

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

RIVERSDALE MANSION

Page 1

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: RIVERSDALE MANSION

Other Name/Site Number: CALVERT MANSION, PG#68-4-5

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 4811 Riverdale Road

Not for publication:___

City/Town: Riverdale

Vicinity:___

State: Maryland

County: Prince George's

Code: MD033

Zip Code: 20737

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: ___

Public-Local: X

Public-State: ___

Public-Federal: ___

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: ___

Site: ___

Structure: ___

Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

2

2

Noncontributing

___ buildings

___ sites

___ structures

___ objects

0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 3
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic: Domestic

Sub: Plantation house
Dependency (kitchen, dwelling)

Current: Social/Education/Culture

Sub: House Museum

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Early Republic, Federal

MATERIALS:

Foundation: Brick (Mansion and Dependency)

Walls: Brick covered with stucco (Mansion and Dependency)

Roof: Wood Shingles (Mansion); Standing-Seam Metal (Dependency)

Other:

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
Page 4**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.****Summary**

Riversdale is a five-part mansion of Federal style, built of brick and covered with stucco; it is made up of a two-story, hip-roof main block, flanked on each side by a 1 ½-story hyphen and wing. Riversdale is distinguished by the European influences in its decorative features. Entrance is in the central bay of the seven-bay north facade through a double paneled door with semicircular fanlight, sheltered by a one-story gable-roof porch with Tuscan columns.

The floor plan of Riversdale is formal, embellished with outstanding decorative detail. The central salon of the main block, in particular, is highlighted with triple-arch motifs in each of the four walls, each arch flanked by pilasters with applied composition decoration, and a nine-course molded plaster cornice. The formal staircase is set off to the side of the entrance in a separate stair hall, and the second story of the main block is composed of bed chambers, two of which have adjoining European-style dressing rooms. These highly embellished spaces of the main block are balanced by the utilitarian spaces of the flanking hyphens and wings. With substantial architectural and documentary evidence, some alterations of the early twentieth century have been reversed, resulting in a restored mansion of very high architectural integrity.

The plantation house stands on an eight-acre lot, all that remains from the nearly 2000-acre Riversdale plantation of the nineteenth century, surrounded by the developed lots of a residential subdivision. A short distance to the east of the house stands a two-story brick outbuilding, which served as a kitchen and servants' quarters, and which is roughly contemporary with the main house; archaeological investigations have revealed the foundations of other domestic outbuildings in the immediate vicinity of this kitchen. On the lawn immediately south of the mansion stands a seventeenth-century cannon mounted on a stone base.

Exterior**The Main Block**

The Riversdale plantation house is a five-part mansion, built of brick and covered with beige stucco; it is made up of a two-story central block, flanked on each side by a 1 ½-story hyphen and wing. The main block is approximately 70 by 38 feet, seven bays by three, with hip roof. The three central bays on each of the north and south long elevations are slightly recessed, and this three-bay indentation frames the central entrance on both north and south. Each of these entrances is sheltered by a porch, approached by a flight of stone steps. On each porch, the floor is composed of diamond-shaped paving blocks of black, white and pink marble.

The north entrance is through a double door, each leaf with four panels. The door is framed by plain pilasters with molded capitals and bases. Above the door is a molded lintel from which springs the arch that frames the fanlight. Lead muntins divide the fan into 22 sections with a ray pattern marking the interior lunette. The front-gabled porch has a full entablature, with fully

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 5
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

molded pediment, two-step frieze and dentillated cornice. The porch roof is supported by four stone Tuscan columns with molded capitals and bases. An exterior flight of steps leads from the east down into the dairy space beneath the porch.

The three central bays in the first story of the south facade comprise a very different type of entrance. Each of the three bays consists of a triple-sash window, the upper sash of which is arched, its upper section resembling an eight-section fanlight. Each of these triple-sash windows opens to a height of about 6 feet, allowing entrance from the sheltering porch into the central parlor. Unlike the north porch, this south porch has a hip roof, with two-step frieze and dentillated cornice. The hip roof is supported by four Tuscan columns with molded capitals and bases. The triple-sash windows are framed by plain pilasters with molded capitals and bases.

Around all four elevations of the main block is a plain belt course, and a shallow coursed watertable. Windows are nine-over-nine double-hung-sash on the first story, and six over nine on the second. The windows have narrow stone sills, and no trim at the lintels. There are dark green louvered shutters on the south facade, and none on the north. The molded cornice is prominently punctuated with modillions on all four elevations. The hip roof is now covered with new wood shingles, painted red. Four corbelled brick, stucco-covered chimneys rise from the roof of the main block: a wide, slim chimney centered at each of the east and west elevations, and two narrower interior chimneys symmetrically positioned at the ridge. The easternmost interior ridge chimney exists for symmetry only, and serves no flue. (Similarly, one of the second-story windows of the north facade is false; see *infra*, northeast bed chamber, and floor plan.)

The foundation is of brick, and encloses a full basement under the main block. There are four narrow single-sash windows in each of the north and south foundations; each is a fixed four-light window. The space under the north porch consists of a small dairy, original to the building. It is accessible by a flight of brick steps leading under the north porch from the east.

Hyphens and Wings

The main block is flanked by one-and-one-half-story hyphens and wings, making this a five-part mansion, typical of Maryland forms that were popular during the period. The small (one-by-one-bay) side-gabled hyphens extend from the side elevations of the main block. From each hyphen, the principal space of the wing turns at right angles toward the north, in each case forming a three-by-one-bay wing with gable front on the north and a hip roof on the south. The coursed watertable continues as on the main block around the entire structure. The total space taken up by each hyphen-wing structure is approximately 36 by 40 feet.

There is an entrance into each of the hyphens, centered in the north elevation. Each hyphen entrance is through double doors, each leaf having three flush panels; each door is surmounted by a six-light fanlight, and inset into a plain recessed enframing. Above each of the north hyphen doors is a narrow double-sash sliding window with plain stone sill. The north and south cornices of the hyphens are detailed with dentillation above a bed molding. On the south elevation of each hyphen, a 6/6 double-hung-sash window corresponds to the door opposite it on the north; the upper-story sliding windows are the same as those on the north elevation.

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 6
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

The three-by-one-bay wings are larger and deeper than the hyphens. On each of the north gable fronts, there is a full molded pediment with plain tympanum, and a single 9/9 double-hung-sash window centered beneath it. Unlike the windows of the main block, the northerly windows of the wing have not only the stone sills, but a fully molded lintel. There is also a 9/9 double-hung-sash window centered in the south elevation of each wing, and each of these two windows is surmounted by a small projecting pediment. Cornices of the wing are, like those of the hyphens, detailed with dentillation above a bed molding.

There are also entrances into the two wings on the outer (i.e., east and west) elevations. The east wing served as the kitchen and associated spaces, and has an entrance centered in its three-bay east elevation. The east entrance is through a six-panel door. Like the north hyphen doors, this east door is inset into a plain recessed enframing and surmounted by a six-light fanlight. Lighting the second story are three 3/3 double-hung-sash windows with plain enframing and stone sills. A corbelled brick chimney is centered at the ridge.

The west wing, which originally served as carriage room and stable, was renovated in the 1930s to serve as a music room/meeting room and the openings in its west elevation were changed. In 1993, when Riversdale opened after years of restoration work, the openings in the west elevation had been restored. There are now two doors and three windows in the west elevation. A false opening in the first (northernmost) bay replicates the original door into the carriage room: a wide double door with eight panels in each leaf. A taller, narrower double door fills the southernmost bay: it has two four-panel leaves, surmounted by an 18-light rectangular transom. There are three modern, six-pane, fixed windows, symmetrically spaced beneath the eaves.

Interior

The floor plan of Riversdale is formal, embellished with outstanding decorative detail. The decorative features are representative of the late Federal period, but they reflect also the European influences brought to this building by the Stier family.

The main block, first story

The first story of the main block consists of six principal spaces: three parlors take up the south side of the building; on the north is a central entry hall, flanked by a formal stair hall on the west and a service hall on the east.

The north entrance leads into the entry hall. The north wall is lighted by two tall slim 9/9 double-hung-sash windows, one on each side of the double door. Each leaf of the door has four rectangular panels. The door is framed with a two-step molding in the form of pilasters; from the molded capitals springs the arch which enframes the fanlight. Soffits and jambs of door and windows are paneled, and the window architraves have a two-step molding with convex backband; a plinth forms a plain base where the framing trim joins the floorboards. The floorboards are wide and probably original.

Baseboards are high with astragal and multi-band molding; they are painted dark green. A pedestal chair-rail encircles the entry hall, defining the plain dado beneath. The wall above the chair-rail is painted a light cream-beige, while that below it is painted a dark blue-gray. The bold plaster cornice has a plain wide frieze with concave upper and lower moldings; it is painted ivory.

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Page 7

Double doors lead from the entry hall into the *salon de milieu*, which takes up the south central space. This space is distinguished by the triple-arch motif on all four walls. On each of the north, east and west walls, these arches mark a central opening and two flanking alcove niches. On the south, the arches mark three triple-sash windows which lead out onto the south porch. The central openings in each of the other three walls are filled with mahogany double doors, each leaf having four decorative molded panels.

The salon is the most ornately embellished space in the house, with the triple-arches distinguished by decorated wooden pilasters, a plaster ceiling medallion, and a complex molded plaster cornice. The arches which enframe the doors, windows and niches are of two-step molding, with an inner bead and an outer bold astragal. Between each set of arches, joining one to the next, is a pair of pilasters, decorated with applied composition ornament in the form of bunches of grapes and grape leaves. Each individual pilaster is topped by Ionic volutes over a double spray of acanthus leaves, and each is framed vertically by a tiny egg-and-dart-like border molding. The pilasters rise from a multi-course molded base, which is continued all the way around the room as the crown molding of the plain high baseboard. The arch moldings and pilasters are painted a putty-gray. Floorboards are wide and probably original.

The complex plaster cornice is made up of nine courses of ornament, proceeding from a narrow border molding on the ceiling, through a wide horizontal *rincaux* frieze, a course of freestanding acanthus leaves above a narrow astragal, a plain horizontal frieze, two courses of egg-and-dart molding, and a wide vertical frieze with graceful grapevine moldings, to a narrow border molding on the wall. In the *rincaux* and grapevine friezes, the ornament is painted yellow on a putty-gray ground, and all other courses are painted a chalky green.

Centered in the ceiling is a decorative plaster medallion, circular in shape. Framed within an outer astragal molding is a wide band with graceful grapevine ornament, separated by another astragal molding from the central circle which is decorated with radiating whole acanthus leaves. The border moldings are painted chalky green, while the ornament is painted yellow on a putty-gray ground. Originally a lamp in the shape of an urn, sent to Rosalie Calvert by her family in Antwerp, was hung from the center.

The south exterior wall of the salon is dominated by the three arched triple-sash windows, which open to a height of six feet to allow passage in from and out to the south porch. Inside the architrave which enframes the windows, the jambs are paneled, and small rosettes are applied at the spring of the arch. Similarly, the jambs and soffits of the three double doors are paneled, and rosettes are applied at lintel level. Each of these lintels is embellished by a running lozenge pattern.

The double doors on the side walls of the salon lead into the dining room on the east and a parlor on the west. Restoration work on the dining room is essentially complete, while work is still in progress in the west parlor.

The dining room is distinguished by a reproduction mantel in the east wall and the recently restored plaster cornice. The mantel is centered in the east wall of the dining room; it is a reproduction based upon some of the information gathered from family letters as well as

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form **Page 8**

remnants of the original marble. The shelf of the mantel is dark gray marble, and the frieze and piers of the are of red grained faux marble; each pier is made up of a large rounded leaf at the top and a scroll at the bottom, decorated by white plaster medallions inset on both sides at top and bottom. Centered on the frieze is an applied white composition wreath and swag, and at the corners of the frieze are two square plaques incorporating the wreath and red marbling motif. The area immediately surrounding the firebox is painted to resemble gray grained marble as is the area below the chair-rail on all walls of the room.

There is a pedestal chair-rail (painted a light khaki-green) around the entire room; below this chair-rail a dado is created by the gray grained faux marble paint. Above the chair-rail the walls are painted a gold color. There is a high baseboard (painted black) with crown molding. Floorboards are wide and probably original.

There are two double-door openings into the dining room: one connecting to the central salon, and one (recently reopened and restored) connecting to the transverse corridor to the north. Enframing each opening is a two-step architrave molding with inner bead and plain backband. A modern opening in the wall just north of the mantel enters a mechanical lift which leads down into the east wing; this opening is disguised.

Two 9/9 windows in the south wall light the dining room. The reveals of the window openings are rectangular, and the area below each window is paneled, as are the jambs and soffits.

The plaster cornice of this room has recently been restored. Uppernmost at the ceiling is a course of standing white plaster acanthus leaves; below, the underside of the next course is a gold-painted soffit, ornamented with white plaster rosettes alternating with mutules. Below a separating white molding is a frieze of white plaster rosettes on a gold ground, bordered below with a bed molding painted light khaki-green.

On the west side of the central salon is the *salle de compagnie*, which is still undergoing restoration. The plain narrow firebox is as yet without a mantel, and the multi-course plaster cornice has suffered water damage and physical damage, and has not yet been restored.

The pedestal chair-rail is three inches higher than that in the dining room, and has additional bands of molding below. The baseboard is high, with crown molding. Floor boards are wide and probably original.

Two 9/9 windows in the south wall light the room; unlike the windows in the dining room, the reveals of the west parlor windows are splayed, and not rectangular. The area below each window is paneled, as are the splayed jambs and soffits. East of the windows and in the pier between the two windows, cuts into the cornice indicate where two pier mirrors were installed early in this century. On the unpainted walls in these locations the ghosts of wallpaper *fleurs de lys* could be distinguished when the mirrors were first removed; these patterns have faded, and are no longer visible.

The most noticeable feature of the west parlor is the plaster cornice, which, as noted, is in need of repair. The topmost course consists of freestanding acanthus leaves, below which is a course of

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 9
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

acanthus modillions. Below this is a narrow course of egg-and-dart molding, a wide frieze with applied swags, and a bold bed molding. All of the cornice is painted a light cream-beige except for the frieze which is painted a light peach. The walls are presently washed with white.

The architrave moldings of door and windows, as in the dining room, are two-step, with inner bead and plain backband. There is only one entrance/exit in this parlor: the paneled mahogany double door into the central salon. Above this door, centered in the east wall of the west parlor, is a handsome ornamental lintel with full entablature - dentillated cornice and frieze with applied cornucopia and swags.

To the west of the north entry hall is the formal stair hall. The three-run, open-string stair rises to the west along the north wall of the stair hall, rising across the westernmost window of the stair hall. The stair has a paneled spandrel, and stairends are decorated with carved rosettes and tendrils; the balusters are rectangular, and the rail is delicately molded. The most distinguishing feature of the stair is the massive wooden newel, approximately 12 inches in diameter; the newel is fluted, with stop-fluting at the bottom, and a high molded base. The newel has a flat top surface, on which a reproduction plaster statue now stands.

The architrave moldings of the windows are two-step, as in the other formal spaces of the first story; in the stair hall, the window reveals are splayed, and the jambs and soffits are paneled. There is a closet space beneath the first run of the staircase.

At the top of the four-step second run, a passage leads west, through a low six-panel door, into the second level of the west hyphen. The cornice of the stair hall consists of a concave upper molding, beneath which is a course of modillions, and wide frieze with applied swags. The cornice is painted yellow, while the walls are painted a cream-beige. The cornice treatment is repeated and continued in the upper (second-story) hall, where there is a three-step chair-rail just above the first-story cornice level. At the top of the formal stair there is one slim turned newel with lower pendant.

Corresponding to the stair hall on the east side, the sixth space in the first story of Riversdale's main block consists of the service corridor north of the dining room, from which are accessed a secondary stair on the west, and a low-ceilinged, two-part pantry on the east. The westerly part of the pantry is fitted with shelves, restored from evidence in the walls, and entered through a small ante-room on the east. The door into this ante-room from the service corridor has a two-step architrave molding similar to other door openings on the first story. The tight, dog-leg stair just east of the pantry leads up to the mezzanine; enclosed beneath it, a tightly winding stair leads to the basement.

The main block, second story

The second-story chambers follow the same pattern as the spaces on the first story. The spaces are accessible from a central, east-west corridor, which runs the full length of the main block, and

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 10**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

which is entered from the second-story stair hall through a formal arched opening. The arch itself has a two-step architrave molding; it springs from fluted pilasters with stop-fluting below.

The principal bed chambers are above the east (*salle de compagnie*) and west (dining room) parlors. Both of these chambers have long, narrow adjoining dressing rooms. In the case of the east chamber, the dressing room runs north and south, and is located over the easterly section of the south-central space. It is in two parts: the smaller space is accessible by the transverse corridor, and the larger (southerly) space, which is lighted by one of the south windows, is accessible from a door in the west wall of the east bed chamber. The dressing room for the west bed chamber runs east and west, on a line with the second-story corridor, between the west bed chamber and the stair hall; it is accessible from both the west bed chamber and from the west end of the corridor.

The bed chamber above the central salon is somewhat smaller than the east and west bed chambers, decreased in size by the space taken by the east dressing room. There is a fireplace centered in the west wall of the room. The east wall of the central bed chamber has a curved alcove for placement of a bed; the reverse of this curve is reflected in the dressing room immediately to the east.

The north side of the corridor, east of the second-story stair hall, is taken up by three small central spaces over the north entry hall, and a secondary stair and a corner bed chamber on the northeast. The northeast bed chamber is located above the two-part pantry, and the mezzanine space above it (see *infra*). An unusual feature of the northeast bed chamber is the fact that it is lighted by only the easternmost of the windows in the north elevation; the easterly half of the other north window lights the adjoining secondary stair, but the westerly half of the same window is false (see floor plan). The three small central spaces (over the north entry hall) comprise a short north-south access passage, and the two very small bedrooms to which it gives access. Only the westerly of these two small chambers (used by the Calvert family for children) has a fireplace. Using architectural and documentary evidence, these three small spaces have recently been restored to their original configuration from an early twentieth-century reconstruction.

Cornices and architrave trim in the second-story spaces correspond to the traditional hierarchy of first- and second-story decoration. The cornices are plainer than those on the first story, consisting of several courses of cove, ogee and astragal moldings, with no applied detail. Door and window architrave moldings are single-step, with plain backband and inner bead. Most rooms have pedestal chair-rails.

Riversdale has an unusual mezzanine (on the same level with the second story of the flanking hyphens and wings) in the northeasterly section of the main block, sandwiched between that section's first and second stories. This small area in the main block comprises a corridor and one small room, accessible by the secondary stair, and connected on the same level with several more spaces in the upper story of the east hyphen and wing. Ceiling height in the mezzanine is just over six feet. This continuation of the upper story of the hyphen/wing into the main block is most unusual, but the physical evidence suggests that the mezzanine is fully original to the building.

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 11**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Hyphens and wings

The ground floors of the east and west wings are four steps lower than the first floor of the main block, and are accessible from the main block by the east end of the service corridor and the west end of the stair hall. Each hyphen is also accessible from the exterior (at grade level) into a narrow northerly passage. The east wing originally housed a kitchen and pantry, connected by the northerly passage to the hyphen which contained a small, square breakfast room. Above these spaces were several small rooms, presumably for domestic servants, accessible by a single-run flight of stairs that rose along the north wall of the passage. The southerly section of both wing and hyphen was converted circa 1912, by removal of the upper floor and the staircase, into a high-ceilinged banquet room. The upper floor and staircase have recently been restored, and the spaces equipped for modern use. The north part of the wing is now a modern kitchen and bathroom, and the southerly large space is a meeting room; the rooms above them form an apartment for the resident caretaker. The two windows in the south wall of the meeting room rise above that room's ceiling, and the upper sashes light the rooms above (cf. *infra* regarding the west hyphen spaces).

The west wing originally served as a coach house in the north part, and a stable in the south part, of the wing; the west hyphen contained the plantation proprietor's study. A very tight staircase in the northwest corner of the hyphen wound up to the second level where there were spaces for the coachman and storage in the wing, and a small bedroom in the hyphen. After the west wing was damaged by fire in the late 1920s, the upper floor was removed and the entire wing was converted into a two-story music room; a fireplace was installed in the east wall at the end of the east-west passage, and a door was opened between the new music room and the study. This music/meeting room has been restored in its 1930s form, but the fireplace has been removed, and the study door closed structurally; access is now open between the hyphen passage and the meeting room. The cornice and chair-rail trim represents the 1930s remodeling of this room. The music/meeting room is lighted not only by the long windows at north, south, and east (as well as the 18-light transom over the west door) but by three small modern six-pane fixed windows just below cornice level in the west wall.

The west hyphen contains the study, or office, entrance to which is directly across the passage from the north exterior entrance to the hyphen. In the east wall of the study, the chimney breast is flanked by arched glazed cupboards; the lower sections of the cupboards are closed with pairs of single-panel doors. French hand-block printed wallpaper adorns the walls of the study. The wallpaper panel on the north wall, west of the door, is original to the room; the remaining panels of the same historic wallpaper were acquired from the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and installed here as part of the recent restoration process.¹ Reproduction "colonnade" wallpaper has been applied below the restored chair-rail.

¹ This historic wallpaper (*Chasse à Courre*) dates from approximately 1816, made by the firm of Jacquemart et Bénard in Paris. It shows the entire sequence of the hunt, with huntsmen, horses, dogs and onlookers progressing around the room from the chateau, through fields and wooded areas, over hills and across streams, to the chateau again. The original wallpaper was undoubtedly sent to Rosalie Calvert by her father or brother, in addition to the many other decorative items that she requested. When first installed, the wallpaper covered all walls of the room.

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 12**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

The wood mantel which frames the firebox in the east wall has plain pilasters supporting a plain frieze. The window in the south wall rises above the ceiling, and the upper sash lights the small bedroom above.

Basement

The floor plan of the basement follows the same pattern as the first story. All walls are of brick, laid in English bond; except for the south central section, all floors are of brick. The secondary stair just east of the north entry hall winds down to the corresponding space below grade. From this space a door leads eastward into the brick wine vault which takes up the northeast space in the basement. Another door leads south into the southeast space, now used as an exhibit room.

The central area of the basement consists of two spaces, beneath the formal salon and the north entry hall. The large southerly space is used for storage. A door in the north wall of the northerly space leads out into the dairy which is located beneath the north porch. The dairy is divided into two spaces, the easterly giving access to the outside staircase from the east, the westerly being a small vaulted dairy.

The westerly third of the basement now serves as a small office/reception area in the north, with the larger south space devoted to use as a gift shop.

There are crawl spaces beneath the hyphens and wings. The deep crawl space beneath the west hyphen is particularly interesting because of the arches in its foundation walls: two in the south wall, two in the west, and one in the north. The arches are not alike, either in size or in shape, and their purpose is not understood. A break in the west wall gives access to the shallow crawl space beneath the west wing, and a glimpse of what must be the brick paving (approximately one foot below the current floor of the wing) of the original stable and coach house.

Condition/Integrity of the Mansion

The Riversdale mansion underwent several renovations early in the twentieth century, both in the main block and in the flanking wings. Recent work, carried out between 1989 and 1993, has restored many of these spaces to their original configurations, particularly in the main block; this work has been carefully substantiated by information both from destructive investigation and from documentary evidence. Present-day use of the mansion has been enhanced by the restoration of the west wing to its 1930 configuration as a high-ceilinged meeting room, and the installation of a modern kitchen in the east wing. These phases of the evolution of the building - from its original design and embellishment, through the renovations of the turn of this century, to restoration of original forms and adaptation for current use - do not detract from the very high architectural integrity of this outstanding five-part Maryland mansion.

The Dependency

Approximately 30 feet east of the east wing stands a two-story gable-roof dependency building, three bays by one, also built of brick covered with yellow-beige stucco; the kitchen building is approximately 29 by 18 feet, three bays by one. There are two entrances: a door in the northernmost bay of each of the east and west elevations. Windows are 6/6 double-hung-sash on the first story, and 3/3 double-hung-sash on the second. The windows have plain board surrounds, and no sills or shutters. The roof is presently covered with standing-seam metal

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 13**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

painted red, and a wide brick chimney, covered with stucco, is centered at the ridge. The kitchen building rests on a brick foundation; there is no basement. The kitchen building is in deteriorating condition, but plans are underway for its restoration. A small one-story shed-roof brick addition encloses part of the west elevation, extending toward the mansion, with entrance in its west wall.

The interior of the building consists of two spaces, up and down. The central chimney serves fireplaces in the south spaces. A single-run staircase rises toward the east along the north wall of the northerly space. All of the interior surfaces of this dependency have been plastered or paneled with modern synthetic materials, but destructive investigation may soon reveal new information about its original finishes. Dendrochronological investigation (see Section 8) has determined that the dependency is contemporary with the earliest construction of the mansion.²

Setting

The Riversdale Mansion stands on a circa 8-acre parcel of land, approached by a drive which enters through shaped stone gateposts from the north and curves around in front of the north entrance of the mansion to exit through another pair of gateposts to the west. The grounds include an open grassy area to the north, with remnants of an old fountain now planted with flowers; on the south, small garden patches frame an ancient iron cannon which is mounted on a stone base. (The cannon, reportedly from one of the early vessels that carried British colonists to the Maryland colony, was given to Charles Benedict Calvert in 1845; it has recently been conserved and remounted on the south lawn.) South of the cannon, the land drops off to a block of 1950s subdivision houses on lower ground. There is a shallow-stepped (modern) brick patio outside the west entrance to the west wing. Narrow brick walkways lead from the paved drive to the two north hyphen doors.

Archaeological investigation was undertaken in the summer of 1995 in the area near the dependency, and additional work will be undertaken in the summer of 1997. The first phase of excavation identified nine different structures. Immediately north of the existing dependency is the 18-by-20 foot foundation of the water tower, probably built during the proprietorship of Charles Benedict Calvert, and known from late nineteenth-century photographs. Immediately north of that is the 25-by-12-foot foundation of the earlier wash house, also known from photographs, and referred to by Rosalie Calvert in several letters. An additional short foundation, running north from the wash house, may represent the base of the *serre* (hothouse) that Rosalie indicated she intended to construct near the wash house. Running much farther north from the corner of the wash house is the line of the garden wall which George and Rosalie Calvert had built in 1806 (probably following the design of William Russell Birch) to enclose their large garden. These structures were essential to the running of the plantation; their foundations and the areas around them will be further studied.³

² Dendrochronology, Inc., *Riversdale Slave Quarters: The Last Years of Tree Growth for Selected Timbers as Derived by Key-Year Dendrochronology*, August 1993.

³ Gibb, James G., and Daniel H. Weiskotten, *A Phase I Archaeological Survey and Phase II Site Examination of Riversdale Mansion (18PR390), Riverdale, Prince George's County, Maryland*; see also Callcott, M.L., "First Stages of Riversdale Archaeology Completed" in *The Riversdale Letter*, Spring 1996

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 14**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide: X Locally: X

Applicable National

Register Criteria:

A X B X C X D

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions):

A B C D E F G

NHL Criteria:

1,2,4

NHL Theme(s):

- I. Peopling Places
 - 3. Migration from outside
 - 4. Community and neighborhood
- III. Expressing Cultural Values
 - 2. Visual arts
 - 5. Architecture, landscape architecture
- V. Developing the American Economy
 - 4. Workers and Work Culture
- VI. Expanding Science and Technology
 - 1. Experimentation and invention

Areas of Significance:

Agriculture
 Architecture
 Art

Period(s) of Significance:

1801-1864

Significant Dates:

1801-02, 1803-09, 1816, 1838-64

Significant Person(s):

Calvert, Charles Benedict

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Lovering, William

Comparative Categories:

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 15**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**Summary**

Riversdale is an outstanding combination of classic Federal-style Maryland architecture and European decorative detail. Begun in 1801 by Henri Joseph Stier, a wealthy Flemish aristocrat, it was finished during the next decade by his daughter, Rosalie, who had married into the Calvert family. On a national level, Riversdale is significant for its architecture: it is one of the last and best of the Maryland five-part mansions, a regional form that developed from Palladian beginnings as expressed through British architecture books of the eighteenth century; it is, however, distinguished from other examples of this type by the European design details brought by its original builders. Riversdale is also significant for its association with one of Maryland's most prominent families, and for the fact that original family papers survive to document the building and finishing of the mansion and grounds. Also on a national level, Riversdale is uniquely important as the repository (during the early years of the nineteenth century) of the Stier family's collection of Old World paintings, the most outstanding collection of its type in the United States at that time. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Riversdale plantation was brought to its greatest prominence by Charles Benedict Calvert, the prime mover in the establishment of the Maryland Agricultural College (now the University of Maryland at College Park) on part of the extensive Riversdale acreage, and also in the establishment of the federal-level Bureau of Agriculture, now the U.S. Department of Agriculture. During the twentieth century, Riversdale was the home of a succession of United States Congressmen: Senator Hiram Johnson of California, Senators Thaddeus and Hattie Caraway of Arkansas, and Congressman Abraham Lafferty of Oregon. Owned for the last half-century by a State-created County agency, it was restored and opened to the public in 1993.

Riversdale meets the following three National Historic Landmark criteria:

Criterion 1: Association with events that have made a significant contribution to broad national patterns of United States history, and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained:

(Progressive agricultural practices, agricultural education, community development)

Criterion 2: Association with the life of a person nationally significant in the history of the United States:

(Charles Benedict Calvert)

Criterion 4: The property embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type exceptionally valuable for the study of a period, style or method of construction.

(Preliminary plan by architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe, adaptations by Henri Joseph and Charles Jean Stier with advice from builder/architect William Lovering, European influences, construction by Lovering, unique design features)

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Page 16**Thematic Framework**

Riversdale should be viewed in the framework of four distinct themes, as enumerated in the National Park Service's Thematic Framework of 1996.

I. Peopling Places: The history of Riversdale illustrates the movement of groups of people and the development of new communities, through the migration of the Stier family (from Flanders) to the fledgling United States and their planning and development of a new plantation on the edge of the new Capital city.

III. Expressing Cultural Values: The history of Riversdale in its formative years highlights several different aspects of art and culture:

(2) visual art: Riversdale is unique in that it was the repository of one of the first and most important collections of Old World paintings in the early United States.

(5) architecture: Riversdale mansion is a unique combination of Federal domestic architecture and European decorative influences.

and

landscape architecture: Although the grounds of Riversdale have been greatly changed over time, the original detailed landscape planning can be perceived through the written records, the few surviving garden elements, and the features identified and analyzed through archaeology.

V. Developing the American Economy: The development, maintenance and productive life of the Riversdale plantation depended on slave labor; Riversdale is uniquely important in that there survives a highly unusual record from a slave's point of view of life and work on the plantation, in a journal kept by a literate member of that slave force.

VI. Expanding Science and Technology: Riversdale was the laboratory of a progressive agriculturalist. Charles Benedict Calvert, proprietor of the plantation for 30 years, was active in agricultural experimentation, and in the pursuit of progress in agricultural education.

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 17**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Statement of Significance

The story of Riversdale began with the immigration of the Stier family from Antwerp to the United States in 1794. The family was headed by aristocrat Henri Joseph Stier, and included his wife, Marie Louise Peeters, their son Charles Jean and daughter Isabelle (and their respective families) and youngest daughter Rosalie Eugenia. As French troops approached, the Stier family fled Antwerp, taking with them their most valuable possessions (including many valuable paintings from the Peeters family collection), and sailed from Amsterdam to Philadelphia. After a short time in Philadelphia, where they established themselves in business and society, the elder Stiers and daughter Rosalie moved to Annapolis, where they made their home, and where Rosalie was married (in 1799) to George Calvert, son of Benedict Calvert of Mount Airy in Prince George's County.⁴

Rosalie and George Calvert spent the first several years of their marriage at one of the Calvert family properties - then known as Mount Albion, now as Goodwood - and during this time, Rosalie's parents, with the help of her older brother, began negotiating to buy property near the newly developing city of Washington. To facilitate this purchase, in the fall of 1800, the elder Stiers rented and moved into Bostwick, the former home of Christopher Lowndes in Bladensburg. Early in 1801, through his son, Henri Stier purchased nearly 800 acres of land north of Bladensburg, and began the planning of the new plantation which would come to be known as Riversdale.

Stier decided from the outset that he wanted a house, not square in plan, but one with flanking wings; he knew also that he wanted a central salon with a parlor on each side, and that parlor should be roughly 20 to 22 feet square, and the parlors 24 to 25. He first commissioned Benjamin Henry Latrobe to prepare a design following this general plan which Henri and Charles Stier had worked out, but Latrobe was late with his response. By February 1801, Stier was negotiating with Washington builder/architect William Loring to do the work.⁵ Although Latrobe had finally submitted a plan during this period of negotiation, it had not met with the Stiers' approval; the Stiers contracted with Loring to supervise the construction of Riversdale, and proceeded with the plan which had been drawn up essentially by the Stiers themselves. It is clear from several of the letters which passed between the elder Stiers and their son Charles (who was living in Alexandria, Virginia, at this time) that Charles Jean Stier had prepared some plan

⁴ Pearl, S.G., and J.T. Wollon, Jr., *Historic Structures Report, Riversdale Mansion*, prepared for M-NCPPC, 1979

⁵ Letters Henri J. Stier to Charles J. Stier, 26 February, 1 June and 19 June 1801; Marie Louise Stier to Charles J. Stier, 28 June 1801. A large amount of correspondence between members of the Stier family has been preserved by descendants in several family archives. A selection of these letters has been published (in English translation from the original French) in *Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert, 1795-1821*, edited by Margaret Law Callcott, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991. William Loring was just completing his task supervising the construction of the Octagon for John Tayloe in Washington. To Loring are attributed several other important buildings in Washington, projects that the Stiers would have known about: Wheat Row, constructed circa 1794 for the Greenleaf syndicate; the Seven Buildings, constructed circa 1794 for the Morris and Nicholson syndicate; and the Thomas Law House, constructed 1794-96, and leased in 1796 by Thomas and Eliza Custis Law (Eliza Law was the niece of George Calvert and a close friend of Rosalie Calvert). Loring had also (1799-1801) worked as architect for the new Courthouse erected in Upper Marlborough, Prince George's County, Maryland.

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

drawings for the new house.⁶ Stier's drawings were shown to Lovering, but were later lost. Although Latrobe's design was not used by the Stier family in the building of Riversdale, a copy of his plan has been preserved in the files of the Stier family descendants in Belgium, and its discovery adds significantly to the corpus of Latrobe's work. Drawn by Adam Traquair in Latrobe's Philadelphia office, the papers show two elevations (labeled as south and north) as well as a plan of the chamber floor.⁷ Rejected by the Stiers, this plan was later adapted by Latrobe for Clifton, built in Richmond, Virginia, and destroyed in 1903.

The Stiers also commissioned Robert Lanphier to take charge of the carpentry and to supervise the selection of woods. Lanphier (1765-1856), who had apprenticed with his father and who had some familiarity with architectural design books, worked as a carpenter in Alexandria, Virginia. Despite some difficulties that the Stiers had working with Lovering, construction on Riversdale began in the summer of 1801 under Lovering's supervision.⁸ Charles Jean Stier and his young wife returned to Antwerp in September 1801, just after work on the new house began. Although the elder Stiers had hoped to move into one finished wing by the end of 1801, the work had not progressed far enough by that time. They finally moved into the east wing in August 1802, while work continued on the main block.

As the political situation changed in Europe, the Stier family began to consider returning to Antwerp; Charles J. Stier had already returned in the fall of 1801, and urged the rest of his family to return in order to reclaim their possessions. By the spring of 1803, the elder Stiers, in spite of their satisfaction with their new Maryland plantation house, prepared to go. They sailed from Baltimore in June 1803, together with the family of their eldest daughter, Isabelle van Havre, and by the end of that month, Rosalie and George Calvert accepted her father's offer of moving in and finishing Riversdale. The Calverts with their two small children then took up permanent residence at Riversdale, bringing with them a substantial population of slaves from the Mount Albion plantation (one of George Calvert's plantation holdings where they had been living since their marriage). At this point, a poignant series of letters began between Rosalie and her Belgian family. Rosalie consistently looked forward to visiting her father and siblings in Belgium (her mother died in 1804), but George Calvert was completely occupied with the development and management of his new home and farm at Riversdale. During the years that followed, children were born at regular intervals, and the plantation required all of the Calverts' time and attention, so that Rosalie was never again reunited with her Belgian family.

The letters which passed between Rosalie and her Belgian family members give much information about the finishing of the mansion and the development of the plantation.⁹ In one of

⁶ Letters: H.J. Stier to C.J. Stier, 25 November 1800; R.S. Calvert to C.J. Stier, January 1807

⁷ Adam Traquair drawings, in Calvert-Stier papers, Van de Werve Archives, Viersel, Belgium

⁸ Letters, H.J. Stier to C.J. Stier, 26 February, 1 June and 19 June 1801; Marie Louise Stier to C.J. Stier, 28 June 1801. Robert Lanphier (1765-1856) had submitted a design for the national Capitol to the competition of 1792. See Butler, Jeanne F., "Competition 1792: Designing a Nation's Capitol", *Capitol Studies, Special Issue*, 1976.

⁹ Much of the information gleaned from this voluminous family correspondence was used in the recent restoration of the Riversdale mansion. See selections from the correspondence in M.L. Callcott, editor, *op. cit.*

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

her first letters to her parents, Rosalie wrote that she might ask Latrobe, who had just come to Washington to work on the Capitol building, to help with finishing details in the dining room. No record of Latrobe's actual work on Riversdale has yet been discovered; however, it is known that he encouraged his craftsmen to work on other projects, so it is possible that some of these advanced workmen were commissioned by the Calverts to do the intricate decorative finishing, particularly in the three parlors. One of Latrobe's Italian sculptors, for example, was commissioned by George Calvert to create a marble tombstone for Rosalie, after her death in 1821 (cf. *infra*).¹⁰

From the date of her parents' departure, George and Rosalie Calvert devoted much time and effort to the completion of the Riversdale mansion and grounds. Many details of the process are recorded in the letters which passed between Rosalie and her father and brother. In 1805 and 1806, for example, Rosalie reported that William Russell Birch, artist and landscape-architect (1755-1834), was working on plans for the Riversdale grounds. Birch had visited Henri Stier at Riversdale during the earliest stages of development of the plantation, and Stier had warmly recommended his services to George and Rosalie Calvert for design of the grounds. Birch came to Riversdale again in November 1805 to draw plans for design of the grounds, and it was he who convinced the Calverts that they should create the lake on the south side of the mansion rather than on the north as Stier had advised. There are indications in later letters that the Calverts used some of the concepts in the Birch plans, probably in the designing of the garden wall and the placement and enhancement of functional buildings, even though Birch himself later wrote that he had prepared a "plan for the grounds but I believe very little was done."¹¹ It is significant that the Calverts commissioned this British artist to assist them in creating an appropriate landscape design for their quasi-European plantation.

Some of the finer appointments of the house were sent to Rosalie by her father and brother from Belgium. Their letters to her, and hers to them, describe the marble mantels, statues, candelabra, etc., which she received and incorporated into the decorative finishing of her plantation home. Many of these *objets d'art* were unique to this country at the time.¹²

Many of the domestic and agricultural outbuildings of the Riversdale plantation were built during the first decade of the Calverts' occupancy, but the kitchen/servants' house which stands a short distance to the east of the mansion was apparently constructed at the same time as the mansion, if not slightly earlier. This building, which was described as a "Servants House of Brick" in a Fire Insurance Policy of 1849, has apparently served different functions over the years, perhaps as construction headquarters during the first phase of construction of the mansion, then as a separate kitchen building, and later as a dwelling for house servants. Dendrochronology has determined

¹⁰ Letters from R.S. Calvert to H.J. Stier, 28 June 1803; from Caroline Calvert to C.J. Stier, 27 July 1821; Elliot, Jonathan, *Historical Sketches of the Ten Miles Square forming the District of Columbia, Washington, 1830*, p. 278.

¹¹ Letters from H.J. Stier to R.S. Calvert, 26 August 1803, 1 May 1806; R.S. Calvert to H.J. Stier, 24 November 1805 and 26 September 1806; Birch, William Russell, *The Life of William Russell Birch, Enamel Painter, Written by Himself* (undated).

¹² Many letters from this period between Rosalie Calvert and her family in Belgium describe the decorative finishing of the house; see Callcott, M.L., ed., *op.cit.*, letters from 1803 to 1809.

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 20**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

that its joists, rafters and roofing boards were built from yellow pine cut after the growing season of 1800-1801.¹³

The west wing of the Riversdale mansion was completed in 1806, giving the plantation the full five-part Maryland form. In a letter to her father in September of that year, Rosalie described the spaces and uses of the west wing as related to the corresponding spaces in the east wing which had been occupied by her parents in the short time that they lived there. Corresponding to the location of the kitchen and corridor in the east wing, the Calverts created a stable for six horses in the west; and the pantry and small bed room in the east was to be balanced by a coach room for two coaches. Above the stable they created a storage room for wool, cotton and bulbs, while above the coach room was the coachman's small room. In the hyphen, corresponding to the space the Stiers had used as their dining room, George Calvert created his study/office, and a tiny staircase led above the hyphen door to a bedroom above the study.¹⁴

Stier had designed the most formal space of Riversdale, the central salon or *salon de milieu*, to incorporate some of the features of a similar room in his Chateau du Mick near Antwerp. Although his plans (drawn by his son, Charles) for its design were lost in the preparations for return to Europe, Rosalie and George Calvert carried out his concepts (e.g., the triple-arch motif) in the finishing of this beautiful room. Rosalie later indicated that the decorative detail of the finished salon was perhaps not as highly embellished as her father had originally planned. However, the completed plantation house was an unusual combination of American (particularly Maryland) architecture and European artistic design. When first completed, Riversdale was locally well known for its distinctive style ("dans un autre genre"), and it remains an important and unique combination of Federal-style domestic architecture and European decorative influences.¹⁵

As finished, Riversdale exemplified the traditional plan of the Maryland five-part mansion, and it is one of the last and best of the form. This form grew out of the three-part Palladian villas of the sixteenth century as interpreted in English design books such as James Gibbs' *A Book of Architecture*, 1728. By the mid-eighteenth century, the substantial brick mansions of prominent Maryland planters and businessmen were expressed in the form of the five-part mansion: a central block with flanking wings, usually with axis perpendicular to that of the central block, connected by lower hyphens (cf. Tulip Hill, Brice House, Paca House, Whitehall, and Hammond-Harwood House, in Anne Arundel County). In the period following the Revolution, the form was refined with Federal/Adam interior detail; Prince George's County is known for its outstanding examples, e.g., Montpelier and His Lordship's Kindness from the 1780s, as well as for similar examples without flanking wings from the 1780s and 1790s - Compton Bassett, Mount Lubentia, Pleasant Prospect, Oaklands, Beall's Pleasure and Concord. In the planning of

¹³ *Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Montgomery County, Policy 121*, 12 January 1849; Dendrochronology, Inc., *Final Report, Riversdale Slave Quarters* (sic): *The Last Years of Tree Growth for Selected Timbers as Derived by Key-Year Dendrochronology*, August 1993

¹⁴ Letter #32 from R. S. Calvert to H.J. Stier, 6 September 1806

¹⁵ Letters, #30 from H.J. Stier to R.S. Calvert, September 1806; R.S. Calvert to H.J. Stier, 6 September 1806, 26 March 1807.

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 21**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Riversdale, Henri Joseph Stier had decided at the outset that he wanted a house with flanking wings as opposed to a square plan. Construction began with the east wing, which served as the Stiers' residence while work continued on the main block. Although the sequence was interrupted by the departure of the Stiers in 1803, the house was finished by the Calverts, essentially according to Stier's plan, in 1806/07.

The completion of Riversdale came at the end of the period of prominence of the five-part mansion. Another fine example from the same decade is Homewood, built by Charles Carroll of Carrollton in Baltimore, noticeably lower in scale than Riversdale. The only local contemporary plantation house which could be compared with Riversdale was Walnut Grange, begun in 1805 for Mary and John Carlyle Herbert; Walnut Grange was made up of a rounded central block with rectangular flanking wings, but one of the wings was later destroyed by fire, leaving an oddly asymmetrical building, now substantially modernized to serve as an office. Possibly the best comparison with Riversdale is Tudor Place in Georgetown, a two-phase structure which was finished within a decade of the completion of Riversdale. In the case of Tudor Place, the wings (begun in the 1790s by the Lowndes family, well known to both Stiers and Calverts) preceded the central block, which, together with the connecting hyphens, was designed by William Thornton for the Calverts' niece, Martha Custis Peter, and her husband. The Peters lived in the already standing west building on their property while work proceeded on the central part of their house. The resulting Tudor Place is another fine five-part building somewhat reminiscent of Riversdale, although it differs in its use of the segmental curve and the relationship between the wings and the central block.

The five-part mansion was soon superseded in Maryland by somewhat more modest forms, usually built of wood, as the nineteenth century progressed. Generally, five-part formal mansions like Montpelier and Riversdale were not replicated until the era of the twentieth-century neo-Georgian estate houses. Riversdale represents an outstanding example of the late period of the Maryland five-part mansion form, unique in some of its European-inspired details, and of high architectural integrity.

In 1812, David Bailie Warden, a close observer of Washington society and later United States consul in Paris, visited Riversdale and published an account of his stay. A few sentences from his account serve to illustrate Riversdale's importance at that time:

“The establishment of George Calvert, Esq., at Bladensburg, attracts attention. His mansion, consisting of two stories, seventy feet in length, and thirty-six in breadth, is admirably adapted to the American climate. One each side there is a large portico, which shelters from the sun, rain, or snow. The hall is ornamented with lemon-trees, geraniums, polianthus, heliotropes, and other plants, which, in the summer evenings, invite the hummingbirds to taste of their sweetness”¹⁶

Other prominent visitors spent time at Riversdale, and their visits were recorded in Rosalie's letters, and in the writings of other members of her family. Gilbert Stuart spent a fortnight at Riversdale

¹⁶ Warden, David Bailie, *A Chorographical and Statistical Description of the District of Columbia, Paris, 1816*, page 156.

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

while painting the portraits of George and Rosalie Calvert.¹⁷ Other artists visited Riversdale because of the Stier-Peeters collection of Old World paintings, particularly during the open-house/showing of these paintings in April 1816. When the Stiers had fled Antwerp in 1794, they had carried with them more than 63 original paintings which had been part of the Peeters cabinet: paintings by Peter Paul Rubens (of whom Henri Joseph Stier was a sixth-generation direct descendant), Anthony Van Dyck, Jan Brueghel, Titian and others. Stier was a collector himself, and was serving as guardian of this important collection of his deceased father-in-law. This remarkable collection of paintings was housed at Riversdale for 13 years, for the most part in storage, but for a short time on display to the art-loving public. The fact of the paintings being housed at Riversdale, and the fame associated with them, gives Riversdale unique cultural importance in the early United States.¹⁸

Twelve of the smaller paintings in the collection were hung in the west parlor (*salle de compagnie*), and on occasions some of the larger paintings were shown to visitors, but in general, Rosalie feared that she would be besieged by art amateurs if the location of the paintings was publicized. Therefore most of the paintings were boxed and stored in the upper story of the west wing. In the spring of 1816, when he felt that the cessation of hostilities allowed for safe transport across the Atlantic, Henri Stier requested that the paintings be returned to him in Antwerp, and accordingly, the paintings were unpacked, sorted, and prepared for shipping. Rembrandt Peale and other artists convinced Rosalie that the fledgling American art world should not be denied the chance to see this priceless collection before it left the country, and she reluctantly agreed to open Riversdale for a showing of the paintings in April 1816, and people came from far and near for the opportunity.¹⁹

There are several contemporary accounts of the 1816 showing at Riversdale, including that by Rembrandt Peale: "for two weeks his [Calvert's] mansion at Bladensburg was the hospitable rendezvous of numerous visitors of taste and education, from the different cities. . . . It was a new and pleasant sight to witness such an animated assemblage of artists and amateurs - members of Congress from the different States, merchants, lawyers, and country gentlemen -- all engaged in discussing the merits of pictures and painters."²⁰

Mary Bagot, wife of the British minister to the United States, wrote in her journal, 24 April 1816: "Went with Mrs. Peter to see a collection of pictures at a Mr. Calverts . . . We found a very curious collection of pictures -- a few very fine Vandykes [sic] & two or three magnificent Rubens besides several other undoubted pictures of old masters. . . .they were to be packed the next day. Everybody flocked to see them, a collection of pictures being almost unheard of in the United States."²¹

¹⁷The Stuart portraits of George and Rosalie Calvert are part of a private collection, among the holdings of the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

¹⁸ Packing list of paintings brought to America in 1794, also various Catalogues of Sale of paintings, 1817, 1822, etc., Calvert-Stier papers, van de Werve Archives, Viersel, Belgium

¹⁹ Letters: R.S. Calvert to H.J. Stier, 20 March, 8 April and 5 June 1816; R.S. Calvert to I.S. van Havre, 2 June 1816; Peale, Rembrandt, "Reminiscences," *The Crayon*, 19 September 1855.

²⁰ Peale, Rembrandt, *ibid.*

²¹ Bagot, Mary, excerpt from "Exile in Yankeeland: The Journal of Mary Bagot, 1816-1819", edited by David Hosford in *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 51, 1984.

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 23**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Sarah Gales Seaton (wife of William Winston Seaton, editor of the *National Intelligencer*, the newspaper published in Washington, D.C.) also attended the art gathering at Riversdale, and wrote to her sister in May about her “view of some of the finest paintings ever in America. . . . Peale from Philadelphia, King and Wood from Baltimore were transported with admiration.”²²

With the advice and assistance of the visiting painters (Rembrandt Peale indicated that it was Charles Bird King who directed the opening and repacking of the paintings), the paintings were prepared for shipping; they were carried to Baltimore, 2 June 1816, whence they were shipped on the “Oscar” to Antwerp, where they arrived in good condition in late July. In August 1817, Henri Stier offered the collection for sale, and purchased the most outstanding paintings for his own collection.²³

Only three of the original Peeters collection remained with the Calvert family in the United States. Henri Stier had selected two landscapes by lesser known Dutch painters Schwagers and Anthonissen for Rosalie to keep, and they remained at Riversdale when the other paintings were returned to Antwerp in 1816; one other, *Romulus and Remus*, by the Rubens school, was later purchased for the Calverts and sent back in 1822; it remains, with the two landscapes, in the possession of direct descendants. Henri Stier’s collection was sold in July 1822, a year after his death, and these priceless paintings (by then 89 in number) found their way into museums and private collections all over the world. The Peeters collection was the most important collection of Old World paintings in the United States during its early years. Although Rosalie Calvert tried to keep the general public from learning much about it, the collection gained considerable fame among art lovers, and its tenure at Riversdale makes Riversdale unique in the cultural history of the early United States.

It was the same year, 1816, that the Riversdale plantation came legally into the possession of Rosalie Calvert. With her help, her brother, Charles Stier, drew up a deed, conveying to Rosalie all of the land which he had purchased in 1801. The deed was validated by the Maryland General Assembly in its December session 1815, and confirmed in January 1816.²⁴

Rosalie Stier Calvert died in March 1821; she was buried in the family graveyard with four of her nine children who had died in their youth. George Calvert commissioned Giovanni Andrei to create the fine tombstone which shows Rosalie ascending to heaven, and welcomed by the four

²² Seaton, Josephine, *William Winston Seaton of the National Intelligencer*, Boston, 1871, pp. 134-135. The other artists mentioned were Charles Bird King (1785-1862), just returned from study in Europe, later to become a prominent portraitist, and Joseph Wood (1778-1830) a portraitist/miniaturist who had recently settled in Washington.

²³ See letter, H.J. Stier to R.S. Calvert, July 1816

²⁴ Prince George’s County Deed JRM#16:612; *Laws of Maryland* 1815, Chapter 110

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 24**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

small angels who had predeceased her.²⁵ As indicated above, her father died in Antwerp only three months later.

George Calvert resided at Riversdale until his death in 1838. His will divided the estate between his two surviving sons, George Henry and Charles Benedict.²⁶ George Henry pursued a literary career, spending considerable time in Europe for travel and study, before settling in Newport, Rhode Island. Charles Benedict, however, remained at Riversdale; in 1839, he married Charlotte A. Norris of Baltimore, and their six children were all born at Riversdale. Charles Benedict Calvert spent the rest of his life at Riversdale, pursuing his principal interests, agriculture, agricultural education and the politics associated, and it was he who brought the Riversdale plantation to the peak of its prominence. Immediately after his father's death, Charles Calvert began the improvement and consolidation of the plantation. He made important innovations at Riversdale, notably in complex drainage systems, scientific fertilizing, and in crop rotation. By successive conversion from tobacco to grasses, and with the scientific use of manure as fertilizer, he was able to improve the soil in sections of his plantation year by year, eventually abandoning tobacco culture altogether. By 1846, his plantation was almost entirely devoted to the production of fodder grasses and dairy cattle.²⁷

Charles Benedict Calvert represented Prince George's County in the Maryland House of Delegates in 1839, 1843 and 1844. Also in 1844, his name was linked with that of Samuel F. B. Morse when a test of the first magnetic telegraph line (along the line of the railroad, whose right-of-way through Riversdale had been sold to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company by George Calvert) was accomplished on 9 April.²⁸

Calvert's greatest talent was in agriculture. His farm at Riversdale became a showplace; his farming methods and implements, in particular his octagonal cow-house, were written up in the most important agricultural publications of the time. The beauty of his grounds, the lake on the south lawn, his flower gardens and fountains, were enthusiastically described. He was founder and president of the Prince George's County Agricultural Society and first president of the Maryland State Agricultural Society; he later served on the executive committee of the United States Agricultural Society. Calvert was the prime mover behind the effort to establish a federal cabinet-level Department of Agriculture (see *infra*).²⁹

²⁵ Giovanni Andrei was one of the stone sculptors brought from Italy in 1806 by Latrobe to execute the sculptural elements of the Capitol building. Andrei worked also on sculpture for at least two important buildings in Baltimore: St. Mary's Chapel by Maximilian Godefroy, and Union Bank by Robert Cary Long, Sr. Andrei died in Washington in 1824. See Borneman, Richard R., "Franzoni and Andrei," *William and Mary Quarterly* X, January 1953.

²⁶ Prince George's County Will, PC#1:89 ff.

²⁷ *The American Farmer*, August 1848

²⁸ Prince George's County Equity #125 (deposition of Thomas W. Morris); Prince George's County deed AB#8:392 ff.; *National Intelligencer*, 10 April 1844

²⁹ *The American Farmer*, March 1852; *The Country Gentleman*, 26 October and 14 December 1854; 3 September 1857; 3 June 1858; Wiser, Vivian D., *The Movement for Agricultural Improvement in Maryland*,

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 25**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Charles Benedict Calvert was also the principal founder and first president of the Board of Trustees of the Maryland Agricultural College - the third institution in the United States established for the purpose of agricultural education, and the first devoted to agricultural research-- which evolved into the present-day University of Maryland at College Park. Since 1851, Calvert had been vigorously advocating the establishment of an agricultural institution; the college was incorporated in 1856 by the Maryland General Assembly, and in 1856, Charles and George Calvert sold to the corporation the 428-acre Roszburg Farm which comprised the north westernmost section of Calvert's lands.³⁰ The essential and critical role of Charles Benedict Calvert and Riversdale in the establishment of the Agricultural College reflects the national importance of the plantation.

In 1853 Charles Calvert commissioned Baltimore surveyor/mapmaker William Sides to survey and draw a map of his plantation holdings: Riversdale and the Roszburg farm. The map, recently discovered and conserved, is five feet tall and four feet wide, of paper on linen; it shows the 1926 acres of Calvert's holdings at that time, extending nearly six miles north and south. Precisely detailed and ornately lettered, the Sides map gives invaluable detailed information about the Riversdale plantation, including the locations of 15 dwellings, 4 barns and 3 mills on the property. Approximately one-half of the acreage was cultivated, while about one-fourth was in forest and one-fourth in pasture. This outstanding artifact is now displayed in the Special Collections of the University of Maryland at College Park. It is a rare and valuable source of information about antebellum plantations.³¹

According to the 1850 census, Calvert's real estate was the most valuable in the County, valued at \$125,000. Only a few other planters held land which came close to the value of Calvert's: Charles Hill owned a series of plantations just north of Upper Marlborough valued at \$114,000; Zachariah Berry owned the Concord and Independence plantations valued at \$96,100; and Robert Sewall owned the Poplar Hill ("His Lordship's Kindness") plantation, valued at \$93,500. No other plantations in the County were considered to be in the same range of value.³²

Riversdale was described by another prominent visitor, Frederick Law Olmsted, in the 1850s. In this tumultuous decade when tension between the Southern slave states and the Northern non-slave states was mounting, Olmsted was commissioned by the *New York (Daily) Times* to travel through the slave states and publish a report on conditions in order to inform Northern readers. Olmsted set out late in 1852, and his book, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, was published in 1856.

Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1963; *Journal of the United States Agricultural Society*, 1853.

³⁰ *The American Farmer*, November 1851; Wiser, *op.cit.*; Acts of Maryland General Assembly, December 1856, Chapter 97; Prince George's County Deed CSM#3:294; see Callcott, George H., *A History of the University of Maryland*: Baltimore, Maryland Historical Society, 1966.

³¹ Sides, William, Land Surveyor, Baltimore: *Map of Riversdale Demesnes and Roszburg Farm Situated in Prince George's Co. Md. Belonging to Charles B. Calvert, Esq., 1853*; see also Callcott, George H., "The Riversdale Plantation Map of 1853" in *The Riversdale Letter*, Winter 1995.

³² Federal Census Records for Prince George's County, Maryland (Population Schedule and Agricultural Schedule), 1850.

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 26**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

He spent the day of 14 December 1852 at Riversdale, and although his principal purpose was to study slave labor, he described the plantation house, the kept grounds, the octagonal cow-house (see *infra*) and cattle, the sawmill production, and some of Calvert's agricultural innovations.³³

The octagonal cow-house was one of Calvert's most progressive innovations. Although this unusual structure was destroyed by fire circa 1910, photographs of it as well as an architectural floor plan survive. It was 100 feet in diameter, two stories high with a 20-foot-diameter glass dome on top for ventilation and light source. In the center of the lower floor was a feed-room, 36 feet in diameter, encircled by two ranges of cow-stalls to accommodate 104 cows; the upper story was devoted to storage of hay, grain and straw. A large yard, sixty feet wide, separated the octagonal cow-house from the outer buildings (hog pens, calf houses, calving stalls, a sheep house, poultry houses and bull stalls), which opened onto the yard and themselves formed an octagonal enclosure with four entrances; a major utilitarian structure was located at each entrance. Just outside the east entrance was a three-story 60-by-26-foot structure which incorporated, among other functions, the steam-operated sawmill and gristmill. Calvert's detailed description of the complex was printed in several agricultural journals, and became immediately both famous and controversial; in general, it was considered an agricultural masterpiece, and its fame reflected the prominence of its builder in progressive agricultural practices.³⁴

Calvert was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1861, and served one term. An ardent supporter of the Union, he referred to himself as a "Whig of the Henry Clay School." Because Calvert was a supporter of Abraham Lincoln, and because, believing that the Union must be preserved at all costs, he supported war appropriations, he was condemned by the local newspapers which supported the County's planters. Despite a vigorous campaign against him, Calvert won his seat in the election of June 1861. Already renowned in agricultural circles, he was immediately appointed to the House Committee on Agriculture, where he renewed his efforts, begun nearly a decade earlier, to establish a cabinet-level Department of Agriculture. These efforts led directly to the establishment of the Bureau of Agriculture, signed by President Lincoln 15 May 1862. The Department of Agriculture was not elevated to cabinet level until 1889, but it is generally agreed that the Bill of 1862 was the organic law.³⁵

Charles Benedict Calvert died at Riversdale in May 1864, and the Riversdale estate passed to his heirs. The slave force, which at the time of Charles Calvert's death numbered about 45 and lived in nine houses (cf. Sides map) around the plantation, achieved freedom with the enactment in January 1865 of the new Maryland Constitution of 1864. There is more information about the slave force at Riversdale than at most other plantations of the period, largely because of Adam Francis Plummer, one of the favorite slaves, and a near-contemporary of Charles Benedict

³³ Olmsted, Frederick Law, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, New York, 1856; see also Beveridge, C.E., and C.C. McLaughlin, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. II*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1981, pp. 86-92.

³⁴ *The American Farmer*, June 1854; *The Country Gentleman*, 17 August 1854, 26 October 1854, and 14 December 1854.

³⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 17 February 1862; Wisner, *op. cit.*, pp 484-485.

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 27**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Calvert. Adam Francis Plummer had learned to write at an early age; this unusual ability enabled him to keep a journal recounting 20 years of his life as a slave and 40 more years as a freedman on and near the Riversdale acreage. In addition to the standard information about the slave population found in census records, tax assessments, wills and inventories, information is available through Plummer's writings, included in the publication of parts of his journal after his death by one of his daughters.³⁶ Like the Sides map, the Plummer publication reveals another unique distinction about Riversdale, i.e., a glimpse from the slaves' point of view of the life and work of the slave population at an antebellum Maryland plantation.

The Riversdale plantation was, after Charles Calvert's death, devised to his heirs, the 300-acre Dower lot (including the mansion, graveyard, principal barns and tenant houses) going to the widow, and the remaining acreage divided among the five surviving children.³⁷ Charlotte Calvert remained at Riversdale until moving to Baltimore with one of her younger sons; after that, the Riversdale mansion remained the part-time residence of her eldest son, George Henry, and his family. After the death of Charlotte Calvert (in 1876), four of her heirs petitioned the Court of Equity to authorize the sale of the Dower lot; the Court appointed a trustee, who advertised for sale the "Large and Elegant Mansion House, Barns, Stables, Overseer's and Laborers' Houses and 300 acres of Fertile Land . . . so well known to the public as to render further description unnecessary."³⁸ The sale was not effectuated, however, until 1887, and by that time most of the buildings of the plantation had deteriorated into near ruinous condition. The mansion itself, occupied for parts of the year by George Henry Calvert and his family, was still in reasonably good condition. In June of 1887 Charles Baltimore Calvert, acting for himself and his three siblings, sold the 300-acre nucleus of the Riversdale estate to John Fox and Alexander Lutz of New York City.³⁹

Fox and Lutz acquired also the adjoining 174 acres, which had belonged to George Henry Calvert, and in 1889 the entire 474-acre tract was then transferred to the newly formed Riverdale Park Company, of which John Fox was president. The company had the property surveyed and platted, and the development of the suburb of Riverdale Park began.⁴⁰ Streets were laid out in a grid pattern, straddling the Washington line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, which ran north and south through the new community, and offered to prospective residents easy commuting into the Federal City. Park spaces and circles of green were provided in the plan, and parkland was

³⁶ Plummer, Nellie Arnold, *Out of the Depths or The Triumph of the Cross*, Hyattsville, Md., 1927; and reprint of same, Simon & Schuster, forthcoming in summer 1997. Federal Census Records for Prince George's County, Maryland, 1860, Population and Slave Schedules.

³⁷ Prince George's County Will WAJ#1:278; Prince George's County Equity #475.

³⁸ Prince George's County Equity #1152; *Marlborough Gazette*, 27 February 1878

³⁹ "The Calverts' Home: Riverdale (sic), Prince George's County: A Historical Mansion of Maryland" article by F.E.W. from unidentified Washington, D.C., newspaper, circa 1885; article from unidentified newspaper, Toner Excerpt, Case 12, #10, Rare Books Division, Library of Congress (circa 1889); *Baltimore American*, 7 April 1889; *Washington Evening Star*, 2 August 1890; Prince George's County Equity #1152; Prince George's County Deed JWB#8:426

⁴⁰ Prince George's County Deeds JWB#8:520, JWB#12:484, JWB#13:614

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 28**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

reserved around the Riversdale mansion which was preserved “as a sacred relic of an era replete with historic memories.”⁴¹

During the development of the Riverdale Park community, the Riversdale mansion was first used as the surveyors’ headquarters, and later as a boarding house. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the mansion fell into disrepair, and suffered some vandalism. Major renovation was undertaken by Thomas H. Pickford, a wealthy real estate man who acquired it in 1912. Most of the east hyphen and wing, which had for more than a century served as the kitchen, breakfast room and staff quarters, was converted into a two-story banquet hall. The west wing, which had housed the carriage room and stable, became a garage. It was also Pickford who purchased several entire rooms of furniture, including mantels, floor-to-ceiling mirrors and paneling, and installed them in the mansion. Several of the mantels which Rosalie Calvert’s father had sent to her from Europe had been removed by John Fox, president of the Riverdale Park Company, and reportedly were installed in his New York home(s); Pickford installed in their places mantels which he had purchased from other sources.⁴²

For about two years after the Pickford renovations were completed, the mansion was occupied by the family of Pickford’s brother; then in the fall of 1914, Pickford leased the mansion to four men who had taken out incorporation papers for “The Lord Baltimore Country Club of Calvert Mansion, Riverdale, Maryland.” The Country Club operations were, however, short-lived, and in 1916 Pickford was again seeking a tenant. A verbal lease was arranged with newly-elected U. S. Senator Hiram Johnson of California. Johnson (1866-1945) was one of the founders of the Progressive Party, and had been chosen in 1912 as the vice-presidential running mate of Theodore Roosevelt on the Progressive Party ticket. Johnson had served as governor of California from 1909 to 1917 when he resigned to take a seat in the United States Senate. A legal lease was drawn up in 1919, allowing the Johnsons occupancy of the Riversdale mansion until the end of his Senate term in March 1923. Johnson was re-elected in 1922, and another lease was drawn up through March 1929.⁴³

In the meantime, the community of Riverdale Park was developing around the mansion, and in April 1920 all of the original 1889 Riverdale Park subdivision (plus a small amount of additional land to the west) was incorporated as the Town of Riverdale. Small bungalows, then becoming the popular style of dwelling, began to fill the lots between some of the earlier and larger late Victorian styles. Pickford continued to offer the Riversdale property (the mansion and approximately nine acres around it) for sale; Hiram Johnson had the option of purchasing the property, but never chose or was able to do so. In January 1926, Pickford concluded a sale of the mansion and grounds to Senator Thaddeus Caraway of Arkansas, and this action occasioned a bitter confrontation between Senator Johnson and both Pickford and Caraway. Johnson, who had

⁴¹ Riverdale Park Real Estate promotional brochure, circa 1904

⁴² Prince George’s County Deeds #80:122, #87:38, #137:154; Letter, Ruth C. Pickford to A. M. Ferguson, 7 October 1969

⁴³ Prince George’s County Incorporation Records, JBB#1:283; Prince George’s County Land Record #121:351. Johnson was re-elected in 1928, 1934 and 1940. See Burke, Robert, *The Diary Letters of Hiram Johnson*, New York, 1983.

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

expected to be able to renew his lease as long as he retained his seat in Congress, remained at Riversdale as long as his lease permitted, but Senator Caraway exercised his right in the spring of 1929, and the Johnsons moved out of the Riversdale mansion.⁴⁴

Thaddeus Caraway (1871-1931) had served four terms (1913-1921) in the United States House of Representatives, beginning his first term in the Senate in 1921. He and his wife, Hattie, had been looking for a Georgian mansion in the Washington area. Before they moved in, however, an electric fire caused serious damage to the west wing of Riversdale, so the first project upon the Caraways' acquisition was the repair and renovation of the west wing. In the place of the original coach house and stable (which by then was being used as a garage) they created a large two-story entertainment room, by removing the floor, building a flue and chimney in the east wall of the wing, and installing a large wooden mantel at the chimney opening. They also replaced at least two of the mantels in the central block of the mansion.⁴⁵

Thaddeus Caraway died in November 1931, and his widow was appointed to fill out his term. Hattie Wyatt Caraway (1878-1950) was elected (the first woman to be elected in her own right to the U. S. Senate) to another term in 1932, and again in 1938. She was, however, unable to meet the mortgage payments on the Riversdale property. Foreclosure followed, and when the mortgage assignee offered the property for sale, Thomas H. Pickford repurchased it early in 1932. He sold it in the following year to Abraham Lafferty, former Congressman from Oregon.⁴⁶ Lafferty (1875-1964) had served from 1911 to 1915 in the U. S. House of Representatives; he resided at Riversdale from 1933 to 1949, several times attempting to purchase from Hattie Caraway the parcel of land directly south of the mansion, containing the lake and grounds surrounding it. Mrs. Caraway refused his offer, but sold the parcel to local developer J. Harris Rogers in 1947. The lake was then drained, much to Lafferty's despair, and the ground prepared for the construction of houses. By January 1949, Lafferty had offered his mansion for sale.⁴⁷

The Maryland-National Park and Planning Commission had been established in 1927 for the purpose of long range planning and park acquisition and development in Prince George's and Montgomery counties. In the spring of 1949, the Commission was looking for new headquarters for its Prince George's County Regional Office, and began negotiations with Abraham Lafferty. In May of that year, the Commission purchased the Riversdale mansion and grounds, and set up offices in its spaces. With the acquisition of Riversdale, historic preservation became one of the

⁴⁴ *Laws of Maryland 1920*, Chapter 731; Prince George's County Land Records #190:191, #256:397, #260:86

⁴⁵ *Biographical Directory of the American Congress*, G.P.O., 1989; See also Kincaid, Diane, *Silent Hattie Speaks: The Personal Journal of Senator Hattie Caraway*, Connecticut, 1979; interviews with General Paul W. Caraway, 1979

⁴⁶ *Biographical Directory of the American Congress*, *op.cit.*; Prince George's County Equity #8467; Prince George's County Deeds #376:232, #401:281

⁴⁷ Prince George's County Deed #968:500; letters between Lafferty, Rogers, and the clerk and Mayor of the Town of Riverdale on file at Riverdale Town Hall; *Historic Calvert Mansion, Riverdale, Maryland* prospectus of sale, 1949

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Page 30

Commission's goals; Riversdale was first historic property purchased by the Commission, which now owns 24 historic properties in Prince George's County.⁴⁸

Until 1982, several divisions of the Commission continued to maintain offices in the Riversdale mansion, but after that time, in response to structural analysis of the condition and weight capacity of the floors, the offices moved out of the mansion, and the first phase of research, analysis and restoration began. The discovery in the early 1980s of the Stier family letters and documents, and their subsequent and ongoing study, contributed invaluable information toward the restoration of the mansion and grounds. The restoration process continued, with the active support and cooperation of a local volunteer group (the Riversdale Historical Society), and the mansion again opened to the public in 1993.

For nearly two centuries Riversdale has been a landmark in the Washington area. Conceived and built by a Flemish aristocrat who fled his country to escape the armies of the French Republic, it was completed by a direct descendant of the founding family of the Maryland colony and his wife, a spirited and accomplished woman who chose to make her home in the fledgling United States after the rest of her family had returned to their ancestral home. When finished, Riversdale was noted for its distinctive style, an unusual combination of period plantation architecture with European artistic design. This house was for several years the repository of the most remarkable collection of Old World paintings in the country at that time. The plantation was brought to the peak of its prominence by an agricultural genius who left, as lasting memorials of his craft, a federal department and an institution of learning. Rare surviving writings from this period give a first-hand account of the life and work of the Riversdale slave force in the last generation before Emancipation; and a professionally drawn map survives to show the plantation layout at the time of its greatest prominence. Riversdale has witnessed in its own back yard the development of the railroad and the telegraph, and then stood silently while one of the early Washington suburban subdivisions developed around it. In this century it was for 30 years the home of a series of United States Congressmen; today it is the prized possession of an agency whose mandate it is to plan for the future while preserving the past. Restored and accessible to the public, Riversdale now clearly expresses its unique history, and is one of the county's most outstanding historic sites.

⁴⁸ Prince George's County Deed #1125:473; Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1987 Annual Report, "Celebrating 60 Years of Service"

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**Primary Sources**

Calvert-Stier Letters and other papers, principally from:

Van Havre Papers, Chateau du List Archives, Schoten, Belgium

H. J. Stier Papers, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, MD Van de Werve
Archives, Viersel, Belgium

Prince George's County Records:

Land Records

Probate Records

Equity Papers

Tax Assessments

Secondary Sources

Callcott, M.L. *Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert, 1795-1821*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

Gibb, James G., and Daniel H. Weiskotten. *A Phase I Archaeological Survey and Phase II Site Examination of Riversdale Mansion (18PR390), Riverdale, Prince George's County, Maryland*. June 1996.

Pearl, Susan G., and James T. Wollon, Jr. *Historic Structures Report: Riversdale, The Calvert Mansion*. Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, October 1979.

Plummer, Nellie Arnold. *Out of the Depths or The Triumph of the Cross*. Hyattsville, Maryland, 1927.

Sides, William. *Map of Riversdale Demesnes and Rossburg Farm Situated in Prince George's Co.Md.* Baltimore, 1853.

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 32**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #MD-655
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University: McKeldin Library (Special Collections), University of Maryland at College Park, MD 20742
- Other: Riversdale Office, M-NCPPC, 6005 48th Avenue, Riverdale, MD 20737;
Historic Preservation Section, M-NCPPC, 14422 Old Mill Road, Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

RIVERSDALE MANSION**Page 33**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreeage of Property: 7.9587 acres (Parcel A, Block 55, Riverdale Park Subdivision)

UTM References:

Latitude: NW 38 degrees, 57 minutes, 41 seconds
 NE 38 degrees, 57 minutes, 39 seconds
 SE 38 degrees, 57 minutes, 34 seconds
 SW 38 degrees, 57 minutes, 36 seconds

Longitude: NW 76 degrees, 55 minutes, 59 seconds
 NE 76 degrees, 55 minutes, 48 seconds
 SE 76 degrees, 55 minutes, 50 seconds
 SW 76 degrees, 56 minutes, 00 seconds

Verbal Boundary Description:

Parcel A, Block 55, Riverdale Park subdivision (Prince George's County Plat JWB#5:475)

Boundary Justification:

Parcel A in Block 55, owned by The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, includes the Riversdale Mansion, the Dependency, and the immediate grounds of the mansion (entry gates and drive, lawn and gardens). The adjoining lot (Block 47, Lot 3 and half of Lot 4) containing the 1940s house (at 6005 48th Avenue, on the west edge of Parcel A) which is also owned by The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and which serves as the Riversdale staff office, is not included in this nomination. With the exception of the non-contiguous Calvert family burial ground, located circa .4 mile to the northwest on the other side of the CSX (originally Baltimore and Ohio) railroad tracks, Parcel A contains all of the surviving historic features of the Riversdale plantation.

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Susan G. Pearl, Research/Architectural Historian
Historic Preservation Section, Planning Department, M-NCPPC
14741 Governor Oden Bowie Drive
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

Telephone: 301-952-3521

Date: June 1997

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS SURVEY
January 6, 1998

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 35
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**LIST OF ATTACHMENTS**

A. Photographs (all negatives are located at the Historic Preservation Section, Planning Department, The Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission, 14741 Governor Oden Bowie Drive, Upper Marlboro, Maryland, 20772)

1. Twenty-two (22) black-and-white 5"x7" prints
2. Color slides: 17 exterior
30 interior
1 portrait

B. Floor Plans

1. Six Measured drawings, 1970, A.J. Bright Insurance Appraisal
Basement level, First floor plan, Mezzanine level, Second floor,
Attic level, Summer Kitchen
2. Four plans (no scale), post-1993 restoration
Basement floor plan, First floor plan, Mezzanine floor plan,
Second floor plan
3. "Ground Plan of Farm Buildings at Riversdale" - measured drawing of octagonal cow-house (from *American Farmer*, Vol. IX, No. 12, page 384.

C. Photocopies of historic illustrations

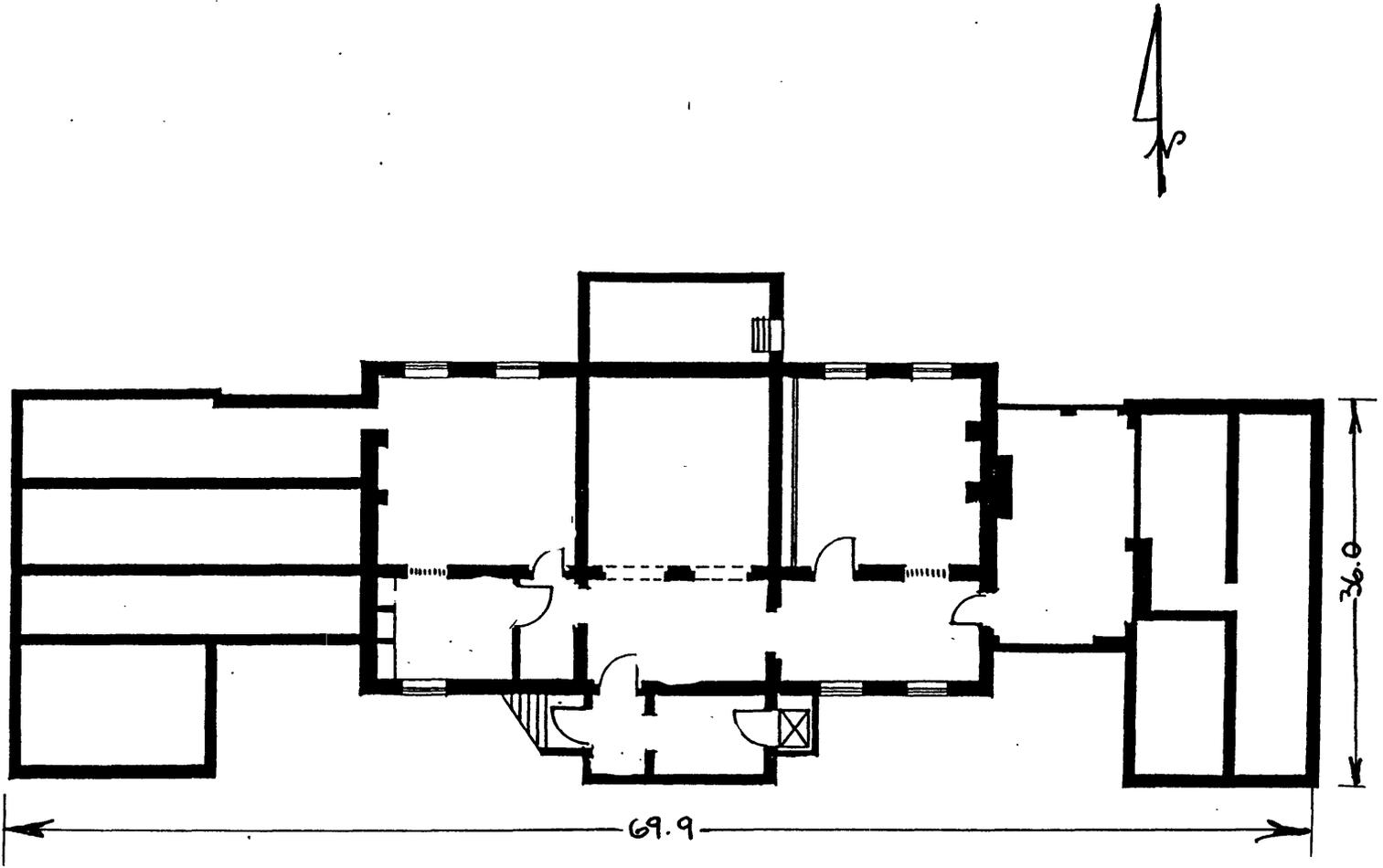
1. Latrobe plan and elevation drawings, 1801
Elevation drawings, South elevation and North elevation
Plan of the Chamber floor
2. Composite sketch *Riversdale near Bladensburg, Maryland, The Seat of George Calvert Esquire*, by Anthony S. John Baker, 1827, published in Baker, Anthony St. John, *Memoires d'un Voyageur qui se Repose*, London, 1850
3. Photograph of William Sides *Map of Riversdale Demesnes and Rossburg Farm Situated in Prince George's Co. Md. (Belonging to Charles B. Calvert, Esq.)* 1853
4. Photograph, circa 1910, of Riversdale viewed from the south

RIVERSDALE MANSION

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

D. Plan/maps showing Riversdale nominated property

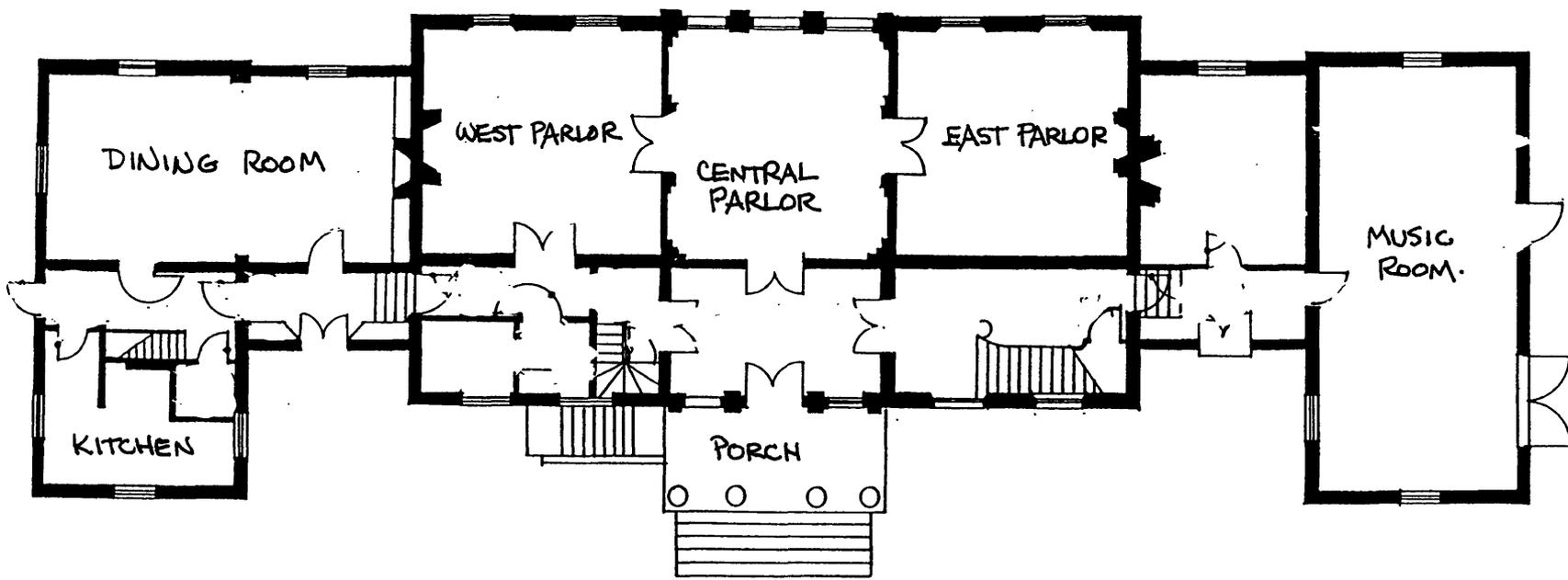
1. *Riversdale Sketch Map* - sketch Map of nominated property
2. Section from Prince George's County Tax Map 42, Grid D-3, showing Parcel A (nominated property)
3. Riverdale Park Subdivision Plan (Plat JWB#5:474), 1889
4. Riverdale Park plat, 1904
5. Section from Washington East Quadrangle (Maryland-District of Columbia), United States Geological Survey Map, 1965, photorevised 1971



BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN

NO SCALE

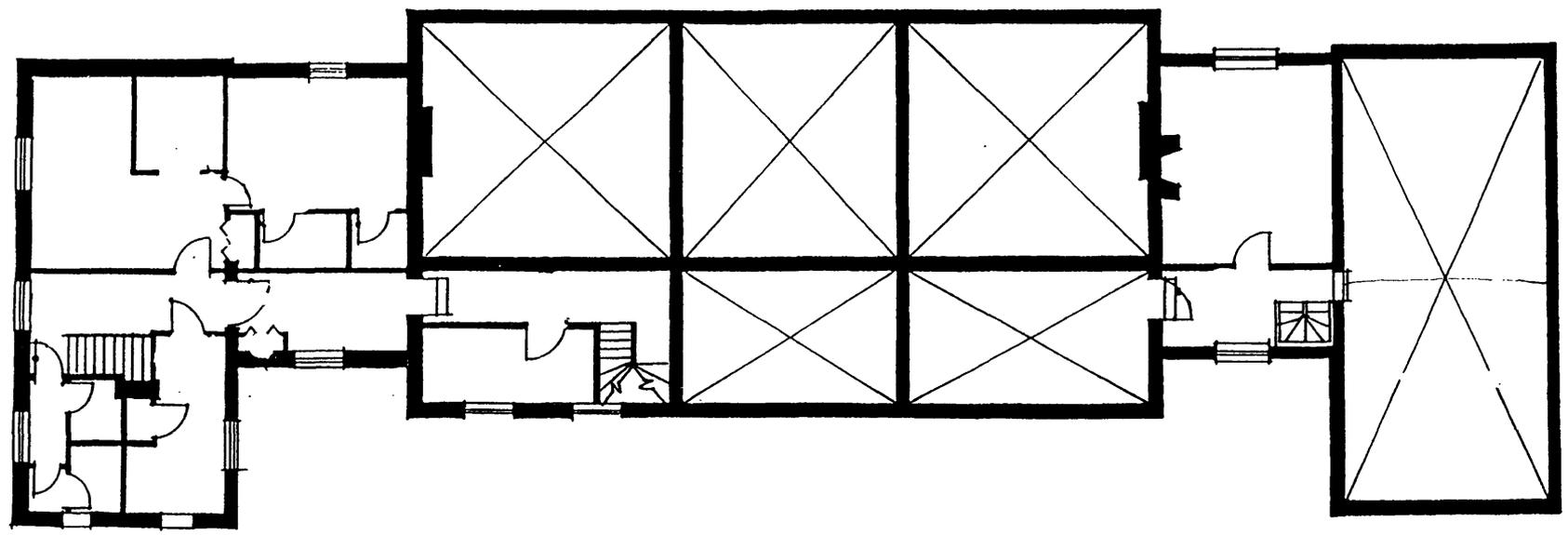
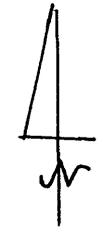
Riversdale
Prince George's Co., MD



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

NO SCALE

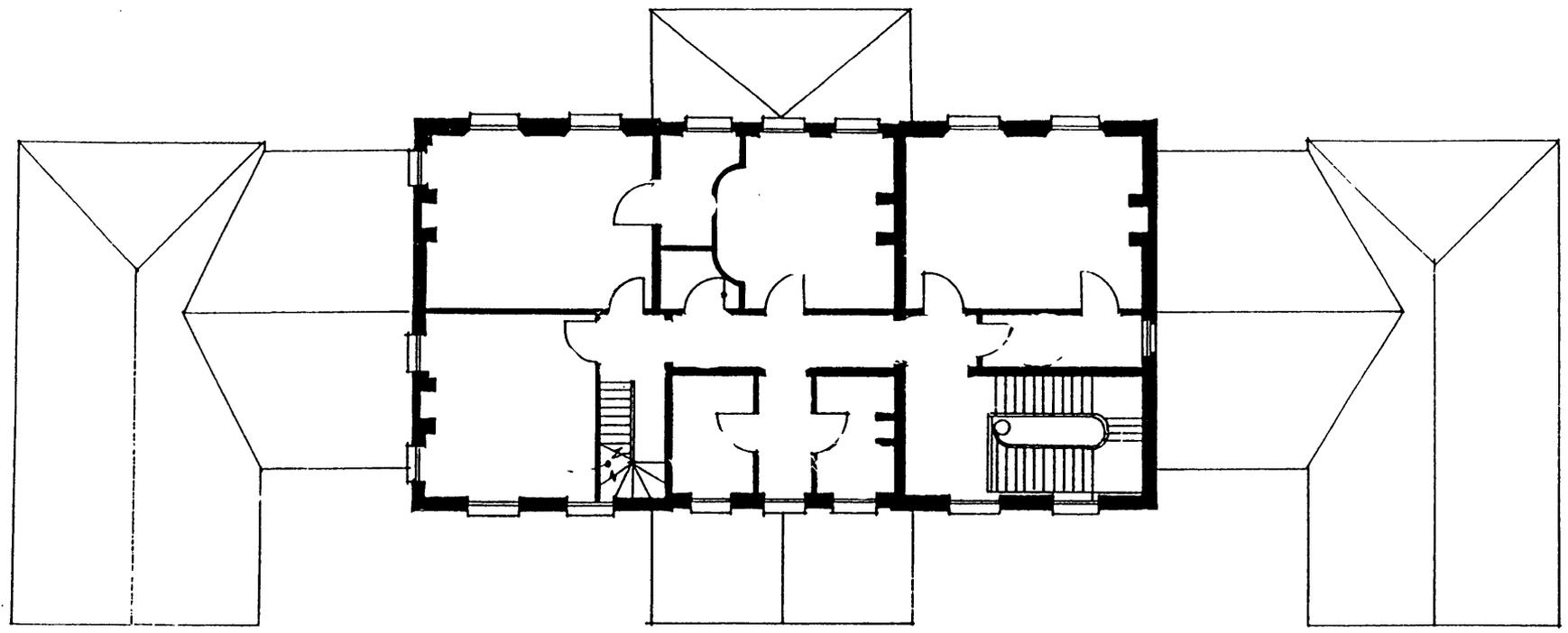
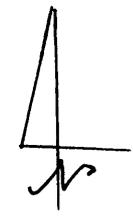
Riversdale
Prince George's Co., MD



MEZZANINE FLOOR PLAN

NO SCALE

Riversdale
Prince George's Co., MD



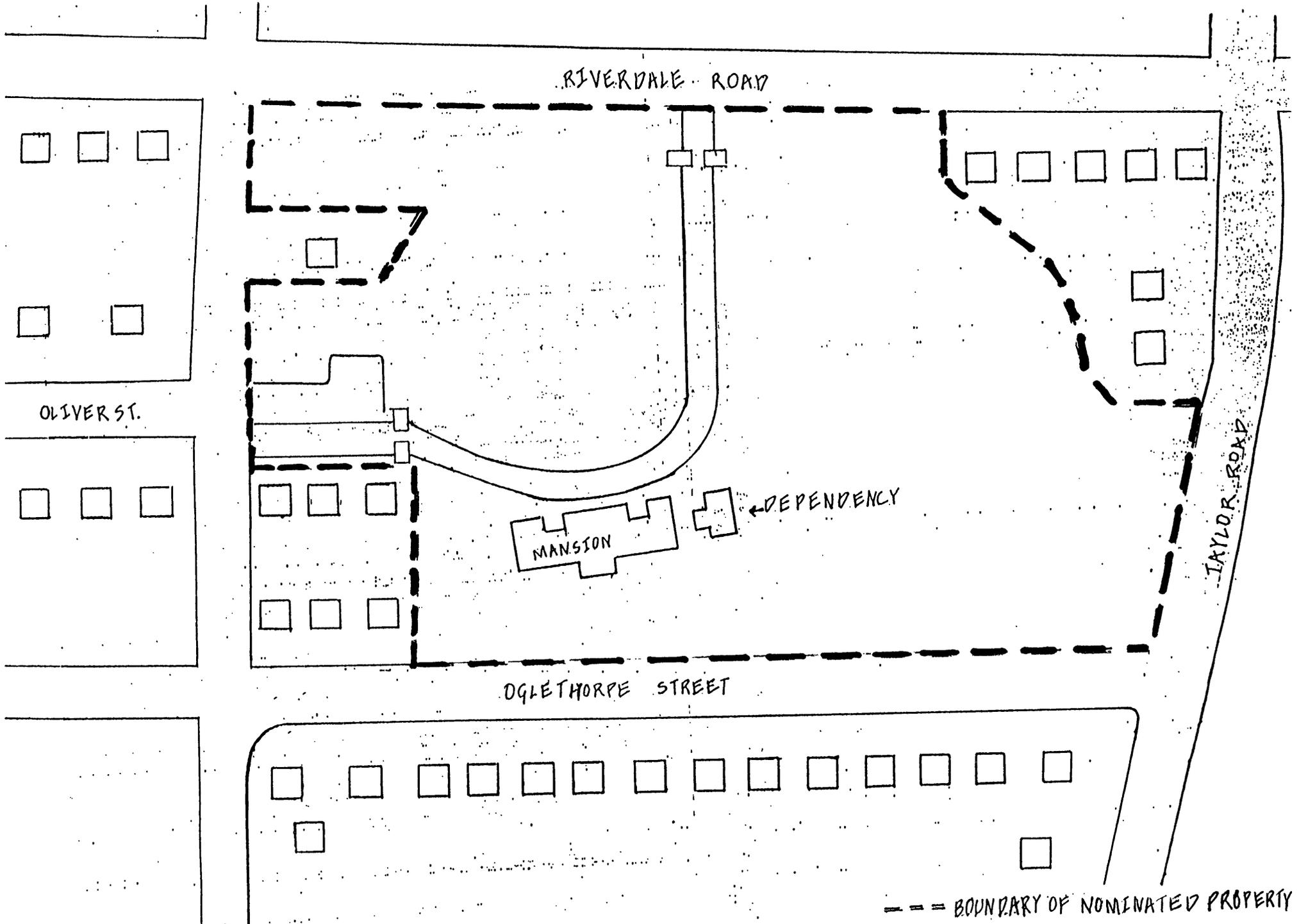
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

NO SCALE

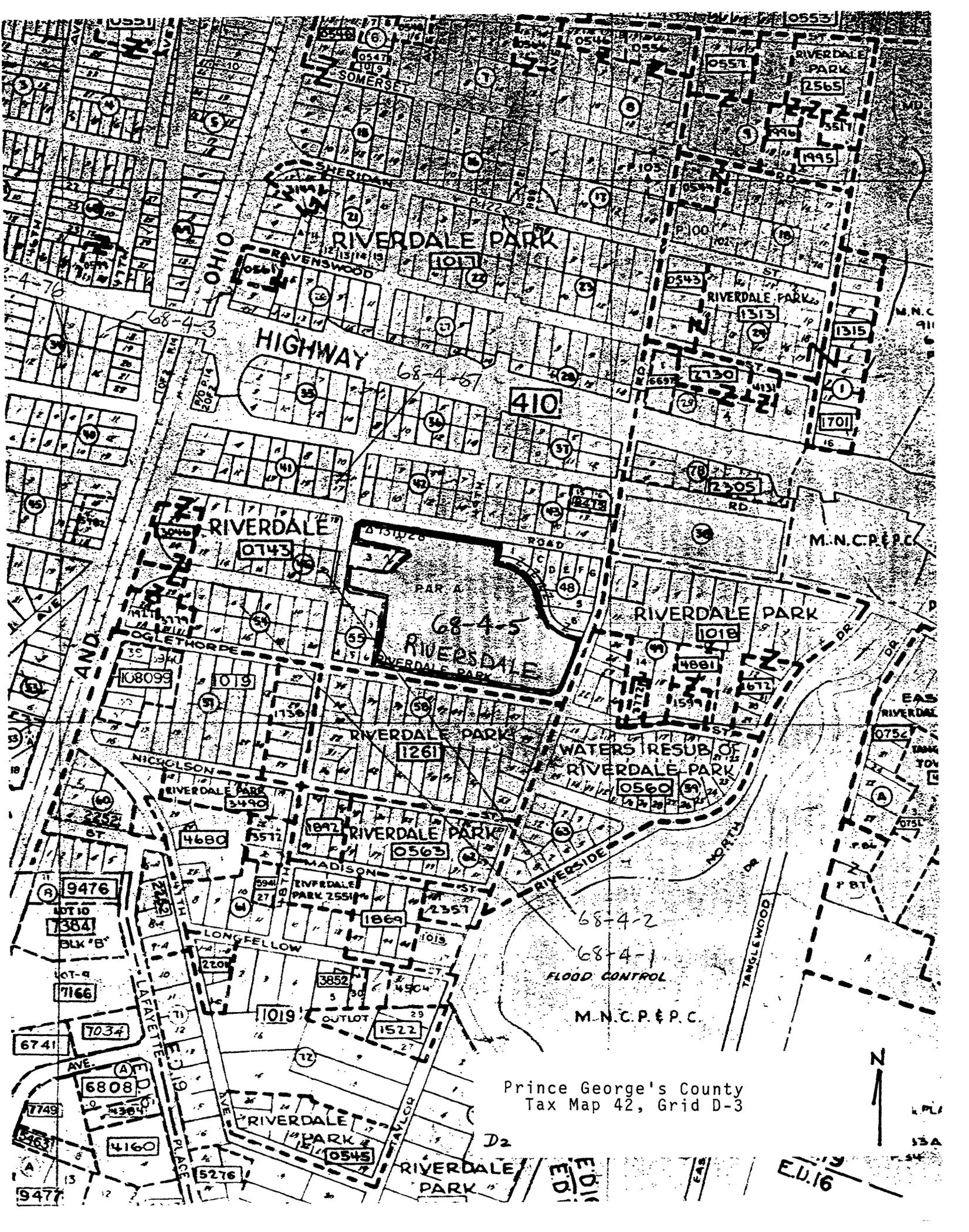
Riversdale
Prince George's Co., MD

RIVERSDALE SKETCH MAP

D1



--- = BOUNDARY OF NOMINATED PROPERTY



RIVERDALE PARK

HIGHWAY 410

68-4-5
RIVERSDALE

RIVERDALE PARK

WATERS RESUB OF
RIVERDALE PARK

RIVERDALE PARK

68-4-2
68-4-1
FLOOD CONTROL
M.N.C.P. & P.C.

Prince George's County
Tax Map 42, Grid D-3



RIVERDALE PARK

E.D.16

E.D.16

D2

9477

4160

5276

0545

6808

7034

7166

7384

9476

4680

3490

108099

0743

1019

0743

3852

1019

1869

0563

1872

1261

1018

4881

1018

1018

1018

1018

1018

1018

1018

1018

1018

1018

1018

1018

0545

1522

4504

2357

2551

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

2357

1701

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

2305

1315

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1313

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

2565

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

0553

City Study 1904

RIVERDALE PARK

PRINCE GEORGE'S CO.,
MARYLAND.

6 miles from Wash. D.C.

Surveyed
1889.

SCALE 200' = 1"

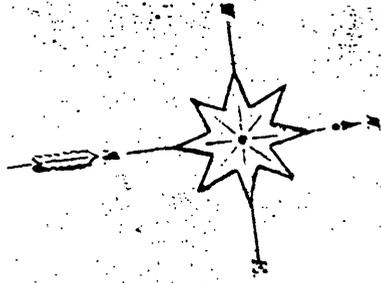
Existing buildings 1904



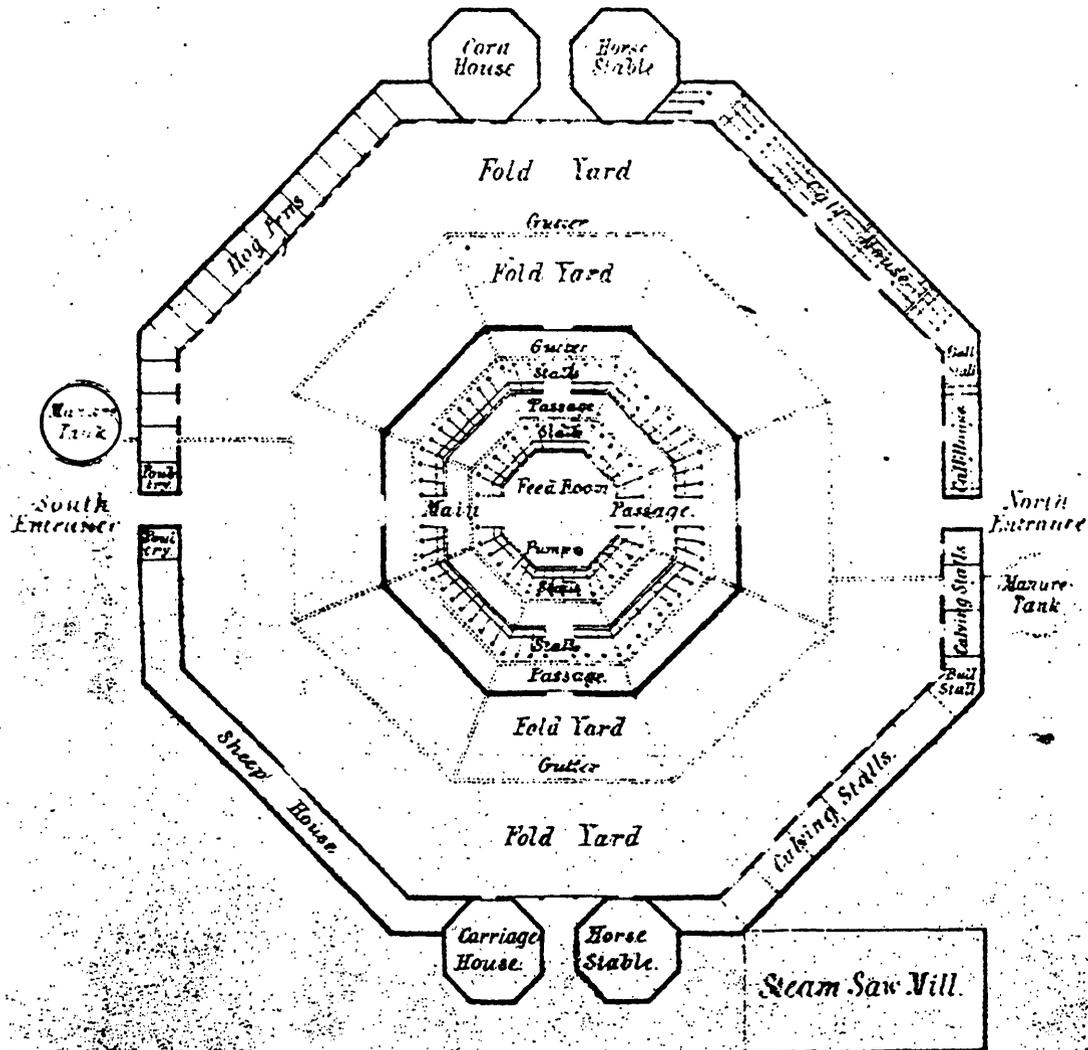
Riverdale Park plat
1904

D4





Overseer's House



GROUND PLAN OF FARM BUILDINGS at Riversdale.

Seat of Chas. B. Calvert.

William Sides

BALTIMORE

Scale 1/2 inch to a foot

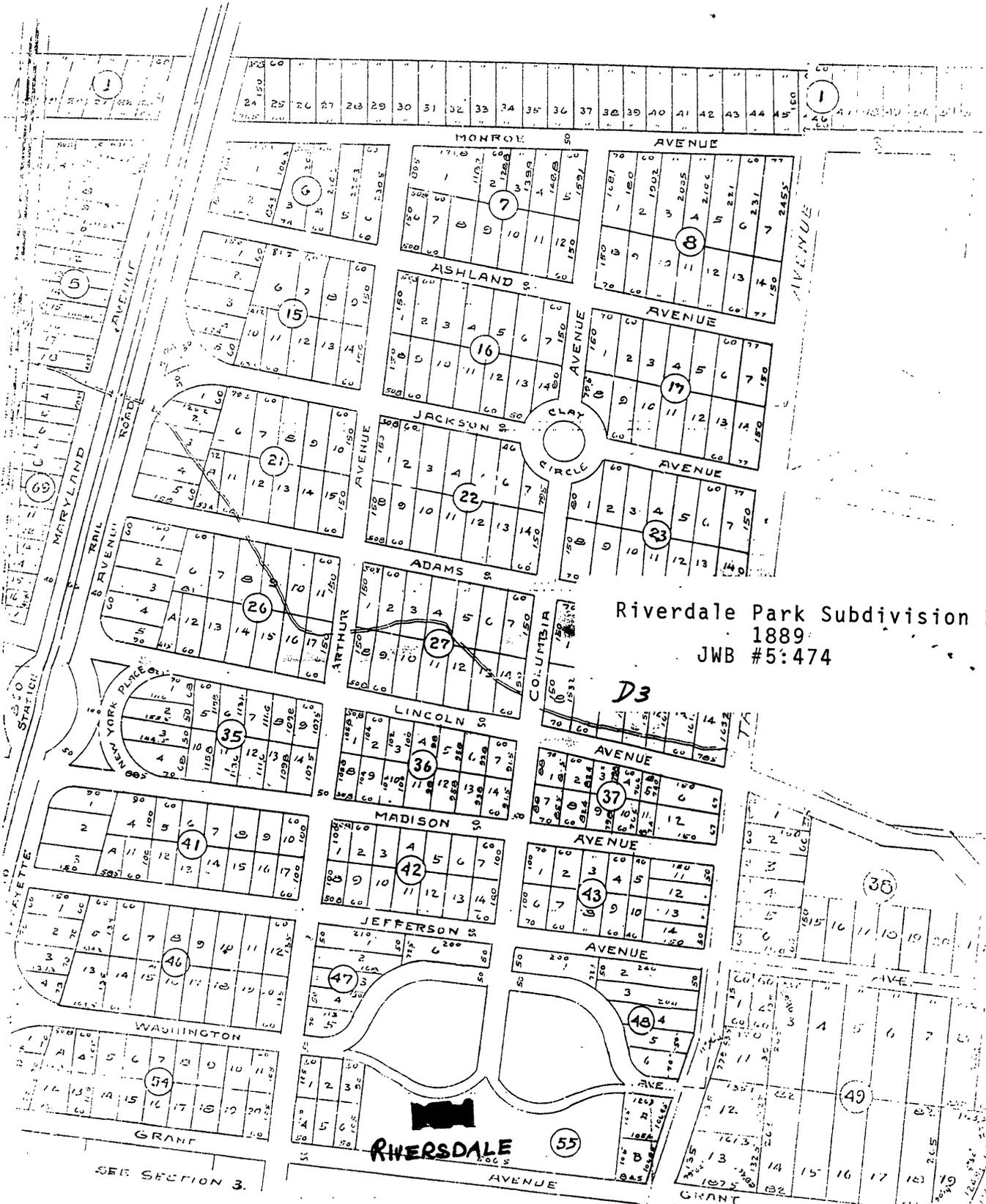
Vol. IX No. 12 Feb. 1874

RIVERDALE PARK

RIVERDALE, PRINCE GEORGE CO., MD.

Following the re-subdivision of certain parts of the original Plat
recorded in Liber J.W.B No. 5 folio 474.

also the Riverdale Park Company's
first Addition thereto.



Riverdale Park Subdivision Plat
1889
JWB #5:474



D3

RIVERDALE

SEE SECTION 3.