

## CENTRAL VIRGINIA HISTORIC PRESERVATION FOUNDATION, INC.

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In 2009, at the request of a landowner in Hanover County, Virginia, volunteers from the Central Virginia Historic Preservation Foundation, Inc., examined the site of what appeared to be an 18<sup>th</sup> century water mill located on a property once owned by George and Sarah Elizabeth (Jennings) Hudson, grandparents of American Statesman Henry Clay; and which was later occupied by the Reverend John & Elizabeth (Hudson) Clay, their children & the widowed Mrs. Hudson.

Henry Clay's parents apparently relocated from John Clay's *Ephraim* plantation in Henrico County to Hanover County in 1775 or early 1776 to care for Mrs. Clay's widowed mother who had inherited a life estate in a 464 acre farm from her husband George (1714-1773). George Hudson had been buried near his home which he called *Slash Cottage*, as it was within the so-called *Slashes of Hanover* and close to *Slash Church*. Henry Clay was thus born in Hanover County, Virginia on April 12, 1777. Henry Clay had his first experience with war when British troops under Major General, Earl Cornwallis, appeared at *Slash Cottage* in 1781 during the pursuit of American Light Infantry under Major General, *marquis de Lafayette*.

The supposed raid on the Hudson-Clay home has long been attributed to *Redcoats* under Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton; but as the raid was not likely made by Tarleton's cavalry, who were then in Caroline County & wearing white jackets, Mrs. Clay, son Henry and his siblings might have been visited by horsemen of Lt. Col. Simcoe's Queen's Rangers, a green-clad Loyalist unit who were in the area on May 29th, 1781. Perhaps some of the 5000 red-coated British or blue uniformed German foot soldiers who were camped near of Hanover Court House came calling. Whatever the detachment involved, the incursion probably took place during the same week that Henry Clay's father, *Sir John Clay*, the first Pastor of Winn's Baptist Chapel, died and been buried along the path to the mill, next to the grave of his father-in-law George Hudson. Hudson's Widow Sarah Elizabeth (Jennings) Hudson died in 1782 and was interred next to her husband and John Clay, her son-in-law.

The mill on the Hudson-Clay property likely survived throughout 1781 as it was not visible from the dwelling or the graveyard, and further, Lord Cornwallis had written from Steele's Ordinary on Ridge Road on June 1, 1781: *It is hoped that no soldiers will destroy the bolting Cloths or anything belonging to the mills of the country, as it is of great importance to the Army, having them fit for use.*

After the American Revolution, Henry Clay went to school near the former *Mechumps Creeke Chapel* of St. Paul's Parish (ca. 1705-1729) did a child's work on his mother's farm in the company of two slaves left to him by his father - James and Little Sam - and reportedly learned to swim in the millpond. Hanover County records show that Elizabeth (Hudson) Clay held the land from 1782 through 1790-91. She had remarried around 1784 and the 464 acres were later *Conveyed to Henry Watkins*. In 1791 Henry Clay moved to Richmond to be employed at Richard Denny's store. A year later, and after his mother and step-father had relocated to the new State of Kentucky (formerly the Kentucky District of Virginia) Henry worked in the office of Peter Tinsley, Clerk of the High Court of Chancery, later serving as a scribe for Chancellor (Chief Judge) George Wythe (the signer). In 1796 Clay read law in the chambers of Virginia Attorney General Robert Brooke and in 1797 was licensed to practice law before the Virginia Court of Appeals. He followed his family west, was admitted to the Kentucky Bar and eventually filled a term in the U.S. Senate.

During his third presidential campaign of 1844 (Clay vs. Polk) Henry Clay was identified as *The Mill Boy of the Slashes* so as to be viewed as a hard worker in his youth, and was often pictured riding toward a water mill with a flour bag in place of a saddle. There is little doubt that Henry Clay traveled to *a neighboring mill* and comments by a contemporary (Hughes) support that eventuality.

However, and given the newly discovered mill on Clay's grandfather's property, the tale that a seven to fourteen year-old carried bags of corn to be ground at *Mrs. Darricott's* (sic) *mill on the Pamunkey* (Carl Shurtz) can be questioned, as a trip to Darracott's Mill on the South Anna River would have been a round trip of some thirty miles, or a six hour bareback ride from and to the Clay home, plus waiting time at the mill. In the 1920s, it was reported that young Henry Clay rode from his home to Langford's Mill on Stony Creek, south of what is now Ashland, where he reportedly rested under a Post Oak as he waited for his grain to be processed. A hand-painted sign telling that particular tale stayed nailed to a tree near Langford's Mill site for over two generations, but neither author seems to have considered the weight of a bag of shelled corn.

It would appear therefore, that Henry Clay went regularly to the one and one-half story wooden mill building, with brick foundation, located on the Hudson-Clay property, and likely built in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century or earlier. Convenient to the Hudson-Clay house, the mill was improved by Henry Watkins, Henry Clay's stepfather, who purchased a small parcel of land (1/2 acre) from a former Wingfield neighbor on November 4, 1784 in order to protect the streams above his millpond. The mill was likely in operation from before Henry Clay's birth until after he moved to Richmond at the age of 14. The mill structure, wooden race and overshot water-wheel may have been destroyed in one of two major hurricanes in 1795, but the creek still flows past the breached dam.

Volunteer members of the Archeological Society of Virginia (Col. Howard MacCord Chapter) led by Carl Fischer and Thane Harpole investigated and measured the mill site and found evidence of a *custom* or *toll* mill, represented by 18<sup>th</sup> century foundation bricks (3-1/2 x 3-1/4 x 8). Upstream was a still-standing mill-pond dam with an earthen (formerly wooden) sluiceway cut into the hill side joining the two, metal flume clips and a pair of 42" corn grinding stones, both bed stone and runner. 18<sup>th</sup> century hand-painted and other ceramics, rose head nails and a broken brass bracelet were also found on the west bank of the small tributary of the southern branch of Mechumps Creek (Campbell's Creek after 1889) all about 500 yards east and a little south of the original *Slash Cottage*.

A preliminary (and later) investigation of the house site with the landowners (different from the mill-site owner) suggests that *Slash Cottage* was erected ca.1740-45. When Henry Clay returned to Hanover County in 1840 to visit his birthplace in the *slashes* he reported that the house was *still standing but much altered*. He was shown the room in which he was born and wrote that he had seen the *wheat field* which then covered the graves of his father, grandfather and grandmother.

Henry Clay visited his old school. He was introduced to an elderly Mrs. Perrin (perhaps Mary Elizabeth Tyler Perrin 1759-1843) wife of Samuel & sister-in-law of Isaac Perrin (1730-1782) who had witnessed John Clay's will in 1780 and who owned the nearby Perrin's Mill. Henry Clay's birthplace existed for nearly thirty years after he last departed from Hanover County; but an article published on January 3, 1871 in the ©*New York Times* copied from the *Richmond Whig* of December 31, 1870, reported its destruction.

*We have just received information of the burning of the house where HENRY CLAY was born, April 12, 1777. It was situated on a small tract of ordinary land, near the old Slash Church, in the County of Hanover, about five miles distant from Ashland. A picture of it before us represents it as an old-fashioned, one-story, framed house, with a sloping roof. It has a large chimney at either end, which according to the fashion of the times in which they were built, have material enough in them for three modern chimneys. At one end there is a shed-room built over (around) the chimney. This shed had from age settled and separated from the main building, thus leaving a gap into which dry leaves and other combustible matter had from time to time fallen. A spark dropping upon them occasioned the fire which resulted in the destruction of the humble birth-place of the great American commoner. At the time of its destruction it was occupied by Mr. CARDWELL son-in-law of Mr. (E. C.) HOWARD, Clerk of the (Richmond, VA) City Council.*

*Mr. CARDWELL*, as described in the Times article was Richard H. Cardwell, (later Judge) born in Madison, Rockbridge County, NC, in August 1846; died in Hanover County, VA, 1931. Two of Judge Cardwells' brothers, Joseph N. Cardwell (1841-1862) 13<sup>th</sup> NC Infantry, and Sgt. Pleasant D. Cardwell (1843-1864) 45<sup>th</sup> NC Infantry, were killed during the war. Joseph died at Seven Pines in 1862, while Pleasant was wounded on May 30, 1864, probably at Bethesda Church, and died on June 6, 1864 at the Moore Hospital (#24) in Richmond. Richard had joined the Junior Reserves of North Carolina (who could be activated at age 17) and served in Company D, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of that unit from June of 1864 until January of 1865, when he was furloughed home.

On February 9, 1865, Richard was married in Rockingham County, NC to Kate Howard of Richmond, VA, the daughter of Edward Calthorpe Howard. Richard and Kate moved into the Henry Clay birthplace, having likely purchased it from the heirs of William Beverly Dabney (d. 1866) or his wife Martha Frances (Norvell) Dabney, who had inherited a right in the Hudson-Clay site from her mother, Ann (Mosby) Norvell of Richmond. After the fire the Cardwells' seem to have relocated, leasing or selling the property to the *W. Blanton family*. The basement cavity was filled to ground level over time, the large chimneys likely broken up and the stone reused.

Regularly identified on Civil War maps as the Birthplace of Henry Clay, the original structure was only recently unearthed by historically sensitive landowners. In May, 2010, one of those landowners (recently deceased) contacted a long-time supporter of the Archeological Society of Virginia to inquire about an unusual number of bricks found on part of the property she shared with her family. In response, the Project Coordinator of the Central Virginia Historic Preservation Foundation, Inc., investigated what appeared to be large and well-made colonial bricks (4 x 3 1/2 x 9) from what appeared to be part of a deeper underground structure. The landowner, her son and daughter-in-law also revealed a mix of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century glass, metal & ceramic material collected over time from the vicinity of the site.

On May 18, 2010, Dr. Robert Bluford, Jr. (Central Virginia Historic Preservation Foundation) Mr. Carl Fischer (ASV-certified amateur archeologist and Treasurer of the Archeological Society of Virginia) Mr. James M. H. Harris Jr., New Kent county historian and Mr. J. David Zimmerman, CVHPF Project Coordinator, met with the owners to further examine the site. Mr. Harris and Mr. Fischer entered the excavation and exposed one corner of what appeared to be a cellar. Based on renderings of the Henry Clay birthplace (attached) the team laid out the site, marking corners with retrieved bricks. On June 12, 2010, a further investigation of the site by a volunteer crew led by Faye Wade, ASV member and Past President, screen-sifted part of the large pile of earth originally excavated from the interior of the site by the landowner, the lowest level of excavated soil being deposited at the top of the pile. The soil was rich in artifacts, including smoke-stained bricks and mortar and glazed headers.

Burned lath was found, as were many 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century ceramic shards and glass fragments. Large and small 18<sup>th</sup> century nails were found, as were 19<sup>th</sup> century metal artifacts such as a 12" section of a cross-cut saw blade, cut nails exposed to fire and 1/2 of a loose-ring snaffle bit, among other items. On June 30, 2010, Mr. Carl Fischer, Mr. James M. H. Harris, Mr. Zimmerman and professional archeologist Mr. David Brown (also an at-large member of the ASV Board of Directors) met and further examined the site. The land owner and her son were again present. Conclusions drawn were that the cellar structure was of Flemish Bond construction with 18" thick walls, which likely supported a ca. 1740-45 frame dwelling (rather than being the remains of a kitchen, barn, slave quarters or other outbuilding). In addition to revealing more of the wall forming one side of the structure, Mr. Brown and Mr. Fischer found bricks forming one side of a cellar fireplace. The corners of the bricks forming the opening had been mechanically rounded to prevent catching the clothing of those using fireplace (below).



Part of the west foundation, collapsed fireplace base at left. Note under-fired salmon-colored bricks (interior of wall) and better-fired (darker) bricks.

Mr. Brown reviewed some of the previously discovered ceramics and identified German Westerwald ware (ca.1720-1760) English Creamware (ca.1750-1780) English Pearlware (ca.1780-1820) and transfer-printed ware (1740-1830). Many more shards will be identified toward the end of 2014, when an additional report will be issued.

In 2011, another volunteer crew led by Dr. Bluford, removed and screened the large pile of remaining spoil from ground level over three weekends, so as to clear that portion of the site. On September 3-4, 2011 more volunteers from the wider Archeological Society of Virginia, led by professional archeologist Patrick O'Neill and dig supervisor Carl Fischer, located two additional corners of the original structure by digging a pair of 5' x 5' test pits; one in the northeast and one in the southwest corner of the structure. Mr. O'Neill again dug the west wall to reveal more of the already-exposed fireplace.

Another small crew consisting of David Hazzard, Patrick O'Neill, Carl Fischer and Mr. Zimmerman reviewed the September 3-4 dig on September 15, 2011 in preparation for a further investigation by ASV volunteers, and on September 18, 2011 volunteers from a number of ASV chapters dug in the center of the south wall. On Thursday, September 22, 2011, a smaller group of volunteers from the ASV and others continued to dig in the northeast corner of the structure and the center of the north wall. On Sunday, October 2, 2011, a few more members of the Archeological Society of Virginia appeared at *Slash Cottage* to further expose the basement hearth in the west wall & also dig the north wall. On October 14, 2011, all excavated holes were covered with plastic which were then covered with bricks to delineate the depth of the dig for future work. On November 2, 2011, Mr. Fischer installed metal posts at each corner of the house, again to indicate the area for future work.

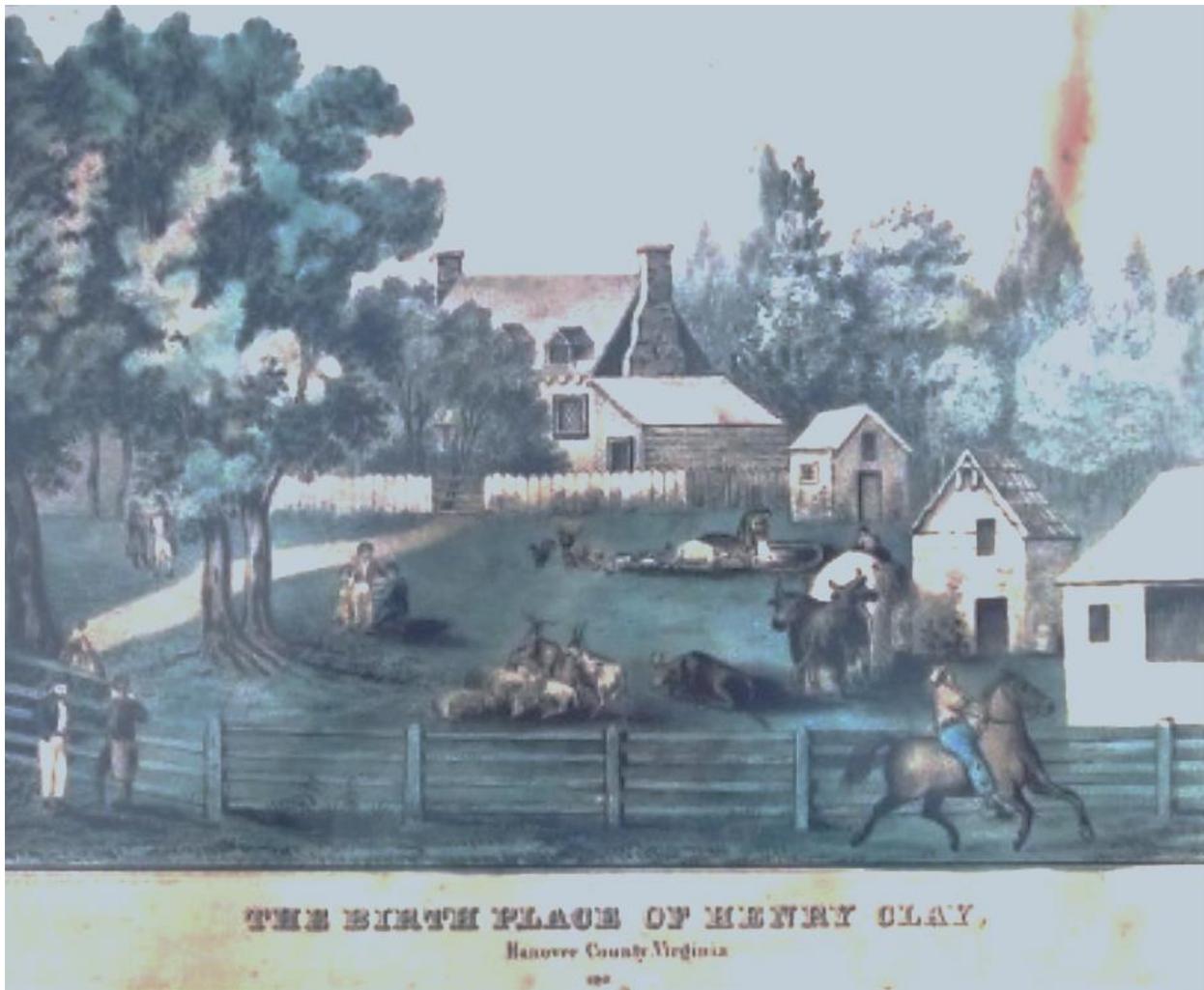
On April 16, 1856, four years after Clay's death, the ©*New York Times* reported: *The Virginia Celebration of Clay's Birth-Day.—The Richmond papers have accounts of the enthusiastic celebration on Saturday (sic) last of the 79<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of HENRY CLAY, with appropriate ceremonies at the Slash Cottage, Hanover County Va., the spot of his nativity. A special train left Richmond at 3 P.M.* The special train, with its load of 300 persons, arrived at the Slash Cottage resort, a facility developed beginning in 1851 by Edwin Robinson, President of the Richmond Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad. It is now clear that Mr. Robinson took the name of Henry Clay's birthplace for his development. The visitors did not (as the newspaper suggested) arrive at the *spot of his nativity*, because Clay's birthplace was in the original *Slash Cottage*, named by his grandfather, which was closer to Peake's Station on the competing Central Virginia Railroad. The village called *Slash Cottage*, which grew up around the R. F. & P. resort, was renamed *Ashland* after Henry Clay's estate in Lexington, Kentucky at a ceremony on Saturday, April 12, 1856.



Monument to Henry Clay near the original *Slash Cottage*, erected ca. 1930

Henry Clay's birthplace, the first *Slash Cottage*, was popularly named *Clay Spring* in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when a monument (above) composed of locally-collected mill stones was erected between 1928 & 1930 and engraved with the *Clay Spring* name. A metal plaque listing the accomplishments of Henry Clay was attached. Henry Clay had moved from his home to Richmond at the age of 14, so it is unlikely that he renamed the house called *Slash Cottage* by his grandparents. It is unlikely that Henry's father John Clay changed the name of *Slash Cottage* to *Clay Spring* during the five years that he and his wife shared the property with his mother-in-law, as Mrs. Hudson had a life interest in *Slash Cottage* and the surrounding property. She lived a year longer than her son-in-law and thus John Clay, Henry's father, never had an interest in the property. Indeed, John Clay's last will & testament mentions real property in Henrico County, but not in Hanover County. Mrs. John (Hudson) Clay remarried ca. 1784 and occupied the property with her new husband.

One rendering (below) of *Slash Cottage* or the Hudson-Clay-Watkins house, is a hand-colored lithograph by E.B. & E.C. Kellogg of 128 Main Street Hartford, CT, ca. 1864. The original document was loaned by Sumpter & Robin Priddy of Ashland. Similar lithographs have been dated as early as 1846.



The above rendering is almost identical to that found on the blue and gray slipcover of the book *OLD HOMES OF HANOVER COUNTY VIRGINIA* (below) ©1983 by the Hanover County Historical Society, except that the *Old Homes* picture is clearly a reversed image of the Kellogg lithograph. The horseman pictured outside the fence faces to the right on the Kellogg lithograph, but to the left on what was identified by the Historical Society in 1963 as a *contemporary lithograph of Clay Spring*. The original lithograph was actually entitled *THE BIRTH PLACE OF HENRY CLAY* and made no reference to the name *Clay Spring*.



Slipcover picture – *Old Homes of Hanover County, Virginia.*

In addition to being reversed, the *Old Homes* rendering was cropped by some 25 percent to fit the cover. The figures standing outside the fence and to the right (left on the Kellogg lithograph) of the walk leading to the house were deleted. In both the *Old Homes* rendering as well as in the Kellogg lithograph, the porched front entrance door is near the right (or left) front of the house, as seen through a four-rail gate closure. The left (or right) diamond-paned window is placed high on the front wall, while any center window is obscured by a tree. Three dormers are shown, the right (or left) dormer also obscured by the tree. The attached shed building in the Kellogg lithograph meets the right gable-end of the structure instead of the left end as in *Old Homes*. No allowance was made for the chimney depth where that feature meets either gable end.

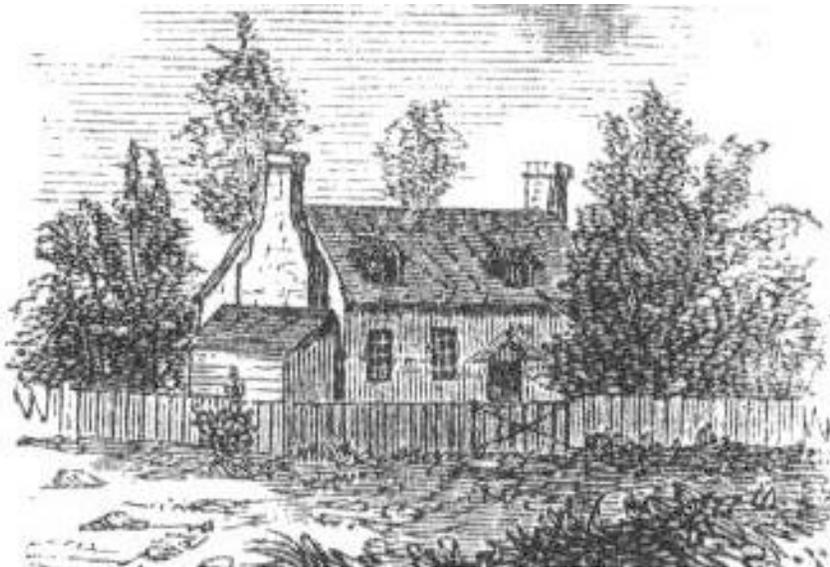
A 19<sup>th</sup> century rendering of the BIRTH PLACE of HENRY CLAY (below) appears on a 45 inch-wide summer fireplace screen, wallpaper on cardboard, is similar to the *Old Homes* rendering but is the reverse of the Kellogg lithograph. The door is centered on the front facade. A woman & child stand in front of a cart next to a man rolling a barrel, while a young man sits under a tree. There is some allowance for the depth of the chimney where it strikes the un-windowed shed. The dependency outside the fence is shown with a door but no chimney. The copy of the fireplace screen was loaned by William Gage and Katya A. Tilton of James D. Julia, Inc.

Another 19th century view of Henry Clay's birthplace was first published in 1850 in Bernard J. Lossing's *Field Book of the Revolution*. Lossing himself wrote on December 14, 1848, while on his way from Hanover Court House to Richmond: *Between three and four miles from Hanover Court House, I passed the birth-place of Henry Clay. It stands upon the right of the turnpike to Richmond, in the midst of the flat piny region called the Slashes of Hanover. It is a frame building, one story high, with dormer windows, and two large chimneys on the outside of each gable.*



19<sup>th</sup> century summer fireplace screen entitled BIRTH PLACE of HENRY CLAY

Lossing claimed that he made the original drawing at the site he described. His engraving (below) boasts a single story with two dormers, rather than three; two, 6 over 6 sash windows, rather than diamond-paned lights, both to the left of a porched front door. There may have been a third window on the front facade to the right of the front door. The shed building at the end of the house is shorter than other representations of that structure, and appears to touch the chimney as it extends along the width of that feature and beyond, but shows neither doors nor windows. A gap or space is shown between the gable end and the interior wall of the shed which is separated from the gable-end by the depth of the chimney. The yard is fenced so as to hide any basement, although a four-bar gate is evident.

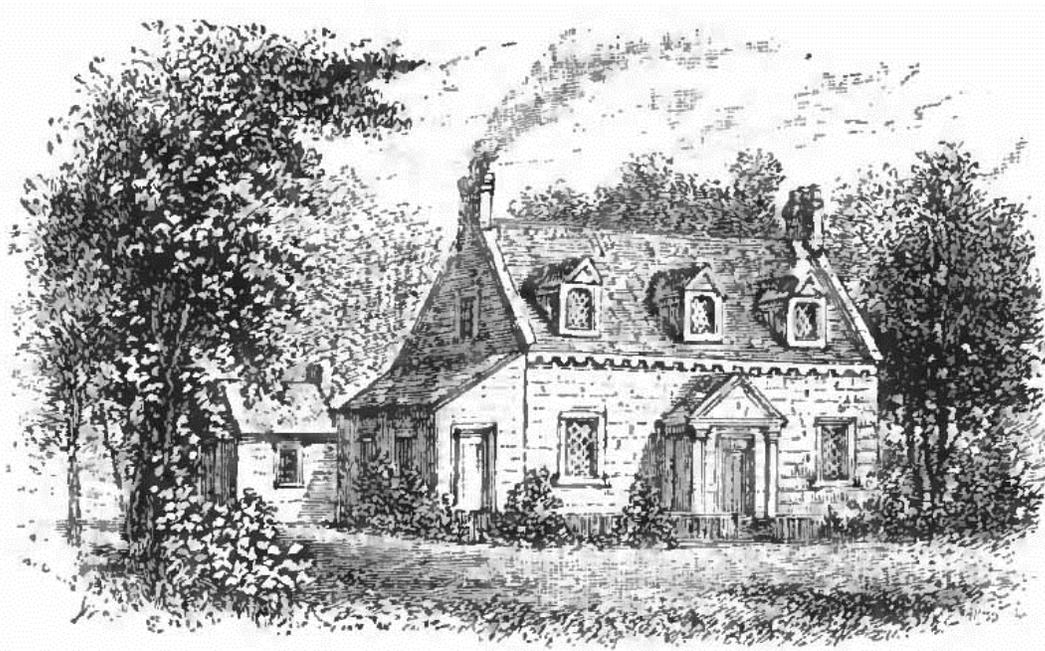


Engraving of Henry Clay's birthplace made from an original drawing of 1848 by Benton J. Lossing, from his *Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution*, New York, Harpers, 1859.

Similar exterior brick chimneys are pictured on page 75 of *Old Homes of Hanover County Virginia* © 1983 (print *courtesy of the Hanover Herald-Progress* but with no other identification) the front porch to the right as in Lossing, showing a left side diamond-paned lower window and an upper dormer window, also diamond-paned, the right dormer window almost hidden by the tree. A brick English basement is suggested by the view through the gate. In the case of this particular rendering, the shed building appears to wrap around the large, stepped exterior chimney and touch the wall of the main house. **The greatest difference between the Lossing picture, the one on p. 75 of the *Old Homes* book and those below, is a wide exterior brick chimney on each gable end.**

In another 19<sup>th</sup> century rendering based on a drawing of 1891 (below) the Hudson-Clay cottage is pictured as a frame structure with what may be perhaps an English basement below, three dormers above and an interior chimney on each gable end. The center window in the gable end and flue stacks on the chimney tops of the 1891 drawing of the Hudson-Clay house suggest both brick gable ends and multiple fireplaces, although most 18<sup>th</sup> century chimneys generally had neither liners nor flue stacks.

The 1891 version of the Hudson-Clay house also appears to have had a porched entry with a center hall dividing two rooms on the main floor. The house may have faced south, as did the entry door of a one bay, one story, shed-roofed addition pictured with two sash windows which stood against the chimney wall and might have been built by John Clay to house his mother-in-law.



Henry Clay's birthplace, in *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 1891. Vol.1, p. 640.

This structure above was identified in *Appleton's* 1888 edition as *Studley - in Hanover County, ca. 1700-1712, [the] ancestral home of the Williams family*. In fact, *Studley* was the ancestral home of Patrick Henry, born 1736, and is quite a distance from Henry Clay's birthplace. The front windows appear to be diamond-paned of an earlier style, but lower on the facade than some others. A porch with columns and a door is centered on the facade. A small one-room dependency (perhaps an office or even a kitchen) shows a single door, a window and chimney stood next to the shed room, shown with two windows. *Appleton's* 1891 & 1888 rendering of the Hudson-Clay structure shows interior chimneys.

A further, but undated English engraving of the Hudson-Clay house again with interior chimneys (below) was published in 1899 as the frontispiece of the *Life of Henry Clay* by Carl Shurtz, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Volume 1. The same engraving was reproduced on the title page of *Homes of American Statesmen* by O. D. Case & Co., Hartford, in 1854; and was republished by Alfred W. Upham, NY in 1862.



In the same *Homes of American Statesmen*, on page 394, but not shown here, a dissimilar Hudson-Clay house is pictured as fenced with 3-bar gate, a couple standing at the fence corner. That particular cottage has exterior chimneys, a single left dormer being visible over a diamond-paned window. The front door is on right front of the house, the remainder of the façade being obscured by trees. The attached shed building has but a single door. The small outbuilding has a door, gable-end window and side window but is smaller and shorter than the outbuilding pictured above.

JDZ, November, 2014