

Nancy's World (to me)

In real estate, the mantra is "Location, Location, Location". As in a story, the right setting can be an effective plot device and can be used to evoke specific feelings. The Nancy Drew books often used a location to create the backdrop for the mysterious and adventurous. As a child, I was able to use my grandparents' home as a true reference for many of the Nancy Drew settings, thus bringing the stories to life and turning me into Nancy Drew



Green's Folly, located in Halifax County, Virginia, was home to my maternal grandparents. As my mother was raised there, our family visited frequently. The estate has served many functions through the years: county courthouse, a racetrack, a farm, and currently an 18-hole golf course, which was originally developed by my grandfather, John G. Patterson, Jr.

As a child with a vivid imagination, my senses were aroused by mysterious features of the old home. This was the world of my childhood and it made a natural location for many of my adventures with Nancy Drew. As many of the Nancy Drew stories involved large old estates, my mind easily substituted the real world for the fictitious. There seemed to be too many coincidences and similarities for it to be otherwise. I found my imagination using Green's Folly as the backdrop for the following stories:

1. *The Hidden Staircase*
2. *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*
3. *The Sign of the Twisted Candles*
4. *Password to Larkspur Lane*
5. *The Whispering Statue*
6. *The Haunted Bridge*
7. *The Mystery at the Moss Covered Mansion*
8. *The Secret in the Old Attic*
9. *The Clue in the Crumbling Wall*
10. *The Secret of Blackwood Hall*
11. *The Clue of the Velvet Mask*
12. *The Hidden Window*
13. *The Haunted Showboat*
14. *The Clue of the Dancing Puppet*
15. *The Moonstone Castle Mystery*
16. *The Mystery at Pine Hill*

17. *The Crooked Banister*

Three stories in particular, *The Hidden Staircase*, *The Haunted Bridge* and *The Hidden Window*, really showcase the likeness between the books and my world at Green's Folly.

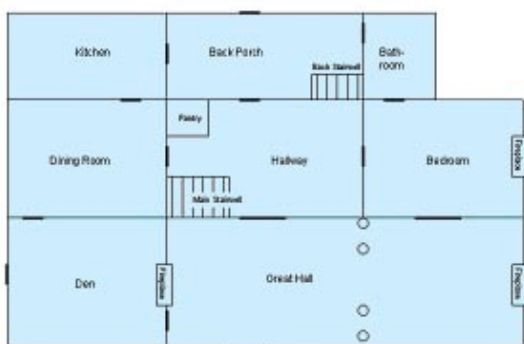
The Hidden Staircase

The second text version of *The Hidden Staircase*, number two in the series, was the first "real" book I remember reading. At the age of seven, I was fascinated with the cover and the pictures, but struggled through the chapters. I read this book again and again I got older and, in my mind, superimposed the description of Twin Oaks as that of Green's Folly. With a child's vivid imagination, my senses were aroused by mysterious features common to both homes - an old great room, multiple fireplaces and staircases, a secret passage, and a three-room attic.

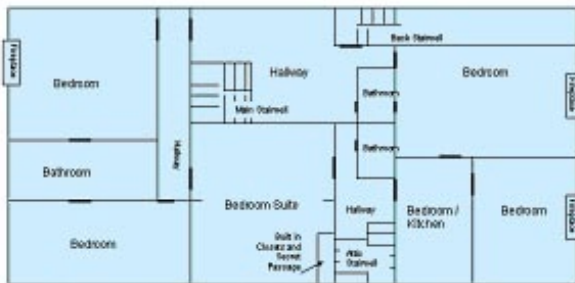
Green's Folly, originally named Oakland by its owner, Captain Berryman Green, was built about 1789. As the first two-story home in the area, the locals thought it was a joke, or folly, thus effectively renaming the estate. The home consisted of a two-story main area flanked by single story wings. Philip Howerton, a subsequent owner, enlarged the home by adding second stories to the wings. The mansion has brick fireplaces covered with ivy, large white columns at the front entrance, dormer windows, and a balcony over a side porch. In contrast, the estate in *The Hidden Staircase*, Twin Elms, is described as follows:

Presently the old Colonial home came into view. Helen said it had been built in 1785 and had been given its name because of the two elm trees which stood at opposite ends of the long building. They had grown to be giants and their foliage was beautiful. The mansion was of red brick and nearly all the walls were covered with ivy. There was a ten-foot porch with tall white pillars at the huge front door.

The Hidden Staircase, p. 25



Although Green's Folly differs from the description of Twin Elms, it was the only large house I had as a point of reference. The interior of the mansion had many more similarities to the book. I have tried here to replicate the floor plan of Green's Folly, although it is not exact. The drawings are not to scale, and somewhat out of line, but do give an idea of the layout.



The Great Hall, as it was known, was the large entertaining area of the home comprised of the original section of the home downstairs. Constructed of large wooden plank flooring and 12-foot ceilings, it echoed like a cavern. Large gold-framed mirrors hung above the fireplaces, which stood at each end of the room like sentinels. The old books, oil paintings and antiques took the room back to another

period. The velvet furniture was royally arranged, though the lights were not grand chandeliers. This room equated to the description of the parlor at Twin Elms. The picture of the ladies watching the swaying chandelier helped connect the two homes in my imagination.

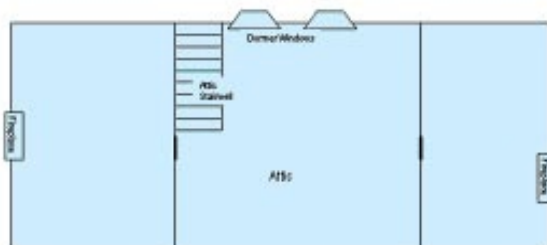
Twin Elms and Green's Folly had the same number of stairways, although not as many locked doors. When Nancy heard the creak of steps and was trying to determine where the sound was coming from, she said:

"I'm sure they're not from the attic stairs or the main staircase. And not the back stairway. Even if the ghost was in the kitchen and unlocked the door to the second floor, he'd know that the one at the top of the stairs was locked from the other side."



The Hidden Staircase, p. 87

Nancy and Helen made it a point to be able to climb the stairs noiselessly so as not to alert any ghosts. I, too, was able to pick out the squeaky spots on the staircase and avoid them to tap noiselessly up or down the main stairwell. Almost. Toward the top, three stairs in a row were noisy and my short legs couldn't quite make it over them without some squeaking. Seems Nancy had this problem as well:



"How about skipping fourteen and then stretching as far as you can to reach the top one at the left where it doesn't squeak," Nancy replied. "Let's go!"

The Hidden Staircase, p. 84

Nancy was able to locate a hidden spring that moved a cabinet away from the wall in the parlor at Twin Elms. Along with my siblings and cousins, I often looked

throughout the house for secret passages. I tapped on walls, particularly in the Big Hall as it was the oldest and most imposing room in the house. I checked bricks on the fireplaces for secret niches, looked for loose floorboards, and examined cracks in the walls for secrets. No luck. There was one secret passage in my mother's old bedroom, though it wasn't too secret. It ran from inside her closet, underneath the attic stairs, and into a hallway. The mysterious secret passage had become, sadly, a storage closet.

You must climb a separate set of stairs and enter a small door to access the wonderland in the main room of the attic at Green's Folly. There were old trunks containing clothes and who-knows-what, and boxes of Christmas decorations. A large hanging rack contained my mother's dancing dresses. She was an entertainer in her youth. Although not from the Colonial period as was the costume trunk in the story, we had great fun trying on the fancy dresses and dancing. A large worktable held a hodge-podge of items, including Peter Pan and Wendy marionettes. The bookshelf on the far wall was filled with leather bound ledgers from my grandfather's drugstore in the 1940's and 50's. Old toys sat in boxes in front of the dormer windows waiting for new children to play with them.

On either side of the long attic room was a door to another chamber. The one on the left opened to an empty, but bright room decorated only with the brick chimney from the fireplaces below, unstable floorboards, dead bees, and a bowling ball in the far corner. The other door opened into a dark cavern. I never knew what lay beyond as the squeaking bats always forced me to close the door before finding out.

Nancy and Helen were able to locate a trap door in the ceiling, but try as I might, I could find no trap doors, secret passages or hidden staircases in the attic.

The similarities between the interior of Green's Folly and the descriptions found in *The Hidden Staircase* made the book very real to me. Even the book covers and interior pictures caused my young mind to ask if Nancy Drew really solved her mysteries right there.

The Haunted Bridge

The first text version of *The Haunted Bridge* is my favorite Nancy Drew story. I don't play many sports, but I always enjoyed golf, though I am not as good a shot as Nancy. Maybe I enjoy it because I was often on the links at Green's Folly. This course could easily have been the one at Deer Mountain Resort.

The property is bordered by highways on two sides, train tracks on one side and finally by property that was previously undeveloped. Our family often walked the course in the evening for exercise and I could easily transform myself into Nancy, hitting the greens, maybe landing in the bunker, or watching shots sink in the water. My dad helped teach me a proper stance and how to swing, just as I'm sure Nancy's dad did when she was a girl.



Outside the main home, there were several utility buildings, including a small attached pumphouse, a four-room shack used for storage, and an old well house in addition to old barns used for golf storage. The grounds around the home were well manicured as my grandfather liked to keep flowers. Large cedar trees flanked each side of the curving drive and hid an onsite cemetery near the swimming pool at the end of the 12th green.

As the book opens, Nancy is bothered by Mortimer Bartescue's approaches and scores a six on the 18th hole when she should have had a five. Five is par for the 18th hole at Green's Folly.

Green's Folly is the first home on the local River Road driving tour. This tour takes visitors on a trip through history visiting several antebellum homes in the area. These homes could have easily been the other resorts in the Deer Mountain area which Nancy was visiting during her vacation. The Lincoln Hotel, Hemlock Hall, and other resorts could be only a short drive away.

Nancy also had occasion to go into the local village to run a few errands – and get a soda at the local drugstore. I can picture downtown South Boston just a short hop away for the local movie theater and drugstore. Hey, my grandfather also owned the Patterson Drugstore in the 40's and 50's. Another coincidence?



The Haunted Bridge really reminded me more of the outside grounds and surrounding area of Green's Folly than other books did. The similarities are very close for someone with a big imagination.

The Hidden Window

The Hidden Window takes place in Charlottesville, Virginia, which is about 125 miles north of South Boston. Nancy, Bess and George are staying with Susan Carr, Nancy's cousin, and her husband Cliff at their home called Seven Oaks.

A low brick wall ran across the front of the small estate. An iron gateway opened onto a tree-shaded drive with beautiful, many-hued flower gardens on either side of it.

Facing the end of the drive was a white clapboard two-story colonial house. At the entrance was a small porch with Doric columns. Above the entrance was a balcony which Susan said opened off her bedroom.

The Hidden Window, p. 46

The Carrs also employed a maid named Beulah. While her character is clearly a throwback to Civil War days, it was not uncommon for older Southerners to have a black maid. My grandparents employed Dorothy for 19 years and she became part of the family. I remember as a child helping her sweep the porches and being excited to see her.

The interior of Seven Oaks is described as follows:

There was a large center hall with the paneling and all woodwork painted white, except for the mahogany railing of the curved stairway. A flowered wallpaper and thick carpeting made the entrance most welcoming.

To the right was the living room, and to the left a library which Cliff Carr used as his office. There was a sunny dining room back of the living room and an open porch beyond this.

The Hidden Window, p. 47

Upstairs there were "three adjoining bedrooms, papered in dainty colonial patterns and each with a fireplace" and outside, "beds of various kinds of flowers, surrounded by low boxwood hedge, were interlaced with brick paths which ran throughout the garden".

While Seven Oaks seems grand, the spooky atmosphere at Ivy Hall seemed more in keeping with Green's Folly. Although described as a "colonial red-brick house, the sides of which were thickly covered with ivy", the estate had "an impressive front porch with majestic white columns". Also, Ivy Hall was owned by Sheila Patterson, an actress. Although there was no Sheila in our family, the Pattersons enjoyed music, dancing, and often hosted parties. My mother often performed pantomime routines for local television shows, telethons and talent contests.

The scene of the ghost in the attic once again brought me back to the attic at Green's Folly. We never say one, but my mother said the house had a ghost named Emma. We never found slave tunnels either. There was one door blocked by furniture downstairs that I was never able to open. My grandmother said it was only a closet, but how could I be sure without inspecting it? I never had the chance, so it always remained a mystery.



Green's Folly was enlarged several times by various owners. In the great hall, there was evidence of a former staircase, noted only by a slope in the ceiling. Upstairs, outside my mother's old room, there were outlines of what were window casings. Obviously they had been filled in when the back of the house was added. After reading *The Hidden Window*, I wondered about the bricked interior

windows and if there were any secrets of the owners before. There was one stained glass window in the back stairwell of the house. It was a Mondrian block style of pastel colors – hardly a prize.

No Longer the Same

Green's Folly was sold out of my family about 20 years ago. It has since fallen into a sad state of disrepair. On a visit last year, we were able to persuade the current owner to let us tour the old home. The attic was inaccessible. My mother's old room was filled with buckets to catch water, making access to the secret passage impossible. The main staircase creaked more than ever. Peeling wallpaper, cracks in the walls, ancient lighting, and strewn clothes spoke to the neglect. The crumbling brick fireplaces seemed held in place only by the small amount of ivy growing on them. Even the great hall, which I think is still used for golf receptions, was not so great anymore.

Though the house is no longer the same, it will always hold fond memories of my childhood and will live when I revisit these and other Nancy Drew stories. Always trying to be a sleuth, during my last visit, I was able to investigate the door that was always blocked with furniture. It was only a closet.