

Architectural Influences in Northumberland County: The Double Portico of Palladio interpreted by the Hardings and other families in the Greek Revival Style

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A surprising number of historic houses in Northumberland County survive with impressive classical double porticos. This paper discusses the origins of the classical double portico in the work of the Renaissance Italian architect Palladio and early examples of Palladio's influence on American architecture of the eighteenth century. Palladio's influence continued well into the nineteenth century in Northumberland County in double-portico Greek Revival houses associated with the Harding family — Wheatland, Clover Dale and Springfield. These houses inspired a significant number of manifestations of the double portico in the county, both in new houses and in stylistic updates to earlier structure. (Howlett, F. Carey)



Palladian Double Portico: Villa Cornaro and Villa Pisani(Padua) Fig. 1&2

The Double Portico of Palladio

The Palladian portico and double portico were perhaps the most imaginative and influential designs to come to America in 1740s with the Palladian Revival. Palladio had used the double portico in his city palazzos and country villas throughout Italy (Fig. 1,2). Across the ocean, Virginia became a center of American Palladianism, and an architectural style developed that combined the central-passage plan of the eighteenth-century house and the Palladian double portico. Shirley Plantation in Charles City County, Virginia, 1765, and the second Capitol building in Williamsburg, circa 1747(after fire), were early examples of the use of the double portico design for private and public architecture (Fig. 3,4). Celebrated architect Thomas Jefferson's first designs for Monticello, circa 1770, included a double portico (Brownell, C.). The double portico articulation in the Federal style reflected the Roman orders of design in a delicate, slender mode that spread throughout the southern states. This Federal style was abandoned in the early nineteenth century when a new classicism came forward based on the Greek orders.



Fig. 3 Shirley Plantation

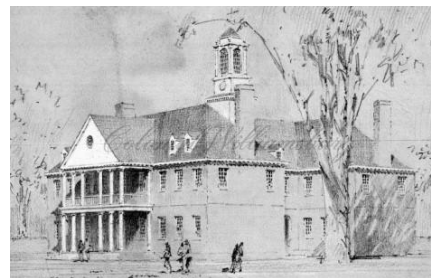


Fig. 4 Second Williamsburg Capitol

The Emergence of the Greek Revival Style Double Portico

By the 1820s, a new architectural style, the Greek Revival, with its plain and stocky design (Fig. 6) spread from New England to the deep South and on to the West Coast and became for nearly forty years the national style. “Whenever towns and regions prospered in the ‘thirties and forties’, the white porticoes were to be found, fronting or surrounding the houses large or small.” (Kimball, F.) This new style was a popular preference of laymen and amateurs since the architectural forms were thoroughly established by the publication of pattern books such as Minard Lefever’s *The Modern Builders Guide*, (1833). The popularity of the Greek Revival in Virginia was confirmed by mid-nineteenth-century photos of Williamsburg, when builders began adding pedimented double porticos to existing colonial homes projecting both the new style and the older style of the second Williamsburg Capitol (Fig. 7). The articulation of the Greek Doric double portico remained wildly popular throughout nineteenth-century America with its most significance in the southern Greek Revival of the 1820-1860s known as the Antebellum period.

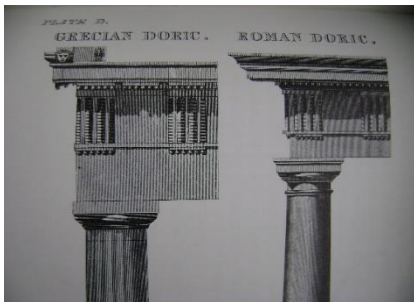


Fig. 6 *Grecian/Roman Doric Order*



Fig. 7 *Bassett Hall, Williamsburg*

Interpretation of Greek Revival Design in Northumberland County by the Hardings and other Families

In the 1820s, the rural aristocracy of antebellum Virginia had been reimagined and characterized as living an extravagant, yet refined lifestyle. “You will never know your friend so well, nor enjoy him so heartily... as you may in one of those large bountiful mansions, whose horizon is filled with green fields and wooded slopes.” (Kennedy & Rasmussen) The Greek Revival style of architecture, with its impressive double portico, became especially popular in the Northern Neck as it related well to the pastoral ideal of “bountiful mansions.” Northumberland County specifically saw a generous use of the double portico in the Greek Revival mode from 1830 to 1860 and then again postbellum from 1870 to 1890. The style was noticeably advanced by houses such as Wheatland, Clover Dale and Springfield built by members of the Harding family.

The Harding family exemplified the renewed prosperity of the period between 1830 and 1860. With their maturing taste for the classical designs of the new Greek Revival style, two Harding brothers, John H. Harding, William H. Harding, and their nephew Dr. William H. Harding were responsible for articulating numerous examples of the Greek Revival double portico on their buildings. The earliest examples of their use of the double portico in house plans were at Wheatland, Clover Dale, and Springfield, all built circa 1850. These three Harding men influenced the designs of later houses built by family, friends, and acquaintances who continued building in this new Greek Revival style. Sally Harding Gaskins, niece of the two Harding brothers and her son Charles Gaskins Jr, built and enlarged their house,

Tranquility, with a Greek Revival double portico. Fereol Lemoine Harding built Covelands with Greek Revival monumental corner pilasters and a double portico. John H. Harding Jr. enlarged his home Guarding Point to which a double portico was added later. Texas, owned by Dr. William H. Harding, was also later enlarged with a double portico. In addition, the Harding's circle of Northumberland County friends including the Burgess and Blundon families, built versions of Greek Revival double porticos on their own houses, Versailles, Cherry Plain and Arcadia.

The Harding Houses of Architectural Importance

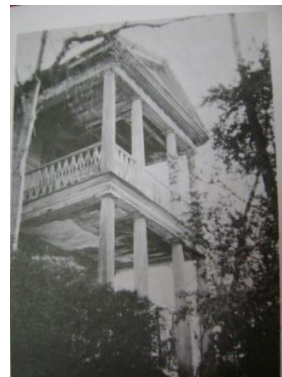
John H. Harding, William H. Harding, and Dr. William H. Harding built three large houses with Greek Revival double porticos and significantly, in the case of Clover Dale and Wheatland, designed with double porticos on both east and west facades. In addition, the influence of Springfield's Greek Revival double portico design was enhanced by its visibility in a prominent location in the county seat of Heathsville. These three houses had a considerable impact on Northumberland County architectural design in the nineteenth century.



Fig. 8 Wheatland (West & East Façade)



Fig. 9 Clover Dale (West Façade)



Wheatland was built between 1848-50 by Dr. William Hopkins Harding (1816-61). The focal point of Wheatland's three-part Palladian composition, a center block and two wings, was distinguished by the front and rear two-tier pedimented Doric porticos with refined Greek Revival and Federal (or Roman) style detailing (Fig.8). The two upper porticos, East and West, had identical pediments with large cornices, double rope moldings, a plain tympanum, and a wide entablature with a frieze of triglyphs, all elements of Greek Revival design. The entablature of the lower porticos was wide and plain, in the Greek Doric mode, but without triglyphs. The columns of the West portico were stockier and fluted in the Greek Doric style and on the East portico were slender and plain in the Roman Doric style. Fluted pilasters were aligned with the columns on the West façade. Plain pilasters lined up behind the columns on the East façade. On the West portico, the railings had fancy flat iron Rococo inspired

balusters in the new style that reflected the use of imported materials found in the wider world of Baltimore or Richmond. On the East portico the latticed balusters were of a Roman classical style like those used in earlier decades at Monticello. Above all four exterior doors, East and West, were transom windows with tracery that added another Greek Revival element. Wheatland's design program displayed a certain academic knowledge of Greek and Roman architecture and reflected the influence of recently published pattern books of Greek architectural design. In contrast to urban architecture of stone and plaster, Wheatland's use of board lumber construction by local carpenters in Northumberland County revealed the limits of building in a rural setting. Wheatland is important to the study of the Northern Neck's vernacular architecture because of its eclectic blend of Federal and Greek Revival stylistic elements and through its unique and elegant articulation of the classic double portico that defines the southern plantation house of the Greek Revival style. (O'Dell, J.) The house is also significant for its close relationship to at least two other notable Northumberland County farmhouses, Clover Dale and Springfield, erected by Harding kinsmen and designed by the same builder.

Clover Dale, was the home of John Hopkins Harding (1803-1875). Harding had the present structure, now in ruins, built between 1849-1850 and lived in it until his death. The basic plan of the house was typical of many Tidewater colonial buildings, a five-bay, center-hall plan with adjacent wings (Fig. 9). Clover Dale and its sister house, Wheatland, were almost identical in size, configuration, and Greek Revival design program. (Jett, D.) This antebellum house, like Wheatland, displayed a pedimented double portico in the new Greek Revival style on both front and rear facades. Clover Dale's two upper porticos had identical pediments with large cornices, double rope moldings, a plain tympanum, and a wide entablature with a frieze of triglyphs, all Greek Revival design elements. The lower entablature was wide and plain in a Greek Doric mode. The round fluted Greek Doric columns had square abacus, plain rounded capitals, and plinth bases. Fluted pilasters placed on the façade were aligned with two outer columns on both upper and lower porticos. Wooden latticed balusters in geometric diamond style were constructed in the same manner as those of Wheatland's East portico. Transom windows, elements of the Greek Revival, were above the upper and lower exterior doors. At Clover Dale, in contrast to Wheatland, each of the double porticos reflected only the Greek Doric order. The result was a Harding design program that displayed a polished and consistent presentation of the Greek Revival style. With their two "bountiful mansions," Wheatland and Clover Dale, the Hardings built their stately double porticos on both the land and the river facades, accomplishing a complete expression of Greek Revival classical design using both the architecture of the house and the landscape of the farm.



Fig. 10 *Springfield*

Springfield was the home of William H. Harding (1797-1878), one of the wealthiest men in

Northumberland County. The house, begun in 1828, was a brick mansion, visually similar to the second Williamsburg Capitol with its Greek Revival double portico and fancy balustrades (Fig. 10). The pedimented double portico and two wings were added in 1850s to the main block of the brick house by the same builder that worked at Wheatland and Cloverdale. The remodeled and enlarged Springfield was constructed in the Greek Revival style with design elements used at the other two Harding houses. The Greek Revival pediment of the upper portico had plain molded cornices and a tympanum with a lunette window. The wide plain entablature of the lower portico represented Greek Doric order. The round fluted columns with plain capitals and plinth bases were Greek Doric elements. Fluted pilasters were aligned behind the columns on the front façade in a Greek Revival mode. Between the columns were fancy iron Rococo style balusters continuing the new style. Transom windows over both lower and upper level exterior doors also reflected Greek Revival detailing. Springfield, with its dignified Greek Revival double portico, presents an enduring design legacy promoted by the Harding family and stands as an important architectural landmark in the county seat of Heathsville.

Interpretation of Greek Revival Double Portico by the Harding’s Northumberland County Friends

The Greek Revival architectural design of Wheatland, Clover Dale, and Springfield influenced many, including Harding Family friends. These friends and Northumberland County residents, Samuel Burgess, Henry Blundon, and Robert Blundon, built their own versions of Greek Revival double porticos during the antebellum period of 1840-1860 and the postbellum period of 1870-1890.



Fig. 11 Versailles



Fig. 12 Cherry Plain



Fig. 13 Arcadia



Versailles was built in 1855 by Samuel Burgess, the second son of the Reverend Benedict Burgess. The influential William H. Harding of Springfield was a Burgess family friend and

colleague. Samuel Burgess began building his house in 1853 only three years after the completion of the three Greek Revival inspired houses built by the Harding family. In typical Tidewater fashion, the Versailles façade was symmetrical with a two-story, single pile, five-bay, center-hall plan, built on a raised basement. (Fig. 11). Following the new Greek Revival style implemented by the Hardings, Samuel Burgess's house featured his own interpretation of a pedimented double portico, not an exact copy of those at Wheatland or Springfield. Specifically, the columns of the Versailles portico were converted to square piers with geometric capital blocks and plain plinth bases, a change from the round, tapered columns of the Harding double portico designs. Pilasters were aligned behind the columns and a transom window installed above first floor door in the manner of the Greek Revival. The cornices and entablature were plain in the Greek Doric mode, matching those of Wheatland. The wooden latticed balusters in a diamond pattern were constructed like those at Cloverdale and Wheatland. Elements of Versailles's board lumber construction, such as the square-wrapped columns and flat-sawn detailing, reflected the influence of published pattern books of Greek architectural design. Using these drawings, the rural and non-academic carpenters used by Burgess could construct the Greek Revival details. Notably, Versailles represents the two major influences on architectural design in antebellum Northumberland County, the Greek Revival architectural building programs of the Harding family and the prominence of Greek Revival architectural publications.

Cherry Plain was built by Henry Blundon in the 1880s. When he began to build Cherry Plain, Blundon used as his models Versailles and Springfield, a sign of the esteem in which he held his guardians the Reverend Benedict Burgess and William H. Harding. Part of Cherry Plain's footprint was a typical Tidewater I-house with a two-story, single pile, three-bay, center-hall plan (Fig. 12). The symmetrical façade inscrutably hid a two-story wing giving the house an overall L shape. The fashionable Greek Revival style—of ornamentation, massing, and simplicity of orders—was vigorously applied to the façade of this new structure. Blundon built his interpretation of a pedimented double portico with square-wrapped columns, plain architraves and plain cornices in the same Greek Doric mode used at Versailles. Pilasters were aligned behind the columns and rope moldings surrounded the doors of both stories with perhaps a nod to Wheatland. In a departure from previous precedents, the double portico featured a pediment with a broken cornice and a tympanum with a lunette window. Oversized modillions, a Greek Revival detail, were included on the entablature of the lower portico. Elaborate flat-sawn balusters and several other pieces of fancy scroll work adorned the portico. Finally, monumental pilasters were added to the corners of the two-story house reflecting a Greek Revival detail not seen in earlier Harding or Burgess efforts. Cherry Plain exemplified the board lumber construction taught in the Lefever pattern book of 1833, erecting square-wrapped columns, plain capitals and bases, and two-story corner pilasters in a columnar Grecian mode. The result was a Cherry Plain, that displayed a discriminating design program of Greek Revival detailing: a double portico with square columns, a broken pediment with simple entablatures, and the emphatic use of colossal order corner pilasters. Henry Blundon's personal expression of Greek Revival design at Cherry Plain was improved only by his son's interpretation at Arcadia.

Arcadia was enlarged in 1891, by Robert Blundon son of Henry Blundon. This Blundon house was built on the rectangular foundation of an 1811 house and intentionally planned to replicate Cherry Plain. Arcadia's Greek Revival pedimented double portico positioned on a raised basement gave the house a more commanding presence than Cherry Plain and a grand entrance like those of Wheatland, Springfield, and Versailles (Fig. 13). The eight square

columns with plain bases and capitals, the pilasters behind the columns, the front door with glazed side lights, and transom were articulated on the front façade with the same vitality employed at Cherry Plain. The stylized entablature of the cornice, formed a broken pediment that surrounded the tympanum and echoed Cherry Plain's design program. Arcadia's lunette window with fan sash placed in the tympanum of the pediment was a more strictly classical element than the louvered fanlight of the Cherry Plain pediment. One of the most remarkable decorative elements of both Blundon houses were the two-story, colossal-size corner pilasters, a Greek Revival mode rarely seen in the Northern Neck region. At Arcadia, the use of the pilasters accentuated the taller height of the building, and it gave the house a prominence not typical of the generic I-house. In contrast, Cherry Plain's exaggerated modillions and other elaborate scrollwork were not implemented at Arcadia. The Greek Revival details of the stylized double portico with square columns, a broken pediment with plain entablature, and two-story monumental corner pilasters were the principle embellishments of Arcadia's decorative scheme. Under the influence of the design precedent set by William Harding, Samuel Burgess, and Henry Blundon, Arcadia underwent a consequential change from a modest farmhouse with little to distinguish itself, to an elegant presentation of an architectural tradition with a significant robustness of form.

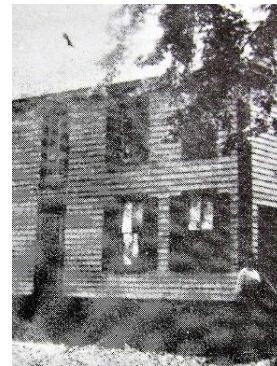
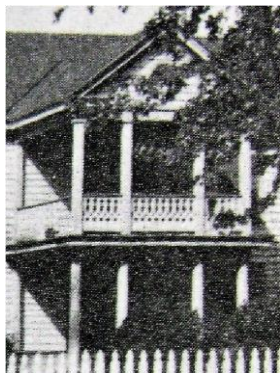
Additional houses with Greek Revival Portico's built by other Harding family members



Fig. 14 Tranquility



Fig. 15 Covelands



Tranquility was the home of Sally Sutton Harding Gaskins (1817-1860) and her husband, Charles Lee Gaskins (1806-1859) who built the original house. Sally was the niece of William H. Harding, John H. Harding, and first cousin of Dr. William H. Harding. Sally's son, Charles Lee Gaskins Jr. enlarged Tranquility around 1900. Influenced by his Harding relatives, Charles Jr. built a double portico on the front façade in the Greek Revival style (Fig. 14). The double portico featured plain cornices, pediment with lunette window, round columns with plain bases, fancy flat-sawn wooden balusters, and pilasters on the façade behind the columns. This is the Greek Revival design program frequently found on other Harding family houses.

Covelands was the home of Fereol Lemoine Harding (1854-1916) who built the house and lived there after his marriage in 1884. The photograph from 1914 shows Greek Revival monumental pilasters displayed as wide corner boards (Fig.15). The presence of shadows on the front façade indicate a no longer extant portico. The colossal order corner pilasters and the location of exterior doors on both the first and second stories indicate that a double portico rather than a single portico would have been constructed. As in all previous Harding houses the double portico was the main feature and the Greek Revival was the predominant style.



Fig. 16 Guarding Point



Fig. 17 Texas

Guarding Point was the home of John Hopkins Harding Jr. The farm was purchased by John Hopkins Harding Sr. of Clover Dale and given to his son. John H. Jr enlarged the house prior to 1860 from an old overseer's dwelling which is still encompassed in the back part of the current house. The double portico was added in the 1970s with Greek Revival details such as square columns, plain cornices, capitals, and bases, pilasters aligned behind the front columns, and a transom and side lights surrounding the lower front door (Fig. 16). Guarding Point's present form was clearly influenced by nearby Clover Dale's Greek Revival portico and paid homage to the Harding family's previous ownership.

Texas one of five plantations owned by Dr. William Hopkins Harding of Wheatland was purchased in 1852. The original nineteenth-century house had a center-hall plan, single pile, five-bay, gabled roof over an English basement (Fig. 17). The house, located across the road from Wheatland, was lived in by William H. Harding (1848-1884), son of Dr. William. The two-storied portico with Greek Revival detailing was added in mid-twentieth-century. Square columns, plain cornices, pilasters aligned behind the front columns, and an interesting solid cove molded baluster railing. The form reflects a later interpretation of the double portico, but retains the influence of Wheatland and the Hardings.

Conclusion

A number of prosperous Northern Neck farmers of antebellum and postbellum Virginia embraced a combination of the "beautiful"—their interpretation of classical design using Greek Revival details for their houses—and the "pastoral"—using the activities of farm life to imbue their rural setting. In Northumberland County, when members of the wealthy Harding family placed double porticos on both the land side and the river side of their houses, as Jefferson did at Monticello, they created a statement of design that merged both elegant architecture and the pastoral landscape of the Northern Neck. The importance of the Harding family's influence on the architecture of Northumberland County lay in their discriminating use of Greek Revival style architecture for their Wheatland, Clover Dale, and Springfield

houses that reflected the finest examples of the antebellum builders' art. (O'Dell, J.) The Hardings put forward a unique vision that greatly influenced many others to build their own expressions of the double portico in the Greek Revival style. The effect was a plethora of houses that profoundly and eloquently captured both the Greek pastoral ideal of beauty and a nineteenth-century farmer's vision of rural virtue that defined the southern plantation house.

From Palladio, to Monticello, to the Greek Revival designs of the Hardings, the development of the double portico in Virginia's architecture can be followed. "The significance of the Greek Revival portico on nineteenth and twentieth century architectural design both in Virginia and the rest of America cannot be overstated. The Greek Revival portico endowed this country with an architectural tradition unsurpassed in dignity and monumental quality. At its base is the love of the simple, austere, refined and chastened in architecture and it remains one of the distinctive American contributions to style." (Kimball, F.)

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Fig. 1,2. Farber, Joseph C., *Palladio's Architecture and Its Influence*, Dover Publ. 1980. p.13,14. With permission.

Fig. 3. Waterman, Thomas Tileston, *The Mansions of Virginia 1706-1776*, Un. Of N.C. Press, 1945. p.346-347. Fig. 3. With permission. Historic American Building Survey. (HABS) (Public Domain)

Fig. 4,7. Yetter, George Humphrey, *Williamsburg Before and After: The Rebirth of Virginia's Colonial Capital*, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Virginia, 1988. p.77,178. With permission.

Fig. 6. Benjamin, Asher, *The American Builder's Companion*, Dover Publ., New York, Sixth ed. 1827. Plate D. (Public Domain)

Fig. 8,11,16,17. Wolf Thomas A., *Historic Sites in Virginia's Northern Neck and Essex County*, Un. Of Virginia Press, 2011. p.120,132,133,146. With permission.

Fig.9. Jett, David, *A Shifting Symbol: Cloverdale and the Greek Revival Style in the Northern Neck of Virginia*, NCHS Bulletin. p.12-18. With permission.

Fig. 14,15. Waring, Lucy Lemoine, *Hardings of Northumberland County, Virginia and Their Related Families*, NCHS. 1971.p.95-132. With permission.

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