

# Alms (Dean's) House

1616 College Avenue

**Date Constructed (major alterations):**

1877

**Original (primary) Function:**

Residence

**Current (primary) Function:**

Residence

**Architect(s):**

?



Figure 1: Image showing 1616 College Avenue, the old Alms House, as it stands today, 2012. (Spencer, 2012)

## Alms House History:

By: Michael Spencer

Mr. Frank Beckwith is noted in January of 1877 as constructing a "...handsome frame residence..." on Mayre's Heights.<sup>1</sup> While initially a residence, a case of small pox in the fall of 1882 alarmed the citizens of Fredericksburg enough that the property was purchased for the sum of \$1,700, with the intent of moving the patient there as soon as possible. The following year the residence was enlarged to 3,800 sq. ft. to house the poor of Fredericksburg.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, a structure for "the colored poor" was also built behind the main structure at that time but burned in 1910 after a lighting strike.<sup>3</sup> Adding to the value of the property were "several outhouses" as well as "a good well and well house".<sup>4</sup> Today the grassy area between Randolph and Mason Residence halls on the University of Mary Washington campus marks the original location of the Alms house.

From the start the Fredericksburg Normal School (UMW) had its eyes on the Alms House tract, owned by the City of Fredericksburg. The master plan at the time called for obtaining the property as soon as possible in order to begin construction of the President's home, Marye House. This process proved to be somewhat contentious and ultimately a joint committee of citizens and elected officials was established to make a recommendation to the City Council. Taking E.G. Heflin's June 26, 1910 inspection and valuation of the Alms House structures into consideration, the joint committee recommended sale of 9.5 acres along with the Alms House buildings to the Fredericksburg Normal School for \$5,000 in a letter dated June 27, 1910. Noted in the same letter are stipulations that the city retain access to the reservoir site as well as "reserve the right to a reasonable amount of time, in which to make the transfer of the city Alms House to another site."<sup>5</sup> However, despite the recommendation it was not until December 15, 1910 that the City of Fredericksburg passed a formal resolution agreeing to

<sup>1</sup> The Virginia Star, January 31, 1877, pg 3 col. 2

<sup>2</sup> Quinn, *The History of the City of Fredericksburg*, pg 173-174; E.G. Heflin, Letter to St. George R. Fitzhugh, "Inspection of Alms House Property", June 27, 1910. (UMW Special Collections)

<sup>3</sup> The Free Lance, June 8, 1910 pg 3 col. 2

<sup>4</sup> E.G. Heflin, Letter to St. George R. Fitzhugh, "Inspection of Alms House Property", June 27, 1910. (UMW Special Collections); The total value of the structures on the property was estimated by Heflin to be \$4,030 excluding the land in 1910. During the moving of the Alms House it seems as though the original Beckwith house was used as the Deans house whereas the addition added in 1883 was moved behind Marye House.

<sup>5</sup> Joint Committee Letter dated June 27, 1910 to the Fredericksburg City Council (UMW Special Collections)

this recommendation with one important divergence.<sup>6</sup> Rather than the 9.5 acres originally proposed, the city would only sell 6.9 acres. The resolution also more specifically stipulated that the city would continue “to occupy the property for several months until the question of another site is settled by the council.”<sup>7</sup> Legally the Alms house complex along with 6.9 acres was acquired by the Normal School on February 2, 1911 for \$4,850, however due to the prior arrangement with the city, the property did not “pass into the hands of the board of said school [until] Saturday, April 1 [1911].”<sup>8</sup>

However, before construction could begin on the President’s home, the Alms House needed to be moved. Rather than demolish the structure the original portion of the Alms House, constructed by the Beckwith’s in 1877 was moved slightly downhill to the north to where Marye House stands today. This structure served as the Dean’s house until the mid 1930s when it was moved again to 1616 College Avenue, immediately across from Seacobeck.<sup>9</sup> The later 1883 addition was also moved, albeit to the west of the site and would serve as faculty housing until it too was moved again in the 1930s with the faculty annex to the corner of College Avenue and Dandridge Streets, across from the College Avenue gates.<sup>10</sup> Over the course of its two moves, the Alms House has seen a number of changes; however, the general form of the building remains intact, with the three bay front façade and the long low sloping roof.

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<sup>6</sup> Fredericksburg Clerks Office, Deed book 78 pg 301-304

<sup>7</sup> Daily Star, March 31, 1911, pg. ? col. ?

<sup>8</sup> Fredericksburg Clerks Office, Deed book 78 pg 301-304; Daily Star, March 31, 1911, pg. ? col. ?

<sup>9</sup> Alvey, History of Mary Washington, pg 173; Images indicate that the Dean’s House was moved to its present location between 1928 and 1935.

<sup>10</sup> Alvey, History of Mary Washington, pg 149

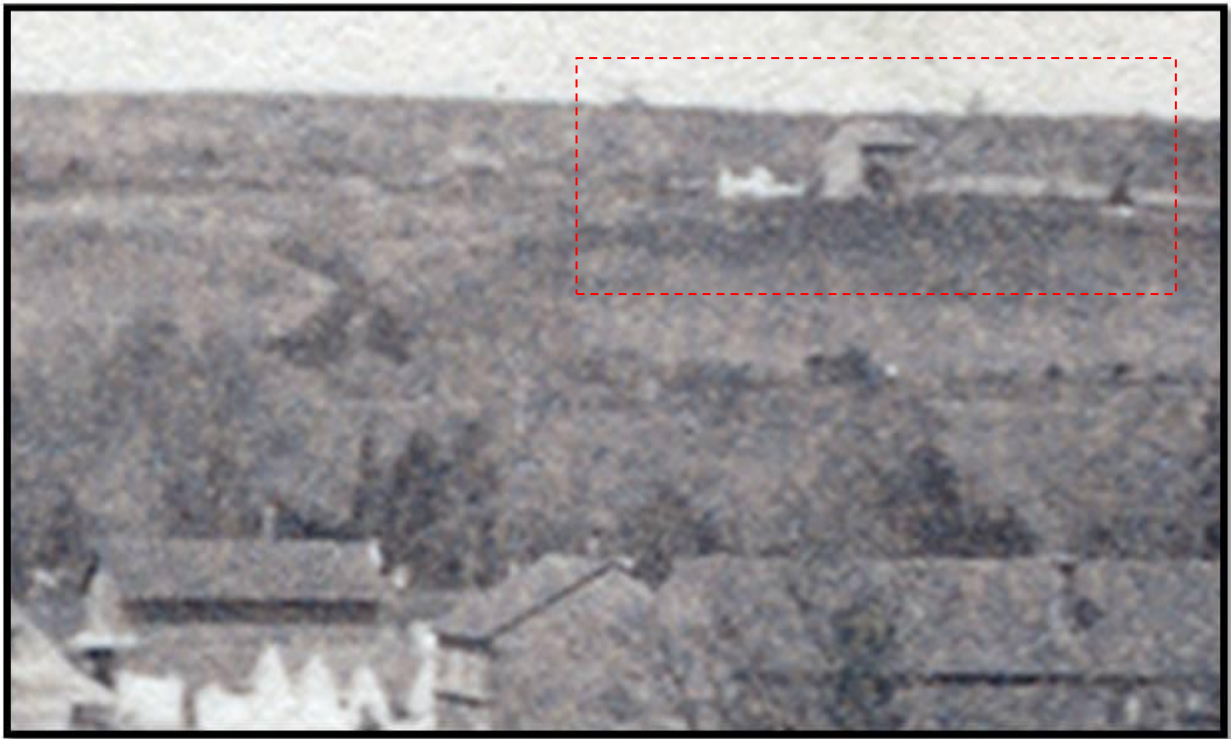


Figure 2: The first known image of the Alms House, taken from St. George's steeple in 1888. Distinguishable in the image are the three bays and doorway located on the left side of the structure. There appear to be steps leading to this entrance. The white structure on the left may be the colored alms house, also on the site. White fencing appears on the right side.

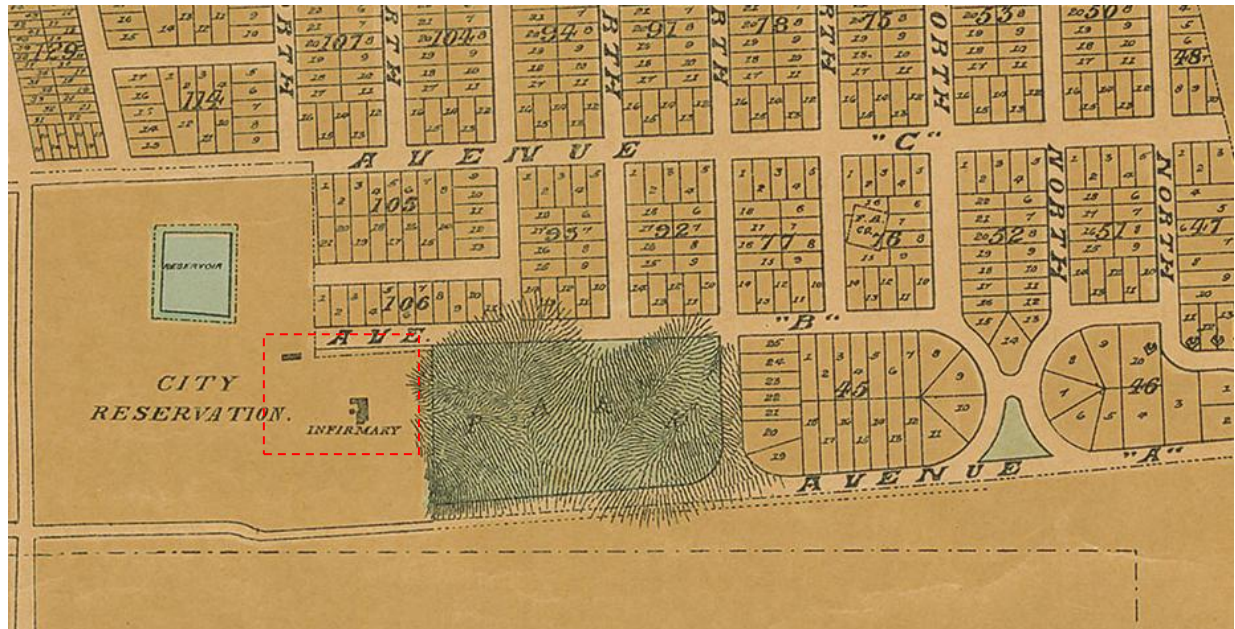


Figure 2: This plat was developed by the Fredericksburg Development Company in 1891, however the company folded a few years later never fully instituting their plan. However, some existing structures were noted in the plat including the infirmory or Alms House (red box). The rectangular attachment on the back of the large structure is likely the 1883 addition, which is detached and moved along with the old, Beckwith portion of the structure in 1912. The other rectangular structure in the upper left of the box is most likely the colored alms house, also seen in the 1888 image (above).





Fredericksburg. va. June, 27, 1910.

Mr. St. Geo. R. Fitz Hugh,

Dear Sir:-

Pursuant to your request, I have visited the City Alms House, and beg to report as follows:

The present Alms House has about 1900 Sq. feet of floor space in each story, and figuring the cost by the square feet, at \$2.00 per foot for ground plan for two story frame building, of this kind of construction, would mean a new building of this size would cost \$3800.00).

I have used the square feet price in quite a number of cases, in getting approximate price of buildings, and this price is certainly within 5 % of exact cost to build.

I also find that there are several Outhouses on the property, that should be valued at about \$200.00.)

There is also a good well and well house, and value of well house is also about \$30.00.)

Respectfully E. G. Heflin.

A Copy: + Teste.

*E. G. Heflin*

Figure 4: This letter from E. G. "Peck" Heflin describes the square footage and value of the Alms House property prior to purchase by the Normal School. (UMW Special Collections)



State Normal School  
Fredericksburg, Va.

May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1912.

My Dear Mr Russell;  
Considering our  
recent conversation regarding  
the cottage which is being moved  
from the old poor house site, I  
desire to make application to  
rent the above named cottage  
this coming year.

Cordially yours  
Olive M Hinkman



RIDGE CREST—HOME OF THE PRESIDENT

Figure 5: The above letter from Olive Hinkman reads, "My Dear Mr. Russell, Considering our recent conversation regarding the cottage which is being moved from the old poor house site, I desire to make application to rent the above named cottage this coming year. Respectfully yours, Olive M. Hinkman". The image on the left, ca. 1912-13 shows the top of the Alms House to the right of "Ridge Crest" also known as Marye House. (UMW Special Collections, Normal School Bulletin)

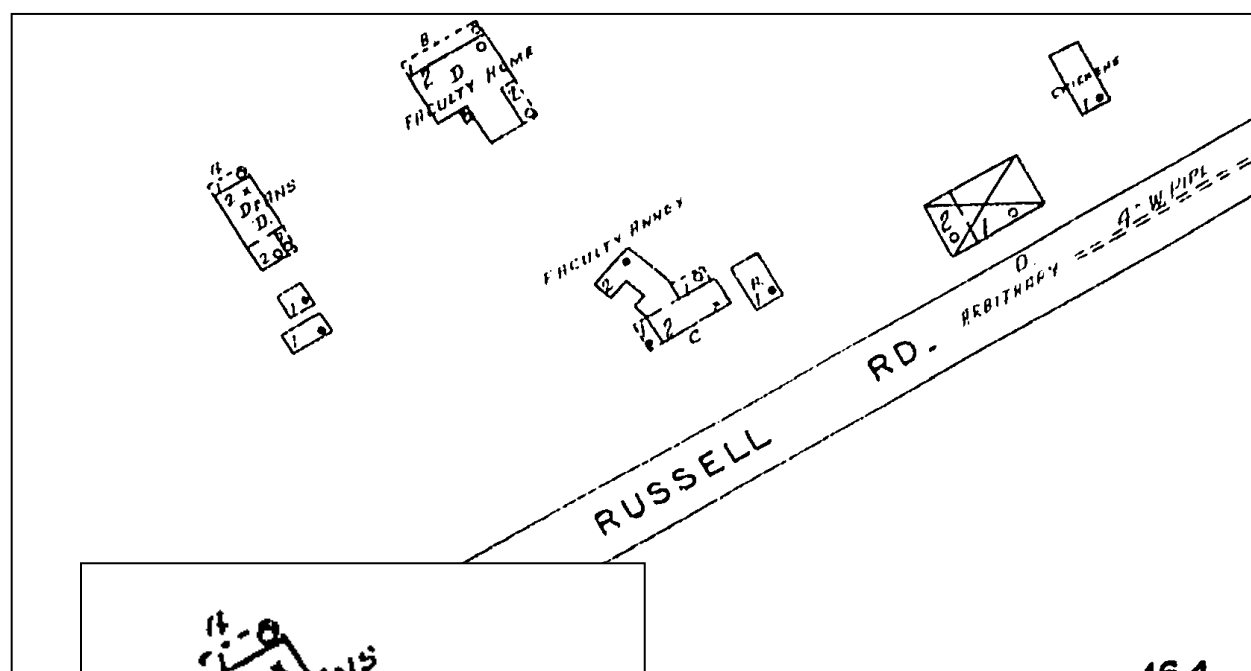
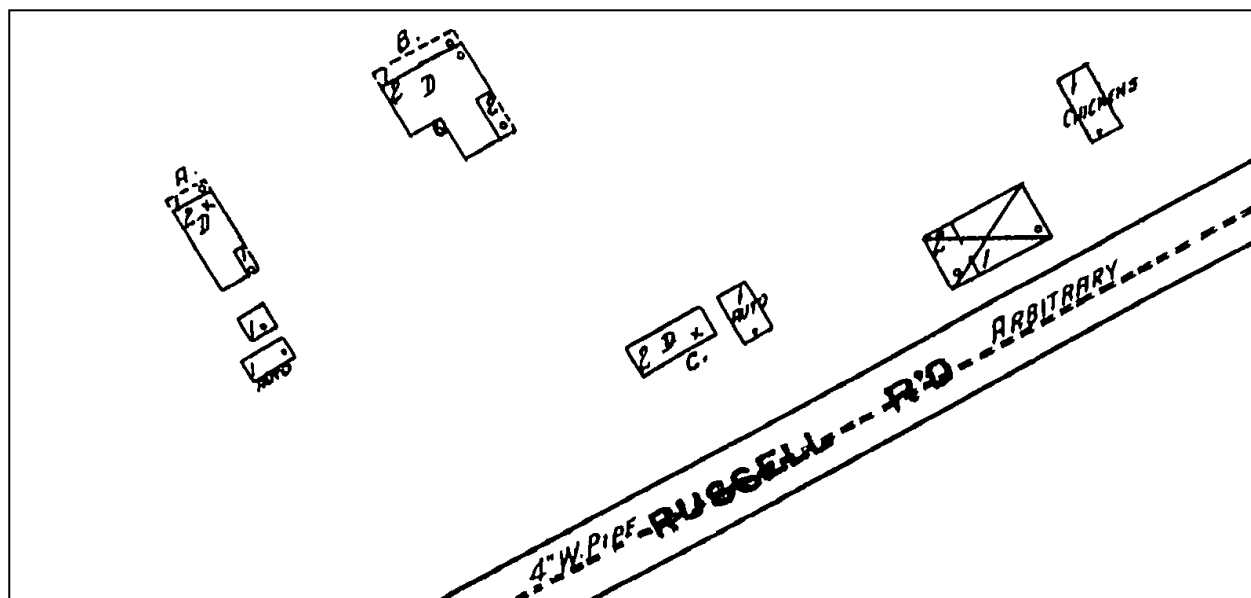


Figure 6: These images are from the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, the top dating to 1919 and the bottom 1927. Notations on the structure indicate that it is a two story building with a 1-story front porch. The later image also labels the structure "Deans". Also of note on the 1927 image is the Faculty Annex, of which the rectangular portion was likely once part of the Alms House, added in 1883. This particular building was separated and now resides at the corner of Dandridge and College Avenue.



Figure 7: This is an image from the 1924 Battlefield yearbook showing the front, or at the time, east facing elevation of the structure.





Figure 8: This is an image from the 1923 Battlefield yearbook showing the Alms House, then the Deans House in the background. Further in the distance is Marye House.

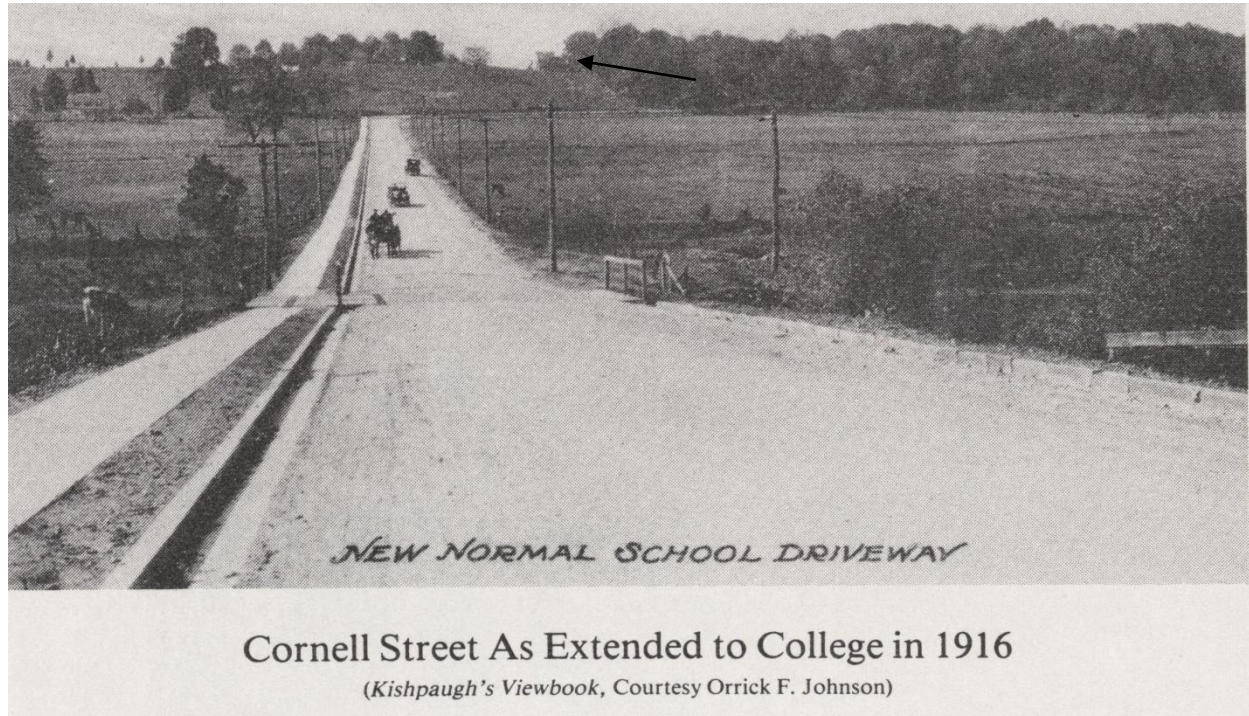


Figure 9: Image showing Cornell street recently completed and in the distance on Marye's Heights is the Deans (Alms ) House noted by the arrow.



**Figure 10: Aerial of Fredericksburg from ca. 1925-29 showing the structure (arrow)**



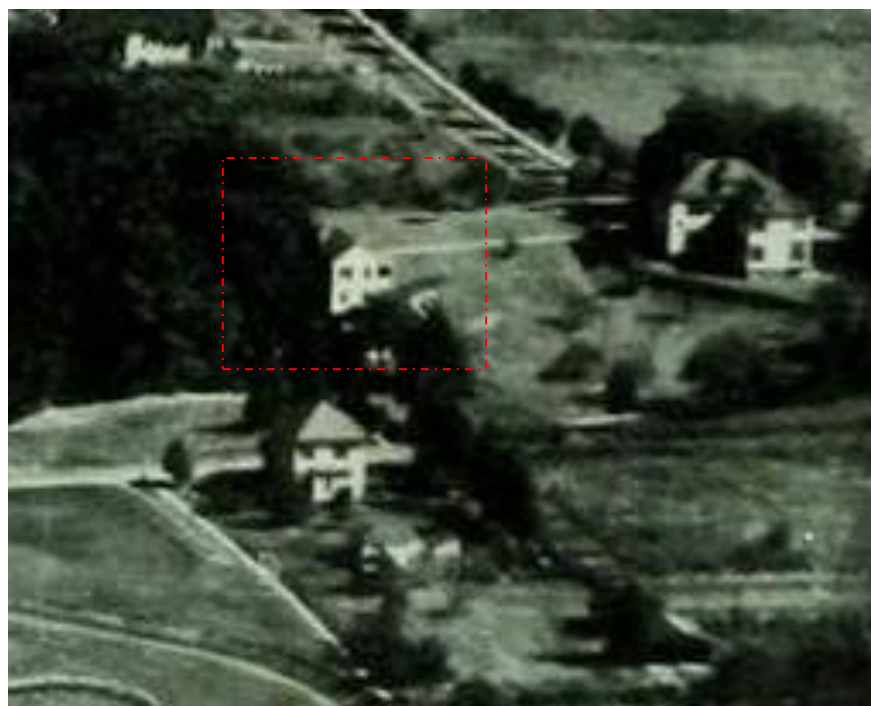
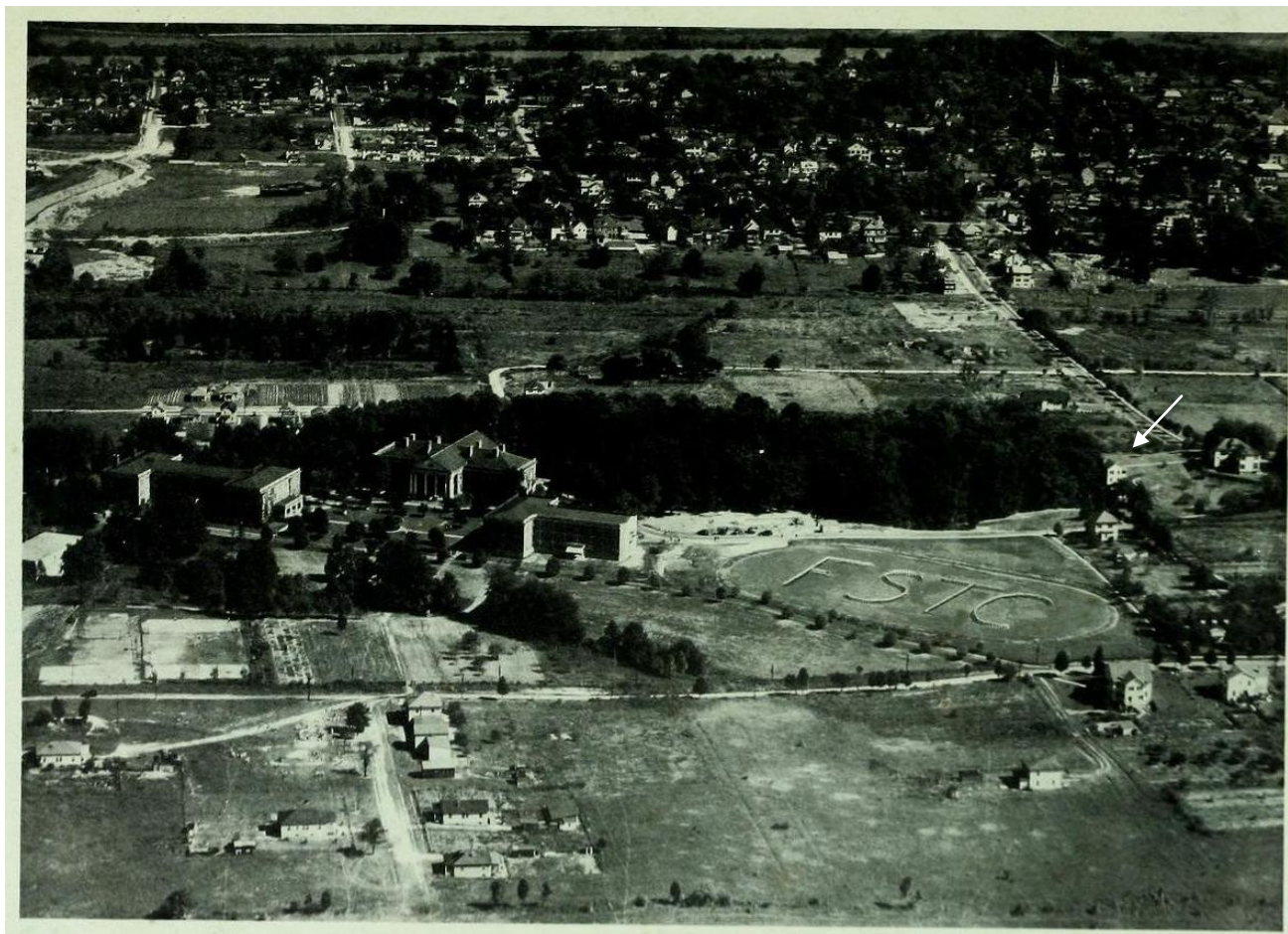


Figure 11: Aerial from ca. 1927 showing the rear of the Deans (Alms) House.





Figure 32: This 1937 aerial shows the Alms House moved to its present location (arrow).



Figure 43: Aerial from ca. 1941 again showing the Alms House in its present location on College Avenue.





Figure 14: Image from the 1951 Battlefield yearbook showing the Alms House in the background. Below is an image of the 1883 Alms House addition as it stands today at the corner of College Avenue and Dandridge Street. After its use as a portion of the Alms House it was used as the Faculty annex for the Teachers College. Behind this structure is also an addition to the faculty annex which was also moved.

