

VLR-12/17/85 NRHP 6/5/86

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Potts-Fitzhugh House

and/or common Robert E. Lee Boyhood Home (preferred) (DHL File #100-82)

2. Location

street & number 607 Oronoco Street N/A not for publication

city, town Alexandria N/A vicinity of

state Virginia code 51 county (in city) code 510

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Lee-Jackson Foundation, c/o Col. Richard B. Smith, Executive Director

street & number 300 Preston Ave., Suite 310

city, town Charlottesville N/A vicinity of state Virginia 22901

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Alexandria City Court House, Circuit Court Clerk's Office, Land Records Department

street & number 520 King Street

city, town Alexandria state Va. 22314

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title (I) HABS and HABS1 has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes no

date 1936; 1968 federal ___ state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington state DC

(See continuation sheet #1)

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Robert E. Lee Boyhood Home (Potts-Fitzhugh House), at 607 Oronoco Street, Alexandria, Virginia, was constructed circa 1795. It is a five-bay, two-and-one-half-story brick dwelling set above a raised cellar, with a contemporaneous two-and-one-half-story brick ell at the rear. The main block has a center hall plan. The main (south) facade is little altered, except for an iron railing added at the entrance in the 1970s and two small dormers, probably added in the 1920s. A smokehouse, originally attached to the rear wall of the ell, was removed circa 1933. A one-story porch with deck, added to the east end of the main block in the early 20th century, was removed in the 1960s. The house is in excellent condition. With its garden and outbuildings, the house now occupies one-half acre on the north side of the block between Washington and St. Asaph streets. The lot originally extended to Pendleton Street on the north. The nominated acreage includes one contributing building and two non-contributing structures.¹

ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

The main block of the house is 55' long by 25' deep.² At the west end, the main block joins a contemporaneous building of the same width with a virtually identical facade. The similarity of the two houses may be partially explained by the fact that they were built by John Potts, Jr., and his business partner, William Wilson (owner/builder of 609 Oronoco), perhaps as a speculative venture.³ There is very fine brickwork on the main (south) facade laid in Flemish bond with thin mortar joints; the brickwork on other sides of the building is laid in three-course common bond. The gable roof was covered with slate ca. 1930, but was originally shingled;⁴ two 20th-century gabled dormers with slate roofs and wooden siding face the street at the front of the building.⁵ There are interior chimneys at each end (the west one shared with 609 Oronoco). A fine, metal gutterhead at the east end of the main block bears a pineapple motif and the numerals "1795," and both the main block and wing are believed to be of 1795 construction.

In 1796, John Potts, the original owner, took out a fire insurance policy with the Mutual Assurance Society of Alexandria to cover "My five Buildings on Oronoco Street at Alexandria now occupied by myself situated between the house of William Wilson and that of St. Asaph Street in the county of Fairfax."⁶ The accompanying plat describes the dwelling house as brick, covered with wood, two stories high and 55'x25'. A connecting two-story brick ell containing a 20'x20' "dwelling" and an 18'x22' kitchen was also listed, as well as an attached one-story brick smokehouse. These survive, except for the smokehouse, which was demolished at an unknown date, possibly ca. 1934.⁷ Under proper lighting conditions, the outline of the smokehouse can be seen in the brick on the north side of the rear wing; older photos show the outline clearly. A one-story brick office, located on Oronoco Street 10' from the main house, and a one-and-one-half-story brick carriage house and stable on St. Asaph Street have also disappeared.⁸

On the symmetrical front (south) facade, a slightly projecting center pavilion culminates in a pediment, with an oval light set in a molded frame with four keystones and a

(See continuation sheet # 1-a)

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates ca. 1795 Builder/Architect Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Robert E. Lee Boyhood Home (noted in the Historic American Buildings Survey as the Potts-Fitzhugh House), completed ca. 1795, is both a distinguished example of Federal-period architecture in Alexandria and a striking reminder of the social, economic and cultural life of the national capital area, from the early days of the Federal City to the New Deal and World War II. The facade has been virtually unaltered since its construction. With its contemporaneous attached near-twin, it occupies an entire block on Oronoco Street, an important 18th-century thoroughfare leading to the Potomac River. It was built for John Potts, Jr., the first secretary of the Potomac Navigation Company, George Washington's grand, if unsuccessful, scheme to link the Potomac River ports with the western territories. The second owner, William Fitzhugh, was a major Virginia plantation owner, tobacco merchant and member of the Continental Congress, in whose home George Washington was a frequent visitor. For nine years in the early 19th century, the house was occupied by the young family of General Henry ("Light Horse Harry") Lee, celebrated cavalry officer of the American Revolution and author of the famous tribute to Washington: "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." Lee's son, Robert E. Lee, future leader of the Confederate States of America, prepared here for his entrance to the United States Military Academy. In the 1930s and 1940s, 607 Oronoco was the residence of such prominent figures in the Roosevelt administration as Royd R. Sayers, Chief of the Bureau of Mines, and the poet Archibald MacLeish, who served briefly as Librarian of Congress and later as Under Secretary of State. Now a historic house museum operated by the Lee-Jackson Foundation, the building remains among the most impressive of Alexandria's Federal-era houses.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

An elaborate gutterhead at the east end of the house at 607 Oronoco Street bears the numerals "1795," suggesting that the building was completed in that year.

The large brick townhouse¹ was built by John Potts, Jr., on land he purchased from Charles Alexander in 1794.¹ Set at the edge of the promising small city of Alexandria, within sight of the Potomac River and the new Federal City, the house echoed Alexandria's conservative architectural scheme, although its chaste Georgian facade and delicately scaled decoration were a step away from the more robust examples of the mode that prevailed in the city until the 19th century. (The predilection for Georgian building is clearly evinced by the huge ballroom of the 1793 addition to Gadsby's Tavern, which Deering Davis, in *Alexandria Houses, 1750-1830*, calls "a magnificent example of the survival of a style for many years after the date of its greatest popularity."²) The restrained elegance of the Potts house design compares favorably with the more elaborate and stylistically advanced residence (now called the Lord Fairfax House) constructed in 1799 by William Yeaton at 607 Cameron Street.³

(See continuation sheet #7)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Alexandria Land Records, Circuit Court Clerk's Office, Alexandria City Court House, Alexandria, Va.

Alexandria Land and Personal Property Tax Assessments (1799-1816), Virginia State Library (See continuation sheet 13)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Alexandria (Va.-DC-Md.)

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	8	3	2	2	3	9	1	0	4	2	9	7	4	3	0
Zone			Easting					Northing							

B

Zone			Easting					Northing							

C

Zone			Easting					Northing							

D

Zone			Easting					Northing							

E

Zone			Easting					Northing							

F

Zone			Easting					Northing							

G

Zone			Easting					Northing							

H

Zone			Easting					Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

Beginning at a point on the N side of Oronoco St. at the intersection of said street with St. Asaph St.; thence extending approximately 100' W along N side of Oronoco St.; thence (see continuation sheet 14)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
	N/A			N/A	

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
	N/A			N/A	

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell, Historic Preservation Consultants

organization Massey Maxwell Associates

date September 10, 1985

street & number P. O. Box 263

telephone (703) 465-4566

city or town Strasburg

state VA 22657

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature



H. Bryan Mitchell, Director
title Division of Historic Landmarks

date April 30, 1986

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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ROBERT E. LEE BOYHOOD HOME, ALEXANDRIA, VA.

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Item 7. DESCRIPTION— Architectural Analysis

modillion cornice that matches the cornice to the front of the house. A fine, restrained entrance doorway has stop-fluted, rectangular pilasters; simple, cavetto capitals; deep, paneled jambs; an eight-panel door with molded flat panels set in a keystone circular arch; and a semicircular fanlight with delicate tracery under the open pediment. Aquia-stone steps laid over an arched support lead to the entrance. Simple iron railings, with handsome turns at the sidewalk are modern; early photos show no railings. Below grade level the foundations are rubble.

On the south facade, there are four six-over-six-light double-hung wood windows on the first floor and five on the second floor, all with simple, molded, recessed wood trim, flat-arch stone lintels with keystones and vousoirs, and stone sills. The plain, gabled dormers, added ca. 1925,¹⁰ have small, six-over-six-light double-hung windows of wood and wood board cheeks. There are a large, handsome modillion cornice and molded and decorated gutterheads, one of which is dated 1795. There are six basement windows, with bars, at the front.

The gable (east) end of the main block formerly had a large, columned, one-story-and-deck porch, built around 1900, which appears in a 1926 photograph.¹¹ Traces of the porch may still be seen in the brickwork. It seems to have been removed between 1962 and 1966.¹² There is now one nine-light-sash wood door with a modern wood stoop. In a 1976 restoration¹³, a six-over-six-light window replaced a door to the former deck on the second floor. There are two small, four-over-four-light double-hung wood windows, one on each side of the brick interior chimney on the attic floor. The gable has a simple bargeboard. A basement door set in a modern, gabled wood bulkhead is also on the first floor.

The rear (north) facade of the main block has a projecting, two-and-one-half-story center stair tower with gabled top at the rear of the central hall; the tower contains the stairs to the second and attic floors. There is an eight-panel rear door to the garden in a plain, molded frame with a modern aluminum storm door and three steps to the ground in the tower. On the second floor of the tower is one double-hung, six-over-six-light sash; a six-over-three-light sash is in the attic; all are set in recessed frames with flat arches and keystones. There are two six-over-six-light, double-hung windows set in recessed frames, with flat arches with keystones and vousoirs, and stone sills on each floor of the main block. Near the west chimney is one gabled dormer with six-over-six-light double hung window, horizontal board cheeks and a shingle roof; the dormer appears in an 1862 lithograph view and may be original.¹⁴ There are two basement windows.

A large rear ell, original with the house, is flush with the east side of the front block. The ell is two-and-one-half stories high, but lower than the main portion. On the east-facing side of the ell are two doors and five double-hung, six-over-six-light wood windows with plain, flat lintels, stone sills and louvered shutters on the first floor. An old, but not original, arched-head door opening was filled in with a simple six-over-six-light window in the 1976 restoration. Six similar windows are on the second floor and a small, gabled, double-hung six-over-six light wood window is in a

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Item 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

- (2) Division of Historic Landmarks Survey File No. 100-82
1968 X State
Division of Historic Landmarks
221 Governor Street
Richmond, VA 23219

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single modern dormer.¹⁵ The dormer has a shingle roof and horizontal board cheeks and front. There is a large, molded double cornice. Traces of the rafter holes from an old arbor show on the facade.

The west side of the ell has two gabled dormers, with slate roofs, cheeks and front sides and six-over-six-light windows; these dormers also appear in the 1862 lithograph mentioned above and may be original. On the second floor are four six-over-six-light double-hung sash in plain molded frames and flat heads. On the first floor are two similar windows and two small, plain doorways, one with a vertical board door. There are louvered shutters (not original) to the first-floor wing windows. There is a large, molded, double cornice.

The rear (north) side of the ell is two stories, with gable end. There are two plain, frame, six-over-six-light double-hung sash windows on the first floor; one four-over-four-light double-hung sash on the second; and one four-over-four-light double hung attic window. There is a plain bargeboard.

Near the rear of the ell is a large, brick central kitchen chimney, which visual inspection reveals to have been rebuilt in the 20th century; a smaller, tall chimney is at the south end where it adjoins the main block.

INTERIOR

Main Block

In the main portion of the house, a wide central hall opens on the drawing room on the west side and the dining room on the east. The hall is extended at the rear to provide for a multi-flight stairway that reaches to the attic; steep stairs to the basement are under the stairway.

The drawing room (west) is a large, well-proportioned room, with two windows set in reveals on both the front and rear walls, original interior paneled shutters, wood wainscoting and a fireplace with a projecting, flat, molded mantel (a replacement) on the west wall. The mantel is in the Federal style, with fluted pilasters. An original bell lever is at the side. There is a double, wooden (not original) cornice, a plain narrow plaster border and ceiling insert, and a crystal chandelier of a later period. Another glass chandelier now in basement storage is reputed to have earlier hung in this room.¹⁶ There is a mid-19th-century brass-and-stone circular hot-air register, similar to another one in the hall. There is also a late-19th-century circular, iron hot-air register.

The dining room (east) has two front windows with paneled reveals and original interior paneled wood shutters; a doorway to the garden with paneled jambs on the east side; paneled wainscoting; and a replacement fireplace with plain pilasters and molded-and-fret mantel and stone hearth. The bell lever to the left of the fireplace is original, as is the plaster crown molding in an elaborate pattern topped by acanthus

(See continuation sheet #3)

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leaves. On the east wall, the French doors leading to the former porch, added ca. 1900 (see above), were replaced with a nine-light sash door in the 1976 restoration directed by Walter Macomber.¹⁷

In the first-floor hall, there are an elaborate plaster double cornice with fret and modillions; a handsome, Adamesque plaster ceiling medallion; and paneled wood wainscoting. A handsome elliptical arch with keystone and fluted pilasters separates the front and rear halls. Hardware of note includes a heavy, brass door-lock on the front door; mid-19th-century, stone-and-brass circular hot-air register; a late 19th-century circular, iron hot-air register; and an old spiral spring door bell.

The three-run open stairway rises at the left of the hall to a landing that crosses one end of the hall and then mounts on the right side to the second floor. There are delicate turned balusters and curving wooden handrail. The newel is a handsome turned volute of balusters surrounding a turned newel post. Riser ends have scrolled brackets, and landing edges are decorated with Adamesque diamond motifs. At the rear of the hall, a doorway with paneled jambs and door leads to the garden; another doorway under the stairs leads to the basement.

On the second floor, the front portion of hall was partitioned in the 20th century, probably ca. 1932, to form two bathrooms serving the bedrooms, obscuring the original grand sweep of the hallway.

The large, east room at the front of the second floor has a fine, Empire-style cast-iron coal fireplace insert. On the east wall, there is a particularly fine mantelpiece, believed to be original to the room; it has composition Adamesque garland and swag-and-urn decorations, pilasters, a plain molded mantel, a marble surround and a brick hearth. At left of the fireplace, a door to a second-floor deck was added ca. 1900, replacing a twin of the existing double-door cupboard with sunk door paneling at the right of the fireplace. The door was converted in the 1976 restoration to a window, with salvaged wood interior paneling (presumed to be original) inserted in front of it. Two front windows set in reveals and interior shutters are original. There is a molded plaster cornice, wooden wainscoting and chair rail. A door on the west wall leads to the modern bath; one on the north wall leads downstairs to the front rear wing room.

The west room has a pilastered fireplace on the west wall, with molded mantel shelf and brick hearth. A three-part iron fireback, old and possibly original, may be an assemblage; the sides match but the back does not, and the top of the sides has an unusual S-curve rising toward the front. There are two windows with reveals on each of the front and rear walls, with original interior paneled wood shutters. Matched four-door cupboards of early Federal period design are set into the paneled wall on either side of the fireplace. There is a molded plaster cornice, wood wainscoting and

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chair rail. The woodwork and floors are believed to be original. A door on the east wall leads to a modern bath inserted into the front of the hall.

The attic, reached by a continuation of the main stair, contains a hall and two large rooms under the eaves, with dormer windows. There is no evidence of fireplaces, but chimneys serving the rooms below run through the attic rooms. There are wide floorboards and board-and-batten doors. The walls and ceiling are lathed and plastered. There is a partitioned closet in the front of the hall.

Rear Wing

A short flight of stairs leads off both the hall and the dining room down to the rear ell and to a hall that extends to the kitchen. The first room off the hall is the "morning room," which was restored to its 1796 appearance under the direction of Walter Macomber in 1976. A center window was replaced in its original opening and 20th-century french doors, plaster and paneling were removed. A west interior partition was rebuilt and a center door to the hall installed. In the south wall is a fireplace, with a molded mantel flanked by paneled reveals and a molded cornice.

An old kitchen with a large cooking fireplace and cast-iron bake oven, labeled "Stratton/73 Cheapside/London," is presumed to have been the winter kitchen. The fireplace is set in a low brick arch with plain mantel and brick hearth. An old cooking crane is in place. An early 20th-century photograph shows washboard wainscoting, now gone, on the wall.¹⁸ Two-run stairs on the south wall lead to the rooms in the second floor above; they appear to have been altered in their lower run. The floor is of modern quarry tile.

A modern kitchen inserted into a space thought to have been the summer kitchen is also in the ell, just beyond the winter kitchen. This room was formerly the laundry. A large fireplace, now filled with kitchen cabinets, retains a mantel shelf above. The 1862 view of the block shows the summer kitchen with smokehouse attached behind, and there is a 1933 sketch of the smokehouse by the owner at that period, presumably done about the time it was taken down.¹⁹

A narrow hallway runs the entire length of the ell on the second floor west side, with an enclosed stair communicating with the attic above. There is a doorway from the ell to the landing of the main stairway. A short flight of stairs, believed to have been added around 1900, connects the east bedroom with a small room over the morning room which, according to tradition, was the bedroom of Robert E. Lee. The bedroom contains an original fireplace with molded wood mantel and coal grate, set in a plaster wall with wide wooden border and wainscoting. A four-door closet is at the left of the fireplace. Behind Lee's bedroom are three small rooms, one now a bath, used for a caretaker's apartment. The attic of the ell is divided into three small rooms with plaster partitions and ceiling.

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Interior Woodwork, Finishes and Hardware.

The woodwork in the main block of the house is fine and, except for two missing mantels in the formal rooms of the first floor (and, possibly, the one in the west room of the second floor), appears to be virtually intact. The two mantels in the master bedrooms on the second floor are of high quality, particularly in the east room, which has rich Adamesque compo ornaments and marble facing. Six-panel doors with sunk panels and paneled jambs in the principal rooms, wooden wainscoting with sunk panels in the hall and dining room, and wooden interior shutters in the four main rooms are original, as are the large cupboards in major bedrooms.

Under later colors, the mantel wall in the morning room retains the black paint with which it was covered, apparently by William Fitzhugh in 1799 as a symbol of mourning at the death of George Washington.²⁰ Woodwork in the morning room and a large quantity of hardware in the house, including the massive brass front door box lock and the gravity bolts on the doors, are original. H-hinges and box-locks in the attic rooms of the ell are also original. Remnants of the original call system for servants, including bell levers in the dining and drawing rooms, remain intact, and four signal bells of different sizes still hang in the kitchen.

Basement

The basement is under the main block only. It contains a central hall space and two large rooms, east and west. There are arched supports in the east and west rooms for the fireplaces on the principal floors; the one in the west room is now filled in. There are two small windows to the street in each room and in the hall, and two additional rear windows in the west room. The east room has a door to the garden. There are plain stairs to the first floor in the central hall, which are not original; they replace stairs that apparently were steeper. There is a cement floor and open ceilings. The rear of the basement hall has a board partition storage closet.

Grounds and Garden

The spacious rear and side gardens contain striking, mature plantings, including an imposing magnolia tree, believed to date from the late 19th century, which forms the centerpiece of a flagstone patio in the rear garden. A wooden fence with slim pickets and turned posts, built ca. 1934 along the south edge of the side garden, is supposed to replicate the original.²¹ Until recently, the fence extended across the front of the house as well. The rear garden wall is of concrete; the wall on the east side of the lot is of brick and frame on a concrete footing. The wall and an inner vertical-board fence afford nearly total privacy on the east (St. Asaph Street) side. A rustic, freestanding wisteria arbor and an old brick walk, set off by a simple picket fence running from the front to the rear of the lot, are near the stoop on the east side of the house. A large arbor, attached to the ell, appears in the earliest known (ca. 1870) photograph of the house; traces of the rafter holes can be read in the brickwork on the east side of the wing. A hexagonal, cupola-like structure (a late 19th-century traffic control house moved from Washington) is in the northwest corner of the lot. In the northeast corner is a modern two-story brick garage, with the upper story opening on the garden; the lower story appears to be of more recent construction than

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the upper story.²² It is believed to have been moved here from a site farther north when the rear half of the garden was sold.

FOOTNOTES TO ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

1. See the accompanying plat for Lots 600 and 601, drawn for and attached to Deed of Resubdivision and Rededication of Land of Henry Koch, recorded in Alexandria Land Records, Deed Book 649, p. 244.
2. Worth Bailey, "Potts-Fitzhugh House (Robert E. Lee House)." Report prepared for the Historic Alexandria Foundation and the Historic American Buildings Survey, 1966. (Edited for HABS 1975 by Antoinette J. Lee.)
3. Potts' and Wilson's Matildaville enterprise is examined by Charles Troup, et al., in a report of archeological excavations at the site, "The Potts and Wilson Iron Forge/Foundry, Patowmack Canal, Great Falls Park, Virginia." Prepared for the National Park Service, Denver Service Center. (Lexington, Va.: Dept. of Anthropology, College of William and Mary, Southside Historic Sites, Inc., June 2, 1978) NTIS No. 81-199069/PCA06/MFA101.
4. John Potts, Declarations for Assurance Against Fire, No. 13, Mutual Assurance Society, December 26, 1795.
5. The dormers do not appear in an early 20th-century photograph (ca. 1900-1905), but are shown in a similar view taken in 1926. (Collection of William Smith).
6. Potts, Assurance Against Fire, No. 13.
7. "Drawing of Lee House Smokehouse, July 29, 1933," by R. R. Sayers (in Dr. Royd R. Sayers Collection, Alexandria Public Library, Lloyd House.)
8. The office appears neither on G. M. Hopkins' 1877 map of Alexandria (Atlas of Alexandria, Virginia from Official Records, Private Plans and Actual Surveys, Philadelphia: 1877), nor on William Yeaton's 1853 Declarations for Assurance Against Fire (No. 17708, Mutual Assurance Society, 1853). The carriage house appears on the 1877 map but is noted as being of frame construction.
9. Photograph of 607 Oronoco Street, 1929 (in collection of William Smith). Also, a similar view, ca. 1870 (also in the William Smith collection).
10. Dormers are not present in the ca. 1870 photograph, but appear in 1920 photo. Also, a building permit for 607 Oronoco Street (October 30, 1924) is for construction of a dormer on the front of the building. (Interview with T. Michael Miller, Research Librarian, Alexandria Public Library, September 1985. The permit itself was not available for inspection.)
11. The porch is not in the ca. 1900-1905 photo, but is shown in the 1929 photo.
12. See Worth Bailey's 1966 report. A 1962 plat of the property drawn for Josephine Goodale (Alex. Deed Book 554, page 557), however, does show the porch.
13. "Elegant New Room at Lee Boyhood Home," The Lee-Jackson Quarterly Review, Summer 1976.
14. Lithographic bird's-eye view of Alexandria dated 1862 (collections of Alexandria Library Association) shows the rear of 607 Oronoco Street in some detail. The artist
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Item 7. DESCRIPTION— Architectural Analysis (Footnotes)

has depicted the rear ell as a separate building. Other details appear accurate, however.

15. Based on visual inspection.

16. Interview, August 1985, with Mrs. Juanita Miller and Mrs. Katherine Cooke, Curators, Robert E. Lee Boyhood Home.

17. Lee-Jackson Quarterly Review.

18. Undated photograph, Royd R. Sayers Collection, Alexandria Public Library.

19. Sayers, "Drawing of Lee House Smokehouse."

20. Lee-Jackson Quarterly Review.

21. "Robert E. Lee's Boyhood Home," The Washington Post Magazine, May 13, 1934.

22. Incomplete "Application for Permit to Build," August (n.d.), 1933: "erect garage—brick." Also, Roslyn Steel and Cement Company, July 27, 1933: Estimate for "reinforcing garage roof." (Royd R. Sayers Collection, Alexandria Public Library)

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Furthermore, while most Alexandria houses of the period presented narrow faces to the street, the imposing breadth of Potts' new residence, made even more impressive by the presence of a joined twin to its west, stretched for fifty-five feet along the street front, shielding an acre of gardens and grounds at the side and rear. A long rear wing contained extra bedrooms and service facilities, including kitchens and a smokehouse. A separate small office building on Oronoco Street and stables behind the house completed the ensemble.

Potts was a young Pennsylvanian, a member of the prominent ironmongering family that founded Pottstown, Pennsylvania, and a lawyer educated in Philadelphia. He was persuaded by George Washington to move, at the age of 25, to Alexandria to serve as secretary of the Potomac Navigation Company, Washington's ambitious but unsuccessful scheme to connect the Potomac with the Ohio River and the western territories.⁵

Like others in his family, Potts was an ironmaster as well, with foundries at Great Falls (Matildaville), Virginia, and, possibly, in the vicinity of Harpers Ferry. His partner in the Matildaville venture was also his neighbor in the matching house at 609 Oronoco Street, William Wilson.⁶ The two men may have built the pair of houses as speculative properties, as Potts chose to live in his side for only a year or so.

Potts seems to have been on close social terms with the Washingtons; he and his family were frequent visitors at Mount Vernon and, on at least one occasion, Potts entertained the Washingtons in Alexandria. One of the Potts daughters recalled having been offered sips from the wineglass of the elder statesman when he dined at their house in Alexandria.

In April 1799, Potts and his wife, Eliza, deeded the property to William Fitzhugh for \$12,000, subject to annual ground rent due Charles Alexander.⁷ Fitzhugh professed to have left his estate at Chatham, near Fredericksburg, partly to escape the burden of

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incessant hospitality occasioned by the property's too convenient location on the route to Richmond and Williamsburg; certainly he was under considerable financial pressure at that point. He may also have wished to be closer to the newly established capital and to his large plantation at Ravensworth in Fairfax County.¹⁰ There is evidence that Fitzhugh actually purchased the Oronoco Street house as early as 1796, although it is unlikely that he took possession before 1797. In a letter to Charles Carter (November 30, 1796), he writes,

"I have already purchased a new, & most delightful House, in a beautiful, & retired situation, having a charming View of the federal City, and the Potomack River - It is large & commodious, and admirably fitted for a Family, having a number of out Houses, in the back yard, all of Brick, a Pump of excellent Water, & a good Garden.... I shall not move til October next."¹¹

The wealthy Fitzhugh, one of Virginia's foremost planters and tobacco merchants, was a lifelong friend and a business associate of George Washington. Like Potts, he was among the subscribers to the Potomac Navigation Company. He was a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, the Revolutionary Conventions of 1775 and 1776 and the Continental Congress. He served as the first president of the Washington Society, which was organized in Alexandria in 1800, the year after Washington's death, and was chairman of the committee in charge of the first Washington's Birthday Parade, held that year.¹² Washington is said to have visited the Fitzhugh residence more frequently than any other home in Alexandria, except that of Dr. James Craik (Washington's physician and close friend).¹³ Fitzhugh's daughter, Mary Lee Fitzhugh, married George Washington Parke Custis, Martha Washington's grandson and the General's ward, at the Fitzhughs' Oronoco Street house in 1804. (In 1831, the Custises became the parents-in-law of Robert E. Lee, when their daughter Mary Anne married the future leader of the Confederacy.)

William Fitzhugh died at Ravensworth in 1809, and the property descended in trust to his only son, William Henry Fitzhugh, a minor.¹⁴ The younger Fitzhugh's insurance policy with the Mutual Assurance Company of Virginia, dated July 25, 1815, indicates that the occupant of the Oronoco Street house at that time was General Henry ("Light Horse Harry") Lee.¹⁵ Lee, his second wife, Ann Hill Carter of Shirley Plantation, and their four children had moved to Alexandria in 1810. Robert Edward Lee, their third son, was then four years old. They rented the Oronoco Street house in 1811 after the birth of their fifth child. Alexandria Land and Personal Property Tax Assessment records indicate that the Lees' residence at 607 Oronoco Street was not continuous, but that they lived in the house twice, for a total of nine years, from 1811 to 1816 and from 1820 until the spring of 1825.¹⁶

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A fervent admirer of George Washington, and, in turn, a great favorite of the general, Henry Lee was the author of the much-quoted "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen" tribute, in a eulogy he delivered before a joint session of Congress at the death of the great man in 1799. Lee was an able and daring cavalry leader who served with distinction in battles in New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. After 1780, he led "Lee's Legions" under Nathaniel Green in the Carolina campaign and, in 1794, he commanded the militia that put down the "Whiskey Rebellion" in the territory west of the Alleghenies. He was governor of Virginia from 1792 to 1795 and a member of Congress from 1799 to 1801. Beset by severe financial reversals, Lee spent an unhappy but productive year in debtor's prison from 1809-1810, during which time he wrote *Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States*, a well regarded history of the American Revolution published in 1812.¹⁷

Although he is listed in William H. Fitzhugh's 1815 insurance policy as a resident on Oronoco Street, Lee actually had departed for the West Indies in 1813, in the vain hope that the Caribbean climate might speed his recuperation from wounds suffered in a riot in Baltimore in 1812. He died at Nathaniel Green's Georgia estate on his homeward journey in 1818, leaving his wife, in somewhat straitened circumstances, to rear their children.¹⁸

The Lee family had moved to another house nearby on Washington Street before Henry Lee's death, but they were once more in residence at the Oronoco Street address by October 14, 1824, when the Marquis de Lafayette called there to pay his respects to the widow of his former comrade-in-arms.¹⁹ Robert E. Lee, then seventeen years old and preparing for his entry to West Point, was probably present during the visit. The Quaker schoolmaster, Benjamin Hallowell, who shortly thereafter became Lee's tutor in mathematics, reported having watched, on the day of his wedding, the arrival of the French hero from the doorway of Hallowell's school and residence next door at 609 Oronoco.²⁰

After Robert E. Lee left for West Point in June 1825, Ann Lee moved with her two unmarried daughters to Georgetown to live with her eldest son.

Among the fourteen subsequent owners of the property at 607 Oronoco were Dr. and Mrs. Royd R. Sayers. They acquired the house in 1932, from the heirs of Emmuella Burson, who had lived for 45 years in the spacious residence.²¹ Sayers, who was Chief of the Bureau of Mines in the Roosevelt Administration, immediately began an extensive renovation and restoration of the house and opened it on many occasions both to private groups and for public house tours. An article in the *Washington Post Magazine* (Sunday, May 13, 1934) notes that,

"...(T)he ravages of time had made reclamation a truly formidable job. A complete replastering and redecorating was in order, all of which has been completed, except for the laundry. The laundry serves as the perfect 'before and after taking' adage. (See continuation sheet #10)

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"The entire house was once just like this laundry, only worse," Mrs. Sayers smilingly said. "That gives you some idea of the work we have done around here."²²

Despite Mrs. Sayers' comments, it would appear that few substantive changes were undertaken, except possibly the removal of the smokehouse (which Dr. Sayers was careful to measure and sketch beforehand).²³ The Sayers may also have added a portion of the current two-car garage at the rear of the lot.²⁴ Their major efforts seem to have been directed at stabilization of the building, "restoring" the grounds to a 19th-century appearance, and bringing about generally cosmetic effects in the interior. The essential fabric of the house as the Sayers found it appears to have been little disturbed. A one-story porch with upper deck at the east end of the house (which may have been added about 1911²⁵) was not removed until long after the Sayers' residence, for instance.²⁶

The Sayers' neighbor, across the street in the Lee-Fendall House, was the outspoken labor leader and UMW official, John L. Lewis. Their guests included New Deal bureaucrats, politicians and wives of prominent Washington figures— among them Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, the first woman appointed to the presidential cabinet. The Sayers sold the property in 1941.²⁷ (The Sayers' interest in historic preservation and restoration was not a casual one; after leaving the Oronoco Street residence, they moved first to Alexandria's Lyceum and, later, to His Lordship's Kindness, an important 18th-century property in Prince George's County, Maryland.)

In 1942, Ada Hitchcock MacLeish, wife of the Pulitzer Prize-winning American poet Archibald MacLeish, purchased the Oronoco Street House.²⁸ The MacLeishes became Washington-area residents when he accepted, somewhat reluctantly, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's invitation to serve as Librarian of Congress in 1939. After leaving the Library of Congress, MacLeish served briefly as Undersecretary of State (1944-45) before returning to a distinguished writing career.²⁹

In 1967, the Stonewall Jackson Memorial Foundation (now the Lee-Jackson Foundation), a non-profit organization that operates several Civil War sites in Virginia, purchased the property from Mr. and Mrs. Henry Koch for use as a historic house museum dedicated to Robert E. Lee.³⁰ The foundation undertook a limited restoration of the interior of the house to its late 18th-century appearance, culminating in the 1976 restoration of the dining room and morning room on the first floor and the east bedroom on the second floor, under the direction of Walter McComber, former architect of Mount Vernon.³¹ The foundation's management policy since has been one of careful maintenance and interpretation of the property as Lee's boyhood home.

FOOTNOTES TO HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. Alexandria D.B. "M" (Hustings), p. 162.
2. *Alexandria Houses, 1750-1830*, by Deering Davis, Stephen P. Dorsey, and Ralph Cole Hall (New York: Bonanza Books, 1946), pp. 16-17.
(See continuation sheet #11)

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3. Ibid. Gadsby's ballroom, pp.36-37. Lord Fairfax House, p. 102. Robert E. Lee House, pp. 88-89.

4. John Potts' Declarations for Assurance Against Fire, No. 13, Mutual Assurance Society, Dec. 26, 1795.

5. **Memorial of Thomas Potts, Junior**, by Mrs. Thomas Potts James. (Cambridge: privately printed, 1874), p. 257.

6. Charles G. Troup, Arthur G. Barnes and Norman F. Barka, **The Potts and Wilson Iron Forge/Foundry, Patowmack Canal, Great Falls Park, Virginia**. (Lexington, Va.: Department of Anthropology, College of William and Mary, Southside Historic Sites, Inc., June 2, 1978.) Archeological report prepared for Hayes, Seay, Mattern and Mattern (Roanoke, Va.) and the National Park Service, Denver Service Center. NTIS no. 81-199069/PCA06/MFA01.

7. **Diaries of George Washington**, ed. by John C. Fitzpatrick (1926). Vol. 4, p. 262. Entries for October 22 and 23, 1797.

8. James, *ibid.*, pp. 290-291.

9. Alexandria D.B. "M", p.162.

10. Ralph Happel, **Chatham: The Life of a House** (Phila.: Eastern National Park and Monument Association, 1984), pp. 9-23.

11. William Fitzhugh, letter to Charles Carter, Shirley Plantation, November 30, 1796 (privately owned; copy in Robert E. Lee Boyhood Home files).

On December 17, 1797, Martha Washington wrote to Mrs. Elizabeth Powell in Philadelphia, "Mr. Fitzhugh and family, have within the last fortnight become residents of Alexa, and we should, ere this, have made him a congratulatory visit, but the bad weather in which they travelled, has indisposed Mrs. Fitzhugh...." In **George Washington and Mount Vernon** (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Long Island Historical Society, 1889).

In **The Diaries of George Washington**, Washington writes of visits to the Fitzhughs in Alexandria on April 3 and 4 and November 17, 1799.

12. Happel, *ibid.*

13. Gay Montague Moore, **Seaport in Virginia: George Washington's Alexandria** (Richmond, Va.: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1949), p. 202.

14. Alexandria Orphans' Court, W.B. "C", p. .

15. William Henry Fitzhugh, Declaration for Assurance, No. 1608, Mutual Assurance Society, July 25, 1815.

16. Alexandria Land and Personal Property Tax Records

17. **Dictionary of American Biography**, Vol. VI, Part 1, Dumas Malone, ed. (N.Y.: Scribners, 1933), p. 108.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Benjamin Hallowell, **Autobiography** (Philadelphia: Friends' Book Association, 1883), pp. 99-100.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Alexandria Land Records, D.B. 5, p. 580.

22. Windsor Booth, "Robert E. Lee's Boyhood Home," **The Washington Post Magazine** (Sunday, May 13, 1934), p. 12.

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23. Drawing of Lee House Smokehouse, July 29, 1933, by R. R. Sayers (in Dr. Royd R. Sayers Collection, Alexandria Public Library, Lloyd House).

24. Incomplete "Application for Permit to Build," August 1933: "erect garage— brick"; and Roslyn Steel and Cement Company, July 27, 1933: estimate for reinforcing garage roof.

25. "Application for Permit for Repairs, Alterations, etc.," June 1, 1911, signed by Emuella Burson. "I wish to simply put my house in repair will possibly build a small porch some time and take down an old greenhouse or conservatory and replace it with a porch at a cost of about (\$50) or less."

Mrs. Burson may also have been responsible for the addition of dormers on the south side of the main block of the house. A building permit dated October 30, 1924, also believed to be part of the Sayers collection but currently unavailable, reportedly contains a sketch of small dormer, according to T. Michael Miller, Research Librarian, Alexandria Public Library (interview, September 1985).

26. Alexandria Land Records, D.B. 554, p. 560. The porch appears in a plat drawn May 8, 1962, for Josephine Goodale.

27. Alexandria Land Records, D.B. 182, p. 137.

28. Alexandria Land Records, D.B. 219, p. 147.

29. R. H. Winnick, ed., *Letters of Archibald MacLeish, 1907-1982* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), pp. xiv-xv.

30. Alex. Land Records, D.B. 662, p. 157.

31. "Elegant New Room at Lee Boyhood Home," *The Lee-Jackson Quarterly Review*, Summer 1976.

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Cox, Ethelyn. *Historic Alexandria Street by Street: A Survey of Existing Early Buildings*. Alexandria, Va.: Historic Alexandria Foundation, 1976.

Davis, Deering; Dorsey, Stephen P.; and Hall, Ralph Cole. *Alexandria Houses, 1750-1830*. New York: Bonanza Books, 1946.

Fitzhugh, William. Letter to Charles Carter, Shirley Plantation. Privately owned.

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Lee Family Correspondence, 1799-1816. Privately owned.

Moore, Gay Montague. *Seaport in Virginia: George Washington's Alexandria*. Richmond, Va.: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1949.

Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia. Microfilm records in Alexandria Public Library.

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Dr. Royd R. Sayers Collection Pertaining to 607 Oronoco Street, Box 94, Alexandria Public Library (Lloyd House).

The White Pine Architectural Monograph Series (Vol. XII, No. 4, 1926), plate CX.

Troup, Charles G.; Barnes, Arthur G.; and Barka, Norman F. "The Potts and Wilson Iron Forge/Foundry, Patowmack Canal, Great Falls Park, Virginia." Lexington, Va.: Dept. of Anthropology, College of William and Mary, Southside Historic Sites, Inc., June 2, 1978. Prepared for Hayes, Seay, Mattern and Mattern, Roanoke, Va., and the National Park Service, Denver Service Center. NTIS No. 81-199069/PCA06/MFA01.

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Item 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

approximately 150' N ; thence approximately 100' E to a point on W side of St. Asaph St.; thence approximately 150' S along said side of said street to point of origin.

Justification:

The bounds have been drawn to include the house , two non-contributing structures, and lot upon which they stand.

USGS 7.5' Quadrangle (Scale: 1:24,000)
Alexandria, VA.-D.C.-MD. 1965 (PR1979)

ROBERT E. LEE BOYHOOD HOME, 607
Oronoco St., Alexandria, VA

UTM References: 18/322 390/42 97 430

