

<sup>Sauler</sup>  
Bowie house  
3124 Q Street, N. W.  
Georgetown, D. C.

HABS No. DC-60

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

District of Washington, D. C.

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Delos H. Smith, District Officer  
1707 Eye St., N.W., Washington, D. C.

ADDENDUM TO:  
BOWIE-SEVIER HOUSE  
Georgetown  
3124 Q Street, Northwest  
Washington  
District of Columbia

HABS DC-60  
*DC, GEO, 12*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

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

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### Addendum to BOWIE-SEVIER HOUSE

HABS NO. DC-60

Location: 3124 Q Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: Herb Miller

Present Use: private residence

Significance: Built by one of Georgetown's wealthiest, early nineteenth-century residents, Washington Bowie, the Bowie-Sevier House is also significant for its association with other prominent owners, as one of the best examples of how homes in Georgetown-especially along Georgetown Heights- were sited to take advantage of views of Georgetown harbor, as an excellent example of Federal period architecture with extremely important decorative ornamentation, and as perhaps, along with Dumbarton Oaks (HABS No. DC- 825) and Evermay (HABS No. DC-61), the best example of the twentieth century appeal of Georgetown to wealthy people who could have resided anywhere in the country or world. More than most grand houses in Georgetown, the Bowie-Sevier not only has architectural merit and historical association with owners who were locally significant, but conveys graphically the evolution of Georgetown and its habitation during the last 300 years. Although the Episcopal Home additions have been removed, the house derives significance from its association with the Home's architect, Horace Peaslee who was important architect and landscape architect in twentieth-century Washington, D.C. (see Dumbarton House, HABS No.DC-434 and Meridian Hill, HABS No. DC-532).

#### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

##### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Based on early nineteenth-century tax assessments it appears that the house was erected by 1808 and then substantially enlarged within the next decade. This conclusions is based on the substantial increases in assessments for the property: \$350 in 1807 assessment, \$6000 in 1808 assessment, \$10,000 in 1810 assessment, and \$14,000 in 1813 assessment. These assessments must be used with caution as it is not known how currency fluctuation might have affected assessments nor how precisely or consistently each year's assessment was determined. Also, other, unknown factors might have influenced the assessed values.

2. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1799        Deed (Liber E5 folio 121-124)  
              William B. Magruder  
              To  
              Washington Bowie
- 1803        Deed of indenture (Liber 11 folio 73)  
              Charles Wayman and Walter Smith, trustees  
              To  
              William Hammond Dorsey
- 1807        Deed  
              William Hammond Dorsey  
              To  
              Washington Bowie
- 1823        Deed (WB5 folio 370)  
              Washington Bowie  
              To  
              William Nicholls
- 1861        Inheritance upon death of Nicholls  
              estate of Nicholls  
              To  
              heirs of Nicholls
- 1881        Purchase at auction of Division of real estate (Equity Case 6878), forced  
              by suit brought by Nicholls's heir  
              heirs of Nicholls  
              To  
              Colonel John McHenry Hollingsworth (son-in-law of Wm. Nicholls)
- 1890        auction (Deed 1325 folio 288)  
              estate of Hollingswoth  
              To  
              Ella and John Sevier
- 1953        donation under terms of will of John Sevier, reiterated by will of Ella  
              Sevier  
              estate of Ella Sevier  
              To  
              Episcopal Senior Ministries (current name)

1996 Deed (Roll 1025, frame 1864)  
Episcopal Senior Ministries  
To  
Tudor Place Foundation

1997 Deed Roll (1099, frame 1423)  
Tudor Place Foundation  
To  
Herb Miller and Patricia Miller

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: No information available.

4. Original plans and construction: No information available.

5. Alterations and additions: The early alterations and additions to the house are open to interpretation, but by the 1890's the changes are well documented. In the Historic Structures Report prepared in 1997 by Archetype, with the architectural history by Bill Lebovich, it was contended that the east hyphen was the original house, constructed in 1807 (after the 1807 assessment was done) by Dorsey or Washington. Next Washington built the main or center block in 1810. This chronology is based on the assessments discussed earlier. The physical evidence is mixed, a cold joint exists between the brick walls of hyphen and center supporting this theory; but the stone foundations do not display a cold joint contradicting this theory. There are, however, differences in stone and mortar that suggest that the basements of the east hyphen and center block were built at different times. It is assumed that the center block was not built first because the great increase in assessed value can not be explained by the addition of the small east hyphen to the large center block. Between 1823 and 1889, the owners of the property, Nicholls or Hollingsworth or both, built an east wing, enlarged east hyphen, added Greek Revival details in the center block, made other interior alterations to the center block, added stairs, redid south porch, and added a small outbuilding. The Seviers, starting in 1890 increased the number of stories of the east hyphen and east wing, added and altered interior partitions; in the first ten years of ownership the Seviers seemed most concerned with making the east additions more livable, not doubt as servant quarters. In 1900 they redid the south porch and in 1901 they again turned their attention to the east additions, adding stairs and an entrance. In 1902 the Seviers again looked at the center block and east additions, making modifications to create larger spaces, such as the dining room, and to increased circulation between the east additions and center block, and installed bathrooms. Then in 1906, the Seviers expanding the house to the east by adding a narrow wing, building driveway from Q Street, and adding a conservatory over rear of stairhall addition, and likely revised north entrance at this time. In 1908, the Seviers built the west wing, giving some balance to the center block and east hyphen. Finally, in 1919, they added the carriage house at the southeast section of the lot, which is entered via an alley, and they continued to make changes to the eastern end of the house. The most significant alterations were carried out after the Seviers had died and the property passed to the Episcopal Senior Ministeries (current name), which engaged Horace Peaslee to convert the

house to a nursing home for Episcopal women by adding a major L-shaped wing perpendicular to the house, and renovate the house. This nursing home wing stood until the present owner, Herb Miller, had it demolished and gutted the west wing and east hyphen. At the time of writing this document (April 2000) the work continues and the extent of alterations and changes to the house and landscape (e.g., pool and possibly townhouses) that will actually be done is not known. Mr. Miller's architect is Horsey & Thorpe.

#### B. Historical Context:

Perhaps better than any other Georgetown property, the Bowie-Sevier House reflects the unstable business climate and hyperactive real estate speculation taking place in Georgetown and the political unrest in the nation in the Federal period. In 1812, the Federal Republican & Commercial Gazette announced "A new ship, belonging to Washington Bowie, Esq. One of the most wealthy and enterprising merchants in Georgetown, yesterday received its name- THE GENERAL LINGAN." The thirty-six year old Bowie had been bankrupt a mere decade earlier and his Georgetown property had been sold at public, but he again owned the property and was one of Georgetown's wealthiest, personifying the volatility and opportunities available in shipping and real estate speculation. But a few years later, these opportunities evaporate as Georgetown loses its importance as a shipping port. When Bowie lost his property, William Dorsey, another prominent Georgetown leader and owner of the property that evolved into Dumbarton Oaks (HABS No. DC-825) bought this property, adding to his large and diverse speculative real estate holdings in Georgetown. And Joseph Nourse, an early and long time Treasury Dept. executive bought, no doubt on speculation, part of the original Bowie parcel. Nourse built Dumbarton House (HABS No. DC-434). In this period, people like Dorsey and Bowie were selling and buying real estate to each other, forming partnerships for real estate or shipping ventures, and suing each other routinely. The deed records, which for Bowie easily list more than fifty transactions, for the early days of Georgetown consist of a rather small number of men who engaged in a surprising number of transactions and this was in addition to their roles as government bureaucrats, or as lawyers, merchants, or shippers and boat owners. Bowie, as mentioned in the newspaper article of 1812, named his ship the Lingan, in memory of his close friend, General Benjamin Lingan (see HABS No. DC-120) who had been killed by a mob in Baltimore during the War of 1812. The death of Lingan, while trying to protect a Federalist newspaper publisher and opponent of the War of 1812 against a pro-war mob, and the no doubt unpopular, political statement made in the nation's capitol by Bowie in naming his ship in his friend's memory, suggest the political unrest during that war. Another interesting nineteenth-century owner of the property was Colonel John McHenry Hollingsworth, who was superintendent of Mount Vernon. Given his important role as preserver of the primary symbol of the first president, Hollingsworth must have seen the former Washington Bowie estate, both the south garden and house, as being sufficiently large and grand to reflect his social position. The next owner, John and Ella Sevier, who were not Washingtonians, and like other wealthy late nineteenth century and earlier twentieth century Americans who bought estates in Georgetown Heights, could have afforded to live anywhere and seemed attracted to Washington's political and social importance. The Seviere intended that the house became a memorial to Sevier's

ancestor, John Sevier, Revolutionary War general, congressman, and first governor of Tennessee, after their death. This twentieth-century conceit of turning one's house into a museum or memorial also occurred at Dumbarton Oaks, where the Blisses willed their house, grounds, and collections to Harvard University.

Despite the early speculation in square 100 (now 1270), which was once entirely owned by Washington Bowie, subdivided when he went bankrupt, and subject to further subdivision in the late nineteenth century, and then recombined in part by the Seviars, the Bowie-Sevier house and south gardens has had fewer owners than many other Georgetown Heights properties. And Hollingsworth was the son-in-law of the previous owner, Nicholls, so in fact two owners, Nicholls-Hollingsworth and the Seviars each owned the property more than fifty years.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Prior to the current demolition of the nursing home wing and renovations to the older sections, the Bowie-Sevier House was Federal period, with two Federal revival updates. With its approximate balancing of wings (prior to 1956), and the early and later revival Federal period details such as the brick work, cornice and dormers, and door and window openings, Bowie-Sevier was nearly a textbook example of the flat surfaces, limited, but delicate contrasting detailing of the Federal period house. Although Horace Peaslee's wing was clearly a mid-twentieth century addition, his renovations to the house, such as the front porch and front walk up to the steps and his design of the wing reinforced the Federal period appearance of the house.

2. Condition of fabric: The house is undergoing major changes including the demolition of the nursing home wing and demolition of rear walls on the east hyphen and west wing, and demolition of west wall of west wing. This demolition was resulted in substantial alteration to the west parcel of land, closest to the alley. The remainder of the south lawn appears intact.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The center block is two and half stories with a basement and is five bays wide. The east hyphen front (north) facade is two stories and basement, and three bays wide. The east wing is also two stories and basement, but higher than the hyphen. The three bay east wing, with its hipped roof, appears as an end pavilion, although a two story, one bay structure with first floor drive-through exists to the east of the east wing. The west wing, north facade, is two stories with basement. Everything to the west of this wing, which was designed by Horace Peaslee for the Episcopal Home, has been demolished.

2. Foundations: Stone

3. Walls: The center block is Flemish bond on the north and south facades with mixed bond on the east and west facades. The wings and hyphen on the north facade were also Flemish. Much of the south facade on the secondary sections is also Flemish. It appears that a new brick wall is being erected in front of the east hyphen.

4. Structural system, framing: Loading-bearing brick.

5. Porches, stoops: On the north facade, porches are at the center block and the drive-through. The center block porch has three steps flanking the landing in front of the main entrance door. The wrought-iron railing terminates in volutes at the bottom step. This cast stone and brick faced is a twentieth-century revival of Federal period tastes. The porch to the drive-through is a simple wooden panel railing up to a servants' entrance. The major porch is the one story rear porch on raised foundation, offering excellent views towards the Georgetown waterfront. The porch, which is not the original one, runs across the center bay entrance and either flanking window bay. A balustrade runs across the roof of the porch, while the first floor has between the columns panels (essentially paneled wainscotting) topped with balustrades.

6. Chimneys: Inside chimneys flank the roof ridge on the east and west facades, with slightly projecting course of bricks at the top. These rectangular chimneys appear to have been rebuilt.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The front door is a six panel door. As the door is set at the rear of the door surround, with paneled reveals, it opens into the stair hall. A leaded glass fanlight is above the door. The fanlight is surrounded by a beaded molding with a keystone. The door surround is a broken pediment supported by fluted pilasters, supported by simple bases. The door into the east wing is a simplified version of the front door, having a half-round light above the door, but lacking the broken pedimented door surround. The door has a glass pane, below is a wooden panel.

A large round arched door into the east hyphen was removed by Horace Peaslee, and sold to the Landon School, Bethesda, along with other furnishings including Franklin stoves, but they cannot be located at the school.

A below ground door to the east hyphen did exist, whether it is still there is unknown. Other secondary doors also existed, but whether they have been retained is unknown.

The south facade door, opening onto the porch is the major door, although the entrance door is on the north facade. The south facade door lacks the front door's surround, but the south door is larger with sidelights and a larger fanlight above. Not only is the fanlight larger than the front door's, but the former's metal muntins are more impressive and older looking. The door is entirely glass, consisting of fifteen lights.

b. Windows: The windows on the center block are eight-over-six double hung windows with flat arches, and no shutters. The exception is the center bay second story rear window. The second floor window is a round arched window, topped with arched muntins, of eight-over-six double hung windows, with a jib door panels below. The windows in the secondary sections, echo the main block windows but are usually smaller, six-over-six double hung, and an occasional round arched window.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: the center block is a gable roof surfaced in slate. Roofs on east hyphen and west wing have been removed, along with rear walls (and side wall for west wing). The east wing has a low hipped roof and the drive-through has a modified hip, both presumably covered in slate.

b. Cornice, eaves: A wooden cornice with paired dentils runs across the four facades, and on the east and west facades it is the bed of the pediment.

c. Dormers: The north and south facades each has three broken pedimented dormers with round arched windows with arched muntins. The dentiled cornice repeats the roof cornice.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. Basement: The basement has central hall, running north-south with cross corridors to the dependencies, and the remaining space has been subdivided into four rooms. The east hyphen consisted of one large space with pilasters dividing it into three smaller spaces. East wing consists of a corridor, two smaller spaces and three larger spaces. West wing consisted of several storage and utility rooms of various sizes. **Note:** past tense used for demolished spaces, present tense used for existing spaces, but it is not confirmed that those rooms still are configured as they were at the time of Archetype historic structures report (July 1997).

b. First floor: The front door opens onto a hall running east-west. On axis with the front door is an entrance hall separated from the stair hall by an arched opening with keystone, supported by fluted pilasters. This type of handsome arch dividing front hall from rear hall is common to several of the Georgetown houses of the Federal period, such as the Riggs-Riley House (HABS No. DC-46) East of the entrance hall is the dining room and west of the entrance hall is the drawing room. The drawing room has a door into the sitting room. That room is directly west of the stair hall and has a door connecting the two spaces. The east hyphen consisted of one large room, with doors into the dining room and stair hall. The hyphen also had an opening on the east wall into east wing where a single long room, reconfigured as a chapel exists. Beyond the chapel wing were small rooms for servants. The west wing consisted of a corridor, institutional kitchen, and stairs.

c. Second floor: This floor in the center block has three bedrooms and a front hall and back hall (separated by pilasters supporting an arched opening), which has been subdivided into small rooms. The second floor hyphen was a corridor leading to the east wing which was servant bedrooms and bathrooms. The second floor of the west wing was bedrooms or offices and bathrooms.

d. Attic: This space was subdivided by wooden partitions into several spaces and based on William Nicholls's inventory it is believed that this was sleeping quarters for slaves and children, and storage for linens and other house goods.

2. Stairway: An open-string, open-well stairs climbs along the north side of the entrance hall, bisecting the window east of the front door and making a right turn into the stair landing and at the end of the landing turns another 90 degrees to ascend to the second floor. A handrail runs on either side of the stairs, with two balusters per tread along the inside edge and in front of the window. The balustrade ends in a volute. The balusters are plain, square in section, and the other elements are lacking in decoration, except for the stringer, which is a cyma recta shape with an incised c-shape above the convex shape at the bottom of the stringer. At either end of the tread, the stringer terminates in a squared off dip.

It is believed that the servants' stairs joined the main stairs at the landing, but that this connection was removed when a second floor bathroom was built.

3. Flooring: The two halls have vinyl tile over plywood while the other rooms in the center block have flooring running east-west.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceilings, including cornices and ornamented chair rails are plaster, except where walls were replaced in 1956. Baseboards, and pilasters and arched openings are wood.

#### 5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The front door surround consists of fluted pilasters supporting impost capitals and a half-round arch with half round molding and keystone. The south door surround repeats the fluted pilasters, imposts, and half-round arch of front door, but wider and taller. Interior door surrounds range from eared door surrounds with raised edge as seen in the second story east bedroom to the first floor door surrounds consisting of two fascia separated by a beading and terminating in a raised edge of the door surround. This door surrounds resemble those in mid to late eighteenth century British publications. The reveals are paneled.

b. Windows: The window treatments are consistent with the door surrounds. Paneled interior shutters fit into the window reveals.

6. Decorative features and trim: The major decorative elements are the arches separating front and rear halls on the first and second floors (which have already been described) and the fireplaces and ornamental chair rails and cornices. The front parlor fireplace has console pilasters decorated with bellflowers supporting a mantel of five part composition of narrow bands above the consoles and the piece over the fireplace opening divided into three wide panels with the raised center panel decorated with an urn and the side panels with garlands. The mantelshelf is straight across but projects over the pilasters. The fireplace in the drawing room (south of the front parlor) has the same rhythm, but is much more ornate in terms of the decoration within the panels, and has paired, fluted half-round pilasters rather than consoles supporting the mantel. The raised center panel consists of three figures, rather than an urn and the side panels are decorated with finer and more garlands. The dining room fireplace is more robust, simpler, and historically the most important. One fluted half round column to either side of the fireplace opening supports the mantel which is a single rather than three sections. Garlands flank a rustic scene of a house and trees. This grouping closely resembles one in the Hoxton House at Alexandria's Episcopal High School. This house was originally called Mt. Washington and built in 1804 for a granddaughter of Martha Washington's, Eliza Parke Custis Law. Its ornamentation is usually attributed to the workshop of George Andrew, who worked at the Octagon and Monticello. If the fireplace was by George Andrew's shop then it relates Bowie-Sevier to some of the most important Federal period houses in this region and it reflects Washington Bowie's intention to build a house of the highest quality. The dining room fireplace also reflects the work of a skilled craftsman in the highly detailed capitals of the pilasters and beading surrounding the fireplace opening. Unlike the other fireplace mantelshelves, this one is straight across, without projections at the ends. (Each fireplace opening has marble surrounds.) Equally impressive ornamental work is seen in the cornices and the chairrails. Chairrails have bands of vertical reeds separated by either garlands or sunbursts (due to the numerous coats of paint, it is impossible to say precisely what the figure is).

The dining room cornice's frieze consists of intertwined grapevines. Above this band, a row of raised acanthus leaves mark the transition from wall to ceiling. The cornice soffit is decorated with rosettes and above the soffit the corona is undecorated, but the cymatium has a row of oval beads and terminates in another row of acanthus leaves.

The drawing room cornice's frieze consists of alternating palmettes, encircled with vines, and an elongated bulb with two groups of leaves sprouting from the top, suggesting the Erechtheion on the Acropolis. Above this band a row of raised acanthus leaves mark the transition from wall to ceiling. The cornice soffit is decorated with rosettes and above the soffit the corona is undecorated, but the cymatium terminated in another row of acanthus leaves. The drawing room cornice differs from the dining room cornice in terms of the frieze and cymatium treatments.

The second floor east bedroom has an interesting wooden cornice and fireplace mantel, but bear little or no relationship to those on the first floor and based on appearance, it is assumed that they are late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century Federal revival replacements.

7. Hardware: The front door lockbox appears to be original. In the drawing room, the chandelier appears to date from 1820-1830 and the four wall brackets probably date to the same period.

8. Mechanical systems: The first floor of the main block of the house was heated by iron radiators.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The parcel is roughly cross-shaped running from Q Street south to P Street and from 32<sup>nd</sup> Street east more than half the width of the block. The parcel was originally the entire square in the time of Washington Bowie's first ownership, somewhat smaller the second time he owned it, and further reduced by the late nineteenth century. The Seviers reacquired some of the land owned by Bowie, along the narrow street that became 32<sup>nd</sup> Street. The orientation is, however, clearly north-south with the view towards the Georgetown harbor being the most important visual issue, as was true of many of the grand Federal houses along Georgetown Heights and in houses south of the heights. When the private road in front of the Bowie-Sevier was leveled, extending Q Street in the late nineteenth century, the north lawn and the house became elevated well above Q Street. The front lawn was relandscaped by Peaslee when he designed the nursing home wing. While the north or front lawn is a shallow, steep climb to the house, the south lawn is a long, fairly gentle descend to P Street, broken up by terraces and plantings. During the last fifty years, the south lawn has apparently lost some of its formal qualities imposed by the Seviers or perhaps even earlier owners, but it still is a handsome space with some old trees and man-made elements.

2. Historic landscape design: Unknown. In popular publications, the house and grounds are often attributed to Pierre L'Enfant, but there is no proof. Remaining paths suggest that a carriage path once led from P Street up to the south entrance.

3. Outbuildings: The Seviers erected a garage, with living quarters, above in the early twentieth century at the end of an alley that runs from 31<sup>st</sup> Street to the eastern boundary of the parcel. It is assumed that there were once nineteenth-century outbuildings.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

This report is based on the Historic Structures Report submitted in July 1997 by Archetype to the Tudor Place Foundation, then owner of the Bowie-Sevier House. That report was based on in-depth examination of the house, glass plate negatives that had once been at the house, Wes Pippenger's history of the ownership of the house, and research conducted in the Tudor Place archives, files of the Peabody Room, Georgetown branch of the D.C. Public Library, Recorder of Deeds, National Archives (permits and lawsuits), library of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Historical Society of Washington, several church archives, Episcopal

School (Alexandria, VA.) and using standard histories of Georgetown such as Grace Eker's *Portrait of Old Georgetown* (1951, Dietz Press). In addition several interviews were conducted with relatives and visitors to the house before and while it was the Episcopal Home, and with various contractors who worked on the house. Also Walter Muir Whitehill's monograph on Dumbarton Oaks and the pamphlet on Joseph Nourse prepared by the Society of the Colonial Dames, Dumbarton House, provided important information that would have otherwise not been uncovered.

Prepared by: Bill Lebovich, architectural historian, April 2000

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

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