The Birds are Coming Home to Roost: Re-Evaluating the Architectural History of Turkey Island Plantation

Douglas Ross, Simon Fraser University

Available at: http://works.bepress.com/douglas_ross/6/
THE BIRDS ARE COMING HOME TO ROOST: 
RE-EVALUATING THE ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF 
TURKEY ISLAND PLANTATION

Douglas E. Ross

Abstract

Turkey Island was the original plantation seat of the prolific Randolph family in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, later becoming the home of General George Pickett of Civil War fame. Until recently very little was known of the landscape and architectural history of the site, particularly in comparison to neighboring Curles Plantation, another Randolph property that has been a virtual goldmine for archaeologists over the past two decades. Archaeology conducted by the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research between 1999 and 2001 is beginning to redress this imbalance and has contributed significantly to the understanding of the eighteenth-century brick mansion known as the "Bird Cage." Excavations within the visible ruins on the site have provided data suggesting that this structure was originally built in the mid-eighteenth century and that its two predecessors (yet to be positively identified) were located elsewhere. These results are discussed in the context of the history and architecture of colonial Virginia.

Introduction

Twentieth-century inhabitants of the north shore of the James River in Henrico County, between Turkey Island Creek on the east and Curles Neck on the west, have always been aware that the several parcels of land they lay claim to were once part of a single 1000-acre tract known as Turkey Island. Four prominent landmarks tell them that this was so. The most ancient of these is the Randolph family burying ground, final resting place for the first two generations of that family in Virginia, now overgrown with trees and vegetation and surrounded by a crumbling concrete wall. Nearby lies the second landmark, the buried foundations of a structure long believed to be the colonial mansion of the Randolphs known as the "Bird Cage." The cluster of hollyhocks that have taken root amongst the ruins make them clearly visible from a distance in the summertime, and a closer inspection reveals a dense concentration of brick rubble that leaves no doubt that this was once the site of a substantial brick edifice (Figure 1).

These first two landmarks lie within a few hundred meters (1000 ft.) of the river; the third can be found approximately 2 km (1 1/4 mi.) due north along Highway 5, the principal overland route between Williamsburg and Richmond. It consists of two brick pillars of unknown antiquity, marking the original entrance to the plantation from the landward side, but whose vanished iron gates have long since ceased to regulate access (Figure 2). This hardly matters because the drive they once framed has been replaced and demoted to little more than a property boundary. About 1 1/2 km (1 mi.) southeast of this gate on a wooded rise, which has escaped recent gravel mining, stands the final monument to the grandeur of Turkey Island's past. It is nothing less than a limestone obelisk, erected by Ryland Randolph between 1771 and 1772 to commemorate the great flood of 1771 and in loving memory of his parents Richard and Jane (Figure 3). The chipped and weatherworn faces of the obelisk also bear the personalized (and dated) scars of two centuries of vandalism.

It is a wonder, with these noble sentinels proclaiming the importance of this place, that no one has long since thought to probe the ground for additional evidence of its past lives. Someone has, but it was for something more lucrative than historical data or valuable antiquities. For the past several decades gravel miners have quarried deep
below the soil that nourished the former planta-
tion, undoubtedly wiping out large portions of the
pre-existing cultural landscape north and east of
the house ruins. It is also quite probable that some
degree of opportunistic amateur digging has oc-
curred in the past. However, it was not until 1999
that professional archaeologists were invited to
conduct limited testing on the southwestern por-
tion of Turkey Island now owned by Mr. George
Little. Large-scale excavations had been conduct-
ed by VCU's Archaeological Research Center at
neighboring Curles Plantation (also a former
Randolph property) since the early 1980s with spec-
tacular results, and comparable success was antic-
ipated for Turkey Island.

The Randolph Family in Virginia

William Randolph (1650-1711) arrived in Virginia
from Warwickshire, England about 1670 at the age
of 20. It is possible that his family had suffered for
their loyalty to the crown during the English Civil
War, and that William had emigrated to seek better
prospects in a new land. He was also a second son,
and it is likely that he left England in hopes of ac-
quiring property and status unavailable to him at
home. Randolph was fortunate that his uncle Henry had already established himself as a man of some means in Virginia, with connections to some of the most powerful and influential men in the colony. It was these connections that led to his marriage to Mary Isham, daughter of Henry Isham of Bermuda Hundred, and heir to considerable property in England and Virginia (Cowden 1977:47-50).

Randolph originally owned property south of the James, but disposed of it; and in 1680, he began acquiring real estate at Turkey Island (Figure 4). The original 1000-acre tract had been owned by Robert and Anne Hallam in the 1630s, and by the 1670s a large portion of it was owned by Captain James Crewes, who was hanged in 1676 for his involvement in Bacon's Rebellion. Between 1680 and 1705 Randolph acquired all of the original tract, in addition to Bacon's own Curles Plantation adjoining it to the west, which he purchased from the crown in 1700 after it had been confiscated from its traitorous owner (Cowden 1977:52-53). That Randolph was living on the property shortly after the initial purchase in 1680 is indicated by a 1682 document listing his address as Turkey Island (Jensen et al. 1999:3).

During his 40 years in Virginia William Randolph acquired thousands of acres of land, much of it along the north bank of the James west of Turkey Island. Between 1703 and his death in 1711 William Randolph began giving his firstborn son, William II, portions of his plantation at Turkey Island, the remainder of which would be transferred to him upon his mother's death. William II (1681-1742) served as clerk in Charles City County for several years before returning to Turkey Island to take up planting upon his marriage to Elizabeth Beverley in 1709 (Cowden 1977:142, 156). Elizabeth (1691-1723) was the daughter of Peter Beverley, a leading planter and politician in Gloucester County. Like his father, William II took an interest in acquiring large quantities of land, and had amassed tens of thousands of acres along the James and Appomattox at the time of his death, several of which he operated as tobacco plantations.

After 1738 William Randolph II presented Turkey Island to his eldest son Beverley and moved to another plantation in Goochland County, where he died in 1742. Beverley (1713-1750) married Elizabeth Lightfoot (c. 1720-1770) in 1737, heir to a respectable sum of money. Beverley died childless in 1750 and his wife remarried in about 1754, and it was not until Ryland Randolph purchased the property from his cousin's estate in the late 1750s that the plantation seems to have been occupied once again. The third son of Richard Randolph of Curles Plantation, Ryland (c. 1734-1784) pursued legal studies in England before settling at Turkey Island as a planter some time after his return to Virginia around 1756 (Cowden 1977:460-3). He owned tens of thousands of acres in several counties, producing primarily tobacco, wheat, and corn, and there is little evidence that he ever practiced law. Despite his large landholdings and political appointments, Ryland was perpetually in debt, perhaps because of his preoccupation with traveling and indulging his personal interests in the arts and sciences, as well as upgrading his home plantation. Ryland Randolph died a bachelor in 1784 and the home plantation of Turkey Island passed from the family forever.

Actually, it was not until 1793 that the family was separated from its birthplace, when Bowler Cocke VI purchased it from the estate of Richard Randolph II of Curles (Moore 1982:61, 64). Cocke (c. 1750-1812) does not appear to have owned any property in addition to what he purchased at Turkey Island and what he inherited from his father. Although his marriage records are ambiguous he did sire at least one son, Bowler F. Cocke (c. 1783-1825), who, following his father's death, sold the plantation to George Pickett in 1814 (Moore 1982:64; Stivers 1964a:7). George, the youngest of seven children, was in no way hindered by his diminutive rank amongst his siblings, becoming senior partner in the mercantile firm of Pickett, Pollard and Johnston in Richmond (Longacre 1995:3). To this successful career he added the operation of the plantation at Turkey Island, which he passed on to his son Robert. By the nineteenth century changing economic conditions, including a severe depression and competition from other parts of the country, made farming in eastern Virginia a shaky endeavor. In response, Robert looked to other
sources of income for his family, particularly the coal business, and significantly downsized the plantation (Longacre 1995:7). His sons General George and Major Charles Pickett, who grew up at Turkey Island, of course, are not known for their success as planters, but rather for their role in the American Civil War.

The Documentary Record

The architectural history of Turkey Island is incompletely documented, due in part to the absence of complete records for Henrico County during the eighteenth century. Existing records do place William Randolph on the property by 1682. In the absence of primary documentation or archaeological evidence, determining what manner of dwelling he inhabited or its exact location is at best a speculative venture. It is almost certain, however, that this house stood along the western 150 acres of the property, which is the only portion that Randolph owned prior to 1684 (Jensen et al. 1999:6). It is also probable that this structure was located in proximity to the waterfront, where in fact the archaeo-
logical remains of the eighteenth-century dwelling are located.

That there were two eighteenth-century houses at Turkey Island is suggested by a pair of documentary sources. The first is the diary of William Byrd II, who made three revealing entries between August 1709 and September 1711. In each entry he recounts a visit to the Randolph family, during which he first called on Will Randolph (William II) and then walked to the house of Colonel Randolph (William I), or vice versa. It is clear from these brief narratives that by 1709 both father and son each possessed his own house at Turkey Island, and that they were easy walking distance from one another (Stivers 1964a:7-8). The presence of two houses by 1709 coincides with the return of William II to Turkey Island from Charles City County to establish a household with his new bride.

The second document was written almost a century and a half later, in 1853, and appeared in the Virginia Historical Register. It is a short descriptive essay on Turkey Island signed R.P., presumably Robert Pickett, who owned the property at the time the piece was published. A portion of the text is worth reproducing at length because its contents have been the principal source for speculation on the architectural development of Turkey Island plantation, and a key source in the interpretation of the recent archaeological excavations:

And, lastly, there is the relic or remnant of an old dwelling house, once, no doubt, the mansion of the Randolphs, apparently of one story only, but originally of two stories, and, it would seem, from the ends of charred timbers still protruding from the walls, once surrounded by porticoes on three sides. The walls are very thick, built of brick that are said to have been imported from England, and the cement is still so hard in some places that it is difficult to break or perforate it. This old house which must have been erected about a hundred and fifty years ago, and was the seat of a distinguished family, for some years, is now only a negro quarter, and occupied by such rude tenants as are usually found in such a habitation.

The present dwelling house on this place is of brick, and supposed to have been built above a hundred years ago. The walls are very thick, the basement story 2½ feet, though bearing only a single story above it. It is true, however, that the centre portion of the building was originally two stories high, and was capped by a very large dome; but in the year 1809, this part of the structure was burned down to its present height, and the rest was thereupon finished off in its actual style.

I ought perhaps to add, that the house before the change induced by the fire was generally considered one of the most beautiful buildings in all the lower country. The materials were all of the very best quality, and the workmanship of the finest taste. It is said to have been seven years in building. An old man now dead, told me some years ago, that he had been bred a carpenter, and had served his apprenticeship in a single room of that house, where he had learned more of his trade than one could now do in building, or helping to build, a hundred houses. This house in former days was known by all nautical men, as the Bird Cage, so called from its ornamental dome, and from the great number of birds which were always seen hovering and singing about it. In its present state, I can not say much for its external appearance, but I can still say that it has some substantial comfort within—and a warm welcome for all who may choose to come and see.

A number of relevant facts emerge from a close examination of this document. First, it is clear that as late as the mid-nineteenth century there existed two structures on the property that were once two-story brick dwellings. Second, chronological information is presented that casts the "negro quarter" as the earlier of the two, and suggests that it was constructed about 150 years prior to Pickett's essay, which would place its origins in the first decade of the eighteenth century. The estimated age for the "present dwelling house" is about 100 years, placing its date of construction in the 1750s. Third,
limited details of the construction, original appearance, and subsequent alterations of these houses provide valuable interpretive data for the archaeological record. What is interesting is that Byrd's diary makes plain that two houses existed by 1709 (the year that William II moved back to Turkey Island), but Pickett's informants have told him that the house he inhabited was not built until several decades later. This disjunction suggests at least two possibilities: that Pickett was misinformed about the dates or that there existed a third house that was present in 1709 along with the "negro quarter," but which was demolished before Pickett's time to be replaced by the "present dwelling house." It is also possible that the house Pickett lived in was one of the two structures present in 1709, which was remodeled in mid century. This latter explanation would account for the testimony of the old carpenter cited by Pickett, who may have worked on a remodeling rather than a newly erected structure. The Virginia Gazette reported on July 14, 1768 that "On Wednesday the 6th instant, about dusk in the evening, the house of Ryland Randolph, Esq; in Henrico County, was struck with lightning; part of a chimney was thrown down, the roof shattered, the windows broken, and other considerable damage done." This event was likely the catalyst for the extravagant remodeling performed under the direction of Ryland Randolph, and observed by an eyewitness who visited the plantation circa 1770.

Figure 5. Sketch of Mansion and Outbuildings from 1796 Insurance Document (Mutual Assurance Society 1796)
while the work was in progress (Cowden 1977:466). These facts, however, do not preclude the second hypothesis, that the house was first built in mid-century (perhaps when Ryland acquired the property in the late 1750s), and then remodeled after the damage inflicted a decade later.

An additional documentary source sheds further light on the appearance of Ryland's house following the remodeling and prior to the fire of 1809. In 1796, and again in 1806, Bowler Cocke took out insurance on the property (Mutual Assurance Society 1796, 1806). The sketches attached to the documents describe a brick structure with a two-story central block flanked by single-story wings (Figures 5 and 6). Interestingly, the 1796 sketch shows a quarter located one-fourth mile northeast of the house and another 100 yards to the southeast, one of which might be the quarter referred to by Pickett. Unfortunately, nothing is known of the house's appearance prior to the remodeling.

The Civil War saw the end to the Randolph-Pickett House and to Turkey Island as a productive plantation. Although the specific details of the house's demise are not clear, Stivers (1964a, 1964b) presents a hypothetical account of the timing and motivation of its destruction based on Civil War records and on the writings of General Pickett's wife, who claimed that General Butler purposely targeted the house in retaliation for a defeat at the hands of her husband. That the house was razed and dismantled by the end of the war is indicated in letters written by George and his brother Charles, who returned home to find their home plantation

![Figure 6. Sketch of Mansion from 1806 Insurance Document (Mutual Assurance Society 1806).](image)
George and his wife lived at Turkey Island for a number of years in a small cottage they built after the war, before moving to Richmond (Longacre 1995:176-7).

Since the nineteenth century, a great deal of knowledge related to the colonial occupation of Turkey Island not committed to posterity in the documentary record has been forgotten and an equal amount of speculation has taken its place. One early attempt to rediscover the form of the mansion at Turkey Island appears in Forman's *The Architecture of the Old South* (1948), which includes a hypothetical plan drawing by the author, presumably based on an examination of the visible ruins (Figure 7). The house was identified as a medieval cross plan house typical of the seventeenth and very early eighteenth century, a type which he contrasted to the classically inspired Georgian style that was to follow. This plan factored in to the interpretation of the house presented in the 2000 site report.

**The Archaeological Record**

*1999 and 2000.* Initial archaeological testing was conducted in the summers of 1999 and 2000 at the request of the landowner, Mr. George Little, as part of a student internship offered by the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research. In those two field seasons three 1 by 2 meter excavation units (Test Units 1, 8, and 9) and three shallow trenches (not penetrating beneath the rubble) were excavated within the visible ruins of what was traditionally held to be the eighteenth-century Randolph mansion (the results of which were reported in Jensen et al. 1999, Ross et al. 2000, and Ross 2002b) (Figure 8). The goals of this work were to determine the age, function, and integrity of this structure, as well as identify a military component that might confirm the destruction of the colonial mansion during the Civil War.

Removal of over a meter of brick, mortar, and plaster rubble within the units and trenches revealed the presence of up to 13 courses of intact brickwork belonging to the basement of the structure. Artifacts and construction material recovered from the units exhibited evidence of burning and a thin layer of charcoal lay above the level of the basement floor, although no diagnostic finds were made to link the house's destruction with the Civil War. Artifacts found within the rubble dated from between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, although an undisturbed deposit at the base of Unit 1, sealed beneath a thin layer of sand, produced ceramics such as creamware and pearlware dating to the turn of the nineteenth century. Amongst the construction material recovered was cut marble and sandstone flooring material that supported the belief that this was more than a common outbuilding or farmhouse (Figure 9). The removal of the burned layer in Unit 9 revealed an intact and well-preserved brick floor with bricks laid on edge (Figure 10). This floor abutted the west face that was interpreted as the western wall of the house's central core, and was assumed therefore to be associated with the west wing shown on the insurance plans. Likewise, excavators interpreted the brickwork uncovered in Unit 1 as the foundation of the house's northern facade, and the wall encountered in Unit 8 as part of an interior partition. A wall encountered at the southern end of Trench 1 and in Trench 3 was presumed to belong to the structure's southern facade.

Additional discoveries made during the first two seasons of work included two brick features projecting from the north wall of Trench 2, which were identified as possible chimney foundations. One of the shovel tests excavated in 1999 several meters south of the visible brick rubble of the house (at coordinates N1000 E970) revealed what ap-
Figure 8. Plan of the Randolph-Pickett House Excavations, 1999-2001.
Figure 9. Flooring Materials from Test Unit 1 (left, large cut sandstone; right, cut fossiliferous marble).

appeared to be brick paving just 10 cm beneath the surface. Excavators interpreted this brickwork as perhaps the remains of a pathway (Jensen et al. 1999:21). Similar brick paving was discovered at the same depth in another shovel test (N1020 E930) to the west of the house.

2001. The archaeology conducted in 1999 and 2000 uncovered portions of a structure that agreed in a general way with the shape and size of the house insured by Bowler Cocke in 1796 and again in 1806. What remained unknown was the relationship between this house and the ones referred to or implied by the historical accounts. It was assumed that the house under investigation was the one erected by or for William Randolph II in or around 1709, and later remodeled by his nephew Ryland after 1768. However, as the previous discussion suggests, other possibilities exist. Very few houses, brick or otherwise, are known from the opening decade of the eighteenth century with which to draw comparisons. Besides, after two seasons of work too little was still known of the precise dimensions and interior layout of the Randolph house for any meaningful comparisons.

It was for these two reasons, the remaining ambiguities surrounding the Randolph mansion and the lack of systematic studies of Virginia's early eighteenth century brick architecture, that I decided to adopt the project for my Master's thesis. However, in order to obtain enough data for the necessary comparisons, I needed to conduct additional excavations, enough to identify the basic details of the structure's internal organization. With a formulated set of questions, the consent of the landowner, and the logistical aid of the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research, I was able to mount a modest field season in the winter of 2001. The questions driving the fieldwork revolved around confirming the structure's exterior dimensions and interior partitioning, identifying structural discontinuities indicative of multiple construction phases, and determining the likelihood that all or part of the house was erected in the first decade of the eighteenth century.

Results from Unit 11 confirmed the location of the presumed eastern wall, which was broken in a stepwise fashion typical of foundations that have been robbed for reusable construction material following the structure's demise. Additionally, the eastern face of this north-south wall was plastered, suggesting the presence of an interior space to the east, perhaps the eastern wing. Basement rooms were often plastered or whitewashed to reflect light and help illuminate an otherwise dark space.

Nearly a meter below present grade in Unit 12, rubble gave way to a surface free of structural debris that appeared to be partially paved with brick. Unlike the well laid floor with closely interlocking bricks laid on edge exposed in Unit 9, however, the paving in Unit 12 consisted of apparently irregularly spaced bricks and brick bats covering only a portion of the surface (Figure 11). The surrounding surface consisted of a loosely compacted sandy loam, which remains unexcavated. The depth of this

Figure 10. Test Unit 9, Plan View Showing Brick Floor.
surface and the presence of brick paving suggests that the unit is located within the basement level of the south porch.

Removal of a complex series of layers within Unit 13 revealed the southeast corner of the structure and an additional wall extending eastward, confirming the presence of the wing whose existence was implied by other evidence (Figure 12). The fact that the brickwork of this wall is not bonded to the core suggests that the wing may not be contemporary with the original structure, although existing evidence is not sufficient to determine whether this reflects days, months, or years. In addition, the southern wall of the eastern wing exposed in this unit is offset approximately 40 cm to the north of the south wall of the core, indicating the wings were slightly narrower. Interpretation of the complex stratigraphy indicates that the wall was robbed without disturbing much of what appears to be the original builder's trench for the wing, including a layer of sandstone pieces that may have been placed adjacent to the foundation for drainage purposes. This sandstone exhibits tool marks and may be debris from other construction related activity.

The negative evidence of Test Unit 14 revealed that the wall discovered in Unit 1 did not extend westward to meet the western wall encountered in Unit 9, presenting the possibility that Unit 1 was placed within the north porch indicated on the insurance plans. Excavation of Units 15 and 16 confirmed this hypothesis, exposing a substantial foundation at least three bricks wide with an external cellar entrance projecting from its eastern side and descending below the porch via a series of large cut sandstone steps (Figure 13). Units 15 and 16 did not extend far enough south to provide evidence for the nature of the articulation between the porch and the core, and the rubble overburden in this part of the site was too deep to make excavation practical at this time.

Returning to Trench 1 excavated in 2000, a clear vertical boundary between brick rubble and clay subsoil was evident that, in light of the reinter-
pretation of the wall in Unit 1 as part of the porch, might mark the location of the northern wall of the house. Removing some of the rubble in the bottom of the trench adjacent to the subsoil boundary revealed the presence of just such a wall (Feature 11) extending in an east-west direction, bordered to the north by clay and to the south by a brick floor (Feature 12) similar to the one found at the base of Unit 9. This wall was not identified previously because it had been robbed all the way to its footing.

Returning to the western half of the house, Units 17 through 24 were excavated sequentially to answer questions related to the interior partitioning of the structure, the relationship between the core of the house and the north porch and to confirm the function of the structural features projecting from the north wall of Trench 2. The western portion of the ruins had not been salvaged to the same degree as the eastern portion, leaving considerably more of the foundations intact just beneath the present ground surface. As a result, excavation was much more efficient, and it was possible to access structural features whose counterparts to the east were buried under a mountain of rubble.

The evidence provided by Units 17, 20, 21, and 23 confirmed this to be the location of a chimney foundation supporting back-to-back fireplaces. Recesses framed by chimney cheeks are present on either side of the wall extending northward across Unit 17. A symmetrically placed chimney is hypothesized for the eastern side of the house as well. It is uncertain, however, what the exact purpose of the angular feature south of the unit was, nor its counterpart to the east.

One informative discovery in the rubble adjacent to the intact wall exposed in Unit 18 was a collapsed wall segment with a number of bricks still bonded together, demonstrating the form of the water table with Flemish bond brickwork both above and below and a clearly ruled mortar joint (Figure 14). The excavation of Units 19 and 24 was able to clarify details relating to the size of the north porch and its connection to the house. Abutting the north wall of the house is a square brick pier 66 x 68 cm (26 x 26.8 in.) in size, and directly north of and abutting this pier is a narrow 1½ brick wide wall extending northward beyond the edge of Unit 14. The fact that the porch is not bonded to the facade indicates that the two were erected separately, but does not provide any indication as to the length of time between the two construction episodes. It is conceivable that the porches were part of the original design of the house, although, since structures of this type usually took years to complete, it is possible that they were not added until a later stage in the process. The data provided by Units 19 and 24, in conjunction with data from Units 15 and 16, indicate that the porch was approximately 9 meters long by approximately 3 meters wide, and that it possessed an extremely substantial foundation along the north facade, but only a narrow foundation along the lateral sides, with the exception of the brick pier.

What we discovered in Unit 22 was that approximately 25 cm west of the brick pier the north wall is offset to the south 40 cm. Additionally, at
the base of Layer I a surface with brick paving similar to Unit 12 was exposed, although at a considerably shallower elevation. This paving also appears along the western edge of Unit 19 and follows the outline of the foundation, although it terminates only a quarter of the way along the wall exposed in Unit 22. This surface likely represents the original colonial ground surface and the paving may have functioned to direct rainwater away from the foundations, as seen on a number of standing colonial mansions.

Returning to the wings, I decided to place a unit over the presumed southeast corner of the east wing using the dimensions on the insurance plans as a guide. Unit 25 comprised a similarly complex series of layers as Unit 13, which likewise represent salvaging behavior followed by episodes of deposition and disturbance. These subsequent episodes include the laying of a metal pipe that extends in an east-west direction across the unit and passing over top of the wall foundations. The foundations are situated in precisely the location predicted by the documentary sources, confirming the essential accuracy of the existing plans.

Trench 2 excavated in 2000 extends across the southern half of the site without intersecting any clear evidence of perpendicular interior walls, such as the one exposed in Units 17 and 18. An absence of this sort would suggest that the southern portion of the house was not subdivided by any substantial partitions. However, a small section of apparently intact wall was visible in the south profile of the trench directly opposite Unit 17. Excavating some of the rubble from this section revealed it to be a continuation of the north-south wall in Units 17 and 18, separated from it by a narrow gap at a 45 degree angle to the rest of the house; this wall was designated as Feature 13. Examination of the trench immediately south of the eastern chimney foundation revealed a similar wall, identified as Feature 14 and actually abutting the chimney. The unique thing about this wall is that it exhibits sloppy workmanship and employs slate roofing tiles between several of the brick courses (Figure 15). These results indicate that the southern half of the house was likely partitioned in a similar manner as the northern half, and the gap present in the western wall permitted movement between basement rooms. Future investigations may reveal a similar opening in the eastern wall.

The fact that the brickwork of Feature 14 is of a different quality than elsewhere and is not bonded to the wall at its northern end raised the possibility that it was a later addition associated with a reorganization of domestic space. With Unit 26 I sought to determine whether this wall was bonded at its southern end to the southern wall of the house, which itself is presumably original. Results indicate that the brickwork in the two walls is bonded together, providing no support for Feature 14 as a later addition.

Several additional features of the brickwork suggesting separate construction episodes have been identified over the past two seasons of work. These include:

1. A vertical break in the brick bonding revealed in Unit 9 along the west exterior wall, suggesting that an original opening was bricked up at a later time (Ross et al. 2000:18-19).
2. The original opening directly opposite this location at the southern end of the east wall, with an eastward projecting feature suggestive of an exterior entry.
3. The presence of lateral wings, possibly additions, which prevent the possibility of exterior entry to the house from either end.

Figure 15. Feature 14 Facing West.
4. The presence of an exterior cellar entry in the north porch, which itself may be an addition.

The purpose of Units 27 and 28 was to explore and evaluate this evidence for structural alterations that affected circulation patterns in and out of the house. Unit 27 was placed along the west exterior wall just south of Unit 9 in search of a second break in the brick bonding that would confirm the presence of a blocked opening. What excavation revealed, however, was the presence of an unblocked opening, which was only partially bricked up to decrease its width from 155 cm to 90 cm. The former width matches the estimated size of its counterpart to the east. This opening in the east wall was explored in Unit 28, in an attempt to identify any evidence that this was once a cellar entrance (Figure 16). Such clear-cut evidence was not forthcoming, although this does not preclude such an interpretation. The brickwork projecting eastward from the north side of the opening is strikingly similar to brickwork observed at William Randolph III's Wilton supporting the steps to the principal entrance on the river facade (Figure 17). If the brick projection at Turkey Island performed a similar function, then it seems probable that the house was originally constructed without wings and with a side entrance to the first floor at the east end, which may also have doubled as a cellar entrance. The matching opening to the west lacks the brick support for steps leading to the first floor, indicating that access may only have been possible to the cellar from this side. Once the wings were erected a new cellar entrance was created beneath the north porch and the former side entrances were altered to provide circulation between the core and the wings.

**Technical Details**

The combined results of excavations over the past three seasons have provided a body of data that go a long way towards answering questions regarding the structural layout and chronology of the Randolph-Pickett House. What I discovered was a structure whose dimensions resemble the insurance documents of 1796 and 1806, leaving little doubt that this is the house represented in those drawings. It consists of a central block 18 m (59 ft.) long by 9.4 m (30.8 ft.) wide, with a wing either side measuring 8 m (26.2 ft.) long by approximately 7.8 m (25.6 ft.) wide, and front and rear porches each measuring 8.92 m (29.3 ft.) long by 2.69 m (8.8 ft.) wide. The total length of the structure is 34 m (111.5 ft.). The brickwork of the wings and porches are not bonded to the core, suggesting that they may have been later additions, although it is not possible to determine how much later without solid dates from builder's trench assemblages. This core is divided into a central non-partitioned portion 9.2 m (30.2 ft.) long with the width quoted above, flanked on each side by a 4.4 m (14.4 ft.) long portion that is 0.8 m (2.6 ft.) narrower, at 8.6
m (28.2 ft.), and that was probably partitioned into two domestic spaces apiece. The brickwork indicates that this entire section was constructed in a single episode.

The walls were laid in Flemish bond above and below a two-course molded water table (cove over torus), although the interior walls and foundations below grade are in English bond. Flemish bond was fashionable in the eighteenth century and so was employed on the exposed faces, but English bond was retained on the interior and below grade because it was sturdier. Regular glazed headers were not employed on the facades, although the discovery of glazed bricks in the rubble suggests that they may have appeared randomly. Wall thickness is four courses at the base of the foundations, narrowing to three courses within the basement level above. These dimensions are compatible with an elevation of at least two stories, which agree with the insurance documents and with Pickett's claim that the basement walls were 2½ ft. thick. Likewise the width of the north wall of the north porch suggests that it was greater than a single story. The house appears to have had interior chimneys located at either end of the central portion of the core. The 1796 insurance plan also shows features on the end walls of each wing that are possibly additional chimneys, although time was not available to test this hypothesis archaeologically. Entrances were almost certainly located centrally along both the north and south facades, as suggested by the presence of porches and the apparent symmetry displayed by the foundations. Seemingly original openings in the southwest and southeast corners of the central core may be exterior entrances that were blocked when the wings were added, but with the openings left in place to provide access to the basement rooms of these wings from the core. A later cellar entrance located beneath the north porch, part of which was exposed during excavations, provided subsequent access to the basement from the outside. The width of the house (approximately 30 ft.) suggests two room depth, although the total number of ground floor rooms into which it was divided is unclear; it was probably at least five. The central space interpreted as a large hall has been subject to minimal archaeological testing and may be subdivided. The partitioning of the wings, if any, is completely unknown.

**Architectural Interpretations in Historical Context**

Interpretation of documentary sources suggests that the foundations uncovered at Turkey Island are the remains of a house constructed by William Randolph II around 1709 and later remodeled by his nephew Ryland between the late 1760s and 1770s. Corroboration from datable artifacts within intact archaeological contexts is not yet available, and it may be many years before additional excavation is conducted at this site. Research carried out for my Master's thesis (Ross 2002a) involved collecting data on all known brick houses built prior to 1750, which provides a means of interpreting the findings on stylistic grounds. With the amount of variation present among brick houses in the first half of the eighteenth century it is impossible to create a template to hold up as the quintessential suite of structural elements for each period. However, by comparing Turkey Island with the general trends identified for the decades surrounding the turn of the eighteenth century, its degree of similarity or uniqueness can be identified, as can the period with which it appears most congruent.

Several houses from the second quarter of the eighteenth century combine two-room depth, interior chimneys, and elevations of two stories or more, but none has a central hall that is equally as broad, with the exception of Thomas Lee's Stratford Hall. Stratford is unique for the early eighteenth century in its combination of two double pile wings with central passages joined by a hyphen (the hall) as part of the original plan. Tuckahoe, a contemporary frame house built by William Randolph II's nephew William, was originally constructed in 1733 as a single pile two-story house with a central passage, but enlarged in 1740 with the addition of a matching wing joined by a hyphen, perhaps in emulation of Stratford begun several years before (Figure 18).1 Thus, there is precedent for a broad central space separating the principal entrances from the living quarters to either side in the Randolph family, but not until c. 1740 and even then not as a
Examined individually, common early eighteenth-century structural features compared with those of Turkey Island suggest (but do not guarantee) that the house was not constructed as early as interpretations of existing records imply. Taken together, however, the contrasts make a strong case for placing Turkey Island later in time, or else casting William Randolph as a precocious innovator whose sense of space and design was not emulated for several decades. A number of the features possessed by the house, including brickwork, elevation, depth, chimney placement, and entry, were more common in the second quarter than in the first, and the house seems more at home in this context. Based on the structural and stylistic data collected for the first half of the eighteenth century, Turkey Island compares more closely with houses built in the second quarter, particularly those built no earlier than about 1740, when Beverley had just recently acquired the property from his father. However, even Stratford does not compare in more than a general way with the structure and layout of Turkey Island, and it would seem valuable to cast a wider net to ensure that there are not closer matches even later in time.

Wenger (1986) notes that the central passage began to increase in size and importance following its appearance in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, becoming a living space in its own right by mid-century rather than simply a means of controlling access to other spaces. Shortly thereafter it overtook the other rooms in the house as the most important formal space, which was often expressed on the exterior by decorative elaboration such as the three bay stone portico at Mt. Airy in Richmond County (completed before 1760). Such a room was often referred to as a saloon. Tazewell Hall, constructed in Williamsburg by William Randolph II's nephew John between 1758 and 1762, possessed a broad entrance hall extending the entire width of the building, although it was frame rather than brick (Samford et al. 1986) (Figure 19). It also had narrow passages along one facade lead-
ing from the hall or saloon to hyphens that connected the house to a wing on either side, similar to the small rooms on either side of the hall at Turkey Island opening into the wings. It may be that the southern end of the hall was partitioned as at Battersea (a brick structure with a similar layout, built in Petersburg in the mid-1760s) to create a passage extending the entire length of the structure (Figure 20).

The structural details of Turkey Island suggest that it belongs to the period after 1725, but the exaggerated central hall has no equal (besides Stratford) until at least three decades later. Wenger (1989:156) discusses an important change at this time as part of an increasing tendency to emulate English forms:

Whereas the ceremonial aspect of gentry life had once centered on the old hall, this function was now divided between two roughly equivalent spaces [the dining room and parlor]. It was precisely this kind of parity that led to the creation of insistently symmetrical houses like Brandon, in Prince George Coun-

ty, where the planter’s public living spaces were effectively detached from the rest of the house and placed at the core of an extended complex.

The result of this shift in emphasis was a breaking up of the traditional blocky rectangular mass into a more elongated plan, with a core of public ceremonial rooms flanked by more private family quarters. Turkey Island could perhaps be seen as a move in this direction with a saloon flanked by a parlor and a dining room with less formal rooms in the wings, yet retaining the traditional compact form, although it would seem more likely for these larger spaces to be the formal rooms. It is possible that Beverley Randolph constructed all or part of this house during his ownership of the plantation between 1738 and 1750. It is more likely the work of Ryland Randolph, who is clearly documented as having engaged in significant building campaigns and who resided at Turkey Island during the time when this trend was manifesting itself in other homes. It may be that he constructed the central core shortly after acquiring the property in the late
1750s as a compete unit with saloon, dining room, and parlor (albeit small ones) on the ground floor and additional public and private quarters upstairs. In this scenario the wings could have been added during the remodeling following the lightning strike to create more spacious formal rooms. Because the entire core was two full stories, unlike Tazewell and Battersea, there was no need for additional wings to provide private quarters. It is important to note that even without the wings and porches, Turkey Island's plan is still more closely reminiscent of structures from c. 1760 than those built earlier. The slightly offset central portion of the north and south walls indicate that the large central saloon was part of the original plan. These findings are obviously at odds with those of Forman, who lacked the benefit of excavated evidence. He seems to have based his plan on what his research led him to expect to find in a house built in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, rather than anything definitive he could actually surmise from the ruins themselves.

If the mansion at Turkey Island, traditionally believed to have been built by William Randolph II in the first decade of the eighteenth century, was actually constructed (not remodeled) half a century later by his nephew, the obvious question that arises is where did the Randolphs of Turkey Island live between 1680 and 1760? The exposed foundation walls are clearly not those of an adapted two-room plan with or without a central passage. From what is visible in the excavation units, the broad central space is clearly a part of the original conception of the house and cannot be reconciled with any known plan from the first half of the century. While there are other houses from this time period, such as Germanna, that are also ambiguous, unlike Spotswood's mansion Turkey Island is not securely dated and demonstrates close affinities to later designs.

Mouer, who conducted large-scale excavations at neighboring Curles Plantation over the past two decades, provides one possible solution to the ultimate question posed above. Curles was inhabited by three successive owners between the early seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Thomas Harris, Nathaniel Bacon, Jr., and Richard Randolph, who built their homes in precisely the same location, one on top of the other. In his discussion of this architectural legacy Mouer (1997) includes a brick structure that functioned as the kitchen for Richard Randolph's frame mansion begun in the 1720s (Figure 21). This single pile, 54 x 22-ft. 3-room kitchen was probably originally about 40 x 22 ft. and was constructed on fill overlying deposits dating to c. 1680 (L. Daniel Mouer, personal communication 2001). It seems to have been expanded to its final size from two rooms in the
late second quarter of the century after the frame mansion was erected, with an addition on the west end and a rebuilt central chimney. Artifacts from the builder's trench suggest a date in the first decade or two of the eighteenth century, and a wine bottle seal with the name "William Randolph" was extracted from the deepest midden deposits adjacent to the foundations above those attributed to the Bacon period.

These clues in combination with the robust and deeply set nature of the foundation (seemingly too substantial for a kitchen) led Mouer to conclude that this was the original Randolph house on the property. Not only was this kitchen probably an early Randolph dwelling, it may also have been the house constructed by William II in the first decade of the eighteenth century. It is certainly close enough for William Byrd to have walked there from Turkey Island, and the dating is right, but this scenario is not without complications. Why would William II build his home on property that his brother Henry had owned since 1706? Assuming that he did, where did he reside after Richard acquired Curles c. 1716? It may be that upon Richard's arrival William II moved back to his father's house at Turkey Island, William I having died in 1711. No records, however, indicate that William II ever resided at Curles; he is always associated with Turkey Island. It may also be that Henry built this house prior to granting it to his brother, although records regarding his activities and place of residence are slim. These hypotheses still leave unclear the identity of the second house described in 1853 by Robert Pickett as once a two-story mansion, but presently a slave quarter. Where is this house? Is this William II's early eighteenth-century home or is it the long lost home of his father? Further excavation of the partially exposed foundations at Turkey
Island may lead to surprising discoveries like the superimposed houses uncovered at Curles. At the very least it should confirm or deny the structural history suggested herein, and determine which of the two or three Randolph homes are still out there somewhere.

Examining Turkey Island in light of the changing styles of homes in colonial Virginia, it is likely that the c. 1680 home of William Randolph was of the small two-room variety, with or without porch and stair towers. Because no early foundations have been uncovered it is possible that Randolph's house was of earthfast construction, although his association with the colonial elite and recent arrival from England suggests that it could very well have been brick. Likewise, although the data for the first decade of the eighteenth century is slim, the dwelling of Randolph's son William II most likely possessed two rooms on the ground floor. Both of these structures were constructed in a time of extreme economic recession, when even the wealthiest planters were constructing diminutive houses, and prior to the period of competitive mansion building that would begin c. 1720 with Corotoman and Germanna. Regardless of who owned the small brick house excavated by Mouer, its small size and two-room plan are comparable to other homes built by wealthy planters at the turn of the century, more so than are the remains at Turkey Island.

One potentially productive avenue of inquiry may in the future help to answer at least one of the remaining questions. Approximately 20 m (65 ft.) due south of the house ruins a feature was encountered in 1999 whose deepest deposits produced the earliest artifacts yet discovered on the site, dating from between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The precise nature of this feature is as yet poorly understood, but may be the remains of an earthfast structure that could shed some light on the living arrangements of the earliest Randolph inhabitants on the property.

Unfortunately, besides the small brick structure at Curles, the homes built by the second generation of Randolphs in Virginia are for the most part unknown. One exception is the second Randolph house built at Curles in the 1720s and attributed to Richard Randolph. It was a small frame structure with brick foundations of approximately the same dimensions as its predecessor, before being enlarged later in the century. Curiously, although Randolph owned considerable amounts of land and was very active in the highest levels of colonial politics, he did not engage in the competitive mansion-building taking place at this time among other wealthy men, such as Spotswood, Carter, Page, and Harrison. By compiling comparative biographical data, Mooney (1991) has identified patterns in the demographics of men who constructed large plantation houses in Virginia. Her results reveal that these men tended to be third or fourth generation Virginians who began construction at a relatively young age, often in their thirties (Mooney 1991:73); this profile matches Mann Page I and Benjamin Harrison IV reasonably well, although Harrison was somewhat precocious in beginning construction of Berkeley in his mid twenties. Former governor Alexander Spotswood and Robert "King" Carter, however, were first and second generation Virginians (respectively), who began erecting their mansions in their mid-fifties. It seems, then, that earlier generations tended to wait until later in life to begin serious construction activities, because they lacked the considerable inheritance available to families of longer standing in the colony and were therefore forced to rely on their own accumulated wealth. Richard Randolph, being second generation, was one of these individuals who built a relatively small dwelling in his thirties and waited until his fifties before more than doubling its size in the 1740s.

The third generation of Randolphs, on the other hand, was very much involved in the competitive construction of large colonial mansions, not always entirely of brick, but responding to strong influences from the increasing availability of architectural pattern books from England, in combination with an evolving local vernacular. Among these are the homes of William III at Wilton, Peter at Chatsworth, and Richard II at Curles. After mid-century this English influence involved the reorientation of domestic spaces away from the local vernacular, with central passages and a focus on the hall, towards an equal emphasis on the parlor and newly introduced dining room. It is this tradi-
tion that Ryland Randolph's Turkey Island seems to belong to, along with his cousin John's Tazewell Hall.

Notes

1. Dendrochronological sampling and provisional dating of Tuckahoe was completed between November 2000 and March 2001 by William J. Callahan, Jr. and Edward R. Cook as part of a project, under the direction of Camille Wells, to dendrochronologically date a set of eighteenth-century Virginia houses. This project has been sheltered by the University of Virginia School of Architecture and supported by a grant from the Jessie Ball duPont Religious, Charitable, and Educational Fund.

2. The evidence from Unit 22 at Turkey Island that the central portion of the north wall was slightly offset to the north indicates a similar exterior emphasis on this space, and reveals that it was part of the original conception of the building. The porches, which were the same width as this room, performed a similar function.

Acknowledgements

A hearty thanks to the landowner, Mr. George Little, for allowing me to invade his property every weekend for several months, and to Dennis Blanton for granting me the use of transportation and equipment belonging to the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research free of charge. Thanks also to everyone who slugged it out in the field along with me, including Courtney Birkett, Jeremy Nienow, Dave Brown, Thane Harpole, Tony Smith, Ben Ford, Jack Gary, Heather Hatcher, and Kelly King. Site interpretation and morale was aided immeasurably by Turkey Island's unofficial caretaker, Bill Rhoades, and this project would not even have gotten off the ground without the guidance and friendship of Martin Gallivan, who directed the 2000 phase of excavations and continued to advise me when I took over. I would also like to acknowledge the aid of Mark Wenger, Willie Graham, Doug Sanford, Camille Wells, and Dan Mouer, who contributed data and opinions from their own realms of architectural and archaeological experience. Eric Agin of the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research was very generous with his time in preparing the plan of the site.

References Cited

Cowden, Gerald Steffens

Forman, Henry Chandlee

Jensen, Todd L., Elizabeth J. Burling, Sunyoon Park, Andrew A. Schmidt, and Jessica A. Williams
1999 Archaeology at Turkey Island: Results of Preliminary Survey and Evaluation. Center for Archaeological Research, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg.

Longacre, Edward G.

Mooney, Barbara Burlison

Moore, William Cabell
Douglas E. Ross earned his B.A. in Archaeology in 1999 from Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, and his M.A. in Anthropology in 2002 from the College of William and Mary. He is currently enrolled in the Ph.D. program in Archaeology at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia. His address is Department of Archaeology, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada V5A 1S6.