

Fox Hall - *Part 13*, Dormer Construction

By

Jack Carter and Dick Gresham

A detailed assessment of the second floor of Fox Hall has been made and is discussed in *Part 11*, recently published on this website. You are encouraged to read Fox Hall - *Part 11*, Second-Floor Assessment for more information on the current and previous dormers on Fox Hall.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, Fox Hall presently has two dormers and a large gable across the front of the house, and there is a third dormer on the back (Fig. 1, Front dormers and gable) (Fig. 2, Back dormer). All are post second fire, circa 1900.



Figure 1



Figure 2

It is clear from Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 (Fig. 3, East dormer) (Fig. 4, West dormer) that the two front dormers do not align with the brick wall piers below. Furthermore, the dormer on the back does not align with the window below or with the east dormer on the front of the house (See Fig. 2). Apparently, during the circa 1900 rebuild after the second fire, little consideration was given to the location of the original dormers or

to the location of the replacement dormers after the first fire of circa 1800.



Figure 3



Figure 4

The style of these current dormers reflects circa 1900 tastes rather than what would have been proper when the house was built circa 1725-30. They are wider, and the pitch of the dormer roofs matches those of the main roofs of the two circa 1900 annexes or additions. Properly, the original dormer roofs would have been steeper, the same as the main roof of the house, 12:12 pitch.

There is no remaining evidence of the locations of the original dormers or of the dormers replaced after the first fire. Based on the configuration of the dormers at Lynnhaven House, three across the front and two on the back, it is reasonable to believe that the original dormer configuration at Fox Hall was essentially the same. The general location of the two present dormers on the front and the one on the back is likely close, considering the five-dormer scheme at Lynnhaven House.

The restoration team has decided to rebuild these four dormers in the proper form to match the house roof. The east and west dormers on the front of the house will be more closely centered on the wall piers. The one on the back will be installed in the same location as the existing dormer (See Fig. 2). The fourth dormer will be placed in the location of the front gable once it is removed, centered over the front door of the house.

Since there is no evidence of the type of windows in the original dormers, a wood casement sash was selected with muntins matching

those in the other restored windows in the house (Fig. 5, Dormer sash). Restoration glass is used as well. The design features of the dormers are on two sheets (Figs. 6 & 7, Dormer details, sheets 1 & 2). These drawings have been reduced from a full-size architectural drawing of roughly 35" x 24" to fit into this article. For better viewing, simply zoom in on your computer.

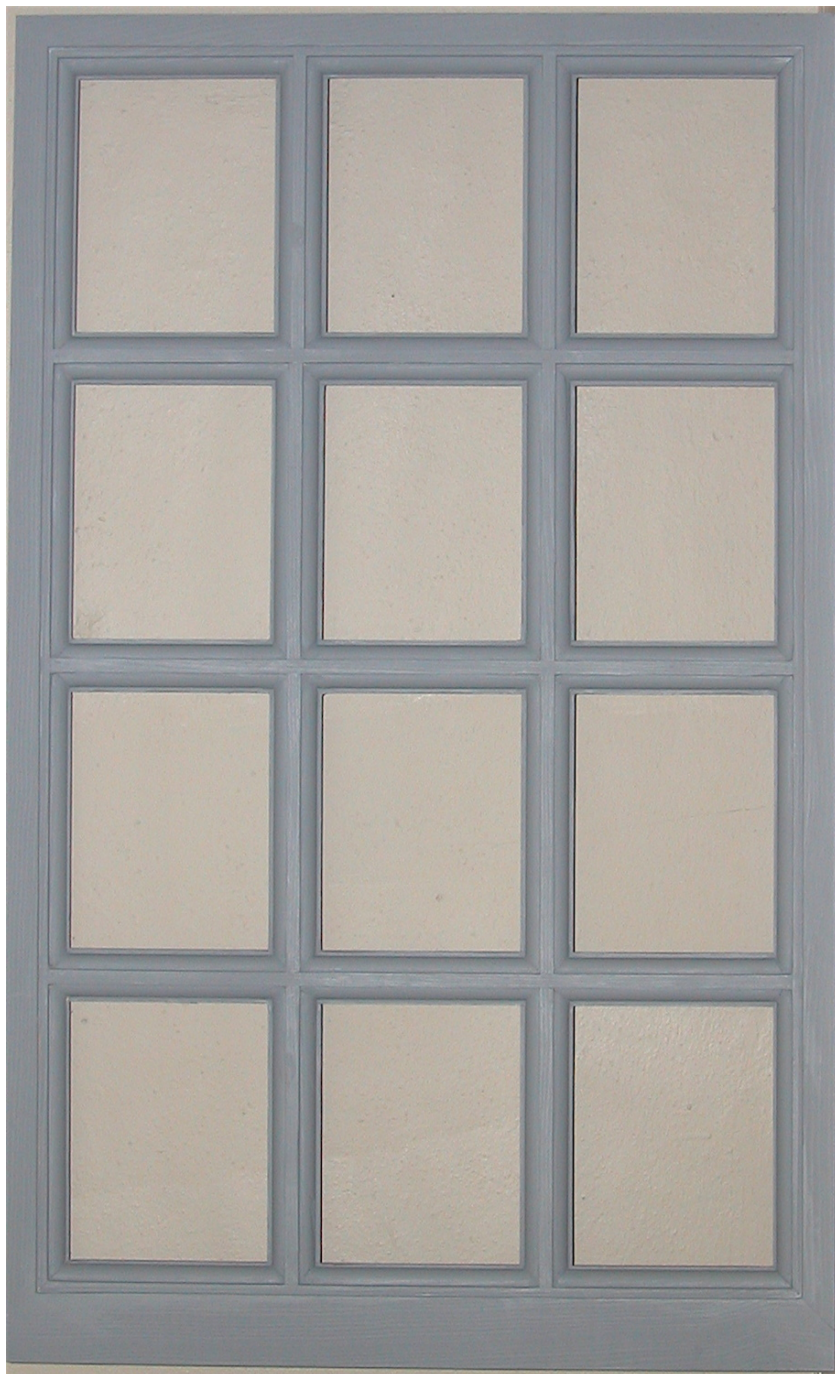


Figure 5

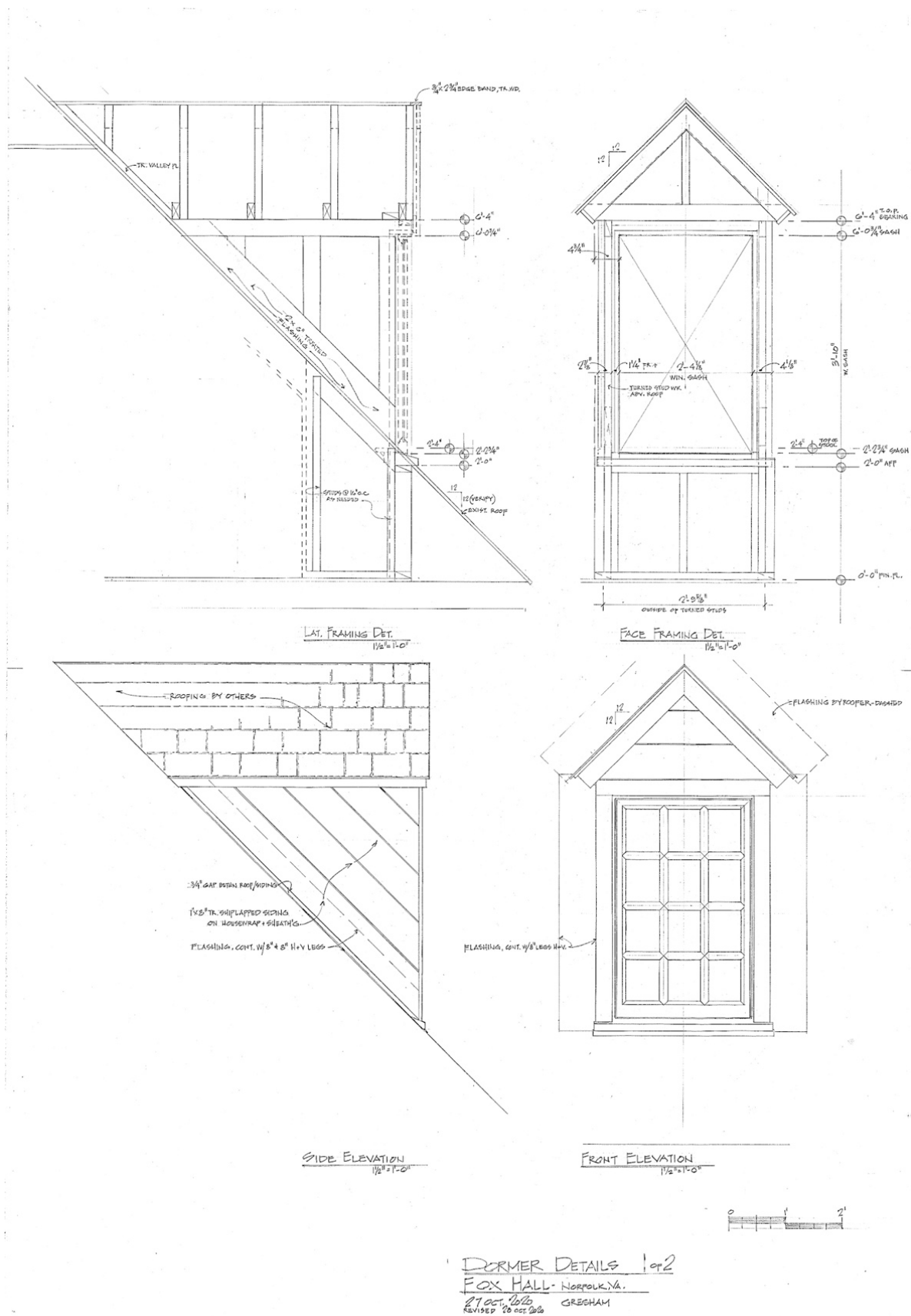
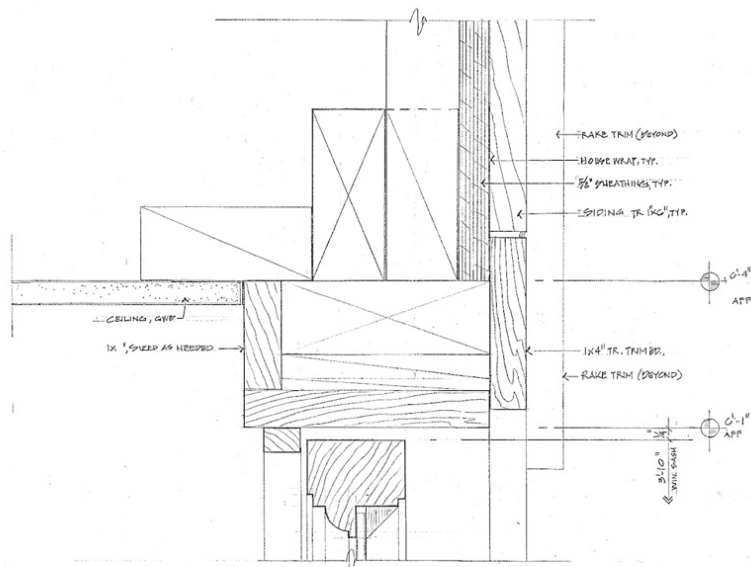
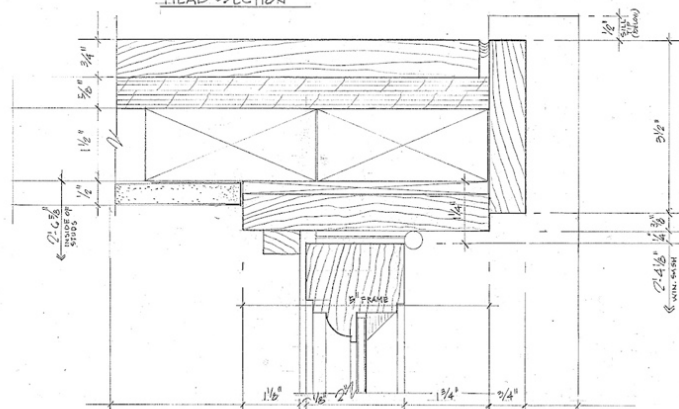


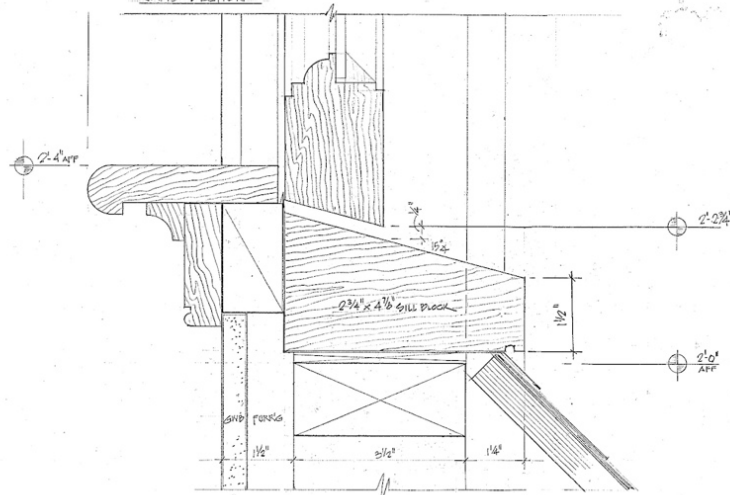
Figure 6



HEAD SECTION



JAMB SECTION



SILL SECTION

FULL SIZE



DORMER DETAILS 2 of 2
 FOX HALL - NORFOLK, VA.
 23 OCT. 1966 GRESHAM
 REVISED 28 OCT. 2010

Figure 7

The dormers have been shop made rather than constructed in place. Once the improper dormers are removed, the new dormers will be lifted and attached to the roof over their newly sized openings. This is in keeping with early eighteenth-century practice in Virginia. Architectural historian, Marcus Whiffen, stated "Dormers...by the eighteenth century had acquired distinctively Virginian forms. Dormers are not...an integral part of the roof structure, but are framed separately. ... They could therefore be added to or removed from a house at will, and they often were."¹

Figures 8 through 12 show the construction sequence of the dormers.



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

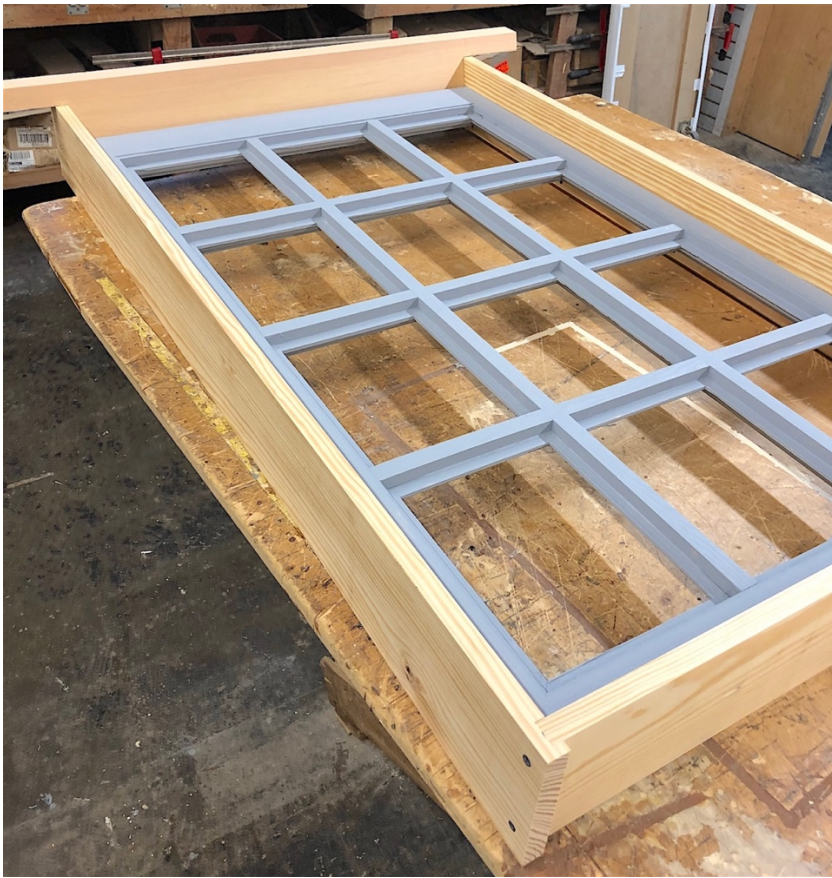


Figure 11



Figure 12

In Figure 13, copper pans, fabricated by the restoration manager, have been installed on the bottoms of the dormer window frames to protect them from water damage. Figure 14 shows the completed four window frames with sash installed.



Figure 13



Figure 14

The four, completed, shop-made dormers were loaded onto a flatbed truck and transported to Fox Hall for staging until they can be installed on the house (Figs. 15 through 17, Transport of dormers from cabinet shop to Fox Hall).



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17

Installation of the three dormers and removal of the large gable and installation of the fourth dormer will be address in subsequent articles in this series on Fox Hall.

References Cited:

Whiffen, Marcus, 1960, *The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Williamsburg*: Williamsburg, VA, Colonial Williamsburg.

Update

In Fox Hall - *Part 2*, Barred Vents, on this website, basement ventilation was discussed. Author, Tony Russell, stated "Fox Hall originally had three barred vents [for ventilation], two on the front of the house and one on the back. The two vents on the front of the house were removed sometime in the past and lost". Russell restored and re-installed the remains of the third original barred vent. This work is documented in *Part 2*. The team cabinetmaker has reproduced the two missing barred vents for future installation on the front of Fox Hall. The following four figures document the construction sequence of these two barred vents.



Initial layout & cuts



Cutting square mortises for bars



Assembly



Construction complete

Update

In Fox Hall - *Part 11*, Second-Floor Assessment, under the heading, *Additional Restoration Projects...*, it is noted that there are four small windows, two in each endwall. These windows date to the circa 1900 rebuild after the second fire, and the casement sash in each has been replaced with sash and restoration glass matching the restored first-floor windows. Likewise, a new transom window for over the front door has been fabricated, matching the restored first-floor windows.



Small endwall window



Transom window