

SM-72
SAVONA
Chaptico
Private

Budd's Creek Road (MD 234)
Rock Point Quad

early 19th century

This two-part house consists of a frame main block and a separate brick kitchen of circa 1805-1815. A later brick arcade connects the two structures. The main block is two stories high and five bays long and has a pair of double chimneys with two-story pents at each end.

Two 19th century frame tenant houses and a tobacco barn remain on the property. The latter dates from circa 1800 or before, although some of its early timbers have been replaced, most notably along the south wall.

SM-72B Savona Tobacco House

Constructed
Spring-Summer, 1803

This long, but unpretentious building is an excellent example of fully evolved "four foot work" Virginia framing. Eighteen feet wide and 72 feet long, this barn is framed in six, 12 ft. bays, each of which consists of three, 4 ft. rooms. The size of the house may have been scaled down during construction. The numbering system of the post braces suggests that it was to have been eight bays (96 ft.) long, and the south side was framed as an aisle wall with heavy horizontal runners to support the tier poles of the house and a shed. That this shed was never added seems conclusive. Under a later granary addition, the south rafters reveal the nail scars of lath for long shingles. The remainder of the much rebuilt south wall is now open.* (The upper third is vertically planked. The lower two-thirds is open so that the building can be used as a wagon and cattle shed.) The north side and end walls are studded for horizontal boarding. The north wall has a single door, five feet wide, near the center.

Except for heavy bracing (both longitudinal and transverse), the house frame is modest. Its sills are supported on low, hole-set locust blocks. While the blocks are modern, presumably they replace earlier blocks. The house is three tiers high with another three partial tiers in the roof. Diagonal false plates support rafters on two foot centers. The rafters are half-lapped and nailed at their apices, and every other couple supports three half-lapped collars. Rafters, collars, studs, and braces are pit-sawn.

This tobacco house was constructed with wrought nails. Prior to tree-ring dating, it could be dated to only c.1800 or before, and definitely before 1825. Now, with a precise construction date, we can understand it as another product of the good tobacco prices that prevailed from 1796 through 1808.

References:

SM-72B, Architectural files, St. Mary's City Commission
Carson, Field Notes
_____. "Savona Tobacco House."
Stone, Field Notes, 1979

Marks, "Economy and Society," p.92.

* Alternately, the south wall may have been runnered so that it could be left open for ventilation and access, as at two tobacco barns of c.1835 and 1850 at the Vineyard (SM-225 A & B). This seems less likely, however, as the bottom runner, pegged in place, would have seriously impeded access for carts and sheep.

THE KEY-YEAR DENDROCHRONOLOGICAL
PATTERN FOR THE OAKS OF
MARYLAND'S WESTERN SHORE 1570-1980

American Institute of
Dendrochronology

APPENDIX

Building Descriptions

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Historic St. Mary's City

1987

[Savona]
TOBACCO HOUSE (SM-72 B)

Circa 1800 or before.

A six bay, framed tobacco house, 18'2" X 72'3". N wall original and largely intact: seven 10'6" posts, each tension-braced in two directions, once to the sill and again to the sleeper; all sills renewed and supported on short, locust piers; posts and studs morticed and tenoned to a four piece wall plate joined with face-halved scarfs with under-squinted butts and five edge-pegs; original doorway (occupying half of third bay) recently removed to admit heavy equipment.

S wall much renewed and rebuilt: sill removed, center section of plate and fourth, fifth, and sixth posts replaced, inward facing tension-braces re-mounted. Yet enough remains to show that this rear wall was framed altogether differently than the N wall. Angle braces in the surviving first and last bays connect posts to plate. These short, straight braces were not morticed and tenoned, but instead either pegged through the toe (first and second posts) or toe nailed (sixth and seventh). Nor were there ever any studs along the S wall, their place taken instead by heavy horizontal side rails, now mostly renewed. Arranged in three tiers (the lowest only 1'6" from the ground), these were tenoned into closed mortices in the corner posts and braces and pegged into open-sided mortices in the intermediate posts. All things considered--the upward turning angle braces, these fully framed side rails, and the absence of any evidence of a lateral sill--the S wall was probably built as an aisle wall, flanked along its entire length by a shedded leanto, which has since disappeared. In that case, the heavy side rails were needed to support the ends of two sets of tier poles, those that

spanned the width of the barn and those in the shed. By contrast, the side rails along the N wall are 1 X 7" boards, merely nailed (with wrought nails and hence original) to the studs.

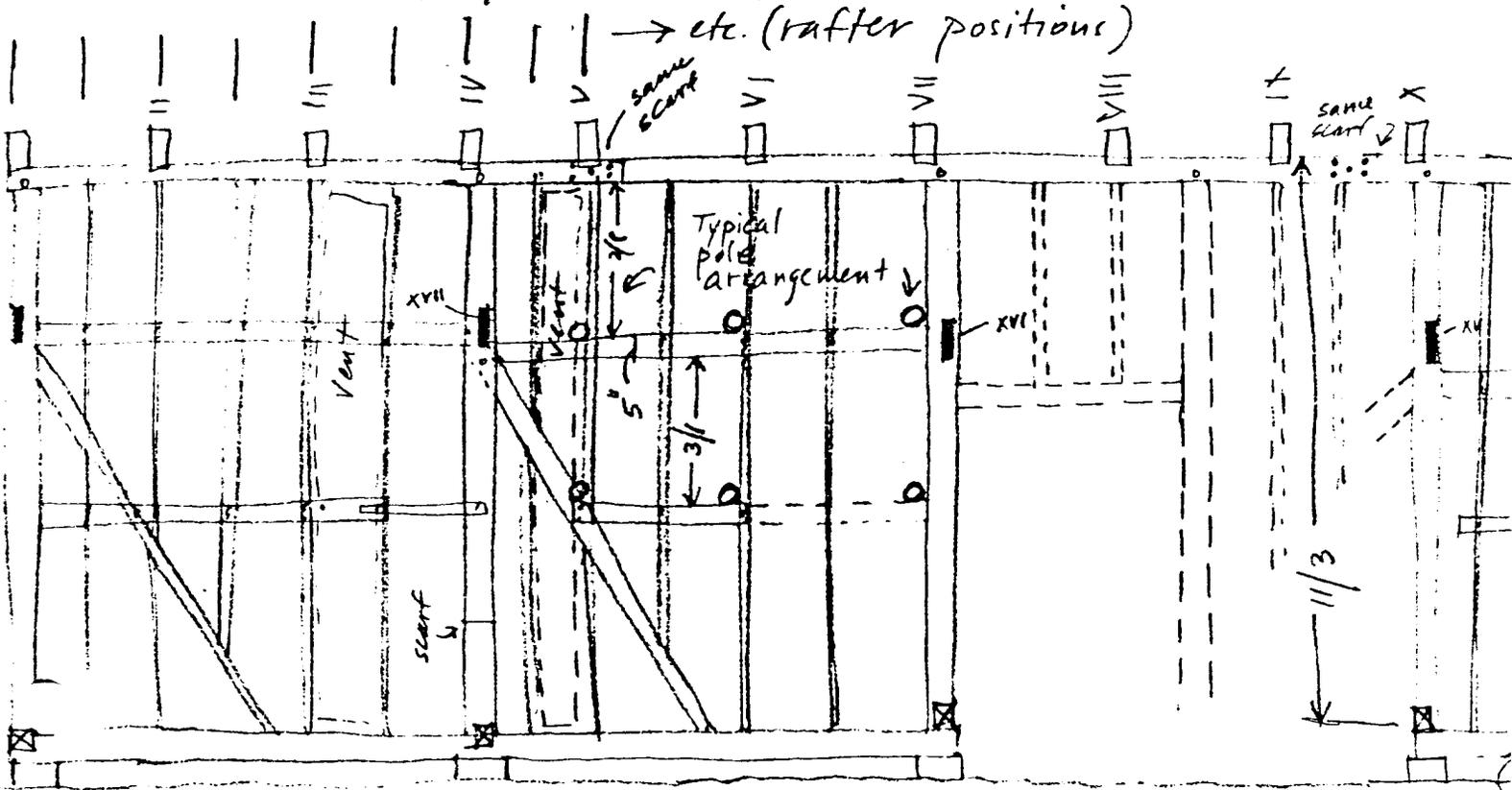
Thirty-seven common rafter trusses frame the roof. Each is half-lapped and nailed at the ridge and collared in three tiers (again, half-lapped and nailed). The rafter feet are nailed to tilted false plates, which are notched and pegged to the extended ends of the tie beams. An upright brace, known locally as a _____, stands on each tie beam, is half-lapped over the lowest collar, and nailed to the one above. It serves to stiffen the lower (and longest) collar beams against the weight of the green crop hung from them. From ridge to floor the body of the barn stores tobacco six tiers high, the 12' bays being wide enough to accommodate at each level three poles spaced four feet apart (the length of tobacco sticks everywhere in southern Maryland except Prince Georges County, where they are often five).

There is some indication that the structure may once have had an eighth and a ninth bay at the E end, making it approximately 96' long overall. Roman numerals scratched in the transverse tension-braces start with XVIII in the NW corner and run consecutively to XII (although the twelfth brace has actually been moved and reused in the S wall). Only by conjecturing two more bays and two more numbered braces along the N wall--XI and X--will an equal number of posts and braces on the opposite wall come out evenly with Roman numeral I in the SE corner. On the other hand, such an alteration, if it really took place, happened early, for the tier rails nailed to the E gable studs are the same size as the side rails on the N wall and are fastened with the same hand-made nails. Unluckily, the consecutively numbered tie beams are no help in resolving the problem, because their numerals also run from W to E.

A small, cereal grain storage shed, attached to the rear of the first bay, followed the older shed's removal. When recorded, the barn's ¹⁾⁹ N wall was covered with modern vertical planks, some of which were hinged for use as louvres.

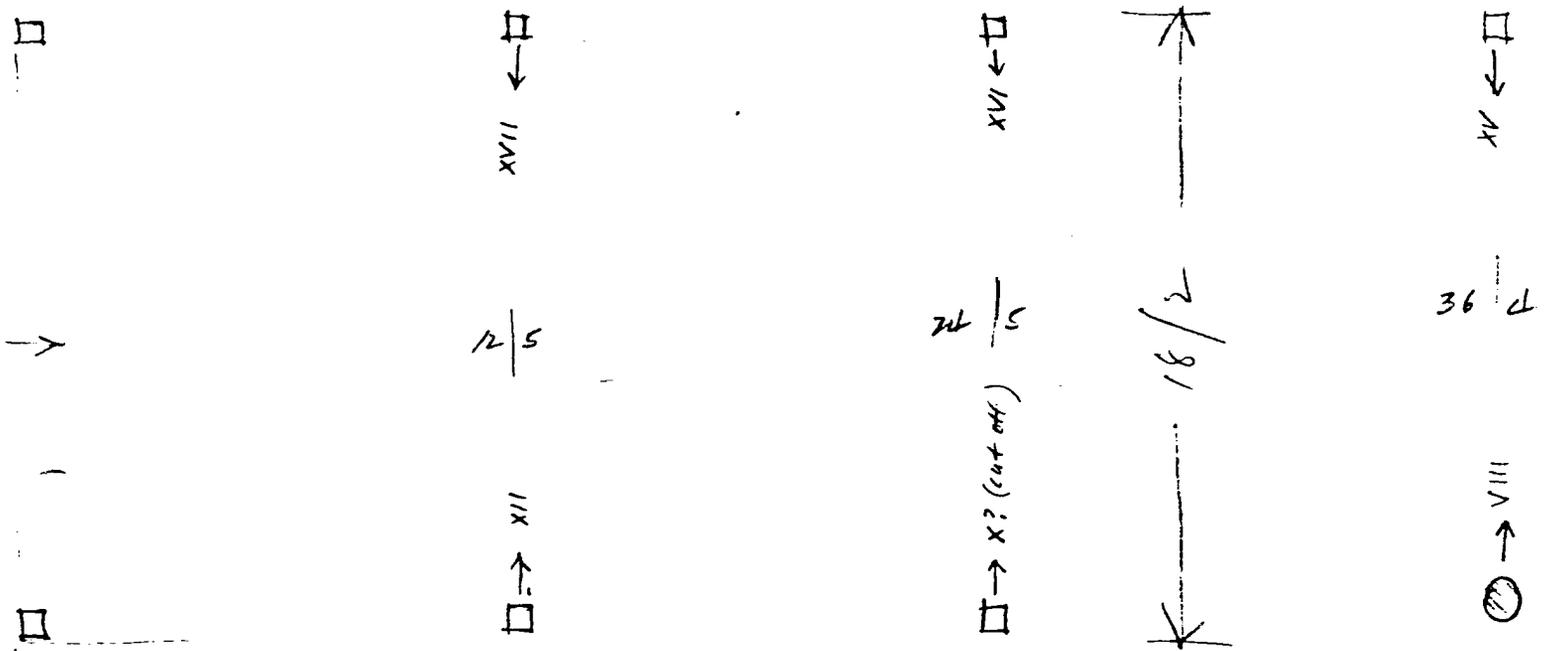
Nails provide the only dating evidence, and they are more negative than positive. The absence of a single machine-made nail in any primary context argues forceably for a construction date before c.1825, but how much before is anybody's guess. The barn could be contemporary with the house, but it exhibits no features that we might not expect in an 18th-century tobacco house or even one built in the 17th century.

TABACCO HOUSE, SAVONA



unbending
 --- 10 for a minimum
 --- 1] 8 bay beam

dim. of
 □ = tr.
 ▬ = Do

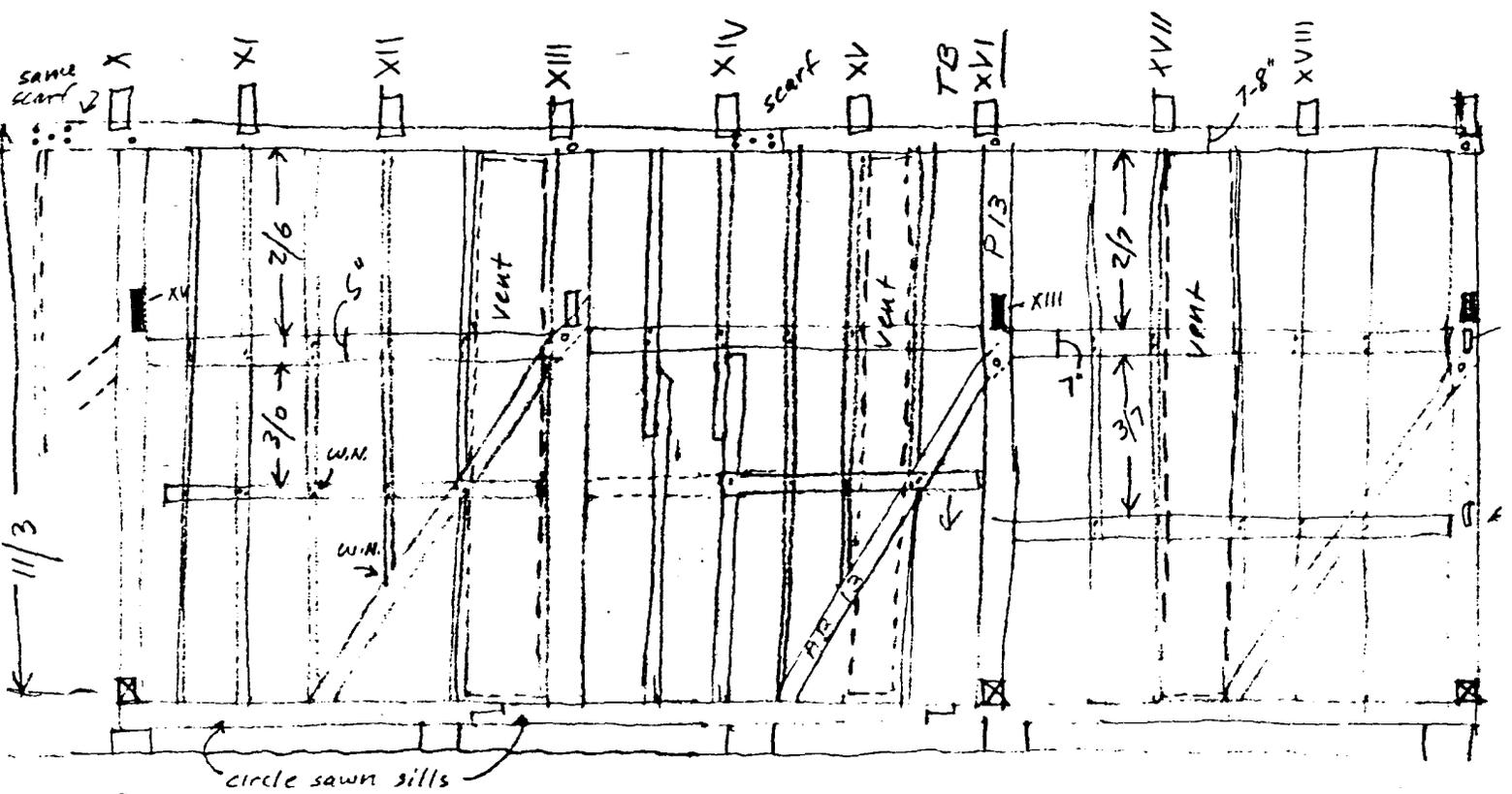


Later structure grain str.

TB = tie-beam + original Roman #
 P = Post + modern # [Left: TAB#]
 TAB = Traverse angl-bruce + Roman #
 AB = Angl: Bruce + modern #

ous: 72/3 x 18/2

TOP VIEW



DI. 11. 22 = wrought nail

⊠ = definitely replacements

⊠ = transverse sills replacements.

▬ = Downturning angle braces

