

Philip T. Berry House  
1402 31st Street, N.W.  
Washington (Georgetown)  
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-253

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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

## PHILIP T. BERRY HOUSE

Location: 1402 31st Street, NW., northwest corner of the intersection of 31st Street (formerly Congress Street) and O Street (formerly Beall), Washington, D.C. (Georgetown)

Present Owner: Mrs. Edith Munson

Present Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. Curtis B. Munson

Present Use: Private residence

Statement of Significance: This frame dwelling is one of the few detached mansarded homes built in Georgetown, where most were row houses of brick. In excellent condition, it occupies an impressive corner lot.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The earliest dated document found which referred to the house was the tax assessment for 1865-1870 under Philip T. Berry. Since he sold the house in 1867, it was apparently built shortly before 1865.
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: The building is located in Square 1256, lot 800 (formerly Square 86, lots 57 and 58). The following is an incomplete chain of title to the property. The references are to the Recorder of Deeds, Washington, D.C.

1806 Deed February 25, 1806, recorded March 23, 1806 in Liber P, folio 119  
Hezekial Beall  
to  
Thomas Beall

1810 Deed September 18, 1810, recorded November 6, 1810 in Liber Z, folio 221  
Thomas A. Brooke  
to  
Jeremiah W. Bronaugh

- 1839 Deed December 7, recorded January 15, 1840 in  
Liber WB 78, folio 25  
Jeremiah W. Bronaugh  
Daniel Kurtz  
Jeremiah W. Bronaugh, Jr.  
Mary Ann Bronaugh  
Elizabeth H. Bronaugh  
to  
Walter W. Berry  
Lots 57 and 58
- 1842 Deed July 28, 1842, recorded August 10, 1842 in  
Liber WB 95, folio 86  
Walter W. Berry  
to  
Philip T. Berry  
Consideration: \$2,500
- 1867 Deed November 16, 1867, recorded November 18, 1867 in  
Liber ECE 19, folio 285  
Philip T. Berry  
to  
Talbot T. Fowler
- 1868 Deed April 1, 1868, recorded April 21, 1868 in  
Liber ECE 31, folio 433  
Talbot T. Fowler  
to  
Philip T. Berry
- Deed April 6, 1868, recorded April 18, 1868 in  
Liber 557, folio 167  
Philip T. Berry  
to  
Talbot T. Fowler
- 1873 Deed September 18, 1873, recorded September 25, 1873 in  
Liber 730, folio 315  
Talbot T. Fowler and wife Grafilia  
to  
William H. Tenney  
Southern half of Lots 57 and 58
- 1875 Deed July 1, 1875, recorded July 3, 1875 in  
Liber 793, folio 20  
William H. Tenney  
to  
Mary Lee Cropley

- 1879 Deed July 3, 1879, recorded September 3, 1879 in  
Liber 920, folio 411  
Sarah Berry  
to  
Mary Lee Cropley  
Northern 21' of Lots 57 and 58
- 1919 Deed October 25, 1919, recorded October 25, 1919 in  
Liber 4272, folio 136  
Burr M. Edwards  
Lizzie Samuel Cropley  
Executors and Trustees of Mary Lee Cropley
- 1919 Deed April 16, 1921  
to  
Mae McCarthy Beesley
- 1921 Deed April 16, 1921, recorded April 19, 1921 in  
Liber 4508, folio 486  
Mae McCarthy Beesley  
Thomas Quinn Beesley  
to  
Flewellyn R. Johnston
- 1924 Deed October 27, 1924, recorded October 28, 1924 in  
Liber 5377, folio 190  
Flewellyn R. Johnston  
to  
William S. Conant

Francis E. Conant inherited the property. Upon his death (November 16, 1946) the property went to the trustees of Princeton University.

- 1952 Deed July 3, 1952, recorded July 9, 1952 in  
Liber 9753, folio 492  
The Trustees of Princeton University  
to  
Edith C. Munson

4. Original plan and construction: None found
5. Alterations and additions: Although the house has been quite extensively remodeled and modernized, none of the fine Victorian detailing has been removed. From about 1877 until sometime between 1921 and 1935, a much larger porch extended across the front of the house. The pantry,

originally an open structure, was enclosed by the Cropleys. (21-  
The present garage was built in 1925 and remodeled in  
1952, at which time the bay window in the dining room  
was added and remodeling of the second floor was done.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

1. History of the House:

This house, by reputation only, has one of the most  
unusual and varied histories of any building in Georgetown.

It is generally said that the building was at one time  
made of brick. It was rented by either a Senator or  
Congressman from Maine who was also engaged in the shipping  
business. As the story goes, he was supposed to have  
said that he could not let his constituents see that he  
was living in a brick house, so shipped down from New  
England this Victorian frame dwelling and built it around  
the brick building. Variations of the story mention that  
the brick building was one of the oldest in Georgetown,  
that only the clapboards and woodwork were brought from  
New England.

Examination of the construction and verification from the  
the contractor who worked on the remodeling of 1952 reveal  
that there is no actual brick structure, but that bricks  
were used between the studs. This type of construction  
is very unusual for this area; it may have been done for  
fire prevention purposes.

The daughter of Mary Lee Cropley, Mrs. Eleanor Cropley  
Speiden, reported that at one time the pantry on O Street  
was open, but that her father had had it enclosed after  
someone left a baby there. She also remembers that the  
porch that covered the front of the house was once two  
stories high.

There is no record of any Maine or New England Senator  
renting a house in Georgetown in the period of 1850-1865,  
nor is there any mention of this in the early Georgetown  
columns of the Evening Star.

Further information is found in papers in the possession  
of present occupants, Mr. and Mrs. Munson. These con-  
sist of two sheets with notes on the chain of title; one  
scrap of paper with the names of some of the former owners;

a page of notes on an article by Hugh Taggart ("Old Georgetown," Records of the Columbia Historical Society, XI, 1908, pp. 120-244); and, most important, a sheet entitled "Age of 1402 31st" which consists of notes collected about 1929, apparently by William S. Conant, who then owned the house. These notes were information, related by local residents, as follows:

Mr. Wm. Gordon to his daughter (Mrs. Nichols):  
"Has been there since his boyhood."

Mr. Clarence Slewmaker [?] to his niece:  
"Was built about 75 years ago."  
(1927 - 75 = 1852, Berry ownership)

Mr. Harrison Dodge to me (1926):  
"Been standing since he could remember."

Miss Jane Beall to me:

"Remembered when she was a young girl (about 1872) when lower porch was added."

Date of upper gallery, 1888---marked [?] on lumber (Cropley ownership).

Mr. James Young to me (1928):  
"Last time in the house--50 years ago." (1878)

Mr. Frank Leetch:  
"An old house when he was a boy."

Miss F. Gillbert said that house was built by a partner of her father (probably was the lower porch and alterations).

Mr. Wm. King: House brought by Fowler from Boston on one of his ice boats 1929-1867+ = 62 years ago. Fowler owned property from 1867 to 1873.

As can be seen, these notes also leave the exact date of the house in some doubt.

## 2. Tax Assessments:

The tax assessment for 1865-1870 (National Archives, Microcopy 605, roll 12) is as follows:

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Philip T. Berry	
Lot 57 60' N.S. Beall St. 120' deep	\$2,000
Lot 58 60' N.S. Beall St. 120' deep	
W.S. Congress St.	\$2,400
Improvements: Large Two Story Frame House, back and side buildings	\$2,000

The assessment to Talbot T. Fowler for 1872-1873 for Lots 57 and 58 is for \$2,880 for the land and \$7,200 for the improvements. (National Archives, Microcopy 605, Roll 14.)

3. Residents of the house:

City directories list the following tenants:

1911-1914	Elizabeth and Mrs. Mary Cropley
1915-1919	Louise Grafton and Elizabeth Cropley
1921	T. Q. Beesley
1922-1925	Mrs. Flewellyn Johnston
1926-1946	William S. Conant
1954-present	Curtis B. Munson

4. Building permits:

The following permits indicate some of the changes that were authorized for the house. (Department of Licenses and Inspection, District of Columbia.)

Permit #21, dated February 26, 1877, is an application from G. W. Cropley to remove the present porch and construct a "piaza" the full length of the house. It was to be of wood, with stone piers, and covered with a tin roof. The permit was granted.

Permit #1078 1/2, dated October 11, 1905, is an application from Cropley to repair a wood cellar door frame on the O Street side of the house located in "an enclosed parking and out of the line of travel." This permit was also approved.

Permit #5485, dated March 30, 1921, is for interior changes, but the plat accompanying the application shows the front porch running almost the width of the front of the house.

Permit #4756, November 17, 1925, was given to construct a private concrete garage at the cost of \$2,800, and to remove a metal garage.

Permit #180552, May 16, 1935, includes a plat which shows the house with a front porch the size of the present porch. The permit to change the porch size has not yet been found.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: None found

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Building Permits, Department of Licenses and Inspection, Washington, D.C.

District of Columbia Deed Books, Recorder of Deeds Washington, D.C.

Georgetown Tax Assessments for 1865-1870 (National Archives, Microcopy 605, rolls 12 and 14), Washington, D.C.

Papers in the possession of the present owner, Mrs. Edith Munson

b. Secondary and published sources:

Taggart, Hugh. "Old Georgetown." Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Vol. XI. Washington, D.C.: Columbia Historical Society, 1908.

PREPARED BY:

Ellen J. Schwartz  
Architectural Historian  
Commission of Fine Arts  
September 1969

and  
Daniel D. Reiff  
Architectural Historian  
Commission of Fine Arts  
May 1970

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This formal mansarded wood house has an impressive setting on a high terrace at the corner of 31st and O Streets. It is a good example of a detached residence on its own ample lot, now rare in Georgetown.
2. Condition of fabric: Good. The exterior is to be repainted in the fall of 1969. There have been a number of changes to the house, however. In 1877 the original front porch was removed and a piazza was added; this may have been only one story at first, with the second story being added in 1888. This two-story porch was in turn removed sometime before 1935, and the present Victorian porch was attached. Thus, while it is old, it is not actually original to the house. This feature could have been brought from New England, giving rise to the rumor that the whole house had at one time been imported from the north. In 1925 a garage tucked under the southwest corner of the house was constructed; at this time perhaps, the pantry addition (which is made of 8" hollow clay tile, clapboarded) was added above it. The garage was remodeled in 1952. In 1953 a number of interior changes were made (repartitioning of the second floor, etc.) and some exterior alterations (the bay window on the south wall of the dining room, new fenestration on the north wall of the pantry and the west wall of the kitchen, and a door from the living room to the west terrace). The architects for the 1953 alterations were Frazier & Raftery, Geneva, Illinois (blueprints dated November 25, 1952, in files of the Commission of Fine Arts).

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This 2-1/2 story house with a three-bay facade measures about 40' north-south x 33' east-west, with a two-story ell extending west from the rear. The ell is about 25' north-south x 20' east-west with a one-story pantry about 22' north-south x 10 east-west attached to the south.
2. Foundations: Exposed around the grade of the house are

stone foundations about 1' high now covered with concrete. 121-  
Those exposed at the west end of the ell are hammer-  
faced red sandstone about 1-1/2' high on a rubble-stone  
basement wall; the stone is now painted gray. In the  
basement the foundation walls are of red sandstone,  
some blocks very small, others up to about 15" x 22"  
in random courses. Above grade there is modern brick  
backing.

3. Wall constructions: The exterior walls, painted yellow, are sheathed in 9"-wide shiplap boarding with no vertical joints exposed. At the corners, boards are neatly mitered, except for the rear northwest corner which has an inset square molding. There has been some replacement of boards on the upper portion of the south side. Similar boarding is used for the ell and for the one-floor pantry addition.
4. Framing: Walls are stud construction. Mr. Sterling Bolling, of Washington, D.C., was the contractor for the 1953 remodeling. He states that the walls of the house were found to be normal stud construction but with infilling of bricks which were, as he recalls, set in mortar. These were laid between the studs, one brick thick, and extended to the eaves, he believes. This construction, for insulation or fire protection, probably explains the rumor that the house is actually brick, but with a wood shell around it. Mr. Bolling can recall no other instance of construction like this in the Washington area. (Telephone conversation, September 8, 1969.)
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: The front porch, on a modern brick base about 8' x 12', is reached by three steps, two of which are sandstone and the same width as the sandstone walk. The north and south sides of the porch have a heavy wood balustrade with eight balusters, and one baluster between the paired posts on the front or east side. The posts have chamfered edges and support a roof with elaborately decorated frieze. Intricate multi-curved brackets attached near the tops of the posts support the cornice. In addition to the elaborate "dentils" there are palmettes, rosettes, and other appliques. A balustrade around the porch roof, shown in 1952 photographs, has been removed.

At the northwest corner of the ell is a semi-enclosed porch about 6' x 10' with three square posts to the west, and three modern brick steps to the south. To the north the porch is at grade with the brick terrace.

Under the porch roof is also a projecting addition 2'-4" x 5'-0" from the laundry room which contains deep storage shelves. At the northwest corner of the house and ell is a brick terrace about 18' x 30' with four brick steps around the northwest corner.

6. Chimneys: The only chimney visible is at the north wall between the two dormers. It is of modern work with several corbeled courses.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The front door, which appears to be old (though may be a replacement) is a two-leaf, two-panel door 53" wide with the upper round headed panels glazed. The glass is frosted (etched) in the center, with alternating clear strips around the edges. The door from the drawing room to the back terrace is a four-light French door with single-light transom. At the rear porch is a four-panel wood door. The garage has a modern roll up door.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Windows on the house are two-over-two sash with segmental heads on the first floor, and flat headed on the second. Windows on the first floor have wide molded enframements with ears and slight projections (similar to the ears) at the midpoint and the bottom. Sills are supported on a pair of brackets decorated with turned bosses. The modern bay added to the south of the dining room repeats these features skillfully. All dormer windows of the house are also two-over-two sash. The windows of the ell are six-over-six sash except for the north side of the laundry room which has three circular windows of six lights each. All window enframements are painted white, with the mullions and frames black. Windows had shutters in 1952, but have none now.
8. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: The house and ell each have a mansard roof covered in light gray asbestos shingles. The garage roof is flat, with a metal covering painted green.
  - b. Cornice, eaves: The cornice is decorated with paired brackets (three pairs on the sides, four on the front) and a "dentil" course, all similar to the

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porch but not at all identical. The rain gutter is concealed in the eaves. On the ell the cornice is simpler, with closely spaced blocky modillions and a rain gutter at both upper and lower eaves.

- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: The dormers of the house are arranged two per side, except for the rear and front which have three. All have simple wood frames and segmental arched two-over-two sash windows, except for the central dormer of the facade which is round headed.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The first floor has a central stair hall with a drawing room the full length of the north side and a small library and a dining room to the south. Added to the west side is an ell which contains the kitchen and, along the north side, the laundry room and back stairs. To the south of the ell is a one-story addition for a pantry. It is possible that the door which at present leads to this pantry from the dining room was originally further north, where it would lead into the present kitchen in the ell.

The second floor has two bedrooms on the north side of the central hall: the northeast room has an attached bath over the entrance hall; and the northwest bedroom, a bath in the ell. To the south of the hall is a large bedroom, with a spacious bath and powder room in the southeast corner. In the ell, reached from the stair landing, are a bedroom with bath (to the north) and the rear stairs.

The third floor has four corner rooms off a small central hall, with a bath at the east. The basement is now one open space with a small storage room in the northeast corner, a wood storage room at the east wall, and a garage protruding in at the southwest.

2. Stairways: In the entrance hall is the half-turn stair with landing; it ascends to the second floor in runs of seventeen and four. The molded handrail is  $4\frac{1}{4}$ " wide; the turned newel post, also of dark wood, is  $3\frac{1}{2}$ ' tall with an octagonal base. The risers are  $7\frac{1}{4}$ " high, and the treads  $38\frac{1}{2}$ " long with stringer appliques. The turned balusters are painted white. The stair from the second to third floor is a continu-

ation of the lower flight, a half turn with landing and runs of eleven and six. The rear stair, of very plain design, is a straight run of sixteen 7-3/4" risers, 29" wide. The rail is supported by vertical 3-inch chamfered boarding. The cellar is reached by a straight run of twelve modern risers under the main stairs.

3. Flooring: On the first floor the drawing room and hall have pine floors 3-1/4" to 4-3/4" wide. The library and dining room are modern 2-1/4" hardwood, and the ell has modern linoleum. First-floor framing is visible in the basement. Joists measure 2" x 10" and are 16 inches on center with X-bracing. There are a number of recent I-beams running east-west with iron columns for support. On the second and third floors, the rooms are also hardwood except for the hall and south-west bedroom on the third floor which are both still pine. The basement has a modern concrete floor.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Most walls are plaster over lath, painted or papered throughout. All the first-floor rooms have ceiling moldings; that in the dining room is the most elaborate, however. Between the ceiling molding and the wall molding is an ovolo molding about 4" wide composed of a pierced grape and grape leaf pattern with volutes. This is cast in 15-inch sections (presumably plaster) which fit together continuously, with a space behind. In the ceiling of this same room are two chandelier rosettes, also of open plasterwork, which are composed of oak leaves and Gothic cusps with small rosettes around the central pendant boss. This is the only room with ceiling decorations. The ell has plain plaster walls and ceilings which are painted. First floor ceilings of this house are 11', 8-1/2" high. On the second floor the new walls are plaster-board, and the ceilings plaster, with no moldings. The third floor is also undecorated. Ceiling heights are 10 feet for the second floor, and 8 feet for the third.
5. Doorways and doors: The first floor has heavy mahogany four-panel doors with a 2-1/4" wide ebonized wood molding around each of the panels. The doors are 2-1/8" thick and 37" wide. The openings are enframed in a 7-inch molding painted white. In the ell the doors are of the same design, only slightly smaller, and only 1-3/4" thick. On the second floor the doors are the same as the ell doors but have been painted white and have a 6-inch molded enframent. On the third floor only three of the old doors remain; others are modern two-panel doors.

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6. Decorative features and trim: Windows are enframed with moldings similar to those around the doors on the first and second floors. There is also an 8-1/2" high molded base-board on the first and second floors. In the drawing room there is a large gilt Renaissance Revival mirror over the mantel. In the dining room the bay window has modern movable louver shutters over all openings.
7. Notable hardware: Door knobs on the first floor (and first landing) are silvered glass. In the ell--and also on the second and third floors--knobs are white porcelain. The brass knob of the front entrance door appears to be original. On the first floor the door hinges are embossed, but on the second floor they are plain. In the drawing room, windows have two recessed rectangular pulls each, with embossed decoration and palmettes at each end. In the northwest second-floor bathroom is a ventilator grate 9-1/2' from the floor which appears to be old. It has a round headed opening 10-1/2" tall by 12-3/4" set flush with the wall and with cast-metal tracery. Behind it are four movable louvers. Directly above this grille, in a small metal tubular opening in the ceiling, is a pull ring with chain which can be pulled downward (presumably opening a vent above in the roof) and be attached to a small projecting arm about 3 inches from the bottom of the grille. Below this, near the floor, is a second ventilating grille 9-1/2" x 13-3/4", with three movable louvers and square openings, which appears to be more recent.
8. Lighting: The hall has a hanging crystal chandelier. The drawing room has a pair of six-branch crystal and cut-glass chandeliers. Other fixtures are modern.
9. Heating: The only fireplace in the house is the one in the drawing room. It is of white marble with a projecting cartouche-keystone. The mantel is 3', 10-1/2" tall with a mantel shelf 5'-9" long. The roundheaded opening is 29-1/2" wide by 32-1/2".

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house is located on the northwest corner of 31st and O Streets on a terrace about 5' high at the south side. It has ample space for plants and trees. The entrance, facing east, is about 20' from the sidewalk.
2. Enclosures: An attractive and well-preserved cast-iron fence composed of classical motifs (mainly palmettes and acanthus) borders the property on the east and south sides. The main posts, which are 42" tall, are decorated with

acanthus and climbing flowers. The fence is mounted on a plain square coping of red sandstone cut in sections about 6' long. The portion of the fence ascending the front steps does not appear to be old.

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3. Outbuildings: None.
4. Walks: The front porch is reached by an 11' long walk, paved and bordered with red sandstone. Six red sandstone steps ascend the terrace from the public walk, which is about 11' wide with a bluestone and granite curb. In the rear yard are several basketweave modern brick walks.
5. Landscaping: The lower slope of the terrace is covered with ivy. Plantings around the house are primarily holly bushes, roses, evergreen hedges (around the rear patio), magnolias, oaks and evergreen trees.

Prepared by Daniel D. Reiff  
Architectural Historian  
Commission of Fine Arts  
September 1969

### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made in 1969 during a project to record 14 structures and a group of 16 items of "street furniture" in the Georgetown section of Washington, D.C. The project was conducted by the Commission of Fine Arts with the cooperation of the Historic American Buildings Survey. The resulting documentation was donated to HABS by the Commission and published in 1970 in HABS Selections Number 10, Georgetown Architecture: Northwest Washington, District of Columbia.

The project was under the direction of Mr. Charles H. Atherton, Executive Secretary and Administrative Officer of the Commission of Fine Arts. The recording team was composed of Miss Ellen J. Schwartz and Mr. Daniel D. Reiff, Architectural Historians, and Mr. William P. Thompson, Architect. The photographs were made by photographers J. Alexander and Jack E. Boucher under contract to the Commission.