

"Malbone"

(J. Prescott Hall-Henry Bedlow House)
West side of Malbone Road opposite Cummings Road
Newport
Newport County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-340

HABS
RI,
3-NEWP,
62-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HABS
RI,
3 - Newport
62 -

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. RI-340

"MALBONE"

(J. Prescott Hall-Henry Bedlow House)

Location: West side of Malbone Road opposite Cummings Road

Present Owner
and Occupant: Mrs. Anita Stewart Morris

Present Use: Residential

Significance: Built in 1849, this large castellated residence is the only example of Alexander Jackson Davis' work in Newport. Located on the ruins of Godfrey Malbone's country seat, the site was noted for its elaborate eighteenth century gardens.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

The building is located in Plat 7, Lot 3.4. The following is an incomplete chain of title from Newport City Clerk's Records for the city of Newport. Reference is to number and volume of the Land Evidence Books, (LEB.--,p.--).

1797 Deed of February 23, 1797, recorded in LEB. 6, pp. 375-377.

From: Godfrey Malbone by Francis Brinley appointed executor by Assembly.

To: William Rotch of New Bedford

For: 28,000 Spanish Silver Milled Dollars

"...a certain farm or tract of land called Tamini-Hill... containing by estimation six hundred and thirty acres be the same more or less, and is the whole of that farm or tract of land which late belonged to Godfrey Malbone and John Malbone aforesaid and which is now under the tenure and occupation of Isaac Chase, Edward Sisson and Eugene Mahé,...All and singular houses, edifices, buildings and all material for building of what kind or nature forever, and all fences, walls, trees, wood or underwood thereon standing, lying or growing. Together with all ways, passages, waters, water courses, thereunto belong or in anywise appertaining or therewith now used occupied or enjoyed."

1831 Deed of December 10, 1831, recorded in LEB. 19, pp. 117-118.

From: William Rotch Heirs of (William Rotch, Jr., Mary Rotch,
Samuel Rodman and Elizabeth Rodman)
To: Benjamin Rotch, of Harrow, England
For: \$1.00 quitclaim deed

"...a certain tract of land...known by the name Malbone Farms,
said tract hereby comprising two divisions of said property as
survey in the year 1829 by Joseph Martin, one known as the
Garden Farm and containing one hundred thirty nine acres, three
roods, thirty rods be the same more or less, and one called the
Tamini Hill Farm containing one hundred fifty five acres, thirty
rods, be the same more or less, reference being had to the plan
of the whole property made by Joseph Martin aforesaid; for the
division lines between the property hereby quit claimed to Ben-
jamin Rotch and the property quit claimed by deeds bearing even
date herewith to William Rotch Jr. and Elizabeth Rodman."

1833 Deed of July 11, 1833, recorded in LEB. 19, pp. 398-399.

From: Benjamin Rotch
To: Paul West, David Baxter and Mary Gwinn, all of Nantucket
For: \$22,501.00

"...a certain tract of land...two farms known by the name of the
Tamini Hill Farm and the Garden Farm..."

1833 Deed of October 11, 1833, recorded in LEB. 19, pp. 594-595.

From: Benjamin Rotch
To: Paul West, David Baxter and Mary Gwinn, all of Nantucket
For: \$22,501.00

Affirms the previous deed arranged by William W. Swain,
Mr. Rotch's attorney

1833 Deed of July 18, 1833, recorded in LEB. 19, pp. 425-427.

From: Paul West, David Baxter and Mary Gwinn
To: David Buffam
For: \$9,300.00

"...a certain tract of land...Tamini Hill Farm, one hundred
fifty five acres, thirty rods with a dwelling house and other
buildings..."

1836 Deed of March 21, 1836, recorded in LEB. 21, pp. 33-35.

From: Paul West, David Baxter and Mary Gwinn
To: James D'Wolf
For: \$13,000.00

"...a certain farm or tract of land, with all buildings and improvements...known by the name of the Malbone Garden Farm, containing by survey made by Joseph Martin December 1829, one hundred thirty nine acres, three roods and thirty one rods, said farm being marked G in the plat of said survey..."

1853 Deed of March 25, 1853, recorded in LEB. 34, pp. 175-176.

From: Jonathan Prescott Hall and Harriette D.W. Hall, of
New York.
To: Charles E. Butler of New York
For: Indenture of \$1.00

"All that certain farm...known by the name of Malbone Garden Farm...which was given, devised and bequeathed by the said James D'Wolf, to the said Harriette D.W. Hall, in and by his last will and testament, bearing date the 28th day of December A.D. 1836..."

1853 Deed of March 26, 1853, recorded in LEB. 34, pp. 176-178.

From: Charles E. Butler of New York
To: Jonathan Prescott Hall of New York
For: Indenture of \$1.00

Same property returned

1896 Deed of August 31, 1896, recorded in LEB. 70, p. 485.

From: Jonathan Prescott Hall et ux
To: Henry Bedlow et als

"...on the fifteenth day of June, eighteen hundred and sixty-three, the said Jonathan Prescott Hall did devise and bequeath the residuary estate, including the lands and premises situated in Newport aforesaid known as "Malbone."

1904 Deed of February 25, 1904, recorded in LEB. 83, p. 309.

From: Herbert L. Dyer, Commissioner
To: Lewis G. Morris

"...Whereas, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the State of Rhode Island, within and for the county of Newport, by a decree entered on the sixth day of January A.D. 1904, and modified by a decree entered on the twenty-third day of January A.D. 1904, in the course in equity no. 734, Henry Bedlow, et als. vs. Lewis G. Morris, appointed Herbert L. Dyer...Commissioner and Special Master, to sell the real estate described in the bill of complaint in said case by public auction, first giving three weeks notice of such sale by publication at least twice a week for three successive weeks in 'Newport Daily News' and 'Newport Herald.'... whereas at a public auction on the premise in said Newport, on the sixteenth day of February A.D. 1904 duly advertised ...Lewis G. Morris was the highest bidder for and became the purchaser of the parcel of land hereinafter mentioned for the sum of eighteen thousand and six hundred dollars \$18,600.00 ...a portion known and designated as 'lot no. 1' on the plat of Joseph P. Cotton, bearing the date January 19, 1904 and referred to in said decrees, containing seventeen acres more or less, together with the mansion house, sometimes called 'Malbone' and other improvements thereon..."

1917 Deed of March 31, 1917, recorded in LEB. 103, pp. 339-340.

From: Lewis G. Morris
To: Alletta Nathalie Lorillard Morris (daughter)
For: \$10.00

2. Date of erection: 1849-1850
3. Architect: Alexander Jackson Davis
4. Builder: Unknown
5. Original plans: The office book of Alexander Jackson Davis in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, contains a sketch of the floor plan and the south elevation.
6. Alterations and additions: Subsequently a two story wing was added to the north side of the house. According to Mary E. Powell, the wing was originally used as a library, but after the death of Mr. Hall in 1862, the room was converted to the dining room by Henry Bedlow. The period from 1865 to 1890 saw numerous alterations and improvements made to the interior of the house and the outbuildings. In 1875, Dudley Newton, architect, and P.G. Case

and Co., builders, installed the elaborate staircase, entrance hall fireplace and the fireplace in the northwest parlor. William Barlow, carpenter, installed the black walnut panel work ornamented carving in three of the second floor rooms. This work was done in 1883. In recent years, Mr. Morris widened the verandah to a terrace and cut off the presumably rotted lower parts of the posts. The bookcases in the southeast room are from a Ludlow house in Ludlow on the Hudson. They correspond in date and style to "Malbone."

7. Important old views: There is a large collection of various lithographs from the second half of the nineteenth century in the house. A Newell-Bufford lithograph with the pencilled date of 1857 shows the addition to the north. The Knickerbocker Magazine, 1859, published a view of the house from northeast showing the addition to the north.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

The name "Malbone" is derived from the original structure on the site erected by Godfrey Malbone in 1741. According to contemporary accounts the structure was one of the largest and most magnificent dwellings in the Colonies. Built of pink sandstone from Mr. Malbone's plantation in Brooklyn, Connecticut, the house burned in 1766 on the seventh of June.

C. Sources of Information:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

1. Records and deeds in the Newport City Hall.
Records of Probate, Probate Court, Newport City Hall.
Office book of Alexander Jackson Davis in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Mary E. Powell, "Jonathan Prescott Hall Family," Newport Historical Society, [Notebook prepared c. 1910.]

2. Secondary and published sources:

Downing, Antoinette F. and Sally, Vincent J., Jr. The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, New York: Clarkson N. Potter, second edition, 1967.

Lamb, Martha Joanna Reade, The Homes of America, New York: A. Appleton and Co., 1879.

Lockwood, Alice G. B., ed. Gardens of Colony and State: Gardens of the American Colonies and of the Republic before 1840, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931.

Mason, George Champlin. Newport and Its Cottages, Boston:
James R. Osgood and Co., 1875.

Newport Daily News, October 25, 1849.

Newport Mercury, May 24, 1796.

_____, January 18, 1868.

_____, April 5, 1873.

_____, July 12, 1873.

_____, May 9, 1874.

_____, May 8, 1875.

_____, January 20, 1883.

_____, December 6, 1884.

_____, December 3, 1887.

Peterson, the Reverend Edward, History of Rhode Island and
in the Past. New York: John S. Taylor, 1853.

3. Likely sources not yet investigated:

Personal papers of Lewis G. Morris, a descendent of Mr. Hall
and Mr. Bedlow.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A masonry Gothic Revival house, its date, 1849, reflects the renewed interest in Newport. The simple plan is contrasted by the picturesque quality of the exterior created by the peaked roofs and crenelated turrets. This is an example of the work of Alexander Jackson Davis.
2. Condition of fabric: The interior and exterior are in excellent condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: About 40 feet by 80 feet; main block plus north ell; 3 bays; 2 1/2 stories.

2. Foundations: The cellar walls are masonry.
3. Wall construction: The structure is faced with pink sandstone from Brooklyn, Connecticut. Some of the material is reputed to be from the original Godfrey Malbone estate destroyed by fire in 1766.
4. Structural system: The construction is masonry.
5. Chimneys: The two chimneys in one original portion of the house are brick with the flues marked by three clay, octagonal chimney pots. The chimney in the north wall of the addition is stone.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways: The two leaf panelled entrance door is centered in a Tudor arched doorway with sidelights. Extending the length of the doors, the sidelights have small diamond panes of glass. At present, the two doors in the north wall of the addition are false.
 - b. Windows: Generally the double hung windows are paired and have various pediments and sills. The upper portion of the window frame has sawn gothic detailing. The sashes are filled with different sized panes created by diagonally placed mullions. There are some French windows with folding interior louvered shutters in the three parlors. The stained glass windows in the reception room, southwest parlor and dining room are late nineteenth century in date. There are casement windows with interior shutters in the projecting window bay on the south side of the house. The towers have lancet windows with diamond panes.
7. Roof: The pitched roof has a single large dormer on the east and west facades. Slate tiles cover the roof. The north wing has two small dormers on each side of the roof. The original portion of the house has metal coping.
8. Porches, stoops, and bulkheads: The entrance porch on the east facade is of smooth faced sandstone masonry. A porch extends the length of the original west facade. This porch has cut gothic detailing in the wooden supports.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The original portion of the house has four areas. The northeast portion of the house contains the staircase, basement stairs, entrance and closets. The southeast corner has a small parlor or reception room. The west side of the house is divided into two equal sized sitting rooms. The addition to the north contains a large dining room with a modern compact kitchen at the extreme north end. The second floor is similar to the first in plan.

2. Stairways: The open, straight run staircase flares at the bottom. It has golden oak parapet railings decorated with trefoils. The heavy molded railing is terminated by square newels with gothic detailing. A closed staircase below extends to the basement. A cramped circular staircase is contained in the southeast tower. This staircase is reached through the bookcases on the south wall of the reception room.
3. Flooring: The three main rooms and entrance hall in the original block have parquet flooring. The dining room has a random width planked floor installed in recent years.
4. Walls and ceiling finish: All walls and ceilings are plaster. The reception room at the southeast corner has heavy plaster moldings the ceiling which repeat the room plan with semicircles projecting from the center of each of the four sides. The southwest parlor has a similar ceiling treatment with a deeply coved plaster cornice. The ceiling and cornice of the northwest parlor, formerly the dining room, is similarly treated. However, the ceiling motif is based on a diamond pattern. A dark red paper with a damask pattern covers the plaster walls in the northwest parlor. The present dining room has a plain plaster ceiling. The plaster walls are wainscoted with darkly stained panelling decorated with gothic detailing. The bottom molding on the deeply coved plaster cornice in the dining room is decorated with gothic cresting.
5. Doorways and doors: Heavy wooden moldings surround the doors. The doorways and French windows are topped by pedimental arches. The four doorways in the entrance hall are topped by a deep arch filled with three quatrefoils in a triangular arrangement. A pedimental top on the six panel doors fits the pedimental arch of the doorways. The hall doors have gothic detailing in the six recessed panels on their hall sides, but are plain on their room sides. The pedimental arched opening between the two parlors has two sliding panelled doors. Crossets or ancons decorate the heavy molding framing the opening. In the north wall of the dining room are two doors set at an angle to the walls. The segmental pointed doorways have bold moldings of a darkly stained wood. Colored glass with coats of arms decorate the two doors. The lower portions of these doors are divided vertically into two recessed panels with elongated quatrafoils.
6. Special decorative features: In the center of the north wall of the dining room between the two doors is a recessed sideboard with gothic trim. The built-in sideboard is framed by columns with foliate capitals supporting a segmental arch within a rectangular composition. The wood fireplace mantel in the southeast reception room, a copy of the southwest parlor mantel, replaces the original which was marble. The hall and the northwest parlor fireplaces were remodeled when the new stairs were installed. The hall fireplace is of golden oak with gothic detailing and a mirror overmantel. The colors of the hearth

tiles are gold, red, blue and white. Pink marble is used as facing on the fireplace. In the northwest parlor, the fireplace is painted white. The architectural detail is of the "American Free Classic" with a mirror overmantel topped by a shield carving the picture of a castle. The hearth tiles are black and terra cotta in color laid in a running Greek key motif. There are several straight, high backed outdoor chairs with gothic detailing which appear to be original to the house.

7. Hardware: Most of the original hardware has been replaced.
8. Lighting: The glass chandeliers are modern.
9. Heating: The heating system is hot water with radiators.

D.. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house, in a rural setting, is approached by a winding driveway. The longitudinal axis of the house is north-south with the entrance to the east and overlooking the Newport city dump to Narragansett Bay on the west.
2. Historic Landscape design: Traces still remain today of the elaborate Malbone gardens which were in front of the mansion. According to contemporary descriptions there were three fish ponds, cedar trees, various fruit trees, exotic flowers, rare shrubbery and a pink sandstone sundial. Until the construction of the present site for country walks. The remains of the estate were so famous that an attempt to establish them as a commercial venture was made in 1796. Presently the plantings are informal in their arrangement. A well within a wrought iron fence stands to the north of the house.
3. Outbuildings: The barn, north of the house, originally had tops on the octagonal towers similar to those on the house. There is a gardener's residence behind the barn.
4. Walks: None of the eighteenth century gravel walks remain. The wrought iron lamps flanking the front entrance walk were installed about 1920.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

Newport HABS Project --1971. Sponsored in cooperation with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Antoinette F. Downing, Chairman. Under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of HABS, and Thomas M. Slade, (University of Notre Dame), Project Supervisor, Jack E. Boucher, photographer.