

The Hollow House

Thomas Marshall's old home is in danger

By NORMAN L. BAKER

ONE OF the most significant landmarks in the history of Fauquier County may now be at the turning point of its long existence. Having withstood more than 200 years of blessings and ravages of time, the house, known variously as The House in the Hollow, Cloverland, and, simply, The Hollow House, needs immediate, compassionate help if it is to continue to stand as a symbol of the county's early years.

The home of an American frontiersman and Revolutionary soldier, Thomas Marshall, the father of Fauquier's most illustrious son, the house, long abandoned and with its windows open to the inevitable destruction of the weather, was damaged by the early April wind-storm. A portion of its metal roof, vital to the survival of any dwelling, old or new, was removed by the destructive winds.

Inproperly identified, in Fauquier County's Bicentennial History of 1959 as Thomas Marshall's "old log dwelling," the house is not constructed of logs but is a small and well-built frame house, a fine frontier dwelling of its time that is a testament to the versatility, skill and strength of this founding father.

The magnitude of the acclaim of his famous son, John, has overshadowed much of the contributions of Thomas Marshall. John Marshall, in later years, explained it best: "My father was a far abler man than any of his sons. To him I owe the solid foundation of all my success in life."

THE NEGLECT of the Hollow House is an unfortunate offshoot of the pre-occupation with the accomplishments of the son to the detriment of those of the father. The spotlight has focused on the later Thomas Marshall home at Oak Hill near Delaplane which marked the years of John Marshall's rise to fame. Also, The Hollow House was never really considered the property of Thomas

Marshall although it is believed to be the earliest surviving product of his hands.

The Hollow House, apparently built in the months prior to Thomas Marshall's move with his family from his first Fauquier home in the Germantown community near Midland, in 1765, has for most, if not all of its existence, been used as a tenant house. At the age of 35, Thomas Marshall, a native of Westmoreland County, moved to the land above the present community of Markham, known as the Wildcat Hollow, where he had leased 300 acres from Ludwell Lee.

He built his house at the south base of Naked Mountain, on a beautiful rise of land, washed by Wildcat Branch on the west and a spring-fed stream on the east. He positioned the house with its back to the mountain and the front to the south, overlooking a high valley of Goose Creek, sheltered on the south by Idens Mountain and, still farther to the south, surmounted by the blue horizon of Rattlesnake Mountain. The crest of the Blue Ridge sweeps across the near western horizon, completing the rim that forms the boundary of the hollow.

IT WAS here that a 10-year old John Marshall called home, roamed, worked, played and grew to early manhood. It was here, where he was also schooled by his industrious father, that he must have formed many of the basic concepts from which he drew his philosophy of life. I lived for ten years on the north side of the hollow, appreciating the natural and wholesome beauty of that small valley which inspired Thomas Marshall to the labors that removed that valley from its wilderness state.

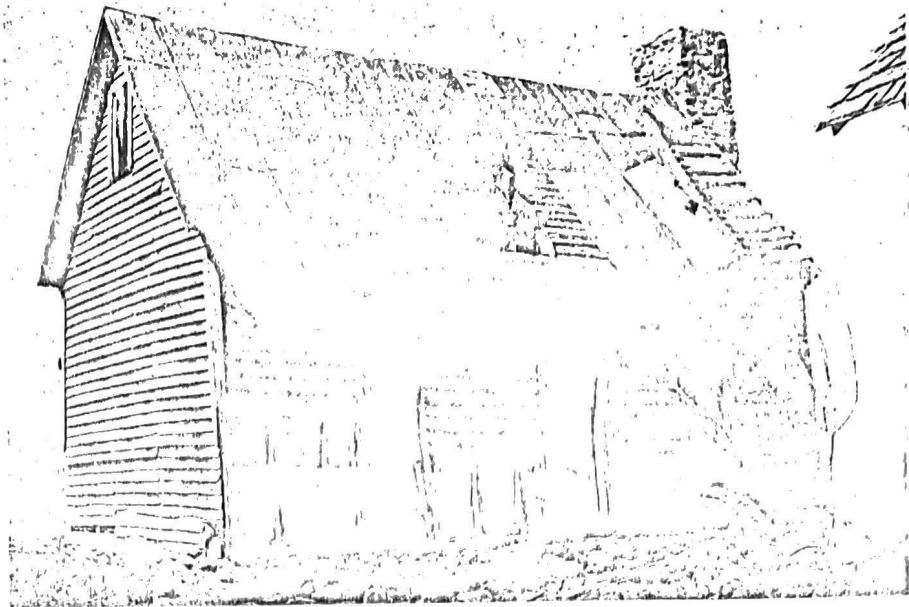
The genesis of Marshall's Oak Hill home of the 1770's is seen in The Hollow House. It is that classic one and one-half story Virginia cottage type which is actually the genesis of many, if not most of the earliest colonial dwellings of both tidewater and piedmont

Virginia. It domestic architecture used in the birth-places, and homes of the earliest residents of the state, from the smallest landowner or tenant to the men of highest office. Yet, generally, it is an architecture that is relegated to conscious obscurity by the documentarians who favor the more pretentious piles of a less simpler era.

The Thomas Marshall house is a rare extant example of the type of homes that were scattered throughout the highlands of Northern Fauquier, built by the first settlers on land leased from the large land grant holders living in the tidewater of Virginia. They were the work of a unique group of strong men and their wives who were willing to carve out a home on land they would never really own. Few of these homes survived, being replaced by the larger homes of the new group of landowners that followed. Those that did survive were almost always incorporated into the larger dwellings. The Hollow House is an exception.

THE GABLED house is mainly original and essentially unchanged. The principal exceptions include more recent siding on most of the house and a metal roof instead of shingles. Its architecture is straightforward early-to-last quarter, 1700's. The 16-foot 6-inch by 24-foot 4-inch structure has a single, 7-foot-wide stone chimney on the west end. Most, if not all the primary building materials for the house were probably fashioned on the site with broadaxe, adze, pit saw and plane.

The framing is of oak, with most larger members axed and adzed, while other and smaller members were formed by the tiring and tedious application of the pit saw. Standard 18th century framing timbers were used — 3 x 4 inch studs, 4 x 7 inch corners (with the flat faces to the sides) and braces, fastened to 5 x 7-1/2 inch sills. The walls are topped with 4 x 4-1/2 inch cap plates which support 3 x 6-1/2 inch ceiling beams that extend across the width of the house and support, in turn, the floor of the "knock-head" upper half-story bed chambers. The untapered 3-1/2 x 4 inch pit-sawed rafters are spaced two feet apart with pit-sawed shingle strips, half-lapped and pinned with trunnels (wood pegs) at the ridge and strengthened with lapped collar beams. This solid and well-executed construction resulted in a final product capable of surviving more than two centuries of less than maximum care.



With its single, fieldstone chimney, The Hollow House continues to ward off its neglect with dignity, having existed 210 years in Fauquier County. The roof shows wounds sustained in the April windstorm which hit the Markham area heavily.

Years ago, a larger frame addition was attached to the south front of the house by a covered passageway, without altering the original structure, by someone cognizant and respectful of the heritage embodied within the landmark. The passageway also protected from the elements much of the original clapboard siding and window and door trim on the front, covered with flaking layers of white paint and whitewash.

THE DOOR trim is four inches wide, finished in the classic style used during the 1700's, with an edge bead and a face cyma molding and a separate cyma molding backband, the whole attached with T-head hand-wrought nails. The windows, whose sash are now missing and were probably 12 lights each (six over six), were trimmed with a flat, beaded piece three inches wide and edged with the same type backband molding used on the door trim. At the eaves, a simple and also classic cornice of the period, with crown and bed molding, blended the facades with what would have probably been the roof of "fish-scale" or half-round shingles, possibly of chestnut.

The half-inch constant thickness, beaded siding, with the exposed surfaces ranging from less than 5 inches to 8 inches in order to get the maximum spread out of every hard-to-make board, and fastened with Rose head hand-wrought nails, and the fine door trim are of the same style as the

original extant fabric and trim on the dwelling at Rose Hill, across the mountain on Crooked Run, a plantation where John Rout was living many years prior to the construction of The Hollow House.

This quest for the simple elegance in the entrance to this unpretentious and isolated dwelling was the trait of the proud colonial builder, a pride that gave us the subdued, unmatched beauty in so many of even the smallest structures of the early houses in our nation's history.

THE EARLIEST builder-home-owners, the men who fashioned a home out of the products of the frontier, such as Thomas Marshall, were usually equipped with a set of wood forming tools, in addition to the basic felling and broadaxes, adzes, and hatchets, including froes, drawbars and jack planes for shaping finish materials and making shingles. To apply the final touch, displayed in the siding, paneling and trim of The Hollow House, the builder had two or more beading planes using cutting bits reflecting the basic architectural style of the period, or the builder's derivation of that style resulting from changes imparted from sharpening those bits.

Moving inside, the builder's pride continues to be demonstrated. What was first one large sin-

gle room of the entire first story, was covered floor-to-ceiling, not with the expected plaster, but with flush, beaded, half-lap paneling, one-half inch thick and 8-1/2 inches in width, and fastened with Rose head hand-wrought nails. The paneling bead is a unique and delicate 1/8 inch wide. The same type of paneling covers the 9-foot ceiling, while a vertical, flush, single-thickness paneling was used at about the time of the original construction to divide the first story into two rooms. The main room, or hall, on the west, opening to both the front and back doors, is 15 feet 3 inches square. The adjoining room, or parlor, is 11 feet 8 inches by 15 feet 3 inches and connects to the main room by an original batten door mounted on large HL hand-wrought hinges, apparently the only original hardware remaining in the dwelling.

The main room contains the only fireplace in the house, an arched stone opening, long since filled in, 45 inches wide, with a stone hearth. A very simple single board mantel is supported by small triangular brackets.

CLOSED "box," paneled stairs with 13 treads lead out of the parlor to the half-story, "knock-head" bed chambers with their 6-1/2 foot ceilings and very low—5-1/2 foot door openings. The chambers were plastered, using riven or split laths fastened with hand-wrought nails. This raises the possibility that it was much easier to panel than to plaster, either due to the lack of plastering ingredients at the base of Naked Mountain in the 1765 period, or the availability of boards and greater ease of application of the paneling. Then again, the paneling effect may have been preferred. The plaster in the bed chambers was later replaced with 19th century paneling.

These sleeping rooms were small, providing cramped quarters for the family of Thomas Marshall. The master's chamber is 10 feet by 14 feet while the children's room is only 9-1/2 feet by 10 feet. The 8-inch width floor boards are original.

The Hollow House was set far back from the road which ran from Capt. Robert Ashby's house at Yew Hill, where Thomas Watt had established an ordinary more than 10 years before, to the Manassas Gap. The decision was one of expediency, to place the house immediately above a good flowing spring which empties into the small branch about 200 feet east of the house.

THIS DECISION has prolonged the life of the house by several years, for it put the dwelling far enough back to take it out of the line of the path of Interstate Highway 66, which several years ago caused to be condemned, moved or destroyed everything within its path. If the old house is now allowed to survive, through individual or collective action, its fronting property, which stretched across the present Rose Bank farm to Goose Creek, will be covered with ribbons of concrete, destined, perhaps, for all time to destroy the quiet serenity that the Wildcat Hollow has known, especially in the time of Thomas Marshall's tenure.

He spent about eight years at The Hollow House, during a period when he formed friendships with the men of the neighborhood who would later serve as fellow officers in the Revolution, including among others Major John Thomas Chunn of Mt. Independence, Capt. Hezekiah Turner of Rose Hill, and Capt. John Ashby of Greenland. Midway through his tenure in The Hollow House, on March 12, 1769, then Capt. Thomas Marshall visited with George Washington at Yew Hill.

In 1773, Thomas Marshall built a larger and finer one and one-half story cottage at Oak Hill, leaving The Hollow House to a new generation of settlers such as Nimrod Farrow. After building a large plantation and serving in the Revolution, which sapped his finances, Thomas Marshall returned to the frontier, this time, Kentucky, where he lived the remainder of his life. □