

H--MOUNT AIR HISTORIC OVERLAY DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Mount Air Historic Overlay District was established in 1984 to protect the Mount Air house and grounds.

GENERAL: CHARACTERISTICS

- o The Mount Air mansion house is a landmark 19th century structure which dominates its nearly twenty-six acre site.
- o The Mount Air complex also consists of outbuildings arranged linearly to the rear (south) of the house and formal gardens and plantings. These are integral features of the site.
- o A 1000 foot long, unpaved driveway running north to south through open fields leads to the house. This approach gradually reveals the house as it is neared.
- o The west half of the Mount Air property is wooded.
- o A wooded buffer between 50 and 200 feet deep screens the perimeter of the Mount Air property.
- o North of the Mount Air property are new townhouses which relate outward to Telegaraph Road, not to the Mount Air site. In the winter, they are visible through trees from Mount Air.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Like many rural houses, Mount Air has had a succession of owners and building campaigns. The McCartys, a prominent colonial Virginia family, owned the Mount Air property in the 18th century; several maps prepared by George Washington showing his neighbors' properties indicate this site as Colonel McCarty's residence. The main portion of the present house dates from 1859, when it was rebuilt following a fire, but the east wing may date from ca. 1820.

The property remained in the McCarty and Chichester families until 1860 when Aristides Landstreet of Baltimore purchased the property. While he served in the Confederate Army, his family lived at Mount Air. Confederate and Union troops stopped at Mount Air for supplies, and, in the case of the Union troops, even used the property and house as a camp. Mrs. Landstreet was imprisoned for three months on charges of giving aid to the Confederates; after her release, she did successfully signal to Southern troops at Pohick Church that Union troops occupied Mount Air.

The mother of the current owner purchased the property in 1914. Army engineers building a railroad spur to the recently begun Fort Humphrey (now Fort Belvoir) camped on the Mount Air property in 1918; they named their encampment "Camp Merry Widow" in honor of the owner, Mrs. Kernan. Condemnation by the Corps of Engineers for the expansion of adjacent Fort Belvoir reduced the property to its current twenty-six acres. Today, the Mount Air house, its outbuildings, and formal gardens remain intact, a unique survivor in eastern Fairfax County of an antebellum plantation with earlier colonial associations. It continued to play a role in later events, such as

the Civil War, the area's subsequent economic hardships, the purchase of old plantations by an influx of newcomers in the early 20th century, and the construction of Fort Belvoir.

CONTRIBUTING FEATURES OF THE DISTRICT

- o ARCHITECTURE: Though portions of the brick foundation may date from the mid-18th-century, no above-ground sections remain from that period. Most of the structure dates from the 1850s, with a portion of the much-modified east wing remaining from the 1820s. Much of the interior trim was installed during repairs completed in the 1870s. A two-story, three-bay portico with a low pediment dominates Mount Air's main three-story wing. The symmetrical front facade has an elaborate door surround of sidelights, transom window, and pediment and tall ground-floor windows with delicate muntins. Mount Air (Sprouse: 1970) fully documents the architecture of the house.

Behind the house, to the south, stand several outbuildings which are integral features of the site. Of the four small frame cabins which survived into the 20th century, two remain. Behind them is a large frame barn with a small rustic Greek Revival portico. From the early 20th century, the pumphouse and garage with living quarters above remain.

HISTORIC AND CONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES: In the report substantiating the zoning amendment that established the Mount Air Historic Overlay District, only the Mount Air house and grounds (8600 Accotink Road, parcel number 99-4-001-47) are listed as historic. No contributing properties are listed.

- o LANDSCAPE AND SITE FEATURES: Impressive, mature plantings surround the house. The house and gardens are on a small plateau; around that, the land slopes down. The approach to the house is from the north, on the most level portion of the property. On the north side of the house are three large trees, two ash and one osage orange. On the east side, a lilac alley creates a partially enclosed lilac garden. A boxwood row marks the edge of the formal garden and at the rear, beyond the small outbuildings, is a boxwood alley. Throughout the east gardens are several varieties of ornamental trees.

Beyond the land immediately around the house and one other clearing west of the driveway, are woods, which perform an important screening function. Kernan Run, a small stream part of the Accotink Creek watershed, runs through the wooded western end of the property. Before the trees south of the property grew to their current height, the house had a view down Accotink Creek to Accotink Bay, Gunston Cove, and beyond to the Potomac. From the west porch, Pohick Church could once be seen in the distance.

ARCHAEOLOGY: The Mount Air property is rich with archaeological potential. Archaeological investigations might fix the location of the 18th century structures and reveal information about the

chronology of the existing house and outbuildings. Artifacts and sites associated with military encampments during the Civil War and World War I are also likely to be located on the property. The only recorded archaeological site is an old farm road leading from Telegraph Road into the property (44 FX 966).

GOAL FOR THE DISTRICT

The goal of the historic district is to protect against destruction of the historic and architectural quality of Mount Air, to encourage uses which will lead to its continuance, conservation, and improvement, and to assure that new uses within the district will be in keeping with the character to be preserved and enhanced.

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

The following section presents standards which should be maintained and promoted in order to achieve the goals of the district. Specific guidelines then suggest ways in which those standards may be maintained.

STANDARD 1--Maintain the rural character of the historic approach to Mount Air.

GUIDELINES

- 1.1 Continue access to Mount Air from the existing driveway, unless documentary or archaeological evidence reveals another historic location of a driveway.
- 1.2 Maintain a view of the north facade of Mount Air, without other visual intrusions, from the approaching driveway.
- 1.3 Keep the driveway narrower than standard road-width.
- 1.4 Keep a landscape buffer along the driveway.

STANDARD 2--Protect the historic integrity of the site.

GUIDELINES

- 2.1 Conserve and maintain historic gardens and plantings.
- 2.2 Preserve an adequate amount of open space around the house, outbuildings, and gardens so that Mount Air retains its historic character as a rural plantation site.
- 2.3 Consider the potential for archaeological resources early in development plans and mitigate adverse effects.

STANDARD 3--Protect the integrity of the historic structures.

GUIDELINES

- 3.1 Follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for all preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation the Mount Air Complex.

3.2 Preserve the outbuildings.

STANDARD 4--Preserve natural features.

GUIDELINES

4.1 Maintain natural land contours.

4.2 Retain Kernan Run in its natural state.

STANDARD 5--Retain and enhance landscape screening around Mount Air to preserve its rural character.

GUIDELINES

5.1 Little, if any, new development or roads should be visible from the grounds of Mount Air.

5.2 Maintain a "green ring" around the Mount Air site.

STANDARD 6--New development on the Mount Air property should respect the existing character by not detracting from or overwhelming the house site or landscape.

GUIDELINES

6.1 Areas furthest away from and lower than the house site are the best sites for new development.

6.2 Structures should fit into, rather than dominate, the topography.

6.3 Minimize the amount of parking areas and road surface.

6.4 Preserve existing trees where possible.

6.5 Structures of larger bulk than Mount Air should be as far away from the house as possible.

6.6 Building height should not exceed 35'.

6.7 Keep massing simple.

6.8 Use muted colors.

STANDARD 7--New structures within the house complex should be compatible with the character of the existing outbuildings and used for similar purposes, such as storage, greenhouses, etc.

GUIDELINES

7.1 Auxiliary structures should be located behind (south of) the house.

7.2 Such structures should be of modest, one-story design.

7.3 Locate service structures where they will not interfere with the formal garden schemes or with potential archaeological sites.

STANDARD 8--Fences, signs, and lighting should not detract from the character of the Mount Air site.

GUIDELINES

- 8.1 All fences should be low, open, horizontal-board, wood fences.
- 8.2 Entrance gates should be of simple design.
- 8.3 Use simple, low, neutral-colored signs.
- 8.4 All lighting fixtures should be of simple, functional design.
- 8.5 No spill-over light should reach the Mount Air property.