



St. George's Parish Home, 18 Secretary Road



The St George's Rest Home dominates the hillside in 1991. This view is no longer possible as the trees and bushes have grown into a forest that blocks access to the front of the building.

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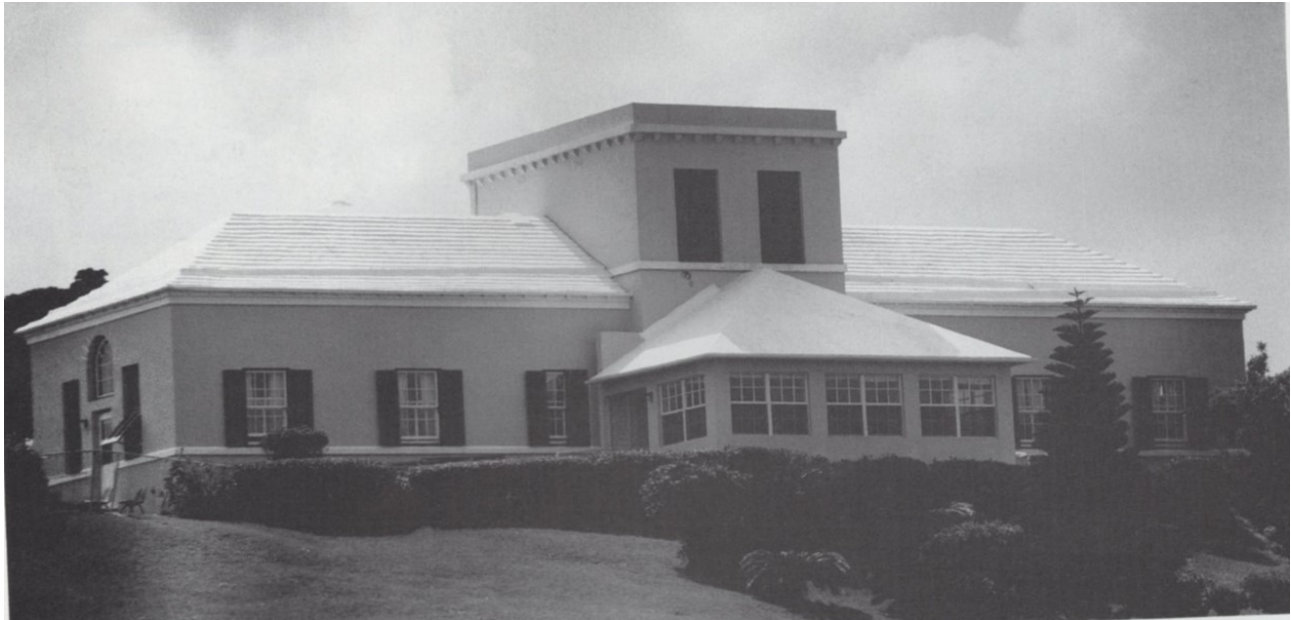
By Linda Abend and Margie Lloyd, Bermuda National Trust

This is part of a series of architectural articles by the Bermuda National Trust that will highlight some of Bermuda's endangered historic buildings.

Sarah Davenport, the eldest daughter of prosperous St George's merchant, John Davenport, died in 1873 and left the sum of £400 to the St George's Parish Vestry for the purpose of establishing "an eligible and healthy home for parishioners in need". The Poor House, as it was originally known, was built in 1881 in the former Government House Park and enjoyed sweeping views to the ocean. It replaced an earlier 'poor house' near Penno's Wharf. As an aside, Sarah's sister, Jane, was married to William Penno, the Deputy Military Storekeeper for the British garrison. It was he who built the wharf and two-storey warehouse that still bears his name.



Poor houses in the 19th century were intended to care for the 'worthy poor' of the parish and not newly-arrived impoverished strangers. This was especially necessary in St George's which saw large numbers of followers or 'groupies' who accompanied arriving British regiments and often put a strain on local charities. Although her history is not known, Margaret Smith was one of those in need. Born in St George's in 1837 Margaret resided at the Poor House for almost 40 years until her death at the age of 83 in 1920.



The St George's Rest Home in 1998. The hipped-roof addition in front of the tower was added sometime in the 20th century.

The former Poor House is a long hip-roofed building divided in the centre by a two-storey porch tower with dentil moulding decoration. It was designed for 12 men and 12 women. A shed-roofed extension at the rear housed the kitchen, dining hall and sick ward. The domed water tank is today hidden by overgrown vegetation. Originally the entrance had a splendid arched doorway with a quoin surround which has been obscured by a 20th century addition. In October 1895 there was a severe island-wide 'gale'. One of the casualties was the Poor House which, due to its very exposed site, had part of the roof blown off and the outhouses considerably damaged. The window on the western end was blown in, carrying with it the frame and all woodwork attached to it. Fortunately, no one was hurt.

In 1959 the term Poor House was considered 'unbecoming' and the name was changed to St George's Parish Home. In 1971 the building was transferred from the parish vestry to the Bermuda government and redesignated a rest home. By 2000 it had deteriorated so much that Health Minister Nelson Bascome ordered it to be renovated and the ten residents moved to other homes. Since 2016 there have been several planning applications to convert it into a funeral parlour. Sadly though, nothing has happened and the once impressive building remains abandoned as it continues to deteriorate and become a home for vagrants.



The forest of trees and bushes extend to the front façade of the building.



Both side wings have quoined arched windows over the doors.



The tower with its dentil moulding and the charming chimney behind the parapet roof are not features one would expect to see on an institutional building. Brand new electric meters appear to have been recently installed.

Source Notes: Bermuda's Architectural Heritage St George's, articles in *The Royal Gazette* from 1881 until 1959.