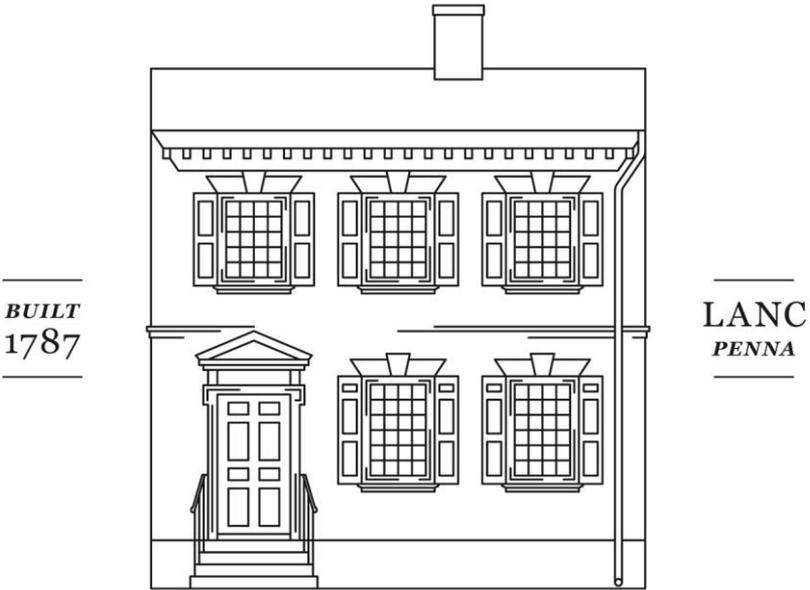


Self-Guided Tour of the Sehner-Ellicott-Von Hess House



Historic Preservation Trust
of Lancaster County

Welcome to the Sehner-Ellicott-von Hess House. This is one of the most intact Georgian residences dating from the late 1700s in not just Lancaster City but the entire county. Restored by the Louise Steinman von Hess Foundation in the late 1970s, the house is an excellent example of adaptive reuse, having been designed to blend the building's history with its contemporary function.

Today, the building is the headquarters of the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County.

123 North Prince Street, Lancaster, PA 17603

Brief History

Built in 1787-1789 by a Lancaster joiner, Gottlieb Sehner II (1751-1799), the Sehner-Ellicott-von Hess House illustrates the adaptation of English-based architectural styles and building techniques by a craftsman of German ancestry. The overall exterior design and most of the extant original interior woodwork, show aspects of the mid-Georgian architectural style introduced in the Philadelphia region about 1750. The original interior woodwork, including most of the trim of the first and second-floor entries, the elaborate open staircase, and the elegant second-floor front room with paneled fireplace wall, pedimented doorway and ornate entablatures over the two windows ranks with some of the finest Georgian woodwork dating from 1750-1790 in southeastern Pennsylvania.

In addition to its architectural importance, the house has earned its place in history, from 1801-1813, as a residence of Andrew Ellicott, one of America's most versatile surveyors. It was here, in 1803, that meetings between Andrew Ellicott and Meriwether Lewis were held in preparation for the Lewis and Clark expedition. Throughout the remainder of the 19th century, the building served as the residence of many prominent Lancastrians.

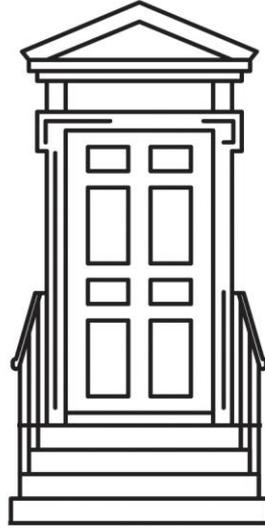
Between 1914 and 1920, the once grand house was altered and remodeled for a social club. At that time, a large percentage of the ornate woodwork and window sash was removed.

After many decades of neglect, a group of local citizens banded together to save the building from impending demolition. In the early 1970s, the building was purchased by The Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County. In 1978, the building was sold to the

Louise Steinman von Hess Foundation. Restoration work by the Foundation began early in 1978 and was completed by 1981. The house was donated to the Trust by the Foundation in 1997.

Front Door

The front door is original and, at the time of restoration, was found in the attic. The door's upper half was cut out some time in the 19th century to install glass, as evidenced by the patched area. The exterior pedimented doorway, with its small dentils and scrolled console brackets, is also original.



Front Office

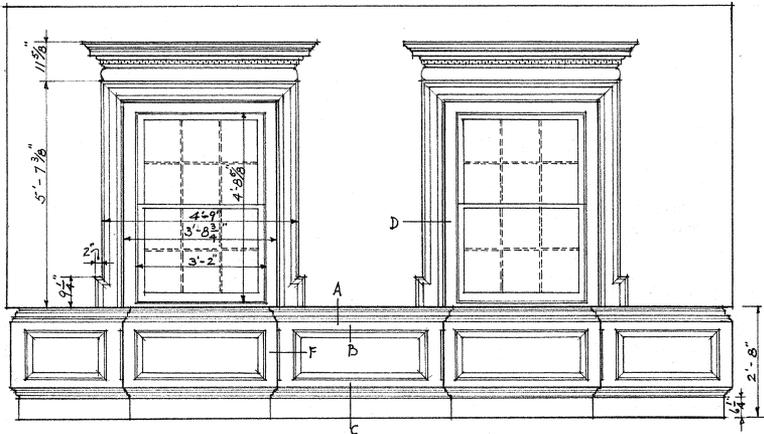
This is the largest room on the first floor and the room that was the most drastically altered in the early 20th century. Its fireplace, as well as all the fireplaces in the main part of the house, is composed of a massive structure of flues supported by an arched masonry foundation in the basement.

The window openings are original; however, the window sash was restored according to evidence from the 1798 Direct Tax. The woodwork in this room was recreated based on the remaining remnants of window molding. The fireplace is a conjectural restoration, incorporating an early Pennsylvania gouged mantel of the Federal period, with a recreated cornice at the ceiling. This room is believed to have functioned as an all purpose room.

Hallway

Segments of the baseboard, the boldly molded chair rail, and the raised panel dado between the baseboard and the chair rail have survived.

If you look closely, you can see splices in the woodwork where the new work was joined to the original. Likewise, looking at the cornice, with its bold moldings and dentals, you can see the same splicing. The surviving fragments of the woodwork were instrumental in establishing the pattern for the restoration work here. The window openings are original; however, all the window sash in the house has been recreated. The hallway arch, with flanking Doric columns and molded keystone, was restored.



Back Office

This room suffered greatly from changes, and few of its architectural elements survived. The location of the fireplace and the door were known from structural evidence. The window facing south was the only window in the house surviving with an original window frame and sash at the time of restoration. The designs of the woodwork and moldings, although recreations, are based on original woodwork used in Lancaster and Philadelphia at the time the house was constructed.

Brick Walkway

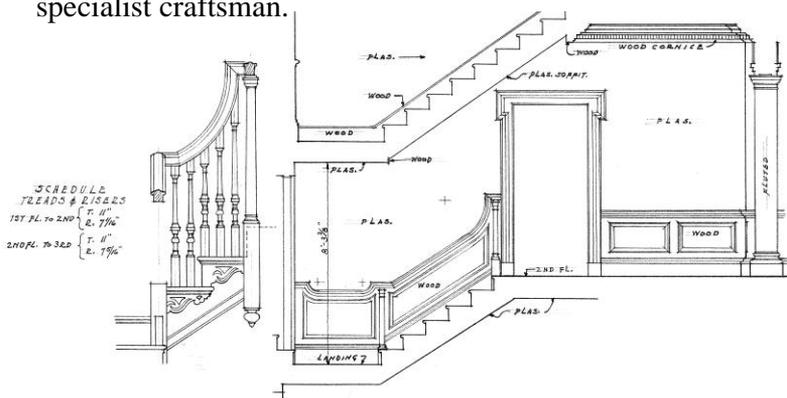
This area represents an adaptation between evidence of what was original and the need for modern access. Period kitchens were often separated, as this one was, from the main house for fire safety reasons. This area was originally a partially open walkway connecting the house and the kitchen. The small stairway is a modern addition, giving access to modern quarters above.

Kitchen

The kitchen was altered several times throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. At the time of restoration, this room was approximately two and one-half times its original and present size. Most of the kitchen has been recreated. The large walk-in fireplace is on the site of the original cooking fireplace. At the rear of the fireplace is a recreation of a bake oven, similar to the type of bake ovens popular in Pennsylvania between 1700 and 1800.

Staircase

This high style Georgian staircase is one of the two most important original architectural features which survived in the house. All the major posts, at the bottom and the turns of the stairway, are newel posts. Around each newel post is an open or well-like space. The stair is bracketed at the end of each step with an applied scroll, reflecting the ascending movement. The balusters, or turned spindles, are an elaborate pattern and most likely the work of a specialist craftsman.



Second Floor Hall

The second floor hall in the 18th century was referred to as the upstairs or second floor entry. The geometric archway, with fluted Doric pilasters, supports a Doric order entablature above. The dentilled cornice is similar to the cornice of the first floor hall.

Upstairs Front Parlor

The placement of the room of great embellishment on the upper floor reflects a very long tradition in western architecture. These rooms were often used as the parlor and as the best bed chamber all in one.

Fortunately, most of the woodwork in this room survived. The raised panel dado, the doorway with its crowning pediment, the elaborate moldings with their crossetted comers, and the window entablatures with torus moldings are all original.

In the 1920s, the late John Lippold of Lancaster was walking by the building at the time the social club was beginning alterations. He was too late to save any of the first floor woodwork but was in time to save the magnificent paneled wall of this room. It was kept in storage by Mr. Lippold and his widow until it was returned to the house, during restoration, to be placed in its original location. The architectural features of this room are all original except for the cupboard doors and the cornice. The cornice has been recreated based on the entablatures over the windows.

Upstairs Rear Office

This room suffered extensively from the changes completed during the early 20th century. The paneled fireplace is a recreation based on architectural features that were popular during the Georgian period of architecture. The doorway, with its overhead, double-faced architrave, is original.

Andrew Ellicott

Ellicott is remembered for his numerous achievements. He drew many state boundary lines, laid out the cities of Erie, Meadville, and Franklin, and helped layout part of the U.S.-Canadian boundary.



Other highlights include:

1784: Received Master of Arts degree at Williamsburg College.

1785: One of the commissioners who established the line between Virginia and Pennsylvania.

1786: Aided in completion of Mason-Dixon Line.

1791: Completed design of Washington, D.C. after Piece L'Enfant quit.

1796: Charted the frontier between the United States and Florida.

1801: Moved to Lancaster, then capital of Pennsylvania, and served as Secretary of Pennsylvania Land Office.

1803: Gave advice to Captain Merriweather Lewis, who came here in preparation for what became the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

1813: Appointed professor of mathematics at West Point by President Madison.



Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County



The Trust was established in 1966 to help “stem the rapid destruction of historic properties in Lancaster County.” Through the years, the Trust has been active in helping to preserve many historic properties in Lancaster County that contribute to their respective communities as unique places for people to live, work, and play.

Our equation for success has been working for over 50 years. Look around you and know that our advocacy and direct action have resulted in saving hundreds of historic structures and other sites throughout the county. The flip side is that not everything can and should be saved.

The Trust continually faces this delicate balance and works closely with all parties involved to reach an equitable decision for all. Sadly, it sometimes takes an irreplaceable loss to a community before preservation moves higher on the priority list.

Learn more on our website at www.hptrust.org