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(L8)

TBIRD STREET

Archibald Alexander Plot  
Houses #26 - #28 - Adjoining Dutch House  
Site - and #24 south of #26 - #28

(See Photo #73)

The first recorded owner of the site now occupied by #26-28, and known as the "Alexander houses" from the builder of the large double house soon after 1797, Dr. Archibald Alexander, was Ambrose Backer, a Dutchman. During the Duke of York period, in the 1670's Ambrose Sacker was a prominent citizen. He had a grown son in New Castle in 1676 and a daughter-in-law in 1680, but whether he was a resident during the Dutch period has not been discovered.

In 1681, his property on Third Street was re-surveyed, and confirmed to him by the court, as 343 feet, extending from Wood Street (present Delaware Street) to the house and lot of George More. (George More's ground included the Dutch house site which must have been at that time 100' in breadth.) Backer's plot extended from Third to Fourth Street, the depth, according to the survey being 169 feet.

It is recited in a new confirmation after William Penn came and Backer had been naturalized as a citizen of Penn's government, that he had bought the 343 feet now enclosed in one fence in three several plots from previous owners. None of these owners has been discovered. In later references to Ambrose Backer, his name is anglicized to Baker.

(Alexander Plot, continued)

Before 1693, a thirty-foot lot with a brick house on it adjoined the north side of Backer's 343', (or according to some later indentures was originally part of Ambrose Backer's plot). It belonged in 1693 to Cornelius Derricksen, who that year sold the house and lot to Beynier Vanderculen; Vanderculen sold house and lot for 84 pounds 10 shillings, silver money, to "Major John Thompson" of Cecil County, Maryland. The date of recording this sale, 1696, must have been later than the actual exchange, for Reynier Vanderculen's will was proved in April 1695. The property was bought later by Dr. Patrick Reilly, and through his widow came into the possession of Gideon Griffith whom she married. Caleb Pusey acquired the property and left it to his son Thomas, who soon after 1762 sold the 30' lot with the brick house to Dr. John Finney.

In spite of some later records to the contrary, this 30' lot of Derricksen's must have been acquired from George More, or from the 100 feet between the 138' of the Harmony corner lots and Ambrose Backer's 343 feet. Of the latter plot, Backer in 1693 sold a plot of 120', south of and adjoining Derricksen's lot to Martin Martinson. Martinson divided the 120 foot lot during 1693 and sold the north half. The 60' adjoining Derricksen, to John Calvert, wheelwright. No house is mentioned in the original deed for the plot to Calvert. There is a "brick house"-on it in Calvert's time and a recital in a still later deed wrongly quotes the original deed as specifically conveying the brick house.

(Alexander Flot, continued)

John Calvert left his house and lot to his daughter Elizabeth, who afterward married Francis Janvier, cordwainer. Francis Janvier, who lived 1705-1751, was the son of the first Thomas Janvier. (After the death of his first wife, Elizabeth Calvert, he married Sarah deHaes, daughter of Roeloff deHaes). Francis and Elizabeth Calvert Janvier had but one child, a son Thomas. Thomas at his early death was in possession of the house and lot which was sold by the executor of his estate to Dr. John Finney in 1762. It was soon after this purchase that Dr. Finney bought the 30' property adjoining to the north, which in 1695 had been described by Reynier Vanderculen as "my brike house I bought of Cornelius Derikson adjoining to widow Walker."

The 90' property owned by Dr. John Finney contained the brick house on the 30' property he bought from Thomas Pusey and the brick house that was on the 60' Calvert property which he bought from the executor of Thomas Janvier. This whole property he left to his son David Finney in 1774. Five years later, 1779, David Finney sold the whole to Adam Dayett.

Adam Dayett and his wife Mary, in 1797, sold to Archibald Alexander "all that brick tenement and two lots of ground" with all and singular houses, buildings etc. etc., for 220 pounds, gold and silver coin. Dr. Archibald Alexander, noted physician and prominent citizen of his period, built here the large double house that is one of the striking architectural features of the town center.

(Alexander Plot, continued)

The very old house incorporated as the back wing of the Alexander house is undoubtedly the Calvert house, that must have been kept up and improved by its owners - (and not the Derricksen brick house, which was older and probably very small and may have been removed for the building of the Alexander house, or later.) The Alexander houses were owned by Hugh M. Ritchie, an early druggist in New Castle, also postmaster, and was inherited by his daughter, Miss Sallie Ritchie. In 1871, it was owned by Aquilla M. Hizar and in 1873 by Richard Cooper. It remained in the Cooper family until 1917. After 1828, the double house was used as two separate dwellings.

Frame House, #24

The position of the Alexander house on the 90' lot was undoubtedly determined by that of the Calvert brick house that was on the property. There was then no need to disturb the little frame house on the south side that is not incorporated in the present #24. Judge Rodney says the original house was very old, was one-story and of the general form of the Dutch house.

Although a house is not mentioned in the sale from Martinson to Calvert in 1633, "the lot of land with all the fencing and improvements" etc. etc. could well include a substantial dwelling as many such early deeds did.

Just when the old one-story house was remodeled to two stories has not yet been followed up in this search.

(Alexander Plot, continued)

The Imposing facade of the Alexander House is so much a part of the New Castle scene, that it would seem definitely wrong to remove it, although it is later than the Calvert house. This report would recommend more study be given to this phase of this property so that the record of the eariier house shall not be lost. Likewise with #24, further resrarch might reveal the character of tha one-story house which is reported to have been incorporated into the present structure. Although not too baa at present, #28 could be improved with 2 more studied use of modern materials used in the spirit of eariier work.