

SCOTT-GRANT HOUSE
Georgetown
3238 R Street, Northwest
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS DC-824
DC, GEO, 242-

PHOTOGRAPHS

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FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SCOTT-GRANT HOUSE

HABS No. DC-824

Location: 3238 R Street, NW, Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: Anne T. Bass and Robert M. Bass

Present Use: Private residence

Significance: This house is most notable as a mid nineteenth-century stylistically transitional house that combines the symmetrical massing of the first half of the nineteenth century with the picturesque, ornate, three-dimensional detailing that was popular from mid-century until nearly the end of the century. This detailing is most apparent in the exterior window hoods. In addition to these handsome details, the second story fanlight on the front and three-part rear window on the landing are excellent executions of the early twentieth-century Federal Revival Style.

The historical significance of the Scott-Grant House derives from its New Deal occupants and the earlier rentals by Generals U.S. Grant and Henry Halleck. It is commonly accepted, but undocumented that Grant used the house as a summer White House. (Grant's papers have not been edited through his presidency.) During the New Deal, two of President Roosevelt's Brain Trust, Benjamin Cohen and Thomas Corcoran, rented the house for themselves and other young lawyers who drafted the New Deal legislation.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: 1857. The tax assessment book for that year listed a new brick house and outbuildings valued at \$8,000. The house appears on a map published in 1861, based a survey conducted from 1856 to 1859, Albert Boschke's *Topographical Map of the District of Columbia*, at Geography and Maps Division, Library of Congress. South of the house is a small guest house which appears to have been built at the same time as the main house.

2. Original and subsequent owners:

1796 Thomas Beall to Thomas Sim Lee

1831 Archibald Lee to Richard Smith

1834 Bank foreclosure

1854 Lees and Charles Carroll to John Davidson

1854 John Davidson to Ignatius David Read (or Reed)

1857 Davidson, Philander Bowen, and heirs of Read to Alfred Scott

1857 John E. Carter to Alfred Scott

(Supposedly Scott was acquiring all the parcels that had been subdivided by Davidson)

1858 Alfred Scott to William O. Nixon

(Nixon also acquired apparently adjacent parcels from the Reads and Davidson)

1871 Rebecca Scott, wife of Alfred and sister of Nixon, to Robert Frey

1871 Rebecca Scott, widow, to Thomas L. Hume

1877 Thomas Hume to Calvin Graves

1878 Graves to Katie M. Joyce

1893 Rebecca Scott to Joyce

1903 Joyce et al to George Nicolson

1919 Nicolson to Gladys Rousseau

1935 Rousseau to Mary Davidson

1964 Davidson and heirs to ?

Note: The above chain of title taken from typescript at the Peabody Room, Georgetown Branch of the D.C. Public Library

In 1974, architect Reid A. Dunn was listed as owner on the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts index cards.

In 1985, Philip Horowitz, trustee was listed as owner on the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts index cards.

1985 Michael Evans to Robert Bass et al

(according to *Washington Post*, May 26, 1985)

The above chain of title is not definitive, leaving some key uncertainties. Nineteenth century subdivisions of the parcel are not clear. More importantly, a critical building permit of 1907 lists Eugene A. Byrnes as owner, yet he does not appear on the chain of title. Subsequently a Mrs. Alice Byrnes is listed as the occupant in the city directories.

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown.

4. Original plans and construction: It is assumed that the original plan was a central hall house with two rooms to either side of the hall.

5. Alterations and additions: In 1907, the front stairs to the main (second) floor were removed and replaced with a porch, making the basement entrance the main entrance. At the same time, the rear elevation was changed, with the addition of a new three part window above the first landing and other changes, including interior partitions. In the 1930s, the house was extensively altered on the interior and the rear porch changed. Work continues on the extensive interior alterations, designed by David Schwartz. His design changes include new moldings throughout the house, new bathrooms, appliances, and a new floor in the five sided bay's main level.

B. Historical Context:

In the late nineteenth century, as Georgetown's merchants and shop-owners prospered, they moved from their Federal period row houses and an occasional free-standing house on the streets closest to the piers farther north to the heights of Georgetown. Many of the finest houses along Q and R Streets were built in the early nineteenth century and subsequently altered extensively in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. One exception is Tudor Place which retains its early nineteenth-century original appearance. Another exception is the Scott-Grant House which is later than many of the other great houses in Georgetown Heights and one of the few of architectural significance for its mid nineteenth-century appearance. Perhaps due to its unusual character, the Scott-Grant House is not discussed or at least not in detail in the standard histories of Georgetown. Also, unlike houses such as Dumbarton Oaks, Tudor Place, Evermay or Bowie-Sevier, its owners do not seem to have been important Georgetown citizens. Instead the Scott-Grant House was associated with nationally prominent men who rented the house, specifically Generals Halleck and Grant, and New Dealers Thomas Corcoran and Benjamin Cohen.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The front of the Scott-Grant House presents to the street a symmetrical three-story facade with the emphasis on the central bay of the second floor. The corners are marked by slightly projecting piers supporting a bracketed cornice. The cornice, window drip moldings with cartouche, and window railings give a three-dimensional quality to the facade that is absent earlier in the century, except for the columnar classical revival houses. But this house lacks the picturesque, irregular massing and silhouette that was being designed in this period as seen in the work A.J. Davis, for example.

On the east side of the house, the five-sided bay reinforces the three dimensional quality of the front facade. On the rear (south) elevation, an appearance entirely different than the front or side elevations is presented. Six piers, with four of them free-standing, support the cornice and create a strong vertical emphasis and rhythm across the facade. The enclosed third floor balcony gives the facade the distinct impression of a mid nineteenth-century plantation in the deep South.

In contrast with the other elevations, the north elevation is virtually undecorated, with two stacks of windows, the end piers, and a base of stone blocks which does not run the length of the facade.

On all three floors, the hall runs from front to back and it is assumed that originally two rooms opened off of either side of the hall. All mantels, wainscoting, cornices, and wall panels appear recent and understated. The marble floor on the second floor of the five-sided projection is the most elaborate detailing currently in the house, but it should be noted that other features such as chandeliers have not been installed and the floor in the rest of the house is covered by protective sheeting.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The Scott-Grant House is a five bay, three story structure across the front and rear. These facades are not as wide as the side facades, which lack demarcated bays. The front door is at basement level, enclosed within a columned porch. The east side is distinguished by its five sided bay, the south side by the columns supporting the cornice and enclosing the third story porch. The west elevation is irregular in placement of fenestration and in the finish of the brick and mortar work. The bracketed cornice and end piers, appearing on the four elevations visually tie the structure together.

2. Foundations: The foundation is of brick, although it appears as stone blocks on most of the length of the west facade starting at the north.

3. Walls: On the front and east elevations, pressed brick is laid in common bond with tight mortar joints. On the south and west elevations, coarse, textured brick is laid in common bond with thick mortar joints. Every fifth row on the west elevation is entirely headers.

4. Structural system, framing: The house appears to be of load bearing masonry construction.

5. Porches, stoops: At the front, one step up from the walk to the front door, but that walk is several steps up from the street. At the rear, twelve stone steps lead up to the balcony which is at the second floor level. These stairs flair out at the bottom and the railings are repeated on the third floor windows and on the front windows. To either side of this flight of stairs are rear entrances to the first floor, gained by climbing down stairs. A longer flight of stairs on the south end of the east facade leads to the basement.

At the front, a porch consisting of four fluted columns and two fluted piers, with Doric bases and capitals support an entablature with simple dentils. Above the entablature is a balustrade with thick vase shaped balusters and substantial railing.

6. Chimneys: Four chimneys run along the east and west facades supporting one fireplace each per floor. A 1930s photograph shows that the chimneys were capped by barrel shaped metal sheeting. On the east facade, the two chimneys are adjacent to the bay, flanking it. On the west facade, one stack of windows is south of the second chimney and the other two stacks of windows are between the two chimneys, but closer to the second chimney.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: One door on the front facade and two on the rear open onto the first floor. The east elevation's door is to the basement. On the rear, the balcony door on the south bay of the projection and the door in the second bay from the west facade open onto the second floor. But only the front door is a major door. The others are secondary entrances, which are not as elaborate and the two rear first floor doors are possibly only twentieth-century openings. The main double door and the flanking side lights are leaded glass, similar to but not as elaborate as the leaded glass at the rear landing. The front double doors and side lights are separated by half-round, fluted Corinthian columns. The doorway has paneled reveals. The door leading from the balcony into the projection on its south side is within a tall flattened round arched doorway with three transom windows above twelve lights in three rows.

b. Windows: On the front, the basement windows are glazed with six-over-six lights, while on the second or main floor four windows are taller, glazed with six-over-nine lights. The central, three part window of the main floor is six-over-six Colonial Revival style, reminiscent of the late eighteenth-century work of Samuel McIntyre in Salem, Massachusetts. The third story windows are six-over-six. The tall second story windows suggest that the floor is a piano noble, again reminiscent of New England architecture, specifically Boston in the late eighteenth into the early nineteenth century. The second story windows, except for the central one, have iron railings. The sills (apparently brownstone) and the drip molding with cartouches of the second and third floors are the most characteristic details of the house. The first floor windows have flat simple lintels and sills.

On the east elevation, all the windows (blind or real) have stone sills with flattened round brick arched tops.

On the south elevation, only the basement windows repeat the flattened round brick arches. The upper story windows, with simple, flat sills and lintels, are on the second floor, nearly floor to ceiling windows of nine-over-nine, with the exception of the west bay which is six-over-six and the next bay which is three transom lights above a nine light door. On the third floor, there are five bays of three part windows, with louvered panels below. Each bay consists of a center window, six-over-six, flanked by side lights, two-over-two. The basement windows are simple round arched frames with three-over-three lights.

The west elevation has three stacks of simple, flat lintels and sill windows of six-over-six lights with the main floor windows substantially taller.

8. Roof.

a. Shape, covering: The roof is only barely visible from the south lawn so it is assumed to be a nearly flat hip roof, covered in metal. A square centrally placed ventilator with a wide overhang is the most visible feature.

b. Cornice, eaves: The deep cornice is supported by scroll brackets at the corners and at the top of the piers and by a continuous row of large scale dentils. Its simple band demarcates the frieze from the architrave.

c. Dormers: None.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:

a. First Floor: A central hall runs from the front vestibule to the stairs at the rear of the hall. Two smaller front rooms are to either side of the hall. Beyond those rooms are larger rooms and behind the stairs and the rear wall is another room, all of these service rooms are interconnected. The hall is one step down from the vestibule and the room at the southwest corner of the first floor is one step up from the other rooms and hall.

b. Second Floor: This floor is the main floor or piano nobile and is sixteen steps and one landing above the first floor. On the west side of the hall are two rooms, while on the south side, the one opening from the hall opens into a room that runs the length of the house. It is assumed that this single space was once two parlors. The five-sided projection opens off of this space.

c. Third Floor: The two rooms east of the hall are bedrooms with the projection divided into two bathrooms, separated by a full height wall. The rear porch consists of bathroom and

changing rooms. The rooms west of the hall form a bedroom, bathroom, and changing room suite.

d. Basement: Access gained by outside door, space not examined.

2. Stairway: An open-string stair runs along the east wall of the first floor, up eleven steps to a landing and then another five steps to the main floor. From that floor, the stairs again run along the east wall to the third floor. The strings have simple, low relief s-curve details and the balusters are also simply detailed. At the first floor, the stairs flair out and that curve is repeated in the volute of the handrail.

3. Flooring: All flooring in halls and rooms in the house is covered by sheets, to protect it while construction is ongoing. The only exception is in the main floor projection where a marble floor and baseboard have been installed. Using veined white, black, and brown pieces in a variety of curved and straight shapes, a highly geometric floor pattern, radiating from the center of the floor has been created.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The ceiling and walls are assumed to be plaster. Paneled wainscoting is used throughout the house, except on the main floor rooms east of the hall. The northwest room on the main floor has paneling above the wainscoting.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: First floor doorways have deep paneled reveals. The second floor doors are hinged double doors with two panels each. Between the east room and the projection, the doorway is arched and without doors. This doorway is the most elaborate one as it has paneled piers, with bases and capitals, supporting the low arch with keystone. The doors are paneled and like the profiles of the doorways, simple articulation of late eighteenth-century features. On the main floor, the northwest room has a panel above the door surround.

b. Windows: The window surrounds house the paneled interior shutters for the windows. The panel profile is the same as the door reveals.

Neither the front vestibule, rear porch and landing, nor front porch align with the hall floors. In the front vestibule, one steps down to the hall. The stair landing is well below the exterior balcony and the top of the window on the stair landing is above the floor of the hall above. At the other end (north) of that hall, the front porch's floor is considerably above the hall floor. This misalignment is due in part to the removal of the front steps in 1907 which went to the main floor and erection of a new porch with a new main entrance into the first floor. The misalignment between stairs, landing window and balcony might reflect that the stairs were reconfigured and the balcony is now taller than it was originally.

6. Decorative features and trim: Each floor has two fireplaces with white veined marble surrounds, eared wood panels surrounds and projecting shelves supported by two consoles. Like the other detailing in the house, these mantels appear as recent constructions, echoing in more simplified style late eighteenth-century features. There is a dentil architrave, plain frieze with bead, and cyma recta cornice. The opening and mantel in the northwest room on the main floor are lower than those in the other rooms.

Of the nineteenth-century features, the window moldings and bracketed cornice are the most notable and characteristic of mid nineteenth-century domestic architecture. When the house was extensively altered in 1907 according to the designs of locally prominent architect George Cooper, the projecting center bay on the front was dramatically changed by the addition of the second story three part window where the entrance door was originally. Also Cooper designed a new rear window at the first stair landing. Both windows have narrow flanking side lights with an arch above the center window. In both cases the arch is filled with carved wood detailing, radiating out like a fanlight. But in the much larger front window, horizontal curved bands run above the fanlight. These bands radiate out of a boss above the fanlight. This arch is carried by a full entablature with fluted frieze, dentiled cornice, with both cornice and architrave built up of several projecting fascia. The architrave fascia also have a bead. In turn the entablature is supported by four Corinthian fluted half-round columns. The center window is glazed with six-over-six lights, while the side lights are leaded glass with overlapping circles and ovals similar to those in the first floor side lights and in the rear landing window. The latter window has the added detail of shutters, which are also on the two windows east of that bay and the door west of that bay.

7. Hardware: All of the hardware seems new and is brass in the major spaces. Door knobs are oval shaped.

8. Mechanical systems: All systems appear new.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces north onto R Street. As the lot is elevated above the street, the paved driveway east of the house is inclined and the two walks to the house have several steps. The driveway leads to an early twentieth century two-story carriage house and walled in space. Parallel to the driveway and closer to the street is a brick house with projecting glass bay. This structure is recent. Southwest of the main house is a one and half story guest house with the bracketed cornice and it appears to date to the construction of the main house. The land falls off to the south down to Reservoir Road. A new metal fence marks the southern boundary of the property. Remnants of a driveway run along the fence which has a wide gate.

West of the property is the Georgetown branch of the D.C. Public Library. This building replaced - in the 1930s - a Georgetown reservoir that was round in plan.

2. Historic landscape design: Original design is unknown, but some early twentieth-century descriptions suggest that the property was densely vegetated.

3. Outbuildings: To the left (east) of the driveway is a brick two-story house of apparently recent construction. South of that house stand two nineteenth-century structures. One is a one story hipped roof structure with a standing seam roof. Perpendicular to it is a two-story carriage house with living space above. The first floor north facade of the carriage house consists of tall glass doors within wood frames. Across the lawn and south of the main house is a so-called guest house which appears to be of the same date of construction as the main house as it has the same bracketed cornice. This is a one and half story building flanked by one story wings on the east and west, and an enclosed porch on the south. All the buildings are made of brick.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. The Peabody Room at the Georgetown branch of the D.C. Public Library has an extensive file consisting of research by the librarians (including title and assessment books), newspaper clippings, and some correspondence. The Martin Luther King branch of the D.C. Public Library has a clipping file on the house. The Historical Society of Washington has the Proctor articles and photographs on the house.

B. Unlike the other major houses on Georgetown Heights, the Scott-Grant House did not receive the coverage in the popular histories of the houses of Georgetown.

C. Papers of owners or renters of the house might be promising sources, but were not sought out and reviewed.

Prepared by: Bill Lebovich, architectural historian, July 1999.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Georgetown Documentation Project was sponsored by the Commission of Fine Arts and undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service. Principals involved were Charles H. Atherton, Secretary, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and E. Blaine Cliver, Chief, HABS/HAER. The documentation was undertaken in two phases. The summer 1998 team was supervised by John P. White, FAIA, Professor of Architecture, Texas Tech University; and architecture technicians Robert C. Anderson, Boston Architectural Center; Aimee Charboneau, Tulane University; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Adam Maksay, United States/International Council on Monuments and Sites (US/ICOMOS) architect from the Transylvania Trust. Historic research was initiated by Bryan C. Green, historian, Richmond, Virginia, during this summer. The summer 1999 team was supervised by Roger S. Miller, architect, Alexandria, Virginia, and

architecture technicians David Benton, The Catholic University of America; Edward Byrde, The Catholic University of America; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Clara Albert, US/ICOMOS architect from the Transylvania Trust. The project historian, and author of the written reports, was William Lebovich, architectural historian, Chevy Chase, Maryland. The photography was undertaken by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, and James Rosenthal, photographic assistant.