

VLR- 9/18/79

NRHP- 12/28/79

11-185

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

## National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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

### 1. Name

historic      Prospect Hill (preferred)

and/or common      Prospect/Gray's Folly

### 2. Location

street & number      East of Church Street, SW of State Route 606       not for publication

city, town      Fincastle       vicinity of      Sixth (M. Caldwell Butler) congressional district

state      Virginia      code 51      county Botetourt      code 023

### 3. Classification

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

### 4. Owner of Property

name      Mrs. James McDowell

street & number      Route 2, Box 329

city, town      Fincastle       vicinity of      state Va. 24090

### 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.      Botetourt County Courthouse

street & number

city, town      Fincastle      state Virginia

### 6. Representation in Existing Surveys (2) (See Continuation Sheet #)

title **Historic American Buildings Survey**      has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no  
Inventory

date 1958       federal       state       county       local

depository for survey records      Library of Congress

city, town      Washington      state D.C.

For HCRA use only

received

date entered

Dec 28 1979

## 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		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Prospect Hill, a Federal-style "I" house, is located on the top of a hill overlooking the town of Fincastle in Botetourt County. Erected in 1837-38, the 2½-story, single-pile, wood-frame house is sheathed in flush boarding and covered by a pedimented gable roof.

Set on a low stone foundation, the three-bay front (north) elevation is dominated by a two-level pedimented portico supported on slender Tuscan columns. The portico shelters two semi-elliptical fanlight entries which retain their original paneled doors and intersecting "Gothic"-style fanlight tracery. The doors are flanked by sidelights, and the gabled pediment contains a semi-elliptical lunette with similar tracery. The original fenestration consists of 12/12 hung sash on the first story and 12/8 hung sash on the second. All windows are hung with louvred shutters. A cornice with two bands of dentils runs the perimeter of the house. The cornice is complemented by similar detailing found on the portico. The facade has been elongated by the addition of one-story wings in the 1940s.

The rear (south) elevation has a one-story porch with a rebuilt gable roof sheltering the rear entrance. The entrance consists of the original paneled door flanked by sidelights and surmounted by a blind elliptical arch. Fenestration is similar to that found on the facade. A large three-part, elliptical-arch window above the porch lights the stair landing. A row of three dormer windows is a later addition.

The east and west elevations were modified in the 1940s to include the addition of a two-bay, one-story wing. The elevations have rebuilt exterior end chimneys flanked by an original 12/12 hung-sash window on the first story and 12/8 hung-sash windows on the second. Two small windows pierce the attic story. The wings are wood frame and are covered with flush boarding duplicating the original. The wings also have a dentiled cornice similar to that found on the main house.

The interior of Prospect Hill is in a fine state of preservation. The central hall is dominated by a handsome open-well stair that ascends to the second floor. The stair has paneled spandrels, sawn scroll brackets, turned newels, and rectangular balusters, two to a tread. The handrail is ramped and eased at the newels. Paralleling the stair is an oak-grained wainscot and chair rail. The landing fascia is richly ornamented with vines and scrollwork. The doorways in the hall and in all the principal rooms have fluted, symmetrical architrave trim with finely molded corner blocks. The hall retains its original painted and grained decoration. The west parlor or library features a Federal-style mantelpiece, the frieze embellished with sunburst-type ovals. A significant feature of the room is the original stenciled border design found on the grained wainscoting. The chair rail displays a carved bead that complements the stenciled design. The bookcases are a 20th-century addition.

The dining room contains a Federal mantelpiece. The wainscot retains its original yellow and orange sponge-type graining complemented by a marbleized baseboard and darkly painted chair rail. The color scheme is used typically in houses grained and painted at this time. The second-floor bedrooms contain Federal mantelpieces. The eastern bedroom also retains its original richly grained woodwork imitating mahogany.

The house is sited on a rocky hill that is surrounded by pasture. A rail fence separates the house and yard from the pasture. Beautiful panoramic views of the Blue Ridge and Alleghany mountains as well as of the rolling Botetourt farmlands are obtainable from all sides of the hill.

# Significance

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

Specific dates 1837-8

Builder/Architect Unknown

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Prospect Hill, a notable late Federal-style farmhouse, was built ca. 1837-38 by John Gray on land owned by his father-in-law, John Moore. Dramatically sited on a hill overlooking the town of Fincastle, the house preserves an interior rich in 19th-century painting and graining. A significant feature of the decoration is the west parlor's stenciling, a decorative device rarely surviving in Virginia houses of the period. Another distinctive feature of the house is the exterior flush boarding, also a rare survival.

Prospect, or Prospect Hill as it was known in the mid-19th century, stands on land that in the late years of the 18th century belonged to Henry Wax. In 1792 Wax patented thirty-four acres in the vicinity of Fincastle. By 1793 he is charged with 163 acres, a part of which became the tract on which Prospect was later built. In 1806 the future Prospect tract, referred to as one of the "outlots" of the town of Fincastle, was sold to John Moore who held considerable acreage in Botetourt County.<sup>1</sup> He served as county sheriff and was a trustee of the Fincastle Presbyterian Church. In 1814 John Moore's daughter married John Gray, who also served as county sheriff and justice of the county court. Beginning in 1821 John Gray assembled various small parcels of land in the vicinity of the Prospect Hill site. The tax books show no substantial improvements on Gray's parcels. By 1839 \$2,000 in improvements appear on the acreage belonging to John Moore that had previously belonged to Henry Wax. From the later tax records it can be established that this was "Prospect", and from an 1854 deed between Gray's two sons, it may be ascertained that John Gray had life tenancy rights to the house and the land. From the same 1854 deed it appears that Prospect Hill passed to John Moore's grandchildren (John Gray's children) on the death of John Gray. The actual parcel on which the house stands continued to be charged to the estate of John Moore as late as 1863.

Although the house was built when the Greek Revival had become the nation's most popular style, Prospect Hill's builders displayed the conservatism typical of a remote area by employing Federal motifs on the exterior. The interior appointments, the stair, mantels and paneling also draw upon Federal precedents. Complementing the interior woodwork, the original interior marbleizing, painting, and graining survive in excellent condition.

Painting and graining were practiced in America as early as the 17th century. Before the manufacture of ready-made paints in the mid-19th century, painters were totally dependent on oral tradition and written guides for instruction on the mixing of paint colors. The earliest guide published in America was H. Reynolds's Directions for House and Ship Painting, published in New Haven in 1812. Reynolds's guide contained directions for mixing "marble color", "mahogany color" and "straw" and "orange" colors, all of which are used in Prospect Hill. Reynolds's guide was followed by numerous American guides, the most popular of which was Rufus Porter's, A Select Collection of Valuable and Curious Arts, which ran through three editions, published at Concord in 1826. Through Porter's work marbleizing and graining became popular and fashionable at the time of the construction of Prospect Hill.

An unusual feature of the house's decoration scheme is a stenciled band in the west parlor applied over a grained panel. The band is one of a relatively few known Virginia examples, others being found in Rockbridge and Augusta counties. While the custom of

# Major Bibliographical References

Stetourt County Census, 1850.

Deed Books 9, 11, 14, 15, 32.

Land Tax Books 1790-1863.

Personal Property Books 1845-49

Will Book G (1848)

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 11 acres

Quadrangle name Villamont, Va.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A	1	7	5	9	9	7	2	0	4	1	4	9	9	4	0
Zone	Easting								Zone	Easting					
C	1	7	5	9	9	6	3	0	4	1	4	9	6	8	0
E	1	7	5	9	9	5	0	0	4	1	4	9	9	5	0
G															

B	1	7	5	9	9	8	0	0	4	1	4	9	8	2	0
Zone	Easting								Zone	Easting					
D	1	7	5	9	9	5	0	0	4	1	4	9	7	2	0
F															
H															

**Verbal boundary description and justification** Beginning at a point 2150' S of State Route 606; approximately 1.3 miles W of intersection of said route and State Route 641 and 1500' NE of State Route 602; thence extending 500' SSE to 1300' contour line; thence extending 750' SSW along said contour line; thence extending 400' WNW continuing to follow said contour across

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

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

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

**name/title** Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

**organization** Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission **date** August 1979

**street & number** 221 Governor Street **telephone** (804) 786-3144

**city or town** Richmond **state** Virginia 23219

## 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

**State Historic Preservation Officer signature**

**title** Tucker Hill, Executive Director  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

**date** SEP 18 1979

For HCRS use only

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

**date** Dec 28 1979

**Keeper of the National Register**

**date**

Attest:

**Chief of Registration**

FOR HCRRS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED  
DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Prospect Hill, Botetourt County, Virginia

CONTINUATION SHEET #1

ITEM NUMBER 6,8,9,10 PAGE 1

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

(2) Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey  
1967, 1978 State  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission  
221 Governor Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

SIGNIFICANCE

Tenciling was widely practiced in the north, it appears to have been relatively unpopular in Virginia. Although graining and marbleizing remained popular throughout the 19th century, changes in paint fashion have reduced the number of extant examples. The present owner, Mrs. James McDowell, restored the interior decoration in the 1940s.

MTP/RCC

<sup>1</sup>Botetourt County Deed Book 9, p. 203.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

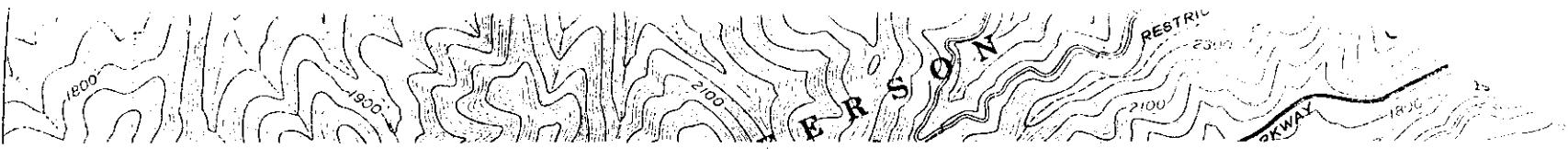
Porter, Rufus. A Select Collection of Valuable and Curious Arts. Concord, N. H., 1826.  
Synolds, H. Directions for House and Ship Painting. New Haven, Conn., 1912.  
Conner, Robert. A Seed-Bed of the Republic. Roanoke, Va., 1962.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA - Verbal boundary description and justification

private drive; whence extending about 1000' NE still following said contour to point of origin.

The boundary for Prospect Hill is drawn along a 1300-foot contour lines on the Laramont U.S.G.S. 7.5' quadrangle. This line encompasses the highest point of the hill which the house was built. The eastern boundary is a straight line drawn to connect the north and south points of the contour. The enclosed area contains approximately 11 acres.

The nominated property includes the house together with its front and rear yards and a small area of pasture. The erection of the house on the top of the hill is what led to its historical name, Gray's Folly, since it was believed locally that the structure would blow away. The rocky landscape and pasture is suggestive of the original house site it has remained undisturbed.



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

5059  
TORISKAN  
SW

79°52'30"  
37°30'

500000m E.

601

SPRINGWOOD 6.5 MI.

603 50'

604

COMMONWE  
DIVISION OF  
JAMES L. CAL

