

THE RESTORATION OF LOCUST GROVE

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IT was evident to all who passed along Blankenbaker Lane, that the derelict, red brick home was very old, yet too few were cognizant of its fascinating history. For as long as anyone dared remember, the Richard Waters family had owned Locust Grove. They had purchased the tract, a few miles northeast of Louisville, in 1883 and had always used it as a working farm.¹

The farmhouse and other outbuildings were in drastic need of repair, but, to the passers-by, the age of the house was difficult to determine because of its Georgian characteristics and Victorian embellishments. The Waters militantly protected their property from all but a few friends. Their friends, who had enjoyed the rustic comforts of Locust Grove, could bear witness to the worthiness of restoring the homestead and they encouraged others to join the project. Of significant historical importance, Locust Grove was the social and cultural center of the early settlement at the Falls of the Ohio primarily due to the presence of General George Rogers Clark.

General Clark had lived permanently at Locust Grove from 1809 until his death there in 1818.² He, the founder of Louisville, had come to live with his sister, Lucy Clark Croghan, following an accident which had caused his right leg to be amputated.^{3, 4} General Clark and Major Croghan had known each other for many years. Croghan had fought in the Eastern Campaigns at Brandywine, Germantown, and Monmouth, being captured at Charleston in 1780.⁵ Meanwhile, more

Dr. Thomas, a member of the faculty of the University of Louisville, is Research Director and Curator for the restoration of Locust Grove, the last home of Gen. George Rogers Clark, 1809-1818. He has charge of the historical research involved in the work as well as the task of returning the 55-acre property to its original beauty. The object of the restoration is to recreate a memorial to Gen. Clark as a founder of Louisville and a permanent record of Kentucky life in the early nineteenth century.—Ed.

- 1 Jefferson County Deed Book 263, 563; and private communication with the Waters family.
- 2 Account Book of William Croghan, University of Chicago Library.
- 3 William Croghan, Jr., to John O'Fallon, March 30, 1809, O'Fallon Collection, Missouri Historical Society.
- 4 Samuel Gwathmey to George Rogers Clark, Draper mss. 55J68, Wisconsin Historical Society.
- 5 Obituary of Major William Croghan, *National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., October 9, 1822, Library of Congress.

strategically, militarily speaking, Clark had relieved the British of outposts at Kaskaskia, Vincennes and Cahokia, later retaking Vincennes in the defeat of Lieutenant General Henry Hamilton.⁶ Following the Revolution, Clark and Croghan had formed a partnership to survey military grants for the officers of the Virginia State and Continental Lines.⁷

In 1789, Major Croghan married Lucy Clark⁸ and began shortly thereafter⁹ to build the Locust Grove homestead on a 387-acre tract acquired in 1790.¹⁰ Nine children were born by 1805 and each was soon able to matriculate into educational institutions throughout the country.¹¹ Their academic and military pursuits were stimulated by Major Croghan, and the presence at Locust Grove not only of Uncles George Rogers and William Clark,¹² but also of J. J. Audubon,¹³

6 James Alton James, *Life of George Rogers Clark* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1928), 119, 121, 137-144.

7 George Rogers Clark Co. Survey Book, property of Jefferson County, on loan at Locust Grove.

8 Marriage Bond and the statement of John Clark's willingness to license for his daughter's marriage, July 13, 1789, photostatic copy property of Locust Grove; July 14, 1789, given in family records in the Filson Club mss., Louisville, Ky.

9 A precise construction date has not been established. However, Jefferson County Tax Records, Major Croghan's obituary, *Port Folio*, 3rd Series, Vol. 5 (1815) and numerous corroborating statements in the Croghan family letters justify a *circa* 1790 construction date. The architectural aspects of Locust Grove also reflect such a date. (Personal communication with Mr. Walter M. Macomber, Washington, D.C.)

10 Jefferson County Deed Book 6, 249. Although deed was recorded July 19, 1802, it states that the land was purchased of Hancock Lee by William Croghan on April 1, 1790.

11 Records of the various institutions and family letters indicate the following: John Croghan attended the Danville, Kentucky, Seminary under Dr. Priestley (1806-1807), William and Mary College (1807-1809) and the University of Pennsylvania for the M.D. degree under Dr. Rush (1810-1813). George Croghan also attended Dr. Priestley's school (1806-1807) and graduated from William and Mary College (1809-1810), studying law at the same college in 1811. William Croghan graduated from Transylvania College (1808-1810), attended Dickinson College, Carlisle, Penna. (1813-1814) and the Litchfield Law School, Litchfield, Conn. (1815-1816). Charles (second of the name, the first Charles having died in infancy according to the family Bible) and Nicholas Croghan went to St. Thomas College, Springfield, Ky., after Nicholas had attended Buck Pond Academy near Versailles, Ky. Ann and Elizabeth Croghan attended Domestic Academy near Springfield. In 1816, Edmund Croghan attended the Jefferson Seminary (University of Louisville). See also fn. 8.

12 William Clark, younger brother of George Rogers Clark, visited Locust Grove on at least several occasions, on November 8, 1806, with Captain Lewis following the Expedition and again in October of 1813. Diary of Jonathan Clark, November 8, 1806, property of Filson Club, and William Clark to George Hancock, October 27, 1813, property of Locust Grove.

13 Alice Ford, *John James Audubon* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 70.

Zachary Taylor,¹⁴ President James Monroe,¹⁵ and General Andrew Jackson.¹⁶

Although certainly well educated and highly trained, the Croghan children did not seem to possess the initiative of their father.¹⁷ After the Major's death in 1822, they could not maintain the farm, survey, rent houses in Louisville nor carry on commercial trade as successfully as he had always done. Through a series of family transactions,¹⁸ Dr. John Croghan bought the homestead in 1834. His death in 1849, followed soon by the deaths of his brothers, George and William, marked the real end of Croghan domination at the country seat. The house became a refuge for renters, who would cultivate the cleared acres.¹⁹ Some thirty years afterwards, the Waters family continued the same toil.

They stopped grazing cattle and tilling the soil seventy-eight years later when the Commonwealth of Kentucky and Jefferson County purchased Locust Grove and fifty-five acres, as a house museum to perpetuate the memory of General Clark. A year later, under the auspices of Jefferson County Fiscal Court, Historic Homes Foundation began the physical restoration. Mr. Walter M. Macomber, Washington, D.C., directed the restoration, calling upon his vast experience

14 Zachary Taylor was raised at Springfield, the tract adjoining Locust Grove. An additional 202 acres for the Locust Grove tract was purchased from Richard Taylor, father of Zachary, in 1811. Jefferson County Deed Book 9, 150.

15 In June of 1819, President James Monroe and General Andrew Jackson on a visit to Louisville, were escorted to Locust Grove where they spent the weekend. *Kentucky Herald*, June 30, 1819, University of Chicago Library.

16 The future President, General Andrew Jackson, dined at Locust Grove again in April of 1825. John Croghan to T. S. Jesup, April 10, 1825, T. S. Jesup Papers, Library of Congress.

17 A general appraisal by the author, but one which is well documented in the Croghan family correspondence in the T. S. Jesup Papers, Library of Congress.

18 William Croghan, Sr., devised Locust Grove to his wife and upon her death to their son, William. Jefferson County Will Book 2, 229. However, George Hancock, husband of Elizabeth Croghan, purchased Locust Grove from William Croghan, Jr., in the fall of 1828. George Hancock to William Croghan, Jr., December 15, 1828, Darlington Memorial Library, University of Pittsburgh. Mrs. William Croghan, Sr., was still living in 1828, but there is no recorded deed giving Locust Grove to her son. An agreement of February 1, 1834, was made by Dr. John Croghan to refund Hancock's payments and to assume payments to William Croghan. George Hancock to T. S. Jesup, December 15, 1838, T. S. Jesup Papers, Library of Congress. This recorded deed from William Croghan to John Croghan was made April 4, 1840. Jefferson County Deed Book 55, 444. This deed was the only recorded deed between the death of William Croghan, Sr., 1822, and Dr. John Croghan's coming into possession. The other transfers were family transactions and are shown in the family correspondence.

19 Christopher B. Wyatt, Newburgh, New York, to Covington Arterburn, Locust Grove, March 4, 1862, property of Locust Grove.

gained from such restorations as Williamsburg, Scotchtown, Stratford, and Mount Vernon.

The Victorian changes were removed and replaced with exact copies of the original woodwork. Two original brass, rim locks and a few items of shutter and door hardware were found, and period pieces were purchased, or if not available, they were specially reproduced. Seven cupboard doors of the chimney panel in the formal dining room were copied from an original found in a dependency. One-third of the chimney panel of General Clark's bedroom had been removed by the Waters to allow for a new window aperture. Fortunately the panel had been saved on the third floor, and could be replaced when the window was sealed.

Clark occupied the room on the lower floor at the end of the passage,²⁰ for several reasons. On March 23, 1809, the General was vented and dripped for the seventeenth time by Dr. Richard Ferguson.²¹ It was decided that only amputation of the burned right leg would permit cure. Constant post-operative care was necessary and as the Croghans maintained between thirty-three and thirty-eight slaves,²² Clark was brought to Locust Grove. From his room, he was transported in a wheelchair by his servant, Kitt, to the other lower floor compartments and to the back porch. The porch was not originally planned, but was added soon afterward, as Clark was remembered sitting on it.²³ In the restoration, both Victorian front and back porches were removed and a back porch or piazza was restored based upon old markings in the flemish bond brick work.

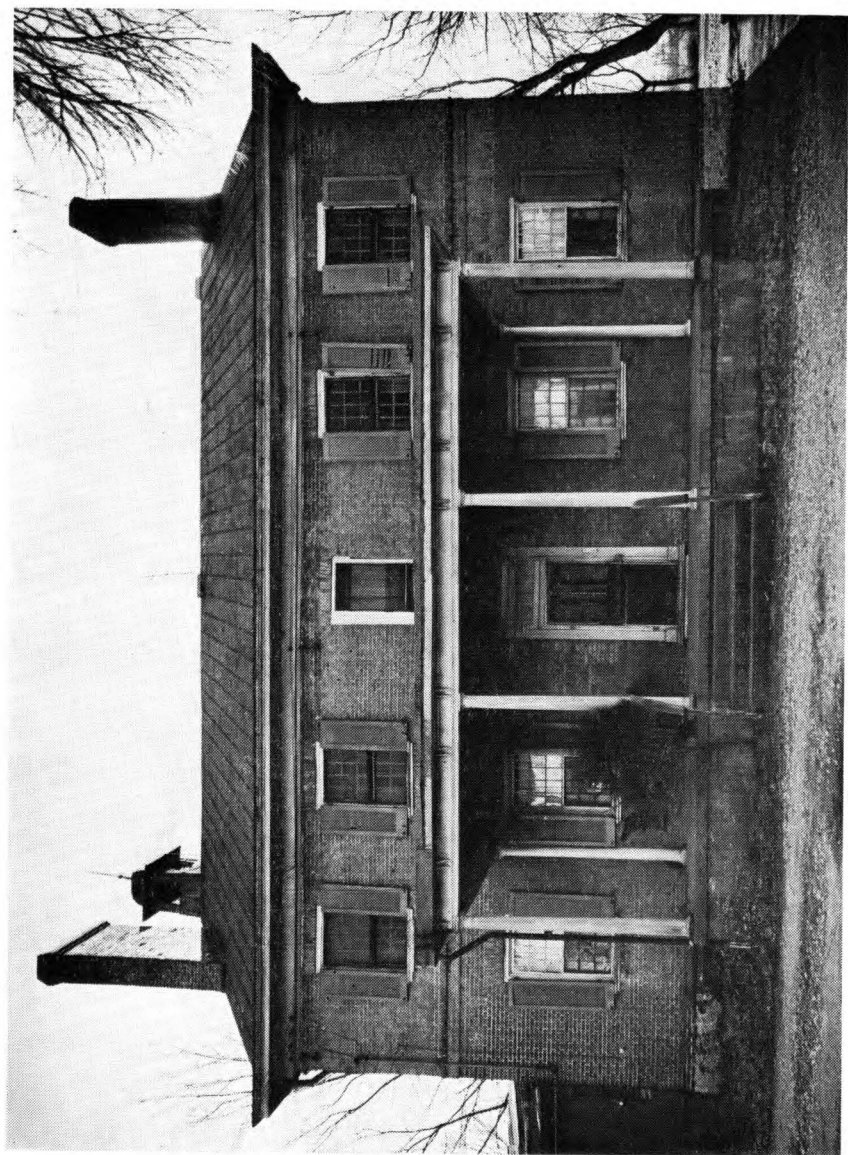
While Clark was at Locust Grove, a back stairway was constructed leading from the family dining room-office to a bedroom above. The stairway provided another access to the second floor stair for the children and allowed a direct entrance into a bedroom for travellers. By 1837, the stair had been removed to allow space for an entrance into a wing added by Dr. John Croghan for the convenience of his seventy-two-year-old mother. A window was lowered to the floor to make the doorway entrance. The date of these changes was not known until, in the last phases of restoration, a Croghan letter in the Library of

20 *Louisville Courier Journal*, July 10, 1883.

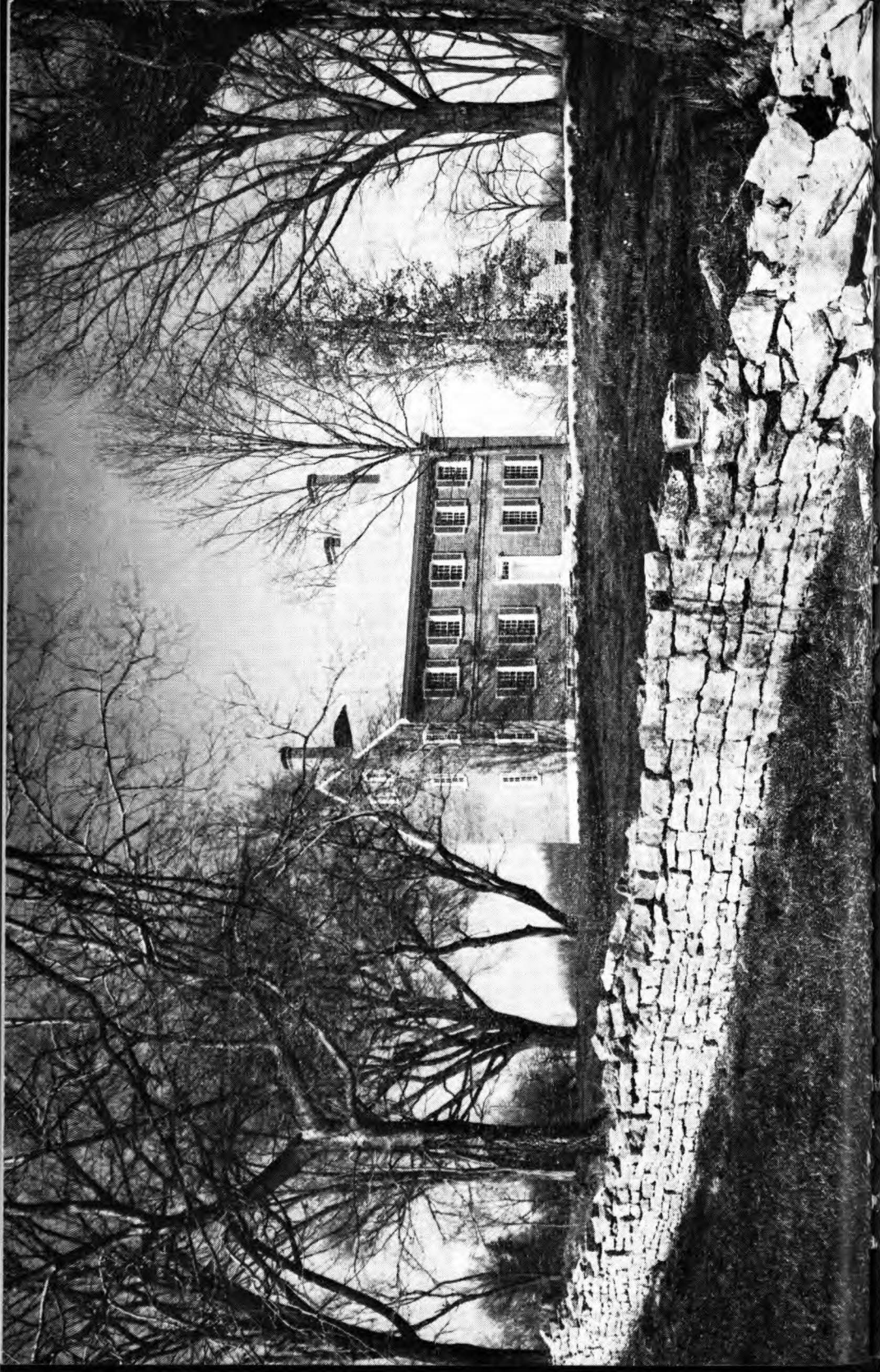
21 Bill of Dr. Richard Ferguson, June 4, 1810, Chicago Historical Society.

22 Jefferson County Tax Records, 1809-1817, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Ky.

23 Statements of Cuthbert Bullitt, Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society, XV, 54; D. R. Poignaud, Draper mss., 35J78; W. B. Gwathmey, Draper mss., 55J88.



Back of Locust Grove, prior to 1963



Congress gave the following details:²⁴ "I am building a small room adjoining the house as a chamber for my Mother and as the plasterers and painters are to be here tomorrow Ann concluded to remain in the City until they had finished which will be the ensuing Friday."

As 1822 (death of Major Croghan) had been established as the date toward which the restoration of the house was to aim, the chamber (1837) was removed and the stairway (*circa* 1810) was reconstructed. The stairway's exact dimensions were obtained from the opening in the ceiling, made by sawing through several ceiling joists, and from the patched mortice still remaining in the floor, where it had accepted the tenon of the newel post.

As the Croghan children departed Locust Grove to pursue their education, to marry and later to return with their own families, the need for the second floor ballroom waned. Consequently, it was partitioned into a necessary bedroom and large closet, and the original ballroom entrance was removed to enlarge the hall. This major change was executed so early in Locust Grove's history that it was not readily ascertained.

After considerable investigation by Mr. Macomber, the original dimensions of the ballroom were established. The concluding evidence was discovered when Mr. Macomber removed a section of the partitioning wall, uncovering a panel of wallpaper. The panel was researched by Katzenbach and Warren, Inc., New York, who found a photograph of the plate for the arabesque panel paper, executed by Cietti of the Reveillon Studio, Paris, France, *vers* 1786.²⁵ An almost perfectly preserved color section of the discovered wallpaper was used in the accurate reproduction of paper for the restored ballroom.

All painted surfaces were scraped to obtain a sample of the first coat of paint, which was then copied. The fine Georgian walnut and cherry mantel panels were cleaned of stain and then shellacked and varnished to give a rubbed wax appearance. The poplar trim and mantel panels were painted, as poplar did not have as uniform a grain or color as the native woods, walnut and cherry. The perfectly preserved ash floors were cleaned, shellacked and waxed.

To replace the Victorian tin roof, concrete tile was used to give the desired color and texture of the original wood shingles.

As the Croghan furniture had been removed from Locust Grove,

²⁴ John Croghan to T. S. Jesup, May 20, 1837, Jesup Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁵ Clouzot and Follot, *Histoire Papier Paint en France*, Cooper Union Museum Library, New York.

it was necessary for the Acquisitions Committee to obtain period, Kentucky furniture, primarily of the Heppelwhite and Sheraton styles. Preserved at Locust Grove of particular interest are three Josiah pieces²⁶ and the Croghan silver tea service. The five piece tea and coffee service, made by Dumoutet of Philadelphia in 1810 descended through William Croghan, Jr., of Louisville and Pittsburgh to his daughter, Mary Croghan Schenley, of Pittsburgh and London, to Mary's granddaughter, Mrs. E. A. Leavett-Shenley,²⁷ of South Hants, England, from whom it was purchased.

At present work is proceeding on the restoration of the outside kitchen, and research on all aspects of the Croghan family and George Rogers Clark continues, so that the restoration of Locust Grove can justly honor and perpetuate the memory of George Rogers Clark and can preserve an example of the skills and taste of early Kentuckians as typified by the Croghan family.

26 Eleanor Hume Offutt, "Kentucky Furniture," *Antiques Magazine*, November 1947, 358.

27 Name restored to original spelling.