

Vowell-Snowden-Black Stable
Franklin Street, between S. Lee and Fairfax Streets
Alexandria
Virginia

HABS No. VA-711

HABS
VA
7-ALEX
170A-

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

VOWELL-SNOWDEN-BLACK STABLE

HABS
VA
7-ALEX,
170A-

Location: Franklin Street, between Lee and Fairfax Streets,
Alexandria, Virginia

Present Owner: The Lee Street Corporation

Present Use: Shop and storage

Statement of Significance: The Vowell-Snowden-Black Stable and Coach House is a fine example of a once common type of dependency building of which few now remain in Alexandria. Its history is similar to that of the Vowell-Snowden-Black House (HABS report No. VA-709).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Attribution, 1798-1800.
2. Original and subsequent owners: This building shares the same history as that detailed in the HABS study for the Vowell-Snowden-Black House, VA-709.
3. Alterations and additions: Justice Black made necessary repairs, but only one design change in substituting wide vehicular openings to serve a garage function. On the northwest corner at the rear, a two-story addition with shed roof, erected previous to his ownership, became a studio.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Reference has been made to the comprehensive history of the Vowell-Snowden-Black House itself, yet the Alexandria Land and Personal Property Assessments of 1810-1812, in the Virginia State Library, shed some light on the probable accommodations supplied by this structure. For these three years we read:

1810, Vol. 27, p. 19

Thomas Vowell, jun. - 2 Male Titheables; 2 Stories;
2 Cows, 1 2-Wheeled Carriage;
1 Male Dog.

1811, Vol. 27. p. 19

Thomas Vowell, jun. - 1 Male Titheable; 2 Stories;
1 Horse; 2 Cows; 1 2-Wheeled
Carriage; 1 Male Dog.

1812, Vol. 27, p. 19

Thomas Vowell, jun. - 4 Male Titheables; 2 Stories;
1 Horse; 2 Cows; 1 2-Wheeled
Carriage; 1 Male Dog.

The two-wheeled carriage was a vehicle also called a chaise or chair. Apparently at the time the tax returns were made in 1810, Vowell was between "horses." His cows may have shared the stalls with the horse.

C. Bibliography:

See sources listed for the Vowell-Snowden-Black House, HABS report VA-709.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: As a rare specimen of a characteristic utilitarian building type of the Federal period, representative nature and reference value of this structure confer distinction.
2. Condition of fabric: Exterior in good condition; interior relatively intact.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Approximately 28'-6" x 18'; one story and loft. Addition to original structure very evident in plan and elevation.
2. Foundation: Brick.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Flemish bond on south (street) elevation; common bond elsewhere. Headers are irregularly spaced, occurring at intervals of three or five courses. Brick size 8½" x 2½" x 4 (7 rows constitute 18" height).
4. Chimney: Relatively modern.

5. Openings: Board-and-batten pedestrian door in southwest corner is original, but louvered panel is a later improvisation. Worth noting is the ovolo moulding with filets, the chief decorative treatment of the frame. Double vehicular doors are modern.

Vertical apertures for ventilation located under apex of roof are now closed with masonry, but discernable in brickwork from inside.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gabled with ridge running east-west; composition roofing.

The rafters are wood and obviously a replacement. The original plates are more or less intact with two tie beams dividing the loft into three sections. The extension of walls above the floor give added head space to this area.

- b. Cornice, eaves: Simple wooden mouldings replacing original work.

- C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Behind the southwest door a narrow room, perhaps intended for the groom, runs the depth of the building. At the north end there is a narrow board-and-batten door which originally opened to the garden and in the northeast corner a similar one opening into a center space, defined by the present cement floor but more particularly by the brick footing of a cross partition. At the rear is a six-over-six light double hung window approximately centered in the rear wall of this space. Both areas are plastered and the details of the installation (brickwork and plaster) suggest that the window may have been an after-thought, but installed during construction. This space is believed to be the actual coach room.

The adjoining section to the east reveals a hard-packed earth floor, while the whitewashed walls and ceiling further suggest that here were the stalls. There would have been sufficient space for about three of them. The rear wall now has a door communicating with the garden, but that is definitely a later feature.

2. Stairways: Open ladder type stair with modern treads and railings rises north-south along the east wall of the stable.

3. Flooring: The so-called "groom's quarters" has narrow pine boards, probably replacing an earlier installation. In the loft are many random-width pine boards which arrest attention. The appearance of numerous peg holes and a great many unfashioned sections suggest the probability of salvage, perhaps from the stalls belowstairs.

Incidentally the loft floor joists are size 9½" x 3" and are laid 24" on center. From the vantage point of the loft one can determine that the laths used for the plaster ceiling below are sawn.

4. Special decorative features, trim, cabinet work: All openings identified as original display the ovolo-filet mouldings. Baseboards with bead appear in the groom's room.
5. Hardware: Sparse, but nevertheless an interesting and varied lot: strap hinges, butt hinges, open face spring latch and downspout strap.

D. Site:

The Vowell-Snowden-Black Stable faces south on Franklin Street. The facade marks the property line which is continued eastward by gateway and high brick wall to the corner at Lee Street. On the west it adjoins a brick residence.

Worth noting is a stone splash block at the southeast corner of the structure.

Prepared by Worth Bailey, Consultant for
The Historic Alexandria Foundation
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Edited by
Antoinette J. Lee
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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 with HABS.