

GRAHAM-HUGHES HOUSE
Mount Vernon Place
718 North Washington Place
Baltimore
Independent City
Maryland

HABS MD-1178
MD-1178

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

GRAHAM-HUGHES HOUSE

HABS No. MD-1178

LOCATION: 718 N. Washington Place, west side, Baltimore, Baltimore County, Maryland.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Completed in 1888, the Graham-Hughes House stands among the most architecturally arresting structures facing Mount Vernon and Washington places. Its prominent corner tower not only emboldens the presence of the narrow house, but also contributes to the overall park landscape by marking the northern extent of Washington Place. Sheathed in white marble, the structure stands apart from the more muted red brick and brownstone facades facing the parks and the surrounding streets. In form and detail, the house's Chateausque expression architecturally linked the Grahams to other upper-class Americans building similar houses throughout the country. The house remains among the extant works of local Baltimore architect, George Archer.¹

HISTORIAN: James A. Jacobs.

DESCRIPTION:

The marble-sheathed house rises three stories on the principal (east) facade oriented to the park; a full, but truncated fourth floor is accommodated under the sweeping single gable evident on the house's secondary (north) elevation along Madison Street. Both the east and north walls are composed predominately of random-range quarry-faced ashlar courses of marble blocks and detailed with delicately carved marble lintels, sills, bas-relief plaques, entablatures, balustrades, friezes, and pediments. The west (rear) wall is of standard brick. The house is overscaled, evidenced particularly by the raised entrance portico, reached by set of gently curved stairs. The roof of this open structure, a contiguous extension of the entablature separating the first and second stories, is supported by two columns at the front and two pilasters flanking the front door at the rear. The columns and pilasters are of a charcoal-colored granite, predominately unfluted, and topped by marble capitals in a florid interpretation of the Composite order. The double entrance doors framed by the portico each contain a window at the top fronted by a grate with four solid panels below. Decorative bronze or bronze-colored metal studs lining the doors' stiles and rails further accentuate their intimidating quality.

On the principal facade, entablatures bearing intricate friezes separate the first from the second, and the second from the third stories. The lower entablature contains two friezes,

¹For additional information related to row houses and urban townhouses in Baltimore see the reports for the Decatur Miller House, HABS No. MD-1175; 18-28 E. Mount Vernon Place, HABS No. MD-1176; Belvidere Terrace, HABS No. MD-1177; and the Addendum to Residence Row, HABS No. MD-399.

one featuring a flowers and foliage topped by a denticulated band, and the other displaying a pattern of stylized acanthus leaves. The upper entablature contains a frieze with flowers and foliage of a different design from that below. On the fourth story, a garlanded frieze rings the top of the tower.

While more simply articulated than the east elevation, what could have been a planar wall on the north is enlivened by a three-story bow window, a two-story rectilinear bay, and two tall chimney stacks. The chimney nearer the front is enlivened by a broken pediment and plaques bearing a foliate design in low relief. A fire escape extends downward from a fourth-story window toward the rear of the north wall. The window sash on all four floors is one-over-one double-hung. The cellar windows are fronted by unadorned iron security grates. The roof is composed of slate shingles with copper gutters and trim.

HISTORY:

While perhaps not deliberately conceived, the original lot divisions and ultimate development of the four parks extending from the Washington Monument gave precedence to the east-west axis of Mount Vernon Place over Washington Place, the north-south axis.² This emphasis resulted from a situation whereby the orientation of the lots dictated that only primary elevations of houses would face Mount Vernon Place. Because houses at the intersection of the axes faced Mount Vernon Place, their side walls and gardens dominated the frontage along Washington Place. Only the lots furthest from the center faced the parks of Washington Place, and it lacked the steady rhythm and visual cohesiveness possessed by Mount Vernon Place.³ In addition to their somewhat peripheral location, the lots facing Washington Place were not as deep as their counterparts along Mount Vernon Place. Perhaps on account of this situation, one source suggests that prior to the end of the Civil War, the lot at the southwest corner of Charles and Madison streets served as the garden to the Moale residence located on the adjacent lot facing Washington Place.⁴ Sometime before 1873 a three-story house with two-story ell was constructed on this corner lot fronting on Washington Place.⁵ It has been intimated that this comparatively modest brick structure was later incorporated into the Graham-Hughes House, however it is doubtful that significant portions of the earlier house would have survived the creation of the later dwelling given

²See MS.10.S.1 4-30, Baltimore City Archives, for an 1868 copy of the lot divisions as authorized by an act of the Maryland State Legislature in 1830. The author is indebted to Lance Humphries for knowledge of this document.

³This situation was somewhat resolved by a second generation of construction on three of the corner lots. The Peabody Institute (1858-1861, 1875-1878) on the southeast corner, Mount Vernon United Methodist Episcopal Church (1873) on the northeast corner, and the Washington Apartments (1906) on the northwest corner—all large buildings with essentially two dominant elevations—better pulled the four parks and their bordering structures into one composition. For more information about the Peabody Institute, see HABS No. MD-1157, and the Mount Vernon United Methodist Church, see HABS No. MD-1155.

⁴This information is drawn from the Passano Architectural Files at the Maryland Historical Society (MHS), Baltimore, Maryland, but remains unsubstantiated.

⁵An 1873 photograph looking west towards Mount Vernon and Washington places verifies the existence of an earlier dwelling on the site. See *Baltimore: When She Was What She Used to Be*, ed. Marion E. Warren and Mame Warren (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), plate 82.

differences in material, footprint, and overall size.⁶ The second house that appeared on the lot bore little resemblance to what came before and its overscaled design likely responded not only to its corner location, but also its positioning at the top of the north-south axis.

Early in 1888, George and Sarah Graham and their daughter Isabella moved into a sumptuous new house at the southwest corner of Charles and Madison streets designed by local architect George Archer.⁷ Archer was born in Harford County, Maryland, educated by his father, and attended the College of New Jersey at Princeton where he received a Master's degree in 1873, although neither his undergraduate nor his graduate degree were architecture related.⁸ Between 1873 and 1875, he gained practical architectural experience in the office of Baltimore architect George A. Frederick before he founded his own firm.⁹ Like most his contemporaries, Archer's commissions encompassed a broad range of types including churches, institutional structures, warehouses, multiunit residential rows, and single-family urban houses like the Graham-Hughes House.¹⁰ While the particulars of the house's construction remain obscure, an 1888 newspaper article established John Waters, warden of the city jail, as the builder and M. O. Travers, as the construction foreman.¹¹

As a young couple with available resources, George and Sarah Graham purchased a prestigious site in the most elite locale of Baltimore, and then commissioned a lavish house, which both visually and socially, would not pass unnoticed.¹² For the house's exterior Archer chose the then fashionable Chateausque mode of expression characterized by steeply pitched roofs, active rooflines broken by dormers, articulated chimneys, towers, and a free use of classical detailing.¹³ By accepting Archer's Chateausque design, the Grahams were architecturally associating themselves with some of the wealthiest American families, most notably the Vanderbilts whose Chateausque house on Fifth Avenue, New York City (Richard Morris Hunt, 1879) became a model for elite residential construction throughout

⁶See "Baltimore Architecture: Then and Now," Maryland Memory Projects, The Digital Library of the Maryland Historical Society, accessed online, 1 Jul. 2003, <http://www.mdhs.org/library/baltarch/Page3.html>, for assertion of incorporation of the earlier structure.

⁷In a situation not uncommon to architectural history, particularly that of elite residences, for many years it was believed that the house was built in 1895 on plans provided by well-known Baltimore architect Charles E. Cassell. This information was corrected upon the finding of the 12 Mar. 1888 *Baltimore Sun* article, which established both Archer as architect and a date seven years earlier for the termination of construction. The existence of this article was noted in a ca. 1980s newsletter located in the Graham-Hughes House file at the Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation, Baltimore, Maryland. "A Beautiful Charles Street Home," *Baltimore Sun* 12 Mar. 1888: (4).

⁸His lack of formal architectural schooling was made up for by his perceived inbred talent stating in an 1893 interview: "architects, like poets, are born, not made." This said, he did express that he wished he could have taken architecture courses, which were not offered at Princeton at the time. See Irma Walker and James T. Wollon, Jr., "George Archer," Historical Research Files, Baltimore Architecture Foundation (BAF) Baltimore, Maryland.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Irma Walker and James T. Wollon, Jr., "George Archer, Architect: Important Dates and Project List," typescript, 1992, George Archer file, Baldwin Memorial Archive, American Institute of Architects, Washington, DC.

¹¹"A Beautiful Charles Street House."

¹²George Brown Graham was a member of the highly influential Brown banking family.

¹³See Virginia McAlester and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 372-377.

the country during the final decades of the nineteenth century. While certainly not on the scale of New York's Fifth Avenue palaces, the Graham-Hughes house stood as a significant addition to Mount Vernon and Washington places and stood out from the architectural staidness characterizing most of the structures facing the parks.

Faced with a spatially constricted yet high-profile site at the top of Washington Place, architect George Archer skillfully gave the residence a bold exterior expression not usually seen in narrow attached urban houses. Its corner turret ably marks the northern extent of the park extending north from the Washington Monument and makes the house's presence known from a number of directions, even after the 1894 construction of the large Stafford Hotel immediately to the south. The exterior walls and details were carved from local Beaver Dam marble with polished Quincy granite used for the four Composite order columns of the overscaled entrance portico.¹⁴

On the interior, the house included all the spaces necessary for an upper-class American family at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Because the house was located on a corner, it could fill the site to the lot line and still allow for light and air in the middle room. The front third of the house included reception spaces and the parlor. Upon entry, a tiled vestibule with passageway aligned along the party wall screened the family from callers and other visitors. The adjacent parlor had frontage along both Charles and Madison streets and extended into the turret positioned on the dwelling's northeast corner. In the house's middle third along the party wall, the entrance passage widened into a spacious stairhall dominated by a U-shaped stair that received filtered light from a skylight three stories above. North of the stairhall, a comparatively narrow sitting room featured a bow window looking out onto Madison Street and could also be entered through a door from the parlor.¹⁶ Constrictions in urban house design are evident in the relationship of the dining room with the other public rooms. Located at the rear of the house with principal frontage along Madison Street and a polygonal window bay in the west wall, the dining room's primary entrance opened from the middle room, making that space simultaneously active and passive as both sitting room and anteroom. The large and well lighted dining room underscores the social importance of the dining ritual to upper class Americans late in the nineteenth century. A large safe was located behind a door in the dining room. Its location suggests a primary use for storing valuable silver objects required for grandiose entertaining.

¹⁴"A Beautiful Charles Street Home," for building materials.

¹⁵Unless otherwise noted, all of the information related to the house's interior as built is based on the period description in "A Beautiful Charles Street Home."

¹⁶In "A Beautiful Charles Street Home," the description of the house's interior places the sitting room "to the rear of the dining room," which was positioned "just back of the parlor" and given the dimensions of 34'-0" x 28'-0". In "Anchor of Washington Place: The Graham Hughes House is Going on a Recycle Trip" (*Baltimore Sun* 28 Dec. 1977), Carl Schoettler reported that the house had not been physically altered and that many of its decorative finishes were also extant. A 2004 visit to the house supports these statements, at least in regard to the principal living story, and reveals flaws in the details of the 1888 description. On account of the stairhall's size, the room "just back of back the parlor," is much too constricted for dining use and furthermore had no direct access to the service areas and kitchen below, both vital requirements to dining practices in the nineteenth century. The current and historical location of the dining room was, undoubtedly, the room at the rear of the first floor.

Social events and family activities in the public rooms were supported by staging spaces (the “cook’s pantries”) at the southwest corner of the first floor along the party wall. Connecting doors into the dining room and stairhall facilitated rapid and discrete movement by staff throughout the principal story. A service stair undoubtedly connected the first-floor pantries with the kitchen, laundry, and mechanical equipment below, and extended vertically through the house up to the fourth story, bearing “rooms for the house servants.” The second floor contained bedrooms, a bathroom, and one semipublic room—the library—that was likely the masculine domain of George Graham. The third floor contained “five rooms...besides linen closets and [a] bathroom.” With a larger family, the Grahams would have likely used some of these spaces for additional family bedrooms; however, George Graham’s early death eliminated this possibility.

After George Graham’s 1890 death, his wife and daughter continued to alternate time between the house on Washington Place and “Prospect Hill,” the family’s country estate in Catonsville, Maryland.¹⁷ By 1899, Sarah Grimes Poullain Graham’s second husband had also died and she and her daughter Isabella spent more and more time at Prospect Hill.¹⁸ In 1908 Isabella Brown Graham married Thomas Hughes, a situation notable for providing the second name now associated with the property.¹⁹ In 1938, their daughter Isabella Brown Graham Hughes moved into 718 N. Washington Place and lived in the house, at times with borders, until her 1977 death.²⁰ Because the house remained in the family for nearly ninety years, it was not divided into apartments nor offices as was the case with numerous other dwellings facing Mount Vernon and Washington places. As a result, through Isabella Brown Graham Hughes death the house remained “essentially in its original configuration and for the most part the decor [was] preserved.”²¹ The dwelling is maintained as a private residence and is the last single-family house facing the parks.

SOURCES:

Ca. 1830 lot divisions for Mount Vernon and Washington Places, Baltimore, Maryland.
1868. MS.10.S.1 4-30. Baltimore City Archives. Baltimore, Maryland.

Baldwin Memorial Archive. American Institute of Architects. Washington, DC.

¹⁷“George Brown Graham,” Deilman Hayward Files, MHS, Baltimore, Maryland, for date of death; see also, “Descendents of Wolphert Gerretse Van Kouwenhoven” (hereafter “Descendents”), accessed online, 28 Jan. 2004, <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com>; for “Prospect Hill,” see Carl Schoettler, “Anchor of Washington Place: The Graham Hughes House is Going on a Recycle Trip,” *Baltimore Sun* 28 Dec. 1977, clipping located in Subject Files, Historic Houses—GRA, MHS, Baltimore, Maryland.

¹⁸Schoettler, for existence of a second husband and relocation to Prospect Hill; “Descendents,” for unsubstantiated name and death date of her second husband, Carroll MacGill. This online resource also notes the possible existence of a third husband, “William Ross Hoff,” but no dates or details were included beyond the name and possible relationship to Poullain. In the few sources where her name appears, “Sarah Grimes Poullain” is mentioned by what apparently was her full maiden name, or as “Sarah G. Poullain.” See “Descendents,” and “William Brown (1715–1778) Descendents and Spouses,” accessed online, 2 Jul. 2003, <http://www.chesapeake.net/~stovy/Brown/>.

¹⁹Schoettler and “William Brown,” for marriage date and husband’s name.

²⁰Schoettler, for return to No. 718 and borders; Passano Architectural Files, MHS, for death date.

²¹Schoettler.

“Baltimore Architecture: Then and Now.” Maryland Memory Projects, Maryland Historical Society. Online. 1 Jul. 2003. <http://www.mdhs.org/library/baltarch/Page3.html>.

Baltimore: When She Was What She Used to Be. Ed. Marion E. Warren and Mame Warren. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

“A Beautiful Charles Street Home.” Baltimore Sun 12 Mar. 1888: (4).

Deilman Hayward Files. Maryland Historical Society. Baltimore, Maryland.

“Descendents of Wolphert Gerretse Van Kouwenhoven.” Online. 28 Jan. 2004. <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/>.

Historical Research Files. Baltimore Architecture Foundation. Baltimore, Maryland.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee McAlester. A Field Guide to American Houses. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.

Passano Architectural Files. Maryland Historical Society. Baltimore, Maryland.

Research Files. Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation. Baltimore, Maryland.

Schoettler, Carl. “Anchor of Washington Place: The Graham Hughes House is Going on a Recycle Trip.” Baltimore Sun 28 Dec. 1977. Subject Files, Historic Houses—GRA. Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland.

“William Brown (1715–1778) Descendents and Spouses.” Online. 2 Jul. 2003. <http://www.chesapeake.net/~stovy/Brown/>.