



FRASCATI ca. 1823

*Mrs. John C. Barrow*

Frascati stands on land acquired by the Todd and Barbour families during the 18th century. In 1806, Thomas Barbour deeded over 800 acres, the nucleus of the original Frascati tract, to his son Philip Pendleton Barbour. The land was leased back to the elder Barbour, who continued to live on the tract until 1821; an earlier house which was his residence no longer stands. The present Frascati house was completed in 1823 for Philip P. Barbour and his wife, Frances, daughter of Col. Benjamin Johnson of Bloomingdale near Somerset. The Frascati name (often spelled Frescati by the Barbours), like nearby Montpelier and Monticello, is a reminder of the 18th and early 19th century fashion for conferring romantic French and Italian names upon plantations.

Like his brother, James Barbour of nearby Barboursville, Philip P. Barbour was a public servant of great distinction. He served as a member of the

Virginia Assembly, as Judge of both District and Superior Courts, and as President of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1829. He was a member, and eventually Speaker, of the United States House of Representatives. For the last eight years of his life he served as a Justice of the United States Supreme Court, commuting between Washington D.C. and Frascati. He died in 1841, and the property passed out of the Barbour family by several deeds between 1847 and 1849.

The next owner of Frascati was Col. James Magruder, later President of the Blue Ridge Turnpike (now Rt. 231), a portion of which ran through the Frascati plantation. A tragic local figure, Col. Magruder lost four of his five sons and his son-in-law to the Civil War. Perhaps unable to live with the memories attendant at Frascati, he sold the estate in 1863. The property changed hands a number of times in the next four decades

before being acquired in 1902 by Elaine duPont Irving. Frascati remained in the hands of her descendants until it was purchased by Rear Admiral and Mrs. John C. Barrow in 1980.

The Frascati house still stands much as it was built. It was begun in 1821, soon after Philip Pendleton Barbour contracted with master builder John Perry to construct his new dwelling. Perry had previously worked for Thomas Jefferson at Monticello and the University of Virginia, and the agreement for the new Frascati house required "The brick work to be equal to any...at the University."

The house is a large, nearly square dwelling, built in the Jeffersonian Classical style. Of brick laid in Flemish bond, it stands two stories high over an English basement and is topped by a hipped roof. The plan is quite conventional--two rooms deep on either side of the central stairhall--but the construction and decoration of the house is outstanding. True to the terms of the builder's contract, the brickwork is extremely fine, and the woodwork on the doors and windows, as well as the carefully proportioned, pedimented portico, are in the strict Classical tradition. Nearly a century after its construction, Orange County historian W.W. Scott noted that it was built "of such excellent material and with such fine workmanship that it is said the floors will hold water like a bucket."

Original woodwork on the interior of the

house includes wainscoting, the stairway, and ornately carved, reeded and columned Classical mantels, as well as the massive front doorway and hallway arch, which rise from floor to ceiling, breaking through the hand-carved wooden cornice. The monumental effect of this entry hall must have been heightened still more by the original wall treatment: the entire hall was once marbelized to resemble cut blocks of pale, polished stone.

The front room to the north of the hall, probably the original reception room or parlor, boasts plasterwork which is among the finest in the area. Deep cornices are enriched with delicate swags and rich moldings, while in the center of the ceiling is an immense plaster medallion of cherubs, grapes and tobacco leaves.

Legend relates that serpentine walls, similar to those at the University of Virginia, once enclosed the Frascati gardens. An early rendering of the house shows it surrounded by the numerous out-buildings that held all the activities of a large plantation. None of these survive today, with the exception of the brick kitchen that stands south of the main house. A story-and-a-half high, with a mousetooth cornice and pedimented gable ends, it is the sole survivor of what must have been an extremely elegant plantation complex, as this out-building is more well-made and attractive than many small dwellings of the period.