

**PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR  
THE BOISSIERE HOUSE**

**12 Queens Park West, Port-of-Spain  
Trinidad and Tobago**

**Prepared for  
The National Museum  
117 Frederick Street, Port-of-Spain**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Preface**

This report has been prepared for the National Museum, Port-of-Spain, to determine the steps and work needed to restore the Boissiere property at 12 Queens Park West, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. We have worked with Claire Broadbridge, Director of the National Museum, in preparation of this material. The family members, living in the house, including Alison and Luis Young, and Peter Boissiere were most helpful in showing us the building and the historic documents and photographs about the house.

### **Report Goals**

1. To develop guidelines for the physical restoration of this historic property.
3. To suggest possible uses which can help sustain and maintain the building.
3. To develop planning steps and priorities for restoration and re-use.
4. To suggest areas for further investigation and research.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

The house of the Bouissier family at 12 Queens Park West, in a prominent location, on the southwest corner of the Savannah, in Port of Spain, is a wonderful example of turn of the century Victorian architecture. The building is remarkable for its wealth of intricate fretwork decoration, and unique roof line with gables, turrets and dormers.

The house and its contents are still remarkably intact, a time capsule from the turn of the century. Fortunately, there has not been much modernization, or alterations over the years. And although lack of maintenance may have preserved the building from inappropriate modifications, it also has resulted in conditions which are deteriorated and need immediate attention.

The restoration and preservation of this house, and its contents are a great opportunity to preserve a unique and noteworthy example of residential architecture and life. And because of the architecture and historical significance, this house is a prime site for a cultural and educational attraction open to the public.

## **ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The house was built in the early 1900's, and was designed by Bowen, an architect who designed residential structures during this time in Port-of-Spain. The building has features found on other homes of this era: intricate fretwork, steep gables, and complicated roof forms, a projecting central porch, slate roofing, cast iron fencing, and a separate building housing the kitchen and bath functions. However, the way these elements were used on this building are particularly unique and picturesque.

Existing within the house are many items of documentation relating to the history of the construction of the building. Original floor plans, and elevation drawings exist; as well as photographs from earlier years, which show changes over time. There are also books of tile patterns, and papers about the materials used. This report does not attempt to research the history of the construction of the house; however, this research is an important future project.

## **BUILDING OWNER**

The house was built for Charles Ernest Boissiere, a descendent of the De Boissiere family. Charles Boissiere was a Trinidadian business man of the turn of the century, with estates in central Trinidad, as well as a business in Port-of-Spain. He used the study in his home for an office, though he also reportedly had another office in Port-of-Spain. He was married and had many children. After Charles's death, the house was occupied by some of his children; the two owners of the house, Muriel Donawa and Enid Hosten, no longer live here; the house is occupied, however, by descendants: Allison and Luis Young and their family, and by Peter Boissiere, a grandson.

Again, we find in the house many papers, letters and records of the Boissiere family and its activities. These records the history of the family, and should be carefully preserved, and catalogued.

## **BUILDING DESCRIPTION**

**Floor Plan.** The basic shape of the building is a rectangle- 60 feet deep, by 46 feet wide. A prominent porch runs across the front of the house. Double doors open to the front porch from the 20 foot by 26 foot Living Room- which is at the front of the house. Behind the Living Room is a 20 foot by 19 foot Dining Room, and a smaller room , currently used as a kitchen, is behind. On the north side of the house are six rooms - the study projecting in front, and five rooms, used currently as bedrooms behind, all having doors to a central hallway. An addition, presently housing a bathroom, was added many years ago. In the rear is a large porch, 10 feet wide by 26 feet long.

There are stairs to a small basement area; the remainder of the foundation is a crawl space. Stairs also run up to a full attic, which is unfinished and was apparently used for storage. The attic is large, light and airy, with many windows, and louvers for ventilation.

**Foundation .** The house was built over a ventilated crawl space. The walls of the foundation are stone; exterior walls were plastered, and the front walls have patterns incised in relief. Under the house are stone bearing walls running from north to south. There are openings with screening, allowing ventilation into this space. The main floor of the house is about 4 feet above grade.

**Exterior Walls.** The exterior walls of the house consist of a timber frame, (visible in a few places) with a brick and rubble infill. The exterior surface is plastered with a concrete-like material with a small rough aggregate, scored into 12 inch by 20 inch blocks. The walls of the front of the house, study, and wall at rear porch are smooth plaster. The tops of the end gables walls have horizontal wood siding.

**Porches.** There are complex porches on this house, which give it it's unique form. In the front is the projecting gabled porch spanning about 14 feet over the driveway. It has decorative fretwork, and fluted cast iron columns. Across the front is an 8 foot wide porch, with shed roof, and centrally located 8 foot wide marble steps. On the south is a circular porch, with a turret roof, covered with painted metal sheet roofing; it is supported with turned columns, fretwork brackets, and a classical baluster railing. Surrounding the study is a 4 foot wide porch, which earlier photographs show had a baluster railing, which was removed and replaced with planters. These front porches have multi-colored ceramic tile in decorative patters. The rear porch, which has recently been rebuilt, has supporting columns, and decorative fretwork and brackets, and a wood floor. There are two sets of stairs to it - one a formal double stair; the other faces the kitchen building.

**Framing.** The first floor framing consists of 3 inch wide by 8 inch deep joists, approximately 24 inches on center, spanning east to west and supported on the foundation walls. Wood decking about 3 inches wide is supported over the joists. The attic framing consists of joists spanning also east to west, resting on bearing walls. Ceiling boards are attached from the bottom. The roof is supported by four trusses, with beams spanning between them. On this are 2 1/2 inch by 6 inch roof rafters approximately 24 inches on center. These hold furring strips which support the slate roofing.

**Roof.** The main roof consists of a gable, with the ridge running east to west. Three steeper gables face east, north, and south. There are two dormers in the rear gable. A shed roof spans the rear porch and rear bedroom., as well as the front porch. All these roofs are covered with slate. The slate is hung off furring. A cast iron roof cap with decorative projections caps the ridges. The two turrets over the study and circular porch are covered with sheet metal roofing with decorative cast iron finials.

**Gutters and Down spouts.** Roof water is collected in gutters. The existing gutters in front are ornately cut tin. Down spouts collect water into a system of concreted surface trenches which eventually run to the south front corner of the property and out under the street.

**Doors.** The elegant front verandah allows entry into the house via a procession of four matching wood doors. These tall narrow doors are 9 feet- 6 inches high by 4 feet wide, divided into four molded panels, with arched frosted etched glass. These doors open out, onto the porch, and have hooks and eyes to secure them. There are three sets of hinges for each door, mounted on the exterior, and decorative dandles, and locks inside. Above the doors are panels of open decorative fretwork. A fifth single door opens from the front porch to the study. This door has a frosted glass panel painted with floral motifs to match the study windows.

Inside, doors are wood. The door from the living room to the hall has frosted etched glass. Dining room doors are double doors, with wood louvers. Doors to Bedrooms are solid paneled wood. Many doors have fretwork above. A six foot high wood screen, with six 20 inch wide sections, with panels, and fixed louvers and an open carved geometrical design separates the Living and Dining rooms. Six inch, wide, heavily molded trim surrounds the doors. These have been painted; some with several colors.

The door from the hall to the rear porch is wood with fretwork on each side, and above. Another wood louvered door with louvers leads from the present kitchen also to the rear porch.

**Windows.** The study has two signature windows on the north and east walls - a three section window divided vertically by wood moldings; the two outside sections are louvered, and the central section is glass, frosted and painted with fruit, flowers bird and vines, in violet, green rust and yellow paint applied to the exterior. Above the window is an elongated oval frosted glass window, painted with the same motifs. The oval is bordered with decorative wood "eye-lashes" and bottom flourishes.

The north, west, and south facades have windows, consisting of a central double hung windows ( 36 inches wide, by 6 feet - 6 inches high), with milk glass in wood sash.. On each side is a strip of 11 inch wide louvers. Above are transoms, with a center louvered section, and clear glass panes on each side. The double hung windows on the north and west sides have a projecting, hinged louvers, which can be extended open, and secured with a wood pole. The louvers, when closed are supported with a triangular fretwork shelf. Exterior window trim is wood, pattered to resemble blocks of stone.

The newer bathroom addition has a band of paned, pivoted milk glass, about two feet high, with a 14 inch high band of louvers above, running horizontally around the entire addition.

Attic windows in the steep gabled ends consist of two arched windows, with clear glass in 12 panes, which pivot to open. A central louvered panel separates them. Dormers have clear glass windows surrounded by louvers, as does the rear gable.

**Fretwork.** Particularly suited to the climate in Trinidad, fretwork allows the passage of air and subdued light. We find painted wood fretwork used in this house in both the interior and the exterior. The exterior has prominent fretwork in an arched design decorating the three steep gables. Fretwork decorated the eaves below roofs, and decorative fretwork brackets are used to support porch roofs. Doors to the exterior and interior of the house have fretwork panels above them; and we find several interior bedroom walls with a 2 foot high band of fretwork next to the ceiling. An arched opening with fretwork above separates the Living and Dining Rooms.

**Flooring.** Throughout the first floor are wood floors, 2 1/2 inches wide, tongue and groove boards. Further research should be done about the type of wood and original finish. The study, and front porch, have ceramic tiles with a diagonal pattern with stripes and zig-zags utilizing rectangles, squares, and triangles of cinnamon, beige, taupe, green and white, and turquoise, with an elaborate border. A book showing tile patterns, published by Minton Hollis Co, Ltd, Stoke on Trent, England, was found within the house.

**Interior Walls.** Most of the interior walls are finished with plaster. In the Living and Dining Rooms there is a heavily molded wainscot, 36 inches high. This has recessed panels and a dentil molding on top. Some of the bedrooms have wood plank walls on exposed framing. All rooms have a heavy base, about 12 inches high.

**Ceilings.** The ceilings are wood boards. In the Living and Dining Rooms, and Study, there is an elaborate applied plaster molding, painted with contrasting colors and with gold, in the center of the room, and heavy cornice moldings at the walls. The wood ceilings have been painted- with a marbled pattern.

**Interior Doors.** The interior doors are heavy dark stained wood- generally 96 inches high. Some of the doors have recessed panels, others have etched milk colored glass. Some (in the dining room) are double doors with louver infills. The doors have heavy moldings and trim, as well as a fretwork panel above them, which allows air to pass between rooms. Between the dining room and living room is a carved wood screen, about inches high.

**Light Fixtures.** The house, as indicated in a presumably early photograph, had electricity at an early date. Some of the early fixtures still exist. Centrally located hanging light fixtures with a cluster of 3 or 4 glass flared shades with metal supports, and flat twist knobs.

## DESCRIPTION OF SITE FEATURES

The site is near the busy intersection where Cipriani Boulevard meets Queens Park West on the Savannah. The front of the lot is about 103 feet wide; the rear is 110 wide and the property is about 150 feet deep. At one time the property extended all the way to Woodford Street; now only a narrow 10 foot wide alley remains to this street.

Across the front in a masonry and iron grille work wall, with two gates, leading to a semi-circular drive. The house sits about 40 feet from the front property line, approximately in the center of the lot. To the rear, at the south, is a long narrow building housing a kitchen and bath facilities. In the rear is also a stable boy's room. There reportedly were other stables and out building on the property, and one building in the northwest corner was recently removed. On the south, west and north property lines are corrugated metal and concrete block walls about 8 feet high.

**Drives.** The front drive is semi-circular and runs from the two front gates under the projecting porte-cochere. It was apparently gravel; and has been filled with extra gravel over the years.

**Front Fence.** In front of the entire property, along Queens Park West, is a masonry and cast iron fence and gates. The lower portion consists of a stone faced wall, about 2 feet wide, and 3 feet high, with a beveled top. Over this is an ornate cast iron scrolled fence, about 3 feet high. Plastered Piers, about 6 feet high with capitals on top, are used to support two ornate cast iron gates at each end of the curved driveway.. The cast iron work is embossed with "WALTER MACFARLANE & Co. GLASCOW No. 1022 2.8" and appeared to be painted green, with contrasting colored (rust?) finials.

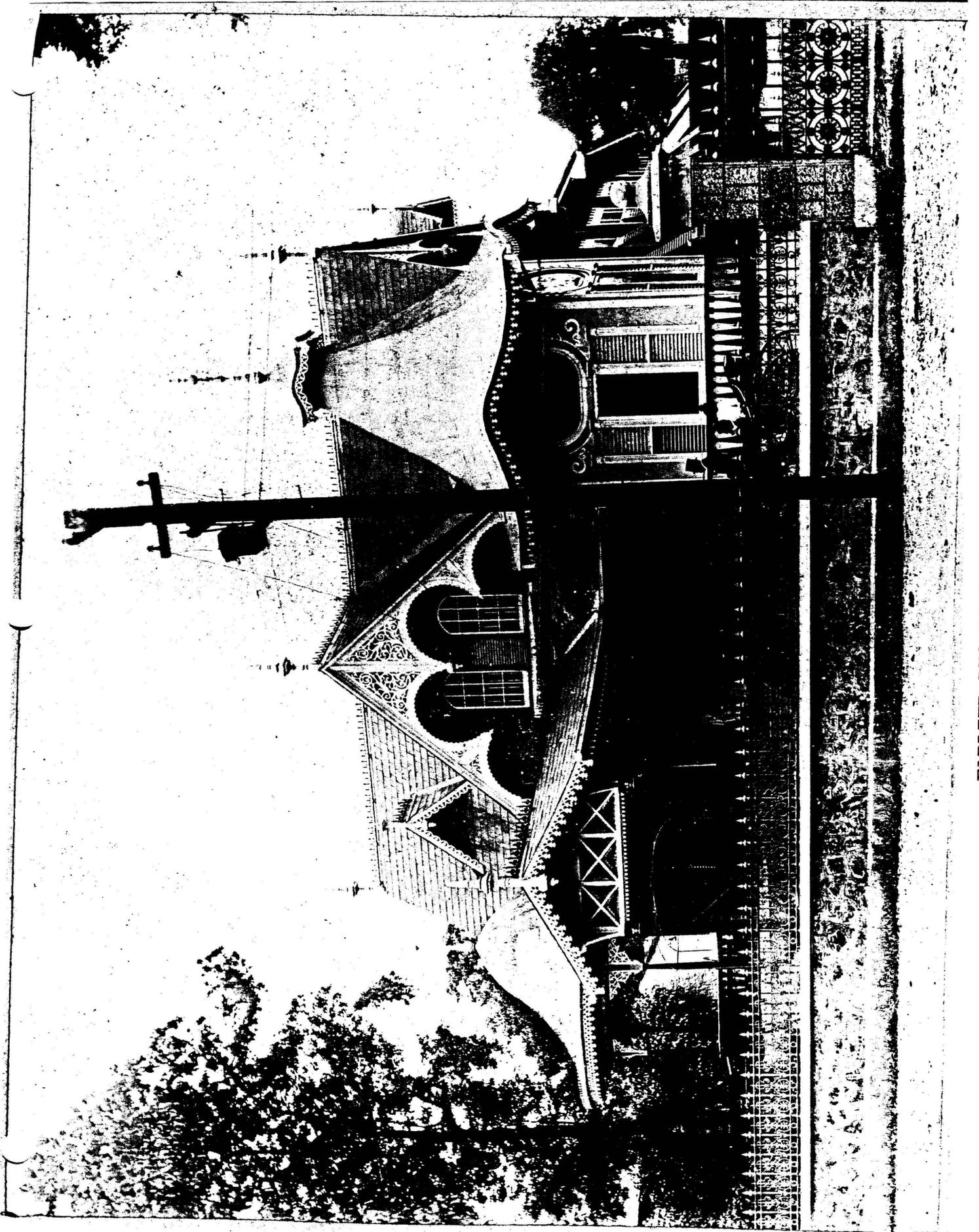
**Landscape and Plant Structures.** There are several types of exterior structures and plant holders. In the front of the porto-cochere, is a metal cage-like structure, 9 feet high by 9 feet wide, and 2 feet deep. Earlier photographs show this covered with plant materials. Around the circular porch, are remains of metal columns, which supported vines; again, earlier photographs show a thick screen of vines surrounding this porch. To the north of the house, are six metal columns, with metal bleacher-like stands, which must have been a plant growing area. And to the south of the house, we also find four metal columns, which might have been a trellis or exterior structure. In front of the house, are large metal wire urn shaped structures at each side of the stairs, and metal plant stands border the porch around the study.

**Curbing.** Concrete curbing defines planting bed areas. The front semi--circular drive is lined with a concrete curb, about 6 inches high. On the north of the house is also a rectangular concrete curb.

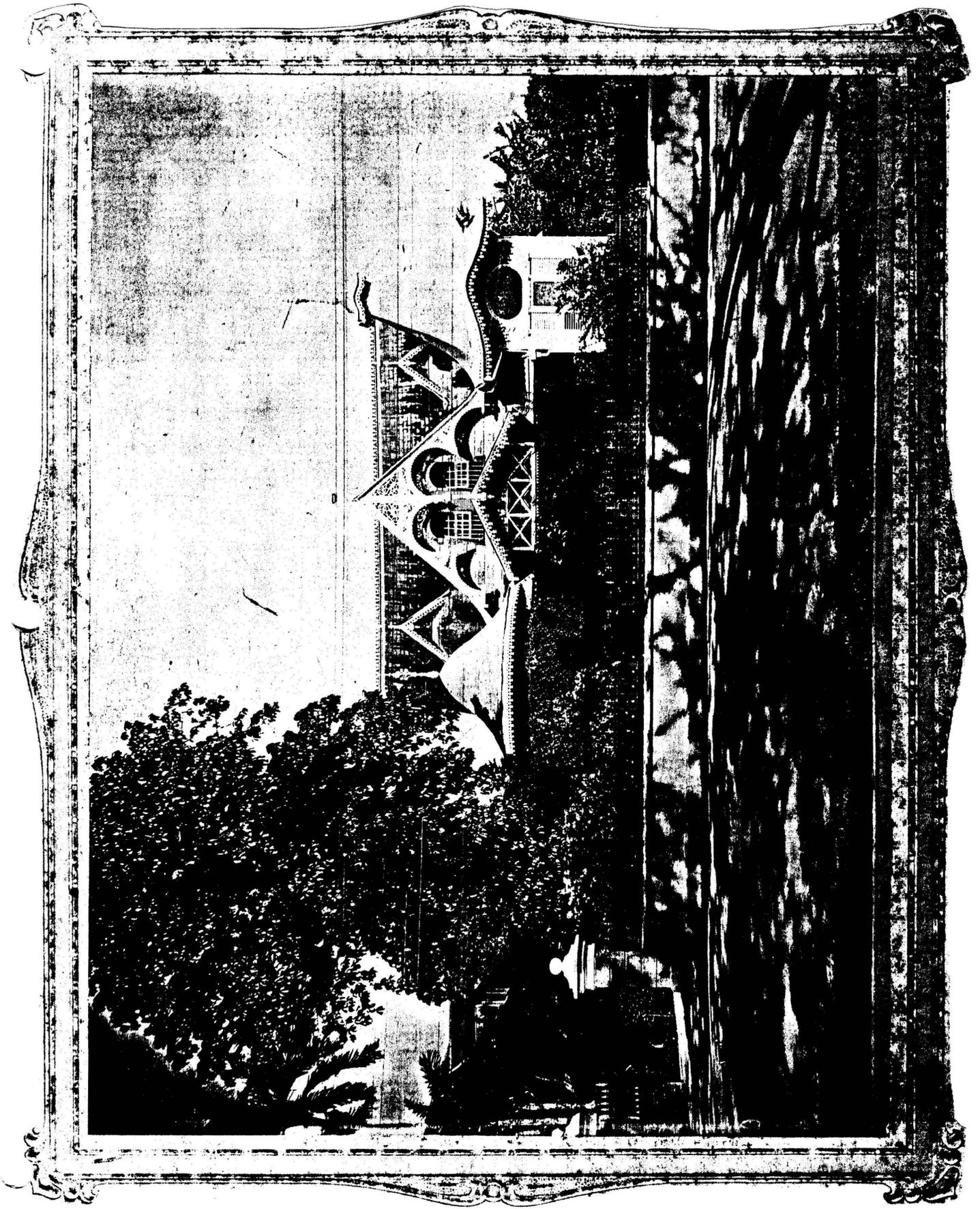
**Landscaping and Trees.** In front of the house are two large bay leaf trees, near the sidewalk. To the south, we find a frangipani, and fig tree, In the backyard is a very large mango tree, as well as the stump of another large mango which had been cut down. The front semi-circular plant bed has various shrubs. And there are other trees and shrubs in the yard. The rear yard is gravel, with weeds growing in it.

**Cookhouse.** About 13 feet from the main house, and connected by roof overhangs, is a 12 foot wide by 48 foot long building, with six rooms, including a kitchen, and bathing rooms. The walls are plastered stone, or rubble, and wood. The roof is a shed, framed with wood rafters with slate roofing tiles, and the underside is visible from the interior. The roof has a wide 6 foot deep overhang. Each room has a door to the exterior, and a band of lattice, for ventilation, runs along the top of the north wall.

The kitchen is impressive, with a large brick chimney over a masonry counter, and a massive brick oven, along the south wall. There is also a sink, and shelving. The walls are plastered stone and rubble; the floor is concrete. Three rooms are used for bathroom facilities. A shower is in one; a water closet in another, and a tile tub 4 feet by 6 feet..



EARLIER PHOTOGRAPH



EARLIER PHOTOGRAPH



FRONT



REAR



FRONT ELEVATION



CHARLES ERNEST BOISSIERE



COOK HOUSE

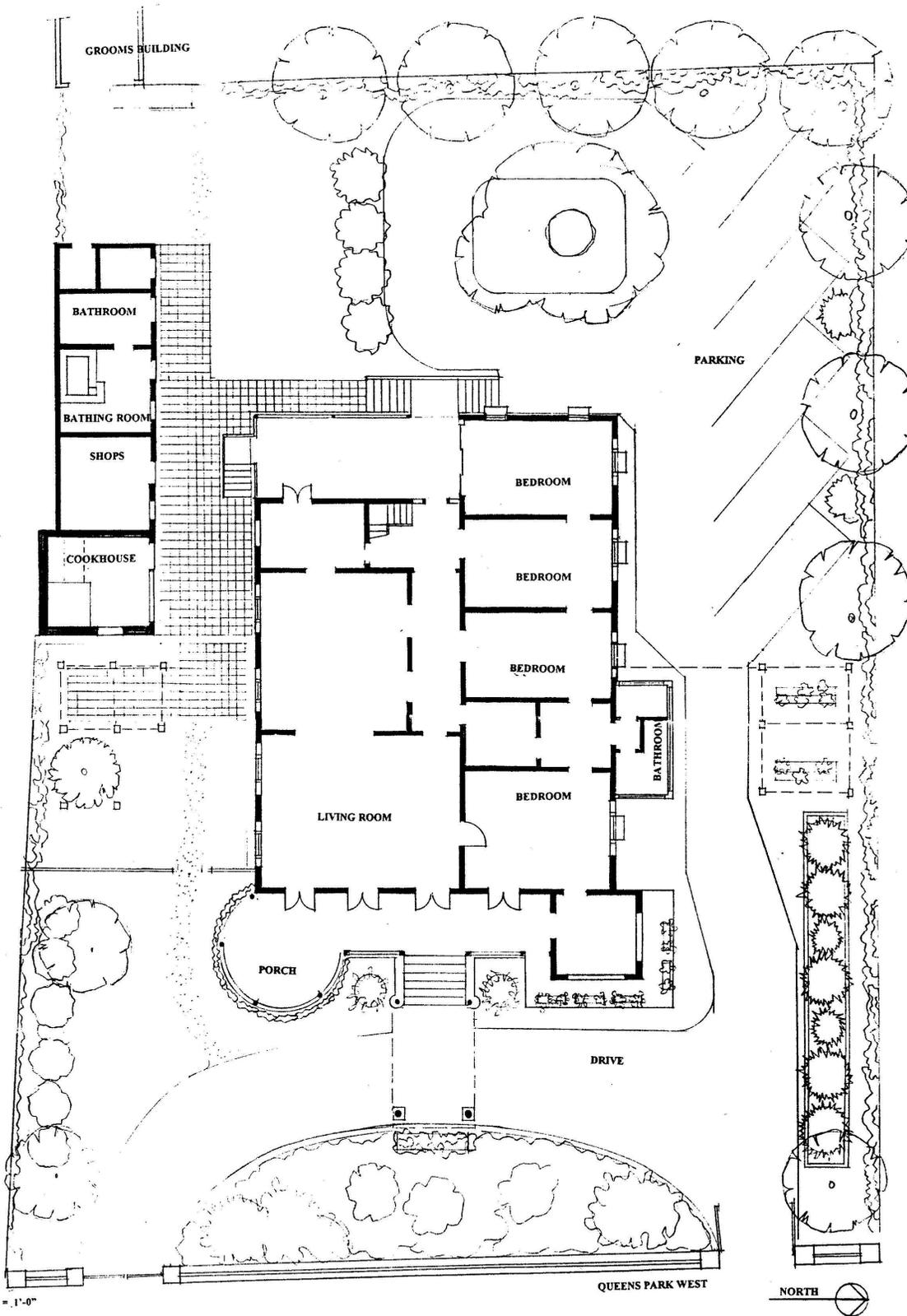


FRONT PORCH



INTERIOR





**BOISSIERE HOUSE FLOOR PLAN  
AND SITE PLAN**  
12 Queens Park West, Port-of-Spain

Drawn by CVE: Caribbean Volunteer Expeditions  
Box 388, Corning, New York 14830, USA  
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