

Sotterley Mansion
St. Mary's County
Maryland

HABS No. MD-181

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Notes on Its History and Architecture
To Accompany Its Measured Drawings

Prepared for
The Historic American Buildings Survey
Library of Congress

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INTRODUCTION

Sotterley mansion is located in St. Mary's County where Maryland's colonial history began. From its site overlooking the tidewaters of the Patuxent River, it is only fourteen miles to the Colony's first capital, St. Mary's City, the site of the founding of the First Maryland Colony in 1634.

The mansion itself, a low white structure 100 feet long and 20 feet deep, one and a half to two stories high, is superbly situated on a ridge from which gently falling meadows sweep down to sandy bluffs at the river's edge. Its steeply pitched roofs and tall chimneys give the effect of a long, low farmhouse. This picture of Sotterley mansion was familiar to generations of seafarers whose vessels sailed into Sotterley Creek to pay customs duties, or to deliver and accept cargo. In this way the productivity of the plantation was woven into the commercial fabric of Maryland, of the other colonies and the mother country.

With its two and a half centuries of history and tradition, this picturesque manor ranks high among Maryland's historically and architecturally important landmarks. Today, under the auspices of the Sotterley Mansion Foundation, Inc. and the sponsorship of the Society for the Preservation of Maryland Antiquities, it is made available for the enjoyment and education of the public.

SOTTERLEY'S HISTORY

1650-1729

History of Land on Which Sotterley Was Built

In 1650, Cecelius, Lord Baltimore, granted to Captain Thomas Cornwallis a 4,000 acre tract on the western shore of the Patuxent River, about 10 miles above the river's mouth and opposite the present St. Leonard's Creek, Calvert County. To this property Captain Cornwallis gave the name Resurrection Manor.

Nine years later in 1659 Cornwallis sold it to John Bateman, "merchant and haberdasher of London." * After Bateman's death in 1663, claims were made against the estate by Henry Scarborough of London. There followed a long period of litigation ending in 1674 when the manor was sold to Captain Richard Perry and the proceeds divided between Scarborough and Bateman's sole heir, his daughter Mary. The ten years of Perry's ownership marked a profound change in the nature of the property. At the time of its sale in 1684, Perry was in a position to turn over not a simple tract of land uncleared and unadorned, but,

* Archives of Md. III, p. 342.

"...all the Manor of the Resurrection,"* including all the out-buildings, tobacco houses, barns, and negroes on said property for £500.*

The purchasers this time were the cousins, Thomas and George Plowden, scions of an ancient Shropshire family and grandsons of Sir Edmund Plowden, self-styled Earl Palatine of New Albion. It was during the Plowden ownership in 1694 that nearby St. Mary's City was supplanted by Providence (later called Annapolis) as Maryland's capital.

In all the transfers of the property by grant, sale, and inheritance so far described, Resurrection Manor had retained the large part of its original acreage. In 1710, however, George Plowden sold 890 acres to James Bowles, a Freeman and a member of the Council of Maryland. The Bowles purchase represented the first substantial division of the original manor. In the early official records it is referred to as "Bowles' Preservation," but is also often called "Bowles' Separation." With James Bowles, a member of the Council of Maryland, begins the record, so distinguished in later years by the Platers, of owners identified with the political life of Maryland.

* Provincial Court Deeds WRC 31, 1676-1899 p. 350. Land Office, Annapolis.

History of Sotterley Mansion

Sometime after 1717 James Bowles built the house which almost undoubtedly constitutes the main part of the present mansion. He also increased his land holdings in the neighborhood by some 400 acres, much of which was cleared and farmed. From the inventory of Bowles' property at the time of his death in 1727, * we have a picture of his home and plantation, and of the way of life of a Maryland Gentleman in the first quarter of the 18th Century. In addition to the residence there was a dairy, a meat house, an accounting house, a barn, a shop and many other out-buildings. A platt drawn up from a 1716 survey of Bowles' property conforms accurately to the outline of the present-day Sotterley.

In 1729 Bowles' widow, the former Rebecca Addison, married George Plater II, thus commencing almost a century of occupancy by the Plater Family.

1729-1822

Plater Period

With George Plater II began a remarkable tenure of this property by four generations of the same family with the same

* Inventories, Liber 13 pp. 79-92 Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

given name. He followed his father in the law and in distinguished service to the Provincial Government as Naval Officer of the Patuxent District, member of his Lordship's Council and Secretary of the Province. When his wife, Rebecca (the former Widow Bowles), died sometime between 1742-1749, the property reverted to the three Bowles daughters, Jane, Eleanor, and Mary, who by that time had married into prominent Virginia families. Although Plater as widower was entitled to remain on his wife's estate as long as he lived, his attachment to the manor and the fact that he had a son to whom he wanted to bequeath it, led him to purchase the property from his step-daughters.

Upon his death in 1755, George Plater II "was able to bestow upon his children a rich patrimony, and he established the name Plater so firmly in Maryland, it became synonymous with efficient and effective public service..."^{*}

George Plater III inherited the manor two years after graduating from William and Mary College in 1753. It was he who first named the property "Sotterley" after the ancestral home of the Playters in Suffolk, England, from whom he was descended. The first known written reference to it by that name appeared as

* Marian McKenna, "Sotterley, St. Mary's County," Maryland Historical Magazine. Sept. 1951, p. 182.

headings on letters written by him in 1776.

His appointment as a delegate to the lower house of the Assembly 1757-1759, marked the beginning of a 35 year career, during which he held many important political offices. These included Naval Officer of the Patuxent District 1767-1777, member of the Council 1771-1774, member of the Council of Safety 1775, member from Maryland in the Continental Congress 1778-1780, President of the Maryland Senate 1781, President of the Maryland Convention which ratified the U. S. Constitution 1788, and Governor of Maryland from 1791 until his death on February 10, 1792.

After his death, at Annapolis, his remains "were attended by honorable members of the Council, the officers of State and a numerous company of citizens to South River on the way to Sotterley, his seat in St. Mary's County." * He was buried in the garden overlooking the Patuxent.

The next heir to Sotterley was George Plater IV who lived only ten years after inheriting the property. His death in 1802 orphaned his son, George Plater V, at the age of five. By the time the boy reached majority and actually came into possession of Sotterley, he was already hopelessly in debt and had

* Md. Gazette, Feb. 16, 1792, p. 2.

mortgaged Sotterley to his uncle, John Rousby Plater Jr. In July 1822 he deeded Sotterley and other large holdings to his step-uncle, Colonel William Clarke Somerville, for the sum of \$29,000. Thus, after four generations, the estate passed from the ownership of the family which had named it and had given it so much of its amenity.

1822-1910

Within the month Colonel Somerville, who already owned Mulberry Fields, resold Sotterley mansion and a large acreage to Thomas Barber for \$7,000. In 1826 the property was again partitioned by Barber's will; the mansion and 425 acres passed to his step-daughter Emeline Dallam, while his daughter, Lydia Barber, inherited an adjoining 500 acres.

The marriage of the heiress Emeline Dallam to Dr. Walter Hanson Stone Briscoe in 1826, marked the start of a second era of almost 100 years in which Sotterley was to remain in the possession of a single family -- in this instance the Briscoes.

When Emeline Dallam Briscoe died she provided that Sotterley be sold and the proceeds be divided among her children. One of her sons, Reverend James Briscoe, bought Sotterley at auction in 1890 and lived there until his death in 1904.

He left the estate to his daughter, Elizabeth Briscoe Cashner, and his son, James Briscoe, Jr., who signed over his half interest to his sister. During the next six years the Cashners lived at Sotterley only in the summer. They reserved a part of the house for their own use, and leased the rest on a year-round basis to a tenant farmer who used the panelled drawing room as his kitchen.

1910-1961

In 1910 the late Herbert L. Satterlee of New York bought the mansion and farm. The appeal of the charming old manor house in its matchless setting was enhanced for him by the fact that, like the Platers, his ancestors had owned and lived in the original Sotterley in Suffolk, England. His collection of books on Maryland's colonial history and architecture served as a guide to the careful rehabilitation of the house which he undertook.

His daughter, Mrs. Mabel Satterlee Ingalls, who inherited the estate in 1947, has continued to use, preserve and improve the mansion in the same spirit that motivated her father. The concept of the "restored house," the house "brought back" to represent a single period of time, has been rejected. Instead, every attempt has been made to sustain the flavor of

its total history as reflected in the taste of all its occupants,
past and present.

A chronological list of the owners and their dates can
be found at the end of these notes.

SOTTERLEY'S ARCHITECTURE

Present

Sotterley mansion has already been described as a long, low, white structure 100 feet long, 20 feet deep with its front facing the river. Its plan is basically that of a long rectangle, running roughly north to south, with a single wing extending west on the side away from the river and joining the main building at a point about one third the distance from its northern end. It is one and a half stories except for the northerly 60 foot stretch on the front, or river side, where the roof has been raised to create a two story facade. The mansion is roofed with shingles colored Spanish Brown, evidence for which was found on original round butt shingles discovered under the later porch; its siding is of wide, flush beaded boards, bevelled on both edges and painted white. The three ends and the west side of the northern end of the building are of brick. Four brick chimneys punctuate the roof line; one each at the north and west brick ends, another at the end of the present dining room, and a fourth at the south side of the small parlor.

A lantern or cupola crowns the roof at the point where

the ridge of the wing joins the roof of the main building. Except for this raised section, the roof is steeply pitched from ridge to plate; then much more gently pitched to form the portico roof, front and rear.

Just south of the mansion and connected to it by a covered passage is a one and a half story brick building, built in 1914 in the colonial style, with a kitchen on the ground floor and bedroom above.

The mansion's most conspicuous and pleasing exterior features are the flagstone-paved portico which extends the full length of the mansion on the river side, and the brick-paved portico in the rear or land side. The portico roofs are one story high and are supported by tapered, panelled columns.

The ground floor plan of the mansion is as follows: at the extreme north there is a drawing room; next comes the entrance hall and stair well; then the small parlor which connects with the dining room. On the southeast, the dining room gives on the back hall and stairs; on the southwest, it gives on a storeroom and a long pantry. Finally, the wing of the mansion is formed by the library which opens to the west from the entrance hall. Under the library there is an old brick cellar, the other rooms all being on beams laid directly on the ground.

On the second floor, bedrooms are located over the

drawing room, small parlor and library, all of which open off the upstairs hall and are reached by the entrance hall stairs. Two other bedrooms are found over the dining room and are reached by the back hall stairs adjacent to the dining room, and by a small secret ladder in the closet off the small parlor. It leads to the northern one of the two bedrooms.

Among the more arresting internal features of the mansion are the unusual Chinese Chippendale staircase, the massive mahogany door to the drawing room with its large brass rising hinges, the unique carved shell-patterned alcoves flanking the drawing room mantel, and finally the pine panelling of all walls of the mansion's three major early rooms and stair hall as well.

Past

Sotterley mansion as it stands today is not the architectural product of any one man or even of any one family. The successive generations of Bowles, Platers, Briscoes, and Satterlees who have owned it have fashioned it to their needs and tastes. The chronology of these changes is not easily established. To supplement the limited documentary evidence presently available, Walter M. Macomber, expert in historic house restoration and advisor to the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, made a detailed examination of the mansion. His observations and

conclusions are quoted freely in the discussion that follows.

Bowles Period 1710-1729

An "inventory of the goods and chattels of the Honorable James Bowles Esquire Deceased"* taken by Mr. Richard Hopewell and Mr. Edmund Plowden on February 12, 1727, gives an excellent idea of the dwelling and its furnishings at that time since it lists each room by name with its contents. As described in the inventory, Bowles' structure fits the plan of Sotterley as it is today, allowing for the subsequent alterations and additions.

On the ground floor there were the "Hall" (drawing room), "New Room Passage" (present entrance hall), "New Room" (present library), "Madame Bowles' room" (present small parlor), kitchen and kitchen chamber. On the second floor were the three chambers, one each over the "Hall," "New Room" and "Madam Bowles' Room." Two of them contained andirons or fire tools, but the one over the "Hall" did not. The inventory also included 928 feet of plank, 3,000 cypress shingles and 20 dozen Newcastle flagstones.

The physical evidence uncovered by Mr. Macomber, which will be quoted fully under the "Plater Period" below,

* Inventories, Liber 13 f 79-92 (Hall of Records, Annapolis, Md.).

leads us to conclude that in 1727 the house was still an unmodified, one and a half story structure; that the rooms were very probably plastered and whitewashed, a usual practice of the day, and that the ceilings of all first floor rooms were of similar height. In addition, the original stairs were probably of much simpler construction, and over the present front door there was a pediment.

Plater Period 1729-1822

According to Mr. Macomber the construction of Sotterley's most notable features, the long portico, the Chippendale staircase, and the magnificent panelling of the three rooms and hall took place in the mid-18th Century. Specifically, he says: ". . . . with an opportunity to review all the evidence, I became convinced that the interiors of the parlor (drawing room), the card room (small parlor) and the stair hall were done at the same time the library wing was added. This means that originally the ceiling height was the same in the parlor as it was in the front hall and other rooms. The ceiling of the parlor (drawing room) was raised to accommodate the design of the room as we now see it.

"I believe it is reasonable to assume that when the ceiling was raised the porch was added, as raising the ceiling

would have affected the exterior cornice line or would have caused splayed intersections of the exterior walls and the ceiling in this room. This would tie all our problems in one small package - the wing - the porch and all the first floor interiors, including the stair, having been constructed during the 1750 period, as a good guess. This, of course, does not include the dining room which we feel sure was considerably later than this date.*

In the discussion of the raising of the drawing room ceiling, Mr. Macomber states: "There can be no denial of the evidence found establishing the fact that the main roof on this (the river) side of the building was raised to its present appearance for the purpose of allowing more head room in the bedrooms on this side and in the stair hall. Exposed beneath the line of the porch roof was the original plate, upon which the studs which carried this raised roof rested. This plate is level with the plate on the opposite side where the roof is still in its original form. The exposed plate shows the marks of the rafters

* In 1798, a Tax Assessment book gives the following description of the House of Colonel George Plater in Resurrection Hundred:

House 22x80, one story of wood; 13 windows 3x6; 11 windows 2x3; 1 Outhouse, brick 14x14; one window 2x3. 2 houses, each 18x18 and 15x15 - wood. From this overall length it would seem the dining room must have been added by this date.

where they rested originally when they formed a symmetrical gable at each end of the building."

Furthermore, removal of a section of the porch roof near the front door revealed that the front door had had a pediment over it and the whole surface had been originally painted and sanded to give the effect of stone. Mr. Macomber states that this was "a very unusual treatment, one used by George Washington at Mount Vernon about 1758, and also found on the "Lindens" - the King Hooper house built in Danvers, Massachusetts, and now located in Washington, D. C. The thin coating of paint and sand indicated that the surface uncovered had not been exposed to the elements very many years before it was covered by the present porch. It was in excellent condition and appeared to have had only one treatment." It is not known which owner was responsible for the elegant stone effect nor who replaced it with clapboard. The elaborate architectural improvements which were made early in the Plater period would seem to suggest that as the most likely time this was done. In this same uncovered section were remnants of several Spanish Brown butt end shingles.

The cupola which crowns the junction of the ridge of the main building with the ridge of the library wing also dates from this same period. Speaking of it, Mr. Macomber says, "It is

quite apparent that the lantern, or cupola, was built at the same time the wing was added. . . although a quantity of modern material has been used in repairs, there is sufficient original hand-hewn and sawn material to establish its period. . . . It is also apparent that this little structure was built to conceal the greater ridge height of the library wing. Without this, the point of the library ridge would have been shown projecting about 18" above the main ridge. Another condition supporting its origin theory is the fact that the front of the cupola rests only a few inches on the main roof whereas its major portion is resting on the library roof -- a treatment that would have looked extremely awkward in the absence of the wing."

In renovating the mansion's interior, the Plater owner of the "1750 period" selected a staircase style which is known to have been employed also in two other colonial houses - "Bushwood," destroyed by fire in the 1930's, and "Bohemia," built about 1745 in Cecil County, Maryland. Waterman* has described it as worked in mahogany "with detail as fine as contemporary furniture." The bannister "grille is notable for its continuous pattern and for the fact that it finishes against the tread."

* Waterman, Thomas Tileston, The Dwellings of Colonial America, Univ. of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1950, pp. 108, 109.

Another interior architectural feature that existed during the Plater occupancy deserves mention. It was a transverse passage running east to west between the small parlor and the dining room. Through it, one might pass from the land side to the water side of the house or gain access to the small parlor or the dining room. This passage existed until its incorporation into the dining room in 1914.

Briscoe Period 1826-1910

The Bowles-Plater house continued largely unaltered during the long Briscoe ownership. However, during this period a kitchen was built at right angles to the dining room and extending toward the river. The addition of this kitchen wing obliterated the view of the river from the dining room. The dining room was further darkened by the closing in of the portico between it and the new kitchen to create a covered passage between them.

Photographs taken of the house in 1910, at the end of the Briscoe Period, show it to have been sheathed in clapboard. Some of the boards still in place are very wide old hand-hewn ones, while the second floor raised front section and other parts had much narrower later-type boards.

During Dr. Briscoe's occupancy, the little customs

house, in which several generations of Platers as Naval Officers of the Patuxent District had collected revenues, was moved from its position near the mansion into the farm yard where it was used as a tool shed. It was still there in 1910.

Satterlee and Ingalls Period 1910-1961

The account of Sotterley's growth and architectural change may be completed for the present with a brief description of the physical alterations accomplished chiefly in 1914. In the years immediately preceding Mr. Satterlee's ownership, the mansion had fallen into a sad state of disrepair. The rehabilitation that proceeded under his direction included the replacement with brick of the rotted wood end walls of the drawing room and library; the insertion of windows in the west brick end to lighten the closets on each side of the chimney in the bedroom over the library, and the changing of the cellar door from the west end of the library to the south side of that wing. Brick was put into the west wall of the drawing room to replace the clapboards in the 1920's, when termites had been found undermining the ground floor rooms. The dining room was lengthened by the inclusion of the transverse passage. A pantry was installed in an old covered-in bit of porch on the west side of the house (adjoining the dining room and leading to an open porch to connect with a newly constructed

brick kitchen building). The Briscoe kitchen was removed, thus reopening the river view from the dining room. In 1910, for the first time at Sotterley, a bathroom was installed in what is now the pantry.

A few years later (1914), approximately 5 feet was cut off the bedroom over the drawing room to allow for a linen closet on the river side and a bathroom on the land side, with an entry passage to the bedroom between. In connection with putting in the bathroom, it was necessary to interrupt the cuddy which had run from the upstairs hall all along the west side of the bedroom, which at that time had no windows to the west. The two present dormer windows on the west were put in then; one for the bathroom and one for the bedroom itself.

A bathroom was also installed on the ground floor under the new back stairs which led to the bedroom above the dining room.

The mansion roof was extended to cover this newly constructed back stairwell and bath. This extension of the roof also covered over the old vaulted, partly brick, storeroom, incorporating it into the house along with the back stairwell and the new pantry. This made for a somewhat unusual feature since the storeroom already had and continues to have a shingled roof of its own.

About 1950 a bathroom was installed in the closet to the right of the chimney in the bedroom above the library. Extensive revisions were made in the part of the house created by Mr. Satterlee when he extended the roof and put in the back stairs. Most recently, the marble fireplaces in the drawing-room, small parlor, library, and dining room were refaced.

It is worth noting that the physical changes made in Sotterley during this 51-year period have served to enhance and preserve, rather than to change its essential character.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to John H. Scarff, architect and former secretary of S. P. M. A. , and to Phelps Warren, for the use, as major sources of material for this account, of papers written by them on the history of Sotterley.

Chronological List of Owners of Resurrection Manor,

Bowles' Preservation and Sotterley

Resurrection Manor

Captain Thomas Cornwallis	1650-1659
John Bateman & Mary, his daughter	1659-1674
Richard Perry	1674-1684
Thomas & George Flowden	1684-1710

Sotterley (Bowles' Preservation)

James Bowles & Rebecca Bowles	1710-1729
George Plater II & Rebecca Bowles Plater	1729-1755
George Plater III (Governor), Hannah Lee, & Elizabeth Rousby	1755-1792
George Plater IV, Cecelia Bond, & Elizabeth Somerville	1792-1802
George Plater V	1802-1822
William Clarke Somerville	1822-1822
Thomas Barber	1822-1826
Emeline Dallam & husband Dr. W.H.S. Briscoe	1826-1890
Rev. James Briscoe	1890-1904
James Briscoe Jr. & sister Elizabeth B. Cashner	1904-1905
Elizabeth Briscoe Cashner & husband John	1905-1910
Herbert L. Satterlee	1910-1947
Mabel Satterlee Ingalls	1947-1961
Sotterley Mansion Foundation, Inc.	1961-

MASTER LIST OF SOTTERLEY PHOTOGRAPHS

(Cutlines to be Used)

1. Sotterley and Its Dependencies
2. Plan of the Ground Floor of Sotterley
3. View from portico toward Patuxent River, looking east across fields. The nearer water is Sotterley Creek flowing from the right.
4. View towards Patuxent River, looking northeast from front lawn.
5. Front of mansion, facing east; shows portico, raised section of second storey, and section (south of extreme left chimney) added c. 1914. Winter view.
6. Front of mansion, summer view.
7. Flagstone portico. At extreme left, door to dining room.
8. Mansion's front, and north end (restored in brick in 1914). At right, west wing (library). Cf. photo 38.
9. Angle of mansion's north end (left) and west wing (library).
10. West view (land side).
11. Entrance hall and stairs.
12. Entrance hall, door to drawing room (right) and to library.
13. Entrance hall and stairs, looking east. Note summer beam.
14. West wing (library). Door on left of fireplace is former entrance to cellar.
15. Drawing room (north end), showing shell alcoves.
16. Drawing room.
17. Drawing room.
18. Drawing room (south end), mahogany entrance door, showing brass rising hinges.
19. Small parlor, door to entrance hall.
20. Small parlor, door to dining room at right. Door at left to concealed passage to room above.

SOTTERLEY PHOTOGRAPH OUTLINES Continued

21. Dining room (south end).
22. Dining room (north end).
23. Upstairs hall, window toward river.
24. West bedroom ("Plater room"). Over library.
25. Necessary house at north end of garden. "E" on diagram.
26. Gate lodges flanking west entrance gate (land side). "C" on diagram.
27. Old log slave cabin. "D" on diagram.
28. Brick ended barn, dated in glazed headed bricks "1757". "I" on diagram.
29. Ceiling, vaulted larder.

The following photographs are from the 1910-1914 period:

30. Kitchen wing and chimney, extending eastward, built in early 19th century and removed c. 1910. Storeroom (next to out-house) was later roofed in with main house. At base of chimney, cistern pump. Cf. photo 5.
31. East front; and, at left, 19th century kitchen wing (c. 1910).
32. East front; and covered-in section of front portico (in front of dining room and transverse passage hall). At right, north end of mansion. Cf. photo 8.
33. Same as photo 32.
34. Looking south along front portico. c. 1910.
35. Looking north along front portico showing break (at left) between earliest (northern) main part of house and dining room. c. 1910
36. Front, east. c. 1910.
37. Front, east, showing cupola with medallion. c. 1910.
38. Front, east, and north end in 1910. Cf. photo 8.
39. North end (left) and north side of west wing (library), c. 1910. Note clapboard finish and the absence of dormers on west roof. Cf. photo 9.

SCOTTERLEY PHOTOGRAPH OUTLINES (Continued)

40. West end of west wing. Note differing roof heights masked by cupola. Shows former entrance to cellar, relocated in 1914 under porch.
41. West view (land side) of mansion before 1914. Cf. photo 10.

" S O T T E R L E Y "

St. Mary's County, Maryland

Snapshots taken 1910 - 1914

Photographs taken 1953 - by H. Beville

Photographs taken 1960-61 - By Sargent F. Collier