

Van Havre-Daingerfield House  
608 Cameron Street  
Alexandria  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-710

HABS  
VA  
7-ALEX,  
168-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

## VAN HAVRE-DAINGERFIELD HOUSE

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VA  
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168-

Location: 608 Cameron Street, Alexandria, Virginia

Present Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Ross

Present Use: Residence

Statement of Significance: This house is a significant Federal town house of the late eighteenth century (1798) with an exceptionally well-documented early history, which relates the residence to persons of consequence, historical sidelights, and family relationships that extend far beyond the local scene.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: c. 1798

Research in the early records of Alexandria, Virginia, has revealed that the son of Baron de Stier of Belgium, Charles Jean Stier, as well as his son-in-law, Baron Van Havre and their families lived in Alexandria and that two of the houses in which they lived are still standing.

The Baron Van Havre and his family were in Alexandria prior to April 5, 1796, when a son was born there, attended by an Alexandria physician. In September 1797, the Baron de Stier wrote from Annapolis to an unidentified correspondent, probably his son or son-in-law:

...The losses in your town are cited in the gazettes. You must all be in great embarassment. What is most fatal is that your town has no prospect of repairing her losses.....put all your energies into play to recover all that is possible and do not flatter your hopes of a propitious future.....Have you already brought your business in Philadelphia to an end? I should be delighted to hear so, for every day makes recovery more difficult.....I strongly dissuade you from any purchase of property, as I have no doubt everything is going to decrease in value.

In spite of the warning in the senior Stier's letter of September 1797, his son and his son-in-law purchased property in Alexandria in June and August of 1798. Baron Van

Havre made the first purchase, acquiring the house, evidently just completed, with lot at what is known today as 608 Cameron Street. Charles Stier purchased the remainder of the quarter block embracing the southeast corner of Cameron and Washington Streets.

Although a frame house was on a part of Stier's land when it was sold in 1802, Stier apparently rented his living quarters. An advertisement of October 9, 1800, describes one of the properties, possibly the first Alexandria home of the younger Stiers:

TO LET -- A two story brick House on Fairfax Street, opposite the Globe Tavern, now in the possession of Mr. Stier. It is in good tenantable order, with a stable for three horses, and a paved yard. For terms apply to

JOHN WHITE  
Corner of Fairfax and Cameron Streets

This house, now 208 North Fairfax Street, is still standing.

2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: The original owner was Baron Van Havre.

On August 6, 1801, the newspapers carried a notice of the dissolution of the partnership of J. M. A. Van Havre and C. J. Stier. On 22 June, 1801, Van Havre and Stier executed "Articles of Agreement" which changed the location of an alley in the quarter block they jointly owned. Apparently this change was made to permit an advantageous division of the land prior to sale. Powers of attorney were executed by Van Havre and the younger Stier on 22 August, 1801, individually, and jointly as members of the firm of Van Havre and Stier, Merchants, to the Baron de Stier.

On 24 August, 1801, an Alexandria "Vendue-Master" advertised the public sale of household goods to be held at the "dwelling house of Mr. Van Havre, Cameron Street." These items were probably the property of the younger Stiers, because Charles Jean Stier returned to Antwerp in November 1801. An advertisement of January 8, 1802, in the Alexandria newspaper, described the house in which the younger Stiers last lived in Alexandria: ...on a lot on the south side of Wolfe Street, east of St. Asaph Street, "there are a large, commodious frame dwelling house, well calculated for the accommodation of a genteel family, a kitchen, stable and carriage house, a well of water...with a pump. The situation is elegant. It was formerly occupied by Mr.

Robert Hamilton, lately by Mr. Stier..." This house is no longer standing.

The Van Havres probably stayed a few months longer in Alexandria, because it was not until May 17, 1802, that the Vendue Master again advertised a sale of household goods at "the house now occupied by Mr. Edward Russell (lately by Mr. Van Havre) on Cameron Street."

On September 17, 1802, the house and the rest of the quarter block were advertised to be sold at auction on September 21:

...The convenient two-story Brick House and Lot on Cameron Street, the property of Mr. Van Havre. Also a two-story frame house on Washington Street and several handsome lots on Cameron and Washington Streets.

On September 22, 1802, deeds conveying all property in the quarter block were executed by Baron Van Havre and his wife, and by the Baron de Stier, as attorney for his son Charles.

The property at 608 Cameron Street was conveyed by the Van Havres to Captain Bathurst Daingerfield for \$2,950, and assuming payment of the annual ground rent on the land. Insurance policies for 1805 and 1815 show Captain Daingerfield as the owner and occupant, and in so far as is now known, he lived there until his death on February 22, 1827, "in the 59th year of his age."

Captain Daingerfield's will, dated July 21st, 1822, and recorded in the Orphan's Court of Alexandria (Will Book 3, p. 275) is a model of brevity:

I, Bathurst Daingerfield, being of sound mind and memory do bequeath the whole of his property both real and personal that he is seized of or may be entitled to after his decease to my Good and loving Wife Elizabeth Daingerfield for her sole use that the Orphans Court of Alexa which I consider looce (sic) in their office (sic) that they have nothing to do with Estate.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

For the early story of this house one must look to the French Revolution and its repercussions in Europe and America.

In June 1794, Henri Joseph, Baron de Stier of Belgium, witnessed the French victory at the battle of Fleurus from the windows in the spire of the Cathedral of Antwerp. Fearing

for his family and his fortune under the French occupation, the Baron arranged passage to Philadelphia for his family and two servants. Their arrival was noted in the General Advertiser of Philadelphia on October 13, 1794. Traveling with the Baron were his wife, his sixteen year old daughter Rosalie; his elder daughter Isabella, her husband Baron Jean Michael Anthony Van Havre, and their three year old daughter; and the Baron's son, Charles Jean Stier, and his wife who was a sister of the Baron Van Havre.

A full account of the Baron de Stier's sojourn in America with his wife and younger daughter, Rosalie, is given in the pamphlet describing the mansion he built in nearby Maryland, "Riversdale," identified as a Calvert homestead throughout most of the nineteenth century and now the Prince George's County Regional Office of the Maryland-National-Capital Park and Planning Commission.

On February 9, 1798, Washington recorded in his diary that he "Returned home from Dinner," and "Found Mr. George Calvert here." Within a few weeks, on March 18, 1798, the Stier family was dining at Mount Vernon: "Mr. Steer, Senr., and Junr., Miss Steer, and Mrs. Van Haven (sic) dined here and returned to Alexa. afterwards..." This dinner party was probably prompted by George Calvert (a brother of Eleanor Calvert Custis Stuart), who had met the senior Stiers and their beautiful young daughter, Rosalie, in Annapolis. Perhaps Calvert hoped this evidence of his distinguished connections would forward his courtship of Rosalie.

Calvert was successful and he and Rosalie Stier were married in Annapolis on June 11, 1799. Washington entertained the bridal couple at Mount Vernon on June 20. It was a large dinner party, including: "Chief Justice of the U. S. Ellsworth, Mr. and Mrs. Steer, Senr., Mr. and Mrs. Steer, Junr., Mr. Van Havre, Mr. and Mrs. Ludwell Lee, Mrs. Corbin Washington, Mr. and Mrs. Hodgson, and Miss Cora Lee, Mr. and Mrs. George Calvert, and a Captn. Hamilton and Lady from the Bahama Island." Eleanor Calvert Custis Stuart was also present, having arrived at Mount Vernon with Dr. Stuart and their three daughters on June 16th. On June 22nd Washington noted -- "Doctr. Stuart's family and Mr. and Mrs. Calvert went away after breakfast." (Mrs. Van Havre is not listed as a guest, probably because of the birth of her second son less than a month earlier.)

The Van Havres probably joined the Baron de Stier in Maryland early in 1802. On March 28, 1802, the following advertisement appeared in Alexandria:

FLOWERS FOR SALE - The Subscriber intending to leave this country will offer for sale...about 2000 of the best HYACINTHS imported from Harlem...Also, from two

to three thousand TULIPS -- imported from Harlem and parts of Flanders...at my plantation, near Bladensburg...

H. STIER

The Baron's daughter, Isabella Van Havre, comments on her father's enterprise in a letter to her brother:

...All the hyacinths are nearly in full bloom, which divert Papa and though they cause great loss of time they put him in good spirits. He has advertised them for public sale without reflecting how we should be over run with people. Now we have to escape them by the door or windows like very Harlequins...The other day a whole car load of ladies and gentlemen came from Georgetown, but as we did not know them we dispensed from very active politeness.

The senior Stiers and the Van Havres left the United States in June 1803. Two postscripts remain to their Alexandria story: the Baron later wrote his daughter Rosalie, when she was engaged in furnishing Riversdale, suggesting that she "inquire about the four mirrors left by Mrs. Van Havre in Alexandria;" and the final entry in the Alexandria records -- a deposition executed by the Van Havres in Antwerp as to the birth of their two sons in Alexandria. The deposition was recorded in Alexandria on 25 March, 1805, supplemented by a deposition of the Alexandria doctor, John Gillies, who attended Mrs. Van Havre.

The next owner of the property at 608 Cameron Street was Captain Bathurst Daingerfield. John Harrower, the Scottish merchant-turned-tutor has left us a colorful picture of that "ancient and respectable family" the Daingerfields, at Belvidera, near Fredericksburg. Harrower was engaged by Colonel William Daingerfield in the spring of 1774 to teach his children and the children of neighboring plantations "to read, write, and figure." Bathurst was the Colonel's second son, then a lad of six years. (The Journal of John Harrower, An Indentured Servant in the Colony of Virginia, 1773-1776 was recently published by Colonial Williamsburg.) The bustling commercial atmosphere of Fredericksburg and Falmouth and the sea-going vessels that landed at his father's own wharf undoubtedly fired his boyhood imagination and helped to channel his interests into maritime pursuits. He settled in Alexandria in 1800 and commanded several fine vessels engaged in foreign commerce. During the administration of President Monroe he was appointed Surveyor of the Port of Alexandria, a position he held to the time of his death.

Daingerfield's "Obituary Memoir" (Phenix Alexandria Gazette of February 24, 1827) states:

Descended from an ancient and respectable family, in the south of Virginia, Captain Daingerfield was early intended for the sea. The young sailor embraced with ardour a profession which was very unusual for the Virginia youth of forty years ago. He continued in it with skill and success, until advancing years, and a large and interesting young family induced him to retire, and spend the remainder of his days in the town of Alexandria, where, in the relations of husband, father and friend, a public officer and a good citizen, no man better fulfilled those duties which endear us to the best estimation of society, and cause a bereavement to be mourned as a public loss.

Captain Daingerfield was a warm and zealous friend of his country and her republican institutions. It had been his lot to visit many European States, particularly France at a momentous period of her Revolution, and this true American always declared, that the more he had seen of other nations, their governments, usages and laws, the better he was pleased and satisfied with his own, the true seat of rational liberty, and the rights of mankind.....

Daingerfield's sons were successful merchants and leading citizens of Alexandria. One gained fame by supplying the funds to build the tower on Alexandria's City Hall, when it was rebuilt after a fire in the late 19th Century.

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## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A comfortable town house of great dignity with subtle proportions, refined details and special features to be noted.
2. Condition of fabric: Well maintained.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Two-and-a-half stories plus cellar, three bays. Front block, approximately 25' x 34' plus two-storied ell extending approximately 50'.
2. Foundations: Rubble foundation to grade. Cellar floor is paved with brick and the floor joists covered with hand-rived laths and plaster. This treatment, attributed as an innovation to Benjamin Franklin, turns up infrequently in Alexandria and is interestingly enough traceable to Philadelphia connections.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Brick, Flemish bond with carefully tooled joints on front facade; common bond elsewhere. Flat stone arches with key, stone sills and stone string course on front only. There is no water table and cellar windows have flat brick arches. A wrought iron shutter holder is still in place.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: Aquia stone stoop and steps with nosing, wrought iron railing and foot-scraper attached to house. No evidence of bulkhead, but arched opening indicates original entrance to basement located at southeast corner.
5. Chimneys: A pair of massive outside end chimneys in front block are an arresting feature of the design. Their weight is transferred on arches over an areaway to heavy piers

or buttresses. This brickwork at the west end of the house has been covered with tan stucco. Two chimneys in the ell serve the dining room and kitchen respectively.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The Greek Revival type doorway and the vestibule development with Victorian side-lighted door are later improvements.
- b. Windows and shutters: The windows for the most part are twelve-over-twelve light double-hung sash. The six-over-six sash in the parlor probably dates from the mid nineteenth century, nevertheless it is interesting to note that large size Bohemia window glass was advertised in Baltimore and Alexandria newspapers as early as the 1790's.

Fixed louvered shutters.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof with paired dormers front and rear. Shed roofs over areaway and ell. All roofs are tin with standing seam.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Moulded with fine regard for scale, dentil course.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Typical side hall plan with double rooms adjoining. Upstairs a long room extends across the entire front. There is a finished attic.
2. Wall and ceiling finish: Plastered walls and ceilings with simple plaster cornices on first and second floors.
3. Doorways and doors: Except for the original plaster cornices and fine hall arch with keystone the downstairs treatment is mid nineteenth century with sliding doors between the parlors. Alterations however stopped at the stair landing. The remainder of the stair is intact with turned balusters similar to those in the Musician's Gallery in the ballroom at Gadsby's Tavern of the same period as this house.

The original doors are six panel raised on one side.

4. Special decorative features, trim, cabinet work: Original architraves and chairrails simple moulded. In the front

room upstairs there is an elaborate mantel with glass ornament. In the bedroom adjoining is a mantel with crossettes and dentils with large and handsome flanking cupboards typical of the earlier work. Trim in the ell is later, largely dating from the early nineteenth century, at which time considerable remodeling appears to have taken place.

Discovered by the owners quite by accident is a most unusual underground feature, reached through a closet in the dining room. It is of brick, arched and constricted in size. Reportedly it duplicates a similar vault next door which has now been backfilled. While an air of mystery surrounds their origin and function, one wonders if they could have been so mundane as a chamber for storage of food, perhaps a primitive ice box?

Original mantels in parlors were replaced by black marble mantels in vogue at the time the downstairs was refurbished.

5. Hardware: Most of the door locks were reportedly removed by a former owner, but two brass box locks with drop handles affixed to the attic doors afford a retrospective view of the quality.
6. Mechanical equipment: An early Franklin stove remains in place in the back attic bedroom.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: House faces north on Cameron Street in a neighborhood of fine town houses. At the rear of the lot there has recently been built a story-and-a-half office, where originally was located the stable and coach house indicated on the insurance plats.
2. Historic landscape design: There is also a walled garden to the rear.

Prepared by Worth Bailey, Consultant for  
The Historic Alexandria Foundation  
July 1966  
Edited by  
Antoinette J. Lee  
November 1975

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was a cooperative effort of the Historic Alexandria Foundation and the Historic American Buildings Survey to document some of the most important early Alexandria residences for the HABS collection. The historian was Worth Bailey, an Alexandria resident and former HABS employee. Photographs were supplied by Victor Amato. The material was edited in 1975 by Antoinette J. Lee, working on contract for HABS.