

Virginia Slave Housing Project

Building Name: Hush Arbor log cabin

Evidence Type: Extant

Site ID: --

Historical Site Name: McCormick Plantation

City: Vicinity of Mt. Airy

County: Pittsylvania

State: Virginia

Investigators: Dennis J. Pogue, Douglas W. Sanford

Institutions: Virginia Slave Housing Project

Project Start: 2/12-13/22; 3/29/22 **Project End:** 3/29/22

Summary Description:

The log outbuilding at the Hush Arbor property has undergone a variety of related alterations, but the original condition is generally discernible. As constructed, the cabin was a one-story building with a substantial exterior stone chimney on the north wall, comprising one heated room with an off-center doorway on the east façade, with windows likely in the east, west, and north walls. The floor surface was packed earth, and the interior walls were exposed and whitewashed.

In its current condition, the cabin is a one-and-one-half-story log structure, roughly 16'-square, supported on a rubble stone foundation, and covered with a modestly pitched, side-gable, metal-clad roof. The plan consists of a single room on the first floor and a garret above, which is accessed via an enclosed staircase in the southeast corner. The most prominent feature of the building is the large and well-built exterior stone chimney that serves the fireplace on the north wall. Doorways are positioned in the west, south, and east walls; a double window is located to the north of the doorway on the east wall, and a single window opening (covered on the exterior) is positioned east of the fireplace. On the interior, the log walls and the joists and undersides of the floorboards are exposed, and were never plastered. The log walls on the exterior are covered with vertical siding; the gables are enclosed with horizontal boards. Where the exterior logs are visible, there is no evidence of earlier siding; other than a few splotches of red paint on the south wall, there are no indications that the walls were systematically covered with paint or with whitewash.

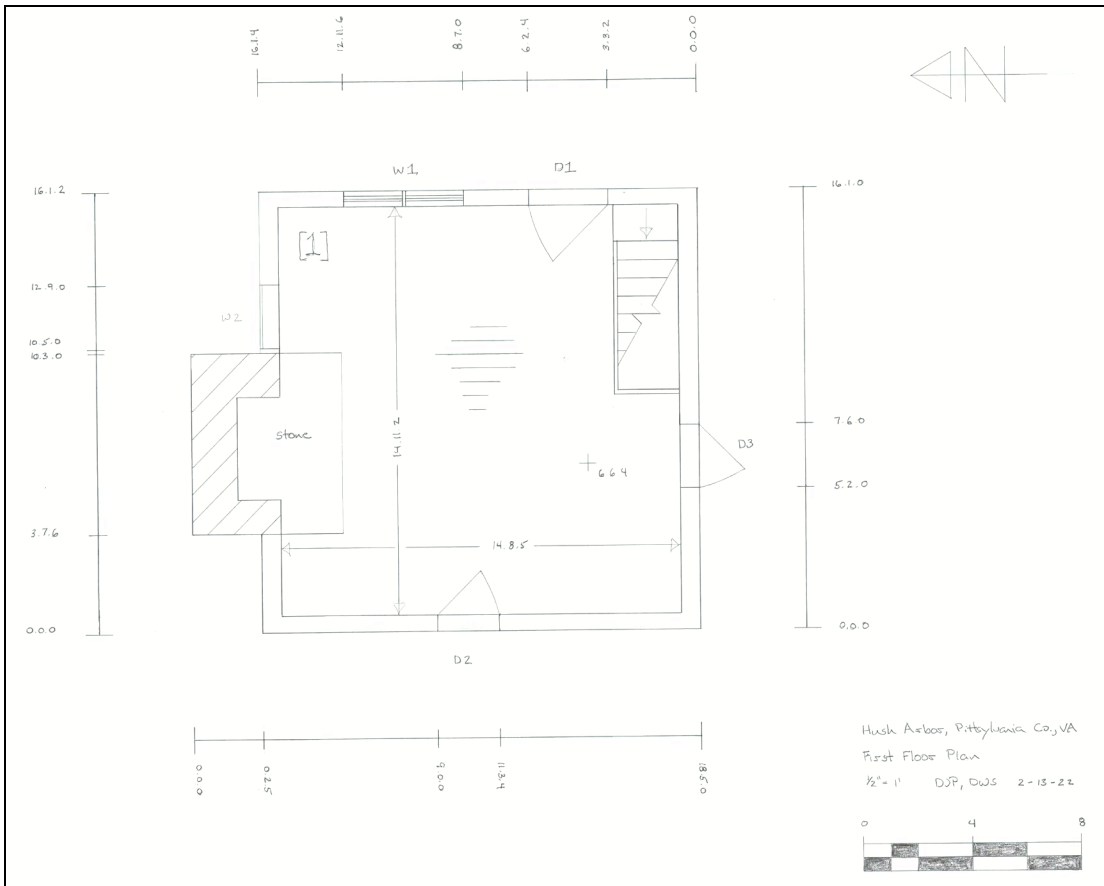
The most dramatic change made to the building was to remove the original roof frame and add several logs to the walls to raise the building from one to one-and-one-half stories. The floor level was elevated in concert with raising the ceiling and installing new joists, and the staircase was inserted to provide access to the garret, which previously was an inaccessible attic. A doorway was installed in the south wall, and the doorway on the west likely replaced an original window. The double window on the east also likely replaced an earlier, smaller opening. The east doorway appears to be intact and the north

window opening, which has been converted to shelves, may also be in its original position.

Physical evidence testifies to raising the ceiling and installing a new floor. The floorboards rest on wood joists that do not connect with the log walls, and below the joists is a hardened surface that survives from the original earth floor. Remnants of the original ceiling joists survive in the notches cut into the former top wall logs. When the walls were raised, the original ceiling joists were cut off and removed to make way for joists positioned roughly 10" higher. The height of the notches for the original ceiling joists is only 5'8" from the wood floor; the current joists have a clearance of roughly 6'6". The original packed earth floor was lower (roughly 8") to conform with the lower ceiling. Thus, the original ceiling height would have been roughly 6'4" above the earth floor. The east doorway retains evidence of the original condition, with the jambs extending below the level of the current floor to connect with the lowest wall log, which acted as the threshold for the doorway. The south and west doorways do not exhibit that evidence, and their narrower widths (2'4") in comparison with the east doorway (roughly 3'), suggests that those openings were converted from windows.

Principal Construction Type: Log, One Story

Footprint:



Number of Rooms: 1

Dimensions: (1) 14.11.1 (E-W) x 14.8.3 (N-S), 6.6.0 (H; from modern floor to bottom of modern ceiling joists)

[Garret room a 20th-century addition, not recorded.]

Doors: 3

| | Rm. 1, E (1) | Rm. 1, W (2) | Rm. 1, S (3) |
|---------------------|---|--|--|
| Type: | Unknown, original door removed; modern door is board & batten with wire nails | Board & batten, 3 vertical boards, 2 battens, with wire nails. Circular-sawn boards. | Board & batten, with wire nails |
| Dimensions: | 2.10.0 (W) x 4.11.0 (H) | 2.4.1 (W) x 4.11.0 (H) | 2.4.0 (W) x 5.0.0 (H) |
| Hardware: | Unknown, original hardware removed | Modern cross garnet hinges | Modern butterfly hinges (hinged on east side) |
| Swing: | Unknown for original door; current door swings out | In | Out |
| Replacement: | Yes, but door location and framing are original. | Modern insertion; likely an original window opening | Modern insertion; hinges attached to exterior siding |

Windows: 2

| | Rm. 1, E (1) | Rm. 1, N (2) |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Type: | 2 single sash (3/3), arranged horizontally within slider | Unknown, removed. Opening enclosed, with shelves. |
| Dimensions: | Each sash: 2.4.0 (W) x 2.0.0 (H); entire opening is 4.10.1 (W) | 2.4.0 (W) x 2.5.2 (H) |
| Hardware: | None | Unknown |
| Shuttered/ Slide/ Swing: | Slide | Unknown, removed |

EXTERIOR

Foundation:

Continuous Masonry: Stone: field stones with irregular coursing

Thickness: approx. 1.4.0 in exposed areas

Height: varies due to slope down to east – 0.0.0 at SW corner; 0.10.0 at NW corner; 1.1.0 at NE corner

Bond: Irregular courses

Mortar Type: Mud (clay and sand) mortar with brick bits

Joint: Unfinished

Repaired: Yes, with Portland cement

Shed/Porch: No

Roof: Roof framing not recorded in detail since marks a 20th-century replacement

Roof Form: Gable

Roof Covering: Corrugated sheet metal

Building Height: Not recorded since the original roof framing has been removed and since additional logs were added to the walls at the top.

Walls:

Log:

Dimensions: 0.5.0 – 0.6.0 wide; 0.6.0 – 0.9.0 high

Finish: Flat Sides – Hewn – Debarked

Notching: V

Chinking: Composite – Wood slats and Mud daub

Chimney(s):

Chimney (1): at north gable end

Material: Stone

Location: Exterior – End

Height: not fully measured; 9.3.0 to shoulder, 11.4.0 to bottom of stack

INTERIOR

Wall Framing: Exposed – Log

Wall Finish: Whitewash

Fireplace (1): End – off center on north wall, likely to allow for window to east

Fireplace Material: Stone

Fireplace Overall Dimensions: chimney flush with wall (6.8.0 wide, E-W)

Fireplace Opening Dimensions: 3.8.2 (W) x 2.9.2 (H) x 1.4.2 (D)*

Hearth Material: Stone

Hearth Dimensions: 2.2.2 (N-S) x 6.7.0 (E-W)*

*The current hearth is a modern reworking set at the height of the inserted, raised wooden floor. The original hearth (if one existed) and fireplace bottom occurred at the level of the cabin's dirt floor.

Stairs: Yes, SE corner - these stairs are a modern insertion and were not recorded in any detail. It is suspected that the original cabin did not have stairs and had a simple attic.

Type: Enclosed

Subfloor Pit: No

Floor: Earth – portions of original floor exists beneath the modern, raised wooden floor.

Floorboards Dimension: The current floorboards, measuring 0.3.2 wide, run north-south.

Dating:

Dendrochronology Date: NA

Other Date: 1820-1860

Dating Evidence:

Saw Marks: Hewn logs, v-notched corners

Nails: NA

Comments:

Evidence to date the construction of the building is elusive. The type of nails used and the manner by which the timbers have been prepared provide the most diagnostic evidence for vernacular buildings. Because of the manner of joining the walls without using nails, log buildings, in particular, offer limited opportunities for dating. The roof material is generally the most helpful, and at Hush Arbor the roof frame has been completely replaced. The later framing members, along with the staircase, the doorway and window surrounds, and both levels of the floorboards, consist of 20th century dimensional lumber that was cut using a circular saw and attached with wire nails. The original wall logs were squared by hand (hewn) and notched together at the corners using traditional methods, but those practices continued in widespread use throughout the nineteenth century.

Notwithstanding the lack of diagnostic evidence, the character of the structure points strongly to an antebellum date of construction. At only 16'-square, with an earthen floor, relatively low ceiling, and likely only one doorway and two or three small windows, the structure matches with rare extant examples and descriptions of buildings that are most likely to have been erected to serve as quarters for the enslaved. The alterations to the

building reflect the improvements that commonly occurred after the end of slavery to better accommodate the households of freed farm laborers or tenants.

Notes

Exterior

A compass bearing taken at the southwest corner, looking towards the northeast corner, measures 103°.

The current exterior siding, in a condition of poor repair, consists of vertical planks attached with wire nails and painted white. Battens survive at a few of the small gaps between the planks. Where the cabin's original logs are exposed, it appears that the logs were left untreated (no paint or whitewash) and were not covered with an earlier generation of board siding.

The mud daub between logs appears similar to the mud mortar used for the stone foundation, namely a mixture of clay, sand, and brick bits. It has a tannish-brown color.

The foundation increases in height from west to east, accommodating the ground's slight, downward slope. This arrangement facilitated the implementation of the packed earth floor within the foundation stones.

Interpretation

The placement of the fireplace and the likely locations of the original doorway and windows provide valuable evidence for picturing the use of the space. The fireplace is shifted offline more than two feet to the west, presumably to accommodate a window in the wall to the east. The east doorway may have been the only access to the building; the opening is located near the southeast corner of the east wall, which provided space on the wall for another window. Shifting the fireplace to the west and positioning the doorway near the southeast corner maximized the distance between the fireplace and the point of access from the exterior. The doorway on the west is roughly centered on the wall and its relatively narrow width suggests that it was originally a window, which would have provided another light source. The south doorway is similar in size and may have also been the location of a window, but it is set toward the west wall and just beyond the later enclosed staircase, suggesting that it was added (rather than converted) when the major alterations were carried out.