



*Photograph of Riversdale House Museum
Prince George's County Department of Parks and Recreation
<http://history.pg parks.com/Home.htm>*

Riversdale in Context

Essays on Riversdale House Museum and the people who lived there

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Introduction

Riversdale Mansion is an early nineteenth-century house located approximately six miles north of Washington, D.C., between Hyattsville and College Park in Prince George's County, Maryland. Riversdale was home to two generations of Calverts, descendants of Maryland's founding family. George and his Belgian-born wife, Rosalie, moved into the mansion in 1803. Their son, Charles Benedict Calvert, also made Riversdale his home and turned the plantation into an agricultural showcase.

The following essays provide information about the mansion and its inhabitants. For more information about the mansion and how to visit, please go to: http://history.pgparcs.com/sites_and_museums/Riversdale_House_Museum.htm Additional information is available on the Riversdale Historical Society's website, found here: <http://www.riversdale.org/> For more information on Charles Benedict Calvert, the founder of the University of Maryland, please visit: <http://www.lib.umd.edu/special/projects/cbc/home>

Riversdale: The House and Its Families

By Jennifer N. Evans and Jill F. Reilly

Flemish émigré Henri Joseph Stier constructed the Riversdale Mansion near Bladensburg, Maryland, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Before the house's completion, Stier planned for his family's return to Europe and left Riversdale in the custody of his daughter, Rosalie, and her husband, George Calvert.

This essay will trace the histories of the branches of the Stier and Calvert families from which Rosalie and George were descended.

It will also depict how Riversdale Mansion evolved over the course of two centuries: the realization of Henri Stier's vision; a golden age as the home of George and Rosalie and later their son, Charles Benedict Calvert; a chameleon phase as a boarding house, a rental home, a country club, and an office building; and its reincarnation as a historic house museum, interpreted to reflect the days of George and Rosalie.

The Calvert Family

In 1625, James I of England granted George Calvert, son of a Yorkshire landholder and graduate of Oxford University, the title "Baron of Baltimore" in recognition of his years of loyal service to the British Crown. Deeply interested in American colonization, Calvert unfortunately failed in his attempt to settle in Newfoundland. King Charles I, James's successor, granted Calvert the territory north of the Potomac River. George Calvert died, however, before the grant was finalized. In June 1632, the final charter establishing a colony called Maryland, in honor of Queen Henrietta Maria, went to George's eldest son, Cecil Calvert. [\[1\]](#)

Cecil outfitted two vessels, the *Ark* and the *Dove*, which set sail in October 1633 with approximately 140 passengers, mostly Protestants who had some experience farming. The Protestants were joined by about seventeen Catholic gentlemen and two Jesuit priests. Staying behind to protect his interests in England, Cecil appointed his brother, Leonard, to act as governor. On March 3, 1634, the settlers entered the Potomac River and celebrated the Feast of Annunciation on March 25 on St. Clement's (now Blakistone) Island. Shortly thereafter, Leonard Calvert made peace with the local Indians and began to build around a spot soon called St. Mary's. [\[2\]](#)

During the next century, the Calvert family's history continued to be tied intimately to that of the growing colony. [\[3\]](#) In 1748, Benedict Calvert, the illegitimate but acknowledged son of the fifth Lord Baltimore, Charles Calvert, married his cousin, Elizabeth Calvert, only surviving child of Charles Calvert, Governor of Maryland, 1720-1727. Benedict's extensive landholdings in Prince George's County included a 7,600-acre estate called "His Lordship's Kindness" and a hunting lodge. A portion of the estate, called Mount Airy, was the birthplace of Benedict's son, George Calvert, in 1768. [\[4\]](#)

George Calvert followed his family's tradition of public service by representing Prince George's County in the General Assembly of Maryland from 1796 to 1799. The young legislator met his future wife, Rosalie Eugenia Stier, in the state capital, Annapolis. [5]

The Stier Family

The Stiers were an aristocratic, landed family from the region around Antwerp, Flanders. Henri Joseph Stier and his wife, Marie Louise Peeters, maintained a townhouse in the port city of Antwerp, north of Brussels in present-day Belgium. In addition to their city residence, the Stiers owned a small, medieval castle, the Castle Cleydael at Aartselaar, near Antwerp, and a country home, Chateau du Mick. [6] Most residents of Flanders spoke Flemish or French, like the Stiers, although the region was under the rule of the Austrian Hapsburg Empire in the late eighteenth century. [7]

Members of the aristocracies throughout Europe, such as the Stiers, regarded with dismay the developments of the French Revolution as they unfolded between 1789 and 1799. The storming of the Bastille launched the bourgeois and peasant (Third Estate) attack on the upper levels of French society. The National Constituent Assembly abolished feudalism and redistributed property from the Catholic Church to the bourgeoisie and "sansculottes" (workers). Many French nobles, Catholic clergy, and aristocrats of France were imprisoned and executed; thousands of others immigrated to parts of Europe and the United States. [8]

The French Republic declared war on Austria and Prussia in April 1792. After months of defeats, the French army claimed victories between September 1792 and April 1793, leading to their occupation of Belgium, Rhineland, Savoy, and Nice. Whenever the Republic gained control over territories, it established republics and abolished feudalism. The most successful faction of the revolutionary French government during this period was the Montagnards. Montagnard reforms included the institution of limited prices (the Maximum), taxes on the rich, poor relief, free education, and the confiscation and sale of properties belonging to émigré citizens. Revolts and protest to these reforms in Normandy, Brittany, Provence, and several cities led to a violent response from the Montagnard government under the leadership of Robespierre. During the Reign of Terror, they arrested over 300,000 treasonous suspects and executed about 17,000, including King Louis XVI. [9]

Although defeats in spring 1793 led the French military to retreat from Flanders, victories in June 1794 prompted their reentry and reoccupation. [10] As the French revolutionist army crossed the border of Flanders in June 1794, the Stiers fled their home in Antwerp. Like other émigrés of the aristocracy, they feared for their lives. First, they resettled further north in the Netherlands, also part of the Hapsburg Empire. From Amsterdam, Henri, Marie Louise, and their three children, Isabelle, Charles Jean, and Rosalie, sailed to Philadelphia. In addition, Isabelle's husband, Jean Michel van Havre; their three-year-old daughter, Louise; Charles's new wife, Marie (Mimi) van Havre; and two servants joined the Stiers. The family's arrival was noted in Philadelphia's *American Daily Advertiser* on October 13, 1794. [11] The Stiers had left just in time. By the winter of 1794, Flanders and the Netherlands were completely under the French Republic's control, and the puppet Batavian Republic had been established by 1795. [12]

Although they left their properties behind, the Stier family brought their most valuable (and portable) assets - sixty-three paintings - with them to the United States. Before his death, Jean Egide Peeters, Marie Stier's father assembled the collection, which included paintings by Anthony Van Dyke, Titian, and Rembrandt. [13] As an educated man of culture and a direct descendant of artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), Stier greatly appreciated the paintings and understood that the group of Old World masters in his possession was "the most outstanding collection of its type in the United States at that time." [14]

The family was quickly accepted into the highest social circles of Philadelphia, but Henri Stier desired to reduce the cost of his living arrangements. He had recently received news of additional taxes being levied on émigrés by the French. In addition, there was concern about contracting yellow fever in the city; many wealthy Philadelphians made arrangements to leave the city during the summer and early autumn to escape the threat. [15] For these reasons, Henri Stier, his wife, and seventeen-year-old Rosalie moved to Strawberry Hill, an estate near Annapolis, in the fall of 1795. The van Havre and Charles Stier families remained in Philadelphia, moving to Alexandria, Virginia, by the end of 1795. [16]

By November 1797, the Stiers had once again relocated. This time they moved to what is now known as the Paca House, a large, two-story, brick home in Annapolis built by William Paca, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and later governor of Maryland. [17] Now twenty years old, Rosalie enjoyed the serious attentions of George Calvert, but her father was reluctant to give his approval to the couple. Stier was undecided about remaining in America and did not wish to be separated from his youngest daughter. Calvert persisted. [18] Mimi Stier, Rosalie's sister-in-law, wrote to her husband that George had presented Rosalie with a kerchief pin with his monogram, surround with pearls and locks of his hair. She continued in her letter, "He is a man who cannot be resisted, and my sister loves him well and rightly so. He woos her so tenderly and with such gallantry that a girl must yield. I didn't think it possible for an American to be so amiable or that Calvert could be so gallant." [19] The couple was married on June 11, 1799, in Annapolis. Rosalie adjusted to her new life on Calvert's two-thousand-acre tobacco farm on the Patuxent River, Mount Albion. [20]

Her father, meanwhile, made preparations to build a house on 729 ¼ acres of land near Bladensburg that he purchased in September 1800. [21] From October 1800 until August 1802, the Stiers lived at Bostwick House in Bladensburg, Maryland, while construction on Riversdale commenced. During this time, Rosalie gave birth to the first of nine children, Caroline Maria. [22]

Bladensburg was located in Prince George's County, Maryland, and situated on the main road between Baltimore and a growing new capital city. A branch of the Anacostia River had flowed through the thriving port city until silt from generations of farming made it unnavigable by the late eighteenth century. According to Alan Virta, in his history of Prince George's County, "Bladensburg, in the colonial era, was second only to Upper Marlboro in population and importance." [23] As such, the town still offered certain amenities, such as a store and social opportunities. In fact, antebellum Prince George's County, the "greatest tobacco-producing county in Maryland," boasted a number of estates and prominent citizens. For example, the

Richard Lowndes family residence, Blenheim, was located in Bladensburg, and the Snowden family built Montpelier in nearby Laurel. [\[24\]](#)

The Stiers resided at Riversdale from August 1802 to June 1803, when they permanently returned to their family homes in Belgium.

The Mansion

Henri Stier had definite ideas about his new country house. He settled on a basic design with wings and employed the services of Benjamin Latrobe, future architect of the United States Capitol, to draw up a plan. Unhappy with the slow pace with which the project was progressing, Stier terminated his agreement with Latrobe and contracted with William Loring to supervise the construction of the house. Stier had previous experience with construction when he built his country home, the Château du Mick, in Belgium in the 1780s. The Riversdale project, however, was a huge undertaking. Stier not only wanted a house but also overseer's quarters, slave housing, and a blacksmith's shop. Even gathering materials was difficult, since Stier estimated 300 to 400 thousand bricks would need to be manufactured on site; he also need large amounts of lime and oyster shells for plaster and mortar as well as nails. [\[25\]](#)

The work progressed slowly, and the Stiers moved into the unfinished house in August 1802. Hearing that it was safe to return to Belgium, the Stiers and van Havres left the United States in June 1803. Mimi and Charles Stier had preceded them by almost two years, returning in September 1801. Henri Stier left the uncompleted house in the care of his daughter, Rosalie, and her husband, George, with the understanding that the couple could live there if they wished. For the next eighteen years, the Calverts made their home in the mansion. [\[26\]](#)

Rosalie worked hard to complete the house and its grounds. Along with her husband, she oversaw the continued construction of Riversdale. Rosalie also took it upon herself to hire William Russell Birch of Philadelphia as her landscape architect. At her request, her father, brother, and sister sent her the most fashionable home furnishings from Europe and advice on selecting quality items in America. [\[27\]](#) For example, Rosalie closed one of her letters to her father with a reminder: "In my letter I asked you to please send me a pair of candelabra to place on the mantel in the drawing room in the same styles as the ones you had here, with bronze figures (those are the nicest I have ever seen)." [\[28\]](#) To compliment the European elegance of the house's architecture, she blended American and European styles in the interior décor and the cultivation of the gardens and grounds. [\[29\]](#) Rosalie explained to her sister, "[There] is a lot of talk about our house, but not because it is so splendid, since many in the Baltimore area greatly surpass it and even more beautiful ones are being built every year. The reason people talk about our house is because of its distinctive style, and people always much admire anything done by Europeans." [\[30\]](#)

From the moment the Calverts established their home at Riversdale, until Rosalie's death in 1821, the mansion and its surrounding plantation bustled with numerous servants and slaves and a growing number of Calvert children. Although the Calverts did not entertain at home as much as many others of their social standing did, Rosalie did host dinners and parties for her select

group of close friends. Rosalie and George also were part of a social circle that included European expatriates and diplomats in Washington, D.C. [\[31\]](#)

Shortly before Rosalie's final illness and death at Riversdale in 1821, her eldest daughter, Caroline, debuted on the social scene in the nation's capital. Rosalie had hopes for her daughter to make a good match, although she was a shy young woman. Responsibility fell upon the shoulders of the widowed George Calvert to assist his children in their passage to adulthood and matrimony. The task was not easy for Calvert. While he was pleased by Caroline's marriage to Thomas Willing Morris, he strongly disapproved of George Henry's engagement to Elizabeth Steuart and Eugenia's to Charles Henry Carter. Both children left their father's house in turn and married without his blessing. The youngest daughter, Julia, married Dr. Richard Henry Stuart without any opposition from her father. When George died in 1838, only his youngest son, Charles Benedict, was still unmarried and living at home. A year later, he married Charlotte Augusta Norris of Baltimore. [\[32\]](#)

Changing Hands

After the death of his father, George Calvert, Charles Benedict took charge of Riversdale, molding it into a model farm. Charles Benedict was a leader in Maryland agricultural circles, eager to implement the best new methods and to spread knowledge about farming to others. He actively participated in agricultural societies, serving as the first president of the Maryland State Agricultural Society, and influenced the establishment of the United States Department of Agriculture in 1862. As one of the founders of the Maryland Agricultural College, which would later become the University of Maryland, he contributed his vision, financial backing, and land -- a portion of his Riversdale plantation became the site for the college's campus. Charles Benedict Calvert lived at Riversdale mansion until his death in 1864, at which time his property was divided among his heirs. [\[33\]](#)

Many family pieces, including furniture, house wares, and books, were sold in an auction in 1877, after the death of Charles Benedict's widow, Charlotte. The mansion stayed in the Calvert family until 1887. [\[34\]](#)

During the next eighty years, ownership of Riversdale changed hands several times, and the mansion served a number of purposes. In 1887, New York businessmen John Fox and Alexander Lutz acquired the mansion and 475 surrounding acres. On March 23, 1889, Fox, Lutz, and seven other individuals formed the Riverdale Park Company to develop a suburb convenient to Washington, D.C. They used the mansion as their headquarters during development and later sold it to Fanny Kelley Gordon. According to oral histories, Gordon converted the mansion and operated it as a boarding housing from 1893 to 1912 but eventually abandoned it. In 1912, Thomas Pickford, a builder in Washington, purchased the home and proceeded to restore it. Unable to convince his wife to move to Riversdale, Pickering searched for a purchase or lease arrangement. During the 1910s, A. H. Lofstrand operated the Lord Baltimore Country Club out of the mansion for a brief time. [\[35\]](#)

In 1917, Senator Hiram Johnson of California began leasing Riversdale mansion. In 1929, Senator Thaddeus Caraway of Arkansas and his wife took possession of the house. Caraway died

two years later, but his widow, Senator Hattie Caraway of Arkansas, who was the first woman elected to the United States Senate, continued to live there until 1932. Congressman Abraham Lafferty of Oregon was the last private owner of Riversdale. In 1949, he sold the house and four surrounding acres to the county government, which used it as offices for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) until the mid-1960s. [\[36\]](#)

Restoration

In 1967, a group of residents in Riverdale Park, Maryland, formed the Riversdale Historical Society (RHS). After successfully protecting the Calvert Family Cemetery, they began the long process of raising funds and awareness to support the restoration of the Riversdale mansion. At that time, the house served as offices for the M-NCPPC. RHS hosted annual open houses to introduce the community to the story of Riversdale mansion. In 1977, RHS was legally incorporated as a non-profit organization. They persuaded M-NCPPC to apply for a grant from the Maryland Historic Trust and move their offices out of the mansion. By 1982, the offices were gone, and a year later, RHS began holding Sunday afternoon tours. [\[37\]](#)

The changes to the house made by various owners over the course of eight decades created a large-scale restoration project. The Maryland Historic Trust grant and fundraising by RHS provided the funding for the restoration. Originally, M-NCPPC decided to restore the house to 1887, because not much documentation existed for any earlier period. In the early 1980s, however, RHS members learned of a collection of letters written by Rosalie that survived in a family collection in Belgium. RHS paid for reproduction of the letters so they could have a set in Maryland. Margaret Law Callcott, a RHS member, set out to edit a volume of the letters, which would become *Mistress of Riversdale*. Based on this discovery, RHS petitioned the Maryland Historic Trust to change plans for restoration to depict the era of George and Rosalie Calvert. In 1987, the Riversdale mansion closed for restoration and reopened to the public in 1993. [\[38\]](#)

Four years later, on December 9, 1997, the Secretary of Interior, Bruce Babbitt, announced the designation of Riversdale as a National Historic Landmark, officially recognizing the property's national importance. Susan G. Pearl, a research/architectural historian employed by M-NCPPC, prepared the nomination that thoroughly describes and documents the Riversdale mansion. The report includes floor plans; photographic images; maps; architectural information; and a statement on the house's historical significance. Pearl explains, "Riversdale is an outstanding combination of the classic Federal-style Maryland architecture and European decorative detail." The house is also important because of the prominence of the Calvert family who lived there, she continues, "and for the fact that original family papers survive to document the building and furnishing of the mansion and grounds." [\[39\]](#)

Today, the Riversdale mansion, home of the Calvert family, is open to the public as a historic house museum. It is maintained by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission and additionally supported by the Riversdale Historical Society. [\[40\]](#)

Notes

[1] Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Prince George's County Regional Office, *The Calvert Mansion "Riversdale"* (Riversdale, Md.: M-NCPPC, 1950; reprint 1958), 1-3; Enoch Pratt Free Library, "The Portraits of the Six Lords Baltimore: A History of the Calverts and their Holding in the United Kingdom"

<<http://www.epfl.net/exhibits/lordsbaltimore/calvertbackground.html>>, and "The Portraits of the Six Lords Baltimore: George Calvert, First Lord Baltimore (1580? - 1632)" <<http://www.epfl.net/exhibits/lordsbaltimore/george.html>>.

[2] *The Calvert Mansion "Riversdale,"* 3-4. Enoch Pratt Free Library, "The Portraits of the Six Lords Baltimore: Cecil Calvert, Second Lord Baltimore (1606 - 1675)"

<<http://www.epfl.net/exhibits/lordsbaltimore/cecil.html>>.

[3] For more information about the history of Maryland, see Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland: A Middle Temperament* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press in association with the Maryland Historical Society, 1988); Maryland State Archives, "All About Maryland," <<http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/msa/homepage/html/mdgov.html>>; Maryland Humanities Council, "Maryland History and Culture Bibliography" <<http://www.mdhc.org/bibliotest/>>. For more on historic sites in Prince George's County, Maryland, see Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, "Prince George's County: Historic Sites and Museums," <<http://www.pgparcs.com/places/historicsites.html>>.

[4] *The Calvert Mansion "Riversdale,"* 4-6. The Calvert family made a lasting impression in the history of Maryland and Prince George's County. See Garry Wheeler Stone, "Manorial Maryland" *Maryland Historical Magazine* 82 (Spring 1987): 3-36; Richard Cox, *A Guide to the Microfilm Edition of the Calvert Papers* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1973); Louise Joyce Heinton, *Prince George's Heritage: Sidelights on the Early History of Prince George's County, Maryland from 1696 to 1800* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, [1972]); R. Lee Van Horn, *Out of the Past: Prince Georgians and Their Land* (Riverdale, Md.: Prince George's County Historical Society, 1976). For information on individuals and branches of the Calvert family, see John Bailey Nicklin, "The Calvert Family," in *Maryland Genealogies: A Consolidation of Articles from the Maryland Historical Magazine*. 2 vols. (Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 1980); Sara Catlin, "Benedict Calvert, Esq.: Man of Maryland." *Riversdale Letter* 19 no. 2 (Spring 2002): 2-3; John Beverly Riggs, "Certain Early Maryland Landowners in the Vicinity of Washington" *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* vols. 48-49 (1949): 249-263; Anne E. Yentsch, *A Chesapeake Family and Their Slaves: A Study in Historical Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Alice Coyle Torbert, *Eleanor Calvert and Her Circle* (New York: William-Frederick Press, 1950).

[5] On George Calvert, see *The Calvert Mansion "Riversdale,"* 6; Margaret Law Callcott, ed. *Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert, 1795-1821* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 16-17.

[6] For more information about Stier homes, see *Riversdale Letter* vol. 7, no. 29.

[7] "Belgium: History," Encyclopedia.com.

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/section/belgium_history.asp>.

[8] "French Revolution," *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* vol. 4 (15th edition, Chicago: 1995), 978-979.

[9] Ibid.; Donald Greer, *The Incidence of the Emigration during the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), 40.

[10] Ibid.

[11] *Mistress of Riversdale*, 1-2.

[12] Christina A. Davis, ed. *The Riverdale Story: Mansion to Municipality* (Riverdale Park: Town of Riverdale Park, 1996), 4; "Belgium: History," Encyclopedia.com, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/section/belgium_history.asp>; "French Revolution," *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* vol 4 (15th edition, Chicago: 1995), 978-979.

[13] *Mistress of Riversdale*, 2.

[14] *Friends of Preservation* vol. XVI, no. 1.

[15] *Mistress of Riversdale*, 3-5.

[16] Ibid., 7.

[17] Ibid., 14-16.

[18] Ibid., 17-19.

[19] Ibid., 19.

[20] Ibid., 19-22.

[21] Today the remains of the Mount Albion plantation are known as Goodwood.

[22] *Mistress of Riversdale*, 22-24.

[23] Alan Virta, *Prince George's County: A Pictorial History* (Virginia Beach, Va: Donning Co., 1998), 40.

[24] Ibid., 86.

[25] *Mistress of Riversdale*, 27-28; on plaster and mortar, see *The Riversdale Story*, 8; for more information on construction, see *Riversdale Letter* vol. 17, no. 66 and vol. 18, no. 67.

[26] *Mistress of Riversdale*, 35-38.

[27] Ibid., 135-137.

[28] Ibid.; quote taken from Rosalie Calvert's 17 November 1806 letter to Henri Stier, as cited in *Mistress of Riversdale*, 152.

[29] For more information on Rosalie Calvert's involvement in planning and maintaining the garden at Riversdale, see Jill F. Reilly, "Rosalie in Her Riversdale Garden".

[30] Letter from Rosalie to her sister, Isabelle van Havre, 20 July 1806, as cited in *Mistress of Riversdale*, 145.

[31] Ibid., Chapter 5, "Completing the American Chateau," 135-178.

[32] Ibid., 374-378.

[33] Ibid., 387-388.

[34] Ibid., 388.

[35] Ibid.; Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, "Riversdale Mansion: History," <http://www.pgparcs.com/places/eleganthistoric/riversdale_history.html>.

[36] Ibid.

[37] To find more information about RHS and the mansion's restoration, see Ann Ferguson and Leigh Ryan, "Preserving Riversdale: A Brief History of the Riversdale Historical Society" *Riversdale Letter* vol. 19, no.1 (Winter 2002): 2-3.

[38] Ibid; *Mistress of Riversdale*.

[39] Only about 3 percent of properties on the National Register of Historic Places are granted status as National Historic Landmarks. Riversdale had been listed on the National Register since 1973. "Riversdale Designated a National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior" *Riversdale Letter* 16 (Spring 1998): 1-2, includes the quoted passage from the Riversdale nomination by Susan G. Pearl. The historic family papers to which she refers include Rosalie Stier Calvert's letters to her family. Margaret Law Callcott edited a volume of Rosalie's letters, *Mistress of Riversdale*.

[40] For more information about visiting Riverdale, see <http://www.pgparcs.com/places/eleganthistoric/riversdale_visitor.html>.

Rosalie Stier Calvert as a Woman of Letters: A Bibliographic Essay on Women and Reading in the United States, England, and France, 1794-1820

By Jill F. Reilly

Rosalie Stier Calvert (1778-1821), the mistress of Riversdale Plantation, was an avid reader throughout her adolescence and adulthood. Although Rosalie learned English at her convent school before arriving in the Philadelphia in 1794, she improved her fluency by reading British novels with her mother. As a young mother, Rosalie continued to spend a portion of each day reading. She purchased books from Philadelphia, New York, and London, and her family sent her books published in Paris. She maintained her intellectual ties to French and British culture while acquiring American reading tastes and habits. A study of her reading provides insight into the reading habits and interests of privileged, educated women of the United States, England, and France between 1794 and 1820.

The recreation of Rosalie's library collection at Riversdale was derived from several sources. Her collected letters provide titles that Rosalie read and hint at genres and authors she might have enjoyed. Scholarship on the history of reading with a focus on women's reading illuminates the cultural discourse surrounding reading women; the private significance of reading for individual women; and the book titles, authors, and poets popular with women of the period.

I

Margaret Law Callcott's edition of the correspondence of Rosalie Stier Calvert, *Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert, 1795-1821* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), provides an interpretive framework. In addition to a variety of topics, Callcott highlights Rosalie's passion for reading and literature. Throughout her life, Rosalie read for pleasure and made time for reading as part of her daily routine. She viewed reading as "a relaxation after [her] domestic cares" (196).

Her letters revealed Rosalie's interest in French and German drama, especially the works of Gessner in translation (185) and Racine, Corneille, Delille, and Molière in the original French (308). Her love of poetry, biography, and travel literature (196) surfaced in her letters. Also mentioned are her favorite authors and poets, including Sir Walter Scott (283), Lord Byron (283, 299), and Thomas Moore (131, 158-159).

Rosalie read and reread the work of Irish poet Thomas Moore with "renewed pleasure each time" (158). Her favorite poems included "Love and Reason" from *Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Little, Esq.*, "Dismal Swamps" from *Epistles, Odes, and Other Poems*, and "Ode XVI" from *Odes of Anacreon* (185). At a social gathering in Washington, D.C., Rosalie met Moore. "Mr. Moore is a young man who is as agreeable in his manner and conversation as he is talented as a poet, and that is saying a great deal!" Rosalie explained to her brother (158).

In addition to drama and poetry, Rosalie enjoyed reading novels. Madame de Staël's *Corinne* was a particular favorite, a copy of which she received as a gift from her sister and subsequently encouraged her brother to read (196, 303-5). Her active imagination and familiarity with Gothic romance may have engendered her fears of living in a Belgian castle as her brother did. "After

you have read all the romances about apparitions and trap doors, don't you shudder passing by those towers and winding staircases in the dark?" she asked (210).

There must have been schoolbooks and juvenile literature in the Riversdale collection, as Rosalie was intermittently responsible for educating her children at home. Subjects such as French, English grammar and composition, history, geography, and religion would have been included in Rosalie's curriculum.

These hints and probabilities provide a tantalizing glimpse into Rosalie's reading habits and imaginative world. As her letters suggest, discussions of literature were conversational topics among relatives and friends (196). Acquaintances often borrowed books from one another because printed volumes were so costly. Subscription libraries such as the Library Company of Philadelphia and the Library Company of Baltimore were another popular option for voracious readers in American cities of the colonial and early republic periods. "You know how books travel in this country (much to the detriment of their covers), but it is an excellent idea," Rosalie explained (196). The existence of lending libraries and the common practice of borrowing among friends make it difficult to determine what books Rosalie Calvert might actually have owned. There is no way of distinguishing between which volumes she borrowed and which she purchased.

II

To piece together this picture of what educated, American, British, and French women read during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, I relied upon the work of academic historians and literary scholars who study the history of reading. While the history of the book focuses on publishing history and technological developments, the history of reading is a relatively new and developing field of research, which places reader response in historical context. Marginalia in published books, diaries, and letters like those Rosalie wrote to her family provide evidence and primary sources for scholars who seek to explore the cultural and personal significance of reading in a certain time and place. A great deal of scholarship on the history of reading has focused on women's experiences.

In *A Colonial Woman's Bookshelf* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), Kevin J. Hayes explores the private writings of prominent Colonial American women, such as Abigail Adams, to reconstruct their intellectual lives. Structured like an extended bibliographic essay, this book offers a broad selection of titles that were available to colonial American women readers. Hayes provides an analysis of various women's reactions to their reading, especially Richardson's *Clarissa*, and the significance of reading in their daily lives. He also explains the cultural context in which men proscribed what women should and should not read.

Hayes's examination of American men's anxiety about women's reading complements Elisabeth B. Nichols's "Blunted Hearts': Female Readers and Printed authority in the Early Republic" (in Barbara Ryan and Amy M. Thomas, eds., *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers' Interactions with Literature, 1800-1950* [Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002] pp. 1-28). Nichols contrasts men's conception of reading as a work activity for women with women's designation of reading as a leisure pastime. The social aspects of reading were important to women, Nichols

argues, and reading aloud in groups was popular. Schoolgirls and adult women alike corresponded with one another about their novel reading. Patricia Howell Michaelson describes the social dimensions of reading aloud for women readers of Austen in *Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading, and Speech in the Age of Austen* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2002).

In "'The Cultivated Mind': Reading and Identity in a Nineteenth-Century Reader" (in *Reading Acts* pp. 29-52), Allison M. Scott explores the patchwork national identity constructed by a well-read Scottish immigrant woman. The importance of one Scottish expatriate's reading of the works of Scottish authors corresponds with Rosalie Calvert's continuing interest in French literature.

The history of reading has received much attention from historians of France and Western Europe. The edition of scholarly essays edited by Dominique De Courcelles and Carmen Val Julián, *Des femmes et des livres: France et Espagne, XIVE - XVIIe siècle* (Paris: École nationale des chartes, 1999), focuses on the libraries of noble women, which included many religious texts, classical works in Latin, history, and poetry. Many of the contributors distinguish between merely owning a book and actually reading it. Angelica Rieger and Jean-François Tonard's similar collection, *La Lecture au féminin: La Lectrice dans la littérature française du Moyen Age au XX e siècle* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), devotes significant attention to the cultural meanings attached to a woman who reads, a woman who has access to knowledge and perhaps power. Contributors also explore the importance of imagination and national identity.

In *Readers and Society in Nineteenth-Century France: Workers, Women, Peasants* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), Martyn Lyons creatively applies evidence to support her arguments about the subversive power of reading. Most histories of reading favor the wealthy and educated members of a society. Lyons, however, explores what reading might have meant to segments of society whose access to reading materials was limited or restricted. Her chapters on women explore the antagonism between men's public pronouncements about what women should read, namely Catholic devotionals, and women's private decisions about what they wished to read, usually popular novels and memoirs. Many French women read sentimental novels contrary to the advice of clergy members and male family members, participating in a subversive activity. Lyons argues that, when reading, women created spaces of personal autonomy for themselves and their ideas.

Moyra Haslett's *Byron's Don Juan and the Don Juan Legend* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) contends that, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, reading "appeared to some to offer a dangerous subjectivity to groups whose use of such potential individualism threatened subversion - the working class and women. And the interaction between women and the narrative imaginative text was increasingly viewed as not only gendered but sexualized" (193-194). Specifically, the work sheds light on the cultural significance of the efforts to control women's reading by focusing on the controversy surrounding Lord Byron's *Don Juan*. Byron's earlier work had been popular among ladies and considered appropriate reading for women. However, critics encouraged husbands and fathers to keep this sexually explicit work hidden from the impressionable ladies in their households.

Although some critics also felt that sentimental novels and Gothic romances provoked the emotions of ladies, these two extremely popular genres received less censure and were not considered unfit reading for respectable women. Rosalie Calvert especially enjoyed Gothic romances. Two works of literary criticism proved helpful in my efforts to pinpoint which titles Rosalie might have read. Susan Wolstenholme focuses on the most prominent romance writers in her study, *Writing Women as Readers: Gothic (Re)Visions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). Bette B. Roberts's *The Gothic Romance: Its Appeal to Women Writers and Readers in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Arno Press, 1980) explores reader response.

Roberts devotes her attention to the seven most popular Gothic romances written between 1785 and 1797, the peak period for the Gothic trend. Gothic novels offered a psychic escape for women who suffered oppression and emotional pain, she argues. Women readers identified with the imprisonment, persecution, and oppression that victimized heroines experienced in Gothic novels like *The Recess* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Gothic novelists contrasted the suspenseful, terrifying confinement of ruined medieval castles and the dramatic, emotional freedom of natural landscapes.

During Rosalie's lifetime, tension infused discussions of women's reading. Men often believed women should read only for educational and spiritual development, but many women chose to indulge in the imaginative escapes of narrative fiction. Rosalie Stier Calvert was a privileged woman whose father and husband allowed her a remarkable amount of personal autonomy. Free to make her own reading selections, Rosalie satisfied her intellect with histories, biographies, and works of great literature and suited her fancy popular novels.

This imaginative reconstruction of Rosalie's contribution to the Riversdale library incorporated primary research, close review of the secondary scholarship, and bibliographic exercises to construct a picture of Rosalie's reading experience. Although Rosalie was an exceptional American woman, she was a representative woman of her class and education who participated in the culture of the Atlantic World in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Rosalie in Her Riversdale Garden

By Jill F. Reilly

Rosalie Stier Calvert shared her father's passion for gardening, horticulture, and landscape architecture. During her married life, Rosalie received advice from her father, Henri Joseph Stier, on how to develop a mature garden that would blend flora from her ancestral home with that native to her adopted home. While an ocean separated father and daughter during these years, their mutual interest in gardening fortified their intellectual and emotional bonds. This essay will explore Rosalie's involvement in the landscape design of Riversdale and her devotion to the garden.

Members of Rosalie's social circle and class competed in efforts to cultivate the widest variety of plants on their estate grounds. Horticulture became increasingly popular in both Europe and the United States during the early nineteenth century, and the acquisition of numerous species sparked intellectual and aesthetic interest. The social dimensions of gardening during this period spread its popularity. Formal and informal circles of amateur gardeners formed to exchange seeds, bulbs, and gardening information. Henri Stier belonged to an informal group, because he delighted in acquiring new varieties of plants and new friends with whom he could discuss horticulture and landscape design.

Friends and acquaintances admired Henri's gardening talents, especially his success in cultivating Dutch tulips. Annual tulip shows and bulb sales held in the Stier garden helped to bolster Henri's reputation as a horticulturist. Visitors arrived when the tulips were in full bloom and placed numbered stakes in the soil next to flowers they wished to purchase. At the appropriate times, the bulbs were gathered and sold to those who had marked them. Tours, shows, and sales were social events that drew large crowds (Sarudy, p. 68).

After spending a number of years in rented homes in Philadelphia and Annapolis, the Stiers decided to establish a country estate. They envisioned beautiful landscaping and carefully tended gardens. The Stier family invested in land near the nation's new capital and began construction of the house and landscaping of the grounds. Riversdale was not complete when the French state threatened to repossess their ancestral properties in present-day Belgium. The family, excluding Rosalie who had married George Henry Calvert, returned to Europe.

Rosalie and George assumed ownership of the Riversdale plantation. Riversdale attracted interest from neighbors and visitors, because of its European design and style. As Rosalie developed the landscape's design and cultivated her plants, the garden gained renown as well.

Designing a garden was an intellectual, mathematic, and artistic project. In their gardens, Americans of the early republic balanced the useful (vegetables and fruit trees) with the beautiful (flowers). Privileged Americans favored European classical gardens with symmetrical patterns, fountains, and sculptures over the natural grounds style fashionable with the British.

Rosalie desired a garden containing both classical and natural elements in harmony. She had been inspired by her visit to George Washington's gardens at Mt. Vernon and by her memories of the Stier family gardens, especially the Chateau du Mick in present-day Belgium. The planned,

ornamental elements of the Riversdale garden included the falling terraces, long brick wall, and the orangerie. The natural grounds influence appeared in the open grounds and the artificial lake filled with fish (Buonocore, *passim*). The vegetable and herb garden was planted near the entrance to the kitchen.

The artist and architect William Russell Birch of Philadelphia drew plans for landscaping Riversdale in 1806. Rosalie discussed these plans with her father, but he never actually saw copies of the drawings. It was unusual, even for a woman of Rosalie's wealth and status, to have so much control of the design of her grounds, as this was typically a masculine pursuit (Sarudy, p. 60). One letter from her father included suggestions for planning the grounds and plantings:

I am glad to learn that you are using the architect Birch. You must not concern yourself about the cost of the plans. Copy them and send them to me. I'll give you my observations. Believe me that water in the landscape, like mirrors in a suite of rooms, forms the principal ornament. . . . You need to plant the surroundings and you don't have a nursery. You also have little choice of trees at your place, so don't fail to pay close attention to this advice: collect all kinds of seeds this autumn, both from your area and elsewhere, omitting none---spruce, holly, beech, elm, thorn, tulip-poplar, yew, birch, oak, willow. Try to get some larch---they create a majestic effect. In the fall I will send you all of these seeds. (Callcott, 142-3)

Henri's correspondence to his daughter provide evidence of and clues about the plants grown at the Riversdale Mansion. In addition to the tree varieties suggested in Henri's letter above, the Calverts may have planted pecan, maple, and walnut trees. Practical, useful plantings would have included apple, cherry, peach, orange, and lemon trees, as well as vegetables, kitchen herbs, and medicinal herbs. Among the flowers were probably roses, poppies, violets, geraniums, heliotrope, hyacinth, jasmine, tulips, and hydrangea (Buonocore, Appendix 1).

Watching her father's flowers and trees bloom in her Riversdale garden each spring comforted Rosalie and evoked memories of him. Rosalie confided in her father that when "I walk in the garden, each tree and rose planted by your own hand is of interest to me, and I take pleasure in watching them grow and caring for them" (Callcott, 48).

In addition to seed exchanges with her father, Rosalie probably purchased seeds and plants from nurseries in America and England. She received catalogs from Bartram's commercial nursery of Philadelphia. Several seed merchants were established in Annapolis and small towns surrounding the new capital city. Merchants of the time include Peter Bellet, John Lieutaud, and William and Margaret Booth (Sarudy, p.66-77).

Rosalie took great pleasure in daily strolls through her garden, noting its progress and breathing the fresh air. Gardening had gained acceptance as a healthy, virtuous activity for wealthy ladies in the early nineteenth century. In addition to physical benefits, Rosalie derived spiritual comfort from her garden. Occupying her time there eased Rosalie's loneliness and homesickness. "I want to make my garden my principal amusement," Rosalie claimed in 1804 (Callcott, 78). She found supervising in the garden to be both work and play. She encouraged this pastime to her daughter, Caroline, then four years old.

I am very busy with gardening at the moment. Half the garden is leveled off now, and they are working on the palings. Today I planted four groups of cherry trees between the house and the barn, with some rose bushes around. Next I am going to plant several clusters of willows, Italian poplars, and acacias on the north side. There is so much work to do that we don't know where to start . . . I have planted a large number of all the varieties of young fruit trees I could find, and I am going to fill the orchard with young apple trees everywhere there is room. Caroline also has a garden where she works all day long, but she often digs up the seeds she planted the day before. (Callcott, 79-80)

Besides designing and supervising her gardens, Rosalie occasionally potted plants in her "greenhouse" cellar space and took great care in personally planting bulbs sent by her father. Enslaved and free servants with gardening skill, however, provided the manual labor on the grounds of Riversdale. They conducted the daily work of planting seeds, weeding, picking fruit, and otherwise maintaining the floral gardens, orchards, and kitchen garden. Among the three hired servants was a German head gardener who performed difficult, heavy tasks and managed the other laborers.

In contrast to the physically taxing labor of grounds maintenance stands Rosalie's practice of tending a container garden. She nurtured the houseplants and bulb plants she kept indoors in the winter. Potted geraniums, lemon trees, and heliotropes decorated the Riversdale rooms used for entertaining. Her father's instructions provided guidance for the proper cultivation of the bulbs he sent, as he kept abreast of the current horticultural literature.

I thank you again for . . . the flower bulbs which arrived in the best possible condition. . . . I planted them myself with the greatest care, following your instructions exactly. I looked forward with so much anticipation to seeing them bloom and boasted to everyone that I now had the most beautiful collection in America. (Callcott, 183)

Rosalie's gardens at Riversdale remained one of her passions and occupied her thoughts even as she lay ill in bed at the end of her life. Her daughter Caroline recounted, "During the cessation of pain, she was busied in giving directions to her gardener, and even separated a quantity of seeds herself and said where and how she wished them to be planted" (Mistress 368). Throughout her life, gardening provided the mistress of Riversdale with both intellectual and physical exercise, with amusement and spiritual solace.

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Gardening in the United States, 1794-1821: A Bibliographic Essay

By Jill F. Reilly

At the urging of her father, Henri Joseph Stier, Rosalie Stier Calvert developed her knowledge about landscape design, horticulture, and practical gardening. The correspondence between father and daughter is filled with discussions and references to gardening. In *Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert, 1795-1821* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), editor Margaret Law Callcott illuminates the emotional importance of gardening to Rosalie and her father. Henri Stier sent seeds and often recommended the purchase of specific books on horticulture to his daughter.

Studying and practicing the art of gardening was common among members of Rosalie's social class in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Europeans, including the Stiers, considered the practice of gardening to be more developed on the continent and in England. The Stiers, however, were delighted by the interest in gardening that developed in the United States at the turn of the nineteenth century. In *American Gardens in the Eighteenth Century: "For Use or For Delight"* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), Ann Leighton explores the cultural significance of gardening among colonial Americans of different classes. While both urban and rural inhabitants maintained simple, practical kitchen gardens, only members of the upper class who owned country estates practiced ornamental horticulture and landscape design. In *Kitchen Gardening in America: A History* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993), David M. Tucker touches upon women's contributions to ornamental and kitchen gardening.

In *Horticulture in America to 1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950; reprint, Portland, Or.: Timber Press, 1988), U. P. Hedrick and Elisabeth Woodburn trace horticultural developments in the American colonies and early national period. Rather than studying the social context of botanical cultivation, the authors focus on the plants: botanical discoveries, developments, and challenges involved in bringing the European art and science of horticulture to a new continent. The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's *From Seed to Flower: Philadelphia, 1681-1876: A Horticultural Point of View* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 1976) offers a complimentary perspective, providing a survey of horticultural literature during this period.

Leighton's *American Gardens in the Nineteenth Century: "For Comfort and Affluence"* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987) traces the growing interest in gardens that took place in the early republic. Women of the upper classes in particular became involved in gardening as a virtuous and healthy pastime. They enjoyed the social dimensions of trading seeds and visiting friends' gardens as well. Another perspective on women's personal gardening experiences is Buckner Hollingsworth's *Her Garden Was Her Delight* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

While many women tended gardens, few had any influence over the design of the grounds. In this, Rosalie was exceptional. She employed the services of Philadelphia artist and architect William Russell Birch for assistance in designing the grounds and gardens of Riversdale Plantation. The details of Rosalie's vision for the garden are described in Susan C. Buonocore's *"Within Her Garden Wall": The Meaning of Gardening for the Republican Woman, Rosalie Stier*

Calvert and the Gardens of Riversdale (1803-1821) (Columbia: South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina, 1996). Buonocore argues that by designing the plantation's grounds Rosalie combined her own personal taste and preferences with the contemporary landscape design trends of Europe and America. "*Within Her Garden Wall*" emphasizes the intellectual, psychological, and spiritual benefits Rosalie derived from her Riversdale garden.

Barbara Wells Sarudy's study of gardening in the Chesapeake region, *Gardens and Gardening in the Chesapeake, 1700-1805* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), opens with a narrative portrait of William Faris, an innkeeper, clockmaker, and passionate gardener, and provides a fascinating glimpse into the personal and social meanings of flower and tree cultivation during this period. As a bourgeois urban-dweller, Faris was not a typical amateur horticulturalist. He, nevertheless, maintained connections to wealthy, landed gardeners, including Henri Stier. In *Gardens and Gardening in the Chesapeake*, Sarudy describes the aesthetic and practical elements of various types of gardens common in the colonial and early republic Chesapeake. She also explores some economic factors related to gardening - the seed and nursery trade and the labor of slaves and white servants. The book concludes by focusing on the social, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of gardening. Sarudy explores what motivated individuals like William Faris, Henri Stier, and Rosalie Calvert in their passionate interest in and practice of gardening.