1 **Front Entrance to the House:** Historically, guests visiting Long Branch arrived and were greeted on this front, southern facing porch. While Robert Carter Burwell built Long Branch between 1805 and 1811, the porticos, as you see them today, were likely added by Hugh Mortimer and Adelaide Nelson in the late 1840s. The Nelsons also added the belvedere that adorns the top of the house. While today the porch floor is made of marble, originally it was made of wood and the steps of limestone. The porticos, front and back, were graced with rocking chairs; evenings were spent sitting, drinking tea and mint juleps, while sharing old stories. Looking south from the porch you will notice the Sheila Macqueen Gardens, and in the distance you can see the mountainous peaks of the Shenandoah National Park.

2 **Sheila Macqueen Gardens:** The Sheila Macqueen Gardens at Long Branch were established in 1997. These Gardens were the brainchild and passion of Martha Cook, a local Clarke County resident. Sheila Macqueen was well-known in Britain—first through BBC lectures and books, and later because of her flower arrangements for the Royal Family in Westminster Abbey, Buckingham Palace, and Windsor. Her career began in 1931 as an associate of the enigmatic floral arranger, Constance Spry, and continued more than 70 years. Clarke County is fortunate to boast the only U.S. garden named in her honor.

3 **Spring House (Original) and Ice House:** Spring and Ice Houses were essential outbuildings on all 19th century plantations; they provided fresh drinking water and ice to help preserve perishable food. Look for the 1811 date etching on the original Spring House. One oral history reveals that throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, children were told to be careful of the “Snake Doctor,” or dragon flies, when drinking water directly from the Spring House. Long Branch Family lore suggests that “Orange,” a local African American boy, once swallowed a Snake Doctor from this Spring House and passed away. A term common in the Southern U.S., ”snake doctor” refers to a folk belief that dragonflies stitch snakes back together if they are injured.

4 **Long Branch Pond** While today this is the site of a large man-made pond, the Long Branch Stream, the namesake for Long Branch Plantation, once flowed through this spot. Future conservation plans are now considering turning this pond back into the Long Branch Stream in order to enhance water quality. Historically, just north of the pond, there was a large bank barn and south of it stood a tenant house.

5 **Original Smokehouse:** Like many other plantations of its day, Long Branch had many outbuildings that provided essential functions in the running of the household and the farm. This is the site of the original smokehouse. Other outbuildings included, a kitchen, an ice house, a spring house, a carriage house, and slave quarters.

6 **Location of Slave Quarters:** Between 20 and 30 slaves lived and worked at Long Branch while it was a wheat plantation. Slaves were the backbone to any southern plantation, and they participated in every aspect of daily life and work on the farm and in the main house. Two slave quarters existed on this location, almost exactly where the two modern garages sit today. Further research is underway to better understand the lives of slaves at Long Branch Plantation.

7 **Backyard:** While today this appears to be the front yard at Long Branch, until the mid 1980s, this area was a backyard and cow pasture. The driveway would have worked its way from what is today a service road, up the hill, and around to the front of the house. As you gaze at the house and grounds from the backyard, image Long Branch, with a wooden roof and porch, as a bustling plantation. In addition to the plantation’s outbuildings, Long Branch residents utilized a greenhouse, an orchard, and kitchen gardens that contained herbs, vegetables, and flowers which were tended to by enslaved African Americans, and later paid workers.
In 1788, Robert Carter Burwell, a descendant of Robert “King” Carter, inherited the land sitting along a stream known as Long Branch in Clarke County, Virginia. Utilizing the labor of enslaved workers, Burwell started a wheat plantation on the land he inherited. About twenty years later, around 1810, he began to construct a mansion on the site. Burwell, along with the help of a local builder-architect, designed and constructed the house following the classical principles suggested to him by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, architect of the U.S. Capitol, in a letter dated July 21, 1811. Latrobe recommended that Burwell include a servant’s staircase and that the dining room and chamber be oriented to the south side of the house.

While it is unclear if Burwell was able to incorporate all of Latrobe’s recommendations into the final design of Long Branch, he did include the servant’s staircase that can still be seen today. Burwell did not have much time to enjoy his new home, for he fell fatally ill in the filthy camps around Norfolk, Virginia while serving in the military during the War of 1812.

Following Burwell’s death, Long Branch passed into the ownership of his sister, Sarah, and her husband Philip Nelson. The Nelson family would continue to own and operate Long Branch until 1957. Throughout Philip and Sarah Nelson’s ownership of Long Branch, the grounds continued to serve an agriculture purpose as a wheat plantation, and also provided space for orchards, equestrian activities, and livestock. Apart from agricultural pursuits, sources indicate that the Nelson Family ran a school for girls out of Long Branch in the 1830s. Philip and Sarah eventually sold Long Branch to Hugh M. Nelson, Philip’s nephew, in 1842.

Hugh M. Nelson and his wife, Adelaide Nelson, oversaw a series of updates and changes to the home and plantation in the 1840s. They enclosed the loggia making a larger “kitchen” space and oversaw a comprehensive Greek revival renovation which included construction of the spiral staircase, interior trim and doors based on the designs of architect Minard Lafever, window casings, and both north and south columned porticos.

Following Hugh M. Nelson’s death during the Civil War, the Nelson family struggled to maintain ownership of the property and years of legal wrangling ensued. Adelaide Nelson and her son, Hugh Nelson Jr., struggled to pay back Hugh Nelson Sr.’s debts, while at the same time maintaining the wheat plantation without the help of enslaved laborers in a struggling southern economy.

The Nelson family ultimately held on to the house, but the financial deprivations caused by the destruction of the pre-war economy forced the family to live a much different lifestyle. Unlike their antebellum predecessors, the Nelsons of the late 19th century, primarily Hugh Nelson Jr. and his wife Sallie Page Nelson, were unable to redecorate the house and acquire much new furniture. The result was that house and its interior furnishings remained remarkably unchanged from the 1860s until 1951. When Sallie Page Nelson passed away in 1951, the Nelson heirs to the house decided to sell Long Branch. The Nelson family’s 144-year ownership of Long Branch officially ended in 1957 when Abram and Dorothy Hewitt purchased the home for $125,000.

Abram Hewitt was a corporate financial advisor who served for the Office of Strategic Services (the predecessor to the CIA) during World War II. His wife, Dorothy Hewitt, was originally from New Orleans and served as a ferry pilot in England during World War II. Together, Abram and Dorothy raised four sons while living at Long Branch. They made several structural changes to the interior of the house, and also rebuilt the summer kitchen structure, which Abram used as his office. While raising their family at Long Branch, the Hewitts raised cattle and grew corn, alfalfa, and other crops. Due to financial difficulties in the late 1970s, Abram and Dorothy reluctantly sold Long Branch in 1978.

After the Hewitt’s ownership the house passed through several subsequent owners and speculators, ultimately landing on the courthouse steps in 1986 at an auction where Harry Z. Isaacs, a Baltimore textile executive, purchased the estate. Isaacs oversaw a large-scale rehabilitation of the house and furnished it to be his home. Before his death in 1990, Isaacs created and endowed the Harry Z. Isaacs Foundation “to hold, preserve, maintain and operate Long Branch Farm... for charitable purposes.”

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