

**Locust Grove-Shirley House, built 1841 by William B. Willis  
(back house possibly ca.1810 log house?)**

**Resource History**

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**Note: The 1925 map of Jefferson County shows several farms named Locust Grove, one is just outside of Summit Point near Mt. Ellen and due south of the Locust Grove farm eventually owned by the Shirley family. The name Locust Grove on this (Shirley) farm dates back to at least 1832 (Davenport heirs to Carver & William B. Willis, DB 17/409).**

Locust Grove was part of the very large, but discontinuous, John Davenport estate. When Davenport died about 1815, his land was divided by a Chancery Court decree in 1816 (JC DB 10/110). Locust Grove was part of the 180-acre dower tract, which implies this was Davenport's home farm at the time of his death. In 1832 the Locust Grove farm was described as 336 acres of the 446 acres purchased by John Davenport from John Bates and Lawrence Washington.

No deed from Bates to Davenport could be found, however the 1790 Berkeley County Land Tax listed John Bates with 537 acres "of Col. Samuel Washington's Executors." This was likely part of the Rich Woods tract of 790 acres, purchased by Laurence Washington from Robert Worthington in 1748 (FC DB 1/413). Samuel Washington inherited the tract from his father Laurence. Richwood Hall and Cedar Lawn are both located on this tract.

Lawrence Washington was the son of Samuel Washington and inherited from his father at least part of the Rich Woods tract. Davenport recorded several deeds from Lawrence Washington in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One in August 1803 was for 60 acres, part of the Worthington to Washington 1748 tract called Rich Woods, and another for 19 ½ acres of the same land. Apparently, the rest of the Locust Grove land came from Bates.

**1798** – John Davenport was assessed on the Berkeley County House Tax for one house "near Bulskin" [sic] valued at \$157.50. This house was probably on his other tract adjoining George Washington's Rock Hall.

From 1790 to 1801, John Davenport was assessed for two tracts of land one 195 acres and the other 114 acres.

John Davenport sold part of this (186 acres) to his son Benjamin before his death around 1815 (see Mt. Ellen report). Again, no deed was found for this transaction and that is likely why the estate went to Chancery – the suit was brought by Benjamin Davenport, probably in order to retain his 186 acres without a dower reservation.

**1802** – John Davenport was assessed for his 195-acre and 114-acre tracts, and for a new tract of 358 acres. This would be the land purchased from John Bates. In 1804, another parcel of 79

acres was added to his assessment – the total of the two tracts Davenport purchased from Lawrence Washington (see above).

The 1810 tax assessment noted from whom each of these tracts came: 114 acre “of Cloke,” 195 acres “of McCormick,” 318 acres “of Bates,” and 79 acres “of Washington.”

**1810** – On the census John Davenport was listed near Smith Slaughter (Richwood Hall) and Harfield Timberlake (Shenston). Davenport was 45+ years old, with one female of the same age (wife), one female and one male aged 16-25, and three female children (probably a son or daughter & family). There were also ten slaves in the household.

Benjamin Davenport (26-44), with a wife, two infant boys and five slaves, was listed near Nathan Haines, Thomas West, John Lock, and Thomas Griggs in the Rock Hall area. Beginning in 1806, Benjamin was assessed for 5 acres of land. By 1814, his father John had transferred the 114-acre and 195-acre tracts (Mt. Ellen) to Benjamin on the tax record, although no deed of conveyance was recorded.

**1815** – John Davenport was deceased but his estate (“Adm.”) was assessed for a house in Jefferson County valued at \$300 over the \$500 minimum (\$800 total).

**1816** – The Chancery Court divided John Davenport’s estate, dividing Locust Grove into the 180-acre dower tract to the widow Eleanor, with adjoining 52-acre parcels to the children, Lot No. 1 to George, Lot No. 2 to Adrian, Lot No. 3 to “K. Davenport”, Lot No. 4 to “N. Davenport”, and Lot No. 5 to “E. Davenport.” (JC DB 10/110; see attached plat)

**1820** – The census listed Eleanor Davenport, widow, aged 45+, with four adult females and one infant female in the household. She also had five slaves.

Her tax assessment for 1820 listed her dower land of 180 acres with a building value of \$500. Her daughters, Catherine, Nancy and Elenor [sic] each had 52, 53, and 57 acres respectively, none with any building value. Son Adrian, now deceased, had 104 acres (including George’s 52 acres) without buildings.

It was likely these three unmarried daughters and the widow of her son Adrian who were represented in the census household.

Benjamin Davenport, whose 380 acres adjoining John Lock included his 186 acres purchased from his father, plus the remaining acreage purchased from other heirs, was assessed for a building value of \$2,500 (see Mt. Ellen).

**1832** – The widow Eleanor Davenport retained her dower tract of 180 acres with a building value in the tax records of \$500 until her death, probably in 1831.

Eleanor (Davenport) Gaskins of Fauquier County, Nancy (Davenport) Ransell, and Catherine (Davenport) Fickler, sold the then 336-acre Locust Grove to Carver and William B. Willis for \$5,482 (JC DB 17/409).

The 1833 tax record for Carver and William B. Willis was for 336  $\frac{3}{4}$  acres with a \$500 building value. Beginning in 1834, William B. Willis alone was assessed the tax on the Locust Grove farm.

**1841** – William B. Willis' tax valuation for the buildings on his 336 acres rose to \$800 without explanation. **The following year (1842) the valuation rose again to \$3,694 with the notation "\$2,694 added for new house."**

**1850** – In April, William B. Willis and his wife Fanny Beale Willis sold the Locust Grove farm to Thomas H. Willis (of Rock Hall) for \$50 per acre or \$17,000 (DB 31/146).

Beginning in 1845, William and Thomas Hite Willis as partners purchased and developed the Hopewell Mills on the Shenandoah River at Little's Falls. The investment apparently did not work out for William.

On October 1, 1851, Thomas H. Willis sold the Locust Grove farm to Robert V. Shirley for \$17,000 (DB 32/91). Shirley's 1852 tax assessment valued the buildings on the 340-acre farm at \$3,000.

By 1914, Robert V. Shirley was deceased. In 1915 his real estate was partitioned among his heirs, the Locust Grove farm going to George T. Shirley (DB 113/4). Today the "Shirley House" sits on 54 acres of the original 446-acre Locust Grove farm and is owned by John P. Creamer III (DB 929/367)