

**STEPHENS-PRIER HOUSE**, 249 Center Street (aka 3672 Richmond Road), Borough of Staten Island.  
Built c. 1857-1859.

Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 4437, Lot 26.

On July 14, 1998, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Stephens-Prier House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 7). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Two witnesses, representing the Preservation League of Staten Island and the Historic Districts Council, respectively, spoke in favor of the designation. No one spoke in opposition. Historic Richmond Town, the occupant of the building, has expressed its support for the designation.

### Summary

This two-and-one-half-story, five-bay, clapboard-covered house is the most impressive mid-nineteenth-century residence surviving in Richmondtown, the historic governmental center of Staten Island. Built around 1857 for Daniel Lake Stephens, a prosperous "gentleman," the house is located on the largest residential building lot in the village of Richmondtown and has frontages on Richmond Road, Center Street, and St. Patrick's Place. Symmetrical in design, the house has identical facades on Center Street and Richmond Road. Its transitional design incorporates Greek Revival and Italianate elements and features projecting columned porches and molded entrance surrounds with narrow sidelights and transoms. Large tripartite windows emphasize the center bay at the second story and all the windows have decorative surrounds. The building is capped by a continuous bracketed cornice and a distinctive cross-gabled roof with shallow pediments pierced by lunette windows.

After Daniel Lake Stephens' death in 1866, the house was occupied by several members of the Stephens family, notably Judge Stephen D. Stephens, Jr., a successful lawyer who served as the Richmond County Judge and Surrogate for three decades. In 1886 it was acquired by James E. Prier, a butcher. The Prier family owned the house until 1926 and again between 1931 and 1946. Since 1991, the house has been owned by the City of New York and now houses the administrative offices of Historic Richmond Town.



## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### The Development of Richmondtown<sup>1</sup>

Richmond County, encompassing all of Staten Island, was established in 1683 as one of the twelve original counties of New York, with Stony Brook, now Egbertville, its official county seat. Previously, the residents of Staten Island had relied on the Court of Sessions at Gravesend, Brooklyn, for the administration of laws, while the center of political activity on the island was at Oude Dorp, near the present South Beach. In 1711, the county government built a prison in the tiny village of Coccles Town.<sup>2</sup> This was considered a superior location for conducting governmental business due to its location at the island's geographical center, near the converging of roads leading to all parts of the island and at the head of the navigable Fresh Kills. In 1729, Coccles Town was officially chosen to be the new county seat and was renamed Richmondtown. A new county court house was constructed there that year.

British troops occupied Richmondtown during the Revolutionary War, establishing quarters in many of the village's buildings, burning the court house and other buildings upon their departure. Little development occurred during the next thirty years; however, a second county courthouse was constructed on Arthur Kill Road in 1793. Richmondtown began to grow around 1800 and was incorporated as a village within the Town of Southfield in 1823. By 1828 the First County Clerk's and Surrogate's Office was constructed to the east of the jail. The hotel, Richmond County Hall, was built around 1829 and soon became a popular gathering place for political and social events. The town's first public school opened about 1830.

Sensing the development potential of the town, Henry I. Seaman, a New York merchant who was secretary of the company that operated the plank road (later Richmond Avenue), purchased ninety acres of farmland to the east of the town center in 1836. Seaman had the land laid out into two new streets, Center Street and Court Place, and 25' by 100' building lots. A large plot on Center Street opposite Court Place was set aside for the construction of a new courthouse (the Third County Courthouse, now the Historic Richmond Town Visitors Center, built 1837, a designated New York City Landmark). Seaman also built several houses, known as "Seaman Cottages," and sold two corner lots to Austin Burke and Stephen D. Stephens, Sr., a cousin of Daniel Lake Stephens, who constructed

their own residences<sup>3</sup>. Due to the financial panic of 1837 Seaman was forced to sell his Richmondtown property, which eventually passed to Harmon Cropsey in 1854.<sup>4</sup> During the 1840s, the village continued to expand, in part because of the construction of a new stone bridge over Fresh Kills Creek at the junction of Richmond Road and Arthur Kills Road. The Washington Hotel was also built around 1840, on a site just north of the stone bridge, and around 1845 Isaac Marsh began construction of a carriage manufactory opposite the hotel. The Second County Clerk's and Surrogate's Office and a jail were constructed in 1848 and 1860, respectively. By the mid-nineteenth century, Richmondtown's position as the political and social center of the island was secure. The Stephens-Prier House, the Parsonage (1855) and the Edwards-Barton House (1869) are the most significant residential survivors of this expansive and prosperous period of the village's development.<sup>5</sup>

### The Stephens Family and the Early History of the Stephens-Prier House<sup>6</sup>

Daniel Lake Stephens, the son of John Stephens, Jr. (1772-1852) and Lana [Helen] Lake Stephens (dates undetermined) was born in New York City in 1810. His father, John Stephens, Jr. was an upholsterer who invested in real estate.<sup>7</sup> In the late 1820s, John Stephens and his family moved to Brooklyn Heights. Daniel Lake Stephens, who was blind, and his sister, Ann Eliza Stephens (1809-79), continued to live with their father in a house on Orange Street in Brooklyn until his death in 1852. John Stephens, Jr. left his son Daniel cash and his daughter Ann Eliza a house on White Street in Manhattan, as well as other real estate that was to be shared equally with their brother John I. Stephens, a banker living on Staten Island.<sup>8</sup> In 1854, Daniel and his sister moved to Staten Island to the home of their cousin Stephen Dover Stephens, Sr. (1808-83) and his wife Elizabeth Johnson Stephens (1811-83). Stephen D. Stephens was the proprietor of the Richmondtown general store, a major center of commercial life for the village, which also served as its post office. A "Jeffersonian Democrat," Stephen D. Stephens was one of leaders of the Democratic Party on Staten Island and held several public offices including county treasurer and deputy sheriff. He also served as secretary for various county organizations and was a member of the vestry at St. Andrew's Church in Richmondtown.

In March 1857, Daniel Lake Stephens bought an unimproved lot extending from Richmond Road to Center Street along the east side of St. Patrick's Place (then Garretson Street) from Harmon Cropsey. With a frontage of 130 feet along Richmond Road and 190 feet along St. Patrick's Place, this was the largest residential building site in the village and Stephens commissioned a large and impressive house for the site. Presumably the house was completed by 1859 when it was represented in *Walling's Atlas*. According to the Federal census of 1860, Daniel Stephens occupied the house with his second cousin, Ann E. McLean, a widow, who acted as housekeeper; her daughter Ann McLean (aged 14); a boarder, Phebe Randolph; and a Irish-immigrant servant, Ann Murphy.

Daniel Lake Stephens died in 1866. The Stephens-Prier House then passed to his sister Ann Eliza. In April 1870, her cousin Stephen D. Stephens and his family moved to the house after he sold his house and store to Mrs. Mary Black. According to the Federal Census for Richmond County, in June 1870 the Stephens household consisted of Ann Eliza Stephens, Stephen D. Stephens, his wife Elizabeth Johnson Stephens, their two adult sons James W. Stephens, (age 34) and Stephen D. Stephens, Jr. (age 24), and a domestic, Catherine Dempsey. In March 1871, James W. Stephens, a widower who had worked as a clerk in his father's store and had served as village postmaster in 1869-70, was married to Mary Louisa Tysen in a ceremony at the Stephens-Prier House. They subsequently moved to Rahway, New Jersey.

Ann Eliza Stephens died in 1879, leaving the house to her elder brother John I. Stephens (1805-85). John Stephens, who was then seventy-four-years old, had amassed considerable wealth through his career in banking and later through his position as Secretary of the Staten Island Railroad & Ferry Company (which he had secured through his friendship with Commodore Vanderbilt and held for twenty-seven years). John Stephens had moved from Staten Island to Fort Greene, Brooklyn in the early 1870s. After Ann Eliza Stephens' death, he chose to remain a Brooklyn resident, allowing Stephen D. Stephens and his family to continue living in the Stephens-Prier House. Stephen D. Stephens, Sr. and Elizabeth Stephens occupied the house until their deaths in 1883. Stephen D. Stephens, Jr. who had continued to live with his parents, remained in the house until it was sold by his uncle John I. Stephens' heirs in 1886. He brought his bride, Agnes Lasar Stephens, there in 1884.

One of the most prominent public figures in the nineteenth-century Staten Island and "the most prominent Staten Islander who ever lived in Richmondtown,"<sup>9</sup> Stephen D. Stephens, Jr. attended Trinity School in New York City and graduated from Columbia College. He earned a law degree from Columbia in 1869 and immediately opened a practice in Richmondtown. Stephen D. Stephens, Jr. followed in his father's footsteps as a Democratic Party leader. From 1873 to 1875 he represented Richmond County in the New York State Assembly, serving as chairman of the committee on villages and a member of the committees on railroads and public lands. In 1881 he was elected County Judge and Surrogate for Richmond County. He held both positions for thirty years until his death in 1911. At the time of his death, eighty-five percent of the population of Richmond County had known no other judge and he had served longer than any other County judge in the State. According to Leng and Davis's *Staten Island and Its People*, Judge Stephens was "universally admired for his careful discharge of his duties and for a kindly manner of treating all who came before him."<sup>10</sup> His obituaries noted that his decisions were rarely appealed and almost invariably affirmed. Judge Stephens also contributed much to the social and civic life of the Island. He served on the boards of the S.R. Smith infirmary, the Staten Island Diet Kitchen, the Students Aid Association, the Richmond County Bar Association, and the vestry of St. Andrew's Church. According to the *Richmond County Advance*, "he was easily the most popular man in the county during all his life."<sup>11</sup> As Judge Stephens' residence of sixteen years, the period in which he became a prominent political figure, the Stephens-Prier House is a significant site in Staten Island history.

#### The Design of the Stephens-Prier House

The Stephens-Prier House is a large and unusually well preserved mid-nineteenth century frame house that has a transitional design incorporating Greek Revival and Italianate elements. The Greek Revival style, which "dominated American architecture from the late 1820s to the late 1840s,"<sup>12</sup> is widely represented on Staten Island in both domestic and public buildings. Noteworthy examples include the main buildings at Sailor's Snug Harbor designed by Minard Lefever (Administration Building, 1831-33; dormitories, 1831-41); the Main Building at Seaman's Retreat, now Bayley-Seton Hospital designed by Abraham P. Maybie (1834-37; additions 1848, 1853, and 1911-12), the Henry P. Robertson House at 404

Richmond Terrace (c. 1835); and the Caleb T. Ward House at 141 Nixon Avenue, built by Seth Geer (c. 1835).<sup>13</sup>

In the village of Richmondtown, the style was widely used. The most important public building, the Third County Courthouse (1837), featured a pedimented temple front with Doric columns. Domestic examples included the Seaman Cottages on Center Street (c. 1836), just to the southeast of the Stephens-Prier House site; the Bennett House (built c. 1839, addition 1853) at 3750 Richmond Road; and the David Latourette House, now the Latourette Park Golf Course Club House (built c. 1836, alterations 1936), located on Richmond Hill Road, just outside town. The Stephen D. Stephens House, now the Stephens-Black House (1837), where Daniel Lake Stephens was residing when he commissioned Stephens-Prier House, was also designed in a simplified version of the style. Thus, it would have been in keeping with established tastes for the Stephens-Prier House to have been a purely Greek Revival design. By the 1850s, however, other styles were becoming fashionable on Staten Island. The new Parsonage of the Dutch Reformed Church (built c. 1855), at 74 Arthur Kill Road, incorporated Gothic Revival elements. The Second County Clerk's and Surrogate's Office, at 303 Center Street, just a block from the Stephens-Prier House site, built in 1848 and raised to two stories in 1858, used Italianate elements, notably the low front-facing centered gable pierced by an octagonal lunette and the bracketed overhanging eaves.<sup>14</sup>

The carpenter-builder of the Stephens-Prier House elected to use a mix of Greek Revival and Italianate features while adapting the design to particular features of the site. He employed a symmetrical plan with a center hall flanked at either side by a pair of rooms, a type of plan commonly used for both the Greek Revival and Italianate buildings. The low pitched triangular gables are treated as traditional pediments with horizontal and raking cornices and are typical of Greek Revival design. The elaborate door surrounds with their narrow sidelights and transoms are also characteristic of the Greek Revival. The window surrounds incorporate elements of both styles. The rectangular shape of the openings and their moldings, the flatness and simplicity of the moldings and the abstracted, stylized treatment of the blocks on the lintels are typical of Greek Revival style; the wideness of the moldings and the use of curving brackets beneath the sills are more typical of the Italianate style. Other Italianate elements include the small one-story arched porches with square

beveled-cornered posts, the handsome carved scroll brackets beneath the deeply projecting cornice, and the elaborate chimneys decorated with recessed panels. The most unusual feature of the design, the cross-gabled roof, was not associated with either the Greek Revival or Italianate styles, but was sometimes used for Gothic Revival buildings. Here, the roof made it possible to employ a common Greek Revival device, the gabled front, in which the narrow gabled end of the house is treated as a principal facade, "giving the house the appearance of a miniature temple with its traditional pediment," on all three street fronts. The solution was particularly apt for the house's setting, on a rise above Richmond Road and at intersection of three major streets, conditions that meant it would often be seen at angled views. The identical treatment of the Richmond Road and Center Street facades was probably a response to the equal but differing importance of the streets -- Richmond Road was the principal highway through town while Center Street was the most desirable residential street and a chief thoroughfare connecting the residential section of town with the Courthouse.

#### The Priers<sup>15</sup>

In June 1886, the Stephens-Prier House was sold at auction by the Estate of John I. Stephens to James E. Prier. James Prier was born in Huguenot, Staten Island, in 1828. His father Andrew Prier, a farmer, and mother, Catherine Eddy Prier, were descendants of families that had settled on Staten Island in the early 1700s. James Prier initially earned his living as a carpenter. By 1860, he and his brothers Peter and John had become butchers in Huguenot. Around 1858, James Prier married Ellen La Forge, a descendant of a Huguenot family prominent in Staten Island since the 1730s. By 1870, James and Ellen Prier had moved to Richmondtown, where they resided in a house on Center Street a short distance from the Stephens-Prier House.<sup>16</sup> Prier had a shop in Richmondtown where he sold meats and vegetables and also owned a large property at St. Patrick's Place and Clarke Avenue which contained a pond and commercial ice house. Leng and Davis's *Staten Island and Its People* reports that the Priers were "regarded as ideal citizens ... strong supporters of civic causes of worthy purport and greatly devoted to the care of their home and family."<sup>17</sup>

The Priers had five children, two of whom, James Irving (J. Irving), born 1879, and Edith, born after 1880, grew up in the Stephens-Prier House. J. Irving Prier was born in Richmondtown; he studied



Business Administration in school and worked as a commission agent for a number of companies before establishing his own business as an export commission broker in 1922. In 1926, he established a real estate development firm in Stapleton, Staten Island. He and his wife, Elizabeth (Betty) Nordenholt Prier continued to occupy the Stephens-Prier House with his mother until she sold the house to Gerardo Cecero and Philip Kaplan in 1926. In October 1928, they sold the house to Nicholas Cecero. In 1931, J. Irving Prier regained ownership of the house after foreclosing on the mortgage. Though they continued to live elsewhere the Priers retained ownership of property until 1946.

#### Subsequent History<sup>18</sup>

After Staten Island became a borough of Greater New York in 1898, governmental activity on the island began to shift to St. George on the north shore and Richmondtown's importance as the island's governmental center started to decline. Its residential growth, however, continued. By 1907, a trolley line ran along Richmond Road and a residential community radiated from the core of the town. Construction of Public School 28 began that year. By 1919, the last county offices located in Richmondtown were transferred to St. George, and the old county buildings were abandoned.

In the early 1930s, the Staten Island Historical Society, which had been reorganized in 1920, persuaded the city to fund the rehabilitation of the vacant County Clerk's Office and the County Court House for use as the society's library and historical museum. In 1939, the Society turned its attention to the acquisition and restoration of the Voorlezer's House, built c.1695, the oldest extant elementary school house in the United States.<sup>19</sup> In the following decades, the Historical Society purchased other historic buildings and land in the area and established Richmond Town Restoration as a living museum of Staten Island and metropolitan history. The Richmond Town Restoration became a joint endeavor between the Staten Island Historical Society and the City of New York in the 1950s. Subsequently, other historic properties in the area were acquired and restored. A number of threatened historic buildings from other parts of the island were moved to the Restoration's property and also restored. The greater Richmondtown area continued to develop as a residential community in the decades following World War II. The 1964 opening of the Verrazano Narrows Bridge, and the boom years of the 1980s and late 1990s has further encouraged development.

In 1946, the Stephens-Prier House was acquired by Francis C. Evans (1911-77), an engineer with the American District Telegraph Company in Manhattan, who occupied the house with his wife Elsa and their four children. Following his death in 1977, the house was sold to an insurance broker, William E. Rigby, and his son, William J. Rigby. William J. (Bill) Rigby, a skilled housewright employed for a number of years at Historic Richmond Town, began restoring the house, removing such twentieth-century accretions as the neo-Colonial columned portico facing Richmond Road (installed by the Priers by the mid-1920s), the shingled siding and the multipane wood-and-glass door on the Richmond Road (both probably installed in 1930s). The restoration was largely completed by May 1986. In 1991 the house and lot were acquired by New York City for Historic Richmond Town. It is currently used as the Executive Director's office and administrative headquarters.

#### Description

The Stephens-Prier House is a mid-nineteenth-century clapboard residence incorporating Greek Revival and Italianate elements. It occupies a large through-the-block corner lot which has frontages on Richmond Road, St. Patrick's Place, and Center Street. The exterior of the house was restored between 1977 and 1986.<sup>20</sup> At that time a number of features that had been altered were replaced by newly fabricated elements based on surviving original features. Three non-historic outbuildings that incorporate some salvaged elements from other structures were also added to the property.

The lot is roughly rectangular in shape except for a rounded corner at the intersection of Richmond Road and St. Patrick's Place. It extends about 125 feet along Richmond Road and Center Street and about 190 feet along St. Patrick's Place.<sup>21</sup> The site slopes upward from Richmond Road to Center Street so that the house appears to be located on top of a mound from Richmond Road. A concrete sidewalk extends along the north side of the lot adjoining Richmond Road. There is a low fieldstone retaining wall extending along the western portion of the front yard on Richmond Road. A non-historic brick and stone stepped path leads from the sidewalk along Richmond Road to the house. To the west of the house a portion of the ground was excavated in the 1970s to create a curving unpaved driveway from St. Patrick's Place to a basement garage. The sides of the driveway are protected by fieldstone retaining walls. There are stone stairs in the middle of both walls providing

access to the first story. To the south of the house is an asphalt driveway which extends from the porch to Center Street. An air conditioning unit rests on a concrete slab next to the north window on the east side of the house. A non-historic carriage house, barn, and privy with aluminum board-and-batten siding extend along the eastern perimeter of the lot.

Five bays wide and three bays deep, the house is basically rectangular in plan and symmetrical in design. It rests on a low brick basement which originally had windows at the far corners of the Richmond Road and Center Street facades (Only the eastern window on Center Street survives and it is partially submerged in a light well because the ground level has been raised. A portion of the western basement wall was excavated and a vehicle entrance was created in the 1970s.) The house has two full stories and an attic that is capped by a cross-gabled roof with four brick chimneys. A wide wood watertable extends along the base of the first story and narrow corner posts frame the facades. The lower stories are clad with lapped-clapboard siding. About eighty percent of this siding is original, with most of the replacement siding concentrated in the area beneath the first-story windows. The siding on the attic gables, consisting of wide boards laid flush, is also original. The rectangular windows have their original molded surrounds with curved brackets beneath the sills and square brackets supporting drip moldings on the lintels. The six-over-six wood window sashes are original and were restored in 1977-86. (Some of the muntins were replaced at that time). The second-story windows in the center bays of the north and south facades feature a tripartite arrangement in which a window is flanked by narrower sidelights. The center bays of the east and west facades are treated as blind windows, concealed by original paneled shutters at the first story and louvered shutters at the second story. Although historic photographs show paneled shutters on the other first story windows and louvered shutters at the second story, they have been entirely removed. The wood storm windows were fabricated when the house was restored. A historic paint analysis was done at the time of the restoration and, according to William J. Rigby, the present buff and brown colors are a close approximation of the original color scheme.

On the south facade facing Center Street, the entrance is announced by a one-story Italianate

arched porch which has square posts and a flat overhanging roof with a molded cornice. The porch posts are treated as square columns with high bases and chamfered corner decorations. They have pilaster responds on the facade flanking the entrance. The non-historic wood porch floor, wood steps and brick paving around the steps were installed when the house was restored. The Greek Revival molded entrance surround with a paneled base, multi-pane sidelights, and transom is original. The paneled entrance door, which originally was part of the interior woodwork, was moved to its present location when the house was restored to replace a non-historic door.

A matching entrance porch is on the north facade facing Richmond Road. Installed during the restoration, it is modeled on the Center Street porch and is thought replicate the original design. It replaces a columned portico installed in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The entrance surround is original and matches the surround on the Centre Street facade. The door was fabricated when the house was restored and is modeled on the door installed on Center Street

The one story extension on the west side of the house facing St. Patrick's Place appears to be original to the house. It originally had a doorway on its south wall facing Center Street that was removed when the house was restored.<sup>22</sup> The small window on the west wall of the extension is original.

The second story of the house is capped by a wide cornice with scrolled brackets that support the overhanging eaves. The low pediments are pierced by oval bull's-eye windows with wood sash and radiating glazing bars. The window has been replaced on the north (Richmond Road) facade and all the openings have storm windows installed in the 1970s. The four brick chimneys are decorated with recessed panels and denticulated moldings. The chimneys, which had been listing badly, were rebuilt when the house was restored following their original design. The wood hatch at the center of the roof was also replaced at that time.

Report prepared by  
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## Notes

1. This section is adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission, *(Former) Public School 28 Designation Report*, prepared by Donald Presa, (LP-2021), (New York, City of New York, 1998); Mesick-Cohen-Waite-Architects, "Historical Survey," in "Richmondtown Restoration Comprehensive Site Restoration and Development Plan: Project Report, Vol. II." prepared for NYC Department of General Services, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, and the Staten Island Historical Society, 1990, pp 2.4-2.19 [Copies available in the LPC "Richmondtown" Research File and at the Staten Island Historical Society]; Charles W. Leng and William T. Davis, *Staten Island and Its People: A History, 1609-1929* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1930), v. 1, 227, 271, 337, 348, 423, v. 2, 536, 544; Loring McMillen, "Richmondtown: The First 160 Years," *Staten Island Historian*, v. 22, n.1 (January-March 1961), 3-5; v. 22, n. 2 (April-June 1961), 13-14; v. 22, n. 3 (July-September 1961), 20-22; Dorothy Valentine Smith, *Staten Island, Gateway to New York* (Philadelphia: Chilton Book Co., 1970), 40-44, 211-215; Henry G. Steinmeyer, *Staten Island, 1524-1898*, revised edition (Staten Island: Staten Island Historical Society, 1987), 109.
2. The name "Coccles Town" originated from the abundant oyster and clam shells, called coccle [sic] shells, which were found in the waters of the nearby Fresh Kills.
3. The former Stephen D. Stephens House, now the Stephens-Black House, is a designated New York City Landmark.
4. Richmond County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 34, p. 100.
5. Staten Island Historical Society, Stephens-Prier House National Register Nomination Form, prepared by Barnett Shepherd, 1997. [Copies available in the LPC "Stephens-Prier House Research File" and at the Staten Island Historical Society]. The Parsonage is a designated New York City Landmark.
6. This section is based on Marjorie Johnson, "Notes on the Owners and Occupants of the Stephens-Prier House," *Staten Island Historian* n.s. v.13, n. 2 (Winter-Spring, 1996), 19-28; Loring McMillen, "The Stephens House and Store," *Staten Island Historian*, v. 31, n. 9 (Jan.-Mar. 1972), 73-75; New York City Directories, 1831/32-1833/34, 1845/46-1874/75; Brooklyn Directories, 1829-1854, 1869/70-1885/86; Richmond County Directories, 1882/83, 1888/89, 1895/96; *Handbook of the Staten Island Railroad and Business Directory of Staten Island* (New York: Metropolitan Advertising Co, 1870); *Staten Island Business Register and Railroad and Steamboat Guide* (New York, 1879); Staten Island Historical Society Archives, Stephens Family Papers, MS 17 Box 1, Stephens-Black House and Store Key Information File; Federal Census, Richmond County, 1860, p. 422; Federal Census, Richmond County, Town of Southfield, pp. 295-296; Stephen D. Stephens, Sr., obituary, *New York Times*, Mar. 2, 1883, p. 5; John J. Stephens, obituaries, *Brooklyn Eagle*, Mar. 25, 1885, p. 4, *New York Times*, Mar. 25, 1885, p. 5; Stephen D. Stephens, Jr., obituary, *New York Herald*, Apr. 20, 1911, p. 9; *Prominent Men of Staten Island* (New York: A.Y. Hubbell, 1893), 9; Leng and Davis, v. 1, 363, 420, v. 2, 547, 555, 1001.
7. John Stephens, Jr. and Daniel Mersereau purchased a parcel of land at West Broadway, White, and Church Streets from Anthony Lispenard in 1803 which was subsequently divided in lots and developed.
8. John Stephens, Jr., Will, drawn Nov. 1, 1838, probated Nov. 8, 1852, Kings County, Office of the Surrogate, Wills Liber 14, p. 142.
9. SIHS, Stephens-Prier National Register Nomination Form.
10. Leng and Davis, v. 2, 555.
11. Stephen Dover Stephens, Jr., obituary, *Richmond County Advance*, Apr. 22, 1911, p. 1.
12. Charles Lockwood, *Bricks & Brownstone* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 55. For a discussion of the Greek Revival style see *ibid.*, 55-97; William H. Pierson, Jr. *American Buildings and Their Architects*, v. 1, *The Colonial and Neo-Classical Styles* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1976), 430-432; Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America* (1944; Rpt. New York: Dover, 1964); Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 178-195. For Greek

Revival buildings on Staten Island see New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Guide to New York City Landmarks*, entries written by Andrew Dolkart (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998); and *Staten Island, An Architectural History* (Staten Island: Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1979).

13. The main buildings at Sailors Snug Harbor, main building at Seaman's Retreat, and Caleb T. Ward House are designated New York City Landmarks; the Henry P. Robertson House is within the St. George/New Brighton Historic District.
14. The Bennett House, the David Latourette House, and the Second County Clerk's and Surrogate's Office (now the Historical Museum at Historic Richmond Town) are designated New York City Landmarks.
15. This section on the Priers is based on Johnson, 21-23; Leng and Davis, v. 4, 432-433.
16. The house was moved to Cedarview Street around 1920.
17. Leng and Davis, v. 4, 432.
18. Material in this section on the twentieth-century development of Richmondtown is adapted from LPC, *P. S. 28 Designation Report*, 2. For the Evans and Rigby families see Johnson, 23-28; Janet Low Rigby "Christmas Traditions Revived," and "The Light at the End of the Tunnel: Or, How to Finish 'This Old House'," in *Victorian Homes*, v. 9 (Dec. 1989), 42-45.
19. The Voorlezer was the lay reader and school teacher for the Dutch families in the area. His house also served as a church and school. It is a designated New York City Landmark.
20. The author wishes to thank William J. Rigby, William McMillen, and Barnett Shepherd for providing information on the restoration. Photographs of the house before and after restoration appear in "The Light at the End of the Tunnel." There are a number of historic photographs of the house in the Stephens Family Papers in the archives of the Staten Island Historical Society. See also New York Public Library, *Photographic Views of New York City, 1870s-1970s* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1981), fiche 1241, E 1.
21. The lot has been slightly reduced in size over the years due to the widening of St. Patrick's Place.
22. According to Bill Rigby, the wood and glass door he removed, was a late nineteenth century replacement for the original door.



## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Stephens-Prier House has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Stephens-Prier House, a two-and-one-half-story five-bay-wide clapboard-covered house, built c. 1857-59 for Daniel Lake Stephens, is the most impressive mid-nineteenth-century residence surviving in Richmondtown, the historic governmental center of Staten Island; that it is one of the most significant residential survivors of an expansive and prosperous period of the village's development; that it was the residence for sixteen years of Judge Stephen D. Stephens, Jr., one of the most prominent public figures in nineteenth-century Staten Island and the most prominent Staten Islander who ever lived in Richmondtown; that many of its other residents, members of the Stephens and Prier families, were leading citizens of the town and contributed to its history and development; that the house's symmetrical design incorporating classically-inspired pedimented fronts on all four sides and identical facades on Center Street and Richmond Road responds to the building's siting at the intersection of three important streets; that the transitional style of the design, which incorporates Greek Revival and Italianate elements, is a good and representative example of the architecture of mid-nineteenth-century Staten Island; that the notable features of this design include projecting columned porches, molded entrance surrounds with narrow sidelights and transoms, decorative window surrounds, a deeply projecting molded cornice supported by scrolled brackets, and a distinctive and unusual cross-gabled roof with shallow pediments pierced by lunette windows; that the house has survived in an unusually good state of preservation and was restored between 1977 and 1986; and that since 1991 it has been owned by the City of New York and now houses the administrative offices of Historic Richmond Town.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Stephens-Prier House, 249 Center Street (aka 3672 Richmond Road), Borough of Staten Island, and designates Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 4437, Lot 26, as its Landmark Site.



Stephens-Prier House, 249 Center Street (aka 3672 Richmond Road), Staten Island  
View from the north showing the Richmond Road facade  
Photo: Carl Forster



Left: Daniel Lake Stephens, *Carte-de-visite*, by Bogardus

Right: Judge Stephen D. Stephens, Jr., Photograph from *Prominent Men of Staten Island*, 1893

Source: Marjorie Johnson, "Notes on the Owners and Occupants of the Stephens-Prier House"





Top: Elizabeth Nordenholt (later Elizabeth Prier) and an unidentified woman (right), c. 1900

Right: Elizabeth Prier and her son, James Eddy Prier, on the Center Street Porch, 1924

Source: Johnson, "Notes on the Owners and Occupants"







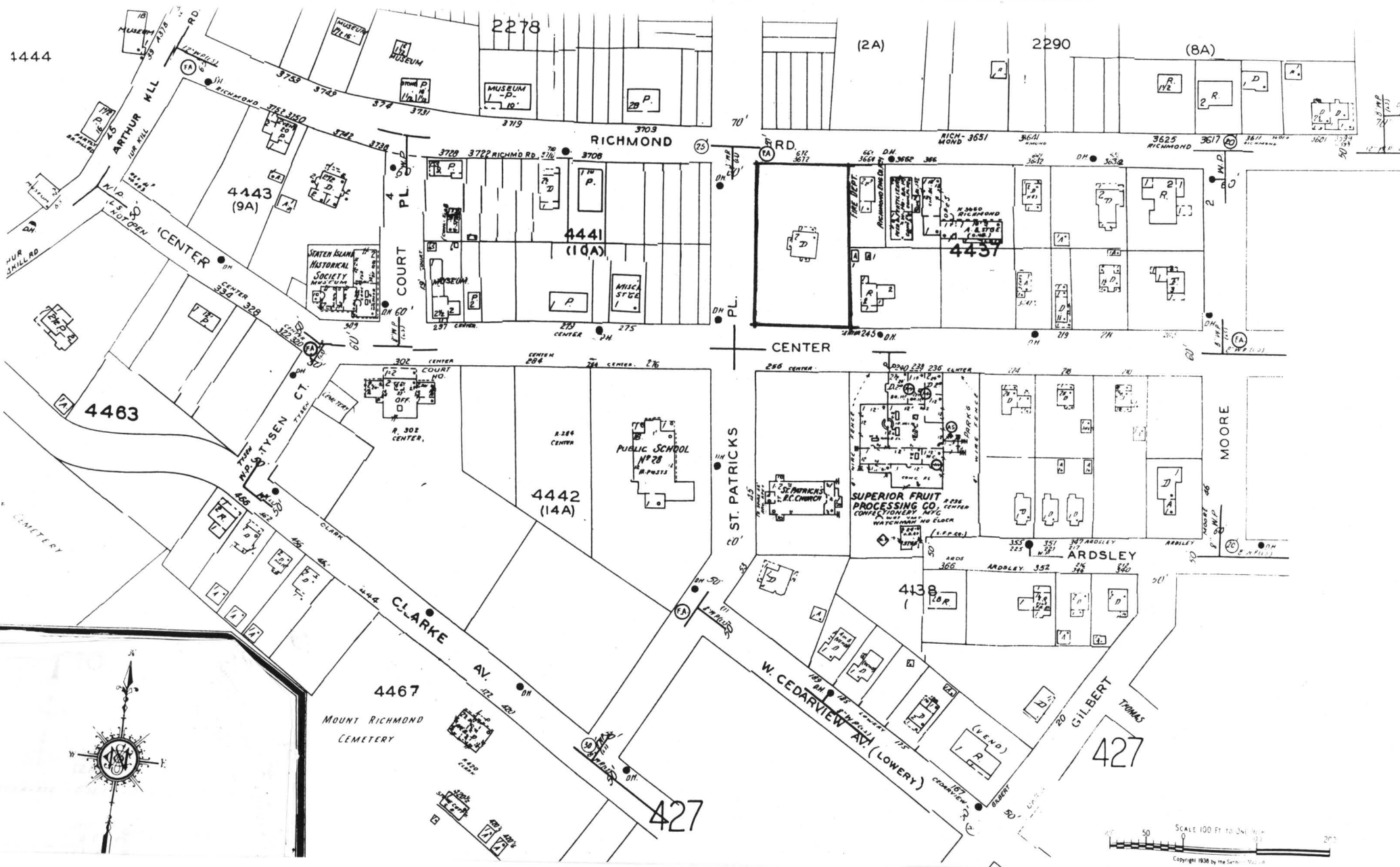
View from the southwest showing the Center Street and St. Patrick Place facades  
Photo: Carl Forster



Left: Detail of the entrance surround on the Richmond Road (north) facade

Right: Detail of a scrolled cornice bracket

Photos: Carl Forster



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 Landmark Site: Borough of Richmond Tax Map Block 4437, Lot 26  
 Source: Sanborn Building & Property Atlas of Staten Island, 1998





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