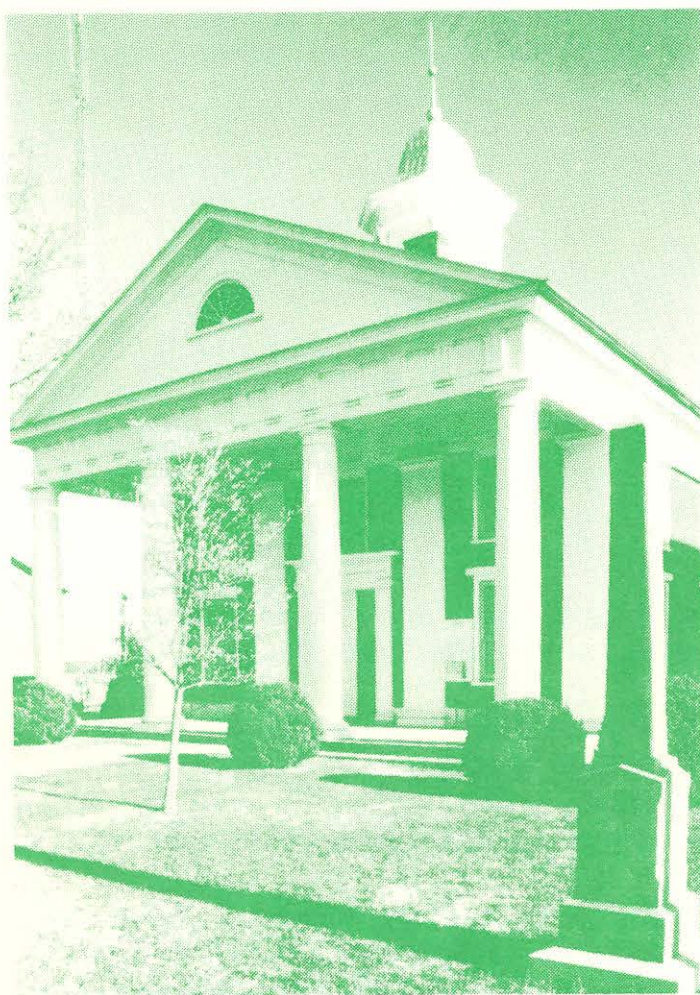

Greene County Magazine

The Restoration of Hibrington



Greene County Historical Society

Volume 12, 1995

(pages 22 - 27)

THE RESTORATION OF HIBRIGHTON

Donald Covey

(It should be noted that this article could not have been written without the complete cooperation and helpfulness of the present owners, Mr. & Mrs. Robert Allen. D.D.C.)

Hibrighton¹ was named by J.L. Moore who purchased the house and 337 acres in 1939. When asked to explain his name for the house, Mr. Moore would only smile. He came to Virginia from North Carolina; but today there is no Brighton or Hibrighton large enough to be included in a map of that state. The only such town of that name which comes readily to mind is the resort town of Brighton, England; but Mr. Moore was silent on the matter.

Prior to Mr. Moore's naming of the house it had been known as "Captain Finks' House", probably with reference to Mark F. Finks' Civil War experience.² Finks began purchasing the land in 1845³ and probably started the building of his home soon afterward. Following the Civil War Finks was not alone in running into financial problems; but by the time those problems first required legal solutions⁴ he owned 860 acres, the house and several outbuildings.



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There appears to have been some initial resolution to Captain Finks' financial problems in 1872.⁵ A final solution seems to have been made in 1899.⁶ There is a hiatus of 27 years in which we find no deeds relating to Hibrighton; however there is a small cemetery containing four graves about 100 yards east of the house. It contains the graves of John C. Sims (1833 - 1895), Mary J. Sims (1832 - 1917) and possibly two of their children. Present members of the Sims family state that the John C. Sims family lived here. There is some evidence that they owned the property but no one has been able to find a deed.⁷ What evidence we have indicates that they owned the property during some part of the period 1872 - 1899. During the next forty years the property, now reduced to 337 acres, passed through half a dozen hands. Finally the property was purchased by J.L. Moore in 1939,⁸ and it remained in that family until its recent purchase by the new owners.⁹

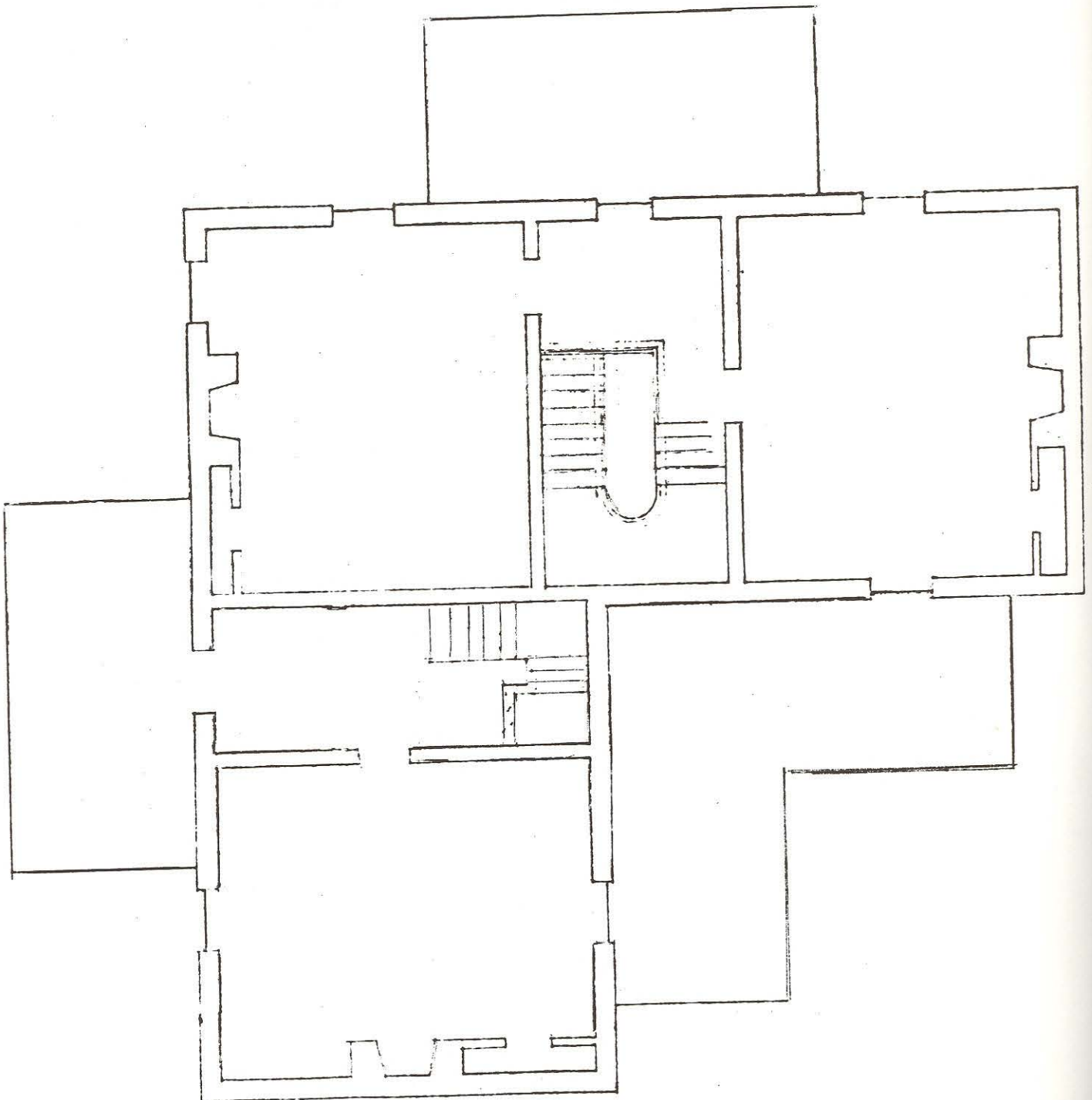
In addition to the house and large acreage the original property contained several other buildings. A short distance to the southeast was a small log building which must originally have served as a summer kitchen and house for servants; for besides a fireplace large enough for the cooking of meals it also had a loft area. It must have remained as a home for some time. Mary Garth, current Greene County Treasurer, states that her grandfather, Donald Smith, was born in this house. A short distance to the southwest was a small brick building. It's floor was set 15 feet down in the earth; and it's interior was painted white, suggesting that at one time this was a milk cooler for some sort of dairy operation. Some distance to the south and also to the east were two barns which gave evidence of being hay barns. At the time of the property's recent purchase all these buildings were considered beyond restoration.

Hibrighton is a unique house. Approached from the front at first glance it seems quite like the Federal style of a number of houses in the county: a central hall with stairway and a room on each side on three levels. The porch, too, in Classic Greek Revival Style is familiar to a number of these houses. In this case the front is to the north facing the Old Fredericksburg Pike. U.S. 29, of course, did not exist when the house was built; and the Fredericksburg Pike was an important route to the northeast. However, approaching the house from the west, one's first impression is that this is the same front. There is no apparent difference in the two views. In fact the exterior of the house is not that simple. In addition to a Federal Style house with Greek Revival porches the eaves and window cornices show an Italian influence. The wide back gallery (seen only from the south or east) shows the Gothic Revival influence; and yet it was all built at the same time. As knowledgeable people examined the house, they recognized that all of the details appeared to be taken directly from the pattern books of Jacob Holt, a builder of considerable repute in southern Virginia up to about this time. He then moved to North Carolina; and there is no record of his having been this far north. One can only wonder how a Greene County builder came

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across these patterns. This original plan of the second floor is basically the same as the basement and first floors. Including changes made during restoration would be difficult, if not impossible.

North Front



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The two fronts are occasioned by the floor plan. The architect, Kim Austin Doggett, who guided in the restoration effort, said, "It was amazing - the most unusual floor plan I had seen in a classic style house, north or south." Behind each front entrance is the usual hall with stairway and room on each side; but in this case the corner room is a part of each front. An aberration occurs on the west side where the stairway leads up only to the room on the south. There is no door to the north room. This may seem strange until we realize that this was probably the usual attempt to separate the sons, or other male members of the family from the daughters of the family. Another unusual feature in the house are the six closets. Wardrobes usually took the place of closets in that day. They were, however, so narrow front to back that clothes could never be hung on closet rods as we do today.

The most amazing feature of the house was that so little change had been made in it during its 150 year existence. There it stood, 18" to 12" brick external and internal walls, with original outside trim paint - even the original window shutters and hardware. In the west wall one can still see, impressed in a brick, the name of Isaac Heatwole; while the name S.C. Finks is found on both the west and south walls. One might guess that Isaac Heatwole made the bricks. (Mark Finks' wife was Susan Finks; and the 1850 census of Greene County shows that they had a 6 year old daughter, Sarah C. Finks. Can some one have been playing a joke on us?) Inside the house a minimum addition of plumbing and electrical wiring had been made; and there was still no central heat. Original paint color, hardware and even keys were still in place. Apparently a closet had been built in the north end of the second floor hall; but little else had been done.

In restoration every effort was made to keep as much of the original house as possible. Nearly 50 cornice brackets were taken down and repaired; or new ones were cut out on the job. It should be noted that Ralph Dammann of Dammann Construction was the restoration contractor; and that he did a considerable amount of the finish carpentry himself. The original style of eave trough - though no longer as practical as current styles - was duplicated. Original shutters and hinges were taken down, cleaned, repaired and replaced.

The original front porches were supported by brick piers. To accommodate necessary utility and storage rooms, excavation was done and basement rooms placed beneath those porches. The only change in shape to the exterior was made when the L-shaped back porch was replaced - in the same style - by a simple straight porch. A solarium was placed under that porch on the basement level - essentially on the ground level.

The floor on the basement level had been so damaged by dampness that it had to be replaced. In the replacement effort, and to secure more head room, the workers actually excavated 12" of soil by hand. The former basement kitchen, which of course was not

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original, was removed ; and a thoroughly modern kitchen was built on the first floor in what had been the south bedroom. On the second floor the corner bedroom was divided into two bathrooms and several closets. It was then made available to both east and west bedrooms. Modern wiring and plumbing were installed; and so great care was taken to hide the heating ducts that four furnaces were necessary. Only those changes which are necessary to modern living were made.

The new owners added one more outstanding feature to the estate. Immediately outside the south east corner of the house is a lovely English garden, designed by the Garden Spot in Charlottesville, VA. The formal garden measuring 60 by 70 feet is walled to the north and west. Combined pillars and hedge define the south and east. The four quarters of the central 40 by 40 foot rose garden are separated by brick lined gravel walks and contain 48 Damask, bourbon and Rugosa roses, as well as more modern David Austin roses, surrounding a central three tier fountain. Herbaceous borders, largely perennial, are thickly planted with peonies, iris, lilies, asters, and yarrow: thirty perennial varieties in all. Outside the formal garden at the south and east flowering trees line a portion of the walkway which completely encircles the house. A keyhole, picket fenced herb garden, at the west of the rose garden has a central sundial bordered by a large variety of culinary and medicinal plants.

- NOTES AND REFERENCES -

1. The correct spelling of this name, as well as several other items of information in these early paragraphs, comes from an interview with Ruth Moore, daughter of J.L. Moore.
2. I have not found a record of Mark F. Finks having been a captain;. In 7th Virginia Infantry, David F. Riggs; H.E. Howard, Inc.; 1983. on page 74 only his enrollment as a private is recorded.
Woodie Parrott lists him as a Lieutenant in the patrol which attempted to capture Confederate deserters hidden in the Blue Ridge Mountains during the Civil War. "The Patrol of 1864" by Woodie Parrott, page 18, The Greene County Magazine, Vol. I.
3. Greene County Deed Book # 2, page 429; February 7, 1845.
Greene county Deed Book # 2, page 441; February 12, 1845.
Greene County Deed Book # 2, page 451; March 11, 1845.
4. Greene County Deed Book # 5, pages 566-67; February 28, 1872.
5. Ibid.
6. Greene County Deed Book 25, p. 305; April 6, 1899.

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7. Ibid. This deed, in the process of recording the sale of the property by William Yancey (a court appointed commissioner) to W.B. Cole, Jr., refers to a similar court decision made in 1895 and includes this phrase, "...before that time purchased by Mary J. Sims....". The fact that some, or all, of these court decisions were made in Harrisonburg, VA. makes investigation more difficult. In any event it does not seem necessary to our present purpose.

8. Greene County Deed Book 25, p. 305; April 6, 1939.

9. Greene County Deed Book 253, p. 309; Sept. 19, 1991