Historic Preservation Brief

Resource Assessment, Cultural Significance & Ethical Interpretation

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63 Dronningens Gade
Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, VI

1. Resource Identification

Resource Name:
63 Dronningens Gade

Location:
Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

Resource Type:
Urban commercial/residential building

Approximate Date(s) of Construction:
1855-1857

Current Status:
Extant; altered

Purpose of Brief:
This preservation brief provides a preliminary assessment of the historical, cultural and community significance of 63 Dronningens Gade within the historic core of Charlotte Amalie, with attention to preservation considerations, urban context and ethical interpretation.

2. Physical Description

63 Dronningens Gade is located along one of the principal historic commercial corridors of Charlotte Amalie. Buildings along this street traditionally exhibit narrow frontage, masonry construction, and a close relationship between commercial activity at street level and residential or storage uses above.

The building is a masonry two-story structure facing south on the southernmost corner of Dronningens Gade and Bjerge Gade in the historic district of Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. Measuring approximately 1,092 square feet, it currently is painted yellow with green doors and shutters and white trim. The exterior has the original red bricks that have been painted directly over the bricks. There is a small balcony above the main front door and it faces the south looking down to waterfront. The roof is a pitch roof with a red galvanized roofing system. There is also an extension that was added to the rear of the building where an exterior stairwell was added to offer external access to the second floor.

The building is currently uninhabited and has been for well over a decade. The exterior of the structure has moderate damage from an aged roof and broken gutters causing excessive water to penetrate the front brick facia. In addition, there is a weak front porch structural system that needs to be reinforced.

The interior of the structure is also in moderate condition and it is easy to see the layout of the grandness this home used to be. There is a space for what used to be a large living room / reception room on the ground level with a wide stairway leading up to the second story. The second story is broken down into smaller spaces that could have once been bedrooms. There is also a door leading out to the front balcony on the south side that overlooks the street corner.

3. Historical Background

Dronningens Gade has historically functioned as the commercial spine of Charlotte Amalie, shaped by Danish colonial governance, maritime trade, and the movement of goods and people across the Caribbean and Atlantic. Properties along this corridor were closely tied to mercantile trade; enslaved and free labor; migrations from Europe, Africa and neighboring Caribbean islands; and post-emancipation economic restructuring.

63 Dronningens Gade likely participated in these patterns, whether as a site of trade, residence, storage or mixed use. Ownership, tenancy, and function would have evolved in response to shifting political control, economic systems, and social hierarchies.

The first known records for 63 Dronningens Gade date back to the 1804 Property Assessment and Census Summary Ledger. It was owned by a 'Free Negress Dominga Friderich with children' (*Fri Negerinde Dominga Friderich med Börn*); Friderich often spelled Friedrich, Fridrik, Frederik. She was listed as the owner and tenant from 1804-1826 Danish archival records. In 1804 it was a one-story structure with a loft (*1. A 1. Etage*) and her plot boundaries had been officially verified and stamped 14 February 1806 by Peter Von Scholten while he was acting surveyor. At this time, the register shows that Charlotte Amalie was thriving and hosted an economically active class of free people of color (*Frie Kulørte*) who legally bought, sold and surveyed urban real estate along major thoroughfares throughout the city center. The surrounding neighbors on either side of 63 Dronningens Gade, with the exception of one, are all freed people of color.

The Property Assessment and Census Summary Ledger of 1805 has been updated to feature different information and valuations. The property is no longer described as one structure, but rather as three (3) distinctive structural components (*Lettra A, B, C*). The individual square footage or values for these sections (75, 68, and 256) combine to give substantial total property valuation of 399 rigsdaler (currency of DWI).

In the 1806 Property Assessment and Census Summary Ledger, the exact calculations for valuations of structures/property by colonial tax assessors show that Structure A measured at 128 square units and valued at 256 rigsdaler; Structure B measured and valued at 75 rigsdaler; and Structure C measured and valued at 68 rigsdaler. Together, they equate to 399 rigsdaler.

In 1820, Dominga Friderich is denoted at deceased (*Dominga Fredrick dod og Börn*) in the Property Assessment and Census Summary Ledger. The property is now listed with just one

main structure (A) and the square footage and value is noted as 128, with a total valuation of 256 rigsdaler.

The Property Assessment and Census Summary Ledger of 1826 shows Dominga Friderich's name crossed out and replaced by Friderich Theurkauff. This means her children or heirs have sold or transferred the property. Theurkauff was a prominent surname among European merchant/burgher class in Charlotte Amalie during this time, leading to assumptions that the property has moved out of the family's ownership. The valuation remains at 256 rigsdaler.

1835 Property Assessment and Census Summary Ledger records indicate that the property has again transferred ownership to Ann Simpson. The records have also been updated to include information such as family size, gender, color, free/unfree status, and smallpox status. Eight people are listed as living in the household. The valuation remains at 256 rigsdaler. Smallpox male status is denoted as 3, smallpox female status is denoted as 1.

The 1836 Property Assessment and Census Summary Ledger records show that the valuation has remained the same 256 rigsdaler, family size 8, but there is 1 unfree male, 1 unfree female, and 1 male smallpox status.

In the 1837 Property Assessment and Census Summary Ledger, the structure and many of the neighbors have listed that it was completely destroyed in the hurricane (Aldeles nedbrudt i Orkanen) or like some neighbors, that it was partially destroyed, uninhabitable, burned down or in process or being rebuilt. The hurricane in reference is the Hurricane Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles between 31 July and 2 August 1837. It was the third hurricane of the season and caused great damage to St. Thomas. There are no population marks on the census record, as the structure was completely destroyed. It did show a valuation of 187 rigsdaler.

In the Property Assessment Ledger of 1837, which further breaks down the structures, it actually labels A, B, C, et al. There are labels of 'Residential House' (Vaaningsh), 'The Building' (Bygningen), Side House (Sideh), Outbuilding/Shed (Udh), Bagerovn (Baker's Oven), Unbuilt/Vacant Lot (Ubebygget), etc. Now, 63 Dronningens Gade is listed as three (3) residential houses (Vaaningsh A, Dito B, Dito C) and their valuation is 59 rigsdaler. This insinuates that most likely after the hurricane destroyed the house, smaller structures were quickly erected as temporary lodgings.

The 1838 Property Assessment and Census Summary Ledger shows an updated household headcount at 18 people living on the lot between all the structures, 2 are free males of color (Frie Couleurte) and 12 are free females of color (frie couleurte). The property is still under Ann Simpson's ownership and the valuation is still listed as 59 rigsdaler.

For the 1839, 1940 and 1942 Property Assessment and Census Summary Ledgers the information is about the same. In 1839, the population of the household has decreased to 15 inhabitants, 2 are free males of color, 2 free females of color and 2 are enslaved inhabitants (Slaver). In 1940 the number of inhabitants are back at 18, with 3 free males of color, 2 free

females of color, 1 enslaved inhabitant. In 1942, the number of inhabitants drops to 5, with 2 free males of color, 2 free females of color, and 1 enslaved inhabitant. Valuation for all three years remained at 59 rigsdaler, under Ann Simpson's ownership.

The 1846 census ledger changed in this year to feature each page as a register more specific for each household, bilingual in English and Danish, and it lists each occupant by name, age, place of birth, religion, date of baptism (if applicable), occupation, and marital status. Ownership is still under Ann Simpson. List of inhabitant includes 2 females and 1 male – Ann Eleanor Philips, female, born in St. Thomas, 47 years of age (presumably head of household), Lutheran, Unmarried, and Seamstress; Eliza Thomsen, female, born in St. Thomas, 9 years of age, Lutheran, baptized in 1837, unmarried, and student; and Alexander Marques, male, born in St. Thomas, 15 years of age, Lutheran, baptized in 1832, unmarried, and also student. All were denoted as 'free' inhabitants.

The 1848 Property Assessment Ledger shows great subsidizing of lots in the neighborhood and the valuation appears to be according to total square footage. Ann Simpson is still listed as owner. Main Building A (Bygningen A) is 79 rigsdaler, Cathrine Casparson's section is 927 rigsdaler, and Rosa Linda Warren's section is 57 rigsdaler – the prior 59 rigsdaler has been shown as crossed out and replaced with the total valuation of 984 rigsdaler. These individuals either, built, rented, or expanded upon separate structures on the lot.

The 1850 census ledger shows something entirely different. It is still listed under ownership of Ann Simpson; however, the inhabitants have changed. It is now denoted as '1 Family' with 5 inhabitants - head of household presumably Anna Lesette Enov (?), female, born in St. Thomas, 55 years of age, Lutheran, unmarried, Washerwoman; Frederica Petry, female, born in St. Thomas, 25 years of age, Lutheran, unmarried, Washerwoman; Wilhelmina Michell, female, born in St. Thomas, 8 years of age, Lutheran, unmarried; Sophia Miller, female, born in St. Thomas, 7 years of age, Lutheran, unmarried; Cicilia Williams, female, born in St. Thomas, 4 years of age, Lutheran, unmarried. There is a leprosy column on the census to record status, obviously leprosy was happening at an alarming rate at this point to require tracking via census records. This household had no infections.

In 1855, the ownership has changed to C. Esannason (Captain Christian Wilhelm Esannason). He was a prominent local business man who had already been in ownership of adjacent parcels on Prindsense Gade and nearby parts of Dronningens Gade. In 1843 Captain Esannason had secured an official contrat with the Danish colonial government for mail boat transportation to St. John. Esannason was a direct decendant of Wilhelm Esannason, the first Black physician of the Virgin Islands, born and raised in Guinea and migrated to the US Virgin Islands in the late 1780s, he worked for 2 decades to buy his freedom from the Danish King in 1803. The note on the census record says "Building a new dwelling house on the lot" and is dated 9 October 1855. The valuation total is nearly 1,000 rigsdaler, meaning that the temporary post-hurricane structures were finally cleared off the land to build a new, permanent family house. It appears that this household is now a more middle-class residence.

The 1857 census ledger lists the house as complete and occupied. The owner is Edmund Esannason, most likely the heir of Captain C.W. Esannason. He is presumably listed as head of household as '1 Family' with 4 other inhabitants. Edmund Esannason, male, born in St. Thomas, 33 years of age, Lutheran, married, Hospital Intendant (Hospital Administrator); Frances T. Esannason, female, born in Tortola, 19 years of age, Episcopal, married, his wife; Cathrine Daniel, born in St. Thomas, 59 years of age, Lutheran, married, his aunt; Cathrine Paulos, female, born in St. Thomas, 16 years of age, Moravian, umarried, House Servant; Mary M. Richard, female, born in St. Thomas, 19 years of age, Lutheran, unmarried, Cook. Dated 15 October 1857.

In the 1860 census ledger, there have been changes to the inhabitants – owner, Edmund Esannason, now aged 37, has a blank for occupation (left blank intentionally or perhaps because he no longer carries out that occupation of Hospital Intendant); Frances T. Esannason, aged 22, still an Episcopal; Cathrine Danzelle (previously listed as Daniel), aged 62; and two children: Elvira Esannason, aged 2; Thomas Esannason, 1; both born in St. Thomas. There are no longer any live-in house servants or cooks registered to this property.

By 1870, there is a change in the occupants. The ownership is now held by Rosa L. Warren (previously a resident under Ann Simpson's ownership: Rosa Linda Warren). The house has been leased to a medium family and a total of 8 inhabitants– head of household is C. H. A. Strandgaard, male, born in St. Croix, aged 49, Lutheran, married, Procurator at the Bank of St. Thomas; Sofia C. Strandgaard, female, born in Venezuela, aged 37, Roman Catholic, married, wife; Rosa S. Strandgaard, female, aged 12, Lutheran; Emil A. Strandgaard, male, aged 10; C.V. Strandgaard, male, aged 13, at present in Copenhagen for his education; all born in St. Thomas; Sarah Koefodberg, female, bor in St. Croix, aged 36, Mission Church, unmarried; Housemaid; Minna Frazer, female, born in St. John, aged 26, Episcopal; unmarried, Seamstress; Antoinetta Guiranda, female, born in St. John, aged 26, Episcopal, unmarried, Servant/Maid. C. H. A. Strandgaard's position and the fact that their 13-year-old son is studying in Copenhagen, maintains that this residence is moving toward an upper-middle class family.

1880 census records show that the property has changed ownership to a very prominent family in Virgin Islands history, A.H. Riise (Albert Heinrich Riise). He is known as an iconic Danish pharmacist (A.H. Riise Apothecary Hall), merchant, and manufacturer, also known for his A.H. Riise Rum. The house is being leased to the Poulsen Family with head of household being Hans H. Poulsen, male, born in Slesvig Holsten (Schleswig-Holstein state in northern Germany), settled in St. Thomas in 1848, aged 67, Lutheran, married, Ship Agent, listed as "On a Trip to Europe;" Alice Poulsen, female, born in St. Thomas, aged 22, Roman Catholic, unmarried, daughter/Teacher in a Catholic School, listed as "a bit in Denmark (Lidt I Danmark);" Hansina Poulsen, female, born in St. Thomas, aged 20, Roman Catholic, unmarried, daughter/unemployed (Ingenting der, leddig), In Schleswig-Holstein (Slesvig Holstein ir der); Malvina Gibbs, female, born in St. Croix, aged 45, Episcopal, unmarried, Housekeeper; Mary Gibbs, female, born in St. Croix, aged 50, Roman Catholic, unmarried, Teacher in St. Mary's free school. Signed by G. H. Paulsen, 9 October 1880. This household shows the global lifestyle of the Virgin Island's mercantile class, when residents frequently traveled between the Caribbean

and Denmark/Europe. Also, this census shows another thing, independent, educated, working, unmarried women.

The 1901 census record shows another change in ownership. The new owner is head of household, George B. Blake, male, born in St. Croix, aged 50, widower, father, Stevedore (loading/unloading of ships)/Auctioneer; Nellie L. Blake, female, aged 24, unmarried, daughter, Teacher; Helen Blake, female, aged 22, unmarried, daughter, Teacher; Adina Blake, female, aged 14, unmarried, daughter; T. George Blake, male, aged 18, unmarried, son, Telegraphist; all children born in St. Thomas and all family members belong to the Dutch Reformed Church. George Blake was originally born in St. Croix to a mother who was from St. Thomas and a father from St. Croix. They migrated when he was 2 years of age to St. Thomas. Before purchasing this house, he, his wife and their family had lived at 64 Dronningens Gade according to 1880 Census records. He held 2 jobs simultaneously, his son is a Telegraphist (St. Thomas was a major international trade hub so lines connected across the Caribbean, the Americas, and Europe), and his daughters were educated, working, and unmarried women who were both teachers. This shows the modernization of St. Thomas. Signed by J. Berne and A. Newton on 1 February 1901.

In the 1911 census, George is now 60, and 'Master Stevedore'/Auctioneer; Nellie is 34, still unmarried and professional field is blank; Mrs. H. Sorensen (Formerly Helen Blake) is now 32, married, and professional field is blank; Adina is 23, unmarried, and professional field is blank; Thomas George is 28, unmarried, and still working as a Telegraphist.

In 1917 the Danish West Indies was transferred to a US territory. George Blake died in 1921, leaving the Blake children to inherit the house after their father's death.

Upon searching for census records between 1911 and 1940, no records were found for the 1920 census. The 1930 census records show the son as head of household for 62 and 63 Dronningens Gade, Thomas George, aged 48, mixed, married, Clerk at Cable Office, W ("working a wage or salary"); Nellie L. Blake, sister, aged 54, mixed, single, occupation crossed out; Helen Sorensen, sister, mixed, aged 51, married, Teacher of Music, O ("working on own account"); Valdrina Petersen, wife, mixed, aged 42, married, born in St. Thomas to a father from Anegada and a mother from St. Croix; Louise Blake, daughter, mixed, aged 20, single, "Grocery Salesman", W ("working a wage or salary"); Victor Blake, son, mixed, aged 19, single, "Grocery Salesman", W ("working a wage or salary"); Gladys Blake, daughter, mixed, aged 17, single; Olive Blake, daughter, mixed, aged 12, single; Lucille Blake, daughter, mixed, aged 8, single.

With the exception of the three youngest, Lucille, Olive, and Gladys, everyone else responded 'no' to attended school and 'yes' to able to read/write. Those three all responded 'yes' to attended school. It is quite questionable how the older daughters (and son), Helen and Nellie were once both educated teachers, and yet in the census it is stated they were not educated. Either it was assumed of the person taking the census, they did not respond honestly, or they were truly not educated formally, but rather informally.

The 1940 census shows Nellie Blake as head of household, mixed race, aged 63, single, unemployed; Helen Sorensen, mixed race, aged 61, married; Adina Blake, mixed race, aged 53, single, unemployed.

In April 1958, it is Emma Blake Brouwer, who is apparently a sibling, that is petitioning with Thomas George's children for the remaining 'surviving' asset of Helen Eliza Sorensen, who was a widow at death (October 1940) and had "1/5 undivided interest in the property" and at this time "that said interest is assessed at $980.00." It was passed to the surviving siblings until each of them died. Nellie died April 1946, Thomas George died November 1955, and Adina died April 1957. By this time, it was shared ownership to the Estate of Thomas George Blake (his 5 children) and Emma Blake Brouwer. It would change ownership again in August 1958 to Alfredo Lima, a Puerto Rican born transplant who had migrated to St. Thomas with his family as a young boy.

Alfredo, his wife Juanita, (born in Vieques and also migrated to St. Thomas prior to meeting Alfredo), and their 4 children (all born in St. Thomas) would end up making additions to the interior of the building, adding a second floor with 2 bedrooms and a bathroom, where they would live, while conducting business downstairs on the ground floor. The family lived in this residence for years, eventually adding a secondary building in the early 1970s to the rear of this building and attached with a shared internal courtyard stairwell.

4. Cultural & Community Significance

This building has retained its community significance with its location alone. Being on the corner of Dronningens Gade and Bjerge Gade it is at a major intersection for pedestrians and vehicles alike. The fact that it is such an older structure still very much intact, maintaining much of its historic integrity, is so important for the historic building fabric of historic Charlotte Amalie.

5. Integrity & Condition

Integrity Considerations:

- **Location:** Retained
- **Setting:** Largely retained with historic streetscape
- **Design & Materials:** Likely altered over time
- **Feeling & Association:** Strong due to continuous use of Dronningens Gade as a commercial corridor

Condition Overview:
Based on observation and comparative analysis, the building appears structurally intact, but reflects multiple phases of modification consistent with long-term adapted transition from residential to commercial use.

The building is constructed of rubble masonry covered with a lime and sand layer, with a finished wall surface of brick, which has been painted several times with a latex-based paint, therefore there has been some damage. A portion of the masonry walls were stuccoed on the West Elevation, before historic measures were taken or known. There is minor masonry damage on the South Elevation (mainly the left corner). There is rectangular massing aligned directly at the street line, minimal setbacks, and adaptations reflecting initially residential use, later moved to successive commercial uses over time.

The verandah, located on the South Elevation, is made of wood and wrought iron. The wrought iron has become rusted and there seems to be a few spots of corrosion. The wood as well seems to be posing a structural, security issue. The door leading to the verandah is not code complacent and is a modern, single entrance wood door with a fixed glass window above the doorway.

Many of the windows are louvered and open, causing major influx of dirt throughout the building. A couple of the windows have been temporarily covered with plywood or semi-converted to shelving (Ground Floor). Many of the casings are intact. A few of the windows on the Ground Floor have shutters, yet there are no shutters on the West Elevation, nor on the Second Floor.

The current doors within the building are all single entrance, wood doors. The front entrance has two, separate entrance ways, swinging, glass doors. Interior doors are all wood doors. Only the front entrance doorways have wood shutters. The anterior entrance has a single entrance wood door on the Ground Floor and another on the Second Floor.

All of the ceilings throughout the building are a dropped, paneling system. The current condition of the roof's integrity is unknown, it has a history of several inconsistent patching and it is felt that a complete renovation of the roof is necessary. Some of the interior roof structure needs to be repaired and addressed.

Due to poor planning and realization of the floor’s construction for the Second Floor from build date, the stability and structural capacity of the floor is in doubt, as it appears most unstable. There are also 3 rooms (one in the rear and two in the front), a bathroom and a kitchen, both in the rear. The floors are covered with vinyl-tiling. None of the current rooms nor the second floor are part of the original historic layout.

Existing staircase is ill-positioned and structurally poor, located right at left entrance. It quite evident this is not a historical element.

Existing front entrance stairs on South Elevation are deteriorating, chipping away and are not historically accepted. There is some rusting on the wrought iron railing. Planters are semi-deteriorating and the right side has completely been demolished (more adjacent to traffic on Bjerge Gade).

6. Preservation Issues & Risks

Potential preservation concerns may include:

- Deferred maintenance common to historic urban buildings
- Loss of historic fabric through incremental renovations
- Commercial pressure leading to inappropriate alterations
- Environmental exposure, including pollution, rain, humidity, and hurricane impacts
- Lack of historical photos and later modifications/alterations could pose issues with ‘accurate’ renovation/restoration, it might be more of a sense of ‘time in history’
- Finding capable carpenters to undertake ‘historic’ restorations/renovations

7. Ethical & Interpretive Considerations

As a colonial-era urban resource, 63 Dronningens Gade exists within systems shaped by enslavement, racialized labor, and economic exploitation. Preservation and interpretation efforts must acknowledge these realities and avoid framing the site solely through architectural or commercial success narratives.

Ethical preservation practice calls for recognition of invisible labor histories, attention to archival silences, inclusion of Afro-Caribbean and migrant experiences in interpretation.

The fact is that this road and neighborhood were predominantly made up of freed people of color owning their land and building their own structures. Throughout time it has transferred hands numerous times, but even after destruction by hurricane, it was built into an upper-class residence by a prominent local man of color in the community. Even being taken into ownership by a well-to-do local Danish businessman for a short while, it was quickly returned to a local man of color and stayed within his ownership only until his heirs’ deaths. At this time, it was turned into a proper example of West Indian historic commercial/residential use, where tenants would lease or run a business on the ground floor and reside on the second floor, very much integrated into the community. Until eventually it would be completely regarded as commercial, matching the surrounding commercial zoning of the road and neighborhood.

8. Recommendations & Next Steps

Recommended actions include: archival research (deeds, tax rolls, fire insurance maps, etc.), review of Danish colonial records and post-transfer documentation, oral history collections (where possible), preliminary architectural documentation, evaluation of local or national historic designation status.

9. Sources & Methodology

Primary Sources:

- Danish National Archives (Rigsarkivet)
- USVI Recorder of Deeds
- Historic maps and fire insurance plans
- Census and Tax Records
- Records of Business Licenses

Secondary Sources:

- Scholarly works on Charlotte Amalie Urban Development
- Preservation studies of Danish West Indies architecture

Methodology:
This brief was prepared using site visits and documentation, contextual research, comparative architectural analysis, and preservation best practices.

10. Statement of Limitations

This document represents an assessment based on on-site investigation and available contextual information. Conclusions are always subject to revision pending further new investigations and/or potential environmental changes.

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