Manuscript for Historical Society Magazine ...December 1971 issue:

In keeping with a new policy adopted by the magazine staff to explore and to share with its readers the history and lore of some of the less familiar and less pretentious old homesteads of Louisa County, we give you the first in this series the story of Belfast, sometimes referred to as Belfast Farm. This longtime home of the Hope family in Jackson District faces the Jefferson Highway (Rt. 33); it is 18 miles east of Louisa Courthouse and 35 miles west of Richmond.

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Belfast Farm

The present Belfast Farm is part of a 223-acre tract of land on Taylor's Creek which Benjamin Burton Hope bought from Dudley Digges, of Louisa County, November 29, 1794.[1]

1. Louisa County Deed Bk. G. P. 439

Thomas Anderson Hope, elder son of Benjamin and Elizabeth Anderson Hope, in turn, inherited "in his own rite and in trust for Mary Hope Newman" (his sister) "land lying on the south side of the rood from the Hanover line to Shelton's Mill . . . . . ."[2] This is a portion of the lengthy will of Benjamin B. Hope dated November 24, 1829. His will was lengthy for two reasons: He had become a prosperous landholder and planter and had fathered 12 children among whom he scrupulously divided his worldly goods down to the exact number of "puter" plates, slaves, and "bedsteds."

2. Louisa County Deed Bk. 8 P. 203

Thomas Anderson Hope, like his father a successful planter and extensive landowner, distributed much property before his death among his five children; in his will he named his elder son Matthew as trustee of his whole property with both sons, Matthew and John Fleming, as executors.[3]

3. Louisa County Will Bk. 17 pp. 346-347

To his will (dated December 17, 1863) Thomas A. Hope added a codicil (February 1, 1866) in which he gave his son John Fleming Hope, M. D. 150 acres of land including the dwelling house and all outbuildings thereon.[4] Thus Dr. John F. Hope became sole owner of Belfast Farm to take possession upon the death of his Mother.

4. Ibid. p. 347

After their Mother's death, the two brothers in order to settle their father's estate amicably, conducted proceedings in Chancery Court from 1866-68.[5] Again Dr. John Hope retained his original inheritance which proved to be 162 acres by survey.[5]

5. Louisa County Chancery Court. #29

Dr. John F. Hope died intestate in 1906. His wife and two children survived him. The son was John F. Hope; the daughter, Miss Annie Hope. Another daughter, Angela, had died in infancy.

John F. Hope, the son, was employed for many years by the State Highway Department, and, as a result, was transferred every five years. He and his wife, Olive Willis, had seven children who lived to maturity.

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Miss Annie Hope, his sister, remained at Belfast with her mother for many years. They attempted to farm and to keep the homestead intact. The copy of an advertisement of Belfast as a summer resort (p.) attested to her efforts to retain her home and shows us the wide variance between prices and services offered in 1910 and 1972!

In 1915 Miss Hope married her employer, Mr. C. A. Nesbitt, secretary of the Virginia Masonic Lodge, and lived in Richmond for several years. Always she considered Belfast her permanent home and paid the real estate taxes. Upon her death in 1949, she willed a life interest in said property, still carried on the County records as the Dr. John F. Hope Estate, to her two favorite nieces, Mary Hope Poole and Lucy Hope Collins.[6]

6. Louisa County Will Bk. 26 p. 196

In 1955 the nieces, Mary Poole and Lucy Collins, and Mary's husband, John L. Poole, deeded "this tract, piece, parcel of land in Louisa County, to their father John F. Hope as sole heir and next of kin of John F. Hope, M.D." [7]

7. Louisa County Deed Bk. 93. p.40

with his wife Olive

John F. Hope retired in 1959 and returned to make Belfast his home. Their daughter Mary Hope Poole and her husband John came to live there at the same time.

When John F. Hope died in 1963, he willed all his worldly goods to his wife Olive. At her death, all said possessions to be divided equally among their seven children.[8]

8. Louisa County Will Bk. 30, p.206

In the same year, his heirs sold two acres, more or less, to the United States Government for a micro-wave site.[9] 1966 Three years later,[10] Mary and John purchased Belfast from the other heirs; the estate was now 159.705 acres by survey.

9. Louisa County Will Bk. 119, p.264
10. " " " " 128, p.242

The solid and comfortable old house at Belfast Farm has sheltered five generations of the Hope family, beginning with Benjamin Burton Hope and kept in the family down to his great grand daughter, Mary Hope Poole. She and her husband John now own her ancestral home and engage primarily in raising Angus beef cattle. Open fields and pastures stretch all around the house, barn, and other outbuildings with a background of encircling woodland.

Four stories high with 14 rooms, the house is of frame construction, with a slightly slanted shingled roof and three heavily graduated chimneys. It is built on a high rise of land, giving an overall view of the highway and neighboring houses. The stretch of lawn, dotted by boxwoods and other shrubs, is dominated by a giant oak tree, measuring 17 feet in circumference. This tree is reckoned by oldtimers to be well over 200 years and in bygone days shaded the kitchen. A brick walkway led from the separate kitchen and weaving room to a door between the two chimneys of the main house. This was the entry to the dining room located in the basement then and now.

There is a full basement under the entire house renovated and made most livable by the Pooles. It consists of a combination kitchen-dining room, a snug den, a bath, and a capacious pantry, all with exposed original beams.

The exact age ~~age~~ of the house is unknown, although indications, such as the handhewn and mortised beams, 14" thick, running the entire length of the house, the enclosed passages (stairways), the lattice work on the basement windows, as well as the date of the land purchase(1794) point to the late 18th century as the probable time of construction of the main house.

All the dependencies have long since disappeared except a smokehouse to which a machine shed has been attached. (Photo) Mrs. Poole recalls her father's telling her of a row of slave quarters built in an orderly row from the backyard toward the woods and sheds for their buggies and surreys. There are no visible traces today.

Mrs. Poole theorizes that construction and additions have taken place in at least three stages: namely, that Benjamin B. Hope built the main section around 1800 for his large family . Constructed like many houses of that day, the house is almost square, being 40 feet long and about 40 feet high. From recollections of older generations, she ~~believes~~ the first structure was two rooms deep with two rooms being built above two rooms, three stories high with shedlike porches on front and back. These

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Additional changes have been made since 1880(date of accompanying photo); at that time Dr. Hope had his office on the first floor and entrance was made through the front porch on the left. Both the front porches have been enclosed and made into rooms. The photograph reveals the rundown and neglected appearance of many Southern homes during Post-Reconstruction days. In a passage in an informal journal still in his desk in the family living room, Dr. Hope complains that all the slaves and servants have gone, and he is left alone to care for his widowed mother and his family while practicing medicine for a pittance. 11

11. Dr. Hope, John F. Personal Journal, 1870

The years since 1959 have been busy for the John F. Hopes until their deaths and for their daughter Mary and her husband. ~~Retirement does not slowly, persistently.~~ While both work: Mrs. Poole as a secretary for the Richmond-Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad commutes to Richmond daily; Mr. Pool has his farm work to occupy his time.

Restoration of her home as she remembers and recalls from family records and recollections is the goal of Mary Poole. And so, restoration continues slowly, persistently. Major improvements so far include rebricking and strengthening the foundations and chimneys, removing the red brick siding and dormer window completely outre for this house, repairing the large living room fireplace and replacing the living room floor which was beyond repair.

The original woodwork.. chair rails, coat rails, mantelpieces, and doors.. are found throughout the old section of the house. Handcarved mantels are found in ~~two~~ five bedrooms and in the old doctor's office. Of pine, all these have been painted the room colors. Most doors are handmade with their original hinges and locks. All stairways are enclosed with steps leading up to them from both sides.

Of paramount interest in the high-ceiled living room(parlor) is the seven-foot mantelpiece. A granddaughterof Mr. Henry Lassiter, a carpenter and craftsman of long ago, told Mrs. Poole her grandfather made the mantel for the Hope family. The carved pieces ~~are~~ individually made and glued into an intricate design, piece by piece. Then the simulayed marble effect was achieved by a special spattering treatment. This fashion of imitating marble was an early Scandanivian craft which probably found its way to England, thence to America. 12

12. The Architectural Record, 1935. "Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg"

The original plaster with patches here and there remains even in the attic where broken spots reveal the handriven lathes and the pig hair used in the plaster ~~and~~ probably accounted for its durabliity.

A striking feature on the house front is the arrangement and fewness of windows. There are four windows on the basement level; two of different sizes and asymmetrical on the first floor; none on the second floor; three on the third floor, and none in the attic. Long narrow windows afford light on every floor ; these are cut in the ends of the house.

Two other odd features of Belfast must be mentioned. The stair rail or balustrade from the second to the third floor is a crooked pole about 20 feet long which has worn smooth and polished with use. Another oddity is the vertical lattices or strips found intact in only one basement window today. Holes where other sticks rotted out are still in the bottom and top of other basement windows. The purpose of the latticework was to keep out cats, dogs, and other small animals. (Photo)

A climb to the attic is rewarding, for the view of the Blue Ridge Mountains from the west window is breathtaking. Mrs. Poole recalls that when she visited Belfast as a child,one of her first requests of her grandmother was permission to run to the attic and see the mountains.

This old home, typical of the dwellings of early landowners with large families and plenty of servants,is commodious and comfortable. It possesses the harmony of simple old furniture, shelves and bookcases crammed with old books and ledgers of bygone days, family portraits, yellowed maps, and dusty old trunks and an attic crowded with all sorts of bibelots and memorabilia. It is a house which has seen a lot of living and , though old, remains ageless.