

Dr. Alexander Glass Strachan House
302 Cross Street
Petersburg
Virginia

HABS NO. VA.-642
HABS
VA.
27-PET
4.

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS
VA
27-PET
4-

DR. ALEXANDER GLASS STRACHAN HOUSE

Location: 302 Cross Street, Petersburg, Virginia

Present Owner: Historic Petersburg Foundation, Inc., P. O. Box 267, Petersburg, Virginia

Present Occupant: Vacant, was a private residence

Present Use: Unoccupied

Statement of Significance: The main portion of this house was probably built by Dr. Alexander Glass Strachan, a physician, and graduate of the University of Edinburgh, about the middle of the eighteenth century. Strachan was one of the first aldermen of Petersburg in 1784. The house is noteworthy because of its method of construction, which includes mortice and tenon joints with pegs.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Middle of the eighteenth century
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: A partial chain of title for the building follows. Deed and Will Books are in the Clerk's Office of Hustings Court at Petersburg.

1830 Deed December 18, 1830 recorded in
Will Book 3 page 39
John B. Strachan
to
Rebecca P. Strachan
Catharine Roberts Strachan
Rebecca Bolling Strachan
Martha Cornelia Strachan
Sarah Ann Strachan
Janet Strachan
John Blackwood Strachan

1848 Deed December 2, 1848 recorded in
Book 17 page 359
Martha C. Strachan
Robert H. Lorton
to
Quinn Morton (tr.)

- 1849 Deed March 19, 1849 recorded in
Book 17 page 499
M. C. (Strachan) Lorton
to
John G. Williams (tr.)
- 1860 Deed March 4, 1860 recorded in
Book 28 page 86
J. B. Strachan
M. V. Strachan
George C. Bland
R. B. Bland
John G. Williams (tr.)
for
M. Cornelia Lorton
R. H. Lorton
M. C. Lorton
to
Dolly P. Harrison
- 1883 Deed March 19, 1883 recorded in
Book 44 page 12
Nathaniel Cole Harrison
Elizabeth Leigh Harrison
to
William H. Harrison
- 1902 Deed November 1, 1902 recorded in
Book 66 page 56
William H. Harrison
Rosa West Harrison
to
Rosa West Harrison
- 1936 Deed December 21, 1936 recorded in
Book 133 page 435
Rosa West Harrison
to
Trustees of Grace P. E. Church
- 1953 Deed December 2, 1953 recorded in
Book 190 page 125
Elizabeth H. Coke
Nathaniel C. Harrison
Dorothy Carroll
Charles R. Carroll
Helen H. Hubbard
George W. Harrison
Delia B. Harrison

(heirs of Rosa West
Harrison d. 1942)
to
Julian Harold Smythe

Will Book 26 page 267
Julian H. Smythe
d. March 19, 1962
to
Gretchen H. Woodruff

1963 Deed October 8, 1963 recorded in
Book 260 page 423
Gretchen H. Woodruff
Coleman W. Woodruff
to
Roslyn Farm Corporation

1968 Deed July 8, 1968
Roslyn Farm Corporation
to
Historic Petersburg Foundation, Inc.

4. Original plans and construction: Unknown.

5. Alterations and additions: Wings added later.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The Strachan House was described by Ellen Glasgow in her novel, Virginia (New York, Doubleday, Page & Company, 1913). It served from 1936 until 1953 as the rectory of Grace Protestant Episcopal Church.

Prepared by Randall J. Biallas
University of Illinois, Urbana
August 1968

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

I. Architectural character: A colonial dwelling of the middle eighteenth century, the Strachan House is significant for its long, linear plan arrangement and its construction methods, which include mortice and tenon joints with pegs.

2. Condition of fabric: The house has been stripped apart to the bare studs and joists on the interior. The exterior is in poor condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Central portion with two wings, overall length 97'. Central portion 46' x 20'. Two stories plus a basement in central portion. Central portion was built first, wings added later.
2. Foundations: Brick in central part, stone on two wings.
3. Wall construction: Heavy timber construction with clapboard siding.
4. Chimneys: Three brick chimneys, two in central portion and one on west wing (facing building). West wing chimney has been rebuilt; others appear to be original brick.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Five exterior openings, two in west wing, one in east wing, two in central portion. Front door has glass side panels and glass transom. All doors appear to be original.
 - b. Windows and shutters: First floor, front elevation has eight window bays, two in each wing. Windows are double hung, with 9 lights each sash in central portion and west wing, 6 lights each sash in east wing. All windows appear to be original.
6. Porches: Rear porch, covered, supported by two wood columns, measures approximately 8' x 10' with steps leading down to grade level. Front porch removed at unknown date, appears in HABS photograph of 1930's. Covered colonnade about 15' wide.
7. Structural system: Heavy axe-hewn timbers. Mortice and tenon jointage system with wood pegs. There are many crude joints due to alterations through the years. Roman Numerals were carved in the rafters for coding purposes when the roof was constructed. Ceiling joists 3" x 5", wall studs 4" x 6", second floor joists 5" x 7", and first floor joists vary.
8. Roof shape and covering: Central portion has jerkinhead roof; wings have gables. All have tin covering. Ribs 13" to 24" o.c., varying.

9. Dormers: Ten dormers on central part, five each side. Windows in dormers are double hung, 6 lights each sash. Dormers are about 8' o.c.
10. Cornice: Simple wood cornice projects on both north and south sides, all parts.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Unfinished basement in central part and east wing; west wing basement inaccessible. First floor: central hallway running north-south with one large room with fireplace each side in central portion. Each wing has only one room. Second floor: two rooms, one each side in central portion. Attic in west wing not accessible from central portion.
2. Stairways: One stairway to right of main entrance leads to basement and second floor of central part. Also stairway in west wing.
3. Flooring: Basement floor, dirt. Others floors all wood planking. On first floor east room, central portion flooring has been removed, exposing floor joists, 3" x 10", approximately 2' o.c. Floor joists vary in size in various parts of the building, some 4" x 6", others larger--8" x 10" and 9" x 12".
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All exposed structure with exception of some wooden wainscoting on first floor.
5. Doorways and doors: Most interior doors removed. Now stored at local builders' supply along with wooden mantels. Doorways have been moved and altered from original in several cases.
6. Decorative features and trim: Fireplace mantels (in storage) have decorative wood moulding on sides and top. Some have sunburst pattern in center. All other decorative features that might have existed have been stripped out.
7. Lighting: None.
8. Heating: None.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation and general setting: The house is oriented almost due south on land sloping north toward the river. Land drops off sharply about 30' beyond house. To south of house is a large parking lot. A church formerly stood on the site of parking lot.

2. Landscaping and walks: Heavy undergrowth has grown up through house's lack of use. Many trees on lot. Concrete steps lead up from Cross Street directly to east. However, walk to house no longer exists. No outbuildings.

Prepared by John M. McRae
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
August 1968

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation made during the 1968 Petersburg Summer Project, undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with The Historic Petersburg Foundation, Inc., with financial assistance from The Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission. During the summer, records were made up on twenty-two buildings in the city.

The project was under the general direction of James C. Massey, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Supervisor was John M. McRae of the University of Florida. The recording team was composed of Randall J. Biallas, historian (University of Illinois, Urbana), and student assistant architects Michael Hamilton (University of Arizona), Thomas J. Sanford (Washington State University), and Edwin S. Smith, Jr. (Rhode Island School of Design). Photographs were made by George Eisenman.