

CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG  
HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION



SURVEY AND RESEARCH REPORT

*The Sloan-Porter House*

*(circa 1810 and 1890)*



*Prepared by Brian S. Clarke*



- a. **Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as the Sloan-Porter House does possess special historic significance for Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following criteria:
- i. The Sloan-Porter House is a rare and good example of the evolution of rural built environment in Mecklenburg County during the nineteenth century.
  - ii. The Sloan-Porter House remains remarkably intact inside and out, with almost all of the historic woodwork in place and unaltered.
  - iii. The Sloan-Porter House is an increasing rare example of a nineteenth century farmhouse that remains in its original rural setting.
  - iv. The original log house, built ca. 1810 by Alexander Porter is one of the oldest surviving houses in Mecklenburg County and one of the few surviving homes early years of the nineteenth century.
  - v. The original log house, with its massive hand-hewn logs and half-dovetail notches, is a fine example of the early building techniques used in the North Carolina Piedmont and Mecklenburg County.
  - vi. The Sloan-Porter House is associated with two prominent families of western Mecklenburg County, the Porters and the Sloans. Both families were among the very early settlers of western Mecklenburg County (arriving in the 1750s) and helped shape and lead the community that grew up around Steele Creek Presbyterian Church.
  - vii. The Sloan-Porter House is one of a dwindling number of historic residences in the Dixie-Berryhill/Steele Creek area and is a significant reminder of the character of the Steele Creek area before the arrival of what is now Charlotte-Douglas International Airport.
- b. **Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:** The Commission contends that the architectural description in this report demonstrates that the property known as the Sloan-Porter House meets this criterion.
9. **Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a “historic landmark.” The current appraised value of the property is \$86,800.
10. **Portion of Property Recommended for Designation:** The interior and exterior of the building, and the land associated with the tax parcel.

**11. Date of Preparation of this Report:** September 30, 2015

Prepared by: Brian S. Clarke

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPERTY:

On March 11, 1871, George Watson Sloan (1838-1902) and his wife Nancy Jane Smith Sloan (1842-1923) purchased 149 acres of land containing a two-story log house from the heirs of his great-great grandfather, Alexander James Porter (1742-1833), for the sum of \$1,229.25. (See Estate File of Alexander Porter (1834), Mecklenburg County Probate Court; Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds, Book 18, Page 62-63, recorded Dec. 18, 1877). The Sloans expanded the house in the late 1880s or early 1890s<sup>1</sup> with a prominent two-story addition to the west end of the log house. The addition gave the house a cross-gabled form. Although the 149 acres tract (as well as the other land owned by G.W. and Nancy Sloan) was subdivided and sold over the years, the house and one acre of that original 149 acre tract remained in the Sloan-Porter<sup>2</sup> family until August 2014.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Sloan-Porter House is significant for several reasons.**

**First**, it is significant due to its association with the Sloan and Porter families. The Sloans and the Porters were very early settlers of western Mecklenburg County, arriving in the 1750s. These families were among the founders of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church with multiple generations buried in the historic Steele Creek Presbyterian Church Cemetery. Porters and Sloans were leaders in the Steele Creek community (now known as Dixie-Berryhill) for generations. They were elders of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church. Members of the families were delegates to political conventions, local trustees and election judges, and they served in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Civil War.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1889, Mr. Sloan borrowed \$625 from L.M. Hoffman of Gaston County and A.D. Jenkins of New York City, which was secured by an indenture/deed of trust on the Property. (See Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Book 69, Page 155 (recorded 31 Dec 1889)). It is quite possible that this loan was secured to complete the expansion and remodeling of the original log house.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Porter obtained the property on which the house is located in or before 1775.

<sup>3</sup> The house and property passed to H.O. Sloan following the death of Nancy Sloan in 1923. Following the death of H.O Sloan in 1978, the property passed to his children and, in 1979, ownership of a 10 acre portion of the original 149+ acre tract containing the house was consolidated with Sarah Sloan Barnes, granddaughter of G.W. and N.J. Sloan, and her husband, Robert Jackson Barnes. Much of the remaining acreage, as well as other land owned by the Sloan family, eventually became the Berryhill Nature Preserve. Mr. and Mrs. Barnes occupied the house for many years until moving to assisted living. The house then became a rental property and, as a result, suffered from deferred maintenance issues and general neglect. Nine of the ten acres remaining acres were sold to Mecklenburg County to be added to Berryhill Nature Preserve, with Mr. Barnes, by now a widower, retaining the house and one acre. In August 2014, the last acre and the house left the hands of the Sloan family after 143 years, when it was purchased by Seth and Carolyn Lehman. The present owners, Brian and Chrissy Clarke, purchased the house on January 21, 2015, to restore and occupy.

**Second**, the original house (now incorporated into the current structure) is among the dozen oldest surviving houses in Mecklenburg County.<sup>4</sup> The ca. 1820 log house was probably the “plantation house” of Alexander Porter, which served as the seat of his 300+ acre plantation along the Catawba River and Paw Creek.<sup>5</sup> The original two-story log house was constructed with massive, hand-hewn, half-dovetail notched logs.

**Third**, the house incorporates one of only nine (9) two-story log houses known to remain in Mecklenburg County.<sup>6</sup> The original log-construction portion of the house is exceptionally well preserved. Its logs show the distinctive marks of the draw knives and axes used to shape them. The half-dovetail notches are typical of early log construction in Mecklenburg County.<sup>7</sup> The rear wall of the original log house retains original whitewash and chinking.

**Fourth**, the house is architecturally significant as a good example of the evolution of rural domestic architecture in Mecklenburg County. The House began as a two-story log house, and was then expanded and remodeled in the 1890s. The expanded house features simple embellishments, like chamfered porch posts, a hipped porch roof, cornice returns, and a louvered gable vent. Additionally, the interior of the House remains remarkably intact with most of the original woodwork from the ca. 1890 expansion remaining unaltered. Especially notable is the two-story entry/stair hall with its heart pine floors, bead-board walls and ceiling, and carved newel post and banisters.

**Fifth**, the Sloan-Porter House is an increasingly rare example of a nineteenth century farmhouse that remains in its original rural setting. The House was once the seat of a substantial farm. The former farmland that surrounds the house is now protected from development as Berryhill Nature Preserve. While the settings of other 19<sup>th</sup>-century Mecklenburg farmhouses in Mecklenburg County are compromised by nearby development, the Sloan-Porter House will very likely retain a rural setting.

**Finally**, the historic buildings of the Steele Creek Area are disappearing at an alarming rate. The nearby William Grier House and the Hayes-Byrum House were moved and then abandoned to

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<sup>4</sup> The oldest surviving houses in Mecklenburg County are the handful of eighteenth century dwellings that remain, particularly the c. 1774 Hezekiah Alexander House, the c. 1780 Hugh Torrance House, the c. 1792 White Oak Plantation, the c. 1795 Holly Bend, and the c. 1790 Cooper Log House. The c. 1800 Latta Plantation, c. 1800 William Alexander House, c. 1804 Grier-Rea House, c. 1807 Rosedale, c. 1811 Potts Plantation house, c. 1815 Neel House, and c. 1820 Benj. W. Davidson House are rough contemporaries of the original portion of the Sloan-Porter House. The “before 1820” construction of the original log house places it slightly earlier than the Beaver Dam plantation house (c. 1829), the William Lee House (c. 1828), and the William Grier House (c. 1825).

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Porter refers to his “dwelling house” and “plantation” in his will dated 27 July 1827 and probated upon his death in 1833.

<sup>6</sup> See Dan Morrill, *Survey and Research Report on the Ephraim Alexander McAuley Log House* (1990). The number cited in this report is seven. I have increased this to nine to account for the Cooper Log House and the Sloan Porter House, both of which were “discovered” subsequent to 1990.

<sup>7</sup> See Stewart Gray, *Log Building Construction in Mecklenburg County From 1920 to 1945*.

make room for commercial development. The Steele Creek Presbyterian Church Manse and several other historic houses near the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport are threatened by potential industrial and commercial development. The well preserved Sloan-Porter House with its intact rural setting is a significant reminder of the historic rural character of the Steele Creek area.

### HISTORICAL ESSAY

#### Alexander J. Porter and Family

Alexander James Porter immigrated to Mecklenburg County with his parents William (1709-1787) and Elizabeth (1718-1779) before 1775. William Porter and Alexander Porter became substantial landowners in the Steele Creek community. Between 1776 and 1803, Alexander Porter assembled a plantation consisting of nearly 500 acres near the confluence of Paw Creek and the Catawba River. The Porters attended Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, along with the other leading families of the area.

According to the announcement of his death in 1833, Alexander Porter “was actively engaged during our Revolutionary Struggle, and was among those who met in Charlotte on the 20th May, 1775, to proclaim independence.” (See THE MINERS’ AND FARMERS’ JOURNAL, 26 Oct. 1833, p. 3). During the American Revolution, Alexander Porter provided material support to the Patriots and served as an officer in the militia regiment raised from the Steele Creek. (See DAR Genealogical Research Database, entry for Porter, Alexander [Ancestor # A090927]).

It appears that Alexander Porter’s plantation grew and ginned cotton. When he died his estate contained 1,400 pounds of cotton and ten bushels of cotton seed along with the running gears of a cotton gin. [See Inventory of Sale of Personal Property on 13 Dec 1833, Estate file of Alexander Porter (signed by James Porter, Executor)]. He also grew corn and raised various animals, including bees, chickens, cows, and pigs. Among the more valuable items Porter owned at his death were a large “Mettal Kittel” which sold for \$15.75 and “Waggon & hind [?] Gears” which sold for \$15.00.

It is clear that Alexander Porter’s plantation was operated with slaves. Porter specifically bequeathed four slaves to his children in his Last Will and Testament (executed in 27 July 1827). Specifically, he left his “negro boy Tuck” to his daughter Margaret, his “negro boy Sam” to his daughter Sarah, and his “negro[s] Jack and Amy” to his sons Alexander and William. [See Will of Alexander Porter dated 27 July 1827, Mecklenburg Co. Wills Vol. G, pp. 148-153.]

Alexander Porter constructed a dwelling house on his plantation, which he referenced in his will. He provided that his daughters Margaret and Sarah, while they remained single, would be entitled to live in his “Dwelling House” on his plantation. Alexander Porter bequeathed to his sons Alexander and William “the Plantation on which I now live.” The dwelling house on his plantation is the only house mentioned in Alexander Porter’s will or in his estate file. It is safe to assume, that the extant substantial two-story log house is the “dwelling house” referenced in the will.

Upon Alexander Porter's death in 1833, his real property, including a 300+ acre tract of land, passed to his surviving children. [See Will of Alexander Porter]. By 1869, this property had passed to Alexander Porter's grandchildren and the various descendants disagreed about the future of the property. As a result a partition action was filed in the Mecklenburg County Probate Court. The Probate Court ordered the partition sale and, after advertising the sale in SOUTHERN HOME (a weekly owned by former Confederate General D. Harvey Hill), the property was sold at public auction on March 11, 1871. The largest tract, consisting of 149 acres, was purchased by Alexander Porter's great-grandson George Watson Sloan and his wife Nancy James Smith Sloan.

*George Watson & Nancy James Smith Sloan and Family*

George Watson Sloan was part of two prominent western Mecklenburg County families, the Porters<sup>8</sup> and the Sloans. Like the Porters, the Sloans immigrated to western Mecklenburg County in or around the 1750s and were firmly established by the time of the Revolution. His great-great grandmother - Margaret Bigham Sloan - died on 22 November 1769 at the age of 66 (b. 1703) and is buried in Steele Creek Presbyterian Church Cemetery,<sup>9</sup> and his great-grandfather Capt. Robert Sloan (1750-1780) was (allegedly) killed at the Battle of Ramscur's Mill in the Revolution. His father, James Madison Sloan (1803-1845), was an elder of Steele Creek Presbyterian Church. His brother Dr. Independence James Sloan (1828-1888) was an early doctor in the Steele Creek Area and a substantial land owner. His sisters, Ruth Beaty Sloan Porter Berryhill (1840-1930) and Margaret Anne Sloan Stowe (1842-1912) married into prominent western Mecklenburg (Porter and Berryhill) and Gaston County (Stowe) families.

G.W. Sloan was also a prominent citizen in his own right. He enlisted in Company B of the 13<sup>th</sup> North Carolina Infantry Regiment on 17 July 1861 and mustered out on 9 April 1865 at Appomattox Courthouse. He was wounded in action around Fredericksburg, Virginia. Following the Civil War, G.W. Sloan became a substantial land owner and served several terms as a Trustee of Berryhill Township and as an election judge. G.W. and Nancy Sloan had seven children, four of whom survived to adulthood: Lee Ira Sloan, Forest H. Sloan, Ela E. Sloan, and Hazel Ottus Sloan. Both George W. and Nancy J. Sloan are buried at Steele Creek Presbyterian Church.

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander J. Porter was George W. Sloan's great-grandfather, via his daughter Jane Porter Marshall, and her daughter Martha Ann Marshall Sloan.

<sup>9</sup> The oldest graves in Steele Creek Presbyterian Church Cemetery date to 1763. Margaret Sloan was among the earliest ten known burials. As stated in the CMHLC's documentation of Steele Creek Presbyterian, the "cemetery has some of the oldest graves in Mecklenburg County. Among them are to be found the names of many pioneering families of that part of the county: Allen, Bigham, Davis, Grier, Hart, Herron, McDowell, Neely, **Porter, Sloan**, Tagart, and Vance. Thirteen veterans of the Revolutionary War are buried there, and a number of families who buried members as far back as 1763 still attended in the 1970s, and thus span seven generations: Berryhill, Bigham, Cathey, Clark, Freeman, Grier, Herron, Knot, Mitchell, McDowell, Neel, Neely, **Porter**, Price, **Sloan**, Spratt, Stilwell, Whiteside and Wilson." (emphasis added).



G.W. and Nancy Sloan expanded the house with the addition of a two-story wing on the west end of the log house in the late 1880s or early 1890s, creating a “T-plan” house (the “Wing”). As is typical in T-plan houses, the Wing is one bay wide and two rooms deep. It has a corbelled center chimney with fireplaces in each of the first floor rooms. The fireplace mantel in the front parlor is mildly ornate with carved columns flanking the fireplace. The mantel in the rear room may have originally been in the western pen of the log house, as it appears older stylistically and is similar to the extant (original) mantel in the eastern pen room of the log house. When the Wing was added, the western pen of the log house was converted into a grand two-story entry/stair hall with heart pine bead board paneling, moulded newel post, and other embellishments.

It is likely that at the same time they added the Wing, G.W. and Nancy Sloan also added a one-story kitchen and dining room ell extending north from the east pen of the log house. Like the wing, the ell is one bay wide and two rooms deep. It originally had two small chimneys, one at the north end of each room, that were apparently designed for use with woodstoves as the chimneys extend downward only to the ceilings of each room.

Around 1930, Hazel Ottus Sloan (one of G.W. and Nancy Sloan’s sons who became the owner of the property following Nancy Sloan’s death in 1923), widened the Ell along its west side with the addition of a bathroom, mud room, and pantry.

### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

#### *The House: Plan and Evolution*

The cross-gabled house is three bays wide, and built in a side facing T-plan with wings projecting from the front and the rear of the principal section of the house. The principal and wing sections of the house are single-pile.

The core of the present structure is a 2-story log house constructed of squared, hewn logs with half-dovetail notches. The single-pile log house featured two rooms on each story. The full 2-story rear wall of the original log house (with surviving chinking) is visible from the attic space of the rear ell.

Original windows remain throughout the house, with 6-over-6 windows dating to the ca. 1890 renovation predominating. The two windows flanking the original chimney in the eastern pen of the log house are older 9-over-6 windows. The front door dates to the ca. 1890 renovation. The brick and stone piers are visible around the exterior, with brick infilling between the piers. The structural supports under the house are large, stripped pine and cedar logs that run the length of the house.

#### *The House: Exterior Features and Finishes*

There is a double-shouldered chimney on the east gable end of the original log house. It features a firebox on the first story and a disengaged upper stack. The chimney has corbelled shoulders and

is skim coated with mortar.<sup>10</sup> The base of the chimney is large field stones. The chimney is flanked by original 9-over-6 windows on the first floor only. The original log exterior was chinked and whitewashed, and was likely exposed for some period. The log portion of the house was undoubtedly covered with clapboards after the 1890 renovation, if not sooner. The window moldings are simple.

The front elevation of the wing (which faces the road), contains a single window centered on each story. The gable features deep cornice returns and a diamond-shaped louvered vent set high in the gable. The north gable end is simpler and lacks the cornice returns and the vent. The west face of the Wing has two symmetrically spaced windows on each story.

A one-story front porch runs the length of the original log house. It has a hipped roof and bead board ceiling. The porch is supported by three square wooden columns, which are chamfered. Matching pilasters are located where the porch meets the house. The portion of the front façade covered by the front porch has German siding instead of the clapboards that cover the rest of the exterior.

The rear ell has two entry doors along its eastern elevation and one window in each room. Above each entry door is a gabled roof extending about three feet from the Ell.

The roof over all of the sections was originally wooden shingles.<sup>11</sup> However, the original roof was replaced with asphalt shingles.

### *The House: Interior*

Inside, the house remains largely intact from the time of the ca. 1890 renovation. The walls in the entry/stair hall, the front parlor, and the upper front bedroom in the Wing and the upper room of the log house have heart pine floors and bead board walls. The rooms in the Wing have bead board ceilings as well. The ceilings in the log house – upstairs and down – are board-and-batten. Drywall was added to the walls of the downstairs/east room of the log house, the rear downstairs room of the Wing, and the rear upstairs room of the Wing at some point in the mid-twentieth century. The original bead board remains in place under the drywall. Additionally, acoustic tiles were added over the original ceilings in several rooms (although the original ceilings remain intact). The interior woodwork remains entirely intact: from the solid five-panel doors with rim locks, to the newel post and bannisters, to the bead board and floors.

The interior finishes of the Ell consists of wide, horizontal tongue-and-groove boards on the walls and floors. At some point, potentially as early as the time of its construction around 1890, the walls of

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<sup>10</sup> The design and finishing of this chimney is similar to the southern end chimney of the Cooper Log House, which dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century and is located approximately 2 miles south of the Sloan-Porter House.

<sup>11</sup> Remnants of the original cedar shingles can be found in the attic.

the dining room (the room closest to the main house), were covered with muslin and wallpaper. Three additional layers of wallpaper were added over the years. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the walls were covered with drywall. In the kitchen, the walls are also wide, horizontal tongue-and-groove boards. The walls were originally painted then, in the 1930s or 1940s, covered with wallpaper before being covered with drywall in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The original floor in the kitchen has been removed and replaced with plywood and vinyl.

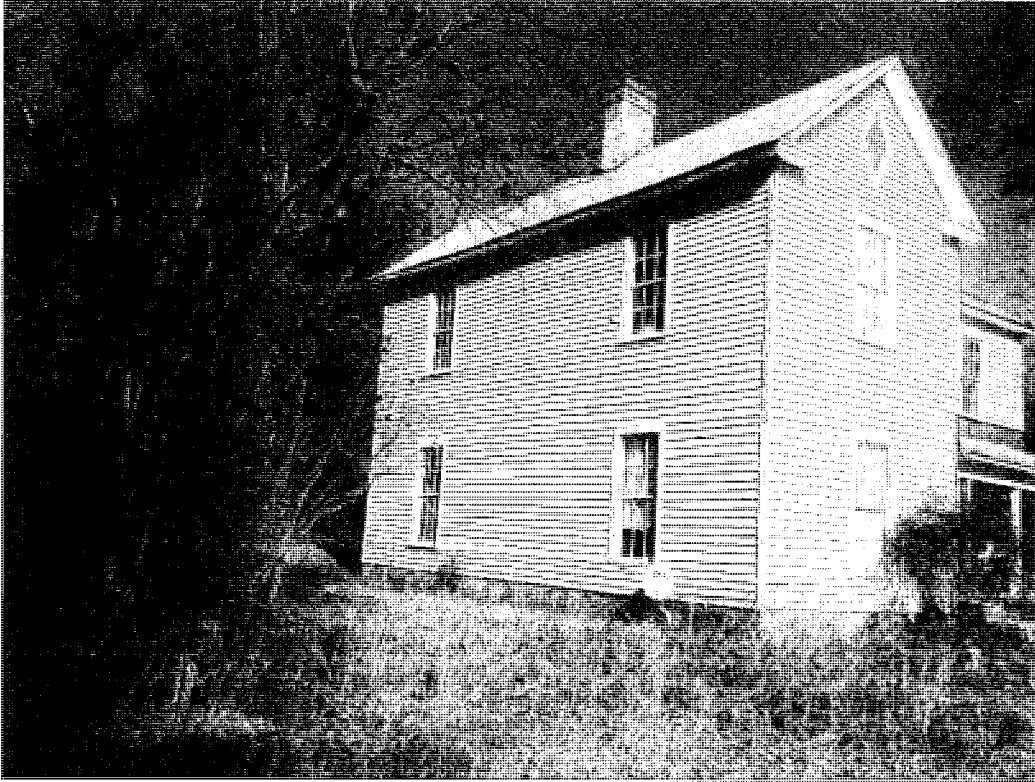
The finishes of the narrow, 1930s/1940s addition along the west side of the Ell are of markedly inferior quality and in poor condition.

### CONCLUSION

The Sloan-Porter House is an important piece of Mecklenburg County's built environment. Not only is it one of Mecklenburg County's oldest surviving homes, connected to several of western Mecklenburg County's original pioneers, and one of only a handful of surviving log houses, it is a rare and exceptionally fine example of the evolution of rural domestic architecture in Mecklenburg County. The house remains remarkably intact inside and out, and remains in its original rural setting surrounded by protected nature preserve on three sides.

### **REPRESENTATIVE PHOTOGRAPHS:**





Above: West Elevation

Below: Rear Elevation





Above: Rear

Below: East Elevation





View from the southeast.



Wing front (south) façade.



Front/South façade. Wing on left and log portion on right.



Wing rear.



Front/southeast corner of second story(hip of porch roof running across lower left corner), three courses of logs with chinking and half-dovetail notching under clapboards.





Detail of half-dovetail notching on log portion.



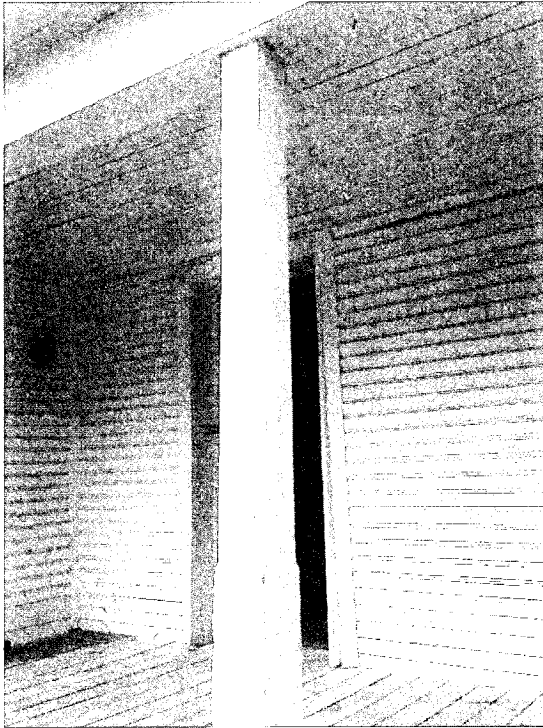
South façade of log portion, just above porch roof. Detail of draw knife marks on log and chinking.



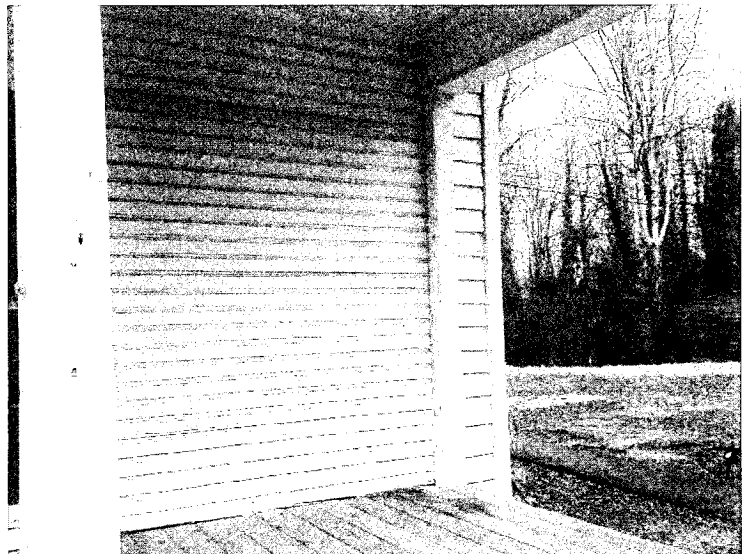
The rear wall (northeast corner) of the log house, viewed from the attic of the Ell, showing courses of logs, half-dovetail notching and whitewash.



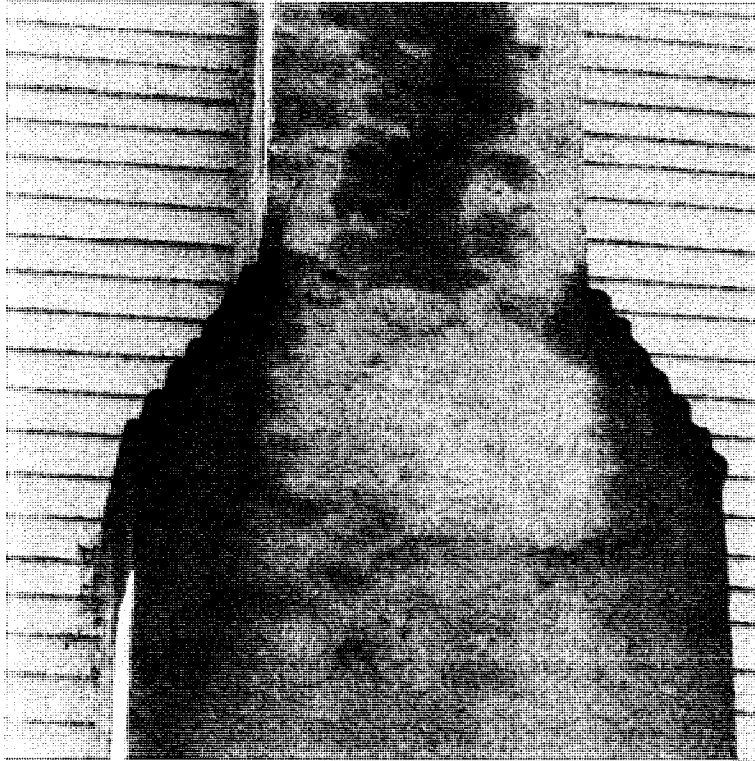
Saw marks on vertical timber of Wing (just above front porch roof).



Chamfered porch column, with front door opening and molding in background.



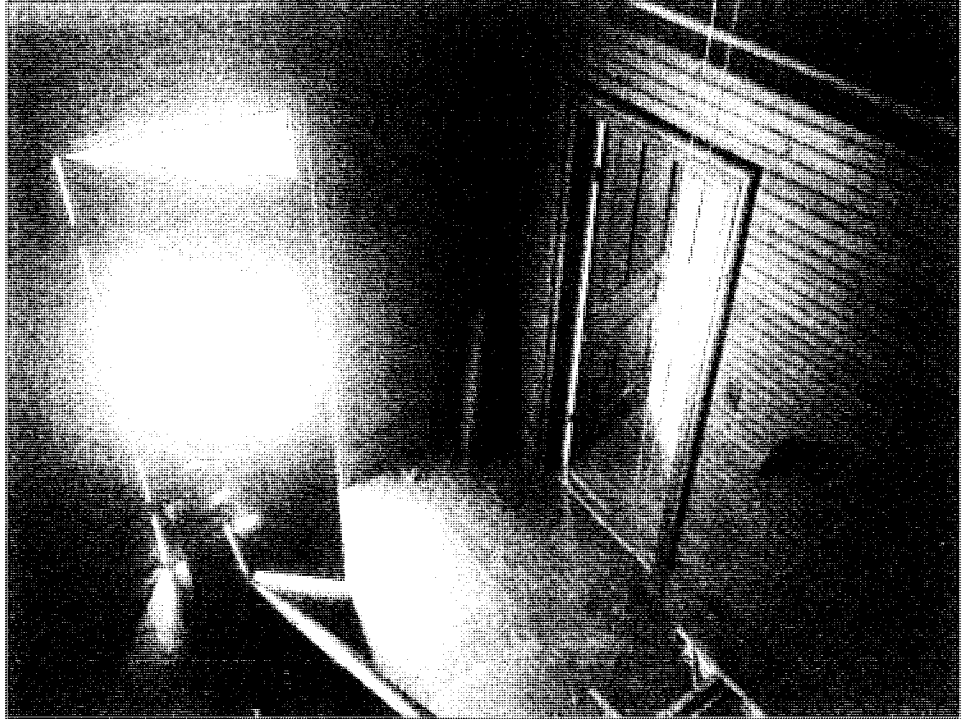
Southeast corner under front porch, showing German siding under porch and clapboard outside porch (also chamfered column in foreground and engaged column at siding transition).



East gable end chimney, shoulders with decorative brickwork and skim coat. Chimney disengaged above shoulders.



Fieldstone base of east gable end chimney.



The Entry/Stair Hall (converted from west pen of log house)



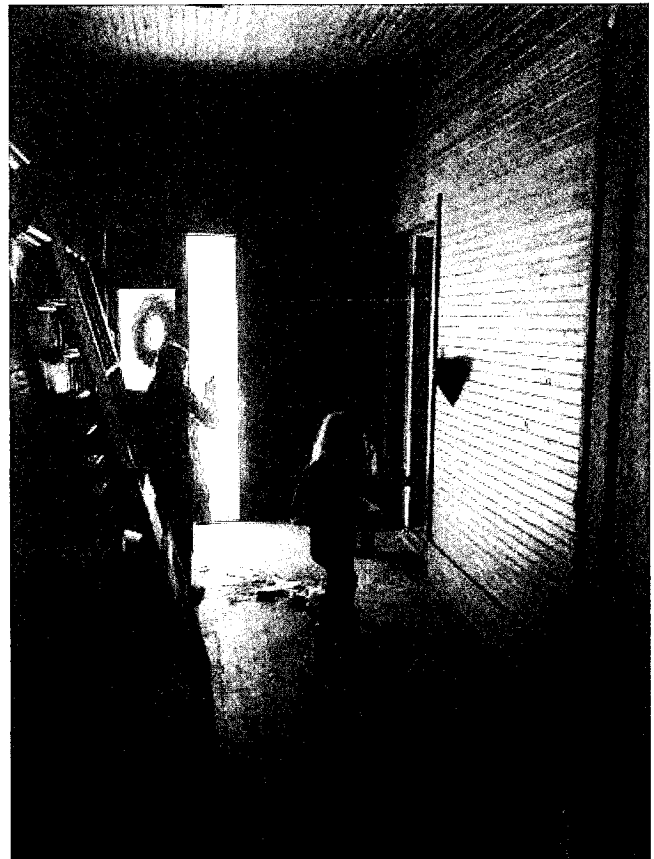


**The Entry/Stair Hall**  
(above, view up the stairs w/ newell post;  
below, the second floor from the landing)





The Entry/Stair Hall

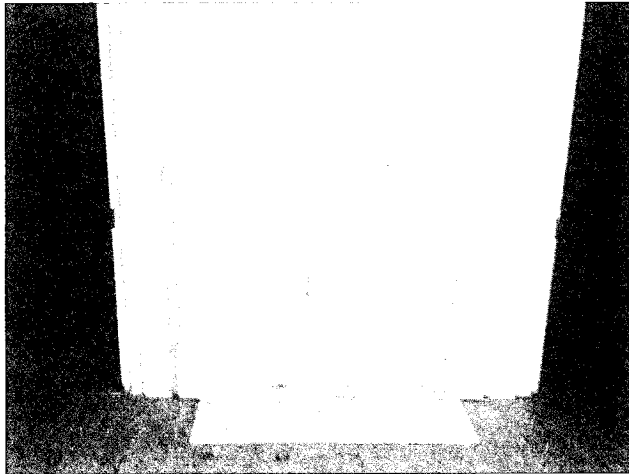




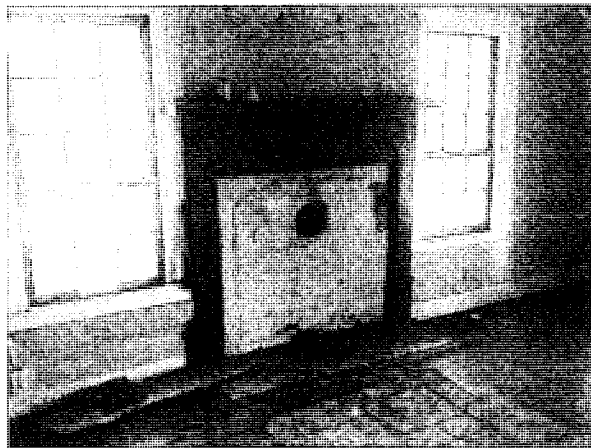
The Entry/Stair Hall

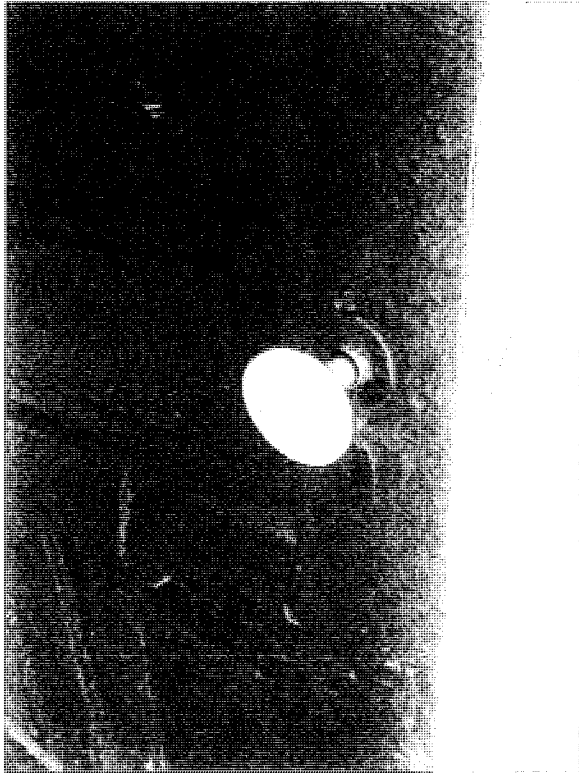






Mantels. *Above:* Wing, downstairs back room; *Below:* downstairs east log pen, with nine-over-six light windows flanking original chimney/fireplace opening; *Bottom:* Wing, downstairs front room.

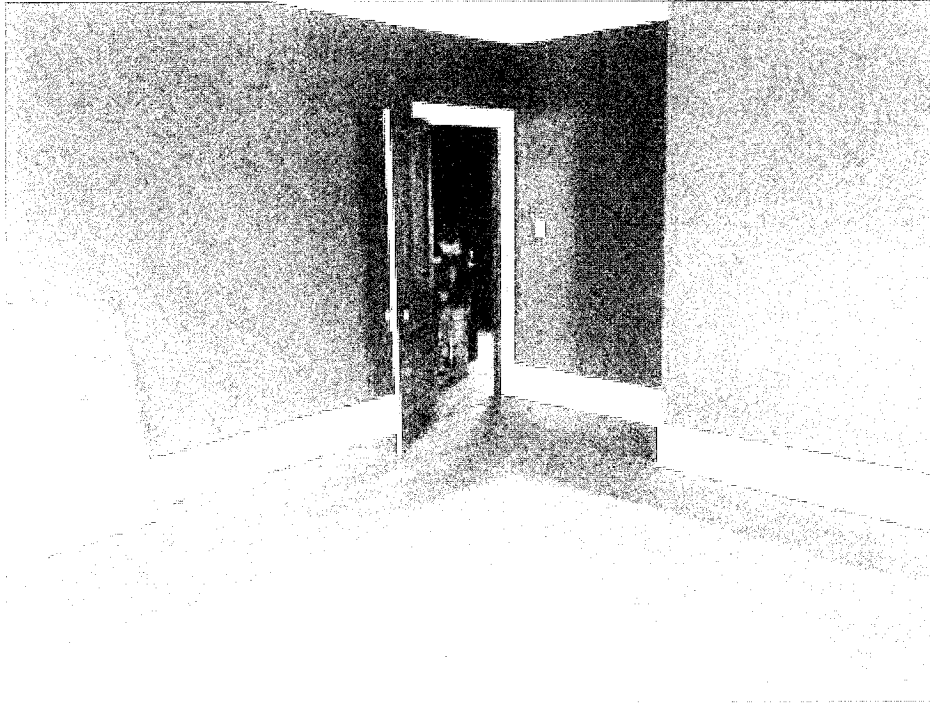




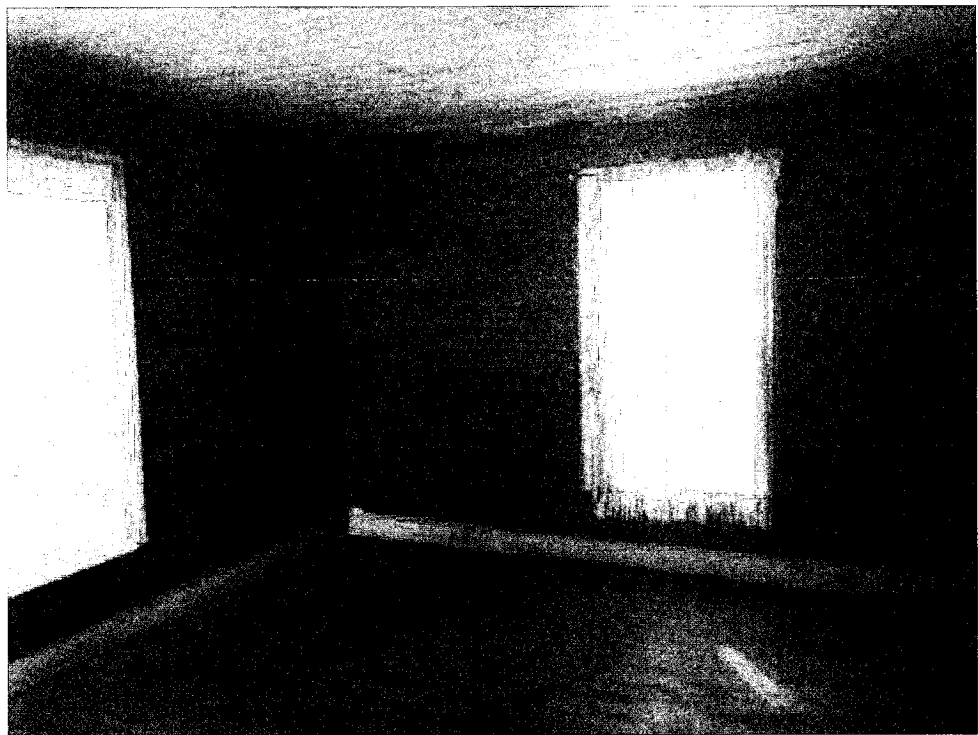
Door (Wing, downstairs front room)

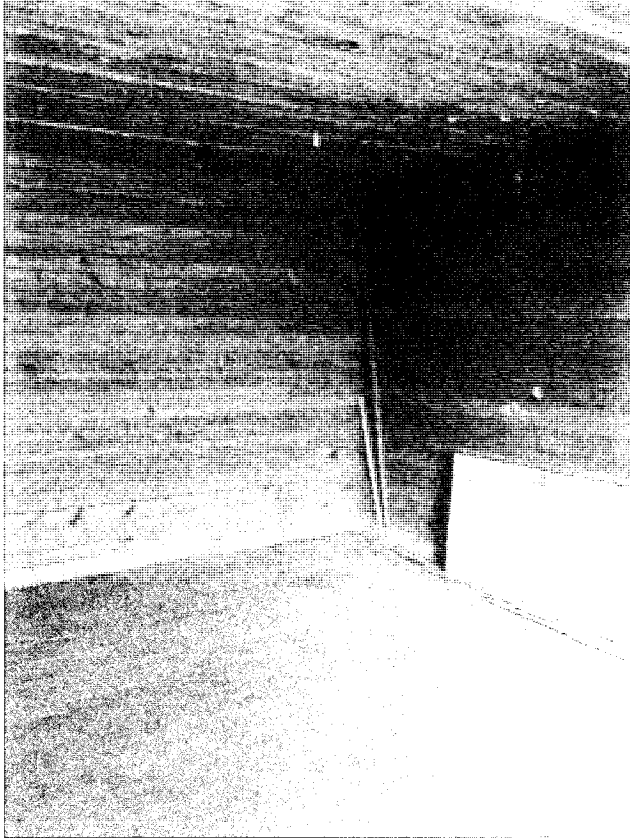
The cupboard under the stairs.





Upstairs Rooms in Wing:  
Back bedroom (above) and Front bedroom (below)





Upstairs Room in log portion.

