

TUDOR GROVE, GARDEN SHED
Old Lynchburg Road (Route 631)
Charlottesville vicinity
Albemarle County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1384-A

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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Location: Old Lynchburg Road, Charlottesville vicinity, Albemarle County, Virginia.

Tudor Grove plantation is located approximately two miles south of Charlottesville, on Old Lynchburg Road. The property is dominated by a large brick plantation house (fig. 1), a central passage structure with two primary rooms on either side of a hallway on each floor. This handsome Georgian house is sturdy and well-built, and its plan, construction technology, and interior moldings date it to the early years of the nineteenth century. Additions have been subsequently added to the rear of the house, and in recent decades, a four-columned, double-storied, pedimented portico has been implemented by the present owner, Ms. Camille Price, who has resided at Tudor Grove for three years. Due to her vigilance, several of the plantation's outbuildings have been preserved.

The garden shed is located approximately 75 yards south of the main house (figs. 2-3).

Architectural Description:

Exterior: The garden shed is a curiously small, square structure (10'3" per side); the walls and floor are constructed solidly out of stone, and a standing seam metal roof is supported by wood rafters joined to a ridge board. Distinctive elements, such as a reptilian grotesque, a round Gothic window, small cottage windows, a steeply pitched roof, and a chimney composed in an intentionally ruinous state (fig. 3) suggest that the shed is a garden folly useful for storing garden tools but additionally evocative of a picturesque, romantic ruin. Technological features, including the ridge board, circular-sawn lumber, and windows glazed with two-over-two lights, indicate that the folly dates to the turn of the twentieth century, a time when the romantic garden folly still lingered in the American imagination.

The shed's stone walls are 15" thick; the majority of the fieldstones employed are irregularly shaped, but squared stones are used to accentuate the exterior corners of the building and to frame the doorway (fig. 2) and windows (fig. 8). Dark cement patches are applied in places where the original, lighter mortar has deteriorated; the dissimilar rates of water absorption of the older and newer cements have drawn water into the walls, encouraging further cracking and

intensive ivy growth. For the present, the walls remain quite stable. The only door, a modern replacement, marks the southern gable end as the entrance facade (fig. 2); the east and west walls have a window each, and a circular window punctuates the shed to the north (fig. 3). The apex of each gable is 10'9" above the ground; from here, the stone walls of the gable ends slope down to 6' at the sides. The side walls rise to this latter height, and provide platforms on which the wood roof joists may rest (fig. 4). On the exterior, the stones are left in their natural, rugged state; inside, the stones are flush and whitewashed (figs. 5-6, 8).

The roof framing system is simple, and is perhaps the shed's most definitive dating feature. Flat boards lie atop the side walls at their edge; nicked green-painted rafters, eight per side, rest on top of these boards (fig. 5) running from the eaves to the ridge board in a roof framing system typical of early twentieth-century vernacular construction. For additional support, cross-bracing boards are haphazardly nailed to vertical faces of the two northern-most pairs of rafters (fig. 6). Wide planks are nailed on top of and across the rafters, and a standing seam metal roof caps the structure. The roof extends approximately 10 ½" beyond the side walls and approximately 4 ½" beyond the gable ends. At the sides, long 2 x 4s extend horizontally to cover the top half of the rafter ends, while at the gable ends, non-structural rafters, thinner in both thickness and width than their structural counterparts, are attached to the underside of the roof butting into small pentagonal pieces suggestive of Gothic barge boards below the apex. All lumber is circular sawn and secured with machine-made nails, features of post Civil War construction in the South and features used today.

Wood jambs and a header about the door are also circular sawn and painted green; the six-light green painted door is a modern replacement and its compact plywood material is distinct from the rougher faces of the jambs and header. On top of the header rests a thin, flat stone slab, on which sit half a dozen small, squat stones that support a concrete lintel slightly wider than the 2'8" doorway (fig. 7); topped by a second thin, flat slab and more small stones, this lintel is probably a later insertion interrupting the large-stone pattern of the shed's walls. The lintel is carved with poetic lines celebrating soil cultivation: "WHISTLE AND HOE SING AS YOU GO: (/) SHORTEN (/) THE ROWS BY THE SONGS THAT YOU KNOW." The capitalized lettering is uneven, and the words are not fitted to even lines, but they clearly state the intention of the shed

as a garden folly.¹ The Jeffersonian sentiment of the romantic American landscape as a garden paradise is commemorated by this crudely cut, simple, nursery-rhyme verse, which invokes the image of the happy gardener blissfully toiling in the peaceful paradise of the American land.² The fact that this lintel may be a later insertion does not negate the folly's intent; rather the lintel intensifies it suggesting that the shed's symbolic use as a folly has been maintained over time.

The cottage windows of the east and west walls are identically crafted (fig. 8) and centrally positioned (figs. 2-3). Made of green-painted wood, they are the products of mass production, fabricated elsewhere and transported to the site by way of the early and extensive railroad system of western and central Virginia. It is quite likely that most of the materials for this shed, including the stones and original door, are foreign to the site as is typical of both vernacular and elite buildings constructed in the United States after the Civil War. These windows are of a simple configuration, glazed with two-over-two lights, and their ornamentation consists of green paint on the wood frames, black-painted latticework (now faded) upon the lights, and copper lizard handles above which are small swivel locks. The windows are hinged to the left and swing inward. Like those of the door, the window jambs and headers are made of rough, circular sawn boards, painted green, and affixed to the stone wall by way of hidden nailer boards. The windows are flush with the inside face of the east and west walls; the deep window recesses observed from the exterior are smoothed with cement, faced at the sides with wide, green-painted boards, and splayed downward at the bottom.

The circular window of the north wall is characteristic of the romantic garden folly of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (figs. 3, 6). While there is a substantial rectangular stone horizontally placed above it, there are many smaller stones and much cement work about the remaining circumference of the window (fig. 6). Like the lintel over the door, it too may be a later insertion suggestive of the structure's long life as a garden folly. As a small-scale

¹In contrast, Tudor Grove lore claims this building to be a former slave cabin, the poetic lintel meant to instill cheerfulness within its enslaved inhabitants. Both technological and ornamental features proves this to be a myth for the shed is clearly a post Civil War structure.

²Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

domestic version of the magnificent rose windows of the great Gothic cathedrals, the window is comprised of seven small circular panes of clear glass fit into a concrete disc out of which seven corresponding holes have been cast. The pattern of seven circles is not aligned with the apex of the roof; the top-most circular pane is off-center, accentuating the nature of the shed as a garden folly in a state of ruin. Above the window, a curious reptilian head of carved stone protrudes from the wall (fig. 9), evocative of the grotesques of sacred and secular French medieval architecture. Unprotected by the overhang of the roof, the head has eroded from the rain in a natural process of decay, but two eyes and a mouth slightly upturned are clearly visible.

The chimney (figs. 2-3), rising up through the roof to the north of the west window, is another element integral to the staged decay of this garden folly. It is short and stubby, and crowned by irregular, vertically oriented, small stones purposefully positioned in a ruinous manner; the lower portion of the protruding chimney stack is covered with cement, possibly in conjunction with the patching campaign carried out on the walls below, but the carefully posed stones above remain free from correction. The chimney serves as an exhaust outlet for an interior stove providing immediate warmth for the gardener seeking shelter from chilly spring rains. The metal pipe required for this heating device is still embedded within the chimney, and can be observed on the interior of the west wall (fig. 8). The inclusion of the chimney is twofold; on the one hand, it allows for yet another manifestation of staged decay, while on the other, it signifies the functional aspect of this folly, and its practical use as a garden shed and shelter.

As if to underline this utilitarian intention, a narrow, green-painted shelf stretches across the inside of the north wall (fig. 6), providing space for seeds and small gardening tools. Although the building may appear to be caught in the early stages of decay, it is, and always has been, quite functionally sufficient for its intended purpose. Unlike its European ancestors, this turn of the century American garden folly is a functional as well as a decorative addition to the landscape. From the outside, swathed in the green growth of Virginia vines, it is reminiscent of the English garden folly, first popularized by Henry Hoare at Stourhead Park in the mid-eighteenth century and it suggests the romantic, Gothic ruin epitomized in England at the turn of the nineteenth century by James Wyatt's Fontill Abbey. Upon entering, however, the function of this folly as a useable shed becomes clear. Space is allotted to the gardener for the storage of the tools of his trade, a stove is provided for warmth, and windows, in combination with a whitewashed interior, ensure a bright pleasant atmosphere in

which to work. Soundly constructed and well maintained, the ruinous state of this garden folly is no more than a playful suggestion, inspired by a century and a half of Gothic garden follies. Verily, Ms. Camille Price - the present owner - continues to find the shed to be both a useful and a charming addition to the estate.

Historian(s): Laura L. Thornton, May 2003.

Project Information: The documentation of the Garden Shed at Tudor Grove took place as part of Louis Nelson's (2003) field methods class at the University of Virginia, School of Architecture, Department of Architectural History. Students recorded various structures through measured drawings and written description; the record the students created was dependent on their ability to read what the structure was telling them about its construction history rather than on traditional documentary research.



Fig. 1. Entrance (east) façade of the Tudor Grove plantation house.



Fig. 2. South-west perspective of the garden shed (entrance door on south façade).



Fig. 3. North-west perspective of the garden shed.



Fig. 4. Exterior rafter detail.



Fig. 5. Interior rafter detail.



Fig 6. Interior view of north wall.



Fig. 7. Lintel above south façade door. The verse reads:

WHISTLE AND HOE SING AS YOU GO:
SHORTEN
THE ROWS BY THE SONGS THAT YOU
KNOW



Fig. 8. Interior view of west wall, including west window, exhaust pipe inlet, and chimney.



Fig. 9. Reptilian grotesque protruding from north wall.