

# LANDMARK



# SURVEY

## IDENTIFICATION

Street Address: Cherry Avenue & Ninth Street  
 Map and Parcel: 30-169  
 Census Track & Block: 5-406  
 Present Owner: Mrs. Mildred Fife  
 Address: Oak Grove, Cherry Ave. & Ninth St.  
 Present Use: Residence  
 Original Owner: Nimrod Bramham  
 Original Use: Residence

## BASE DATA

Historic Name: Oak Lawn  
 Date/Period: 1822  
 Style: Jeffersonian  
 Height to Cornice:  
 Height in Stories: 2 & 1 1/2  
 Present Zoning: R-2  
 Land Area (sq.ft.): 5.56 acres  
 Assessed Value (land + imp.): 16,680 + 2700 = 19,380

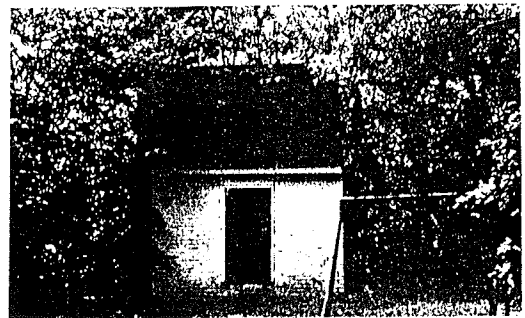
## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Built in 1822, the house is believed to have been constructed by workmen employed by Jefferson to execute his designs for his academical village. The design is a notable example of domestic Jeffersonian classicism with its three bay, two story pedimented gable central block flanked by one story wings and a four columned Tuscan columned flat roofed porch. The house is finely laid in Flemish bond above a water of three course American bond with moulded quarter round bricks. Exterior chimneys arise between the main block and each of the wings. An interior chimney is at the west end of the main block. The detailing is quite simplistic in comparison to the Lawn as the delineation between the architrave and frieze of the Tuscan porch entablature is nothing more than an applied flat board, and there are no architrave mouldings on the exterior windows found on most Jeffersonian buildings. The roof is tin. A small American bond brick gable roofed building with an exterior end chimney was the original cook's house and is set west of the house.

## HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION

Originally a tract of 338 acres of land was conveyed to Nimrod Bramham in 1818. An earlier house named "Oak Grove" is believed to have stood on the property, but no substantial evidence for its existence has been located. According to tax records, the present house was erected in 1822 for Col. Bramham. The property was sold by Bramham's executor to James Fife in 1847. Rev. James Fife had practiced landscape gardening in Scotland in his youth and had laid out some early subdivisions in Richmond. The house remains in the Fife family, presently owned by Mrs. Shelton S. Fife, the daughter-in-law of Major Herndon R. Fife.

## GRAPHICS



## CONDITIONS

Average

## SOURCES

Rawlings, Ante-Bellum Albemarle, p. 53.  
 Miss Anne Freudenberg, Historian  
 VHLC National Register Nomination Form, Feb.'73

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

SEE MAP 10

MAIN STREET

UNION STATION

SEE MAP

SOUTHERN

10th ST.

ESTES ST.

DELEVAN ST.

DICE ST.

NALLE STREET

STREET

KING STREET

STREET

CHERRY

AVE

CHERRY

Oak Lawn SITE

ELM ST.

PINE ST.

Buford School

18.899 Acres

SEE MAP 23

Bramham Graveyard

- 1) Nimrod Bramham  
Born Feb. 28, 1769  
Died June 18, 1845  
  
Blessed are the dead  
who die in the Lord
- 2) Peggy Bramham  
formerly  
Peggy Marshall  
Born July 1, 1776  
Died July 6, 1845  
  
Blessed are the pure in heart  
for they shall see God
- 3) Sarah Bibb  
Born Oct. 31, 1800  
Died Nov. 12, 1869  
  
William A. Bibb  
Born Nov. 4, 1790  
Died Sept. 12, 1865  
  
(On shaft together with  
" Our Parents " at bottom)
- 4) Sacred to the memory of Horace Bramham M.D.  
Born 5th Aug. 1798  
Distinguished for zeal and ability in his  
Profession, just in his dealings with  
mankind, he died triumphant in the Christian  
faith.  
March 18, 1834  
aged 35 years, 7 months and 13 days
- 5) John Simpson  
Born September 6, 1787  
Died Dec. 16, 1869
- 6) Lucy Simpson  
Born August 8, 1806  
Died Jan. 12, 1883  
  
The Lord is my Shepherd  
I shall not want
- 7) Richard N. Pinkard  
Born July 9, 1807  
Died Sept. 15, 1840
- 8) In memory of Wm. A. Son  
of H. B. & A. W. Bibb  
Born Feb. 22, 1854, Died  
April 26, 1854  
  
Sweet Bird of Life, God  
knows this earth was not  
meet home for thee.  
He took him-thee even from  
thy birth to bless eternity
- 9) Henry N. Bibb  
Born Sept. 24, 1821  
Died July 23, 1881  
  
" Remembered Still "
- 10) Robert B. Slaughter  
Born 11th March, 1823  
Died 30th June, 1840  
  
(This tombstone has a brick  
wall around it and a large  
flat slab on top.)
- 11) Mrs. E. A. Garland  
widow of  
Rice Garland SR.  
Born June 1767  
Died Nov. 1840 in the  
74th year of her age  
  
Erected in memory of a  
pious mother by her ~~children~~  
children.  
  
( maiden name - Hamner )
- 12 ) In memory of Elizabeth  
Ann , eldest daughter  
of Robert and M. R.  
Slaughter  
Born May 30th 1821  
Died May 7, 1841  
  
( a broken rose on tomb-  
stone )  
  
( These two tombstones have  
brick walls around them  
and large flat slabs on top )

# THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE  
CAMPBELL HALL  
CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.  
22903

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: 5 June 1987  
TO: Eugenia Bibb  
FROM: K. Edward Lay *EL*  
RE: OAK LAWN ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Certainly the most notable example of domestic Jeffersonian classicism within the city, Oak Lawn distinguishes itself as Charlottesville's finest building outside the University. Undoubtedly designed and built by one of Jefferson's master builders, its three-bay, two-story pedimented pavilion with lower side wings is similar to the Semple House of 1780 in Williamsburg. This Jeffersonian paradigm, patterned after a plate in Robert Morris' SELECTION ARCHITECTURE of 1757, was disseminated throughout Virginia and North Carolina. The only other similar extant dwelling within the city is Belmont, now altered by the addition of a second story on its wings. The house is laid in Flemish bond over a water table of three - course American bond with a tetrastyle, Tuscan - columned portico of one-story upon which is a chippendale railing. The tympanum contains a fan lunette. A summer kitchen of American bond is just west of the house.

Since I cannot see the building, this is all the architectural description I can give at this time. If you need a more definitive description let me know, and I will see what I can do.

KEL:bb1

Enclosures

# Family Tenaciously Holds Onto Estate

By DAN FRIEDMAN  
of The Progress Staff

Oak Lawn, the Fife family estate, is a well-known Charlottesville landmark. It stands on a large — and rather overgrown — lot of five acres on the corner of 9th Street and Cherry Avenue, in the middle of the garish neon-neighborhood known as "Fifeville," and is a stunning and poignant reminder of a finer and more gentle world now almost entirely disappeared.

The Fifes are a distinguished old Charlottesville family and have lived at Oak Lawn for exactly 130 years — since the Reverend James Fife, born in Edinburgh, Scotland, moved from his estate in Goochland to take up residence in his

Jefferson-inspired Charlottesville home in 1847. Reverend Fife — whose headstone is most prominent in the extensive Fife family graveyard at Oak Lawn — was a well-respected landscape architect who laid out some of Richmond's early subdivisions.

Originally, the Fife's Oak Lawn boasted of 338 acres. The present owner's uncle — Billy Fife — was at one time Commonwealth's Attorney. Another uncle was once head of the foreign language department at Columbia University in New York, and Doug Fife's (the current occupant) father was a former Charlottesville City Manager. Francis Fife, Doug's brother, is Charlottesville's Vice-Mayor.

"But today," as Mrs. Fife said, "we try as hard as we can to keep the place up, but you have no idea how expensive it is. The joy of living here, however, is worth the great financial burden."

In "The Winter of Our Discontent," John Steinbeck shows how old New England families — who have lost their once elevated social standing and their money — struggle to hold onto the family home and old lifestyles without living entirely in the past.

And the Fifes have both problems to contend with. Oak Lawn is littered with family photos and memorabilia but Doug Fife owns the Gulf service station across the street from his house — working a 12

to 15 hour day — and it's conceivable that he and his family would be far more comfortable if Doug wasn't so sentimentally attached to the family home.

And Mrs. Fife is the first to admit it. "The only problem," she said, "is that it would be impossible for Doug to live anywhere else."

Despite their efforts, then, the Fifes have a dilemma in common with many old local families — and there are several families in similar (or worse) circumstances in Albemarle County — who struggle tooth and nail to retain ownership of an historic home even though the necessary funds have long since dried up.

"If I had a million dollars," Mrs. Fife said, "I could spend it

all in restoring the house. We sold our pasture land to Buford Middle School but that was a long time ago. However, we still call that land 'the pasture.'

Built in 1822 and designated a Virginia Historic Landmark in 1966, Oak Lawn — resembling the pavilions on the Lawn at the University of Virginia — is reputed to have been constructed by the same craftsmen who built Mr. Jefferson's academical village.

The first owner was a Colonel Nimrod Bramham — who called it "Oak Grove" — and the Bramham family graveyard adjoins the Fife family graveyard on the west side of the property.

The interior is rich in detailed  
See OAK LAWN, Page C2

C2 THE DAILY PROGRESS, Charlottesville, Virginia, Sunday, October 2, 1977

Legal Notices



Progress Photo by Dan Friedman

OAK LAWN'S OLD COOK'S HOUSE  
Gabled American Bond Brick Structure

## ★Oak Lawn

Continued from Page C1

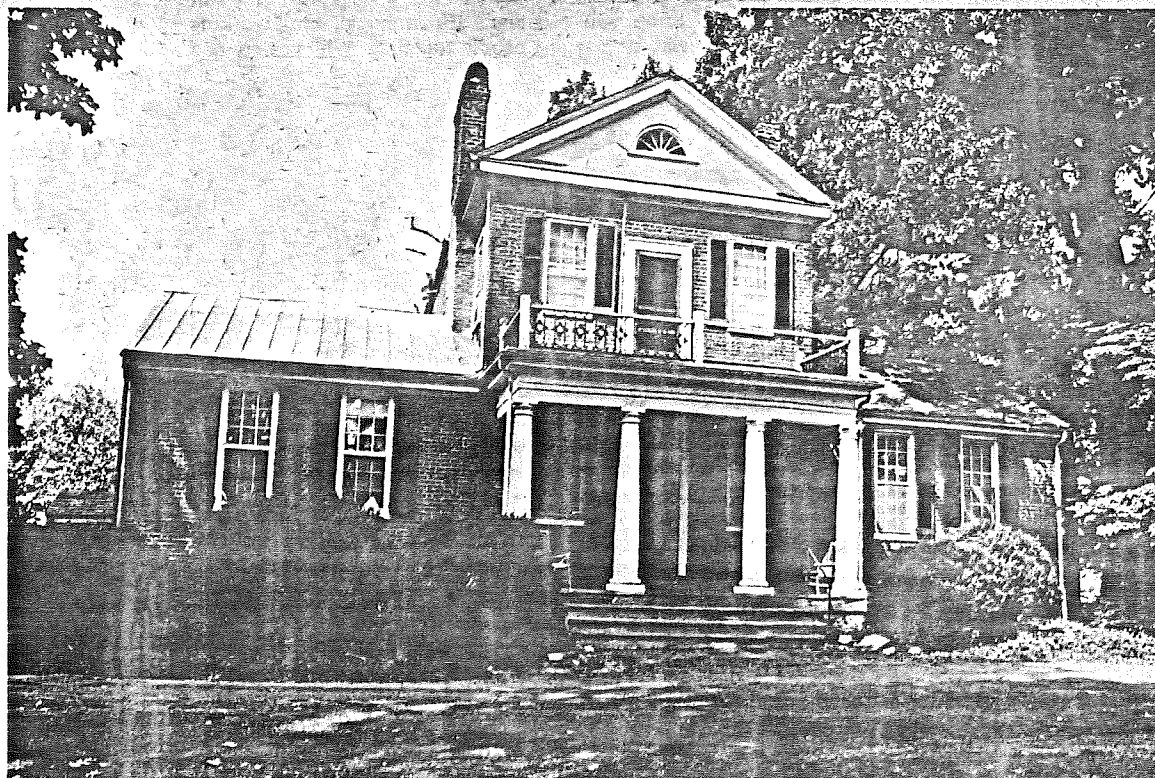
woodwork and fortunately the random-width heart-of-pine floors and beautifully hand-carved mantels (six in all) are still in good overall condition.

There is a large — and typically Jeffersonian — entry hall with a bedroom and living room off to each side. The dining room is spacious and well-preserved are two additional bedrooms with bath upstairs and a kitchen on the back of the house. Most notable of the family heirlooms which have passed from generation to generation

is the lovely Harrison Spode china.

The neglected gardens serve at least one purpose: they shield the house from the busy traffic on 9th Street. But Mrs. Fife laments their overgrown state. "You should have seen them just a few years ago. Now we just try to keep the jungle at bay."

The Fife's children are equally interested in keeping Oak Lawn in the family. "And we're doing everything we can to save it for them," she said.



Progress Photo by Dan Friedman

OAK LAWN, BUILT 1822, BECAME HOME OF FIFE FAMILY IN 1847 AND HAS REMAINED SO  
They Cling to the Stately House Despite High Upkeep and Urban Growth Nearby

