Council in 1746, Thomas quickly took his place in the House of Burgesses. On April 20, 1749, Thomas followed his brother to the Council. He continued as a councilor until 1776, and succeeded his brother as president. The two brothers, William and Thomas, came to be known among their associates as "Mr. President" and "The Secretary" respectively. The were leading voices in the conduct of Virginia affairs. Thomas would not follow the mercantile way though he would have interest in the plantation area. He showed interest in undeveloped lands on the Greenbriar in western Virginia,

in the Loyal Land Company, and in other speculative activities. Besides, his duties as Secretary grew more demanding as did his role as a councilor. Even so, the new often interested him as did the John Hobday wheat harvester in 1773.[8]

Thomas outlived his brother by a decade and a half and saw the Revolution through. Though plagued by gout from time to time, he remained interested in hunting (especially for woodcock and fox), and other pastimes. As Yorktown's gossip Martha Goosley saw it in 1770, he was then "at Present Laid up hand and foot with the Gout doing Penance for past folly."[9] But back to William Nelson.

With bad tobacco years and a certain amount of trade disruption, even William Nelson ran into debt (in 1766-68 particularly) with the firm of Edward Hunt and Sons, London merchants with whom he did a large volume of business. This troubled him immensely. He curtailed his orders and retrenched a bit, writing that: "To remain in Debt I could never bear but with the greatest Pain, & the Difficulty of getting in money makes me fearful of accumulating

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8. Thomas married Lucy Armistead of Caroline in 1745, though it is not clear just where they first established a residence (possibly on the plantation which his father had given him in King William County, but just as likely in Yorktown). He was in Yorktown at least by 1746 when he became a burgess. It was likely then that he built his fine mansion on the southeast edge of Yorktown. This location was included in the property that "Scotch Tom" had bought, in 1744, from Dr. John Dixon, for him (possibly a wedding present), and it included "houses, Lots, and plantations." (Edward M. Riley,"History of the Founding and Development of Yorktown," typed report dated 1941 in Colonial National Historical Park Library, p.87.)

9. Francis Norton Mason (ed.), John Norton & Sons: Merchants of London and Virginia: Being the Papers from their Counting House (Richmond, Va., 1937), p. 145.

any Debt on your side of the Water."[10] A run of several bad crop years and the difficulty of collecting from those in his debt were at the root of his difficulties, which he in due course surmounted.

By the late 1760s William Nelson had begun to believe that the future of Virginia tobacco was not bright and indicated that wheat might be its successor. Soil depletion troubled him, too, and when on one occasion, in 1767, he sent clover seed to his manager in Hanover, he commented that it made good pasture "& helps to recover land by feeding it." Both he and his brother, "The Secretary," had earlier become interested in the promotion of arts and manufactures and were subscribers to the fund rewarding new successful endeavor. This became especially meaningful as difficulties with the mother country brought stress and strain on trade and supply. More self sufficiency was needed.[11] He could report in 1769 that he and his son Thomas both had suits made of cloth produced by Thomas in Albemarle and equal to Yorkshire cloth. Their shirts were of Virginia linen and his "Shoes, Hose, Buckles, Wigg, & Hat" were all made in Virginia.[12]

Though William Nelson loved the mother country and regretted frictions that developed, he was a Virginian through and through. When in 1759 it became necessary to create a Committee of Correspondence

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10. Quoted in The Nelsons, p. 118.
11. Ibid., pp. 148-49.
12. Ibid., p. 149.

to keep Virginia's agent in England informed of the reasons for Assembly actions that he might better present his defense of them, William Nelson chaired the committee with his brother, Secretary Nelson, being another of the four councilors who worked with the eight burgesses in the matter.

William was pleased, too, and relieved when the Stamp Act was repealed. As for the Townshend Acts and their direct duties on imports, Nelson considered them all wrong. It was a question in his view of whether Americans were "to be slaves or Freemen," the difference being use of property. The slave could have no property: it was all at the disposal of his master. The freeman on the other hand has the natural and constitutional right of disposing of his property as long as he disturbed no one. He was led to write a little later that "the scheme of Politicks" in England, with respect to the colonies, "doth not promise Happiness to America. The Error will not be seen I fear before it is too late."[13]

Though he was not one of the signers of the Association formed in May 1769 to put economic pressure on England, he agreed he was "an Associate in Principle" and adhered to the regulations laid down. He saw the duty acts as "wantonly, arbitrarily & unconstitutionally imposed" and resolved to hold his imports to goods absolutely necessary. Later he would write John Norton to send him nothing

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13. Quoted in Evans, The Nelsons, pp. 128, 137ff.

"except Garden Seeds" that year. In his view all of the "hateful Acts" must be repealed; it was not enough to repeal the Townshend duties.[14]

When he became the Acting Governor in October 1770, it fell to William Nelson to deal with various items of business left on the demise of Botetourt and he acted usually with cautious forthrightness. There was:(1) the matter of opinion on a western lands colony project,[15] (2) special recompense for the long serving, but now retired council president, John Blair, whom he succeeded,[16] (3) the authority and jurisdiction for trying erring clergymen,[17] (4) the proposal for an American Episcopate,[18] (5) a councilor successor for Blair,[19] and (6) regulation of the Indian trade.[20]

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14. Ibid, pp. 140-42.

15. In Nelson's view, Virginia would take no offense if all earlier commitments here were honored. He also defended the Council which he believed had not profited from western lands speculation.

16. This he endorsed and recommended an annual pension of 400 pounds.

17. Here he favored some established regular jurisdiction to prevent popular dissatisfaction and loss of interest in religion.

18. In William's view, Virginia probably did not want a bishop but likely would not oppose it. On the other hand he believed it would split the ranks of the ministers as "many of our clergy were bred up Dissenters whose Eyes have been open'd by the glare of 16,000 lb Tobo P Annum." Quoted in Evans, The Nelsons, p. 165.

19. On this he was noncommittal whether it be Ralph Wormeley of Middlesex, or neighbor Dudley Digges of Yorktown. He did not appear to be unhappy when it proved to be Wormeley rather than Digges.

20. In his view it was not practical to try to enforce liquor prohibition in this trade, particularly "when I consider how bewitching the passion for strong drink is among the lower and unthinking part of mankind." The Nelsons, p. 161.

When the report came in that the plague was rampant in Hispaniola, Nelson quickly instituted proper quarantine measures for ships from those parts. No doubt he was relieved when it proved a false rumor. He was faced with a crisis when torrential rains and floods wrought widespread havoc and suffering in May 1771. For this he quickly called the Assembly into session to provide a measure of relief, especially in the James and Rappahannock river valleys. Action was swift and 30,000 pounds in treasure notes, supported by specified special taxes,[21] were ordered issued to help repay the flood victims for their losses. The second and final action of this session was to authorize a statue as a memorial to former governor Botetourt.

Now Governor William Nelson like his brother, "Secretary Thomas," went often between Williamsburg and Yorktown as had been his custom for years. Actually sometime before 1749 they owned a house, on Francis Street near the Capitol, where they stayed when there. At this time he purchased Lord Botetourt's coach and his team of four white horses, hiring the coachmen as well, of which he planned to offer the next governor at the same prices he had paid.

Perhaps, William sold the rig to Governor Dunmore when he reached Yorktown on September 24 by boat from the Eastern Shore, to which point he had come by land from New York. Likely Dunmore

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21. Throughout his career Nelson normally opposed with vigor the use of unsecured paper money, or loans not backed by specific methods of payment. This was the careful business man's view.

spent the night in Yorktown with William before moving on to Williamsburg the next day. As a senior councilor William had greeted other governors. When Botetourt arrived in late October 1768, he had been met within four miles of Williamsburg "by Mr. Secretary and his Brother," who escorted him to the Capitol where the "council and all the Gentlemen of Williamsburg assembled to receive" him.

From all indications Nelson enjoyed the gubernatorial post and believed that he had been successful. Having learned of the appointment of his successor, Dunmore, he remarked that the King's "Subjects of Virginia have been very easy if not happy during my short Administration: However I still have the pleasure in resigning the Government . . . to one, I trust much more capable." But a little later, on this subject, he had second thoughts.[22]

Reading was a favorite pastime with William, and he followed book notices in the London Magazine, placing orders regularly. Poetry, history, law and politics were among the fields that interested him. He had an interest in art, too, especially in John Collet's landscapes. Once he wrote a friend to go as high as 25 guineas for paintings he considered good. His interest in

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22. Evans, The Nelsons, pp. 163-64.

horse racing, manifested in younger days, remained.[23] He was fond of riding and even encouraged his wife to take to the saddle for health reasons in later life, until an "ugly fall" incapacitated her for quite some time in 1767. William enjoyed occasional hunting for both woodcocks and foxes, but perhaps not as much as did his brother. He seemed generally on the alert for new things and better ways of doing old ones, as when he wrote in 1766 that he had received the "Invoice & Bill of Loading for the Engine & Chariot, both wch pleases Me very well . . . but the Maker of the first hath ommitted to send the Hose you mention, to water the Garden: & therefore I hope she will send me one." On August 14, 1767, he could report "the Hose for the Enjine I have also received" and, presumably, now he could water his garden when the weather proved dry.[24]

William loved his family and the house he created in Yorktown which grew into a large H-shaped building.[25] He liked his children about him[26] and expected them to be a comfort in his old age. He

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23. In January 1740 there was notice of a horse race set for the first Thursday in April at Joseph Sewell's over the York River in Gloucester County. It read: "The Gentlemen that are Subscribers for the Purse, are desir'd to pay their Money to Mr. William Nelson at York, or to Mr. Ralph Wormley, of Middlesex." Virginia Gazette, January, 4-11, p. 4, c.1.

24. Mason, John Norton & Sons, pp. 14, 31.

25. He had his house completely done over in 1769 to the cost of 204 pounds. This included repainting, reshingling, the addition of two porches, laying an attic floor, reglazing many windows and installing wainscoting.

26. There were Thomas (1738), Nathaniel (c. 1745), Hugh (1750), Robert (c. 1752), and William (c. 1754). John Baer Stout, Nicolas Martiau: The Adventurous Huguenot (Norristown, Pa., 1932),

seemed proud that the Nelsons were prolific in boys, commenting at one point that there is "not a female among us except our Wives."[27] Only Thomas went abroad for education. Instead the other boys attended local schools and then went on to William and Mary College. He had three there at the same time and a fourth would follow a bit later. He himself served as a visitor of the College.

William Nelson liked people and often entertained family, friends, and business agents. "Entertainment and social activities," one biographer wrote, "played an important part in the Nelsons' lives. Like most Virginia families of their standing they were most hospitable."[28] There are records of some visits to the Nelson homes in Yorktown as that by William Byrd II in May 1741 which Byrd recorded in some detail in his diary.[29] He relates that on May 2, after attending court in Williamsburg, he and his daughters left town:

> I went to York in Mrs. Needler's chariot to young Mr. /William/ Nelson's where we dined and I ate roast fowl. After dinner we visited Colonel /Philip/

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pp. 91-92: Page, Genealogy of the Page Family, pp. 161-62. The daughter Elizabeth married Captain Thompson of H.M.S. Ripon that brought Botetourt to Virginia and she went back to England with her husband and lived there.

27. The Nelsons, p. 116.

28. Ibid., pp. 26-27.

29. Another Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover 1739-1741, edited by Maude H. Woodfin and Marion Tinling (Richmond, 1942), pp. 155-56. Byrd had also visited William the preceding February. On the 23rd he had arrived about three o'clock: "where we found young /William/ Nelson and his family and Betty there. I ate dry beef. We talked and were courteously entertained. I prayed." (p. 136).

> Lightfoot, where we drank tea. Walked about the town, talked with a man just come from Jamaica, lay at Mr. /William/ Nelson's, and prayed.

On May 3, the next day:

> I rose about 8 and prayed. I had chocolat for breakfast....About 11 walked to /York-Hampton (now Grace Episcopal)/ church and had a good sermon; dined with Colonel Lightfoot, and ate fish. After dinner we had tea with old /"Scotch Tom"/ Nelson and in the evening we supped at Mr. /Richard/ Ambler's with Colonel /William/ Fairfax and his lady, went home about 9 and prayed.

Byrd ended his visit on the 4th: "I rose about 5 and read English and then prayed and had chocolate....About 9 we took leave and went in Mr. /William/ Nelson's chariot to Williamsburg." There was the time too in 1767 when Governor Fauquier stayed with William Nelson in Yorktown during a spell of illness. In the fall he had recovered and in gratitude sent Nelson a cask of wine which Nelson promised to hold for sampling until the governor should come again. Both President and Secretary Nelson were men of influence as indicated in the recollections of later governor John Page, who was grateful:

> William Nelson and Thos. Nelson (two brothers and members of the Kings Council,) I was by these gentlemen, introduced to Lord Botetourt's attention, when he arrived here as Governor, and, after his death, to Lord Dunmore, on his arrival . . . These circumstances contributed to introduce me into public life.[30]

In late years Nelson's health began to fail. In the spring of 1772 he had a protracted illness. Though he improved in the summer,

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30. "Memoir of Colonel John Page of Rosewell" (c.1808) in The Virginia Historical Register, III (1850), p. 147.

by late September he was ill again, so ill that his son Thomas was taking care of all of his pressing business affairs. He filed his will on October 6 and on November 19 he died.

Perhaps the epitaph on his tomb[31] in the churchyard of Grace Church tells part of his story, in brief, as inscribed beneath the family arms:

> Here lies the body of the Honourable William Nelson Esquire/ Late President of His Majesty's Council in this/ Dominion. In whom the love of man and the love of God/ so restrained and enforced each other/ and so invigorated the mental powers in general/ as not only to defend him from the vices and follies/ of his country but also to render it a matter/ of difficult decision in what part of laudable/ conduct he most excelled whether in the tender and/ endearing accomplishments of domestic life/ or in the more active duties of a wider circuit./ As a neighbor, a gentlemen or a magistrate/ whether in the graces of hospitality, or in the possession/ of piety. Reader if you feel the spirit of that/ excellent ardour which aspires to the felicity/ of conscious virtue animated by those consolations/ and devine admonitions, perform the/ task and expect the distinction of the/ righteous man./ He died the 19th of November, Anno Domini 1772./ Age 61.

This was the man William, a strong, capable, active man, who guided his son Thomas Nelson, Jr., and worked closely with him for some 34 years in an intimate family proximity except when this son was away at school in England.

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31. His body lies at the feet of his father, whereas that of his son Thomas is at his feet.

Chapter III

A Famous Grandson

Thomas Nelson, Jr., born in Yorktown, possibly in his grandfather's home on Lot 52, spent his early youth in this growing and busy port town. If not born in the old home, surely he was often there and in the busy storehouse across the street which his grandfather, and then his father who built his home adjacent to it, operated. He was almost seven when his grandfather died, but his step-grandmother would continue on in the old mansion. Soon he was in school, attending that conducted by the Rev. William Yates across in Gloucester County.[1]

It is established that William Nelson sent his son Thomas to England in the summer of 1753, when fourteen years of age, to be placed in school there. He was under the care of two of his father's friends, a Mr. Hunt of London and the Rev. Beilby Porteus, who at that time was a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge University. Initially they placed Thomas in the preparatory school of Dr. Newcome at Hackney, a village near London, where he remained for six years. After this he went on to the University of Cambridge and became a student at Christ's College there. It was here that he

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1. John Page in his "Memoirs" recalled in later years, perhaps, in 1808: "But in the year 1752, when I was nine years old, my father put me into a grammar school, at the glebe house of our parish, where the Rev'd Mr. Wm Yates, had undertaken the tuition of twelve scholars I found there. . . Thos. Nelson (the late Gen. Nelson)." The Virginia Historical Register, III, p. 144.

"Resided till Lady Day /March 25/, 1761."[2] Thomas was "a pensioner" rather than a "Fellow Commoner," an undergraduate who paid for his keep unlike the "scholor" who was given it. There is no record that he received a degree, but then, as G. MacLaren Brydon notes, "gentlemen did not bother with examinations much in the 18th century."[3]

His father had been deeply concerned lest he get under the wrong influences in England and was relieved when he returned. Actually he returned a good Virginian, whereas many of the young men being sent to England at this time developed strong loyalist leanings. Evidently William came to be convinced that an English education was not essential, perhaps not even helpful any more. None of his other sons crossed the Atlantic for their schooling.

Thomas was elected to the House of Burgesses immediately on his return to Virginia; some say the election took place even while he was enroute. He would remain a member for the next fifteen years and then move into the Virginia House of Delegates.

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2. Brydon, "The English Education of Thomas Nelson, Jr., of Yorktown," in Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LI (1943), pp. 347-48. Brydon also related that: "There is a tradition that Thomas Nelson while at school in Hackney saved from death by drowning a younger lad, the son of Lord North. This tradition is supported by the fact of the existence today of a gold snuff-box, with a beautifully painted miniature of Lord North in the inside of the lid, which as a highly prized relic has come down in the Nelson family. It is said to have been presented by Lord North to young Nelson as a mark of appreciation and gratitude for saving his son. This snuff-box is now preserved by the Virginia Historical Society."

3. Ibid., p. 349.

He, too, in February 1762 was named to the York County Court as a justice of the peace. Initially in the Assembly, he seems not to have been very active. His name was not in the Journals during the first three sessions. Evidently he was a spirited one and found it a little difficult to settle down.[4]

It was in Williamsburg that he met Lucy Grymes, the daughter of Councilor Philip Grymes of Middlesex. She was better educated than most ladies of her day. Actually she had attended the school of the Rev. William Yates in Gloucester, the same that Thomas had attended earlier. Proficient in arithmetic, Lucy was also fond of reading, played the harpsichord, and was an "Elegant Dancer." They were attracted to each other and on July 29, 1762, they were married by their former teacher, the Reverend Mr. Yates. Lucy would eventually give Thomas eleven children, five in the first six years and all boys, but there would be girls later. No doubt this had its settling effects on Thomas as he became increasingly more responsible and constructive in local and colony affairs as well as in business and plantation matters.

It was in this period that he learned something of his father's business and gave some aid in plantation management. In 1767 he was raising tobacco, likely in Albemarle County, and he

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4. Much of this narrative unless otherwise noted is from Evans, The Nelsons, a well-documented narrative previously cited. There is a brief thumbnail sketch in Weddell, Virginia Historical Portraiture, p. 264, along with a reproduction of Nelson's 1754 portrait painted in London when he was 16 years old.

had converted a York County plantation into a farm "to produce Wheat, Corn etc., for the Use of his Family." Locally, he took on responsibility concerning himself with arrangements for building a wharf in Yorktown at public expense. Later he was taking lists of titheables, helping plan the building of a new public warehouse, and making repairs to the local jail. It was on January 1, 1773, that he was added to the vestry of York-Hampton Parish. "As had his father, Thomas was taking much interest in church affairs."[5]

In the Assembly as a burgess his role became more active, the result no doubt of age and experience. Committee duties multiplied and in 1772 he was continued on the committees of Religion Privileges and Elections and added to that of Propositions and Grievances. Already he was showing signs of the patriot. He was a leader and signer with the group which, in May 1769, formed as an association to put economic pressure on England because of the Townshend and other acts.[6]

In 1772 Thomas and his brother Hugh hopefully undertook the continuation of their father's mercantile concern. Though the times were full of portents of change and disorder, these young men were were optimistic. But collections were difficult and tobacco prices declined. Heavy orders for merchandise led to debt and to difficulties with merchants, especially the Thomas and Roland Hunt firm of London,

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5. The Nelsons, p. 182.
6. Ibid., pp. 98-103 ff.

with resulting misunderstandings. Thomas also learned that the business operation was more complex than he had known.

He and Hugh took Augustine Moore into partnership and the firm then became Thomas Nelson, Jr., and Company. Moore, "a Man conversant in business & of the greatest integrity," had actually been with the business since 1746 when he came in from the country below Yorktown as an indenture, or apprentice, to William Nelson.

In the meanwhile Thomas sought to dispose of the Penrith estate[7] which had descended from his grandfather through his father to him. Though debts to English firms were growing, Thomas in mid-1773 was not ready to reduce spending as he bought some land in York County, added a few slaves, and ordered his mother a "genteel chariot" with six harness. It was to be painted a "grave color" and to have the Nelson coat-of-arms on the side. He also bought himself a "neet plain post chaise" since his old one was "Broke to pieces." Early in 1774 Thomas ventured a full share (50 pounds) in the agricultural company organized by Philip Mazzei, the Italian immigrant, for the purpose of producing wine, oil, silk and such. He even became a member of a company standing committee.

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7. William Nelson had described it as "a small Inheritance I have in and near the town of Penrith of about 50f a year. It hath been in the Hands of Mr. Wm Cookson Grocer there, who married a near Relation of mine, and who accounts annually with me for the Rents with great Exactness and Fidelity." Nelson Letterbook, Nelson to Samuel Martin, July 2, 1772, p. 246.

Business conditions for Virginia, with Thomas Nelson included, continued to deteriorate. By 1775 it was an "unhappy state." Of the sizeable debts owed him little seemed collectible and he in turn was rather heavily indebted to the Hunt firm. There was little, he admitted, that he could do at the time to clear it up. Besides his tobacco crop was very small and he hesitated to buy the tobacco of others since the year before, he wrote, he had "burnt my fingers" in this manner.

Thomas hoped to succeed his father on the Virginia Council in 1772 and sought endorsements, but instead John Page was named in March 1773. Though he was passed over, there were those who thought him well qualified. Robert Carter Nicholas, for example, wrote: "his pretensions are superior, all things consider'd, to those of any other. I believe he has as good a Heart as any Man living; his morals are sound, his Conduct steady, uniform & Exemplary; & in point of Fortune, which necessarily gives a Man an Independency of Spirit, he is inferior to very few."[8] His second try at a Council seat, in 1774, also came to nought. He remained in the assembly, however, and increasingly played an active role here and in the various conventions that followed the crises arising from the British tea act, the Boston tea party, and the closing of the port of Boston.

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8. Mason, John Norton & Sons, pp. 285-86.

In May 1774 Dunmore dissolved the Assembly and many of its membership moved over to the Raleigh Tavern. Thomas Nelson was among those who signed an association protesting the Boston Port Bill and calling on the Committees of Correspondence in the various Colonies to consider the need to name delegates to meet in a general congress "to deliberate on those general measures which the united interests of American may from time to time require." Dispatches indicated that the momentum was growing.

A call, in which Nelson participated, went out for Virginia's burgesses to meet on August 1 in Williamburg to deal with the matter of cutting off trade (imports and/or exports) with England. Thomas Nelson and his fellow York County Burgess, Dudley Digges, took the matter to the people, and the "Freeholders, and other Inhabitants of York County met according to publick Notice at the Courthouse in York" on July 18. Nelson was chosen "Moderator" and he made an "Address to the People." He and Digges were named to the convention. "Business being finished, the Deputies were invited to a genteel Entertainment provided for them by the Inhabitants of York County, as Testimony of the entire Approbation of the Conduct of the Gentlemen."[9] Nelson believed it necessary that all imports be stopped but "as a People in Debt" he did not then feel the same about exports. The British must be made to "feel the effects of

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9. Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon), July 21, 1774, p. 1, c. 1.

of their mistakes . . . /and/ arbitrary Policy."

The Virginia Convention met as scheduled, formed an association to stop imports from England after November 1, and, unless American grievances were redressed by August 10, 1775, then exports as well. Then delegates were named to the General Congress in Philadelphia in September. Thomas Nelson was in the running, but neither he nor Thomas Jefferson made the list this time.

When the call went out for the second general congress to meet in Philadelphia in May 1775, there having been no redress of grievances, it was preceded in Virginia by a convention in Richmond in March. Nelson and Digges were again in attendance when it convened in St. John's Church. When Patrick Henry moved to prepare a plan that would put the colony in a state of defense, there was strong opposition, but Nelson rose to the support of Henry's motion, concluding his speech by calling on almighty God to witness "that if any British troops should be landed within the County, of which he was lieutenant, he would await for no orders, and would obey none, which should forbid him to summon his militia and repel the invaders at the water edge."[10] The resolves eventually carried, and delegates were named for the Second Congress, though Nelson was not among those chosen.

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10. Quoted in The Nelsons, pp. 202ff.

The Third Virginia Convention met on July 17, 1775, and Nelson served on the Committee that was to bring in an ordinance providing for creating an armed force for the defense and protection of the colony. Three regiments were proposed, though as yet there were no arrangements for raising troops. Patrick Henry was to head the first, Thomas Nelson the second, and William Woodford the third. Actually Nelson did not seek the post and thought others better qualified. He found it necessary to resign and this act occasioned his election as a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress to meet in September.

It was late in August 1775 that Nelson and his wife Lucy and others journeyed to the meeting of Continental Congress in Philadelphia though there was delay enroute as his carriage broke down and another "through the unskillfulness of the driver" was run against a tree and demolished.[11] One of the Nelsons' first acts was to be inoculated against smallpox.

In Congress he seems to have created a favorable impression and entered vigorously into the work, taking on responsibility particularly in the area of treasury and finances. He opposed more paper money and favored instead interest-bearing treasury notes, but this view did not carry Congress which even now was still reluctant to make the definite break with England. Thomas felt

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11. Virginia Gazette (Purdie), September 14, 1775.

that Congress should declare its independence and quit "beating around the bush" and get rid of the "womanish hankering after Great Britain." In February 1776 he gave vent to his feelings: "We are now carrying on a war and no war. They seize our property wherever they find it either by land or sea, and we hesitate to retaliate, because we have a few friends in England who have ships. Away with such squeamishness say I."

Later, in March 1776, he returned for a while to Virginia, where the talk of independence was strong, and he found himself representing York in the Virginia Convention which convened on May 6 in Williamsburg. He was squarely behind the independence movement and had been for months. Action on independence became an early order of business.[12] It was agreed that he would introduce the resolutions for independence (authored by Edmund Pendleton and Meriwether Smith) and that Patrick Henry would support his proposal. Edmund Randolph described his presentation:[13]

> Nelson affected nothing of oratory, except what ardent feelings might inspire, and characteristic of himself, he had no fears of his own which to temporize, and supposing that others ought to have none he passed over the probabilities of foreign aid, stepped lightly on the difficulties of procuring military stores and the inexperience of officers and soldiers, but pressed a declaration of independence upon what, with him, were incontrovertible grounds that we were oppressed; had humbly supplicated a redress of grievances, which had been refused with insult; and that to return from battle against a sovereign, with the cordiality of subjects was absurd.

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12. The Nelsons, p. 223.

13. From "Edmund Randolph's Essay on the Revolutionary History of Virginia, 1774-1782," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XLIV, pp. 41-42; Stout, Nicolas Martiau, pp. 89-91.

His conclusion was to resolve that the delegates in Congress be enjoined in the strongest and most positive manner to exert their ability in procuring an immediate, clear, and full "Declaration of Independency." Though there were other proposals, this is the substance of that adopted. With this done, and with the resolutions of May 15 in hand, Thomas Nelson headed back to Philadelphia.[14]

He gave them to the Virginia delegation and on June 7, Richard Henry Lee moved for a declaration of independence on the floor of Congress and recommended that measures be taken to form foreign alliances and plan a confederation of states. Two committees were formed; one to draw up a declaration and another to prepare a plan of confederation. Thomas Nelson was a member of the latter committee.

Meanwhile, in Virginia, work was begun on a bill of rights and a constitution. The convention also named its delegates to the Continental Congress for the coming year. Nelson was one of the five chosen. While this was transpiring, he remained in Philadelphia and was on hand when Congress finally approved the motion for independence and, on July 4, the formal declaration, at which time Thomas Nelson likely penned his signature on the document.[15]

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14. The Nelsons, p. 228.

15. Ibid., pp. 235ff. He was on hand as well to sign, on August 2, the engrossed copy of the Declaration. Stout, Nicolas Martiau, pp. 89-91.

In the meanwhile the plan for a confederation was presented to Congress, the committee having done its work, but agreement was not now in sight. Nelson began to feel the strain that summer, and in September 1776 he took a leave and returned to Virginia. It was much more of an armed camp than when he had left. All three of his cousins (William, Thomas, and John, the sons of Secretary Nelson) were now officers in the army and even his youngest brother Billy was lieutenant of a militia company formed of William and Mary students.[16]

With the institution of a new government in Virginia there was need, in May 1776, to fill the governor's post. Though Secretary Thomas Nelson had not taken an active part in Virginia's revolt, his loyalty was not questioned. Because of his long experience in government, some thought that he, as governor, might serve to bring radical and conservation elements together. His opponent in the contest was Patrick Henry, who won the assembly vote 60 to 45. On the same day, June 26, Secretary Nelson declined his election to the Council for reasons of "Age and infirmities" though he continued on in his post as Secretary, an office that the new order had not greatly changed.

Thomas Nelson, Jr., though home for rest in October 1776, sat in the House of Delegates contributing to that body's deliberations. He returned to Continental Congress in November. He was with

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16. Ibid., pp. 232-33.

Congress when it moved for a time, for safety reasons, to Baltimore. He was elated when Washington struck successfully across the Delaware and surprised a garrison of Hessians at Trenton. He wrote then of "those Scoundrels" and "these damn'ed Invaders."

The treasury was in a bad way and this troubled him. His health contined to decline and he returned to Virginia in February. Here he saw his daughter Lucy (born on January 2) for the first time. The trip however, was a necessity: he had to close the firm of Thomas Nelson, Jr., and Company because of the deterioration of business. The Virginia Gazette on April 11, 1777, carried the appropriate announcement.[17]

By late April Nelson was back in Philadelphia in Congress, but this would be a short stay. On May 2 he seems to have suffered an apoplectic stroke on the floor of Congress. Though minor, it incapacitated him for a time, temporarily affecting his memory. He resigned his seat, returned to Virginia, and recuperated at his plantation, "Offley Hoo," in Hanover County.[18]

Nelson was not allowed, or did not take, much time for rest and recuperation, only a week or two. By late May 1777 he was

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17. "The partnership of Thomas Nelson, jun. and company of York being at an end, all persons indebted to them are requested to settle their accounts as soon as possible, and those who cannot conveniently discharge their balance it is expected will give bond for the same. If any have demands against the partnership, they are desired to bring them in and they shall be paid." It was signed by Augustine Moore. Virginia Gazette (Purdie), Supplement, p. 4, c. 1.

18. The Nelsons, pp. 240 ff.

again in Williamsburg and active in the House of Delegates to which he had been elected. He accepted, too, the post as County Lieutenant of militia for York County. Of his return to service on the State level one historian has said:

> Evidently Nelson's recovery has been rapid, for he did not decline either of these jobs. It would seem strange that he could perform these duties at a time when he did not feel capable of serving in the Congress; but neither of these positions was as exacting as congressional service and in those days devotion to state superseded devotion to nation. Thomas Nelson was no exception to this rule.[19]

In the election of a permanent Council, he apparently did not intend to accept the post, though his name was high in the balloting that gave him a seat which he declined on June 27, the last day of the Assembly session. Then came the supposed Sir William Howe threat of invasion of Virginia later in the year.

Virginia proceeded to get itself in to a military posture, and the Governor called on the militia. Nelson was selected general officer. He accepted on July 19, but refused to take a salary for it. He presented the Council of State with a proposal for militia reorganization and he became very busy with military affairs. When it was realized in September that invasion was not coming, the militia that was called up was dismissed and Nelson was discharged from his general's duties. An offer by the

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19. The Nelsons, p. 245.

Council to send five thousand militia under Nelson to serve with Washington was declined as the need then was not great and providing food, clothing, and shelter was too difficult. Seemingly Nelson was disappointed, for he was anxious for a field command in the war.

There was another session of the Assembly in the fall of 1777. Funding the war effort continued to be a nagging problem. There was now a state loan office and an appeal to private sources. Secretary Nelson, Thomas' uncle, loaned £645. The Assembly increased taxation in various directions. Then it was arranged that debtors of British creditors could satisfy their obligations by payment into the state account, receiving receipts that such had been done. This actually would allow the payment of debts in depreciating paper currency. Another feature of the bill allowed the sequestration of the real and personal property in Virginia of British subjects. Though because of a spell of illness Thomas Nelson missed some of the early debates, he reappeared in January 1778 in time to oppose the measure contending that not only was it a breach of contract, and a cancellation of agreements knowingly and purposefully arrived at, but it was also a practice unlike British actions, and an act unfair to British merchants and citizens. He, is reported to have ended his argument vigorously against the measure, stating: "for these reasons . . . I hope the bill will be rejected; but whatever its fate, by God, I will pay my debts like an honest man." But the bill passed.[20]

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20. The Nelsons, p. 258.

Nelson was one of two named as brigadier generals to command volunteer troops raised in addition to the regular Virginia regiments. He was very active in this recruiting. Then there was a call from Congress in early March 1778 for persons of means in the country to form troops of light cavalry and to be in service for the remainder of the year at their own expense, except for themselves and forage for their horses. He made the appeal and suggested that local subscriptions be made where necessary to finance the equipping. In May the Assembly lent its support and called for a regiment of 350 horses for Nelson's command. He did not meet the quota (only about 100 reported on June 15), but in July, after training, he headed north. In Philadelphia, Congress decided, though Washington regretted it, that the troop was not needed. It returned without action to Virginia. He gave much of himself, but the evidence shows that the state largely funded the costs for this short-term corps, and on January 15, 1779, Nelson received a warrant for £669 to recover all of the then-unpaid expenses for it.[21] Once again Thomas had failed to have an active field command through no fault of his own.

Nelson returned to Virginia and to the House of Delegates resuming his now-familiar role. In December, however, he was ready, or now willing, to return to the Continental Congress. Selling 600 acres in York County and getting £1,200, likely for

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21. The Nelsons, p. 262, note 21.

his and his family's support, he made ready to return to Philadelphia. Washington had chided him earlier that men of his caliber and standing now were badly needed in the Congress.

He journeyed northward in February 1779 to see some of the same old problems still under consideration - troop ranks depleted, supply shortages, inflation, depreciating paper money, and the rest. He did not stay long, and in May he was back in Virginia, having resigned on the grounds of bad health though he did not comment on specific causes. One historian has noted: "The enigmatic things about this illness, as with the previous ones which occured in Philadelphia, was that Thomas returned home and took on tasks which would seem too strenuous for a man too sick to discharge the duties of a Congressman."[22]

In May 1779 a British raiding party landed at Portsmouth and struck out against the countryside. Once again Nelson headed the militia for the state's defense, but the alarm was short-lived. He was, also, now returned to the House of Delegates from York County. A new governor would now have to replace Patrick Henry, who had served the allowable three terms. He made a run for governor, but Jefferson defeated both John Page and Nelson. On the first ballot it had been 55 for Jefferson, 38 for Page and 32 for Thomas. On the second ballot it was 67 for Jefferson and 61 for Page. In

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22. Ibid., p. 271.

the fall of 1779 Nelson had also been among the losers in seeking to prevent the removal of the state capital to Richmond.

At the beginning of 1780 Virginia was heavily in debt and there was another threat of British invasion. The state sought a loan, but response was poor. Now Jefferson turned to private individuals to solicit loans and one of these was Nelson, who managed to raise in this way only about ten thousand pounds.

It was in May that the Assembly moved to Richmond with Nelson among its membership. In the session he dealt largely with matters of finance and defense and occupied important committee positions of leadership. On May 30 a request from Congress for almost two million dollars was received. The money was needed to fund the cooperation with the large French expeditionary and naval force in prospect. Congress could not support offensive action in its then low budgetary state. The deadline was close, June 15.

The Assembly resolved to borrow from private individuals and to sell 600,000 pounds of state tobacco. State leaders also intensified their drive for private loans. Nelson, vigorously active, went "beating the bushes" south of the James. According to one biographer,

> In this situation, he, and evidently some of the others who were soliciting funds, pledged their own security for the payment of these loans if the state did not fulfill its obligations. In this manner Thomas was able to raise approximately 41,000f, 7000f of it being from the estate of Robert Carter Burwell, which Nelson as executor controlled.[23]

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23. The Nelsons, p. 281.

In the last half of 1780 and the first half of 1781 Nelson was much to the fore in Virginia affairs, being active and influential in Assembly matters and exercising various militia commands. In the summer of 1780 he was busy alerting militia on the Peninsula against the possibility of invasion. When a British fleet appeared in the bay in late October, he was the only man available to head state forces; possible regular army leaders were out of the state. He took command until the return of Peter Muhlenburg, who assumed the leadership but left Nelson to organize north of the James.

The British had landed, taking over Hampton and Newport News and establishing a base at Portsmouth. Nelson found that in his area confusion reigned, but he was able to introduce some order. For critically needed supplies he advanced money out of his own pocket and would not be repaid until the next year. The amount was £10,000 in depreciated currency. He formed one regiment, in addition, and posted it farther down the Peninsula to watch the British. However, General Leslie had come to Virginia to work with Cornwallis, who did not get through at this time and, after waiting, he withdrew from the State. Again, the State dismissed the militia and the government relaxed. But this respite was short-lived. At the very end of the year the British returned.[24]

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24. The Nelsons, pp. 283ff; see also Henry P. Johnston, The Yorktown Campaign and the Surrender of Cornwallis, (New York, 1881), chapter 3.

In January, this new invasion was confirmed, militia calls went out again and Nelson was commissioned a brigadier general. From the Hampton Roads area, the British, now led by Benedict Arnold, proceeded up the James and landed at Westover. Nelson watched the passage from Jamestown, it was reported, but he was not able to impede the movement as his available force was small, poorly equipped, and not well trained. Arnold went as far as Richmond, raiding and burning supplies as he found them. Baron von Steuben, now organizing and drilling troops in the western part of the State, came to the scene and commanded south of the James.

As Arnold returned toward Westover, Nelson hoped that with his 450-man force he could harass the enemy in the Chickahominy area. He was prepared to engage in this activity until a heavy rain soaked his gun powder and rendered his unit inoperative for the time being. Arnold moved leisurely toward Portsmouth, plundering south of the James at every opportunity. He entered Portsmouth in late January. Now the question was: could he be dislodged?

Von Steuben and Nelson conferred in Williamsburg and the decision was no, not at this time, likely because of green troops, inadequate arms, and little artillery. The policy became attempted containment. General Muhlenburg was to command south of the James and Nelson on the peninsula, or "this Neck." Thomas had an

important role in both the abortive plan to send a fireship into the British Portsmouth fleet and in the secretive project (which did not materialize) to kidnap Arnold.[25]

When Captain Tilly, of Admiral Destouches' French fleet, came into the Chesapeake Bay in mid-February to render possible assistance, Nelson was delighted with the news. He had conversations with Tilly aboard the command ship Eveille, but nothing came of this meeting. Virginia forces were not ready for immediate attack on Arnold and Tilly was unwilling to move his ships into the shallow Elizabeth River. Besides, Tilly was not prepared to wait; he feared that a larger British fleet was in prospect.[26]

Nelson returned to Williamsburg, where an order waited him to command south of the James. Militia and regular forces were to be separated and Muhlenburg evidently was to take charge of the latter. But at this point, much to Von Steuben's loss, Nelson came down with a "violent pluerisy." With Lafayette heading south and promise from the French (from Captain Tilly), a plan was developing for another try to take Arnold. Von Steuben implored Nelson to return to duty as soon as possible as he needed both "your Council & your influence." It would be early May, however, before his return and conditions would be vastly changed.

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25. The Nelsons, pp. 289ff.
26. The Nelsons, p. 304; Johnston, Yorktown Campaign, chapter 3.

On March 16 the British Navy intercepted off the Virginia Capes the French fleet sent to aid operations in Virginia, and, after a brisk engagement, forced the French to return to Newport in Rhode Island. Their departure allowed the 2,600 men under Maj. Gen. William Phillips to join Arnold. Virginia's strength had dwindled and Von Steuben saw the need to pull back his force before Portsmouth - back as far as Petersburg. In mid-April Phillips and Arnold moved out and, after a day's fight before Petersburg, Von Steuben could only withdraw again and leave the area to be pillaged by the enemy. The British moved on to burn barracks and stores at Chesterfield Court House, to hit at Virginia navy installations at Osborne's below Richmond, and then to advance on Manchester south of the James opposite Richmond. Here the British saw Lafayette's troops across the James. He had forced marched into Virginia.

Prior to Lafayette's arrival Nelson, now back in the field, had a small force at Richmond. In view of the Lafayette reinforcement the British elected not to force a fight and dropped down the James toward Portsmouth. Lafayette sent Nelson into Williamsburg in advance of his own units now at Bottoms' Bridge. Prior to Cornwallis' arrival from the south at Petersburg on May 20, Lafayette saw that he had about 900 continentals and some 1,500 militia, the latter in two brigades under Nelson and Muhlenburg, not enough for a full-scale action.

After union with Phillips, Cornwallis moved toward Richmond with Lafayette retreating northward toward expected reinforcements under General Anthony Wayne. On the march Nelson took time to visit his plantation in Hanover, where his family was, to pack them off for a safer place. Then he rejoined the Army. Cornwallis gave up the chase and turned his attention to stores at Point-of-Fork on the James above Richmond and to the Assembly in session at Charlottesville. Lt. Col. John Simcoe took the former and Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton would have succeeded with the latter but for Jack Jouett's timely ride.[27]

The Assembly fled to Staunton where it reassembled. Jefferson's term as governor had expired on June 2 and, after some maneuvering and a call for government by "dictator" was narrowly beaten back, the Assembly named Thomas Nelson, Jr., governor on June 12, 1781. Also, the Assembly voted a grant of authority to the governor which, especially when used in concert with the Council, greatly strengthened his hand in the conduct of the war. Nelson received the news on June 16 while encamped on the South Anna River. It was later that he remarked, "/To/ Have declin'd the appointment might have indicated timidity. I, therefore accepted it with a determination to exert every power that I possess'd to give energy to Government and security to the inhabitants of the State."[28]

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27. The Nelsons, pp. 304-12.
28. The Nelsons, p. 314.

Nelson left the army at once and reached Staunton on June 18. He would need to draw on all of his now-considerable legislative experience and his military service. When Washington heard of Nelson's selection he was pleased. He wrote: "He is an honest man, active, spirited and decided, and will, I daresay, suit the times as well as any other person."[29]

Nelson was not long in putting his newly acquired broad powers into operation. "In the end," remarked a family biographer, "Thomas was to go beyond even the sweeping powers granted him."[30] As W.H. Gaines concluded:

> Nelson soon showed Virginians that he was a man of energy and determination who had no great regard for popularity. Jefferson's hand /as governor/ had been tied by a state constitution which had created deliberately a weak executive. Nelson secured from the General Assembly a grant of emergency powers and proceeded to use them. There were those who cried "dictator", but the forceful new governor was more interested in winning a war than in debating political theory. More men and more supplies were needed to build up the state's defenses and to support the small force of Continental troops led by Lafayette which was then operating in Virginia. When persuasion failed Nelson impressed what was needed. When it was inconvenient to consult the executive council, as the enabling act required him to do, he acted on his own.[31]

Also he began to deal with the Loyalists (a number of whom he took into custody) and with recruitment. As Cornwallis continued toward the coast, Nelson knew that it was important to return the

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29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., p. 316.
31. "Thomas Nelson, Jr. - Governor at Arms", Virginia Cavalcade, I (Autumn 1951), p. 40.

seat of government to its home base. Late in June he had it back in Charlottesville where he fell ill and inactive for a week and a half, possibly with another attack of asthma. Early in July he decided it was appropriate to return to Richmond. In this move, due to a stopover in Hanover with his family, he was out of touch for a time, to the consternation of his assistants. He was, however, in Richmond just past mid-July to deal with the problems of finance, militia strength, and supply. He was quick to act on irregular issues, or seizure, of supplies even for needy troops, though it involved Anthony Wayne and his command and sharp retorts from Wayne.[32]

When news of the plan for concerted action by the French and Americans reached him, he was overjoyed. "An event so unexpected, and so much wish'd cannot but be productive of the most happy consequences to this Country," he wrote Washington. Enroute to visit Lafayette at his headquarters near West Point, he became ill again and had to retire to Hanover for the last two weeks of August leaving the government to be run largely by Lieutenant Governor David Jameson. He returned to duty in early September with a visit to Lafayette and then a return to Richmond. Supply of the French army now took precedence with him and he used heavily the power of impressment. A large militia call was also issued. Efforts were redoubled to round up flour, meal, salt, and beef and to stockpile saddles, ammunition, powder, uniforms and shoes.[33]

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32. The Nelsons, pp. 323ff.
33. Gaines, Cavalcade, I, 41; The Nelsons, p. 31.

Early in September Nelson announced his intention of joining the forces assembling for the Yorktown siege. He encountered the army on September 11 in Williamsburg, and, a few days later, took command of the three Virginia militia brigades in the field there. He devoted more time to keeping liaison between Washington's headquarters and the State government and in maintaining a flow of supplies to the troops of the allied armies, than to his own troops. These activities separated him from the Council whose assent he needed, something that brought him sharp criticism later. It created a situation whereby he would find himself often acting alone and illegally.[34] Even Lieutenant Governor Jameson urged his return to Richmond, but Thomas saw it differently, as he wrote Jameson on September 21:

> It gives me Concern to hear that the Members of the Council give such bad attendance at a Time when Matters of so great Moment are in agitation, & when they know not but what their presence may be of the last Importance. It is however impossible for me to quit the Army at this Time, -at least the bad Consequence which would result from it would not be compensated by any Good which might arise from my attending at the Council Board. The Wants of the Army which are many, & which require the most instant Attention, are here represented to me on the Spot, & the most immediate Measures are fallen upon to supply or anticipate, them. Not all the Exertions which could possibly have been made in Richmond, & the Commissaries & others above, would have the Army either from suffering extreme Distress, or seizing the little that remains to the People of the Neighborhood, to their utter ruin. It is my Opinion that nothing should come into Competition with our Endeavours to give Success to the present Military Operations, because, if they fail, we shall have but the shadow of a Government, if even that, whereas if they succeed, the Hands of Government will be Stronger & it will be more respectable than ever.[35]

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34. The Nelsons, pp. 332ff; Gaines, Cavalcade, I, pp. 41-42.
35. Official Letters of the Governors of the State of Virginia, edited by H.R. McIlwaine, III (Richmond, 1929), 65.

Nelson soon acted to put food supplies in a central location and took charge of distribution so that American and French troops might share equally. He redoubled the effort at increased supply collections. Already he had applied for supplies from the governors of North Carolina and Maryland with some promised support from the north. He had not taken kindly to French efforts in the countryside. The French used hard money whereas his representatives had to deal in depreciating currency.

Nelson and Lafayette were on hand to ride out and greet Washington and Rochambeau when they arrived in Williamsburg on September 14. At this point illness forced him inside for a time but it did not render him inoperative. He was up and around in time to move out with the troops on September 28. Before Yorktown his units would be on the extreme allied right and would function as a reserve for Lafayette's regulars.[36]

When the siege was over Nelson knew that success had rewarded the combined effort, and he was pleased with his role in it. He was more optimistic and possibly more prophetic than most leaders in the effort. "This blow I think must be a decisive one," he wrote on October 20 from the "Camp before York." His reason, however, likely was not the real one: "it being out of the Power of G.B. /Great Britain/ to replace such a number of good troops."[37]

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36. The Nelsons, pp. 336ff; Johnston, Yorktown Campaign, Chapter 5.

37. Official Letters of the Governors, III, 88-89.

Victory did not end Nelson's problems. For a time the workload increased, since he had to obtain supplies for the captured British and wintering French troops in the area, as well as manage the release and storage of equipment and dispose of surplus cattle. There were other matters, too, such as western land claims and continuing civil strife in lower Tidewater. It proved too much for him, and the criticism of his earlier autocratic methods mounted. More particularly his health was failing badly. Nelson had pushed himself during the siege to keep things going. He saw no alternative now but to resign. He wrote the speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates: "The very low state of health to which I am reduced, and from which I have little expectation of soon recovering, makes it my duty to resign the government, that the state may not suffer for want of an executive."[38] He was replaced by Benjamin Harrison, whom the Assembly chose on November 30.

Within ten days there were remonstrances before the Assembly criticising Nelson for issuing impressment warrants "without advice of Council" and without specified limits except for the persons executing them. They took exception, too, to his blocking French purchases on the open market and to his embargoes on the export of commodities. This touched off debate, and he asked, and received, permission to appear before the delegates to make a personal defense of his actions. In due course after his appearance the Assembly

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38. Quoted in The Nelsons, pp. 349-50.

acted unanimously, in the House on December 29 and in the Senate on the 31st. It agreed that his acts produced general good and had been "warranted by necessity" and that they "held the same validity . . . as if they had been executed by and with the advice of the Council, and with all formalities prescribed by law."[39] It was further stated that: "Thomas Nelson junior, esquire, be, and he hereby is, in the fullest manner indemnified and exonerated from all penalities and damages which might have accrued to him from the same."[40]

Thomas Nelson would have another eight years, but he would not have the heights again in health, wealth, or leadership, though he would become active sporadically between bouts of illness. He passed the winter of 1781-82 at his plantation in Hanover, "Offley Hoo," where accommodations were satisfactory, but unpretentious. French Generals Rochambeau and Chastellux visited him there in the spring. His last child, Judith, was born that May.

Now Nelson began to turn his attention to his business affairs and thought of reopening his old company. Business had been at a

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39. Ibid., pp. 351-52.

40. William Waller Hening, The Statutes at Large Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, X (Richmond, 1822), p. 478. The preamble of the act read in full: "Whereas upon an examination it appears, that previous to, and during the Siege of York, Thomas Nelson, junior, esquire, late governor of this commonwealth, was compelled by the peculiar circumstances of the state and army, to perform many acts of government without the advice of the council of state, for the purpose of procuring subsistence and other necessaries for the allied army under the command of his excellency general Washington."

standstill since the outbreak of the Revolution. Though there was debt he did have resources, including over 20,000 acres spread in five counties, some 400 slaves, 500 cattle, a hundred horses and mules as well as numbers of sheep and hogs.[41]

In the fall of 1782 he, along with his uncle The Secretary and brother Hugh, returned to the York County Court and in November he was back in the House of Delegates. This presaged a move to Williamsburg and the reopening there for a time of the Nelson mercantile firm. Within a year he was in poor health again and found it necessary to resign from office once more. He was unable to do both public service and the pursuit of business and the latter was necessary.

Arrangements were made for the installment payment of his old debts with the Hunt firm in London, and he was now able to dispose of his Penrith (England) inheritance, the sale of which had fallen through earlier. At the same time he petitioned the state to repay the loans for which he had given his own security in 1780, pointing out that it had done great injury to himself and his creditors. There was favorable report in the amount of £10,525 on which "no part of principal or interest hath yet been paid." Presented in January 1785, the bill to redress this failed to come up for vote. In the next session there was favorable committee report again, but the resolution to effect it was dismissed on the last day of December 1785. There was no further activity and evidently Nelson had to pay up out of his own pocket.[42] Nelson had a further complication in that he had

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41. The Nelsons, pp. 356ff.

42. Nelson's heirs later, through St. George Tucker, sought indemnity in the Virginia Assembly for Thomas Nelson's uncompensated

risked in this way a sizeable amount of an estate for which he was an executor. "What the outcome of this situation was is not known" stated one student of the Family, "but it served to point out the involved state of Nelson's affairs, and the fact that his patriotism surpassed his business judgment."[43] Nelson himself said that if he had known the difficulties that would ensue from this estate management he would not have taken the "Executorship for several thousand pounds." And there were other suits for debt to him, such as the one against Carter Braxton, that dragged on.[44]

In the spring of 1786 Thomas stood again for the House of Delegates and was elected from York County. Here he again concerned himself with the serious nature of the paper money situation and the money situation and the emptiness of the state treasury. He remained a hard money man. In due course he served on the committee to select delegates to the convention called for May 1787 in Philadelphia for

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advances. Committee expression was to the effect that some redress was in order but no bill to cover it was forthcoming. The matter lay dormant for a while but in 1831 it was disposed of when further consideration led to a report against it. The heirs now petitioned Congress, in December, 1833, and here, too, after some delay it was finally reported on unfavorably. Unlike George Washington, Nelson did not keep precise accounts in these matters and auditors were naturally concerned with sufficient documentation. R.A.Brock, "The Nelson House: Yorktown-Virginia," The Magazine of American History, VII (July 1881), p. 52; Thomas Nelson Page, "Old Yorktown" Scribners Monthly, XXII (1881), p. 812.

43. The Nelsons, p. 364.

44. Ibid., pp. 365ff. Other members of the Nelson family fared better in the Revolution. The Secretary, retired now on his plantation in King William County, began to profit from his western lands interest. William, Thomas' younger brother, was now in the Council and he and his brother Nathaniel were confirmed in lands in Nansemond and Norfolk counties. When Nathaniel died in the spring of 1786, however, Thomas became a benefactor of his will.

the revision of the articles of Confederation. When Patrick Henry declined to serve, the governor then named Nelson, but he also declined. Perhaps his health was not up to it, or perhaps business was too pressing. He wrote Edmund Berkeley in May 1787:

> I know by my own feelings that nothing can be more disagreeable than to be dunn'd. I am however unfortunately reduc'd to the necessity of dunning /others/, or parting with more property than I can spare from my numerous family. George Smith, the young man, who lives with me, will present your Bond and open account to you....Do my Dear Sir give me all the assistance in your power. If I do not raise a sum of money in the course of this Week, some of my Negroes will be sold on Monday next.[45]

Thomas was ill again in the summer of 1787, as he wrote from Yorktown, where he was in residence again. Though a York delegate, he did not attend the full session. Earlier his uncle, "The Secretary," had died and this likely had its depressing effect on Thomas.[46] But he recuperated to some extend and evidently was vocal in his

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45. Quoted in The Nelsons, p. 369.

46. It is unfortunate that Secretary Nelson has come to be listed in some quarters as a man of loyalist sympathies. Such seems most unfair and unjust. It remained for the Marquis de Chastellux, who visited with him in Hanover sometime after the Siege of Yorktown, to pen, perhaps, an accurate analysis of the man whom he found to have no rancor even though his Yorktown mansion was in shambles. Chastellux saw him as an American: "To far advanced in age to desire revolution, too prudent to check the great event, if necessary, and to faithful to his countrymen to separate his interests from theirs, he chose the crisis of this alteration to retire from public affairs. Thus did he opportunely quit the theatre when new pieces demanded fresh actors, and took his seat among the spectators, content to offer up his wishes for the success of the drama, and to applaud those who acted well their part. But in the last campaign chance produced him on the scene and made him unfortunately famous." Quoted in Brock, "The Nelson House," Mag. of Am. Hist., VII, p. 49.

opposition to the "New Constitution" that the Philadelphia Convention drafted. His feelings were strong, and he was not happy that Virginia passed it though his reasons are difficult to determine. But after this period he was no longer a well man.

Nelson became quite ill in the summer of 1788 and his condition grew worse. It did not help that he was now over £13,000 in debt and recently had to sell 120 slaves in Prince William County. He was fearful that he would not be able to straighten out his affairs before his death and would lose much of his property which his large family would need. His condition grew worse in December, and he drew up his last will and testament. He died, it is said during an attack of asthma, on January 4, 1789, at the age of 50, at that time being on one of his plantations in Hanover.[47]

Thomas Nelson had been able to preserve most of his land holdings despite misfortunes, and he had left a sizeable inheritance and a sufficient amount to cover his debts. He had earmarked 1,500 acres in Hanover, plus his Prince William and Loudoun lands and his two Elizabeth River surveys for payment of debts.[48] Settlement of his debts came in March 1791, all £13,323 pounds of it, but not as he had arranged. It came in large part through the sale of slaves (some £3,032)and lands (about £8,147) in York, Hanover, and

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47. Weddell, Virginia Historical Portraiture, p. 264.
48. For Thomas' will see Appendix B.

Frederick counties.[49] One of the expenses of the estate was the sum of £1,268 to his mother, her award against his father's estate.

This debt settlement was not necessarily unduly complicated by his widow's dissatisfaction with his will. She renounced the provisions that affected her and elected to "claim that portion of the Estate of the aforesaid Thomas Nelson deceased to which by Law I am entitled." She, on June 4, 1789, had made it of record that:

> I Lucy Nelson of the Town and County of York widow and Relict of Thomas Nelson Esquire deceased of the aforesaid Town and County for and in consideration of divers secret causes . . . do by these presents renounce the will of the aforementioned Thomas Nelson....I do hereby declare that I will not take or accept the provision made for me.[50]

Nelson's will clearly shows that he did not die a pauper nor was he in want. He was not, however, able to pass on a substantial fortune such as he had inherited and such as had been wrecked on the vicissitudes of the Revolution plus his own largely unimpeded, patriotic generosity and, perhaps, some lack of sufficient business acumen and interest. He was first and foremost a patriot, "an ardent Revolutionist," but "in no sense a Radical." He was and remained basically conservative in politics and business.[51]

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49. The settlement was by the estate's administrator, Thomas' son William Nelson, Jr., and recorded in Wills and Inventories, No. 23, pp. 661-663.
    Of the more personal items disposed of in the settlement (likely surplus items) were two saddles and bridles (£5. 10s.0p), a "Black Gammon Table" (1.4.0), an "Iron Toothed Harrow" (0.12.6), a shaving glass (0.3.0), two "Large Glasses" (16.0.0 and 3.10.0), a gun (2.0.0) and two pairs of pistols (21.0.0).
50. York County Records, Deed Book, No.6 (1777-1791), p. 414.
51. Brydon, "The English Education of Thomas Nelson, Jr.," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, II, 349-50.

Chapter IV

Thomas Nelson Assembles a Town Estate

Thomas Nelson made his initial land purchase in Yorktown on July 2, 1706, when he purchased Lot 52 from the Town Trustees, Col. Thomas Ballard and Maj. William Buckner, for 180 pounds of tobacco, obligating himself within twelve months "to build and finish on ye sd Lott . . . a good house to Containe at Least Twenty foot Square." The deed was duly recorded three months later, on September 24.[1] This lot, "Ten poles in length & Eight in breadth," had initially been conveyed to "James Darbisheire of Yorke and County" by deed of July 19, 1699,[2] but he had failed to meet his building commitment and thereby forfeited it.

Nelson's next acquisition came soon, in 1707, when he obtained Lot 46, located directly across Main Street from Lot 52 and adjacent to the "Great Valley," a principal connection between Main Street and the waterfront and river. Two previous owners of this half-acre had failed to build upon it and thereby forfeited it. First, in 1691, it had been "taken up by Thomas Cheasman Gent" and then, in 1705, by one John Owen of Prince George County, Virginia. Nelson took ownership by deed of March 4, 1707 (recorded 20 days later on March 24).[3]

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1. It was the "Trustees to the Port Land in York Town, Gentm of the one part" and "Thomas Nelson of the prsh and County aforesd Mecht of the second part" for "All that lott or half acre of Land Scituate in York Towne being part of ye Port Land there known by ye Number (52) as by the Plot of Record do appeare." Deeds & Bonds, No. 2 (1701-1713), p. 171.
2. It was recorded on October 14 in Deeds & Bonds, No. 1 (1694-1701), p. 195.
3. Deeds & Bonds, No. 2, pp. 141, 271.

The one lot (52) became the location of Nelson's home and on the other, already being an established merchant, he built storehouses. These two half-acre parcels, each measuring ten poles in depth by eight poles in width, would, however, constitute but his nucleus, the point of departure for an acquisitive man.

The next acquisition was Lot 48, a half-acre adjoining Lot 52 on the east. This parcel gave him a Main Street frontage between two "cross" streets.[4] This lot, too, had been purchased earlier and forfeited by William Cary, "Gent of ye County of Warwick."[5] He added Lot 49 directly behind (south of) 48 in 1712 and then, in 1715. Lot 50, giving him an acre and a half on the cross street (now Read Street). A year later he added Lot 57 on the other side of the cross street (now Nelson) opposite Lot 52. The last acquisition would become his "Stable Lot" and round out his residence area holdings.[6]

Lot 49 had already passed through several ownerships[7] when he made the purchase in 1712. In the deed for this transaction he was described as of York "Town & County Gentl." Heretofore he had

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4. These are now known as Read Street and Nelson Street, designations dating only from the early 1930s.
5. Deeds & Bonds, No. 2, pp. 225, 326.
6. See Illustration No. 1 for lot locations.
7. Deserted by its first owner, William Simson, it was purchased again in June 1706 by James Bowman, a blacksmith, of the "parish of York-Hampton" in York County. A year and a half later (November 1707) he sold it to Thomas Mountfort of York County, indicating that he had satisfied the standard building requirement. Thomas Mountfort's "Son & heir at Law," a York County "Planter," inherited it and it was

been designated simple as "Merchant." The purchase was from "Micajah Perry & Richd Perry of Londo Merchants," through the firm's Yorktown attorney, William Buckner, "by vertue of a Power of Attorney." The price was £7 and the lot was described as "(49) late in the Tenure of James Bowman with all houses buildings & appurtenances thereon."[8]

In the case of Lot 50 the original grantee was John Dunbar in 1707, though he failed to build the required house and left it open to be taken up by others. The next owner was Edward Powers, a Yorktown carpenter, who purchased it from the feoffees in January 1709. Holding it for five-and-a-half years, indicating that he built on the half-acre property, he then sold it to "Tho: Nelson of ye Town & County of York" for £10 Virginia money. As in the case of Lot 49 one of the bounds cited in the deed was adjacent property of Nelson.[9]

The story of the early years of Lot 57 was much more crowded and is linked for a time with neighboring Lot 56 on Main Street where Thomas Session built the brick home that still stands, the oldest existing in Yorktown and already a landmark when Thomas Nelson built his own just on the other side of the "cross /Nelson/ Street."

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he who in June 1711 had sold it to "Micajah Perry of London Merchant," along with a 200-acre plantation and another Yorktown lot. Deeds & Bonds, No. 2, pp. 175, 253, 371.

8. Deeds & Bonds, No. 2 pp. 371, 407.
9. Deeds & Bonds, No. 2, p. 335: No. 3, pp. 75, 76.

Lot 57 initially went to Thomas Sessions, "Inholder," in 1699. He and his wife Hester sold it to Robert Snead, planter and gentleman, in 1701 and he to John Penton in 1703. Then Penton disposed of it to John Martin, also in 1703, and two years later Martin sold it back to Penton. Martin and Penton were both merchants. At this point, for some reason, Penton forfeited. Likely no one had as yet built a house with sufficient qualification though Lot 56 was amply covered. In 1708 the Trustees, who were back in control of it, conveyed it to Nathaniel Huggins and it was from Huggins, a "Weaver" of Gloucester County, that Thomas Nelson, Gentlemen, brought it in 1716.[10]

In time Lot 57 was developed by Thomas Nelson as his "stable yard," actually being described as such in 1745 in a deed for abutting property. The South boundary of Lot 56, the deed stated, was "the Stable Yard of Thomas Nelson, deceased." In 1764 Lot 57 was still in such use by Nelson's widow, who lived on in the town house. The fact that the year before, 1763, another deed noted it as "a Stable Lott of the Hon. William Nelson" is not disturbing since Mrs. Nelson had a resident life interest in her home which in reality had passed to her oldest step-son William on the death of her husband and his father, Thomas Nelson.[11]

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10. Deeds & Bonds, No. 1, p. 220; No. 2, pp. 15, 81, 94, 124, 298; No. 3, p. 178. From the Session ownership, through that of Penton, Lots 56 and 57 passed together.

11. Deeds, No. 5, p. 166; No. 6 (1755-1763), p. 509; No. 7, (1763-1769), p. 55.

Though these six town lots would constitute a base of operation, Thomas Nelson continued his acquisitions, adding other properties in various parts of town and especially extending his operation from Main street through to the York River's edge.

In 1719 he and Joseph Walker purchased Lot 25 from Benjamin Clifton and, before 1722, they "built a Tenement commonly called the Swan." In due course Nelson's son William, by purchased of the Walker moiety, became full owner of lot and tavern. Five years later, in 1724, Nelson added adjacent Lot 31. Evidently this lot was already developed since he was willing to pay John Brooks, "Mariner," f100 sterling for it, the sale being arranged through John Gibbons, Brooks' attorney.[12]

In 1729 Nelson added another important piece to his estate in the center of town. It was Lot 47 "next adjoining to the store-house of said Thomas Nelson" with the "premises and appurtenances." The "appurtenances" would have included the house of Charles Cox, who, when he purchased it in 1706 from the town trustees, was an "Inholder of Bruton prsh." Cox held the property for 13 years and

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12. Deeds & Bonds, No. 3, pp. 303, 394, 425: Deeds, Orders, Wills, No. 16 (1720-1729), pt. 1, p. 287; Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XXXI, 60. These lots (25 and 31) passed one by deed in 1735 and the other by will, to President William Nelson, who in March 1761 conveyed them to "Thomas Nelson the Younger," his "Son and Heir apparent." In 1773 Thomas, Jr., sold one of the lots, No. 31, to William Reynolds for a handsome f550 current Virginia. Deeds, No. 4 (1729-1740), p. 353; Deeds, No. 6, pp. 318; Deeds, No. 8 (1769-1777), p. 302; Charles E. Hatch, Jr., "Final Historical Reports on Developed Unites in the Town of Yorktown: I. Swan Tavern-Lot No. 25, II Corbin Griffin Medical Shop-Lot No. 30, III Reynolds House-Museum Unit-Lot No. 31" (a type written report dated 1939), pp. 10-14, 55-56.

when he and his wife, Mary, sold it to Nelson he was listed as a "Planter," indicating a rise in station.[13]

In 1728 Nelson received his lease, or right of use, for an 80-foot-square parcel on the waterfront from the Council. This lot was in the "Common" area between the bluff line and the river's edge. It lay "opposite to his own Lotts, and adjoining to the landing he now useth in York Town." This parcel also carried the right to build a wharf into the river at the same location.[14]

In 1731 Nelson added three more lots. One was Lot 40 on the brow of the bluff overlooking the waterfront and bordering on what became Read Street, a principal connection between Main and Water Streets. Very near Nelson's waterfront lease, this half-acre had initially been granted to Richard Starke, "Chiruageon," in November 1691, but within less than a year (June 1692) he sold it to Governor Francis Nicholson. Nicholson devised it to one Kingsmill Eyre. Eyre's attorney "in part" conveyed it to Thomas Nelson on July 12, 1731.[15]

Lots 84 and 85 came through the same purchase as Lot 40 for a total price of £100 "Lawful money of Great Britain." Governor Nicholson had received these lots intially[16] and like Lot 40 had

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13. Deeds & Bonds, No. 2, p. 179; Deeds, No. 4, p. 33. The initial grantee for Lot 47 had been Daniel Parke, who forfeited through non-development.

14. Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia, IV, 184.

15. Deeds, Orders, Wills, No. 1, pp. 406, 407; Deeds, No. 4, p. 101.

16. Deeds, No. 4, 101.

devised them to Kingsmill Eyre, whose attorney, James Blair, sold them to Nelson.[17] Lots 84 and 85 lay back (riverward) of Lots 46 and 47 and the four together formed a block of property that lay between Thomas Nelson's house and the waterfront area leased in 1729. This block of property, or most of it, would become the William Nelson homestead development of residence, dependencies, gardens, and grounds.

Altogether, aside from his waterfront lease, Thomas Nelson acquired a dozen of the town's half-acre lots, more than any other citizen when a list of lot owners was made in 1738.[18] The thrust of his operation, as already shown, was in the center of town extending between two "cross streets" (Nelson and Read) from the south side of Main, across, and all the way to the water.

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17. An order of court on September 26, 1692 read: "The Rt Honble Francis Nicholson Esqr his Deed from Ye Trustees for his port lands in this County, was this day by them acknowledged in Cort to his Honors use, And it is Orded to be committed to Record." Deeds, Orders, Wills, No. 9, (1691-1694), p. 169.

18. Riley, "Development of Yorktown," pp. 80-81.

Chapter V

"Scotch Tom" Builds a Home and Creates a Family Residence

Thomas Nelson, the Emigrant, did not record the year in which he built his mansion that still stands on Lot 52 in Yorktown. The first known specific references to it appear in 1732 and 1736 and were made by travelers to Yorktown. Neither made any reference to its newness and both were impressed by it. Nelson arrived in Yorktown in 1705, bought the lot in 1706 and married a lady from a prominent family in 1710; they had their first child in 1711 with others following about 1713 and 1716.

It has been generally assumed that he did not build his mansion then but rather, for financial reasons, built a slighter home to satisfy building requirements and continued to use this until he could do better. None of this may have been necessary as either the kitchen (40 by 20 feet), or the servants quarters (20 by 24 feet), both later known to have stood here, would have satisfied the building requirement for "a good house to Containe at Least Twenty foot Square." Besides, as detailed earlier, in 1706 he was already 29 years old, a man with an established family background. Already he was a man of some means and inheritance, and he had come to stay. A vigorous business man, he seemingly had then staked a course to follow and prospered mightly. Why not build a fitting place in the beginning: both of his sons built mansions early in their careers. And there is some family tradition that the residence was completed in 1711.

Mrs. Sydney Smith of Yorktown in her account[1] of the town, written early in this century, had this to say: " the writer found among some old papers copied from an old history giving 1711 as the time of the building of this house....Miss Kate Nelson, the last of the Nelson family to live in this house also told the writer that her father had stated to her that the house was built in 1711."[2] There is the family tradition, too, that Thomas let the "cornerstone" brick pass through his infant son William's hand as a ceremonial gesture for his first son and future heir. This story, current in the nineteenth century, was detailed thusly by Bishop William Meade: "The cornerstone of it was laid by old President Nelson, when an infant . . . he was held by his nurse and the brick laid in his apron and passed through his little hands."[3]

William Hugh Grove, who landed in Yorktown on June 23, 1732, noted that there were about "10 good houses not above 4 of Brick";

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1. Old Yorktown and Its History (Yorktown, Va., c. 1920), p. 14.

2. In his Genealogy of the Page Family in Virginia, p. 156, R.C.M. Page states that Nelson built his brick mansion about 1715, but he does give the source of his data.

3. Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia, I, 205. This legend has become beclouded with obvious error in other forms that ascribe the home to William Nelson with the brick passing through the hands of Thomas Nelson, Jr. William did not build the home and lived in it only as Scotch Tom's son. He established his own home across the street on Lots 46, 47, 84, and 85. And Thomas Nelson, Jr., was not born until well after the house was constructed. For these forms of the story, see Edith Tunis Sale, Interiors of Virginia Homes in Colonial Times (Richmond, 1927), p. 89: Paul Wilstach, Tidewater Virginia (Indianapolis, c. 1939), p. 208.

opposite the reference to brick houses Grove made an asterisk in the margin of the manuscript and noted the names of Nelson and Ambler.[4] Four years later an English observer made other comments and in general was more favorably impressed with the town of York than was Grove:

> You perceive a great Air of Opulence amongst the Inhabitants, who have some of them built themselves Houses, equal in Magnificence to many of our superb ones at St. James's: as those of Mr. Lightfoot, Nelson, &c. Almost every considerable Man keeps an Equipage.... The most considerable Houses are of Brick; some handsome ones of Wood, all built in the modern Taste; and the lesser Sort, of Plaister. There are some very pretty Garden Spots in the Town.[5]

Thomas Nelson in his will dated August 6, 1745, made brief but pointed reference to his residential establishment, which he left to his oldest son William after a life interest to his second wife was extinguished. He enumerated the "Dwelling-House, Kitchens, Gardens" and the "Furniture" in the buildings plus his "stable, chariot, and chariot Horses."[6] All was on the same (south) side of Main Street and it is established that the stable and its appointments

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4. Manuscript Diary in Alderman Library, University of Virginia, leaf 54. To put this reference to the Nelson House in proper context, Grove wrote: "York-This City (As tis' Call'd) is indeed a delicat village....A Stranger Concluded there were at least 100 houses whereas there are really not 30 for Their Kitchins, Warehouses &c: are here & generally Elsewhere Seperate from their dwelling houses & make them appear Different habitations there are about 10 good houses not above 4 of Brick the rest of Timber viz Pine Planks Covered wth Shingles of Cypress."

5. "Observations in Several Voyages and Travels in America in the Year, 1736," The William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine, 1st Ser., XV (1907), 222.

6. William and Mary Quarterly, 1st Ser., VI, 143-45.

occupied Lot 57 diagonally across a sideway from the residence.[7] Early records are silent on the precise location of the "Gardens" but seemingly they came to include Lots 49 and 50 and possibly a small part of the northwestern section of Lot 48. At least this area was known as the Nelson garden lots in the next century and in the early part of this century.[8]

Nelson evidently enjoyed his garden though little is known about it. A Virginia Gazette story in 1738 would indicate that he exchanged horticultural information and liked to try the new things. This story involved a reflection on the authenticity of an earlier report of unusually large cucumbers. The correspondent somewhat testily rebutted in reply:

> we must by Leave assure him /the doubter/, that the Description we gave of that Cucumber was true; and that from the Seed of it, and others of the same Kind, abundance of them have been propagated in several Gentlemens Gardens this Year; particularly in That of Mr. Thomas Nelson, Merchant, in York Town, who has one in his Garden, which measur'd (this Day) 40 Inches in Length; and has several others 3 Feet long: He had some this Year, which exceeded any of these in Size; but being ripe and wither'd, are now considerably

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7. A deed of 1746 notes this as the "stable yard of Thomas Nelson, deceased," another in 1763 as "a Stable Lott of the Hon. William Nelson," and still another in 1764 as "Mrs. Frances Nelson's Stable Lot." Deeds, No. 5, p. 166; No. 6, p. 509; No. 7, p. 55.

8. A Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia Policy (No. 17298) for Lot 53 in 1852 showed "Nelson's garden and open lots" to the northwest while the "Nelsons Dwelling &c /stood/ 120 feet off "to the northeast." The Assurance Society records are in the Virginia State Library but there are copies (negative photostats) in the Colonial NHP Library.

shrunk. There are Two Species of them, one Green the other White; the Green ones are the largest, but both of 'em eat well.[9]

Deeds for properties adjoining, or adjacent, to Nelson's Lots 52 and 48 leave little doubt as to where he was established in residence, as that for Lot 43 in 1721 which had a location that was southeast opposite to Thomas Nelson.[10] And there was that for Lot 54 in February 1720, which was "joining to the Street that leads to Mr Thomas Nelsons now dwelling house."[11]

Fortunately when John Gauntlett sketched Yorktown from the vantage point of a British naval vessel in the Yorktown harbor in 1755, he paid special attention to the Nelson home, accentuating its dominance of the scene, something he did for several of the larger homes (mansions) in the town. Though some of his detail is awry, he obviously saw the same house that stands today. He would seem to show, too, that it was fenced then, with an open board fence. There is, however, no detail on dependencies.[12]

The Nelson House group obviously had its necessary dependencies, a characteristic part of any home scene of the time. The earliest enumeration of them appears to have been when the property was insured

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9. Issue of August 25-September 1, p. 4, c. 1.
10. Deeds & Bonds, No. 3, p. 340.
11. Deeds & Bonds, No. 3, p. 346. Conceivably "now dwelling house" is language that could suggest a new residence. If such can be implied from so small a phrase, it generally would correspond to that period after the death of Thomas' first wife (1718) and his marriage to his second (1723), perhaps a likely time if there was need for a new home.
12. See Illustration No. 5.

in 1796, as will be discussed later. This enumeration would have been quite typical of the earlier scene - dwelling, kitchen and wash-house, servants quarters, spinning house, smokehouse, dairy, poultry house, and well house. That Alexander Berthier does not show them all on his 1781 billeting map[13] is not controlling as he sometimes shows dependencies and sometimes does not. He does, however, definitely show the residence itself and the kitchen, plus two others, which the size of his symbols would indicate were very small. All were aligned closely to Main Street as he tended to place his symbols in this manner. In one detail he must have been in error unless it represented some temporary military expedient. He shows a line denoting fencing, or some other form of demarcation, that includes the Nelson House (but not its dependencies) and the Edmund Smith House including two dependencies of the latter. These then were entirely separate property ownerships as they always were until George Preston Blow acquired them both early in this century.

Fortunately there is a glimpse of activity at the Nelson House during a change of occupants and ownership in 1766. After "Scotch Tom's death in 1745 his second wife and widow, Mrs. Frances Tucker, (née Courtney) Nelson, continued in residence for more than twenty years. A very old lady, she died in June 1766. The property then passed to William, who was already well-established across Main

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13. See Illustration No. 6.

Street and elected not to move into it. As he wrote on September 12: "I have yet five sons left & the eldest is the Father of three Boys. He /Thomas/ by the Death of my Mother in Law /stepmother/ this summer at the Age of near 84 Years, goes into my Father's House: That which I have built I have lately added to being more roomy & fit for my family."[14] Earlier (in July 1766) he had written: "Tom is the Father of three Sons and goes to Housekeeping this Fall as I presume you heard of the Death of the poor old Lady: who held out till Life became Burthen to her: or rather till she lost all sensibility of pleasure or pain."[15] There seems to have been some delay in Thomas moving in. There may have been need for renovation, and likely William did not want to hurry him. He generally wrote affectionately of his family and on February 27, 1768, it was this way:

> My Son /Thomas/ hath been a Housekeeper abt 3 months: but my wife hath kept on this Side the street the two eldest Boys for Company. My family is much reduced of late: Bob, Nat and Carter go to school to Mr. Washington Hugh at College & Ed Berkeley hath taken Miss Molly Burwell to wife: & my youngest Boy Bill I must send some where this summer to school.[16]

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14. Letter to William Cookson, Nelson Letterbook, pp. 12, 36.

15. Mason, John Norton & Sons, p. 15; Brock, "The Nelson House," Mag. Am. Hist., VII, 47. This was not necessarily in conflict with the notice in the Virginia Gazette (Purdie and Dixon) of June 13: "On Monday last died at York in the 84th year of her age, Mrs. Frances Nelson relict of Thomas Nelson, Esq; late of York county. She was a lady endowed with many amiable qualities, which makes her death more regretted by all who had the pleasure of her acquaintenance; particularly by the poor and needy, whose wants she often supplied with a liberal hand."

16. A letter to John Norton in London in Mason, John Norton & Sons, p. 39. Earlier (September 1766) William had written William

The Nelson House was a lively place again with Thomas, who had "his fifth son christen'd" in the fall of 1768, in residence.[17] One such period of happiness has been given an effective word picture by E.G. Evans. The time was in 1774 while business was taking a turn for the worse and relations with England were daily approaching impass and revolution:

> The pending marriage of Thomas' younger brother Robert to Molly Grymes, Lucy Nelson's sister, no doubt added an air of gaiety to family affairs. Molly and her two sisters had lived with Thomas and Lucy since the death of their father, so naturally the two young people saw each other often. The marriage was delayed while waiting for Molly's wedding apparel, which had been ordered from London. It arrived finally and the marriage took place in Yorktown late in October of 1774. This was followed on December 19 by the birth of a daughter, Mary to Thomas and Lucy, - their seventh child. The seven Nelson children, with the addition of the three Grymes girls, must have made a lively household. For the increasing brood there was soon to be a tutor. He was Jacob Hall, Jr., evidently from Pennsylvania. For teaching the five Nelson sons, he was paid f50 a year, furnished with room and board, as well as a servant, and given the use of Nelson's library, which Hall characterized as a "fine collection."[18]

But war would introduce changes, especially when the British bought full scale action to Yorktown in the late summer and fall of

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Cookson thanking him for his "kind Invitation to send one or two of my sons to your part of the Country for Education, but they have a Mother so extreamly tender of them that she cant bear the Thoughts of parting them at a time of Life that she can hardly expect to see them again." Nelson Letterbook, p. 12.

17. Mason, John Norton & Sons, p. 77. William had also written to Norton earlier, in August, that "My Son is the Father of four Sons the oldest not yet in Breeches" and now there were five - William (1763), Thomas (1764), Philip (1766), Francis (1767), Hugh (1768). Others would follow as Elizabeth (1770), Mary (1774), Lucy (1777), Robert (1778), Susanna (1780), and Judith (1782). Page, Genealogy of the Page Family, p. 171.

18. The Nelsons, pp. 202-03.

1781, when no one's property would escape unscathed. Already there had been great damage through thoughtlessness, pilferage and even vandalism by troops stationed there. In April 1777, Nicolas Cresswell recorded in his journal for April 29 that in and close to Yorktown:

> 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, but now almost ruined by the disorderly soldiers, and, what is more extraordinary, their own soldiers the guardians of the people and the defenders of their rights. Houses burnt down, others pulled to pieces for fuel, most of the Gardens thrown to the street, everything in disorder and confusion and no appearance of trade.[19]

There is little to tell how much of this vandalism specifically related to the Nelson properties, particularly the Nelson House on Lot 52.

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19. The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774-1777 (New York, 1924), pp. 206-07.

Chapter VI

British Headquarters and Damage To Nelson Houses

Little is known of the specific role of Governor Nelson's home when the British were in occupation of Yorktown, during the battle, or while the French were wintered here in the months that followed. Being one of the finer homes in town, almost by definition, it was put to good use by both the British and French alike. The Nelsons were not in residence as Thomas had moved his family to a home ("Offley Hoo") on one of his Hanover County plantations, where they remained for some time. In the instance of French use, Alexander Berthier on his plan of Yorktown, drawn for billeting purposes, showed distinctly that the mansion and its kitchen were viewed as major useful units after the siege had passed.

With the occupation of Yorktown by the British in August 1781, Cornwallis set up his headquarters in the home of Secretary Nelson[1] who then lived in Yorktown, and was now an old man still troubled by gout. The Secretary remained in residence in his home and on the premises. When, however, the allied bombardment opened, this home and headquarters came quickly into the gunners' view and range with telling effect. Even Secretary Nelson was soon quite willing to leave. On October 10, as St. George Tucker related, he "came out of

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1. This is shown on various Siege plans as John Hill's "A Plan of York Town and Gloucester in the Province of Virginia" (London, 1785), photostat in files of Colonial NHP.

York /and/ I am told he is not restricted by a Parole." One account is that two of his sons serving in Washington's army, Colonel William and Major John, went in under a flag of truce arrangement to help him out as walking was difficult for him.[2]

Tucker saw him the next day and wrote:

> I this day dined in Company with the Secretary. He says our Bombardment produced great Effects in annoying the Enemy & destroying their Works. Two Officers were killed & one wounded by a Bomb the Evening /9th/ we opened. Lord Shuten's /likely Lt. Col. Chewton, aide-de-camp to Lord Cornwallis/ cane was struck out of his Hand by a Cannon Ball. Lord Cornwallis has built a kind of Grotto at the foot of the secretary's Garden where he lives under Ground. A negroe of the Secretary's was killed in his House.[3]

It seems established that the heavy artillery fire rather quickly made the Secretary's house untenable. Isacc Weld, traveling in Yorktown in 1796, had this to say then:

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2. Evans, The Nelsons, p. 346. One witness at the scene, however, had another explanation. The Marquis de Chastellux wrote later of the 'anguish' of the Secretary's sons when his house was under fire: "I was witness to the cruel anxiety of one of these young men, when after the flag was sent to demand his father, he kept his eyes fixed upon the gate of the town, by which it was to come out, and seemed to expect his own sentence in the answer." Travels in North-America in the Years 1780-81-82 (New York, 1827), p. 221.

3. "St. George Tucker's Journal of the Siege of Yorktown, 1781," edited by Edward M. Riley, The William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, V (1948), pp. 386, 387. Capt. James Duncan puts it another way: "He /Secretary Nelson/ informs us our fire did great execution last night; that we had killed 11 or 12 of their officers, that his black servant was killed by his bedside, and the first gun fired killed two commissarys as the were sitting at their wine." "Diary of Captain James Duncan," Pennsylvania Archives, 2nd Ser., XV, 750.

> In the town the houses bear evident marks of the siege, and the inhabitants will not, on any account, suffer the holes perforated by the cannon-balls to be repaired on the outside. There is one house in particular, which stands in the skirt of the town, that is in a most shattered condition. It was the habitation of a Mr. Neilson, a Secretary under the regal government, and was made the headquarters of Lord Cornwallis when he first came to the town; but it stood so much exposed, and afforded so good a mark to the enemy, that he was soon forced to quit it. Neilson, however, it seems was determined to stay there till the last, and absolutely remained till his negro servant, the only person that would live with him in such a house; had his brains dashed out by a cannon ball while he stood by his side; he then thought it time to retire, but the house was still continually fired at, as if it had been headquarters. The walls and roof are pierced in innumerable places, and at one corner a large piece of the wall is torn away.[4]

On leaving the Secretary's house Cornwallis needed other quarters, likely more than the "shelter" they sought "under the bank of the river,"[5] where "the shells annoyed them" still, but specific reference even now is missing. The Marquis de Chastellux, like others at the time, was not specific: "Lord Cornwallis was soon obliged to seek another asylum"[6] The Governor's home on Lot 52 would have been a likely choice as it was spacious enough and

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4. Issac Weld, Jr., Travels Through the States of North America, and . . . Canada, 1795, 1796 and 1797 (London, 1807), I, 164-65. This account confirms the observations of St. George Tucker from the works on October 18, during the cessation of hostilities: "the Secretary's house with one of the Corners broken off, & many large holes thro the Roof & Walls part of which seem'd tottering with their Weight afforded a striking Instance of the Destruction occasioned by War. Many other houses in the vicinity contributed to accomplish the Scene." Though in his journal Tucker makes repeated reference to Secretary Nelson's House he makes no mention of the Governor's home. "Journal," p. 391, and elsewhere.

5. Octavius Pickering, The Life of Timothy Pickering (Boston, 1867), I. 304.

6. Travels in North America, p. 221.

well down into the town. Even the Governor, Thomas Nelson, thought so and evidently directed fire against his own home to root out the enemy, so it was said in later years.

As reported in the Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington, by G.W.P. Custis[7], when a new American battery was ready to open some time after Secretary Nelson had brought news of the effectiveness of artillery fire against his own house, Governor Nelson was present. Lafayette, general officer of the day, had invited him, it is reported, to be on hand and asked him about a likely first target. Nelson is said to have replied:

> There to that house. It is mine, and, now that the Secretary's is nearly knocked to pieces, is the best one in the town. There you will be almost certain to find Lord Cornwallis and the British headquarters. Fire upon it, my dear marquis, and never spare a particle of my property so long as it affords a comfort or a shelter to the enemies of my country.

This in essence is a repetition of the story that Lafayette recalled when at Yorktown in 1824. It was further recalled then that Nelson turned and rode away without waiting to observe the effects of the barrage that he had suggested.[8] This simple anecdote has not

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7. Published in 1860; p. 336. This is as quoted in Henry P. Johnston, The Yorktown Campaign and the Surrender of Cornwallis, 1781 (New York, 1881), pp. 139-40.

8. W.H. Gaines, "Governor at Arms," Virginia Cavalcade, I, 41-42. The Lafayette account would have it a day, or two, after the 10th. Louis Gottschalk, Lafayette and the Close of the American Revolution (Chicago, Ill., c. 1942), pp. 316-17.

been left this way being rather much embelished in its telling and retelling.[9]

Artillery did reach the house as its southeast face still shows. There are even now two balls visible on the outside, reset[10] at points where there had been cannon penetration during the bombardment. Scars exist inside, too, and several have been left open to view. Damage could not have been particularly heavy to the mansion though likely it was frightening for those in residence at the time.[11]

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9. As told in one form at the time of the Yorktown Centennial, 1881: "It is tradition that the patriotic gentlemen /Governor Nelson/, presuming that his house would afford shelter to the British officers offered a reward of five guineas to every gunner who should strike it with his fire." John Austin Stevens, Yorktown Centennial Handbook (New York, 1881), pp. 99-101. And in still another form it is told: "A few days before this eventful night /October 14, when British Redoubts No. 9 and No. 10 were stormed/, the Governor of Virginia, who was present in person, commanding the Virginia State forces, had displayed his patriotism by an act which attracted much attention. Observing that his own house within the town had escaped injury from the shells, he learned that General Washington had given orders that the gunners should not aim at it. He immediately had a gun turned on it and offered a prize of five guineas to the gunner who should strike it." Thomas Nelson Page, "Old Yorktown," Scribners Monthly XXII (October, 1881), p. 810.

10. See Illustration No. 21.

11. Most obviously the Paul Wilstach story and others like it actually related to the Secretary Nelson house rather than to that of the Governor to which he ascribed it: "Two cannons were accordingly pointed against it and the balls began tearing through it. The British officers were at the moment at table and two of them were killed by the first shot. The subsequent shots caused the staff to abandon the house." Tidewater Virginia, p. 208-09. One contemporary story dealing with the shelling of the Secretary Nelson House likely became a confused source for Governor Nelson house tales. This was by Benjamin Latrobe, who painted the Secretary Nelson Houses ruins several years before the turn of the eighteenth century, some time

The tradition that Cornwallis' second and last headquarters was established in Governor Nelson's home, as the Governor seemingly thought, is very strong. Certainly members of the family accepted it, and passed it on. The import, too, is that it was generally accepted at the time of Lafayette's visit and likely it was a reason that the Marquis was quartered here.[12] It is true, however, that categorical statements that it served as headquarters do not seem to appear until the time of the Civil War and particularly the Centennial, and generally they are unsupported.[13] There has

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after 1796: "A gentleman who was present during the Siege, observing my original drawing, told me the following anecdote of the hole in Secretary Nelson's house which appears between the window and door on the left hand. The Duke de Viomenil came into the the American lines and visited a battery. He observed an American cannoneer who appeared to point his gun with great care. 'Sir,' said the Duke, 'I will give you a dollar if you at the first attempt throw a ball to strike the fascia that runs around that house.' (The fascia is a string of projecting brickwork, between the first and second stories.) 'Will you give me a dollar,' replied the American, 'for every ball I throw to strike the fascia? And I will give you two for every miss.' It was agreed. The American then threw thirteen successive balls and made the hole in question without missing once. The Duke paid his thirteen dollars and begged to be excused any more experiments." "View at Little York in Virginia," Virginia Cavalcade, I (Autumn, 1951), p. 47.

12. E.E. Brandon, Lafayette: Guest of the Nation (Oxford, Ohio, 1957), III, 87. There were other reasons, too: It was the most substantial house in Yorktown, and "the offer of the owner."

13. Henry P. Johnston, the first of the serious published students of the Siege of 1781, had this to say: "In what house Cornwallis took up his quarters next /after Secretary Nelson's House/ does not appear—possibly Governor Nelson's, in the town. More likely he pitched his tent under the bank which gave rise at the time to the story that he made a cave his head-quarters." The Yorktown Campaign and the Surrender of Cornwallis, 1781, p. 139, note. R.A. Brock also writing in 1881 was much more positive in his conclusion: "Through the stirring relation which the Nelson House

been no shortage of them since.[14]

This was the reason, perhaps, for the placement and dedication by the Virginia Yorktown Sesquicentennial Commission of a plaque on the southeast face of the mansion on October 16, 1931.[15] All in bronze, it carries a bust of "Earl Cornwallis" as "Commander of the British Forces" and the inscription: "A Testimonial of the Affection of Virginia for the Mother Country."

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holds by tradition to the memorable Siege, many popular writers have fallen into the error of assigning it as the headquarters of Cornwallis, a mistake in identity which by repetition has fixed itself upon the public mind." "The Nelson House," Mag. of Am. Hist., VII, 48.

14. Even Henry Howe in his Historical Collections of Virginia (Charleston, S.C., 1845), p. 522, peopled it only with "some of the British officers." Interestingly, Howe related: "Portraits of this last-named gentleman and wife /President William/, which were mutilated by the British at Hanover, where they were sent for safety, /now/ adorn its walls." Mathew Brady accepted the story in 1862. The caption for his view of the Nelson House (see Illustration No. 12 of this report), registered as Brady's Album Gallery No. 393, reads: "Headquarters of Lord Cornwallis at the Surrender of Yorktown: Now used as a Hospital, under the Superintendence of Miss Dix." Colonial NHP photocopies Nos. 16,601 and 16,602.

15. The Richmond News Leader, October 17, 1931; Official Program of the Yorktown Secquicentennial Celebration Yorktown, Virginia, October 16, 17, 18, 19, 1931, copy in files of Colonial NHP.

Chapter VII

The Nelson House Property as Seen in Insurance Records (1796-1880)

It is fortunate and very helpful that the owners of the Nelson House rather consistently insured the property over the period 1796 to 1860 with the "Mutual Assurance Society against Fire on Buildings of the State of Virginia."[1] Altogether there were nine policies[2] in this period and each of them had a plot sketch that carried at least some building detail. Eight structures were involved and they preempted all of Lot 52 and much of adjoining Lot 48. This is the property along the south side of Main Street between present Read and Nelson Streets measuring 264 feet by 165 feet deep. It was here that Thomas Nelson, the emigrant, developed the necessary components of town living.

The insurance plots, it should be noted, while very valuable for locations cannot be taken as carefully measured scaled drawings. They were not. By and large they seemingly were based on paced, or eye estimate distances. To illustrate, the Nelson residence itself was given as 40 feet by 60 feet in 1796 and 1810 but as 50 by 40 in 1823 whereas it actually measured 40 feet, 7 inches by 56 feet and 4 inches.[3] It was the principal structure, or structures, in a holding

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1. The Society records are in the Virginia State Library with photostats of pertinent policies in the library of Colonial NHP. This Society had been established on December 26, 1795, and was "agreeable to the several acts of the General Assembly" of Virginia.

2. There are policies for the years 1796 (Policy No. 98), 1810 (No. 196), 1815 (No. 1507), 1823 (No. 5049), 1830 (No. 7612), 1838 (No. 10765), 1846 (No. 14290), 1853 (No. 17661), and 1860 (No. 21356).

3. In 1830 it was 56 by 42; in 1838, 58 by 41; in 1853 and 1860, 56 by 40.

that received all, or most, or the insurance coverage and consequently the most careful treatment. Details of other structures, except where they had a bearing on this, may, or may not, have been included.[4]

The earliest policy, that of 1796 taken out by William Nelson who "now occupied" the house, is the closest in time to 1781 and could very well reflect the condition that existed at the time of the Siege of Yorktown. Certainly it was one that would continue with little change, except for a minor structure or two, for the next sixty years.

The plot plan and policy lists eight structures, the first three marked A, B, and C. The other five were without letter, or numeral, designation.

1. "Dwelling House" - A
2. "Kitchen & Wash-house - B
3. "Servant's Quarters" - C
4. "Poultry House"
5. "Dairy" ("F" in 1838)
6. "Spinning House" ("E" in 1838)
7. "Smoak House" ("D" in 1838)
8. "Well"

In a number of cases the policies give building sizes and distances between buildings. Where they do not the plot plan usually permits

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4. The policies for 1796, 1810, 1830, 1846 and 1853 follow as Illustrations Nos 7-11.

rough estimates.

1.(A) The "Dwelling House" in 1796 was noted as being built of brick "2 Stories high," "Covered with Wood," and measuring "Forty Feet" and "Sixty Feet" with its long side facing Main Street. It was located a few feet in from the "Cross Street" and back from Main sufficiently to accommodate a "Front Court 30 feet" deep. Behind the residence was a "Back Court 60 feet" deep, and, like that in front, it ran the width of the house. The shape of the building was a simple rectangle. Nothing in this or later policies indicates that the house had any appendages, back or front, or on the sides, during this 65-year period. In view of this absence one must assume that the present back entrance structure is an addition, or additions, placed here for convenience after 1860.

A 1796 notation states: "No house intervenes between the front of the Dwelling House and the edge of the River Bank which is distant at least four hundred feet," thus indicating that the storehouse which Thomas Nelson originally built on Lot 46 across Main Street from his home must have burned, of been pulled down, by this date. It was further noted in 1796 that all of his other structures, except the servants quarters, were built of "wood covered with wood, of which the House denominated the Kitchen and Wash-House alone has a Chimney!" The amount of "Contiguity" of buildings varied from policy to policy within small limits, as already indicated. Perhaps the general statement in the 1853 policy makes this clear. "The buildings A. B. and C. and the smaller buildings /4 of them/ described, are all

contiguous within thirty feet of each other." There was similar expression in the 1838 policy.

2.(B) The "Kitchen & Wash-house" structure was shown in 1796 as one measuring 40 by 20 feet and facing the residence only 27 feet away. The building's smaller dimension was parallel to Main Street, it being closer to Main than the dwelling. It was described as a "Wooden" building, and "one story high." A line inside the rectangle representing it suggests that the interior was divided into two sections, or rooms, with the likelihood of the wash-house being the smaller one on the Main Street end. Measurements on later policies differ, buy not markedly,[5] and there is no suggestion of structural change, either addition or subtraction. It is doubtful that the wash-house's listing in 1853 as "1-½ stories" rather than one story is significant. This ordinarily could mean that it was a one full story structure with a dormered second floor area for rooms, or loft. However, later pictures of the structure show no dormers. Its function remained the same throughout this period as the 1846 description reveals - "Wood Kitchen & Wash House." It, as it will later be discussed, survived into this century.

3.(C) The "Servants Quarters" stood in line with the kitchen and was only three feet away from it westerly. Built of brick and

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5. The policies for 1810 and 1815 give it as 21 by 42 feet; that in 1830 as 20 by 43; and those for 1838 and 1853 as 20 by 42.

covered with wood, it was said to measure 20 by 24 feet in 1796 with its longer side to Main Street.[6] Evidently it continued in use as servants' quarters, being consistently noted as such, as in 1846, "Brick Servants Quarter." This structure seemingly disappeared from the scene shortly after 1860, before the siege of 1862 if we accept the sketches done then.

4. The "Poultry House" in 1796 was located directly behind the servants' quarters and rather convenient to the kitchen only "5 feet" away. It was even closer to the servants' quarters. This slight structure was not dimensioned then, or later. It was noted again in 1810 but then appears to drop from consideration. Likely it became unusable and was removed. In 1853, however, the plot plan shows a "log, fowl house - under $100 in value." This was very generally in the area of that formerly shown but probably, in the writer's view, represented new construction. It, too, disappeared from the scene at some undetermined date.

5. On the 1796 plot plan the "Dairy" was the first of the three dependent structures westward from the "Back Court" and 21 feet from the residence. It was a square building and only 4 feet from the "Spinning House," next in the line, No dimensions are given. There are dimensions, however, in the 1838 policy when it was described as "F. upper dairy wood" and 12 by 12 feet in size. This was after

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6. Other measurements given include 22 by 27 feet (1810, 1815), 22 by 24 (1838), 22 by 26 (1830), and 24 by 28 (1853).

the old spinning house had become, for a time, the "Lower dairy" and before it was in use as a smokehouse. It was always a lesser structure, as when in 1853 it was stated to be "under $100 in Value." It seems to have disappeared in the last half of the century.

6. The "Spinning House" in 1796 was the middlemost and smaller of the three dependencies west of the back court, being three feet from the smokehouse and four from the dairy. It was shown in outline as a near-square rectangular structure and, like the others around it, made of wood and covered with wood. This structure seemingly remained constantly in service though its particular use changed. In 1838, when listed as a 12 by 12 foot structure, the insurance policy noted it as building "E. Lower dairy, wood." By 1853 it had become the "Smokehouse under $100 in value." It, like the spinning house, was removed from the scene before the turn of the century.

7. The "Smoak House," so noted in 1796, evidently was the largest of the three dependencies and the most removed from the main house, being square in shape and of all-wood construction. The only measurement given for it was in 1838. Then it was said to be a smokehouse measuring 16 by 16 feet. Eventually it ceased to be a smokehouse. In 1853 it was noted as a "Lumber house under $100 value." This use may have presaged its early disappearance from the scene.

8. A "Well" shown on the 1796 plot was very close to the Main Street edge of the property, perhaps 10 or 15 feet beyond the servants' quarters. No later plot sketches show or note this feature, though

it is unlikely that it went out of use in this period. J.R. Chandler of Yorktown, now 82, remembers an old well that in his youth was located about where the 1796 well was shown on the insurance plan. It then was a main source of water in Yorktown. It was good water, he related, and came from a well possibly 75 feet deep.[7]

Garden

As already indicated, the insurance plots indicated that most of the area of Lots 52 and 48 was preempted by the Nelson House and its dependencies. There was, however, a small part of this tract (the northwestern end), bounded on two sides by streets, that was not in use for buildings. This plot may have had garden use through the years. The 1846 insurance plot at least suggests, or states, this "Garden" use at that time. It seems worthy of note, too, that Lot 49, directly behind Lot 48, was noted in an insurance policy covering adjacent Lot 53 as "Nelson's garden and open lots."[8] There would have been an open, direct way to any garden plot on Lot 48 from the residence. The kitchen-washhouse, servants' quarters, poultry house and well development were along the northeast (Main Street) edge of the property, whereas the smokehouse, dairy, and spinning house were near the southwest bounds of the tract. This arrangement left a passage between the two sets of structures.

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7. Mr. Chandler does not remember any other dependent structures except the kitchen. He was interviewed by the writer in August 1969.

8. Policy No. 17,298 drawn to William S. Mallicote.

Insurance Evaluations:

	1796	1810	1815	1823	1830	1838	1846	1853	1860[9]
Dwelling House	5500	4000	5000	4000	4750	7000	8000	9000	5000
Kitchen and Washhouse	200	300	300	300	500	250	300	300	
Servants' Quarters	300	300	300	400	300	300	267	300	
Spinning House						(Under $100		(Under $100	
Smokehouse						value)		value)	
Dairy						"		"	
Poultry House						"		"	
Well									
	6000	4600	5600	4700	5550	7550	8567	9600	5000

Owners and Occupants as Reflected in Insurance Policies:

1796 - William Nelson reported the land as "now occupied by my self."

1810 - William Nelson took out the policy though "the said Buildings are at present owned by Lucy Nelson (during her life & by William Nelsons heirs after her death)." The policy further noted that the buildings "are now occupied by the said Lucy Nelson."[10]

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9. The 1860 policy evaluation was reduced, by notation, in 1866 to $4000 and in 1876 to $2000. It carried $2000 again in 1877 and in 1880.

10. Another reference was to the "buildings of William Nelson representatives and Lucy Nelson." There was a further note, too: "The Proprietors of the within mentioned property, are said to be Lucy Nelson widow of Genl Thomas Nelson decd. of York, Tenant for Life Sarah Nelson widow of Genl Wm Nelson, of York, and Thomas Nelson son of said Wm Nelson decd Reversioners whose Guardian is Robert Nelson of York."

1815 - This policy was in the name of "Lucy Nelson and other residing at York and Williamsburg" who owned the property. The buildings were then "occupied by Sarah Nelson and Thomas Nelson."

1823 - The buildings were noted as owned by Lucy Nelson, Sarah Nelson, and Thomas Nelson "residing at Hanover and York" and were "occupied by Sarah Nelson and Thomas Nelson."

1830 - The policy was to "Sarah Nelson, William Nelson, & John R. West for themselves and Elizabeth P.H. West residing at York Town." The property was occupied by William and Sarah Nelson.

1838 - The property and buildings were then owned by William Nelson, John R. West, Sarah Nelson and Elizabeth P.H. West residing in Yorktown. The premises were occupied by William and Sarah Nelson.

1846 - The insured was William Nelson alone, "my Buildings on my own land now occupied by myself."

1853 - At this time the buildings were owned by William Nelson, infant sone of William Nelson deceased, "and were occupied by Martha Nelson Widow of William Nelson deceased."

1860 - William Nelson was still in ownership with the property still being occupied by his mother, "Mrs. Martha Nelson."

Chapter VIII

A Century and a Quarter in Brief Review

After General Nelson's death the Nelson House continued on as a Nelson home for almost 120 years, and in that period it often served for long periods as the residence of the widow of the last owner. Such was true of Lucy, Thomas Nelson, Jr.'s wife, who outlived him by more than thirty years. She outlived, too, her son William, who inherited the home subject to her life interest.

William died prior to 1810 leaving Thomas, who had no heirs, Elizabeth,[1] and William Nelson, Jr. It was William, Jr.,[2] who eventually came into full ownership and in turn bequeathed it to his son William. William, Jr., died prior to 1853, and his widow, Martha, remained in residence with their young son William and, perhaps, other children. This was the last William in direct line, and he died in September 1877 in St. Louis, Missouri, at the age of 32; he left a widow but no children.[3] His sisters were the Nelson heirs who inherited and continued in occupation, or residence,

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1. She, about 1813, married John R. West of Accomac County, who became owner and resident of the Dudley Digges House on lot 77 and left his name on the house for a long time. They had a daughter Sarah.

2. William Nelson, Jr., born in 1801, married first about 1827 Mrs. Catherine Fox, by whom he had five girls (Lucy Thomas, Sally Burwell, Catherine, Mary Berkeley and Elizabeth Page). He married secondly about 1844 Mrs. Martha Whiting (born Martha Sheild) and from this union came another William Nelson and a daughter, Fannie Burwell.

3. Page, Genealogy of the Page Family, pp. 174 ff.

until early in this century.

The Nelson House, strong and roomy, remained through these years a principal historical attraction in Yorktown. As Bishop William Meade has written,

> His /General Nelson's/ papers and those of his father descended, together with the old York house, to one of his sons and the descendants of the same. They were doubtless objects of curiosity and desire to its numerous visitors from all parts of the State and land, especially after it became as it was for many years, one of public entertainment. Too freely may the desire and curiosity of travellers and visitors have been yielded to, and too little, as in many cases in Virginia, have such relics of our ansestors been prized.[4]

The Nelson House served as Lafayette's quarters when he revisited Yorktown in 1824, it was featured in the Centennial events in 1881, and it was a high point in the visits of Henry Howe, Benson J. Lossing and others interested in reporting on the historic scene in after years. It served for church services, too, in the lean years of the early nineteenth century when the York-Hampton Parish Church was in ruins following the fire of 1814. A century later it was the normal meeting place of the Yorktown Historical Society.[5]

The Civil War touched the Nelson House, especially just before, during, and after the siege of 1862. It was pressed into use as a

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4. Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia, I, 213. Meade also noted: "Not long before General Nelson's death he caused his correspondence to be collected and filed by his son Philip who had been trained to the mercantile life. These have disappeared."

5. The Society formed in 1924 was active for a time. A note in a "Yorktown Country Club Scrap Book" (in the files of Colonial NHP) states that "Meetings were always held at the Nelson House."

hospital, first by the Confederates and then by the Union occupiers of the town.[8] The report is that: "The balustrade around the staircase was entirely destroyed by the Federal troops during the late war, whose desire to secure historical souveniers too often took the form of vandalism and the wainscoting is badly damaged."[7] It is generally agreed that the now filled circular holes high in the interior doors of the house were cut at this time to provide ventilation and to allow ready view into the room by attending nurses and aids.

It was obviously the Nelson House that Harriet Douglas Whetten had reference to in her letter of May 8, 1862, written "Off Yorktown" on the "Steamer Knickerbocker" following a day or so in the then war-possessed little village. She, a volunteer Sanitary Commission nurse, noted:[7a]

> 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' garden - Miss Dix's headquarters - an old brick house /with/ a wide hall in the middle, panneled, with a handsome staircase.

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6. See page 83 and illustration No. 14 of this report.
7. Stevens, Centennial Handbook, pp. 101-02.
7a. "A Volunteer Nurse in the Civil War: The Letters of Harriet Douglas "Whetten" edited by Puul H. Hass in Wisconsin Magazine of History, XLIII (1964-1965), 136. It was Dorothea Lynde Dix who had been named superintendent of nurses by the Sanitary Commission in the spring of 1861.

Yorktown and the Nelson House were continued in the hospital support role in much of the Peninsular Campaign period. For instance, Miss Whetten noted in late June:

> we stopped at Yorktown and received /on board/ about 320 from the Hospitals there - not very badly wounded though - chiefly convalescents, or hurt in the hand or foot. One of them had his dog, Fanny, with him, small, black & brindled, who had been with him in three battles - in the last she never left his heels.[7b]

In regard to the Civil War activity, Historian R.A. Brock made this report in 1881:

> In the early months of the late civil war, the "Nelson House" was occupied as quarters by the Confederate soldiers, then stationed on the Peninsula, and we are informed that a large number of family papers, covering a period of a century and a half, stored in the attics, were utilized by some Louisiana Zouaves as bedding. They were gathered up by permission of General Geo. W. Randolph, then in command of the Confederates, by a visitor from Richmond, and brought thither, but we know not their fate. After the battle of Bethel, June 10, 1861, the Nelson house did service as a hospital for the accomodation of the Federal soldiers wounded in that engagement, who fell into the hands of the Confederates.[8]

Though it was in poor repair at the time of its restoration, evidently the Nelson House was well, or at least satisfactorily, maintained until toward the end of the nineteenth century. It is not known, except for the kitchen, just when its dependencies disappeared. The last record of a full complement was in the insurance policy of 1860. Views done in the late

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7b. Ibid, p. 145. The Nelson House was the principal hospital in Yorktown and likely many of the 320 which Miss Whetten mentioned were taken from the house.

8. "The Nelson House," Mag. of Am. Hist., VII, 57.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries document the old kitchen and washhouse unit and give its exterior lines. Evidently the structure burned early in this century. Its massive chimney stack still stood just prior to the restoration of the mansion.[9] Thus, of the Nelson residence grouping, only the residence itself has survived to be the controlling landmark that it is today.

Though likely there was fencing in front and to side of the Nelson House in colonial times, as the 1754 view suggests, and later in 1824, as the details of the Lafayette visit verify for that date, there seemingly was none in place at the time of the Civil War. Afterwards a low brick wall was laid to turn the corner here, and it was later included in the estate wall Captain George Preston Blow erected as a part of his development.[10]

Mr. J.R. Chandler of Yorktown remembers the house well early in this century and related that it was much "run-down" during the occupancy of Miss Kate Nelson, the last of the Nelson family to reside here. After her death it was for a time largely unused. When the

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9. See Illustrations Nos. 22, 23, 30, 31, and 32. Mr. J. R. Chandler of Yorktown, now 82 years of age, remembers the kitchen well and reports that it was covered with lapsiding with a beaded edge. Interviewed by the author on August 27, 1969.

10. See Illustrations Nos. 13, 17, 18, and 30. Also Mrs. Sydney Smith, in her Old Yorktown (c. 1920), page 14, relates: "The wall around the house was not built until after the Civil War, and was put up by the last William Nelson."

old kitchen was abandoned, he recalls, the west corner room on the first floor was used for kitchen purposes for a time. He does not remember, however, which room was then the dining room. He saw and knew the concealed stairway that ran from the basement to the attic, and at that time there was a room in each end of the attic where the windows are. Only attic space separated the two rooms; a very dark space it was.[11]

Lafayette at the Nelson House - 1824:

As "Guest of the Nation," Lafayette made a tour, a "Triumphal Tour," of the Country in 1824-25. A grateful and enthusiastic people greeted him wherever he journeyed. His travels included Virginia and Yorktown, where Governor James Pleasants, Jr., invited him to be present on October 19, 1824, for the anniversary of the Battle of Yorktown.[12]

Planning for the visit was done well, as was its execution. Lafayette came down the Potomac from Washington (after having visited President James Monroe), through the Chesapeake Bay, and up the York River in the Steamship Petersburg. The ships Potomac and Richmond

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11. Interview of August 27, 1969. Mr. Chandler considers the dormers which were added as out of period and much out of the character of the old house. It is his view, too, that the back entrance was a nineteenth century addition. As he knew it, a brick walk led from the front of the house directly to Main Street.

12. Carolyn Medlock, "Lafayette visits Yorktown in 1824," a typed staff digest paper dated September 10, 1966 for Colonial National Historical Park.

joined the Petersburg for the journey up the York. Some ten miles downriver the Virginia met the incoming flotilla of six ships and extended a welcome. Lafayette boarded the Virginia for the remainder of the trip to Yorktown. They arrived about two o'clock on the 18th.

He was greeted by the Governor and a host of others on the wharf, and Pleasants, with Chief Justice John Marshall and Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, accompanied him in the special barouche (built for the occasion) through town to the Nelson House, where he was quartered. That evening the Revolutionary War tent of Washington was brought from the Petersburg and pitched by an honor guard of citizens on a green across Main Street from the Nelson House almost adjacent to the "spacious marquee" already in place there.

At five o'clock there was a banquet and reception under the marquee, and later that evening Lafayette went out to the grounds on the southeast side of Yorktown where the events of the next day would transpire. In this area of the battlefield a "Triumphal Arch" (at the site of British Redoubt No. 10) and two obelisks had been built for the occasion. The obelisks marked the site of Redoubt No. 9 and a point in the Surrender Route of 1781.

On the 19th there were exercises at the "Triumphal Arch," including addresses, the principal one being by Major General Robert B. Taylor, and a grand review of volunteer companies and troops. Lafayette returned to the Nelson House and that evening was guest at a dinner in the grand marquee across Main Street. Later in the evening most,

including the Marquis, attended the fireworks display on the battlefield.

On the 20th there was a breakfast under the Washington tent (now moved to the troop encampment area) for Lafayette by the officers and privates of the volunteers. This was the last of the programmed events, and shortly afterwards Lafayette departed Yorktown for Williamsburg, escorted by the whole corps of cavalry. He would go from there to Norfolk via Greenspring (where his army fought on July 6, 1781) and Jamestown.

It had been a gala and festive occasion during his two-day visit to Yorktown, and in all of it the Nelson House was a busy place.[13] The news accounts of the time testify to this. On the day of his arrival, for example, the Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald reported on October 22nd and 25th:[14]

> At half past one, the Virginia anchored opposite the place of landing where a pontoon had been thrown out from the shore, the water not being of a depth sufficient to admit a boat within several yards of the beach. The place was designated by a flag staff, from which waved the American ensign -- On the height above, (nearly 100 feet above the beach) were stationed the Richmond Volunteer Artillery, under the command of Lieut. Richardson, and Capt Cooke's new Artillery Company from Portsmouth. About 200 yards to the right was the celebrated point of rock, on the elevated summit of which stood the British redoubt, stormed by the forces under La Fayette's command, in Oct. /17/81; on this occasion it was designated by an elegant triumphal arch, of which we shall speak again by and by-On the left of

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13. Robert D. Ward, An Account of General La Fayette's Visit to Virginia in the Years 1824-'25 (Richmond, Va., 1881), pp. 9-42.
14. Quoted in Brandon, Guest of the Nation, III, 54-58.

the Artillery, for a quarter of a mile, the heights were lined with groups of spectators, of both sexes; and, in the river below for nearly the same distance, rode at anchor a numerous fleet of small vessels, (we believe nearly a hundred sail,) their decks crowded with admiring spectators. At the place of landing stood the Governor, with the Executive Council of Virginia and the General Committee of Arrangements -- on their left was placed the superb barouche from Richmond, provided for the General; an elegant family carriage for his suite, and carriages for the conveyance of other distinguished individuals, civil and military -- beyond these a long procession of citizens on horseback and on foot was marshalled in excellent order, and lining the beach to a considerable distance. The whole scene as it was presented at the period of the steam boats, coming up to their anchorage, was in the highest degree animated and impressive -- wherever the eye turned, some object or other invited observation and excited interest.

At 2 o'clock, the illustrious Guest of the Nation was landed at York amidst the thunder of artillery from the heights and from several of the vessels in the river, the cheering strains of martial music, and the acclamations of the thousands of spectators on the heights and on the beach below. Those who did not witness the scene can form but a faint idea of it from description. As the General stepped upon Virginian ground the Governor received him with a warm and heartfelt welcome, which was responded to by the General in his usual brief but expressive manner.

With introductions over now came the procession to the Nelson House: The General was then handed to his barouche, accompanied by the Governor, the Chief Justice, and Mr. Calhoun; and the other carriages being filled, the whole moved on through a double row of citizens, who, as the carriages and those on horseback, passed along, successively filed in and following in procession, (the people all the way cheering, and testifying the most enthusiastic joy,) to the residence appointed for the General and his suite, (the venerable mansion of one of the branches of the Nelson family, and now in possession of Thomas Nelson, Esq. who politely gave it up to the Committee for the General's accommodation. During the siege it was several times pierced by the balls of the American cannon, the marks of which are now visible in its walls.) -- 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 and so great was the anxiety to have a good look at the General, and a hearty shake of his hand, that it was with great difficulty the marshals could persuade them (force would have been out of the question) to restrain their impatience but for a little while. In about half an hour, the General, attended by Major General Taylor, came out and passed through the guard to the gate. -- Instantly he was caught by the hand, first by one and then another with such rapidity and greediness (if the word may be allowed,) that had all his hairs been hands, the affection and joy of the multitude would have given employment to them all. The General was greatly affected -- many who pressed forward had something to say which reminded him that they had been the sharers of his toils and hardships in the glorious campaign of [17]81. It was obvious however that he could not stand these rough demonstrations of affectionate devotion from so large a multitude, and he was led back from the gate to the house, until the enthusiasm of the people could be gratified with a better regard to order and to the General's comfort. The reason of the General's retiring was then made known to them by General Taylor, and the marshals set about opening a passage just wide enough for one person to pass at a time along by the gate. The General then reappeared at the gate and shook them affectionately by the hand, as they severally came up and retired -- The scene, to a sensitive mind, was highly affecting -- most of those who took him by the hand were of the yeomanry of Virginia -- many of them fellow laborers with the good old General in the vineyard of independence. It was not the empty honor of taking a great man by the hand that they coveted; for rank, and titles, and distinction, are barely understood, much less worshipped by <u>the people</u> of Virginia -- but they acted from the impulse of hearts warmed towards him by the pure feelings of veneration and gratitude. Dearer -- far dearer to them was the simple act of taking by the hand the virtuous La Fayette, the champion of their liberties, and of the rights of man, than could be to the pious anchorite the relics of his patron saint. Such are the feelings which animate the independent yoemanry of our country, and constitute the best safeguard to the purity of our republican institutions.

On a beautiful lawn forming the summit of a lofty eminence, in front of the mansion house was pitched a spacious marquee, with a front of nearly 100 feet, surmounted by a large dome in the centre, at the top of which waved the "star spangled banner," and from the rear of which extended a wing about 50 feet

> in length. Under each of the wings were placed two rows of tables, and under the dome a circular one cut transversely through the centre in continuation of the passage between those under the wings. -- This splendid canopy was appointed for the dining place of the Guest and other distinguished personages, who repaired to it at five o'clock, and partook of a splendid entertainment, provided by Mr. Butler, from Richmond. In the evening the General visited the encampment which was illuminated in a most brilliant style, and thence returned to his lodgings, escorted by the Guard of Honor.
>
> The tent of Washington[15] was brought ashore from the Petersburg in the evening. This revered relic, had no sooner landed than a number of citizens volunteered to escort it in order of procession to the place where it was to be delivered to the Committee, and as a reward for their services the Committee deputed to them the honor of pitching it. -- It was pitched in the lawn at the back of the great marquee.

On the morning of the 19th: "Agreeably to the arrangement of the General Committee, a procession of the citizens was formed as on the preceding day, beginning at General La Fayette's quarters, extending up the street beyond West's House, and then turning to the right, in the direction of the Hampton road." After the events on the field Lafayette returned to his quarters in procession and under escort. "The lower rooms of the house were soon filled by a number of guests, who were invited to participate in the public dinner." Later, "A splendid dinner was given in the afternoon to the General, by the high dignitaries of the State in behalf of the volunteers, under the great marquee, in which all the civil and military officers and private citizens who have a part in the arrangements of the festival, participated." It seems of special note that "The indefatigable genius

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15. It was loaned for the occasion by George Washington Parke Custis. Brock, "The Nelson House," Magazine of Am. Hist., VII, 54.

of Mr. Warrell had prepared several elegant and appropriate transparent paintings, which decorated the front of the General's mansion,[16] and the interior of the marquee producing a fine effect."[17] At the banquet under the marquee on the 19th, it was later reported:

> and it may be a matter of curiosity to some persons to learn, that the lights set before General La Fayette were fine wax-candles, which had been discovered among the United States stores by Colonel Abram Eustis, and ascertained to have been found among the stores of Lord Cornwallis, captured forty three years before at Yorktown.[18]

On Friday, October 15, just prior to the celebration 21 members of "the General Committee, appointed to make arrangements for the reception of General La Fayette at York" was "held at Nelson's house, in York" with Col. Burwell Bassett chosen to preside and John Y. Mason serving as secretary. From this a local arrangements group was designated "to superintend the erection of necessary buildings and to prepare suitable accommodations for General Lafayette and the guests."[19]

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16. That at the Nelson House seemingly was the "one representing the Goddess of Liberty, who is showing a boy the words,'19th of October, 1781, and the names of Washington, La Fayette, and Nelson:' at her feet, is a small child playing with and regarding a crown as a toy." Ward, La Fayette's Visit to Virginia, p. 38.

17. Brandon, Lafayette: Guest of the Nation, III, 60-61; Ward, Lafayette's Visit, p. 32.

18. Ward, La Fayette's Visit, p. 32.

19. Ibid., pp. 19-21. The membership was Maj. Thomas Griffin, Maj. John Goodall, Capt. William McCandlish, Robert Anderson, and William Nelson, with Dr. John Carr of Williamsburg as treasurer.

The Lafayette visit to the Nelson House would be long remembered, even some of the incidents associated with it. Such was true even in John Austin Stevens' Yorktown Centennial Handbook quoted below:[20]

> The Nelson house was once more a scene of surpassing interest in 1824, when Lafayette, in his last visit to this country, made it his headquarters. Here he was entertained with old Virginian hospitality. On this occasion a curious incident occurred. In making the preparations for his reception, a box of candles, black with age, was discovered, marked Cornwallis' Stores, to the light of which the company danced till they were burned out. A few were preserved, some of which were presented to Colonel Nicholas Fish....Others will no doubt throw light on the approaching Centennial. The Nelson house, built of brick, the massive construction of which has enabled it to withstand the ravages of time, is still in the possession of the family, and will no doubt play an important part in the approaching ceremonies of the Centennial. A hole made by the cannon ball near the roof is still visible. The interior has been much defaced.

The Nelsons and the Nelson House and the Church

Bishop William Meade, writing near the mid-point of the nineteenth century and drawing on family papers, correspondence, church records, and recollections of older family members, has a good deal of comment about the religious and church inclinations of the Nelson family, especially President William and his wife, Elizabeth. Of Elizabeth, he relates that she had been educated religiously by her aunt of Rosewell, Mrs. Page:[21]

The committee proceedings were published as a broadside. A framed copy of it is in the Park collection, having been acquired with the Nelson House.

20. Published in New York, 1881, p. 101.

21. Meade, Old Churches, Ministers, and Families of Virginia, I, 205. "One of his /William's/ sons was burned to death, and another became an idiot by a fall from an upper story. These afflictions contributed to make Mrs. Nelson a woman of a sorrowful spirit.'" Ibid., I, 205-06.

> She was truly a pious and conscientious woman. The private and public exercises or religion, her well-known frequent prayers for her children and pious instruction of them, and exemplary conduct in all things, established this beyond all contradiction. Mrs. Nelson was not alone in her personal piety, nor in her wishes and endeavors for the religious welfare of her children. President Nelson performed his part most faithfully.[22]

William remained deeply concerned about the proper growth and development of his children. He, himself, being church oriented and a God-fearing man, hoped to see the same in his prodigy. Of important concern was his first born son, Thomas Nelson, Jr., who was placed under a local tutor to prepare him for later education in England:

> At the age of fourteen - sooner than was intended - he was sent thither. The circumstance which hastened his going was the following. On one Sunday afternoon, as his father was walking on the outskirts of the village of York, (for it was then but a village, and never much more,) he found him at play with some of the little negroes of the place. Feeling the evil of such associations, and the difficulty of preventing them he determined to send him at once to England, and, a vessel being ready to sail, he was dispatched the next day to the care of his friends /there./[23]

According to letters, "copies of which I have," Meade related that William evinced "deep anxiety for the improvement of his son in all things, but especially in morals and religion. He is evidently uneasy about the spirited character of his son, fearing it might lead him astray, and /he/ begs his friends to inform him if his son shows a disposition to idleness and pleasure." This concern continued and,

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22. Ibid., I, 206.
23. Ibid., I, 206.

even after seven years, he delayed his return to Virginia several months rather than have him come in a ship that would make him the companion of two other young Virginians "whose habits he feared were not good."

When he did arrive his father was glad to see him, but did not hestitate to make some observations:

> Mr. Nelson writes to his friends in England that he is much pleased with the general improvement of his son, but regrets to find that he has fallen into that bad practice, which most of the young Virginians going to England adopt, of smoking tobacco, - adding, emphatically, 'filthy tobacco;' also that 'of eating and drinking, though not to inebriety, more than was conducive to health and long life.' Still, he was rejoiced to see him, such as he was, with good principles.[24]

If we accept the evaluation of the Rev. John Camm, long-time minister at the Yorktown Church and sometime president of the College of William and Mary, then William Nelson was a good citizen and mindful of his obligations to his community and fellow citizens.[25] He remained "constant in his attendance at the ordinary service of God and the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and in exhibiting unaffected and fervent devotion."[26] It is said, too, that "On Church-Sundays he always had a large dinner prepared, to which rich and poor were indiscriminately invited: since for some the distance to Yorktown to

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24. Ibid., I, 207.

25. This is deduced from a printed sermon of Camm at the occasion of William's death, from which Meade quotes at some length (ibid., I, 208-09). Meade also had available, he reported, a copy of a brief manuscript biography of Thomas Nelson, Jr., written by Judge Tucker.

26. Ibid., I, 208-09. "His charities were many, and dispensed with choice and discretion, and so as to be most serviceable to the receivers and the least oppressive to their modesty. As one of the

attend service was a long and time-consuming one for the transportation then available.

It is not clear just how devoted a churchman Thomas Nelson, Jr., was as the records are sparse in this area; however, Meade finds no question about his moral fiber. In the case of Hugh Nelson (William's son and Thomas' brother), who inherited his father's residence while Thomas received that of his grandfather, there were close church ties. "He followed the example of his father's piety, and was a kind of lay preacher to the families in York, especially to those of his own name." This was in that period when the Episcopal Church was having very lean days due to its disestablishment, the rise of other churches, and a general loss of support following the Revolution. Of Hugh Nelson, it is said:

> Besides reading the service and sermon in the church every Sunday in the absence of the minister, and every Sunday when there was no minister, as was often the case after the war, he acted as minister in preparing the candidates for the first confirmation ever held in York, soon after Bishop Madison's return from England with Episcopal confirmation. On the morning of the confirmation he assembled them all in the large parlor or hall at the old house in York, and addressed them on the nature of the rite.[27]

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first and most respected merchants in this dominion, he had great opportunity of being acquainted with the circumstances of many people whose cases otherwise would have escaped his knowledge. This knowledge was often turned to their advantage whose affairs fell under his consideration....He was an instance of what abundance of good may be done by a prudent and conscientious man without impoverishing himself or his connections,-nay, while his fortunes were improving."

27. Ibid., I, 212.

Likely the "old house in York" mentioned here was the home of Hugh Nelson which had been built by his father William. This stood directly across the street from that built by Thomas Nelson, the emigrant. It, however, as did York Church, burned in the "great" Yorktown fire of 1814, while the older Nelson home survived as it still does. It would have been in this latter home that occasional church services were held in the absence of a church structure. This is noted, as in the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia journals in 1824 when Bishop Richard Channing Moore visited Yorktown and "preached in the courthouse in the morning and at Mr. Nelson's house in the afternoon."[28] This likely went on for some time as York Church (now Grace Church) was in ruins from 1814 until 1848.

Lossing Visits the Nelson House in 1848

It was at twilight on December 20, 1848, that Benson J. Lossing arrived in Yorktown while on a data collecting trip for his Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution.[29] He "passed the night at the only inn in the place /Swan Tavern/ which is owned by William Nelson, Esq., grandson of Gôvernor Thomas Nelson." As a matter of fact they dined together "upon far-famed York River oysters just brought from their cozy bed" and did not part company until midnight. "Mr. Nelson resides in the fine old mansion which belonged to his grandfather, and which yet bears marks of the iron hail poured upon it during the

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28. As related by Charles E. Hatch, Jr., "Grace Church (Formerly York Church, York-Hampton Parish): A Chapter of Church History," manuscript report in preparation, p. 18.
29. Published in New York in 2 vols., 1860; II, 301.

siege of Yorktown." Lossing with William Nelson, "in his carriage," later toured the area, visiting "the several localities which make Yorktown historically famous." Lossing was very grateful for this aid. "To the kindness and intelligence of that gentleman," he said, "I am indebted for much of the pleasure and profit of my visit there."

Lossing's last stop before departing for Hampton on the afternoon of the 21st was at the Nelson House. He commented on this building as well as on the ruins of another Nelson house across the street:

> From the field of humiliation /surrender/ we /Lossing and Nelson/ rode back to the village, and after visiting the remains of the elegant dwelling of President Nelson,[30] which was situated near that of the governor, within the British lines, I passed an hour in the venerated mansion of Governor Nelson. It was erected by the first emigrant Nelson ("Scotch Tom"), and of imported bricks. Among other relics of the past, I saw upon the walls the mutilated portraits of President Nelson and his lady, the parents of the governor. They were thus injured by the British when they rifled his house at Hanover, whither he had taken his family and furniture for security.[31]

Another interesting observation of Lossing had to do with a tree on the premises and Lafayette's visit a quarter century before:

> A few feet from the door of Mr. Nelson's dwelling is a fine laurel-tree.[32] On the occasion of La Fayette's visit to Yorktown in 1824, a large concourse of people were assembled, branches were taken from this laurel-tree, woven into a civic crown, and placed upon the head of the venerable marquis. He took it from his brow, and placing it upon that of Colonel Nicholas Fish of the Revolution, who accompanied him, remarked that no one was better entitled to wear the mark of honor than he.[33]

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30. This had burned in the fire of 1814.
31. Lossing, p. 324.
32. On Charles F. Gillette's Ground Plan for "York Hall, Yorktown, Va." (Plan 56-21a) a "Lafayette Tree" is shown just to left of the steps as one enters from the front, but now the tree is gone, likely the result of earth disturbances in the area. Copy of plan in files of Colonial NHP.
33. Lossing, p. 315.

The Nelson House in 1854:

The author of an article in Putnam's Magazine, "Yorktown in 1854,"[34] penned his account of the town and siege after a visit to the area. While there he saw the General Nelson House, then "occupied by the estimable widow /Martha Nelson/ of the grandson of Governor Nelson." He did, however, have its identity confused[35] though he assumed that Cornwallis moved here after he had been bombed out of his first headquarters. He was impressed with the shell damaged to this house which he detailed:

> Cornwallis, after seeing his servant killed, was driven futher into town, to another mansion belonging to the Nelsons, although the American shot still pursued him. The house is of bricks, and the marks of several balls are still to be seen; one shot penetrated the southeast corner, went through the wall, entered the dinning room, tore off a couple of panels of the wainscoting, and spent its force against the marble mantel, which it shattered to pieces. Three other cannon shots have left their marks, all on the eastern gable end. Two of them went through the wall, the hole made by one of these is still open; a third stuck half way.

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34. Vol. IV, No. XIX (July 1854), p. 40.

35. He assumed that the Secretary Nelson Home on the east end of town had been that of the Governor. Of this he wrote: "In a conspicuous angle of these works may be seen the foundation and ruins of the costly mansion of the patriotic Governor Nelson who commanded the Virginia militia at the Siege. Justly supposing that his house would be the most convenient spot for Cornwallis's headquarters, the Governor, with rare disinterestedness, offered the American gunners a guinea a-piece for every shot which should hit his own house - a promise which it is said he scrupulously redeemed. Under such incentives it was, of course, soon a heap of ruins."

Thomas Nelson Page and the Nelson House - 1881

Thomas Nelson Page wrote feelingly of the Nelson House and Rosewell mansions and the Nelsons and the Pages, from whom he was descended through much intermarriage of the two families.[36] This was in what might be called a Yorktown Centennial feature story which appeared in October 1881 in a copyrighted article in Scribner's Monthly: An Illustrated Magazine for the People.[37] In so doing he described the old Nelson home on Lot 52 as he saw and knew it at the time:

> Scotch Tom's dwelling, known as the "Nelson House," still stands, with its lofty chimneys and solid walls - towering among the surrounding buildings; an enduring preeminence which would probably have gratified the pride which tradition says moved him to have the corner-stone passed through the hands of his infant heir. The massive door and small windows with the solid shutters,[38] look as if the house had been constructed more with a view to defense

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36. Thomas Nelson Page was the sone of John Page of Oakland in Hanover and of Elizabeth Burwell, daughter of Capt. Thomas Nelson of the same place. This John Page was the grandson (through Francis Page and General Nelson's daughter, Susan) of Gov. John Page of Rosewell in Gloucester County. Capt. Thomas Nelson, who married Judith Nelson his cousin, had been the oldest son of Col. Hugh Nelson of Yorktown and his wife Judith Page, daughter of John Page of North End in Gloucester County (now Mathews.) Judith Nelson was the youngest child of General Thomas Nelson, Jr., and his wife Lucy Grymes. General Nelson and Col. Hugh Nelson were both of Yorktown and brothers, sons of President William Nelson. Judith Nelson, it might be noted, was one of General Nelson's family of eleven children, five of whom married sons and daughters of Governor John Page of Rosewell and two others children of John Page of North End. Page, Genealogy of the Page Family, pp. 78-88, 160-73, 181-82.

37. Published by The Century Company; XXII, 801-16. Illustrations for the story were by R. Blum, J.H. Pennell and F.H. Lungren. One of them has good detail of the Nelson House.

38. There is no evidence of shutters in the accompanying illustration, an engraving done in some detail.

> than to architectural grace. Within, everything is antique; modern paint has recently, with doubtful success, if not propriety, attempted to freshen up the old English wainscoting;[39] but the old-time air of the place cannot be banished.[40]

At this point the author begins to reminisce and to let his romantic fancy play. He does, however, create a word picture that seems useful here:

> Memory grows busy as she walks through the lofty rooms and recalls the scenes they have witnessed. Here, in "ye olden tyme," dwelt a race which grew to wealth and power noted even in that age, when the mere lapse of years, opening up the broad wild lands to the westward, and multiplying the slaves, doubled and quadrupled their possessions without care of thought of the owners. Here have been held receptions at which have gathered Grymeses, Digges, Lees, Carters, Randolphs, Burwells, Pages, Byrds, Spottswoods, Harrisons, and all the gay gentry of the Old Dominion. Up the circular stone steps,[41] where now the dust of the street lies thick, blushing, laughing girls have tripped, followed by stately mammas over whose precious heads the old-time "canopies" were held by careful young lovers, or lordly squires whose names were to become as imperishable as the great Declaration they subscribed.[42]

And there is more, some of it of a substantive nature:

> Coming down to a later period, a more historical interest attaches itself to the mansion. George Mason and Washington and Jefferson have slept here;[43] Cornwallis established his head-quarters here during the last days of the great siege, when his first head-quarters, Secretary Nelson's house, had been shelled to pieces. Lafayette, no longer the boyish

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39. Likely this was prompted by the Yorktown Centennial Celebration of 1881.

40. Scribners Monthly, XXII, 803-04.

41. These are still at the front, Main Street door, of the house. The accompaning sketch of the house also shows a low brick wall and an opening through it with enclosed steps down to the street level.

42. Ibid, 804-05.

43. No documentation for this has been seen.

> adventurer with a mind wild with romantic dreams of the Cid, and chased like a fugitive by his sovereign, but the honored and revered guest of a mighty nation, returning in his old age to witness the greatness of the New World toward which his valor had so much contributed, slept here and added another to the many associations which already surrounded the mansion.[44]

Some Early Efforts Toward Saving the House[45]

After the Yorktown Monument to the Alliance and Victory was pronounced complete in January 1885, for some time an Army enlisted man was detailed as "Keeper" of the shaft and its grounds. Efforts looking toward the establishment of a regular position of watchman were unsuccessful as were moves to construct quarters for the purpose. The matter was before Congress on several occasions in the late 1880s. A House of Representatives bill, introduced on January 10, 1887, would have, had it passed, led to the purchase of the Nelson House for a sum not exceeding $5,000 for "the use of the keeper of the Yorktown Monument." This likely was not out of context with the preservation of local landmarks and Yorktown park ideas that had grown, in some quarters, out of 1881 Centennial Celebration affairs.

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44. Scribners Monthly, XXII, 805.

45. Much of this is drawn from pages 8-13 of a manuscript paper, "The Evolution of the Concept of Colonial National Historical Park; A Chapter in the Story of Historical Conservation," by Charles E. Hatch, Jr., dated July 28, 1964. It is intended as Chapter I of the Park's History.

Actually the park idea of 1882, despite defeat, remained a hope. In June 1890 an official party made up of members of Congress, representatives of the Carpenters' Association of Philadelphia, and others journeyed to Yorktown to inspect the completed Monument. The group also took "into consideration the subject of acquiring the Moore and Nelson mansions at Yorktown with the grounds thereto attached." The committee that dealt with the matter considered that it could not "recommend too strongly the securing of this historic spot by the general government." Mention was made of the earlier New Jersey action. In October 1890 the Carpenters Company of Philadelphia fully supported this position, emphasizing that "the Government should secure the Temple farm and the historic Moore House to be preserved and placed in charge of an official to take care of the property and pay proper attention to visitors." But this and related actions were not destined for passage in this period.

It is of interest to this study, perhaps, that there was an unsuccessful House measure in 1894 to purchase the Nelson House. Some of the language of this bill, however, showed the growing awareness of the need for conservation. It described the residence as being "a solid brick structure . . . still in a good state of preservation" and closely associated with the Yorktown Battlefield, General Thomas Nelson ("one of the central figures in the final act of the drama which closed the struggle for American independence on that historic field"), the 1781 bombardment, its occupancy by

British officers and its association, in 1824, with the Marquis de Lafayette. It was carefully pointed out that:

> 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.[46]

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46. Quoted from House Resolution No. 5546.

Chapter IX

The Nelson House Restoration and "York Hall"

Captain George Preston Blow, a native of Norfolk, Virginia, and a United States Navy veteran, but then of La Salle, Illinois, and his wife Adele Matthiessen Blow acquired the Nelson House in 1914 and set about the business of "renovating /and/ restoring" the old home. It was their plan to retire here. The first move was in October 1914 in the acquisition of Lot 52, "the Nelson House Lot" which embraced "the mansion house and out buildings and the yards in front and back."[1]

The Nelson home would become the focal point of an estate inclusive of various properties, some not enjoyed by Thomas Nelson, the Emigrant, or by his grandson, Thomas Nelson, Jr., including houses and areas where other Nelsons and Nelson neighbors lived. This Blow estate would carry the name York Hall and include a guest home (the Edmund Smith House) and a gardener's cottage (the Ballard property), plus new features opening on Read Street, such as a cottage, carriage house, maintenance facilities, tennis courts, hot house, a swimming pool, and a formal

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1. YCR, Deed Book No. 34, p. 401; A "Nelson House..(York Hall)" fact sheet compiled in the early 1960s, likely by Mrs. George Waller Blow (copy in files of Colonial NHP); manuscript letter (with a brief account of the restoration) from M.F. Gallagher (Chicago, Ill.) to Mr. George W. Blow (then of New York), and Mrs. Wayne Chatfield Taylor (Lake Forest, Ill.), dated June 30, 1931 (in files of Colonial NHP). The Blow purchase in 1914 was from R.A. Lancaster, Jr., of Richmond, the agent who "held the said Nelson House" for "Messrs A.A. Blow and Thomas P. Bryan." Lancaster had actually purchased the house and lot from members of the Nelson family, a family where ownership had remained since 1706. This was done in three deeds (October and December 1908 and April 1909) for the aggregate sum of $3,100.00 Deed Book, No. 29, pp. 513, 515, 516.

garden. The estate development would be continued and perfected by George Waller Blow (son of Captain Blow) and his wife Catherine.[2]

The major part of the architectural work (restoration) of the Nelson House and other structures was done by Percy Griffin of the firm of Griffin & Wynkoop of New York, and the landscaping and grounds development was by the plans of Charles F. Gillette of Richmond.

As reported in a feature story in the December 1921 issue of The Architectural Forum:[3]

> Like many other old southern houses York Hall fell into semi-ruin and decay until it was purchased and restored by Captain George P. Blow, whose home it now is. The restoration has been carried out with the utmost care to preserve the eighteenth century character of the house; parts which it was necessary to restore were studied from other parts still in place and woodwork was worked to agree with that originally used.[4]

On the interior most rooms are paneled from floor to ceiling.[5] The paneling is made from Virginia pine and during the restoration

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2. The basic part of "York Hall," though there were other Blow holdings of considerable extent, involved seven town lots, acquisitions that took a little time. Lots 48, 49, and 50 ("three lots known as the Nelson House garden lots") were purchased by Captain Blow from Nelson heirs in March 1915; the old Smith House and lot (No. 53) was added, part in February 1915 and part in March 1917; Lot 54 (the colonial Ballard Home lot) came in 1919 (but subject to a life interest); and Lot 55 was added in 1920. Deed Book, No. 34, pp. 117, 243; No. 35, p. 387; No. 36, p. 337; and No. 37, p. 79.

3. Rogers and Mason Company, Publishers, pp. 211-20. The Griffin and Wynkoop location was 30 Church Street, New York City.

4. The Architectural Forum account was entitled "Restoration of a Southern Colonial Estate: 'York Hall,' the Residence of Capt. George P. Blow, Yorktown, Va.: Griffin and Wynkoop, Architects." It is well illustrated with photographs (some before and some after), floor plans, architectural detail drawing, and the like.

5. An exception for a principal room is the second floor hall where the ends are paneled and the sidewalls are in plaster.

it was all removed and fumigated and stripped of its layers of paint to reveal a heart pine that had aged to a red tone suggestive of rosewood, or mahogany. It was seen from the paint layers that there was originally "a definite color scheme for each room,[6] and curiously enough the successive coats of paint showed that the original color schemes had been adhered to in previous periods of redecorating."[7] Paint colors were reproduced as carefully as possible. "They are toned colors, purposely aged in appearance." Of particular note was the black and red of the study.[8]

"All of the paneling and all of the wide boards in the floors of the Nelson House are original. The only substitutions are the marble-tiled entrance hall where the boards, irreplaceable at the time . . . were too worn to use and served to repair other floors."[9] The stairway

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6. As lavender and old rose on the dining room walls, yellow and white in the drawing room, black and red in the study and bedrooms of blue-gray, green and blue and brown.

7. Architectural Forum, p. 216.

8. "The wood was first given a slightly yellowish ground with paint and over this black and chinese red in their respective positions were wiped on and rubbed down, the red being the secondary color and applied to the bevel of panels and parts of mouldings. All surfaces were then stippled with a purple glaze and dusted. This produced a very mellow and aged effect, the wiping of color leaving the recesses of mouldings and slight imperfections in the wood darker in tone than flat and round surfaces. The appearance of the walls, however, is not in the least "painty;" the colors are put on in thin mediums and the wiping and rubbing afforded an opportunity of sensing the texture of the wood beneath the colored surface. The yellow ground shows through the other colors, harmonizing them with the black and gold marble mantel facing." Architectural Forum, pp. 216-19.

9. "Nelson House..(York Hall)" fact sheet.

"was restored from a few remaining balusters and a section of handrail together with the mortise holes in the old treads."[10] By additional report[11] the replacement of "the bannister, was made possible by the finding of a section of railing in the great beamed attic. The lowest step of the stairs was intact to indicated the swing of the bannister and the position of the newel post which carries an ivory button, testimony to the world that the contractor has been paid in full."

Another interesting repair that the house had seen earlier was "the closing of the circular holes cut in the doors for ventilation when the home was a hospital" in the Civil War. "Whether the cutout circles were found in the attic along with the bannister section or whether they were replaced by Virginia craftsmen is not certain. Possibly a bit of each."[12] An interesting touch in the restoration was the attention to shell damage here and there even to the resetting in war-torn niches of several cannon balls in the east fact of the building. At a couple of points, too, visual access was provided to

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10. Architectural Forum, p. 213. According to Thomas T. Waterman: "The stair ascends in three flights, an initial long run against the west wall, a short cross run on the south wall, and a final run on the east wall. The stair treads, risers, and stringers are original, the balusters and hand rails being reproductions of the old. It is exceptionally broad and easy and has a particularly fine terminal scroll." The Mansions of Virginia, 1706-1776 (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1946), pp. 172-73.

11. Brief account with Gallagher letter (1931).

12. "Nelson House..(York Hall) fact sheet." The fact sheet, also, has the account that "there is /Was/ an old newspaper drawing of the house as a hospital, the gift of Judge and Mrs. Conway Sheild who live across the way in the oldest house in Yorktown." And they still do.

shell-fire scars on the inside.[13]

Initially the roof was covered with wood shingles. However, "Mr. Blow substituted slate, which proved to be not quite what was wanted." Recently /as of 1931/ it was removed and shingles of concrete asbestos were installed. These shingles, besides being practical, have the added advantage of looking almost identical to old wood.[14]

In the restoration there were a number of changes in the house to adapt it to the kind of estate living the Blows sought, particularly in regard to space and orientation. This is evident from before and after photographs and from written accounts and plans.

1. The Nelsons did not have a dormered home, a truly functional third floor in their house. By adding four large dormers on each of the two slopes of the roof, however, the Nelson garret became space for living was so equipped. A new connecting stairway from the second floor was added. This wrought considerable change in the second floor south corner room.
2. The simple doorway on the northwest side of the house was redesigned,[15] in close conformity with the detail of the

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13. Clyde F. Trudell, Colonial Yorktown: Being a Brief Historie of the Place; Together with Something of Its Houses and Public Buildings (Richmond, 1938), p. 129.

14. Brief account with Gallagher letter (1931).

15. The doorway "on the west elevation is modern and existed formerly as an untrimmed opening." Waterman, The Mansions of Virginia, p. 168.

structure, to give it prominence from the formal garden which was created on adjacent Lot 48.[16]

3. The cellar, or basement, seemingly not much used by the Nelsons in the historic period except for wine and other storage, was adapted to kitchen and kitchen living purposes by the Blows. This resulted too in altering the south corner room of the first floor to serving room purposes with food coming up on a special lift provided for this.

4. Additional space was added to the entrance way on the southwest side of the house, an entrance likely not a part of the house before the nineteenth century judging by insurance policies and a mid-1860s engraving of the rear of the house. As Waterman comments: "The rear wall of the mansion, overlooking a walled entrance court, is now the main front of the house, but the symmetry of the four openings is disturbed by a vestibule built against the hall door."[17] Edith Tunis Sale has also offered comment on this detail. "In a way, the entrance might be called a porch chamber, as it meets such a need by having brick walls with an archway and no windows, but in the restoration of the house a second arch was cut and windows added."[18]

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16. When complete the "restored garden" was described as "a formal arrangement after one at Groombridge" in Kent, England, which Captain and Mrs. Blow visited and photographed. Brief account with Gallagher letter (1931).

17. Waterman, The Mansions of Virginia, p. 172.

18. Interior of Virginia Houses in Colonial Times, p. 90.

5. By report of Thomas Waterman, the restoration of the house saw the replacement of all the mantels in the home. He commented:

> The marble mantel /in the dining room, the room so used by the Blow family/[19] with piers and frieze, is a copy of the original. This is true of all others in the house, the new ones taking the place of slightly damaged originals. Like those at Rosewell, the fireplaces here have corner jambs and smoke channels, and are apparently rebuildings of the originals.[20]

6. Edith Sale also makes this comment: "The small chamber leading to the secret stairway of Colonial days was sacrificed for domestic purposes in the restoration....though the stair was removed, the panel in this room /dining room/ which gave access to it may still be seen."[21]

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19. There is nothing in the record that has been seen that gives indication of what specific rooms were used for what purposes by the Nelsons in colonial times. There are, however, room names in the 1789 inventory (see Appendix A). These are: "Dineing Room," "The passage","The Drawing Room," "The Chamber," "The Back Parlour," "The Chintz Room," "Room over the Dining Room," "Room over the Drawing Room," "Room over the Chamber," and "The Passage up Stairs." There was a listing too of contents for the kitchen, the stable, and the store.

20. Mansions of Virginia, p. 173.

21. Ibid., p. 27. There is also reference to this "hidden stairway leading to the garret" in Robert A. Lancaster, Historic Virginia Homes and Churches (Philadelphia, 1915), p. 27. This would have been before the restoration. There is an undocumented label, of Blow Family origin, behind the dining room panel today that reads: "These hinged panels gave access to concealed storage space between the walls where silver and valuables could be hidden in time of emergency. It was large enough for several people to remain comfortable within if necessary and communicate with a small circular stairway leading to the attic, later remodeled for a service stair."

7. In developing plans for the grounds, it was decided to shift the entrance through the brick wall in front of the house, down street a bit to the northwest, as reported: "The entrance from the street is being closed and a still pool arranged in the center of the space to reflect the old doorway, the foliage and the sky."[22]

   This arrangement relegated the Main Street entrance (the principal entry-way to the house in earlier times) to one largely for private use.

8. Seemingly in the 19th century a section of relatively low brick wall was constructed along the Main Street edge of the front court of the house, replacing, or on line with, an older fence and gate of wood. At the time of restoration the then-existing wall was embodied in the higher wall with which Mr. Blow encompassed most of the area of the "York Hall" basic acreage.

Despite these changes and the introduction of modern conveniences (electricity, central heating, plumbing and the like) architectural comment generally concludes that it was all done with feeling, respect, and the employment of the best restoration practices current at the

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22. The Architectural Forum, pp. 220, 217. This was written, or published, in December, 1921, at which time other plans were still projected: "One or two accessary or service buildings, such as a garage and chauffeur's cottage which are necessary for present day use, have been planned in the spirit of the older fisherman's cottages in the neighborhood." Already the Smith House had become a guest house, there was a stable, and the "Gardiner's Cottage" /"Wisteria Cottage"/ "Modeled on Lines of Old Local Fisherman's Cottage."

time. Perhaps Sale summarized the essence of the restoration when she said,[23] "there was much repairing to be done, and so well was this accomplished that the house still remains a splendid example of the Colonial builder's art and one feels the splendor of its brightest days within the panelled walls of the spacious rooms." The same author also left another pleasant word picture of interest here:

> Yorktown has changed, is changing daily, but the old Nelson House remains much the same. It has seen a meadow transformed into a thriving little city: it witnessed the climax of the war drama of Seventeen-seventy-six and it still exists on to prove to twentieth century iconoclasts the great charm of the true Colonial house.

It should be noted that the record of the Nelson House restoration, while not voluminous, is helpful to understanding in some areas. The Blow family made available a variety of blue prints and plans concerning the Nelson House and some other units in the Estate.[24] A large number of them are best described, perhaps, as operations plans. Conditions before the restoration, especially in regard to the Nelson House, exterior and interior, were documented photographically in some

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23. Interiors of Virginia Houses in Colonial Times, pp. 94-95. Though this is but a passing note recorded by Rosewell Page, it seems appropriate to include it here. Captain and Mrs. George Blow "were the owners of the Nelson House or York Hall for a good many years. At the death of Mrs. Blow in 1929 she bequeathed the property to her children with the request that they endow it to be used as a historic shrine, open to the public for a small remuneration, except for two months in the year when the family is in residence." Susanne Williams Massie and Frances Archer Christian, Homes and Gardens of Virginia (Richmond, 1931), p. 95.

24. The Historic American Buildings Survey record of this structure is limited to 12 photographs made in 1934, 1937, and 1938.

forty views. These have been arranged and preserved in several large size family albums. All were made available for photocopy and a small number of them have been included as illustrations in this report.[25]

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25. Both blue prints and copy negatives are now a part of the Colonial NHP files. It should be mentioned, also, that some of the old views included in the albums will be helpful in the study of other buildings and features, in the Yorktown area (see Park Photograph Number Sequence 16,500-16,603).

Chapter X

The Nelson House Architecture

There has been a generous use of superlatives in describing the Nelson House both for its architectural mass and detail and its history. On both counts it seems to have a secure niche. As quoted in a National Geographic story, "history and architecture make this one of Virginia's most noted homes."[1] Thomas T. Waterman saw it as "a suberb Virginia house"[2] and Clyde F. Trudell wrote that it is "One of the best examples of Georgian architecture in all Virginia."[3] A. Lawrence Kocher and Howard Dearstyne viewed it as a place of "considerable historical significance" and "notable as a town dwelling of fair size and excellent details. It is built of a pale-red brick with angle quoins and key blocks above the windows of Acquia Creek stone."[4]

As reported in Architecture in Virginia:

> This sturdy house, with its segmental headed windows, its quoins, its pedimented gables and strongly dentiled cornice, seems to have survived very well indeed the 'disorders and confusions' of the various wars that have eddied about Yorktown. Its interior, with its central hall /is/ not quite on axis.... The paneling is among the most interesting in Virginia.

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1. Howell Walker, "History Keeps House in Virginia" (issue of April 1956), pp. 447-48. Combining "beauty and history," the "Georgian Mansion," it was noted in conclusion, was "Virginia's most famous Revolutionary home," having "solidly defied time and three wars" and stood "broad, substantial, masculine."
2. The Mansions of Virginia, pp. 168, 406.
3. Colonial Yorktown, p. 135. There was similar expression by Emmie F. Farrar in 1957: "One of the finest examples of Georgian architecture in Virginia, /the Nelson House/ is a famous shrine." Old Virginia Houses Along the James (New York, 1957), p. 215.
4. Shadows in Silver: A Record of Virginia, 1850-1900 in Contemporary Photographs (New York, 1954), pp. 23,40.

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> Although there is a slight provincialism about the proportions of the Nelson House, its excellent preservation and its forthrightness give it a splendid independence.[5]

Actually the house is not as large as a first impression, or a photograph might suggest. Much of this is due "to the extremely large scale employed in the design and in the execution of detail." Also,

> There is a consistency in the scale throughout and the very happy relation of parts produces a domestic effect in spite of the boldness of execution. The same vigorous handling is noted on the interior, the first floor rooms are 12 feet high and the windows, which are given vertical prominence by the use of pilasters or special paneling, are 7 feet high. The interior doors on the other hand are only 7 feet high, which tends to emphasize the largeness of the scale.[6]

Various students of architecture have seen a kinship in many of the old Virginia homes of which the Nelson House is one. It often is used in comparisons. Such is inherent in various observations of Thomas T. Waterman, for example:

> The difference in scale between Rosewell and the Nelson House is profound, but the work of the same hand is seen in both. Rosewell is tall, exquisitely fashioned, feminine; Nelson House is broad, substantial, and masculine. A comparison of the window heads will illustrate this contrast. In Nelson House the heavy sashes and cornice, the latter with big, closely spaced modillions, bear out this scale, as do the superb chimney stacks with richly moulded caps and steep weatherings similar to those of Carter's Grove. Useful dormers, installed at the time of the reconditioning of the house in 1920, detract from the original intent of the design.[7]

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5. William B. O'Neil, An Official Guide to Four Centuries of Building in the Old Dominion, published for the Virginia Museum (New York, c. 1968), p. 63.

6. The Architectural Forum, p. 213.

7. Mansions of Virginia, p. 172. Waterman (p. 408) views the Nelson House and Berkeley as being unique examples of early "Virginia pediment-roof houses."

There is other comment on the chimneys: "The great chimney stacks /of Carter's Grove/ are another noteworthy element in the design. The moulded brick caps, with those of the Nelson House, Yorktown, are undoubtedly the finest in Virginia."[8]

Waterman writes further that the "Nelson House, except for the four-bay south elevation, is almost the counterpart of Berkeley, and possesses a generally superior and more monumental architecture."[9] He considers it fortunate that "a superb Virginia home of the type and size of Berkeley remains complete with its woodwork. This is the Nelson House."[10]

The woodwork within the house has drawn much comment as from the architects who reconditioned it when the house was restored.[11]

> There is a remarkable dignity about the old paneling and it can be ascribed to the pleasing proportions of the wall dimensions and the extreme simplicity of the mouldings. The typical panel mould is a simple, flat quarter-round made of the rails and stiles, and the panels themselves have their edges beveled to give them prominence....Mouldings throughout were necessarily worked by hand and show many departures from the strictly accurate form to which we are accustomed....Several of the paneled rooms are arranged with pilasters supporting the entablature and the curiously fashioned capitals of the pilasters in the dining room are said to have been made by slave workmen from someone's meager description of the Corinthian capitals of Christopher Wren or Inigo Jones.

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8. Waterman and John A. Barrows, Domestic Colonial Architecture of Tidewater Virginia (New York, 1932), p. 101.
9. "It has richer detail such as stone corner quoins, window sills, and keystones, a fine gauged-brick balustrade-type water table (as seen at Rosewell), deep flat window arches and segmental saffits, and a gauged belt course and fine pedimented doorway." (Waterman, Mansions of Virginia, p. 168.
10. Mansions of Virginia, p. 168
11. The Architectural Forum, pp. 213-14.

Waterman, too, notes the peculiarities of the "pseudo-Corinthian order" here, but concludes that "The resulting effect is much a pilaster treatment, but it has novelty and considerable grace in spite of the fact that the proportions and detail are not particulary good. The capitals have single bands of tall acanthus leaves. The windows, doors and mantels are framed by the orders." He comments, too, that "The northwest room is also paneled to the ceiling and has fluted pilasters marking the window and door openings and the mantel. The order was apparently Doric, but the capitals have been removed."[12]

The Nelson House floor plan is perhaps typical, certainly not uncommon for the period, though it has elements of departure from the customary. It full-length central hall is off axis:

> There are two rooms on the east side with a lobby and service stair between them, and two square rooms to the west. These latter have an entry between them, in the thickness of the chimney wall. This was probably a pantry, for the kitchen that stood farther to the west. The second floor repeats the first except that space for a stair to the attic is borrowed from the east rooms.[13]

The bricks and brickwork of the building are interesting. As described by the restorers of the house:

> The bricks are larger than modern brick measuring 9 inches long, 4-½ inches wide and 2 5/8 inches thick. They are a dull brownish red that approaches a rose color. The bond is Flemish with headers having a dull blue glaze through which the red body of the brick shows. The gray mortar joints measure about 1/8 inch in thickness. Smaller bricks with smooth texture and thin joints gave decoration about the doors and windows and were used in the pilaster at the main entrance.[14]

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12. Waterman, Mansions of Virginia, p. 172-73.
13. Ibid, p. 172.
14. The Architectural Forum, p. 212.

The massive brick chimney stacks are a notable feature. "At the Nelson House a much more conventional profile is found /than at Stratford/, but as fine as the correct and beautifully worked caps at Carter's Grove."[15] The "classic doorways were executed in brick" being exceptional in the early part of the eighteenth century.[16] The use of stone prominently for quoins and in window keys also ranks an early appearance. Waterman and Barrow note that: "At the Nelson House . . . stone keys are again employed and quoins are first used at the corners."[17]

"Although the Governor's Palace must have inspired wealthy planters to new ideas in housing themselves, no other house is known to have been designed from it" wrote Thomas T. Waterman some twenty years ago.[18] But he saw a kinship in design and execution of many of the mansions of the period,[19] sensing the same architects and builders working from the same style books. This was especially true of "that great group of early houses built for the Carter and allied families." He saw, too, in his view, that "the buildings have

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15. Waterman, Mansions of Virginia, p. 96.

16. Fiske Kimball, Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and the Early Republic (New York, 1922), p. 67. Among others that Kimball notes are Stratford, Christ Church, and, later, Carter's Grove.

17. Domestic Colonial Architecture of Tidewater Virginia, p. 11.

18. The Mansions of Virginia, p. 103. It "initiated a period of mansion building unequalled in the history of England's Colonies.... the great Virginia landowners soon sought to build houses becoming their estate." H.O. Eberlein and C. Van Dyke Hubbard, American Georgian Architecture (London, 1952), p. 14.

19. Berkeley, Sabine Hall, Rosewell, Nomini Hall, Cleve, Carters Grove, Elsing Green, Westover, Wilton, Powhatan, Wythe House, and Nelson House.

not only a definite English quality but also a definite county quality, which is Shropshire." They also show the mark of English architectural publications of this time. One was William Salmon's Palladio Londinensis, or the London Art of Building. Salmon was a builder of Essex. Waterman makes a case, too, for the relationship of the off-axis floor plan to that of the Queensferry House[20] in London illustrated in Leoni's Designs for Buildings. This was an expression that came to be central in a number of the old Virginia homes.[21] Thus, in architectural terms, as well as in history, the Nelson House keeps very good company. This was recognized even in 1881 when R.A. Brock wrote:

> the historic building at Yorktown known as the Nelson House, would arrest attention as a memorable object, did not its impressive association with the decisive event of the American Revolution invest it with a more significant interest.[22]

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20. Mansions of Virginia, pp. 107, 109, 172, 406.
21. As Westover, Nomini Hall, Nelson House, Wilton, Elsing Green.
22. "The Nelson House," Mag. of Am. Hist., VII, p. 47.

Appendix A

Inventory of the Thomas Nelson, Jr., Home-1789

APPRAISEMENT [1] of the Estate of General Thomas Nelson deceased in York County, June the second one thousand seven hundred and Eighty nine.

DINEING ROOM

		£. S. P.
1	Dozen green Windsor Chairs	4/16/
2	Mahogany Dineing Tables	11/ /
1	black walnut side Board	3/12/
1	ditto ..... writing Table	1/10/
1	large Turkey Carpet	13/10/
1	pair And Irons and Tongs	/18/
1	fire Skreene	1/ 5/
1	large Looking Glass with sconces £5, 1 Ditto chimney with sconces £3/10	8/10/
3	blue and white China Bowles (not sound)	1/ 5/
3	Enamil'd ditto (one cracked)	2/10/
1	Tea board, 2 Tea pots, 7 coffee cups, 7 Tea ditto, 8 Sauces & 1 Bowl	1/10/
3	Tumblers, 5 Crewitts & 4 Glass salts & 1 Glass mustard pot with a spoon	/15/
15	Queens China Dishes 40/. 18 Plates 4/6	2/ 4/ 6
1	Dozen do. Wash Basons	/10/

1. YCR, Wills and Inventories, No. 23 (1788-1811), pp. 181 ff. There were inventories, also, for various plantations in Hanover as Mountair, Skelton Smith's, George Smith's, Richard Mauray's, William Mallory's, Bridge Quarter, and Bellfield.

1	Mohogany Tea Board, 2 Sliders & 2 Japan'd waiters	/12/
1	dozen shallow and 7 deep blue and white China plates	/18/
1	China blue and white Tureene	4/10/
1	Tea Kettle and Trivit 12/6. 1 Japaned plate warmer 12/6	1/ 5/
2	Tin Lanthorns 8/. 2 Tin Coffee Pot 4/1	/12/
6	Brass flat candlesticks 18/. 2 high ditto 10/	1/ 8/
6	high fluted brass candlesticks	2/ 8/
7	pair steel snuffers 10/. 1 Tin cheese toaster 11/6	/11/ 6
2	Knife Trays lined with Tin	/ 5/
2	dozen Ivory handle Table knives and forks	2/10/
26	knives ditto smaller & 50 forks	1/15/
1	silver Soup spoon 40/. 10 Table spoons and 1 marrow spoon £8	10/ /
1	dozen Desert spoons 96/. 13 Tea spoons 40/.	6/16/
1	Tankard 3 waiters, 1 salver, 1 porringer in pint can & 1 Pepper-box, weight 108 oz. 16 dwt @ 7/6	40/15/
2	pr. Carpeting side Board	/ 6/
1	silver mounted Fowling piece	6/ /
1	pair Silver Capt Pistols 30/. 1 pair brass Barrel ditto 30/.	3/ /
1	black Walnut Desk £3, 1 Backgammon Table 24/.	4/ 4/
1	Shaving Glass Mahogany case	/ 3/
In the passage. 1 Glass Lanthern £6, Looking Glass £3/10, 1 ps Carpeting £2/5		11/15/

IN THE DRAWING ROOM

2	Arm & 1 Dozen Mohogony chairs with leather Bottoms	22/ /
1	round Mahogony Tea Table 40/. 1 Cherry ditto 40/.	4/ /
2	mohogony Tea boards 15/	/15/
1	Looking Glass £5. 1 Chimney Ditto 50/.	7/10/
1	pair And Irons shovel and tongs Brass heads	2/ /
1	Scotch Carpet	5/ /

IN THE CHAMBER

1	Bed matrass boulster, Bedstead and suit yellow morrain Curtains	25/ /
6	Mohogany Chairs £9, 1 dressing Table and Glass £6	15/ /
1	large ditto. Desk £10, 1 ditto spice press 30/.	11/10/
1	mohogany sugar box 40/, 1 Carpet 15/	2/15/
1	pair And Irons, Tongs and Bellows	1/ /

IN THE BACK PARLOUR

4	walnut Chairs 20/. 1 ditto Tea Table 20/.	2/ /
1	large ditto round Dining Table	1/10/
1	pair old and irons	/ 5/

IN THE CHINTZ ROOM

2	Beds boulster & Bedsteads @ 90/	9/ /
5	black walnut chairs 50/. 1 ditto Table 6/.	2/16/
1	dressing Glass £3, 1 pair And Irons 7/6	3/ 7/ 6
1	Set Table china consisting 1 Tureen and dish 28 dishes 4 puding ditto 87 plates, 27 desert ditto and two butter boats	20/ /

1	compleat set Tea China	6/	/	
1	China bason and bottle 15/. 1 Glass bowl and plate 6/.	1/	1/	
2	large Decanters 20/. 5 quart Decanters 15/.	1/	15/	
1	Glass Funnel & 13 wine Glasses & 1 beer Glass		/12/	
1	Glass Tumbler with a top Glass mustard pot & Crewit		/ 5/	
2	small stone Pots 12/. 2 China Salts 1/3		/13/	3
1	Glass Bpern	7/	/	

IN THE ROOM OVER THE DRAWING ROOM

1	Bed boulster matrass, 7 Pillows Bedstead & a suit blue morrain Curtains	20/	/	
1	Table and glass 20/. 2 mohogany and 2 Windsor chairs 60/.	4/	/	
2	small carpets 10/. 1 pair And Irons, Tongs and shovel 12/.	1/	2/	

IN THE ROOM OVER THE DINING ROOM

1	Bed boulster, 2 pillows, 1 matrass, mahogany Bed stead with a suit red Morrain Curtains	28/	/	
1	mahogany low Bedstead, Bed boulster and 2 pillows	12/	/	
1	Black walnut Bedstead, Bed boulster and 2 ditto	10/	/	
1	Bed, oznabrigs Tick with 1 pillow	2/	/	
6	Mahogony Chairs £12, 1 Wash stand 20/.	13/	/	
1	Table and Dressing Glass £3, 1 Carpet 25/.	4/	5/	
2	Bed carpets 6/. 1 pair And Irons Tongs and Shovel 40/	2/	6/	

5	pair best Bed Blankets £10, 5 pair old ditto £4	14/ 0/
21	pair sheets different qualities @ 30/	31/10/
2	mersails Quilts £6, 4 patch callico quilts £8	14/ /
6	White counterpins £7/10, 8 Chex Ditto £4	11/10/
18	pillow cases 54/. 40 Towels different sorts £4	6/14/
16	Damask Table cloths different Qualities @ 20/	16/ /
38	ditto . . . Napkins different qualities @ 4/	7/12/

IN THE ROOM OVER THE CHAMBER

3	Bedsteads with Beds @ £5	15/ /
5	leather bottom chairs 30/. 1 pine Table 5/.	1/15/
1	pair And Irons Tongs and shovel	/15/

IN THE PASSAGE UP STAIRS

a	pair Globes £3, 1 large Leather Trunk brass nails 30/	4/10/
a	parcel of Books	30/ /

IN THE KITCHEN

9	Pewter Dishes 72/. 3 pewter dish covers 15/.	4/ 7/
6	Tin dish covers 18/. 1 pewter & 1 Tin cullinder	1/ 8/
2	copper Fish Kettles 60/. two ditto stewpans 40/	5/ /
1	preserving Pan and cover	/15/
Forks Skimmers, Ladles and Graters 10/.		/10/
3	bell mettle Skillets 60/. 1 spice Mortar 7/6	3/ 7/ 6
6	Iron Pots & 1 Dutch Oven with Hooks and hangers	3/ /

3	spitts 15/. 2 frying pans 8/. 2 grid Irons 8/.	1/11/
1	pair And Irons tongs and shovel 50/. 1 dripping pan 10/	3/ /
one	large Kitchen Pine Table	/10/
2	Coppers & 2 Iron kettles £12/6, 6 Tubs and pails 12/.	12/12/

AT THE STABLE

A	Waggon and Gear £25, 5 mules @ £15, £75	100/ /
a	Charriot and Harness for 4 horses	60/ /
4	Charriot Horses @ £25. £100 a bay mare £8	108/ /
12	Milch Cows £36, 1 saddle & 2 bridles 40/	38/ /
a	saddle, 1 newer	3/10/
1	Tumbrill L3/10. 1 old ditto with one Wheel 30/	5/ /

IN THE STORE

a	pine writing Desk L3, a Pine Table 6/.	3/ 6/
a	black walnut writing Table	2/ /
1	Iron pot 6/. 1 dripping Pan 10/. 3 spades 20/	1/16/
2	black walnut chairs 20/ 9 sett brass Chair boxes 45/	3/ 5/
5	sett Iron chair boxes 12/6, 1 Iron Chain 20/	1/12/ 6
1	Cask read lead dry 25/	1/ 5/
1	pair Grocers Scales with lead Weights	/ 5/

NEW PLATE IN THE HOUSE

2 Dozen Table spoons, 6 gravy ditto, 1 Dozen Tea spoons 6 Salt spoons

1 peper do, 1 mustard ditto, 6 salt cellars, 1 Sugar dish a Rim & Casters & 1 milk pot weighing in the whole 150 oz. 1dwt. Silver Spern weighing.....

92 19

243: @ 13/4 pr. oz..... 162/ /

Glasses and Box belonging to it 8/ /

one pair large Money scales 1/ 5/

NEGROES

Cook Cain £80, old Tryall £10, Sukey £15 105/ /

Wagoner Cain £70, Peter £40, Penny £40 150/ /

Heffy £30, Grace £40, Krender and her Infant £45 115/ /

Rose £35, Sue £25, Beck £15, Betty £50 125/ /

Lucy Mountfort £40, Bob £17.10, Sally £15 72/10/

Sukey £10, Bdy £17.10, Louisa £5, Janny £10 42/10/

Aggy £40, Betty £12, Denah £5, Betsy £20 77/ /

Cooper £25, Phil £65, Roger £45, Child George £30 65/ /

Jerry £17.10, Aggy £20, Massey £45 82/10/

Letty & Child Grace £45, Betty £20, Tenah £15 80/ /

Pegg £40, Judy £30, Dinah £20, Jammey £25 115/ /

Old Hannah £15, Phillis £5, Nancy & Child Tom £55 75/ /

Joan £17.10, Rachael £15, Else £12, Charles £5 49/10/

Charles £40, John £40, George £40, York £40 160/ /

AT THE QUARTER

an old Waggon £10, old ox Cart £2	12/ /
Red Waggon £15, Ox Cart £17.10 rolling Cart £1.10	34/ /
Two Whipsaws £3, 1 Cross cut 10/. Grindstone 6/	3/16/
4 narrow Axes 12/. 9 Weeding hoes 27/	1/19/
2 chip Ploughs and Gear £2, 4 small half shear Ditto 32/	3/12/
5 Harrow shanks 25/. 3 three hoed harrows 30/	2/15/
1 Hog Harrow with Iron teeth 12/6, 6 Iron Wedges 24/.	1/16/6
3 Ox Chains 15/. 4 Grubbing hoes 12/. 3 spades 9/	1/16/
4 Ox Yokes and staples 40/. 6 hogs £6	8/ /
5 Mules £55.13 Oxen, £52, Wheat Fan £3	110/ /
23 grown cattle £69, 15 young ditto £18.15	87/15/
20 old sheep & 9 Lambs £18.12, coopers Tooles £2.10	21/ 2/
£	2790/19/3

Wm. Reynolds)
Matthew Pope)
Corbin Griffin)

Sworn before Hugh Nelson, Gent.

RETURNED into York County Court the twentieth day of July 1789 and Ordered to be recorded.

Teste

RO: H. WALLER, Cl. Cur.

Appendix B

Thomas Nelson Jr.'s Will.[1]

IN THE NAME OF GOD, I Thomas Nelson of the Town and County of York being of sound and disposing mind tho' infirm in body and being sensible of the Casualties to which human nature is subject do constitute and make this my last Will and Testament thereby disposeing of and bequeathing all my Worldly Goods and Chattles in manner following.

IMPRIMIS. I give and bequeath unto my beloved Wife Lucy Nelson all her wearing apparel Jewells of every kind and my Chariott and four Horses, to hold as her own proper Goods forever. I lend to her during her natural life my lands and plantations in Hanover County known by the names of Montair, Mallorys Longrow and Smiths with the slaves stocks of every kind and Plantation Utensils on the said Lands I also lend her during her Natural life my Farm near York together with the Slaves, Stocks and Plantation Utensils thereon and the choice of Ten of my House Servants also the liberty of cutting fire Wood off a Tract of Land I have in Warwick County known by the name of Hobdy's and Timber for the use of the aforesaid Farm likewise My houses and Lots in York Town (except such of them as I shall herein after bequeath otherwise) my Household and Kitchen furniture and my Plate of every kind except so much thereof, as shall be hereafter otherwise bequeathed. But it is my Will that my Wife do, out of the Profits of the Estate I have before lent her pay unto my Mother each year during her Life one hundred Pounds Sterling, it being an annuity left her by my Father and furnish her with five fat Hogs, one Grass Beef and two stalled Beeves. It is also my Will and Desire that out of the Profits of the Estate I have lent my Wife she do maintain and educated all my younger Children until they shall come to the age of twenty one years or marry.

Item. I give and bequeath unto my Son Thomas Nelson and his Heirs forever my Houses and Tenements in the City of Williamsburg, all my Lands in the County of James City, and two thousand five hundred acres of land lying on the upper part of my Tract in Hanover, on both sides--Newfound River, including the Land he is at present possessed of but it is my Will that he shall not til after the Death of my Wife possess or enjoy any of that part of the Land on which Skelton Smith lives, except a Stripe of high Land of an hundred yards breadth beginning at the Causey and running thence parraled with the sunken grounds of the River to my upper Line I also bequeath unto him and his Heirs forever the Slaves, Stocks, of every kind and Plantation Utensils of which he

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1. Wills and Inventories, No. 23, p. 171.

is at present possessed, and likewise a Negro Woman named Aggy living at York, together with her Increase except her eldest Son Charles, but it is my Will that he do furnish my Mother each year during her Life with four fat Hogs.

Item. I give and bequeath unto my son Philip Nelson and his Heirs forever all that Plantation and Tract of Land in the County of Hanover known by the name of Offley bounded as follows: beginning at Little River bridge, and running along the Road which crosses the said Bridge and Mr. Berkeley's Mill Road until it strikes the dividing Line between Mr. Berkeley's Land and my own. in the Mill Road thence along that Line until it strikes the Hanover Town road, thence along that Road so as to include a piece of Land called the Triangle purchased by my Father of Mr. Berkeley, thence along the dividing line between Mr. Berkeley and the Offley tract to Little River, thence up the River so as to include the Mill & mill-pond to the beginning. I also bequeath unto my said Son Philip and his Heirs forever the Slaves, Stocks and Plantation Utensils lately allotted to his Use on that Plantation and also a negro Girl by the names of Melinda now living with Mrs. Brown at Bullrun, and I do further Will that my said son Philip do furnish my Mother with three fat Hogs each Year during her life.

Item. I give and bequeath unto my Son Francis Nelson and his Heirs forever all my Lands in the County of Hanover lying on the North side of Little River and known by the name of Bridge Quarter, also a Tract of Land lying on the South side of Little River, to be taken off the Montair Tract and to be bounded as follows: Beginning at Little River bridge and running up the River to the Mouth of Colley Swamp; thence by a right Line to be drawn to the mouth of the first Branch that runs into Colley Swamp on the North East side, thence by a Line to be drawn as nearly paralel to the little River Roade as may be to the Road leading from David Anderson's old Store to Hanover Town, thence along the said Road to Mr. Berkeley's Mill Road, thence along the Little River Road to the beginning. I also give unto him and his Heirs forever the Slaves, Stocks and Plantation Utensils now on the said Lands, and It is my Will that the Slaves be increased so as to make up ten hoe hands and five Plow-boys. It is also my Will that my said Son Francis do furnish my Mother with two fat Hogs each year during her Life.

Item. I give and bequeath unto my son Hugh Nelson and his Heirs forever my Land and Plantation in Hanover County known by the name of York's to be bounded as follows, beginning at Jones Swamp Road to where it joins the Road leading from David Anderson's old Store to Hanover Town thence up the said Road to where it intersects John Thompson's line, thence along the Lines of the said Thompson, Nathaniel Rice, and David Thompson to Jones Swamp; thence down the said Swamp by

its several meanders to the beginning. I also give to him and his Heirs forever the Slaves now on the said Land, their number to be increased out to the rest of my Estate so as to make in the whole ten Hoe hands anf five Plow boys; I also give him the Stocks of every kind and Plantation Uttensils on the said Land. To my Son Hugh and his Heirs forever I also give one hundred Acres of Land in the County of York which I purchased of my Brother Hugh and fifty acres in the same County on the large Swamp in Charles Parish; also the Reversion which I have in a tract of Land near York, now occupied by Mrs. Lucy Moore, together will all the Interest which I have or may have in a Water Grist Mill on the said Lands; but he is to furnish my Mother with two fat Hogs each year during her Life.

Item. I give and bequeath unto my Son Robert Nelson and his Heirs forever after the Death of My Wife, all my Tract of Land in the County of Hanover known by the name of Montair, also ten Hoe negroes, five plow Boys, Thirty Cattle, twenty Sheep and the Plantation Utensils on the Place. But it is my Will that my son Francis shall have it in his option at any time within six months after the Death of my Wife to take in lieu of the Estate I have herein before bequeathed him, the said Montair Tract together with the Slaves, and other Estate herein bequeathed to my Son Robert; and should my Son Francis make his election of the Montair Estate then it is my Will that my Son Robert shall have all the Estate which I have herein before bequeathed to my Son Francis. Item I give and bequeath unto my Daughter Elizabeth Page one thousand Pounds to be paid by my Executors out of the Issues of the Lands hereinafter appropriated to the payment of my debts, so soon after my Debts are paid as conveniently may be. I also give unto her and her Heirs forever the reversion of a Negro Women named Nancy now in possession of my Mother, together with her present and future increase.

Item. I give and bequeath unto my Daughters Mary Nelson, Lucy Nelson, Susanna Nelson and Judith Nelson six hundred Pounds each to be paid them by my Executors, out of the Funds appropriated to the payment of my Debts, when they shall respectively come of age or marry; but it is my will that if their Legacies can be conveniently raised out of the said Funds at an earlier Period, then the Money shall be put out to Interest or otherwise disposed of as my Executors shall think most condusive to the Interest of my said Daughters. I do also give to each of my Daughters Mary, Lucy Susanna and Judith and their Heirs forever a Negro Girl to be chosen out of my Estate at Large by my Wife and Executors.

Item. It is my Will and Desire that Doctor Augustine Smith shall not be charged with or called on to repay one Shilling that I have expended in his maintenance and education, and that he have credit in full for all Sums with which he may be charged on my Books.

Item. I give and bequeath unto my Son William and to his Heirs forever all the Lands whereof he is at present possessed together with the

slaves, stocks of every kind and Plantation Utensils thereon and at the Death of his Mother. I further give him that plantation whereon Skelton Smith now lives (except so much thereof shall be included in the bequest I have herein before made to my Son Thomas Nelson) Long-Row and Willian Mallorys, including the sunken Grounds on Newfound River below the Causey; also all the Slaves, Stocks and Plantation utensils on the said Plantation. I also give to my Son William after the Death of his Mother the choice of five of the ten house Servants which I have herein before lent to my Wife; and it is my Will that the remaining five Servants with their Increase be divided at the Death of my Wife among my other five Sons; but in case any of the said House Servants should die before my Wife, it is my Will that then my Son Willian shall have his choice of one half of what shall remain alive and the Remainder be divided among my other five Sons. I give to my Son William and his Heirs forever my trusty and faithful Servant James Rideout and an Amathist Seal left my by my Father. It is my Will that all my Blacksmiths, Carpenter's, Shoemakers and Weavers do continue to work for my Wife and Several Children; and at the Death of my Wife I give and bequeath then to my Son William & his Heirs forever.

Item. I give and bequeath to each of my Sons, except my Son William a Negro Boy to be taken from my Estate at large and put to work with my Carpenters in order to learn the trade.

Item. I give and bequeath to my Son William Nelson and his Heirs forever my Lotts in the Town of York which I purchased of William Rowsay adjoining the Street which runs by Mr. Abraham Archers and the late Secretary Nelsons, and at the Death of my Wife I give to him and this Heirs forever all my Lotts, Lands and other Property in and about York which I have herein before lent to my Wife during her Life, and not herein otherwise disposed of.

Item. It is my Will that so much of my most indifferent Plate as will be sufficient to procure a Dozen and an half of table spoons & a Dozen tea-spoons for each of my Sons except my Son Willian be appropriated to that Use; all the rest and residue of my Plate I give to my Son William after the Death of my Wife.

Item. It is my Will that Smith Harry be furnished out of the Profits of the Estate which I have lent to my Wife, with a good House to live in during his Life: also with a good Suit of Cloaths, two Shirts, two Blankets, three hundred Weight of Pork and Five Barrels of Corn each Year during his Life and that he be considered from hence forward as free and discharged from all service.

Item. I give and bequeath unto my Executors hereinafter named and their Heirs and Assigns forever my Lands in the County of Hanover known by the names of Bull-field and Bull-hill containing by estimation

one thousand five hundred and sixty eight Acres, more or less; also all my Lands in the Counties of Prince William and Loudon, and likewise two Surveys on the Waters of Blizabeth River made in partnership with Robert Andrews Esq. Doct: James McLurg, and John Page Esq. of Rosewell, with which Robert Andrews Esquire is well acquainted having transacted all the business. To have and to hold the said several Tracts of Land to them, their Heirs, and Assigns forever. IN TRUST nevertheless for the purpose of paying all my just Debts and the Legacies bequeathed in this Will. I do constitute and appoint my Friends Nathaniel Burwell of Carter's Grove and Francis Willis of Gloucester and my Sons William and Thomas Nelson Executors of this my Will and Guardians of all my younger Children, requesting them to bring my Son Robert up to some profession, such as they shall think will best suit his genius.

Item. I give and bequeath unto my Nephew William Nelson Son of My Brother Nathaniel Nelson after the Death of my Mother a negro boy named Dick who now rides as a Postilion for my Mother, to have and to hold the said Boy Dick to him and his Heirs forever.

Item. It is my Will that my Son William shall enter upon and enjoy all the sunken Grounds on New-found River (which in a former Clause of this Will I bequeathed to him after the Death of his Mother) immediately after my Decease.

I do constitute and declare this to be my last Will and Testament hereby revoking and annulling all former Wills and Codocils heretofore made by me IN WITNESS whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my Seal this twenty sixth Day of December in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty eight. But before signing and sealing this I do declare it to be my further Will that should my Wife die before Smith Harry, then my Son William to furnish him with what I have bequeathed to him in this Will: and further that after the Death of my Mother each of my Sons shall furnish my Wife with as many fat hogs as they are by this will to furnish my Mother with. I do also bequeath unto my Son William all the rest and residue of my Estate of What nature soever after my Debts and Legacies herein mentioned are paid and satisfied, to hold to him and his Heirs forever.

THOS. NELSON (L.S.)

Testes

Jno. Minor, jr.
Edmd. Berkeley, jr.
Nelson Berkeley Junr.

Thomas Nelson Jr.'s Will, Cont.

At a Court held for York County the 16th day of February 1789.

This Will was proved by the Oaths of Edmund Berkeley Junr. and Nelson Berkeley Junr. Witnesses thereto sworn to by William Nelson Junr. Gent. one of the Executors therein named and ordered to be recorded and Certificate for obtaining a Probat thereof in due form was granted the said Executor he having given Bond with Hugh Nelson and William Goosley Gent. his Securities in the Penalty of eighty thousand Pounds Current Money conditioned as the Law directs Liberty is reserved to the other Executors in the said Will named to join in the Probat when they shall think fit.

Teste.

RO: H: Waller, Cl. Cur.

Examined.

Appendix C

A Digest of William Nelson's Will

William Nelson built solidly on his inheritance and amassed a considerable fortune of which his will gives good indication as well as offering an insight into the standard of living that he and his family, including his oldest son Thomas, Jr., enjoyed.[1] He was grateful for "the worldly Estate with which it hath pleased God to bless me, so much above my desire." To his wife Elizabeth went £5000 sterling, payable after a year, plus an annual stipend of £250 during her natural life." Likewise for life she was to have the use of "my House wherein I now live, with the Lotts and Gardens thereto belonging, including the Store Garden, but not the Storehouses, also my Stable and the Lott whereon it stands, the use of all my household furniture, Plate, Coach, Chariot and Cart with all their Harness, my Town Horses and Town Cows, and the use of Ten House Servants, such as she shall Chuse." To her also went: (1) "her Watch, all her Jewels, Rings, Snuff Boxes, Clothes and other ornaments of which she may be possessed at the time of my death." (2) All "the liquors and Provisions of every kind that shall be in the House at my death, and any Medeira Wine and Rum imported for the use of the family, which may be in my storehouses." (3) He gave her too "all such Family goods and liquors as I may have wrote for . . . /and/ such new goods as she may chuse out of my store for herself and the use of my three young children

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1. The will is given in full in The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XXXIII (1925), pp. 190-192.

to the amount of One hundred and fifty pounds Sterling, prime cost." (4) She was to "be supplied out of any part of my estate, with such Beef, Pork, Wheat and Corn as she shall require annually." (5) Also for her life time she would have "the use and profits" of his "Plantations in Warwick and James Cities Counties, commonly called Cheesecake Plantation" including "the Use of Slaves and Stocks of every kind," as well as "my Plantations near Yorktown called Pennys and Tarrapin Point, including my meadows with the Slaves, horses, carts and stocks of every kind thereto belonging with liberty of cutting her firewood off the said lands and also a tract called Dowsings." She did not receive an interest, except as noted, in her husband's "Store Houses in Yorktown and at the waterside." These he devised "to my sons Thomas /the Signer/ and Hugh."

Thomas and Hugh were the senior sons and these were the larger benefactors from their father's will though all were substantially remembered as well as others.[2] Hugh was, in time, to receive "the House I now live in, the lots and gardens thereto belonging, together with the Store Garden . . . also my Stable and the lott on which it

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2. Son Robert was given all of his father's lands, slaves, and stock in Albemarle County though it would require assignment from Thomas in whose "possession and occupation" it was at the time. Also, Robert was to receive £2000 sterling and his father's "gold Stock Buckle." Sons Nathaniel and William, not yet of age, were each awarded £5000 sterling and jointly all of their father's "share and interest in The Dismal Swamp Scheme." Also, "my Sword and Pistols" were earmarked for Nathaniel and "my best Garnett sleeve Buttons set in gold," for William. For his sister Mary Berkeley, William willed £25 sterling yearly as well as any money she owed him." "Cousin" Hephzibah Nelson was to get £20 on a similar basis.

stands, likewise all the furniture of my House, as it may remain at his mother's death, my Plate excepted." At the same time Hugh would get one-third of the Plate and Thomas two-thirds plus "my best Silver Cup." Already Hugh had been assigned "all my lands and Slaves in the counties of Frederick and Fauquier" and in time would get the "Cheesecake Plantation" closer to Yorktown. There was also a £2000 legacy for Hugh, plus his father's "Mulatto woman named Aggy with all her Children and future increase," "the Ten House Servants" plus their increase after his mother's death, and "my gold watch, chain and Cornelian."

It was his son Thomas who would receive "my Virginia Amathyst Seat set in gold." Thomas, too, was willed the considerable "lands and estate in the County of Hanover" and a "Mulatto woman Hannah" with her increase (the latter after his mother's death.) There was this significant entry, too, for Thomas. "All the rest and residue of my estate of what nature of quality soever, whether real or personal in Virginia or elsewhere, I give, devise and bequath to my son Thomas Nelson."[3] This covered unspecified lands, slaves and moneys including his home, that built by Thomas, the Emigrant, on the south side of Main Street.

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3. There were other specific bequests that preceded this injunction. Some £50 current money was to be set aside for "the poor of the Parish of York Hampton" and another £100 current for "the Public Hospital for the reception of Lunatics in Williamsburg." This he intended "towards the further relief of such Patients as may be sent to the said Hospital." It was "not to the enlargement of the Building or to any other purpose."

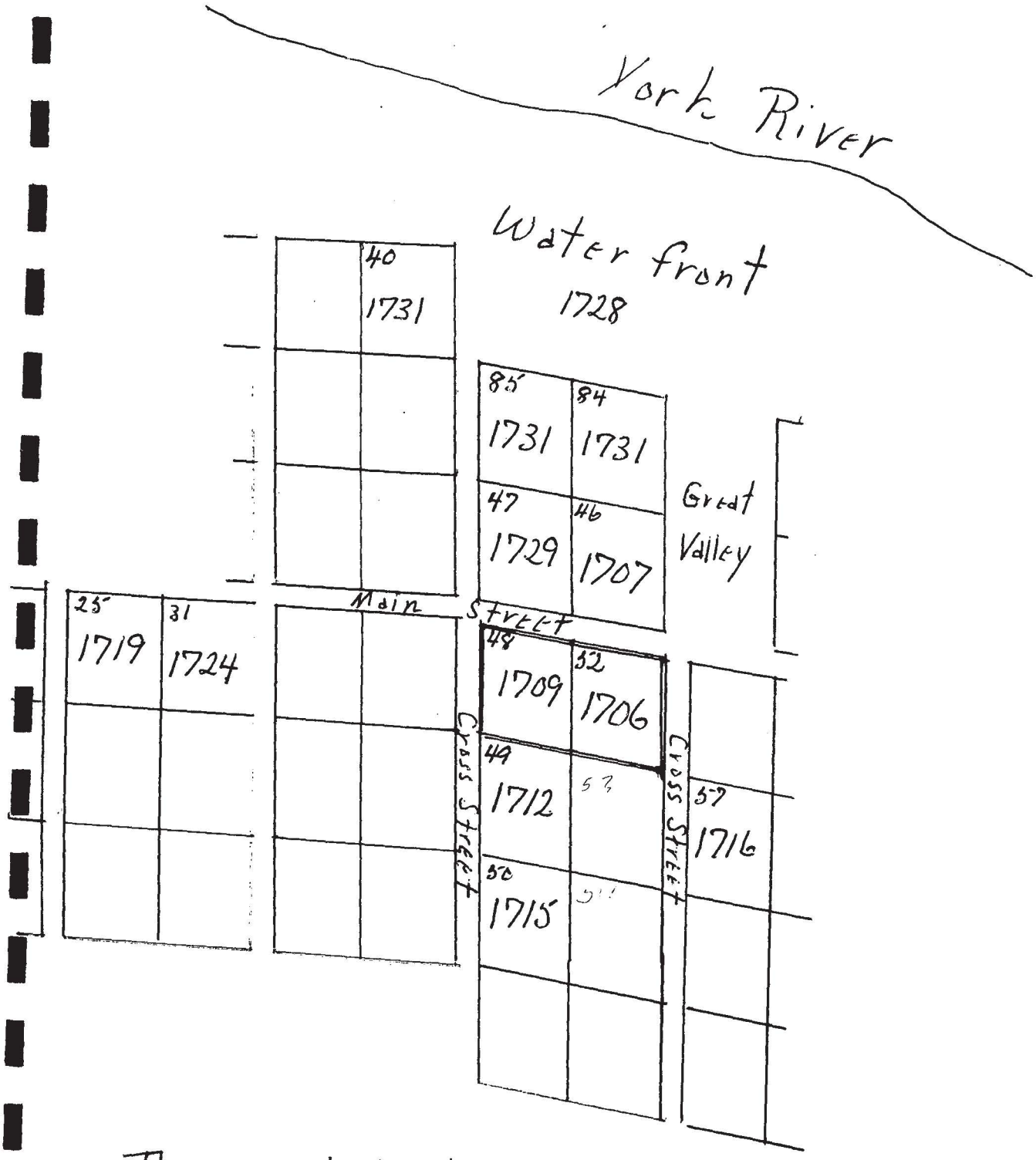
William's was a sizeable fortune. Besides the number of going plantations with slaves and stock scattered over six counties and a prosperous mercantile business, his cash bequests involved sterling in the amount of more than £19,000 and annual life annuities amounting almost to £300 per annum with essentially all of it in sterling.[4]

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4. To act as "executors of this my Will," and as "guardians of my younger children during their minority" he named "my dear Brother, the Hon. Thomas Nelson Esquire," my dear friend Robert Carter Nicholos Esqr" and "my two sons Thomas and Hugh."

Illustrations

No. 1 Thomas Nelson's Yorktown Holdings, 1706-1745.



Thomas Nelson's
Yorktown Holdings
1706-1745

No. 2 (16597) President William Nelson (from R.C.M. Page, Genealogy of the Page Family (2nd edition, Bridgewater, Virginia, 1965) p. 153.)

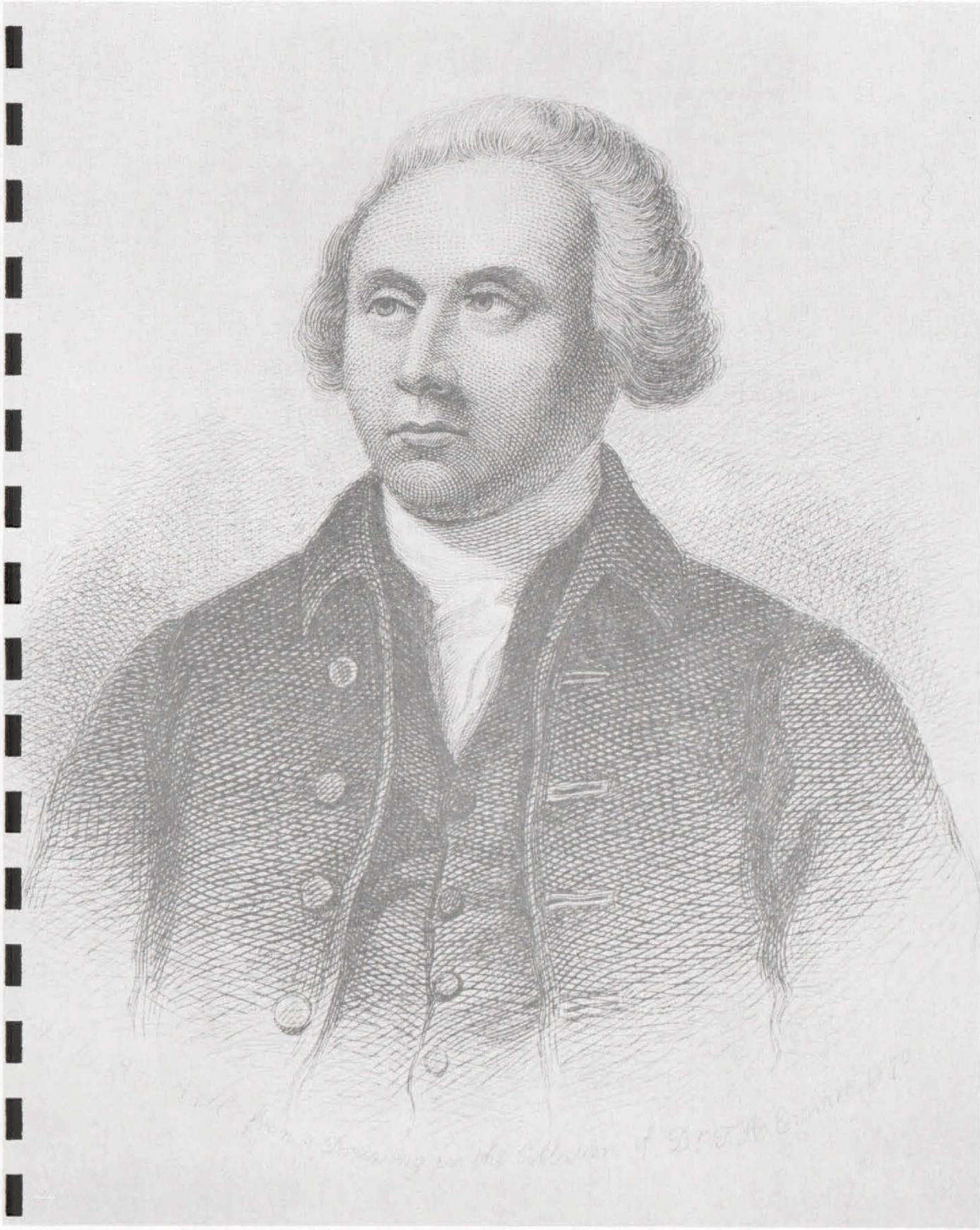


(From a water-color copy by C. H. Sherman, New York, 1883, from the original portrait by unknown artist.)

HON. WILLIAM NELSON, OF YORKTOWN, VIRGINIA.

No. 3 Thomas Nelson, Jr.
(Courtesy of the Virginia State Library)

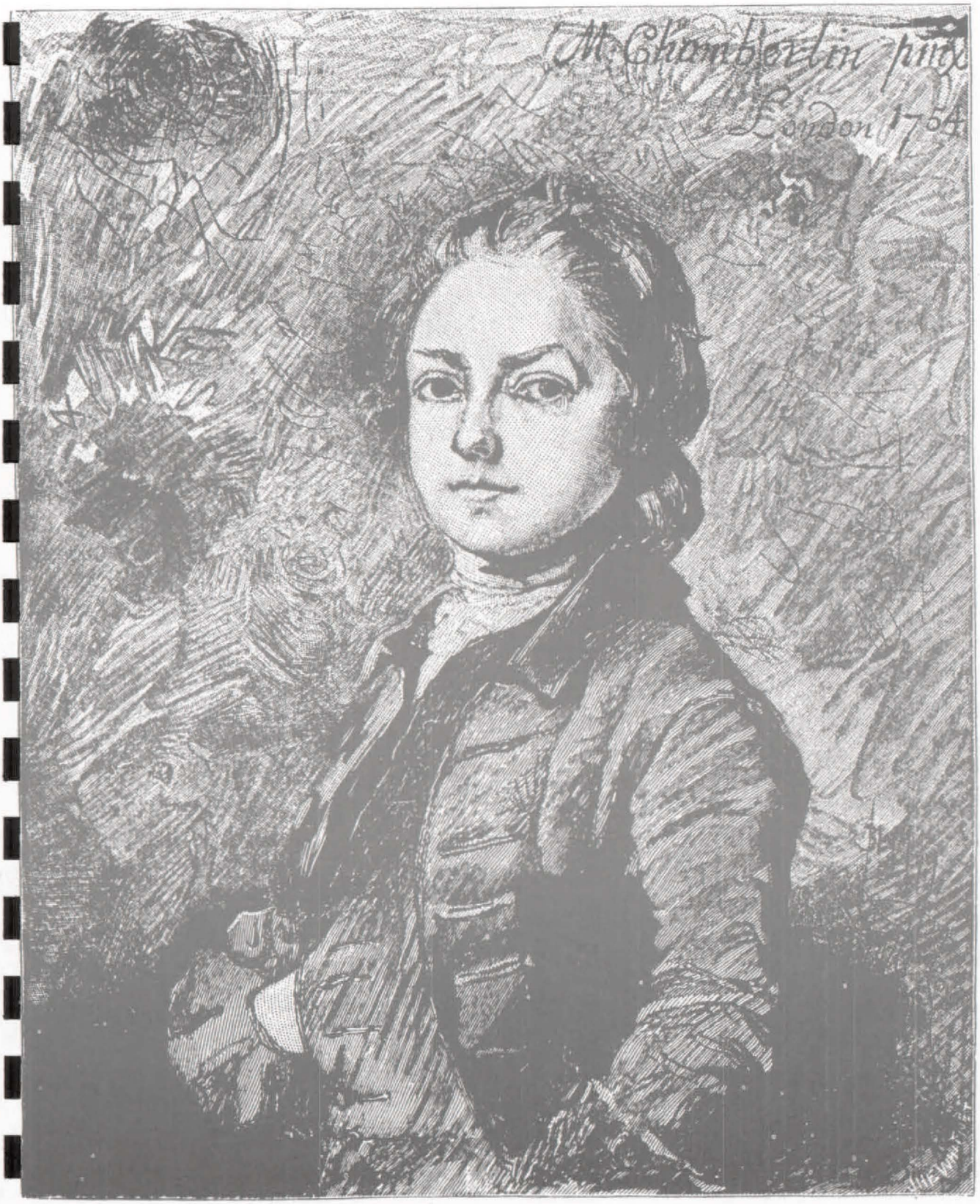
Another later likeness is in the form of statuary. "His statue was one of the six selected to be placed around the Washington Monument at Richmond" in "Capitol-Square . . . in the company with Washington, Jefferson, Marshall, Henry, Mason, and Lewis, he stands with the bonds in his outstretched hands in perpetuam rei memoriam." This was a recognition "under the leadership of Governor Henry A. Wise . . . tardy and partial justice to the memory of Nelson's great services." (Weddell, Virginia Historical Portraiture, p. 264; Page, "Old Yorktown," Scribners Monthly, XXII, 811-12.)



No. 4
(16596)

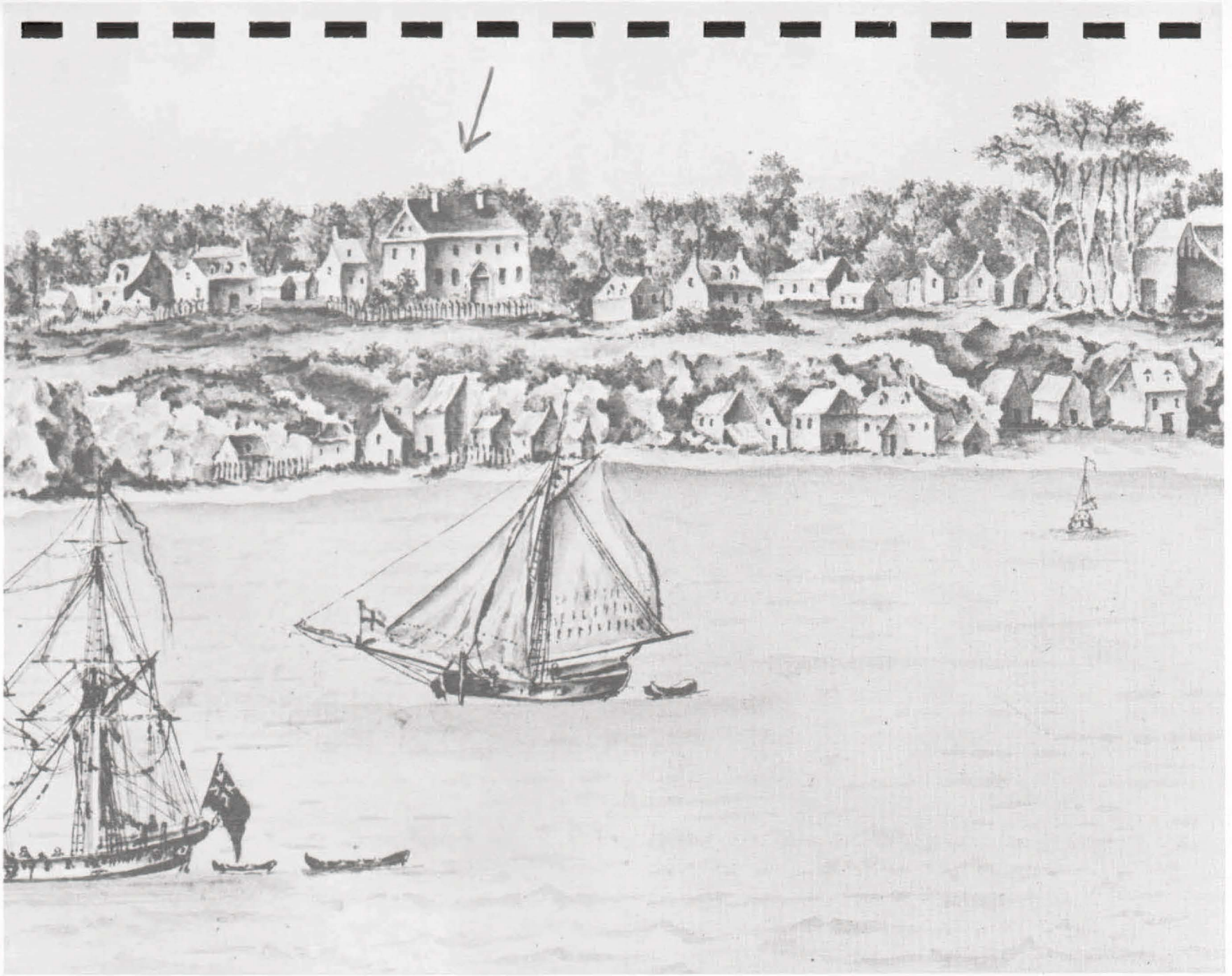
Thomas Nelson, Jr. (after the Mason Chamberlain portrait of 1754) from Scribners Monthly (October, 1881), XXII, 809).

This, the only contemporary portrait, was described in 1878 thusly. Nelson's age is about 16, his hair is light (the color of Naples yellow in the light), his eyes are a medium shade of blue and his complexion is ruddy with plenty of warm color. (Page, Genealogy, p. 170).

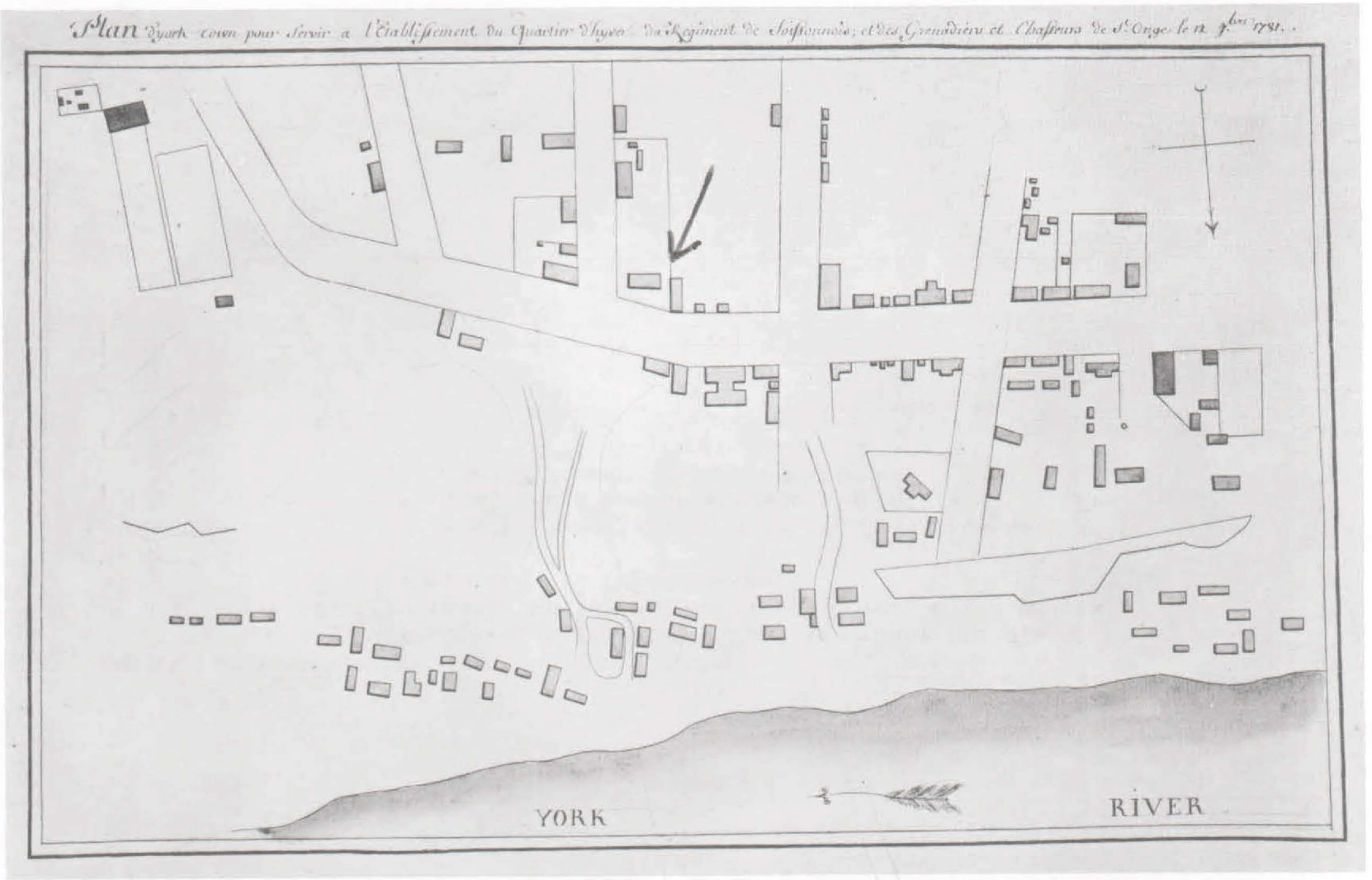


PORTRAIT OF GOVERNOR NELSON AT THE AGE OF FIFTEEN.

No. 5 Section from a 1755 View of Yorktown. (Added arrow points to Nelson House.) Sketched by John Gauntlett while on board a British naval vessel in Yorktown harbor. The original is in a manuscript volume ("Voyage of H.M.S. Success and H.M.S. Norwich to Nova Scotia and Virginia 1754-1756") in library of the Mariners Museum (Newport News, Virginia).



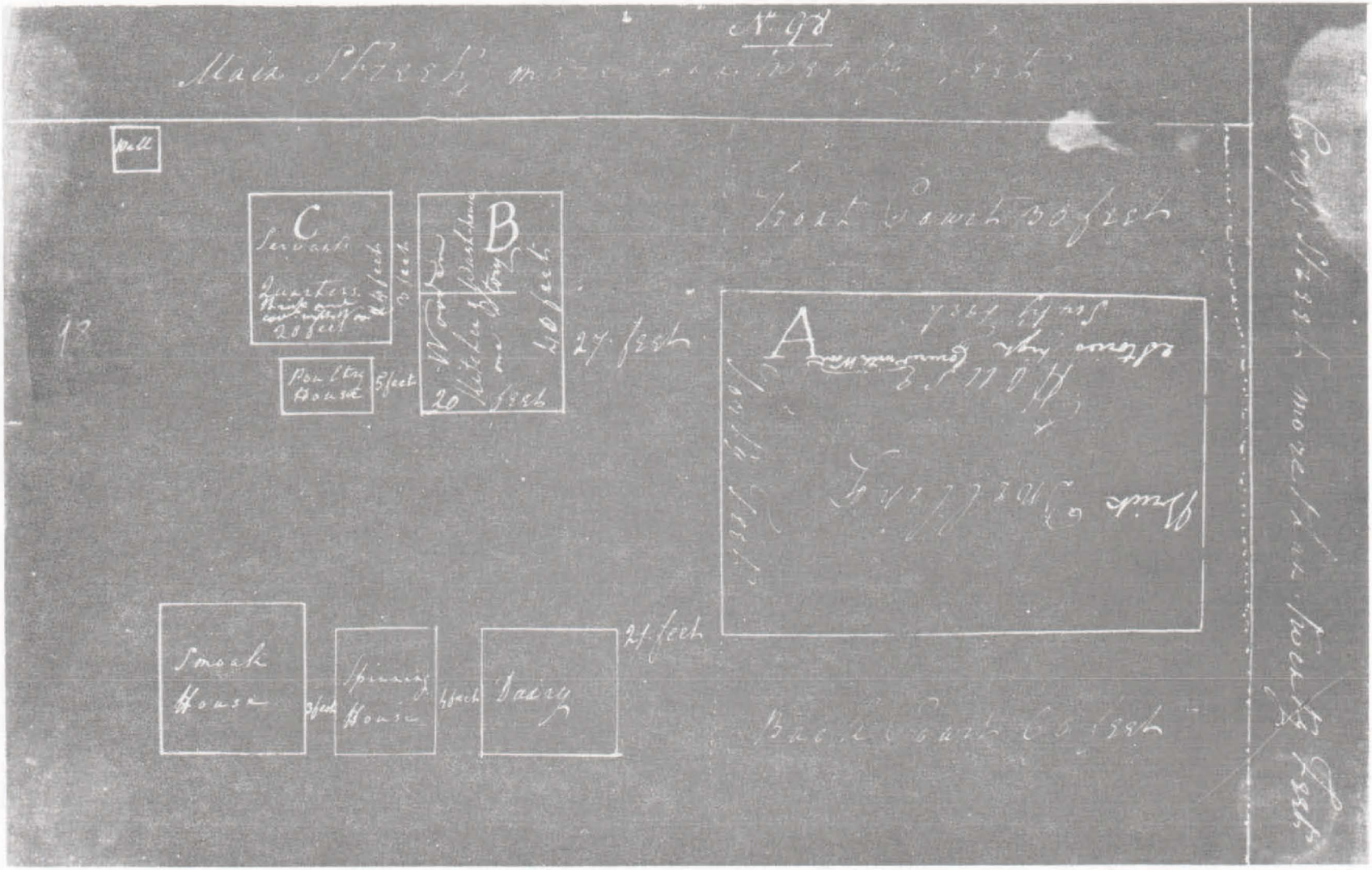
No. 6 Alexander Berthier's Plan of Yorktown-1781. (Added Arrow points to Nelson group.) (From the Berthier Papers in Princeton University Library.)


Plan d'york cotoyé pour servir a l'Etablissement du Quartier d'hyver du Regiment de Soissonnois et des Grenadiers et Chasseurs de St Onge le 11 7.bre 1781.
YORK
RIVER

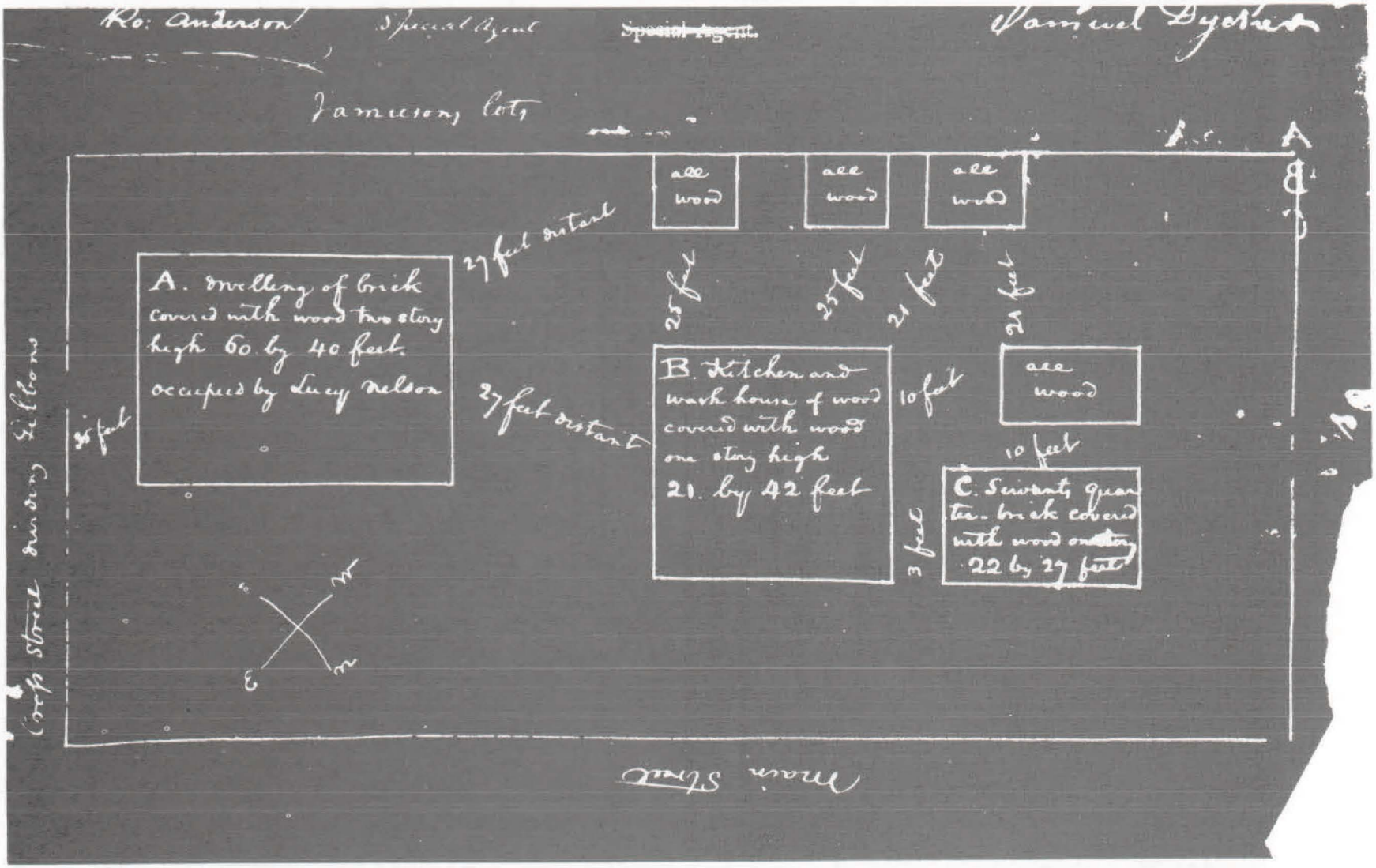
No. 7
(16565)

Plot Sketch from the Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia Policy No. 98 (1796) Covering the Nelson House and Its Dependencies.

It may be important to note the Front and Back Courts, and a possible suggestion of fencing. The "Spinning House" is also of interest.


Well
C
Servants
Quarters
20 feet
B
20 feet
Poultry House
5 feet
A
Smoak House
Spinning House
Dairy
24 feet
20 feet

No. 8 (16566) The Nelson House and Its Dependencies from Mutual Assurance Policy No. 196 (1810).


Ro: Anderson
Special Agent
Special Agent
Samuel Dyer
Fourteen lots
alley wood
alley wood
alley wood
27 feet distant
25 feet
25 feet
21 feet
21 feet
A. Dwelling of brick covered with wood two story high 60 by 40 feet occupied by Lucy Nelson
27 feet distant
B. Kitchen and wash house of wood covered with wood one story high 21 by 42 feet
10 feet
alley wood
10 feet
C. Seventy quarter brick covered with wood one story 22 by 27 feet
3 feet
Joseph Street
Main Street

No. 9 (15569) The Nelson House Group from Mutual Assurance Policy No. 7612 (1830).

[redacted] I verily believe the building herein described are not over-valued.

Ro Anderson Special Agent.

N Taylor

C Servants Quarter of Brick & wood 26 by 22

B Kitchen & Wash house of wood enlosed 43 by 20

NE NW SE SW

A Dwelling of Brick & Covered with Wood of two Stories in height 56 by 42 feet

A B and C are contiguous to each other, and also to the Dairies and Smoke house, which are of small value

Dairys Smoke Houses

Mr R West

Wm Fowlkes

N Taylor

Jno Nelson

Sarah B Nelson

No. 10 (16568) The Nelson House and Its Dependencies from Mutual Assurance Policy No. 14,290 (1846).

[redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [

No. 11 (16567) The Nelson House Group from Mutual Assurance Policy No. 17,661 (1853).

I, the undersigned, do hereby certify that I verily believe the Buildings herein described are not over-valued.

Ro: Anderson

SPECIAL AGENT.

W. Rowell

Cross sheet on the S. East

A. Dwelling of Brick Covered with wood two stories high 30 by 40

The buildings A. B. and C. and the smaller buildings described, are [illegible]

Ro. Anderson Sp. agent

W. Rowell

Main sheet on the N. East

SE

NE | SW

NW

B Kitchen and wash house of wood 1½ stories 20 by 42

Dairy. under $100 in Value

Smoke house under $100 value

C Servants Quarters Brick Covered with wood 24 by 28

Lumber house under $100 value

Log fowl house under $100 value

No. 12
(3557)

A Mathew Brady Photograph Made in 1862.

Here there is an absence of fencing and the overhangings from the garret windows would suggest that even the attic space was used when the Nelson House was serving as a hospital.


BA 1991

No. 13
(16578)

The Nelson House from the South. (From Bishop William Meade's, Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia (Philadelphia 1857), I, 204-05.)

Although this is a romantic view it seems significant that there is no special back entrance. Perhaps it was added later when the brick wall was put in front. It seems most unlikely that this was a colonial feature.

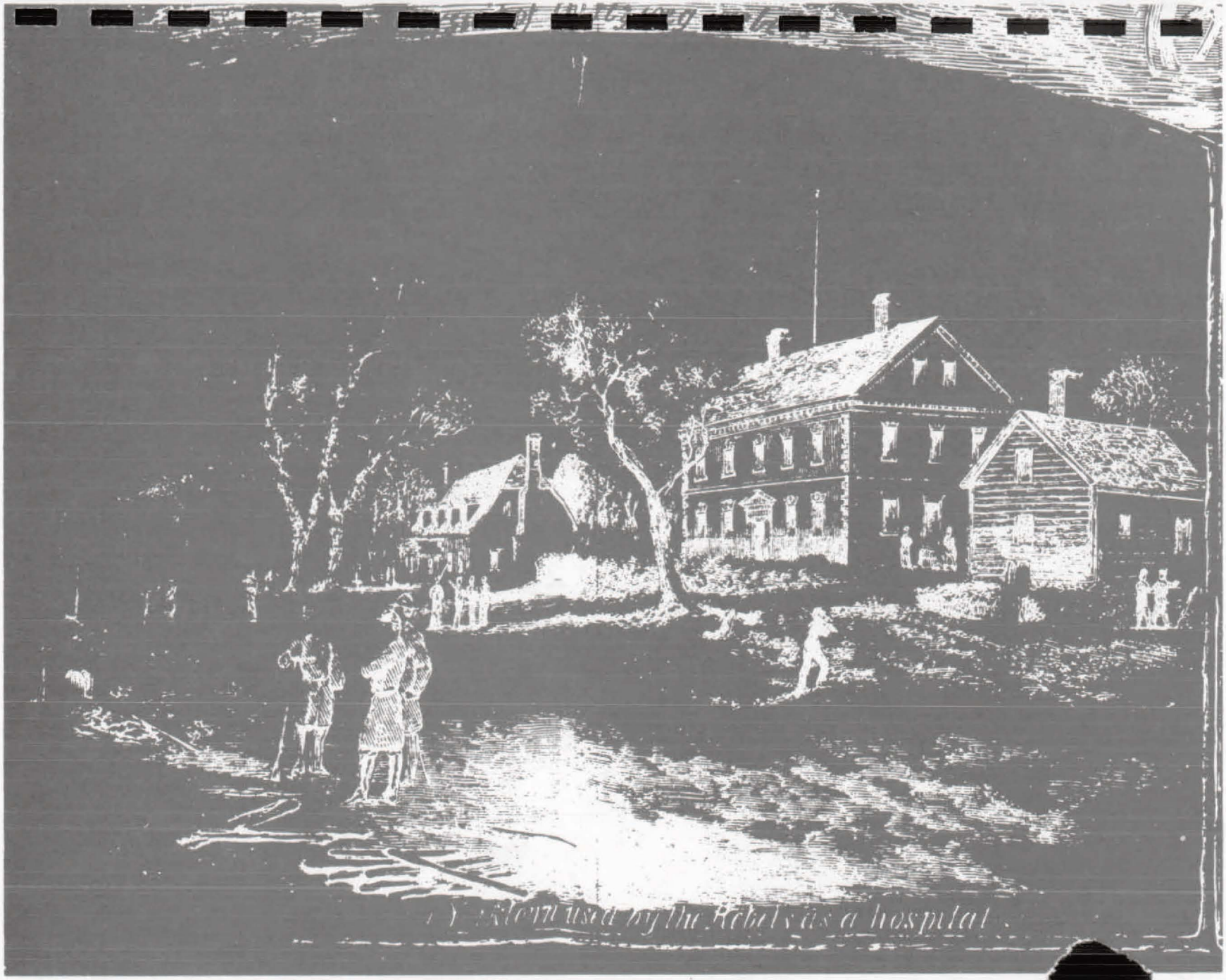


BACK VIEW OF GEN. NELSON'S HOUSE, YORK.

No. 14
(16591)

Nelson House and Wash-House - Kitchen as Sketched in 1862. (From Harpers Weekly (May, 1862?), pp. 328-29 (Photocopy of a negative photostat).)

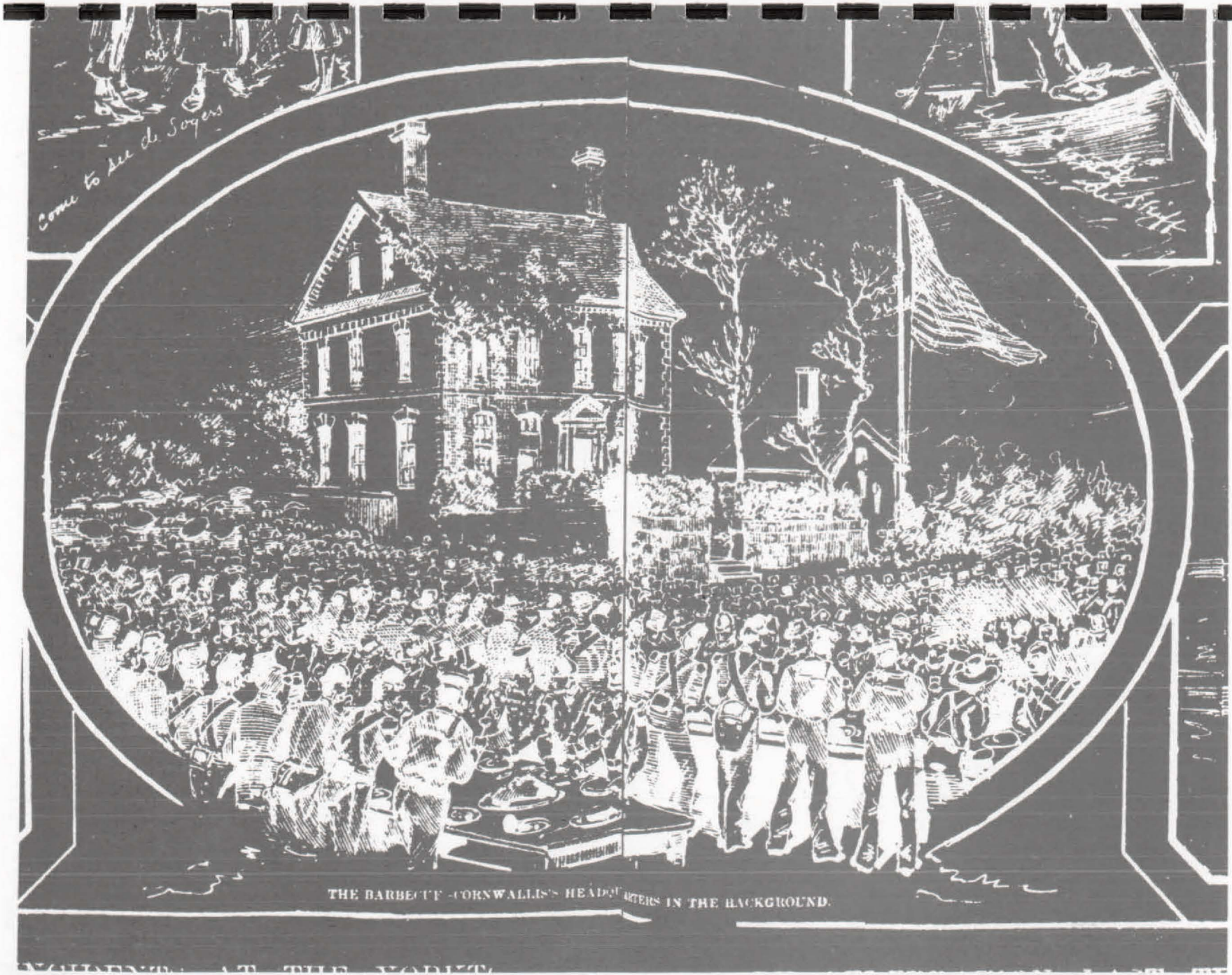
This sketch details the Nelson House and its kitchen-washhouse (on the right). Note caption: "The Nelson mansion Yorktown used by the Rebels as a hospital."


used by the Rebels as a hospital

No. 15
(16590)

A Gala Time Around the Nelson House - 1879.
(From The Daily Graphic: An Illustrated Evening Newspaper (New York), October 29, 1879, pp. 844-45 (from a negative photostat).)

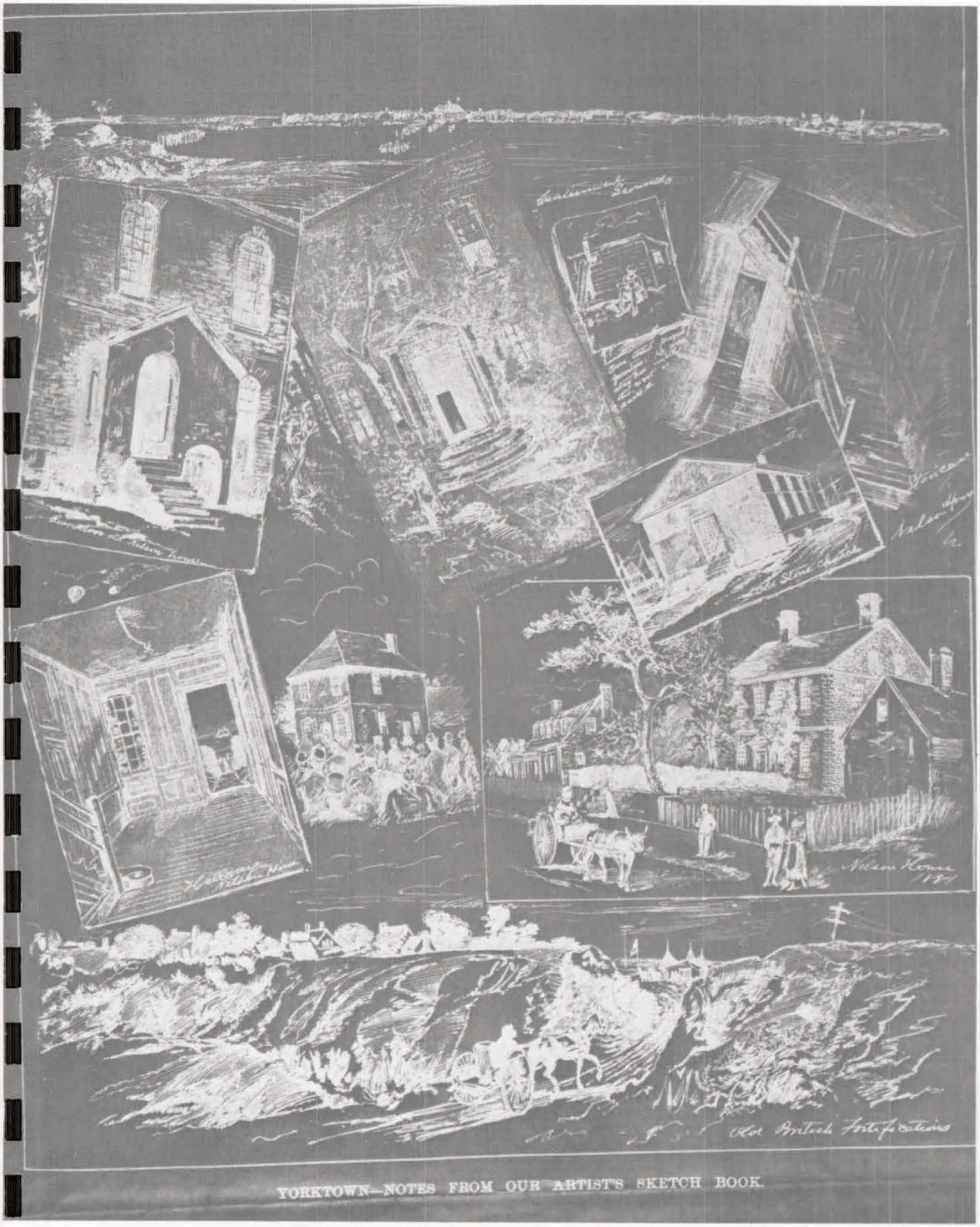
This shows a festive anniversary observance that featured "The Barbecue-Cornwallis Headquarters in the Background." The kitchen-washhouse is to the right of the mansion.



THE BARBECUE—CORNWALLIS'S HEADQUARTERS IN THE BACKGROUND.

No. 16
(16,594)

A Series of Nelson House Sketches - 1881 (From The Daily Graphic (New York), October 17, 1881 (XXVI, No. 2665, p. 1). From a negative photostat.) Among these various Yorktown scenes is a number dealing with the Nelson House as: (1) house and kitchen (center, right), (2) down the first floor hall (center, left), (3) the "Rear Door" (top, left), (4) the front entrance (top, center), (5) the stairway and first floor hall (top, right.)

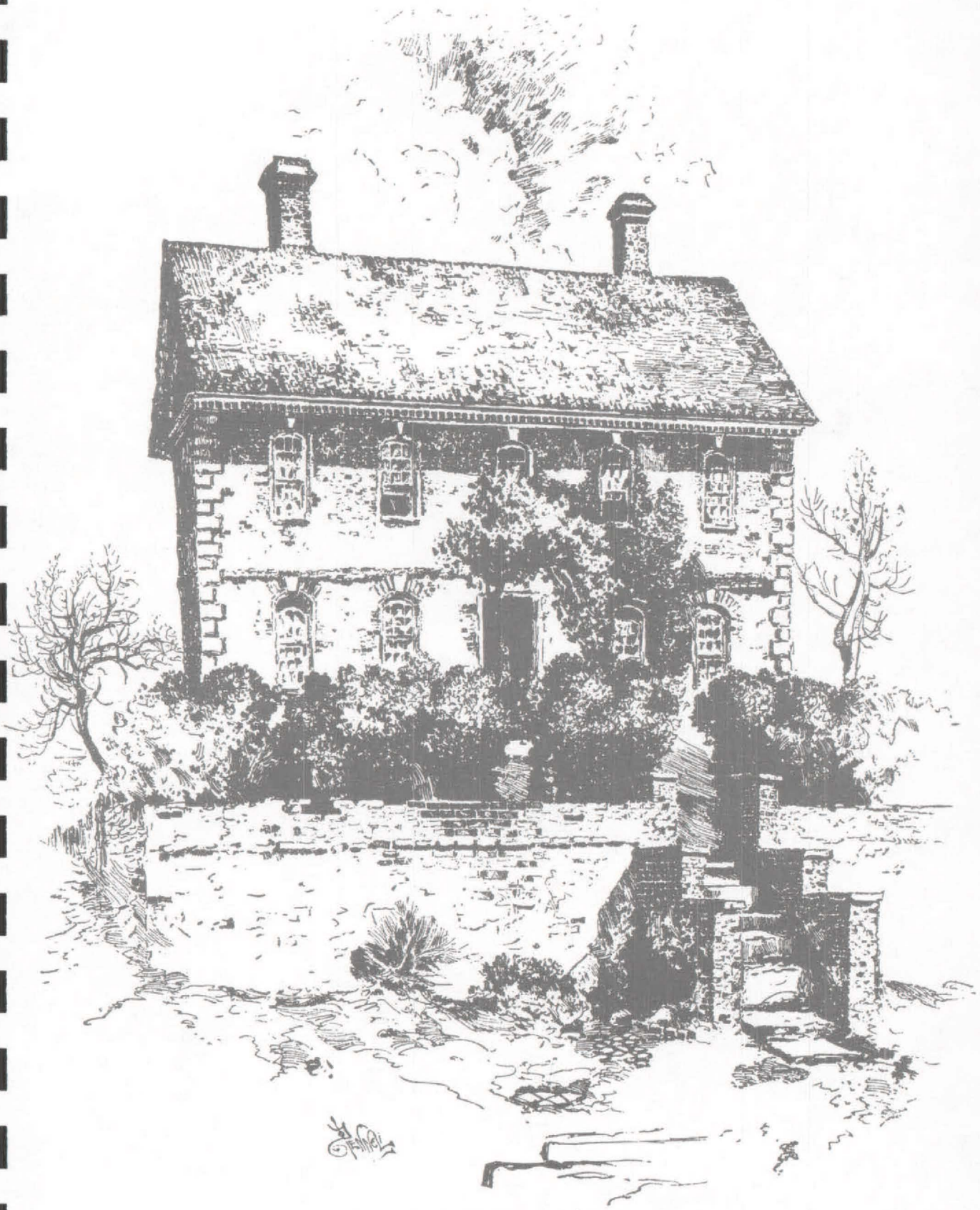


YORKTOWN—NOTES FROM OUR ARTIST'S SKETCH BOOK.

No. 17
(16595)

The Nelson Mansion.

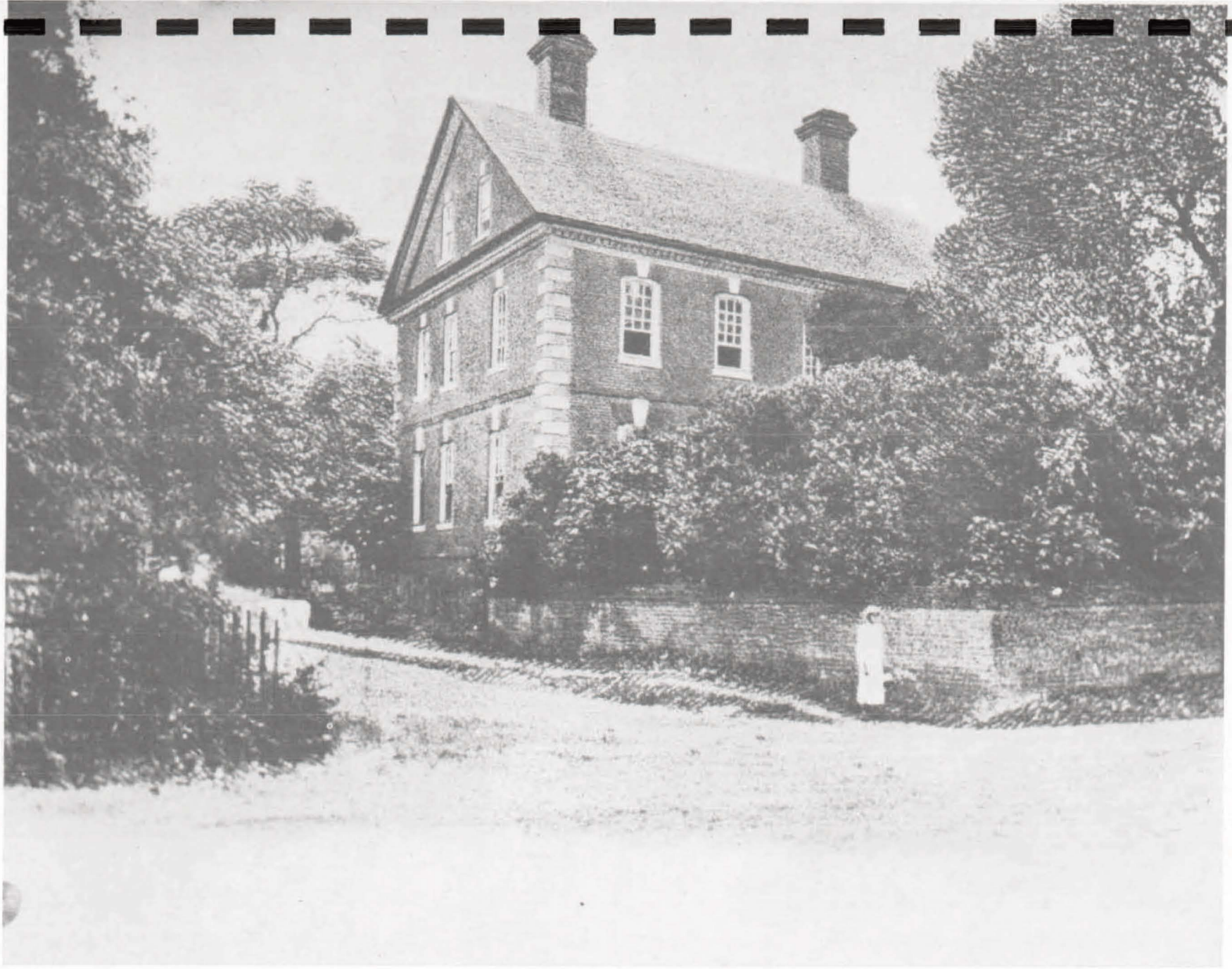
(From Scribners Monthly (October, 1881), XXII, p. 803.)



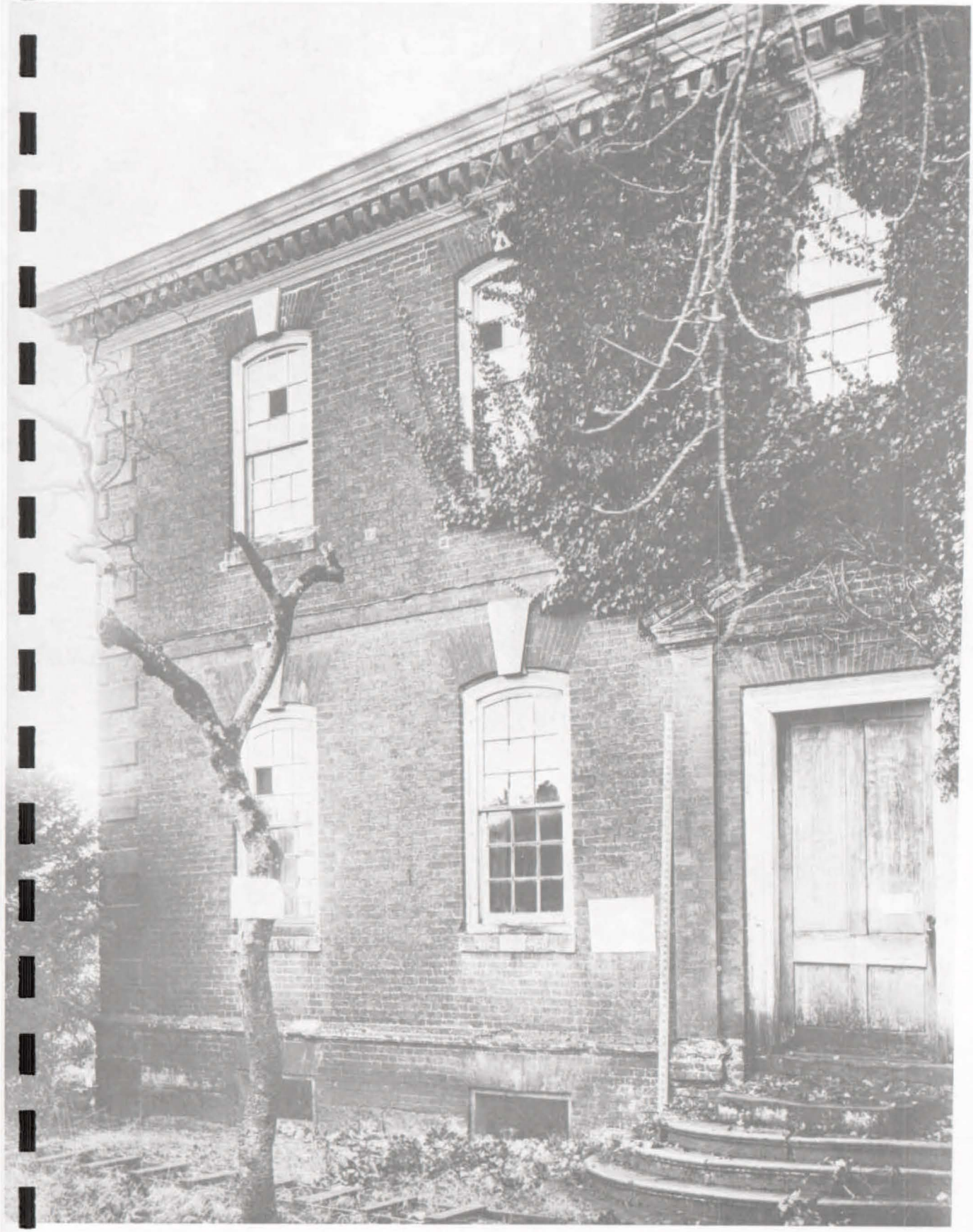
THE NELSON MANSION

No. 18 The Nelson House near the Turn of this Century.

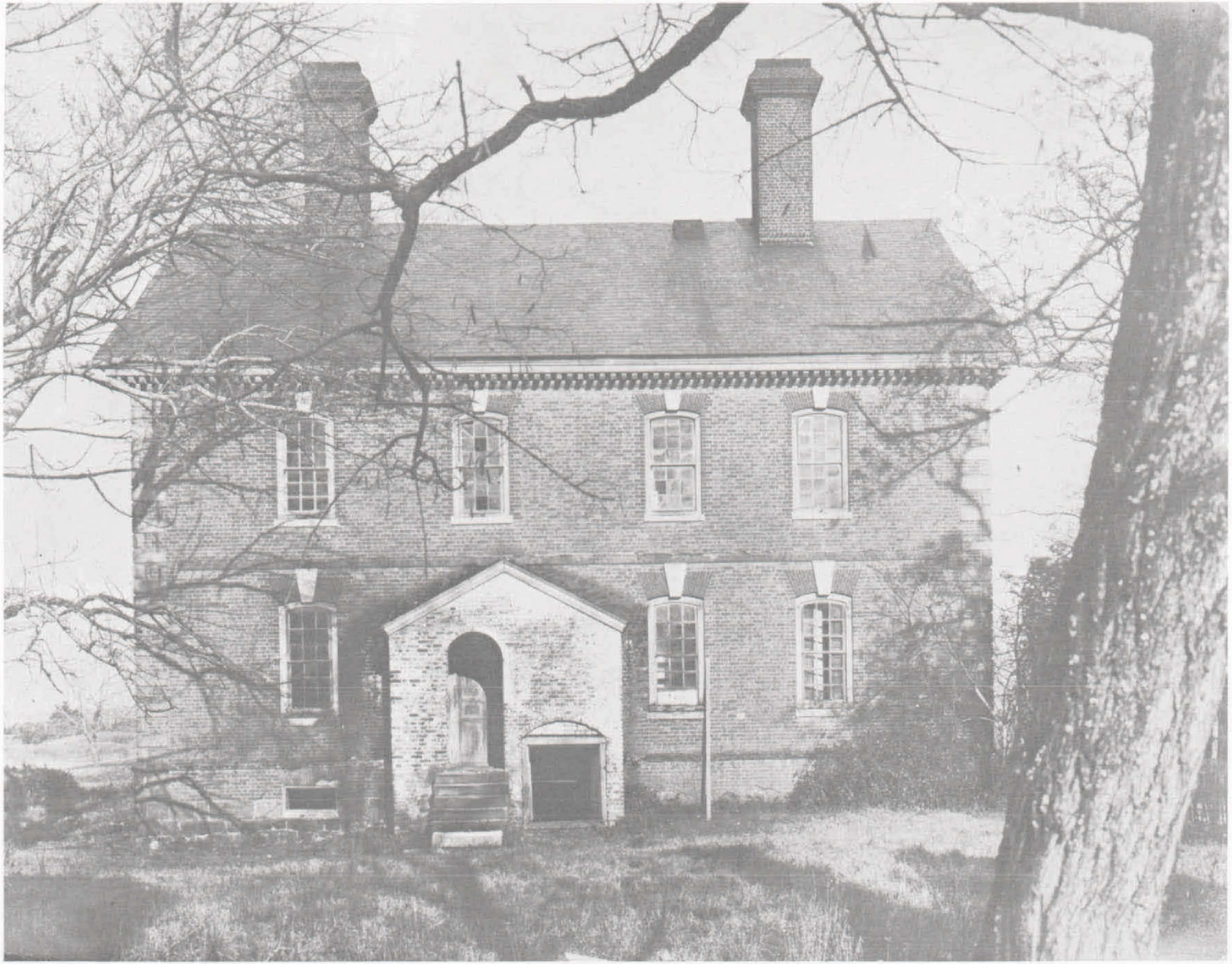
(This is likely from a Huestis Cook (Richmond Photographer) negative.)



No. 19 (16512) Front of House just Prior to Restoration (Copy from Blow Family Album).



No. 20 (16501) Rear of House just Prior to Restoration (Copy from Blow Family Album),

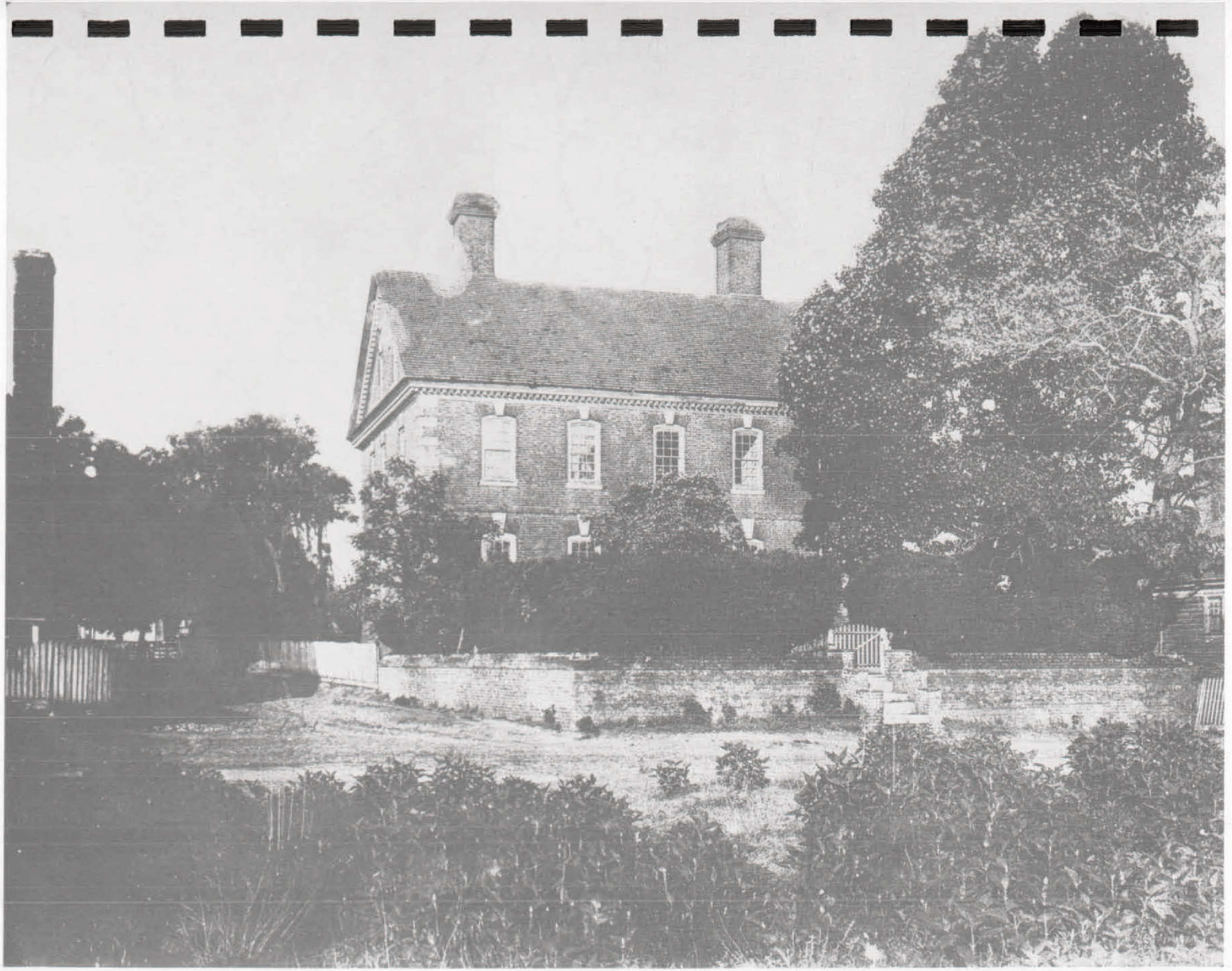


No. 21 (16548) Rear and Southeast Elevation Just Prior to Restoration (Copy from Blow Family Album).

Note the brick patch between the corner and the last window to the right on the lower floor. This is where a cannon ball, in place today, was reset during restoration.



No. 22 (16580) Nelson House with Part of Kitchen at far right, at the Turn of this Century (From a Huestic Cook negative).



No. 23
(16547)

The Northwest Face of the Nelson House Just Prior to Restoration.

Of note, perhaps, is the simple doorway and the kitchen chimney stack and foundations. (Copy from Blow Family Album)



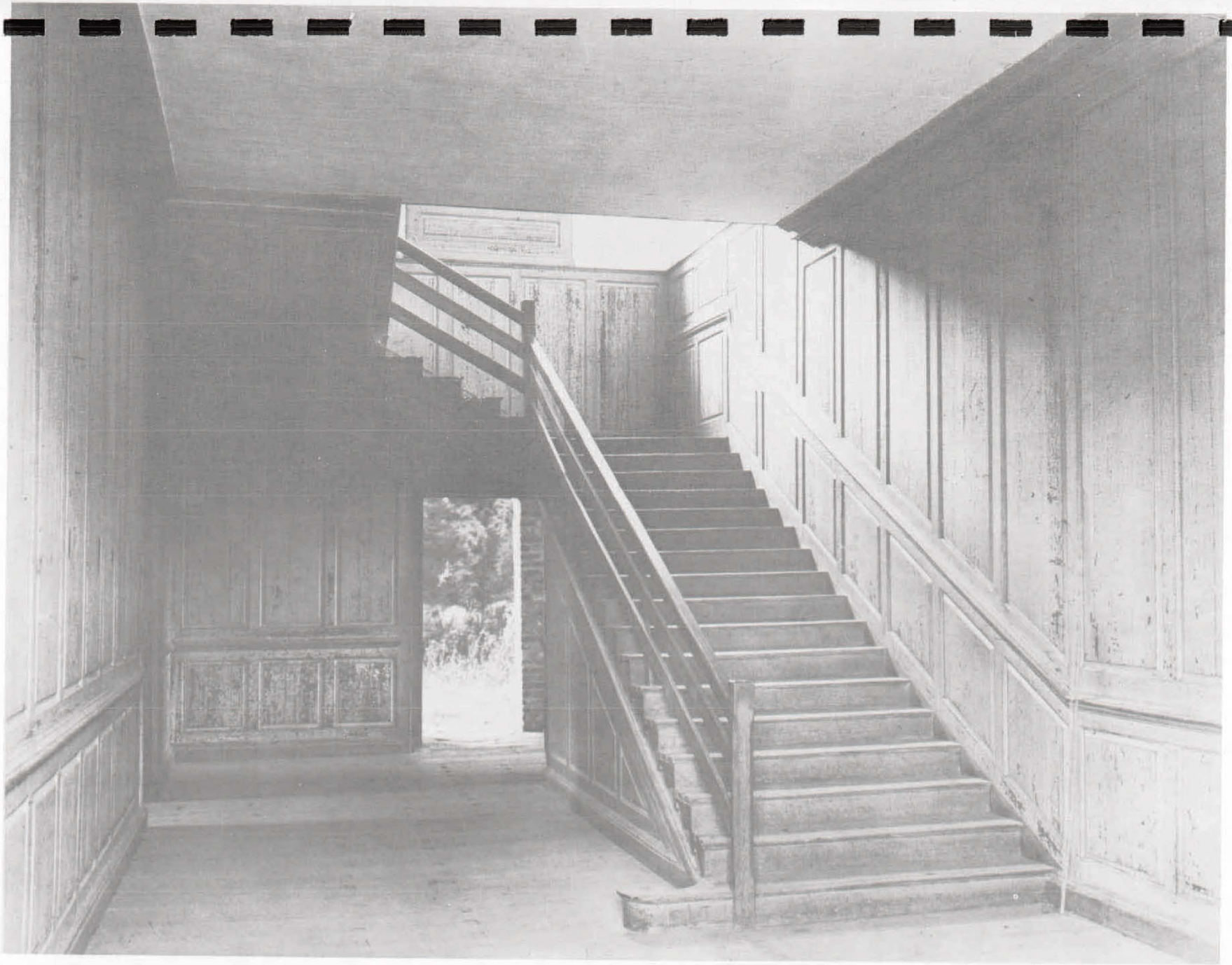
No. 24
(16522)

The First Floor Hall and Stairway before Restoration.

Note the wood floor and the balustrade. (Copy from Blow Family Album.)



No. 25 (16525) Closer View of Stairway and Rear Door before Restoration. (Copy from Blow Family Album.)



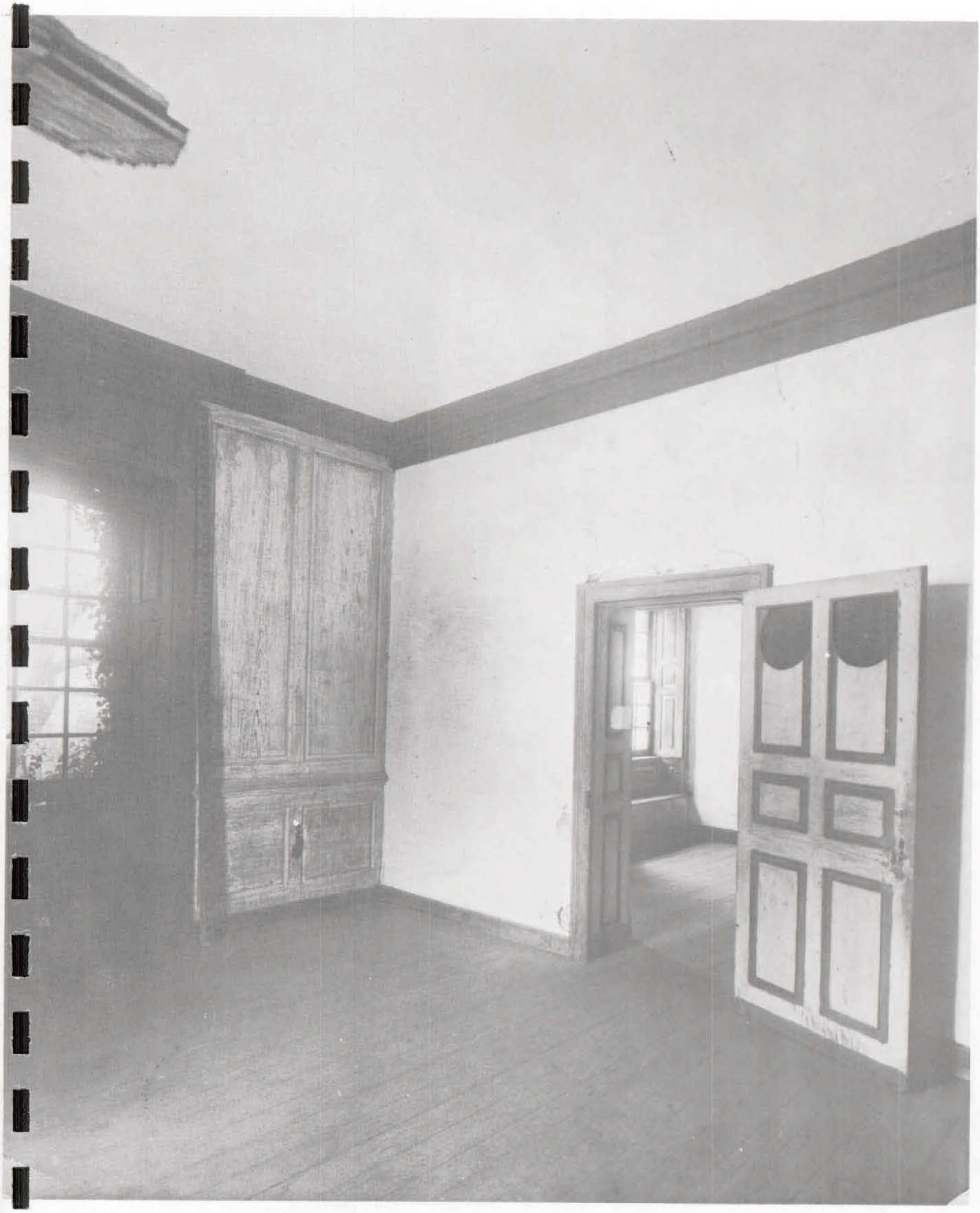
No. 26
(16529)

First Floor, East Corner Room of Nelson House Prior to Restoration.

Though the Blow Family used this as the dining room the Nelsons likely used it as the drawing room, or parlor, as it is rather far removed from the kitchen on the opposite side of the house. (Copy from Blow Family Album.)



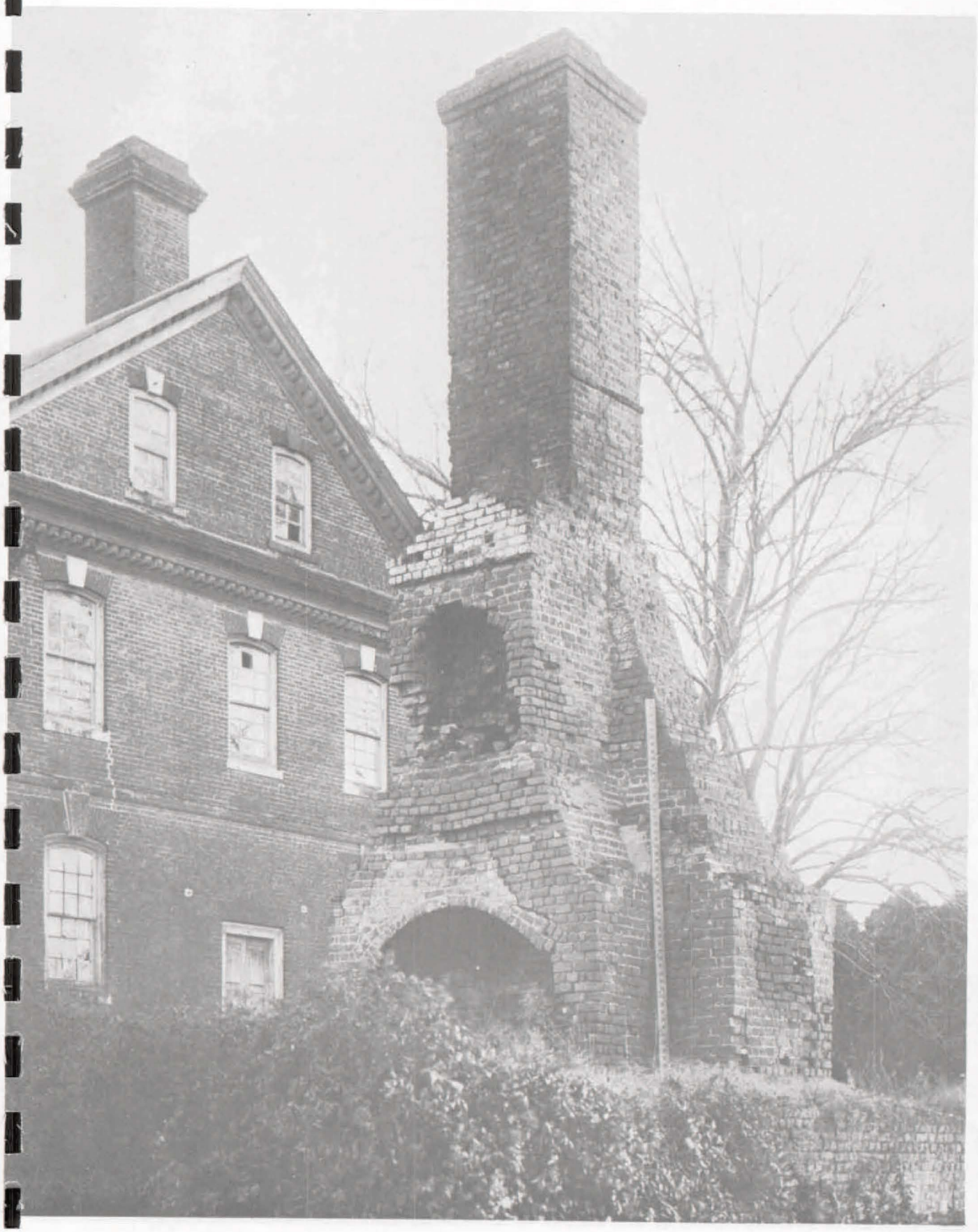
No. 27 (16540) The Second Floor North Corner Room Before Restoration. (Copy from Blow Family Album.)



No. 28 (16>41) Second Floor South Corner Room Before Restoration. (Copy from Blow Family Album.)



No. 29 (16520) Close-up of Old Kitchen-Wash-House Chimney Prior to the Restoration of the Mansion Behind. (Copy from Blow Family Album.)



No. 30
(16521)

Nelson House and Kitchen Chimney Just Prior to Restoration Showing Alignment with Main Street. (Copy from Blow Family Album.)



No. 31
(16581)

Nelson House in Background With the Kitchen and Its Towering Chimney in Front of It. (The old "Customhouse" looms large in foreground.) (From a Huestis Cook negative likely taken in the 1890-1900 period.)



No. 32
(16599)

Nelson House Kitchen in Outline with its Tall Chimney Stack (on left). (From The New York Sun, Pictorial Magazine Section, October 19, 1913)

This view was troublesome until it was seen that the paper had printed this photograph in reverse. The kitchen obviously had no dormers.

Street in Yorkto
as it Looks To

No. 33 Nelson House from Main Street Some Time After Restoration (circa 1920). (From old negative of W.L. Scott of Yorktown, Va.)



No. 34 Nelson House View from the South Shortly After Restoration (Circa 1920). (From old negative of W.L. Scott.)



GPO 906.647