

Riggs-Riley House  
3038 N Street, N. W.  
Georgetown  
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-46

HABS  
DC  
GEO,  
48.

(DATA SHEET AND MEASURED DRAWINGS ONLY)

Photographs in addendum

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Columbia

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Washington Office

ADDENDUM  
FOLIO 48.

RIGGS-RILEY HOUSE  
3038 N STREET, N. W.  
Georgetown, D. C.

Owner: Major Henry Leonard

Date of erection: c. 1800

Present condition: Good

Description:

This is a typical Georgetown house, of brick laid in Flemish bond, three bays wide, with arched dormers on the roof. The wing to the east is modern. The interior contains good woodwork of the period.

Author: *Thomas Waterman*

Date: *May 14, 1944*

An Addendum to  
Riggs-Riley House  
3038 N Street, NW  
Washington  
District of Columbia

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48-

PHOTOGRAPHS

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

ADDENDUM TO:  
RIGGS-RILEY HOUSE  
Georgetown  
3038 N Street, Northwest  
Washington  
District of Columbia

HABS DC-46  
*DC, GEO, 48-*

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FIELD RECORDS

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

### RIGGS-RILEY HOUSE

This report is an addendum to a one page report previously transmitted to the Library of Congress.

Location: 3038 N Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: Jane and Thomas Nigra, M.D.

Present Use: Private residence

Significance: This house is an outstanding example of Federal Period architecture, especially noteworthy for the perfection of elements such as the half-round window above the front door. As the temporary residence of Jackie Kennedy and her two children after they left the White House following the president's assassination, and as the home of the internationally prominent Averell Harrimans and other politically prominent people, the house has importance or at least great notoriety in late twentieth century American history.

#### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

##### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Based on Georgetown assessment records and deeds, it appears that the house was built between 1812 and 1815. In 1806, lot 7 sold for \$666 and in 1812 it sold for \$1,000. The assessed value of the lot was \$400 in the 1808-1812 assessment and \$600 in the 1813-1818 assessment,. (It is assumed that the 1813-1818 assessment represents a 1813 value.) The significant increases in sale price and assessment reflect a still highly speculative real estate market, but the first truly dramatic increase in value is in the 1815 assessment. The lot is now denoted as improved by a house and the assessment has shot to \$4500. Consistent with construction between 1812 and 1815 are the Federal details apparent on the main (north) facade and in the hall and stair hall are.

##### 2. Original and subsequent owners:

(originally Lot 7 in Thomas Beall's addition to Georgetown, now Square 1209, lot 36)

1795 Deed (B397)

- John Thomas Boucher  
To  
William Murray
- 1806 Deed (P 169)  
William Murray  
To  
Samuel Thomas Jr.
- 1811 Tax Deed (AA 370)  
Jacob Mountz, col. Taxes to Thomas Roberston  
Lot #7 Beall's charged to John Thomas Sr.
- 1811 Deed (AB 101)  
Thomas Robertson  
To  
John Thomas, Sr.
- 1811 Deed (AB 450) (confirming earlier deed)  
William Murray  
To  
John Thomas
- 1812 Deed (AC 495)  
John Thomas, Sr.  
To  
Romulus Riggs
- 1835 Deed (WB 56, 164)  
Romulus Riggs, ux Mary Ann (?)  
To  
Joshua Riley
- 1883 Deed (1071, 46)  
Heirs of Joshua Riley, deceased  
To  
Mary Anna Riley
- 1912 Deed  
Estate of Mary Anna Riley  
To  
Elliot H. Goodwin

1930	Deed Goodwin To Colonel and Mrs. Henry Leonard.
1959	Deed (6361) Leonard estate To Congressman William Scranton
1963	Congressman William Scranton To Former governor W. Averell Harriman
1997	Estate of Pamela Harriman, widow To Dr. Thomas and Jane Nigra

This chain of title is based on documents from the Peabody Room, including a chain of title to 1883, newspaper articles, and un-attributed statements about the house. Additional information was provided by Mrs. Jane Nigra and Mrs. Elie Rublee, the granddaughter of the Leonards and neighbor of the Nigras.

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: No information available.

4. Original plans and construction: No information available.

5. Alterations and additions: In addition to the house, a small one-story free-standing medical office stood on the lot, fronting on N Street. Dr. Riley's office was demolished and replaced by a two story brick addition in 1928. This kitchen wing, with Dr. Nigra's medical office above, was designed by Laurence Hall Fowler, according to the building permit. Other alterations done in 1928 for the Leonards included installing new windows along the west facade, and adding new bath in bedroom. Two years later, the porch along the library was repaired. George Howe is listed on the building permit as the architect or designer. According to Mrs. Nigra, this porch was enclosed by the Harrimans to a design by Hugh Newell Jacobson. The Nigras have changed the rear window in the kitchen, and moved the window that was formerly there to the second floor of the kitchen wing on the rear. The kitchen interior dates to the Harrimans, who also added ceiling lights, in cones, in the drawing room.

The terraced garden has undergone several landscape designs over the years, but probably the most drastic was done in 1963 for the Harrimans who placed a pool at the extreme

south end of the parcel. Their landscape designer was the firm of Edmunds and Hitchcock. It is assumed that the garage at the southwest corner of the parcel was removed at this time.

B. Historical Context:

Just north of the original (1751) boundaries of Georgetown, the Riggs-Riley House's original section has the narrow width and relatively low height of an urban architecture, unlike the palatial Federal house erected on Georgetown Heights or even across N Street. Other houses of this period had the side hall plan that survives in Riggs-Riley, but even in the nineteenth century were enlarged to form much larger houses (see Laird-Dunlop House, HABS No. DC-630). Nor were all the Federal Period houses as deep as they now are. In the basement of the Riggs-Riley House, the south side of the wall separating the front basement room from the rear of the basement has bars on the window. Given the bars and the wide door in this east-west wall, it is reasonable to assume that the original house was but one room deep and that in the early nineteenth century the land fell off much more steeply from N Street because the rear of the basement was then above ground.

The separate structure where Dr. Riley saw patients and trained medical students (including Armistead Peter of Tudor Place, HABS No. DC-171, and the nephews of Ambassador Bodisco, HABS No. DC-174) was standing by 1859 because it appears on Boschke's Topographical Map of the District of Columbia, 1856-1859.

Isabel M.G. Goodwin, who along with her husband, a vice-president at the United States Chamber of Commerce, owned the house from the early 1910s until 1930 wrote on gardens for House Beautiful and wrote at least two articles for the magazine on her own garden at 3038 N Street, making at one of the more published of the Georgetown gardens.

Subsequent owners were more famous in politics. William Scranton bought the house when he was a congressman and he sold it when he became Pennsylvania governor, but he also sought unsuccessfully the Republican nomination for president. He sold it to W. Averell Harriman, another scion of an extremely rich family whose head made his money in the late nineteenth-century American industrial growth. Harriman was also a former governor, but unlike Scranton he was a democrat and served as an ambassador and undersecretary in democratic administrations. Averell and Pamela Harriman held numerous fund-raisers for democratic candidates and she continued that role after her husband's death and she was prominent in Bill Clinton's campaign for the democratic nomination for the president. She died while U.S. Ambassador to France.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The original section of the Riggs-Riley House is the quintessential Federal period house, and the attached wing is a respectful addition. With the characteristic flat brick facade rendered in the Flemish bond, the contrasting relief is provided by the slight projection of the white stone lintels and sills and light above the front door. In the choice of materials, colors, and details, along with the delicacy of the whole, this house is consistent with the Federal period architecture of Charles Bulfinch in Boston and his contemporaries in other parts of the country. But what makes this house more than another well-executed Federal period house is the half round window. Usually the windows above the door in this period are more segmental and the mullions radiate out, suggesting a fan. But in this house the shape is round and the mullions undulate out in two overlapping branches. The delicacy and perfect proportion of the mullions and the window raise this window above the well-executed fanlights of other period house, and perhaps raise this house above other period houses.

The late 1920s wing echoes both the Riggs-Riley original section in the use of the round-arched door and echoes the Federal period in the use of the short windows below the cornice, a motif Bulfinch used in the first Harrison Gray Otis House in Boston.

2. Condition of fabric: The house and gardens are in excellent condition.

#### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The main block is 2 ½ stories tall, with a full basement and bedrooms in the attic, while the rear and side wings are two stories, with basement. The height of the main block is approximately 35 feet.

2. Foundations: Rubble and brick.

3. Walls: The main facade is Flemish bond, while the others are American bond.

4. Structural system, framing: Timber framing.

5. Porches, stoops: The front door has four rectangular stone steps (including threshold) and the service entrance has three brick steps (including threshold). A long porch runs along the east side or garden side of the library. According to Mrs. Nigra, it was enclosed for the Harrimans and Hugh Newell Jacobsen designed the enclosure along with new lighting in the parlor. The absence of any porch is unusual.

6. Chimneys: The east end wall of the main block has two chimneys. The rear wing has one chimney along the west wall and one on the rear wall. There is also a small chimney in the kitchen wing in east wall.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The front door is a traditional Federal period door consisting of two square panels at the top, two tall panels in the middle, and two somewhat squatter panels below. The doorway is less typical in that there are neither sidelights nor pilasters. The archivolt of the window above the door, therefore, is unsupported. The impost alternates double glyphs and a diamond. There is a fluted keystone, with angled outside edges. In addition to the keystone and impost, the archivolt is decorated with two beaded-edge friezes which step out to the extrado.

The kitchen door is also six paneled with half round window above, but the door and window are within a single surround and the window's mullions radiate out like a fanlight. This door is replicated on the south side of the kitchen wing.

b. Windows: All windows have flat heads and those on the main facade (facing south) are decorated with stone lintels terminated in bullseyes. The majority of windows and all of them on the north facade are six over six with louvered shutters. The kitchen wing windows are three over six on the first floor, three lights on the second floor and an assortment of sash on the south facade.

#### 8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The gable of the main block and kitchen wing run parallel to the street while the gable of the ell runs perpendicular to the main block. The roofs are covered in slate.

There is a gable roofed extension beyond the gable and a shed roofed storage structure beyond that extension. They also have slate roofs.

b. Cornice, eaves: There is a slight brick corbel beneath the gutters on the north and south facades of the main block and kitchen wing and on the east and west facades of the annex.

c. Dormers: The original block has two dormers per roof and the kitchen wing has one on the rear roof. The annex has five windows that start in the wall and terminate above the eave, so should be considered dormer windows. The two dormers on the north facade of the original block are broken pedimented, pilaster supported structures enclosing a round arched two sash window with nine over six lights. The mullions meet at the top of the window to form a truncated point. The other dormers lack the architectural interest of the front dormers. The rear dormers of the main block and kitchen wing lack round arches and the detailing of those on the front. Also those on the rear of the main block are French windows. The dormers on the annex are even less interesting as they have shed roofs.

#### C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. Basement: Basements extend under the kitchen wing, annex, and main block. But the main block basement is the most interesting, consisting of three spaces. In the front space, at the northern wall, a sloping floored, segmental arched tunnel runs from the house to under the sidewalk and perhaps as far as the street. The south wall separating this front space from the rear space, as mentioned earlier, appears to be an original outside wall with barred window (on the south facade) and wide door with (originally) sidelights on one side. There is also a wine cellar in a separate space under the main block, but this space was not examined.

b. First floor: The main block is a side-hall plan with a dining room and then a parlor opening off the left side. An arch divides the hall into a front hall and the back is the stair hall where the stairs climb along the right (west) wall. Beyond the stair hall, and down a step, is the library and small wet bar and bathroom (designated the den on the HABS drawings of 1934). The owner, Mrs. Nigra, believes this wing (library) to date to the mid-nineteenth century. The kitchen wing has a small pantry opening to the dining room on the right and opening to the kitchen on the left.

2. Stairway: An open-string, open-well stairs climbs along the west side of the stair hall. The newel is quite slender and terminates with a circle cap. Three equally slender, square in plan, balusters per tread support the handrail. The balustrade is extremely simple with the only ornamentation provided by annulets on the newel and the stair's string. The front edge of the string moves from a rectangle to a cyma recta molding ending in a loop with a small ball. The intermediary newels have shallow pendants. The triangular surface beneath the first run is paneled and to the left is a door, under the landing, which opens into the closet. The door appears old, it is assumed that the stairs to the basement were originally in this space and that the exterior window in the closet is later. In all likelihood, the removal of basement stairs, creation of closet, and cutting the window date to late 1920s when the Leonards carried out their alterations. A wheelchair lift, with fold-up platform, is mounted on the right (west) side of the stairs.

A secondary or servants' stairs is in the corridor east of the kitchen.

3. Flooring: The floors are light colored narrow boards running north-south in the hall and stair hall, and east-west in the parlor and dining room. In the library the narrow boards also run north-south. Rugs are placed over the flooring in most spaces, and the stairs are carpeted.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings are plaster, with wallpaper in the halls and dining room. The wallpaper in the dining room was brought from Mrs. Nigra's parents home in North Carolina and is an old reproduction of late eighteenth/early nineteenth century paper. Where there was not enough wallpaper, sections of the dining room walls were painted. Each room has a somewhat different early to mid-nineteenth century crown molding consisting

of plain friezes and beaded edges. Only in the hall is the ceiling decorated with beading with a concave shape at the corners of the ceiling.

All rooms have tall baseboards and a chair rail. The rail in the halls has glyphs.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: As appropriate to the interior, the front door detailing of the architrave is scaled down and more intricate than on the exterior. Scaled down in that the keystone is less robust and not as large, more intricate in that round window and door reveals are paneled and there are convex, fluted pilasters with diagonals. In addition, the cornice of the pilaster capitol has glyphs and the inside edges of the door surrounds are decorated with gadroon molding. The doorways between the halls and other rooms have paneled reveals.

b. Windows: In the parlor, the south window is a jib door with the lower wooden panels opening and the lower sash sliding up. All windows are flatheaded and have a slight, plain reveal with relatively ordinary sill, jambs, and header. However, there is a dentil band supporting the sill.

6. Decorative features and trim: The foyer is visually separated from the stair hall by an arch with paneled intrado. Within each panel there is a border of pearl molding. Below the impost, which has a dentil row, the pilasters have an undulating fluted surface, with gadroon molding on either edge of the pilaster. Similar arches are seen in other Georgetown houses of this period (Henry Foxall House, HABS No. DC-66), but the arch in the Riggs-Riley has the slender and effeminate detailing characteristic of the Federal period.

The fireplaces of the library, dining room, and parlor are major elements of the room, and the library fireplace can be seen from the front entrance making that fireplace a visual focus of the first floor. The fireplace is variegated marble with fluted marble jambs and header with endblocks and central recessed panel. Its detailing is rather simple and the shelf lacks the detailing or undulating edge seen in other Georgetown houses. This apparently twentieth-century fireplace makes its statement through the marble's pattern and color. By contrast, the fireplaces in the dining room and parlor are unpainted wood, with elaborate Federal or Adamesque decorations on each inch of the surface. Fluted pilasters end in leaf capitals and support the header with urns in the endblocks and swirls of vines flanking the projecting central panel which has recessed oval filled with leaves growing out of a shell. The mantelshelf has incised decorations along its edges as does the inside edge of the jambs and headers. The space between the fireplace surround and the opening is surfaced in thin marble slabs.

7. Hardware: No original hardware was noted on the first floor.

8. Mechanical systems: Mrs. Nigra said the house had four heating systems, with steam radiators in the front and forced air in library.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Riggs-Riley House, unlike some of its neighbors and the houses north of it, abuts the sidewalk and its front door is but a few feet above the sidewalk. The garden is entirely in the rear where it steps down by a series of terraces, which have been substantially altered several times in the twentieth century. Alleys run perpendicular to the lot near the south end of the parcel. A garage/ stable structure was adjacent to the alley running to 31<sup>st</sup> Street. It appears that the garden has always - at least since the 1920s- had a central path, now terminating in the swimming pool installed by the Harrimans.

2. Historic landscape design: Unknown.

3. Outbuildings: None

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The house file on the Riggs-Riley House at the Peabody Room of the Georgetown Branch of the D.C. Public Library, was the basic source of information. The National Archives and the Commission of Fine Arts had additional information on twentieth-century additions and alterations. Mrs. Edie Rublee and Mrs. Jane Nigra provided important information that was not otherwise recorded.

Prepared by: Bill Lebovich, architectural historian, March 2000

### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Georgetown Documentation Project was sponsored by the Commission of Fine Arts and undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service. Principals involved were Charles H. Atherton, Secretary, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and E. Blaine Cliver, Chief, HABS/HAER. The documentation was undertaken in two phases. The summer 1998 team was supervised by John P. White, FAIA, Professor of Architecture, Texas Tech University; and architecture technicians Robert C. Anderson, Boston Architectural Center; Aimee Charboneau, Tulane University; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Adam Maksay, United States/International Council on Monuments and Sites (US/ICOMOS) architect from the Transylvania Trust. Historic research was initiated by Bryan C. Green, historian, Richmond, Virginia, during this summer. The summer 1999 team was supervised by Roger S. Miller,

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architect, Alexandria, Virginia, and architecture technicians David Benton, The Catholic University of America; Edward Byrdy, The Catholic University of America; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Clara Albert, US/ICOMOS architect from the Transylvania Trust. The project historian, and author of the written reports, was William Lebovich, architectural historian, Chevy Chase, Maryland. The photography was undertaken by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, and James Rosenthal, photographic assistant.