

NUMBER 2A BJERGE GADE, QUEEN'S QUARTER, CHARLOTTE AMALIA

By Aimery Caron

The land below Cathrineberg and labeled N° 2 Bjerger gade was probably split up into lots by Judge H. H. BERG around 1840. The lot N° 2A Bjerger gade first appeared on the property tax list in 1841 and the owner's name was John NEWTON, a merchant, who had already appeared in the 1803 census. No structure was reported to have been built on the property and therefore the lot was not taxed. In 1849, the lot was acquired by Judge H. H. BERG, who kept it until 1856, when he sold it to J. H. MORON. Although the property carried no tax during ownership by H. H. BERG, according to the 1850 census, it was rented out to six persons, who must have resided in some structure. However, it wasn't until 1856 that the new owner J. H. MORON was taxed for a structure or structures with a total surface of 3,360ft². From 1856 until 1871, when the St. Thomas Bank took possession of the property, it was rented out to G. DACOSTA GOMEZ and his family. The departure of the DACOSTA GOMEZ family and the take-over by the Bank followed by no tax assessment from 1871 until 1886 are indications that perhaps the structure(s) on the property were severely damaged or destroyed by the 1867 hurricane. In 1873, the property was purchased by Alfred H. WHARAM, an Englishman and a marine engineer, who owned a marine salvage yard in Krum Bay, across from the present WAPA location. In 1886, the tax record shows again a total building surface of 3,360ft², indicating that Alfred H. WHARAM renovated or rebuilt the pre-existing building(s). On the other hand, since the census shows that Alfred H. WHARAM, his wife, two daughters and a servant already occupied the premises in 1880, the property may have been restored as early as 1874. Upon Alfred WHARAM's death in 1897, the property passed to his older daughter who was then married to A. MENDES MONSANTO. Subsequently, the property was unoccupied according to the 1901 census and, in 1903, it was purchased by Jacob PAIEWONSKY, who resided there with his six daughters. After her father's death, the oldest daughter, Zelda PAIEWONSKY, alone occupied the lower apartment and rented out the upstairs apartment until 1989, when hurricane Marilyn severely damaged the house, which became vacant again. Finally, two years later, the property

was purchased by Aimery CARON, who after one year of repair and restoration work was able with his wife Joyce DONOVAN CARON to re-occupy the top floor of the main building.

On the eastern side of the property, the main access is through a small steel gate, which opens on street steps that were added by the Department of Public Works as late as 1944. Also on the eastern side, there is a new (1995) steel service gate, wide enough for a carriage or a car. Before 1995, this access was blocked by a brick landing for the lower Villa Santana gate. On the south side, there are two new (1995) cast iron gates, which open on a fire lane and which give direct access to the front and back entrances of the lower apartment.

The property is bound on the east side with steel pickets capped with cast iron spikes imported from Glasgow and installed by A. T. WHARAM. On the south side, the property is bound by a masonry (18" thick) retaining wall, topped, on the east end, by steel pickets and, on the west end, by wooden pickets. On the west side, the property is bound by a three-step masonry wall, which was recently (1999) raised from four to seven feet. Finally, on the north side, next to Villa Santana, the property is bound by a five-foot retaining stonewall (18" thick) topped with new five-foot wooden pickets and lined with a planter topped with yellow bricks. The eastern half of the stonewall collapsed after a heavy rain around 2004 and it was rebuilt.

Although the house has only two levels, the garden has three levels to the east and to the west of the house, which were redesigned some fifteen years ago. The top level of the garden was originally separated from the rest of the garden and the north-side of the house by a seven-foot masonry wall, which in 2004 was knocked down to four feet, capped with yellow bricks, and topped along the north-side of the house with lattice arches and with a steel and cast iron railing westward to the back wall. At the same time, a fountain was added against the western wall where a small cottage was removed. This top level held two small board houses, which presumably were servant quarters that were eliminated in 1991. It is believed that this top level was added to the 2A lot sometime in the late 19th century. In about 2004, west of the house, the top-level garden was connected to the middle-level through new yellow brick steps in the 'welcoming arms' style. After the elimination of an outhouse, a cottage, a huge genip tree and some steps leading to the lower level, the middle level garden west of the house was tiled with Italian porcelain tiles, a gazebo on the southeast corner, a masonry bench with four columns, and a planter at the foot of the western wall were added. The lower-level east-end garden is planted with native thatch palms and its retaining wall had to be re-enforced recently at the southwest corner

with steel straps after some major cracks developed within the last two years. The lower-level west-end garden holds a 3,000-gallon spare cistern to weather droughts. It is connected to the main cistern with a pump. The western end of the lower level is planted with fruit trees—a tall hog plum tree, a mesple tree, a starfruit tree, West Indian berry tree, and a banana plant.

The formal access to the house is through a traditional one-foot square grey and pearl marble tile walkway made of salvaged tiles laid in random fashion, leading to four marbled steps and reaching the porch with two four-foot high columns on either side, topped with frog figurines playing music. The porch is covered with galvanized sheeting and supported by four cast iron arches with hanging fern baskets, following an authentic New Orleans design dating back to the early 1800s—Pontalba. The porch extends the width of the house—36 feet—and is edged by a two-foot high parapet topped with 20-inch square marble tiles. The main entrance to the house is through mahogany French doors nine feet high and four feet wide. The service entrance is reached on the north side to the west, on a walkway tiled with salvaged yellow Danish bricks.

The masonry walls of the upper floor and steep sloping hip roof were originally built in the 1870s by Alfred WHARAM. The overall dimensions of the house are 36 feet wide on the east side and the west side and 44 feet long on the north side and the south side of the house. The roof has no overhang and the guttering sits on a masonry molding. The builder simulated corner stones by using yellow Flensburg bricks in relief—a unique Charlotte Amalia style. At the northwest corner of the house is a protruding 14- by 11-foot kitchen with its chimney safely down wind at the west end. Underneath the kitchen is a 7,000-gallon cistern capped by WHARAM with a steamer's steel boiler top. Since the 1870s, the roofs of the house and the kitchen have been lost at least once or twice through the hurricanes of 1916, 1936 and 2019.

The upper floor has a total of 15 window openings (13 sash windows) and 8 doors opening on the outside, thereby avoiding the necessity for hallways. The walls were stripped of wood paneling and plastered in 1991. At the same time all electric wiring was hidden into the masonry walls and in the attic. The upper level is bisected along the whole length of the building by a partition that separates the reception rooms—entrance/office/library, living room and dining room—from the utility/private rooms. The three reception rooms are separated by pocket doors on rollers. The living-room has the classic three doors opening on a prefabricated Glasgow cast-iron balcony with four arches (instead of three).

WHARAM was the St. Thomas agent for Glasgow cast-iron, which may be found in other structures in Charlotte Amalia, including Government House. The original pitch pine flooring of the reception rooms was so damaged that it had to be replaced in 1991 and Brazilian Imbuya was chosen. The 14-foot (16-foot in the living-room) wooden ceilings with elaborate moldings of the reception rooms probably date from 1917, some months after the destructive 1916 hurricane. The present moldings around the windows and doors are replicas of the original seven-inch wide moldings and were fabricated on island. The reception rooms are connected to the utility/private rooms by three doors—two small French doors from the living room to the bedroom and the toilet-room and one Imbuya door from the dining room to the pantry.

The utility/private rooms were all redesigned in 1991. They include the bedroom with closets and pine flooring; the bathroom (ex-boudoir and child bedroom) with closets and tile flooring; the toilet-room (ex-bathroom) with tile flooring and linen closets; the pantry with tile flooring, floor to ceiling cupboards, access trap to the cellar, washer and dryer; and the kitchen with the same tile flooring. All the plumbing for the utility rooms was redesigned in 1991 and routed through the cellar. At the same time, a solar water heater was installed on the kitchen roof and the hot water storage tank was hidden in the cellar with the water pump.

The cellar is immediately below the utility/private rooms; it has a dirt floor and is unfinished. It is separated from the lower floor apartment by an 18-inch stonewall bisecting the whole length of the building. The lower apartment has the same footprint as the upstairs reception rooms and it includes a bathroom, a bedroom, a living room and a dining room; they had to be completely rebuilt in about 2009. The ceiling and the wall paneling were replaced with water resistant gypsum board. Half of the sash windows had to be rebuilt. The original 7-inch moldings were replicated locally with Puerto Rican cedar. The entire subfloor had to be replaced due to rot. The wooden flooring in simulated cherry wood was imported from Finland. Sometime in the 1920s or 1930s the eastern entrance was transformed into a bathroom, which is connected to the municipal sewerage line. The kitchen is outside the back entrance door, against the southern wall of the cistern below the top kitchen; it was not renovated and it is used as a tool shed. Immediately to the west and on the same level is the so-called ‘lion cage’ built by Jacob PAIEWONSKY in the early 1900s to bottle RIISE’s distilled bay rum. This small 8-by-10-foot structure is made of steel bars—walls and ceiling—to allow ventilation and avoid intoxication from alcohol vapors. It is used today as a tool shed and it holds the water pump for the lower apartment. It also supports the terrace gazebo built with a similar design.