

John M. Davies House  
393 Prospect Street  
(east side of Prospect Street)  
New Haven  
New Haven County  
Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-284

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
801 - 19th Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C.

## JOHN M. DAVIES HOUSE

Location: 393 Prospect Street (east side of Prospect Street),  
New Haven, New Haven County, Connecticut.

Present Owner: Culinary Institute of America.

Present Occupant: Culinary Institute of America.

Present Use: Classrooms. Davies house and Taft House next door are both used as classroom and dormitory buildings. The outbuildings of the Davies house, stable and barn, are used as bakeries and residences for faculty and staff.

Statement of Significance: One of the largest houses of its period in New Haven. It is built in the manner of the French Second Empire and is remarkable for its rich interior ornament and lack of alteration. The house is being restored under the direction of the New Haven Preservation Trust.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Incomplete chain of title from the New Haven Land Records.  
  
1867 - 1874 John M. Davies (deceased October 23, 1872).  
1874 - 1911 Alice S. Davies.  
1911 - 1947 Thomas Wallace, Jr.  
1947 Culinary Institute of America (Restaurant Institute of Connecticut).
2. Date of erection: 1867-68.
3. Architect, builders, suppliers, etc.: Henry Austin and David R. Brown, Architects; Andrews and Rockwell, Carpenters; Chatfield and Perkins, Masons; Corbusier and Durand, Painters; Howland and Kingsley, Plumbers.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: None noted.
5. Alterations and additions: None noted.

"At the time of the building's completion, Mr. Davies held a banquet for the workmen engaged on the project, and at that time the house was described as follows: ...it is three stories high, has a mansard roof, and is constructed of

stuccoed brick. The windows and doors all have segment heads. The first floor consists of a parlor, a library, a bedroom, dining room, sewing room, butler's room and kitchen. All of the first floor rooms are finished in black walnut with hard-finished walls except the kitchen, which is done in solid chestnut. The ceilings are all elaborately carved plaster, and the floors in the hall and vestibule have red and white mosaic tile inlay. The main staircase runs through to the third story, and is made of black walnut with finely carved bannisters and an elaborate newell post. The second floor has eight rooms, finished in pine and painted white. The third floor also has eight rooms, and is completed in chestnut." (Anonymous contemporary article in the Dana Scrapbooks.)

In 1911 Thomas Wallace, Jr. purchased the house and re-decorated it according to this article: "The residence of Mr. Thomas Wallace, Jr., at 393 Prospect Street is of an utterly different style of architecture than that usually designed by the modern architect. ...Italian Renaissance has been carried out in the design of the exterior and the first floor; the second floor being of French design.

"The hall is finished in black walnut, with tile flooring, and the high ceiling, together with the carved historic furnishings, lend an air of quaintness. At the right of the hall is the library, with high arched windows and woodwork, a repetition of that of the hall. ...Connecting with the library on the left is the music room, being of the Louis XV style, finished in white enamel with yellow wall coverings, and the furniture is of the style of that period.

"At the right of the hall is the drawing room, being also of the style of the Louis XV period, and taken from a drawing room at Fontainebleau. The tapestries are pink, the same tone as the walls, and the gold and pink furnishings harmonize perfectly.

"The billiard room opens from the hall at the right, and is done in French Oak, and with portieres and wall coverings of deep brown. Opening from this is a small writing room, finished in terra cotta, and well appointed.

"At the end of the hall and toward the left past the stairway is the dining room, with tapestries of blue and brown and woodwork of pink walnut. The portieres are deep blue and gold, carrying out the color effect...." (Anonymous article in the Dana Scrapbooks.)

6. Important old views: Entrance Hall, Billiard Room, Drawing Room, c. 1911.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

John M. Davies as a business man was an associate of the Winchester family (prior to the latter's success in the manufactory of firearms) whose mansion stood immediately to the north of the Davies house. To the south is a mansion (now belonging to the Culinary Institute of America) which once belonged to President Taft after he was President.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Dana, Arnold G. New Haven Old and New. Unpublished scrapbooks in the archives of the New Haven Colony Historical Society, 114 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Conn.

Essays in the files of Prof. Carroll L. V. Meeks, Professor of the History of Architecture, Yale University, Department of Art History, New Haven, Connecticut.

2. Secondary and published sources:

The New Haven City Directory, 1840 to 1952. Copies in the Yale University Library, the Public Library, the Town Clerk's Office, and the library of the New Haven Colony Historical Society.

The New Haven Land Records for the City of New Haven, Hall of Records, Orange Street, New Haven, Connecticut.

Prepared by Jonathan B. Conant  
Research Assistant  
National Park Service  
August 31, 1964

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A large mansion in the manner of the French Second Empire by the office of architect Henry Austin. It is the largest house of its period in New Haven, with spacious rooms, rich interior detailing, and a wide staircase which extends through three floors. Much of the interior woodwork and many fireplaces are intact.

2. Condition of fabric: A large scale maintenance and restoration program was begun in 1964 to reclaim the deteriorating exterior which included replacing exterior stucco, gutters and leaders, repairing roof, painting exterior walls and trim.

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B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The house has an irregular ell-shape with several protruding bays and wings. It is about 99' wide and 65' deep. It is two and one-half stories high, although the attic is actually a third floor with finished rooms and fireplaces. The facade of the main forward block is four bays. The second bay from the south is a 4-stage tower over the entrance door.
2. Foundations: Exterior foundation walls are stone faced with ashlar sandstone; interior foundation walls are brick.
3. Wall construction: Brick with scored stucco finish painted light beige; red sandstone belt course below second story window sills on all projecting bays.
4. Porches, stoops: Entrance porch: red sandstone steps and floor in front of entrance. Remainder of floor is wood.

The main entrance bay is framed with paired fluted Ionic columns on pedestals. The remainder of the porch is three bays, the outer bays are wider than the central bay. There is a wooden balustrade between the bays which is separated by Tuscon columns supporting arches. There appears to have been another porch on the southwest front. The area is now enclosed with plywood and glass. There are two smaller entrance stoops on the east rear.

5. Chimneys: Four large brick chimneys which appear to be doubled. Each has an inset brick panel and corbeled cornice.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance door consists of a pair of three-panelled wooden doors with single pane fanlight. The panelling is in several planes, each of which is trimmed with moldings. The doorway is trimmed with large panelled pilasters which enclose smaller fluted pilasters. There is a molded stucco surround with a sandstone keystone which is now painted. The rear door at the opposite end of the hall is also a double door with sidelights and transom.

- b. Windows and shutters: Windows on the entry porch begin at floor level, are double hung, two-over-four lights. Other windows are two-over-two lights either flat-headed or round-headed; the heads of second story windows are perfect semi-circles. All windows on both floors have molded sandstone sills which are supported by plain square sandstone block-like brackets. Shutter pintles are in place in most window jambs.

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7. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: The mansard roof is covered with grey-green slate in a hexagonal pattern except for the top courses which are diamond shaped and introduce courses of red slate.
- b. Cornice: Large wooden cornice bracketed and painted brown. Recessed wooden panelling is inset between the brackets.
- c. Dormers: Wooden dormers are framed with classical pilasters with broken pediments over round-headed double-hung windows. In the east rear projecting bay, the sash are glazed with diamond-shaped panes of stained glass.
- d. Towers: There is one square tower over the main entrance. There are two round-headed windows in the third stage and a single dormer window in the mansard roof over the tower.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The original floor plan has been altered on all floors, however, the important rooms on the first floor have not been changed.
- a. First Floor: The hallway behind the entrance foyer extends through the house and at approximately mid-point it opens to the stair hall and well at right angles on the north. Near the entrance door are double doors on each side which lead on the left (north) to a spacious richly ornamented room which extends into a large open bay window on the long axis. The doorway on the right leads to a smaller room which has a rectangular bay window on the west front. Behind this room are three adjoining rooms which have been altered. On the east wall of the stairhall is a double door leading to another spacious room with a fireplace and curved niche opposite each other on the long walls and the rear (east) wall opening full width into a half-hexagonal bay window. To the north are pantry and kitchen.

2. Stairways: The main stairway is U-shaped, continuing in flights through three floors. The balustrade with turned balusters ends on the first floor at a massive square newel ornately carved in high relief.
3. Flooring: The foyer and main hallway are paved in alternating red and white square marble tiles. Other floors are parquet, some of which are covered with linoleum or asphalt tile. The hall in the finished attic is covered with an inlaid alternating light and dark wooden floor laid in a large diamond pattern. The tower room floor is parquet.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: At present walls are plaster, however, interior views taken prior to the present occupancy show the living room and dining room walls covered with brocade. The hall and dining rooms also have a panelled wooden wainscot in good condition. Ceilings on the first floor and in the halls on the upper floors are plaster, richly ornamented in panels and rosettes.
5. Doorways and doors: All doors on the first floor have slightly curved heads and multi-membered trim. The doors are panelled in several planes, decorated with several moldings.
6. Decorative features and trim: Most notable decorative features are the ceilings. In the hall, there is a richly molded cornice in three ornamental bands. The recessed panels in the ceiling are framed with plaster pendants set in foliated wreaths.

In the living room there is a complexity of panelling and moldings with a large oval rosette in the center flanked by two circular rosettes. The cornice is treated with three large-scaled ornamental bands.

7. Notable hardware: Original door hardware.
8. Lighting: Modern electric fixtures.
9. Heating: Modern central hot air heat with some original ornamental floor and wall grilles. In addition, many of the original fireplaces are intact. In the living room fireplace the hearth and facing is white marble. The opening is trimmed and paved in brass. The fireplace projects into the room and is framed in wooden pilasters and curved panels. The panels are inlaid with arabesques in lighter wood. Above the black marble shelf is a ceiling height mirror. Dining room fireplace also has a full height mirror over the shelf. The hearth and facing are of green rectangular glazed tiles. The wooden trim is ornamented with claw and pineapple motifs. Ornate fireplaces are also found on the second and third

floors. The chamber in the northeast corner has a particularly rich fireplace executed in white marble. The Ionic pilasters contain arabesque panels and over the shelf are three panels; center panel has small niche with shell-head. The scale and detail in this mantle are very delicate.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. General setting and orientation: House is located on the east side of Prospect Avenue facing west.
2. Outbuildings: There are two outbuildings which are part of the original estate. One is the two-story stone and shingle barn now used as a Bake Shop. The other is the original two story brick stable which has been converted to a residence for the Director of the Institute. Here the gables, dormers, and wide overhangs have a strong Swiss-chalet character.
3. Landscaping: The house is set far back from the street and is approached by a circular drive. The essential track of the drives and walks is original. There is an asphalt paved parking area immediately in front of the house and also one in the rear. The entire campus of the Culinary Institute of about ten acres, is wooded.

Prepared by Woodrow W. Wilkins  
Architect  
National Park Service  
August 17, 1964

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the Summer, 1964 New Haven Project, jointly undertaken by the HABS and the New Haven Preservation Trust, and financed by "Mission 66" funds of the National Park Service with assistance from the NHPT, following a 1963 HABS inventory survey of old New Haven carried out by the NHPT under the direction of Professor Christopher Tunnard of Yale University, President.

The project was under the direction of the Eastern Office of Design and Construction, James C. Massey, HABS Supervisory Architect, and was supervised by Architect Woodrow W. Wilkins, Professor of Architecture at the University of Kentucky, assisted by Ned Goode, Photographer, Frazier, Pennsylvania; Annette H. M. Gottschalk, William P. Hersey, and Charles R. Tichy, Student Assistant Architects and students at Carnegie Institute of Technology, Yale University, and Iowa State University, respectively; and Jonathan B. Conant, Research Assistant and student at Yale University.