

3111 GROVE AVENUE (HOUSE)  
1009 Monroe Street  
Richmond  
Independent City County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1387

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20240

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### 3111 GROVE AVENUE (HOUSE)

HABS No. VA-1387

Location: 3111 Grove Avenue, Richmond (City), Virginia.

Located west of the Boulevard, 3111 Grove Avenue stands within an early twentieth-century suburb of Richmond, Virginia. Oriented toward the north, the front facade is flush with contemporary detached single-family houses and detached apartment buildings along the block. Several neighboring houses appear to be built by the same developer as they possess similar architectural embellishments and floor plans with only minor variations (fig. 1). The row houses are set back nearly 50' from the sidewalk. Narrow alleyways divide each lot. Accessible from the east side of the house, the backyard (fig. 4) extends nearly the same length as the front yard but to a cobblestone alley.

#### Architectural Description:

**Exterior:** From 1900 to 1920, neoclassicism prevailed in grandiose public architecture. Focusing primarily on the Greek orders, neoclassicists most often employed the Doric and Ionic orders as well as clean polished surfaces rather than elaborate detailing. At the height of its popularity, elements of the highly visible style infiltrated the domestic market, appearing in eclectic middle-class housing all across the states. The main facade of 3111 Grove Avenue is graced by Ionic columns as is the division between the foyer and the front parlor in the interior (figs. 1-2, 6). Initial construction of the house (phase one) did in fact occur in the 1910s. Several houses within the block bare historic designation plaques with the engraving of the erection dates therein.

From the exterior, the house reads as frame construction with a brick veneer. Like most urban dwellings of the era, the primary facade is covered by a finer quality brick and thinner mortar than the side and back elevations. Currently painted light lavender, the entire front wall is comprised of smooth, face bricks which were likely machine pressed, common after the 1870s, as they maintain sharp uniform edges. The other exterior walls consist of common brick joined by thicker raked mortar in six-course American bond. Fig. 3 shows the transition from the public facade to the alley facade. Three interior end chimneys on the east elevation lack decorative brickwork due to their near invisibility from the street. A parapet along the main facade disguises the gently pitched built-up roof. Mass produced and popular at the time, modern Spanish-style tiles cover a slim pent roof that slopes up the parapet from the

base of the attic level. A small cross gable, containing a semi-circular fanlight, bisects the pent. The same tile swathes the slight three-sided pent around the flat porch roof.

Two other variations of fanlights adorn the facade. All three fanlights are framed by stone corner blocks, arches, and keystones which are dressed with machine-tooled grooves. The glazed front door and stained-glass sidelights are capped by an elliptical stained-glass fanlight (fig. 2). A similar one also tops the tripartite double-hung windows (glazed with one-over-one lights) on the first floor. Engaged entablatures ornament the mullions between these three windows. Flat arches with keystones cap the three second-story windows.

Interior: Upon entering the foyer from the front door situated on the west end of the north elevation, one can view the entire depth of the house to the south elevation windows (fig. 5). The entire house consists of narrow strip wood flooring except in the bathrooms, where second and third phase ceramic tiles have been laid. Stairs against the west wall have decorative newel posts and balustrade with a turned platform three steps up from the main floor. In contrast, the newel at the back of the house on what was likely the servant stairs is not quite as elaborate, nor is the stair as wide.

Turning east from the foyer is a wide opening flanked by Ionic columns to the parlor. Fig. 6 illustrates the detail with which the capitals were produced as well as the stained-glass fanlights within the front facade. The house is four chambers deep, the first three of which flow into one another through double pocket doors. Identical mantelpieces and tile hearths along the east wall surround the fireplaces in these three rooms. They are rather simple, yet elegant in design and characteristic of mass-produced features of the early twentieth century. Beveled mirrors, a more affordable luxury by this time, fit within the mantelpieces. The fireplace in the front room has a decorative metal screen (fig. 7).

Approaching the rear of the house, No. 3111 has undergone two visible interior alteration phases since its construction. Possibly in the 1960s, phase two occurred, evidenced by a hollow flush door at the top of the basement stairwell in the kitchen and faux paneling over the interior walls of the stairwell. Indicative of a third phase, stains and nail holes scar the wood flooring in the kitchen. The third-phase kitchen renovation created these scars and an overhead reflection of where the dividing walls once stood (fig. 9). The removal of the load-bearing wall that had divided the kitchen from the back stair hall required the addition of

three structural columns executed in the Tuscan order. Two of the columns only stand a portion of the ceiling height from the position on raised piers. The central one is the full height of the room.

The back hallway that had once existed to the west of the kitchen also has extended to the front of the house. The passage was closed off in the middle portion of the first floor by a third phase bathroom and kitchen closet. A historic door hangs on the closet jamb, yet its paneling and knob fixture are different from the other doors in the house which all have the same hardware (fig. 8). Inside the closet, new unfinished lumber shelving and contractor pencil markings on the wall indicate that these changes have all occurred in the last decade. The bathroom has been finished carefully with the inclusion of spare original base molding removed from other portions of the house. Within the wall between the bathroom and living room, an original stained-glass window, a popular domestic vestige of the industrial and railroad era, was preserved.

In phase three, new molding and baseboards were added to the kitchen. Interestingly, with the enclosing of phase one windows and the addition of new ones, the contractor matched the new frames to the old; yet, concerning the base and crown moldings, a pattern incongruent to the rest of the house was chosen. New windows and door frames though matched to the original, lack the layers paint, have cleaner edges, and visible nail heads. Remnants of two segmental arches on the exterior south elevation where there are now three windows, and one segmental arch on the east facade completely filled in, also reveal that the kitchen windows are phase three (fig. 4).

Accessed either from the backyard or the kitchen, the basement is only as large as the room above. The underside of the house can be viewed via a crawlspace of packed earth. The foundation of the walls is concrete mixed with small stones and common bricks laid approximately nine bricks high on top of that. Other than the exterior walls, the foundation supports exist beneath the wall dividing the hallway from the living chambers and the wall dividing the third chamber from the kitchen. The regular and circular pattern of grooves on the wood in floor and roof supports seen in the crawlspace and attic confirm that the boards were produced in a twentieth-century saw mill. The pattern of saw marks can clearly be seen in the attic (fig. 10), which is accessed through a hall closet on the second floor. The framing structure within the attic confirms how the roof was described from the exterior. It consists of boards with a variety of dimensions nailed together and situated in a crude truss fashion extending back

from the built-up facade.

Overall, the technology, style, and decorative fixtures and moldings employed are consistent with early twentieth-century buildings. Many elements within the house from glass, mirrors, moldings, and doorknobs, to bricks, flooring, roofing, and structural members were mass produced and used widely in buildings contemporary to it. Such common decorative and structural elements were easily accessible due to its location in the suburb of a by then industrialized city with numerous railroad connections. The authenticity of the house and the care with which it has been kept and renovated renders No. 3111 Grove Avenue a significant piece in the history of turn-of-the-century suburban development in relationship to revitalization efforts of the late twentieth century in historic cities throughout the Southeast.

Historian(s): Anna Maas and Lara Mathes, May 2003.

Project Information: The documentation of the house at 3111 Grove Avenue 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.

3111 Grove Avenue ~ Richmond, Virginia

Anna Maas & Lara Mathes



Figure 1:  
Primary north façade and  
west alley façade as viewed  
from Grove Avenue sidewalk.  
Neighboring houses of similar  
design partially visible.



Figure 2:  
North façade entrance.

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Figure 3: Transition from public façade to alley façade on northeast corner.



Figure 4: South façade as viewed from alleyway.

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Figure 5:  
Looking south from front  
foyer.

Figure 6:  
Looking toward northern  
interior wall from front  
stair platform.



3111 Grove Avenue ~ Richmond, Virginia

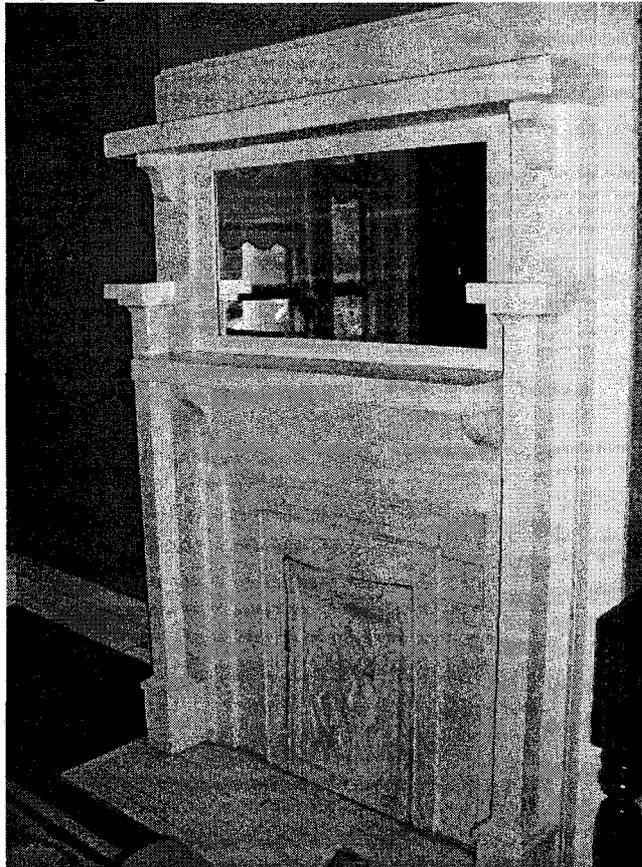


Figure 7: First-chamber mantelpiece on east wall.

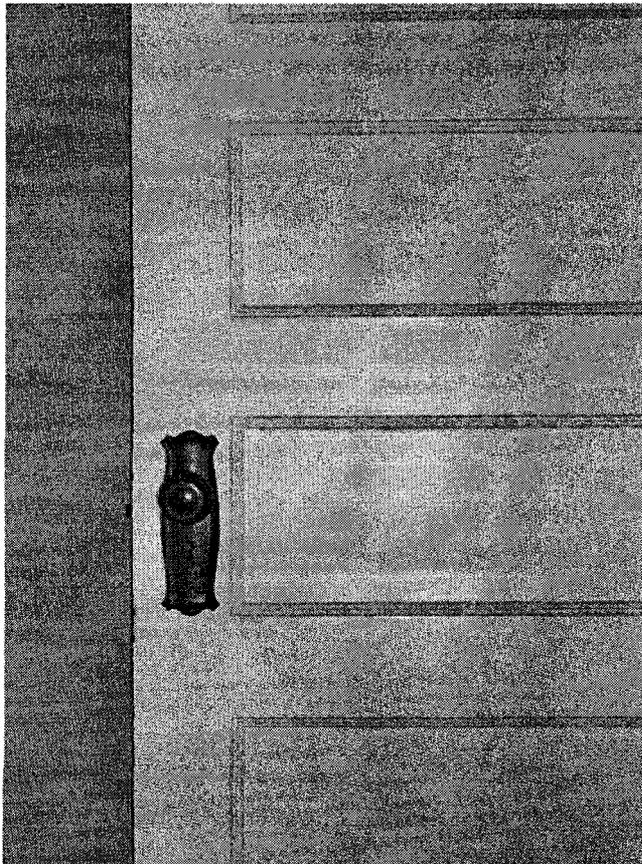


Figure 8: Door detail, used throughout the house, on the door between the hallway and the third chamber.

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Figure 9: Structural Tuscan column, which replaced the support of two load-bearing walls removed during Phase III.

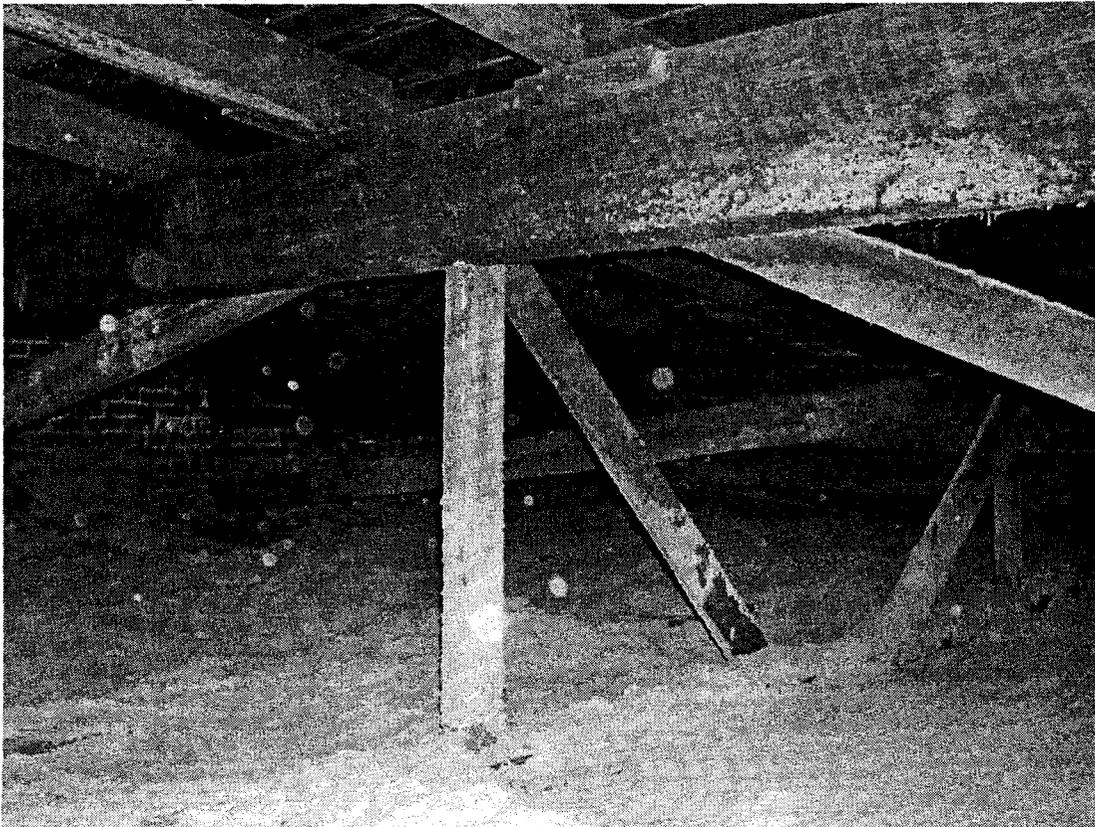


Figure 10: Looking toward the southeast corner of the attic (sawmill pattern visible on the boards).