

The Early Architecture of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHITECTURAL FORMS
IN LANCASTER COUNTY DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

"No chapter in the history of national manners would illustrate so well, if duly executed, the progress of social life as that dedicated to domestic architecture," said Hallam. How true this is regarding the early architecture of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Here we can find a large part of the history of the days of our forefathers recorded in the walls of the houses they built. From the time of the earliest home-seeking pioneers, living in crude log huts, to the more substantial structures of stone and brick, the record of their building progress is very legible and not easily mistaken. Were their buildings not preserved, we would be at a loss to know in what manner of dwelling these early colonists lived their lives, and how from the primitive form of the cabin was evolved the more finished type commonly referred to as "Colonial." In this locality, as would also be true in other regions, we are able to detect national habits of thought and racial characteristics expressed in the varied kind of architecture, depending upon the racial antecedents of the first settlers and builders.

By the general term "Colonial Architecture," we refer to the early architecture of the territory comprised within the present limits of the United States. Historically speaking, the buildings of the Colonists alone would be included under this title. To be exact, the period would end on the fourth of July in 1776; but architecturally there is not such a definite limitation. On the basis of the principle that styles in building must change slowly, and cannot be supplanted at will by new forms, we must allow for a long period of time before the so called Colonial style was brought to an end. As happened in Pennsylvania, we find "Colonial" houses erected as late as 1825, at which time "Greek Revival" influences and later the scroll saw work succeeded in gradually eclipsing the simple models of earlier days and bringing about a period of transition and decay.

Pennsylvania was settled by diverse nationalities; the English, German, Dutch, Swedish and Danish. It is but natural to expect that from such a conglomerate population a complex influence would be brought to bear upon the newly moulded architecture. It is noteworthy, however, that the building style as established by these settlers bore only slight resemblance to that of the countries from which they came. The new conditions met in this word, the new materials of building that were available, and the manner of living, caused a re-forming of their ideas of construction. Their houses here came to be unconscious expressions of the new conditions, colored by their new living; and in general were, at first, so simple as to scarcely come under the term "Architecture," which implies a conscious effort to build

beautiful and expressive buildings. There are two factors that did much to effect the architecture of Lancaster County. The first is the location at a considerable distance from the cities along the Atlantic seaboard, which were the main centers of building activity, and the second arises from the various nationalities of those who dwelt in this region.

The remoteness of the county tended to encourage originality in designing and stimulated the invention of new methods in building. Edward Eggleston has said that "it is difficult for the mind of man to originate, even in a new hemisphere." But oftentimes he was coerced into originality by force of circumstances. It was so with the early architectural efforts. Tradition was followed by the early settlers as far as was possible, and they then essayed original ventures because of force of circumstances. It is true that crude and even bizarre features crept in, but on the whole the results were commendable, because of the frankness with which definite needs were met.

The early architecture of this County may be characterized as being constituted of various national elements, but chiefly the Teuton and the Anglo Saxon. These elements are at first fairly distinct, and we find architecture of German derivation in one locality and the British in another. In time there was brought about a blending of some of the two influences into a new and unified kind of building, but, in general, they continued separate and apart, producing their own individual dwellings and more pretentious structures; each with its peculiar features. The line of demarkation between the two may be accounted for by the variance of the habits of living and thinking of the two classes. The German trait—at least the inclination of the pioneers of Southern Germany who first settled along the Conestoga and in the northern tracts of the county—was of a sectarian nature. The people were more or less amalgamated by religious bonds. They sought their own people as associates, they continued to speak the German language, they evidenced a closer affiliation with the old world than with their fellow home-seekers who were mostly Scotch-Irish.

The inclination toward clannishness by the Swiss and Germans is clearly expressed by such distinctly separate settlements as Ephrata, Lititz, and Manheim. These places have retained, even up to the present time, a racial isolation. Did not Franklin complain to the Provincial Assembly of the Commonwealth against the continuance of the speaking of German which threatened to make of the settlement a German colony? In 1741 the German and Swiss Mennonites of Lancaster County were represented to the provincial government of Pennsylvania as being "determined not to obey the lawful authority of government,—disposed to organize a government of their own." This strong feeling of nationality on the part of the Germans, their local independence and feeling of self-sufficiency naturally led to an architectural product which had a characteristic local flavor.

The English (in speaking of the English, the Scotch, Irish and Welsh are included) sought localities that recalled their native heath. The Scotch-Irish, being accustomed to a country with a rugged surface, choose the hill country for their homes. There the forests were lighter and more easily cleared. The Swiss and Germans, in looking about for land, were attracted by the heavy-timbered portion. "Where the wood grows heaviest, the soil

must be best," they reasoned. Thus the Germans selected the limestone valleys for settlement, in which were rich meadows and the heavy forest lands. Proud, the early historian of Pennsylvania, writing in 1778, said: "The Germans seem more adapted to agriculture and improvement of the wilderness; and the Irish, for trade. The former soon get estates in this country where industry and parsimony are the chief requisites to procure them."

During the time that the Germans were contentedly clearing land and permanently settling and improving their farms the English subjects were busy founding towns and becoming traders and merchants.

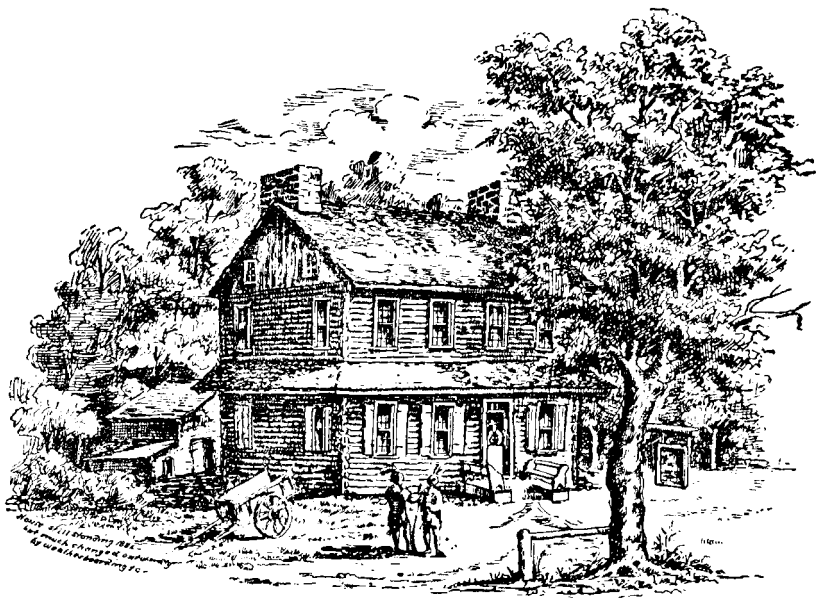
It is rather significant that of the twenty original townships in 1729, fourteen are named after places on the British Isles, namely; Lancaster, Donegal, Sadsbury, Drumore, Lampeter, Martock, Hempfield, Brecknock, Caernarvon, Salisbury, Derry, Earl, Warwick, and Leacock. The one German name is Manheim. One is scriptural—Lebanon. The four Indian names are, Conestoga, Peshtank, Cocalico and Tulpehocken. The decided majority of English township names seems the more remarkable, knowing that the preponderating number of first settlers were Germans.

Having called attention to the natural and national peculiarities of Lancaster County, let us examine the existing architecture of the eighteenth century with a view to determining the origin of various traits.

The first buildings of the pioneers were but log huts made of timber cleared from the staked-out claims. The logs of which the walls were made were squared and placed horizontally, one upon another. These logs were notched at the corners and the interstices between the logs were "chinked" with stones or wedges of wood and then plastered with lime mortar or clay. A few small windows admitted light, and slabs of wood served as a door. Instead of glass, skins of wild animals or oiled paper served to keep out draughts of wind. The interior usually consisted of one room with a fire-place at one end for cooking purposes and heat. The sleeping quarters were in the loft beneath the roof and were reached by a ladder. The floor was made of split logs, known as puncheons. Tables and benches were fashioned of split timber with legs of straight pieces of sapling. These buildings afforded but temporary shelter of a primitive sort and do not attain the dignity of architecture and so will not be considered here in detail. The only impress left upon later buildings by these first attempts consists of the pent roof, known to-day as the Germantown hood. This pent roof was used between the first and second story of Postelwaite's Tavern, a log building erected near Lancaster in 1729. This intermediate roof served the purpose of protecting the chinking of the log walls from being washed away by the beating rain. In the more permanent architecture which followed, this feature persists as an element of design, even though the walls of later architecture are of brick or stone. The sandstone mansion built by Martin and Ann Meylin in 1740 in Lampeter township, made use of it. Residence architecture of to-day, particularly in the vicinity of Philadelphia, has adopted this hood as a feature of many a town and city dwelling.

True architecture begins when construction possesses beauty as well as usefulness; when building, however simple, breathes a charm or gives a pleasure. The first building efforts failed to attain such standards. There

was too much of the dire need of hasty and sure protection from the Indian and the weather to give play to the promptings of the artistic instinct. The log cabins are therefore of the undeveloped, necessitous sort. As in literature we have a time of story-telling around the frontier camp fire before works of literary art are composed, so also there existed a period of fundamental beginnings in building. Both are episodes in respective branches of



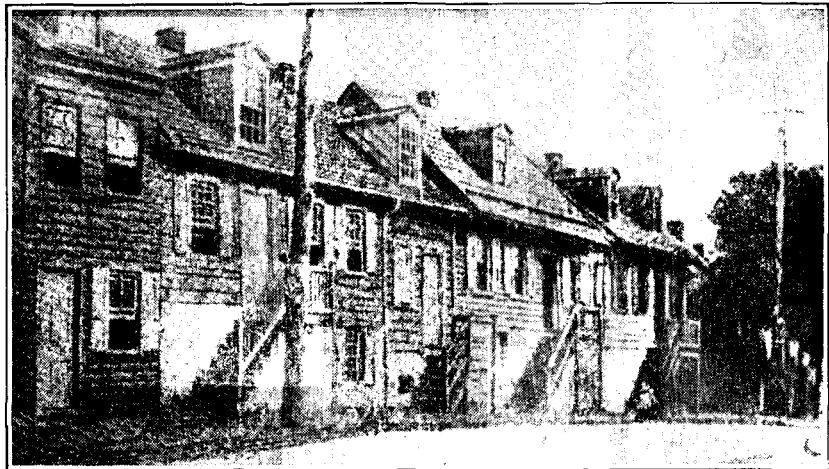
POSTELWAITE'S TAVERN.

art, both are necessary milestones in man's effort to express and adorn. In general, architecture that is worthy of the names, possesses thought-out construction and arrangement, with windows regularly spaced with a view to supplying light where needed, stonework dressed and jointed to produce an attractive effect, brickwork with patterned bond, pilastered doors and walls, or similar features intended for beauty as well as use.

The early architecture of German derivation in Lancaster County is clearly marked by racial attributes. The distinguishing characteristics include the steep roof, rows of sloping dormers, small windows, tile roofing, whitewashed walls, and wooden hardware. There is, in addition, a prevailing air of the medieval, both about the construction and the design. The existing examples in this region unmistakably hark back to the Middle Ages in Germany. The monastic halls of the religious community at Ephrata might have been modelled after medieval buildings found in many a German town such as Nürnberg or Mannheim. It seems important to note that the prevailing type of architecture of the cities and court circles of Germany of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was what is known as "Renaiss-

sance," while in the country districts and lesser towns the buildings erected were medieval in all but a few minor details. It is probable, therefore, that most of the German settlers were from rural districts.

Half-timber houses built by the Germans show the same medievalism. Investigation has brought to light several examples where this construction method was used. That this method of building *was* used in America has generally been overlooked. That its use was confined to the German is doubtful. In the half timber house, the walls are formed of heavy-shaped timber, framed together. The space between the framework is filled with lath and plaster or with brick. The structural parts are strengthened by horizontal members and braced by sloping struts. The framework is left



MIDDLE STREET BUILDINGS.

visible and presents a pleasing pattern with the wood contrasting with the background of plaster or brick. The chief value of this method of construction is esthetic, in that it satisfies the eye as to the stability and strength of the fabric. The wood chosen for these buildings was usually oak, fitted together with mortises and tenons and locked with wood pins.

The Moravian church near Friedensburg, just beyond the limits of the county is an example of this manner of building. Two photographs of Early Lancaster show the same construction. One house stood on the east side of Middle street and was built to accommodate General Forbes' troops after the fall of Fort Duquesne in 1758. The other was the Powell house which stood, until recently demolished, on the corner of Middle and Lime streets.

The Hans Herr House, built in 1719 near Lancaster may be taken as a specimen of the "small dwelling" architecture of the German type. It is particularly well suited for study because it has not undergone any change since the staunch walls were reared. The same Teutonic appearance which

was noted in the monastic settlement at Ephrata is indicated here. The walls are of stone, plastered and whitewashed. The roof is steep in pitch resembling the "Brother House." The small windows, with heavy wooden shutters, are fitted to wooden frames at the front and to stone frames at the ends of the house. The angles, both in stone and wood are mortised together. A chimney of large size, measuring over ten feet in width, divides the interior into two parts, and after contracting to a square.—crowns the saddle of the roof in the center. Dr. Schoepf, in his book "Reise durch Penn-



THE POWELL HOUSE.

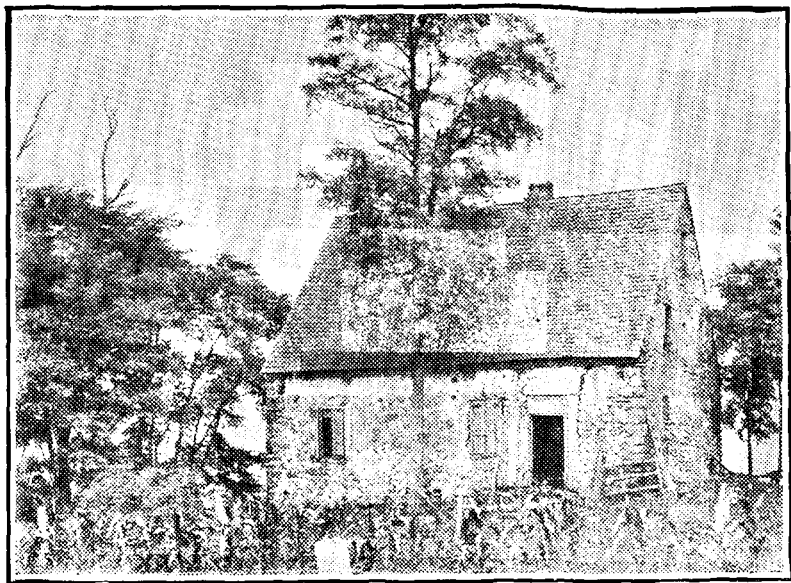
sylvania" observed that "a house built by a German could, even at a distance, be readily distinguished from one erected by a Scotch, Irish or Englishman. Had the house but one chimney, and this in the middle (in der Mitte des Hauses) then it was a German's. . . . A house with a chimney at each gable end was erected by an Englishman."¹

The floor joists of the Herr house consisted of round logs, grooved at the sides and with narrow split boards fitted between and spaced so as to allow rye straw to be woven over and under the sticks. Beaten clay was then applied to the top of the straw with a resulting floor of earth for each story.

The building is notable for its expression of national tradition and be-

¹ There are exceptions to this general rule. In New England it was the custom to locate the chimney stack in the center of the dwelling of the seventeenth century for purposes of economy. All of the fireplaces were built around the chimney and also heat was conserved in that there were no cold walls to cool.

cause of its substantial, straightforward simplicity. There is a distinct charm in the ancient windows which rise story above story in what would presumably be a first floor and attic only. The trait of thriftiness and practicality is well expressed in this straining effort to put to use every available cubic foot of space.



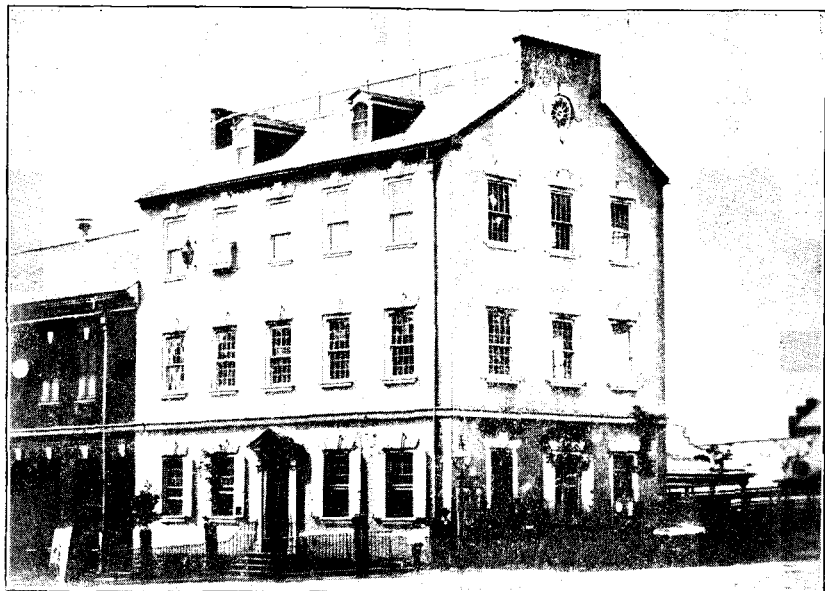
THE HANS HERR HOUSE.

Early dwellings of Lancaster have been influenced by this and other houses which clung to similar tradition. The house, illustrated, which stood on Middle street, follows the outlines and window spacing very closely.

Now, what effect did the German ideas of building have upon the commonly adopted style of architecture in Pennsylvania? The Teutonic influence is seen only in minor details. It is, perhaps, recognized in the fact that Pennsylvania buildings have an air of their own that is quite different from what is found in other localities,—the plain substantial and broad walls, the big roof, the abundance of dormers, the use more often of stone than of brick, and the stonework as often stuccoed as not.

It was more to the English subjects that the Pennsylvania style of architecture was due. The building traditions of the eighteenth century in England were transported with but slight changes to the new world. The Anglo-Saxon influence is recognized in the placing of buildings with the broad side to the road, resembling the English wayside cottage, the location of chimney stacks at the gable end and the symmetrical divisions of house fronts. Their chief gift was the arrangement of the floor plan and the introduction of the classic style of woodwork that adorned cornices, windows, doorways, mantles, and stairs.

England was in the midst of a revival of architecture, the inspiration for which was derived from classic models. The period was known as the late English Renaissance. The study of architecture was becoming popular and a knowledge of the subject was considered a mark of accomplishment. Books were being published in plenty, giving exact rules for the treatment of buildings, and for use of the "orders of architecture." Many of these handbooks found their way to the colonies and to the settlements in Lancaster County. Among the books of this nature that found their way to this region may be cited, "The British Carpenter" by Francis Price and the

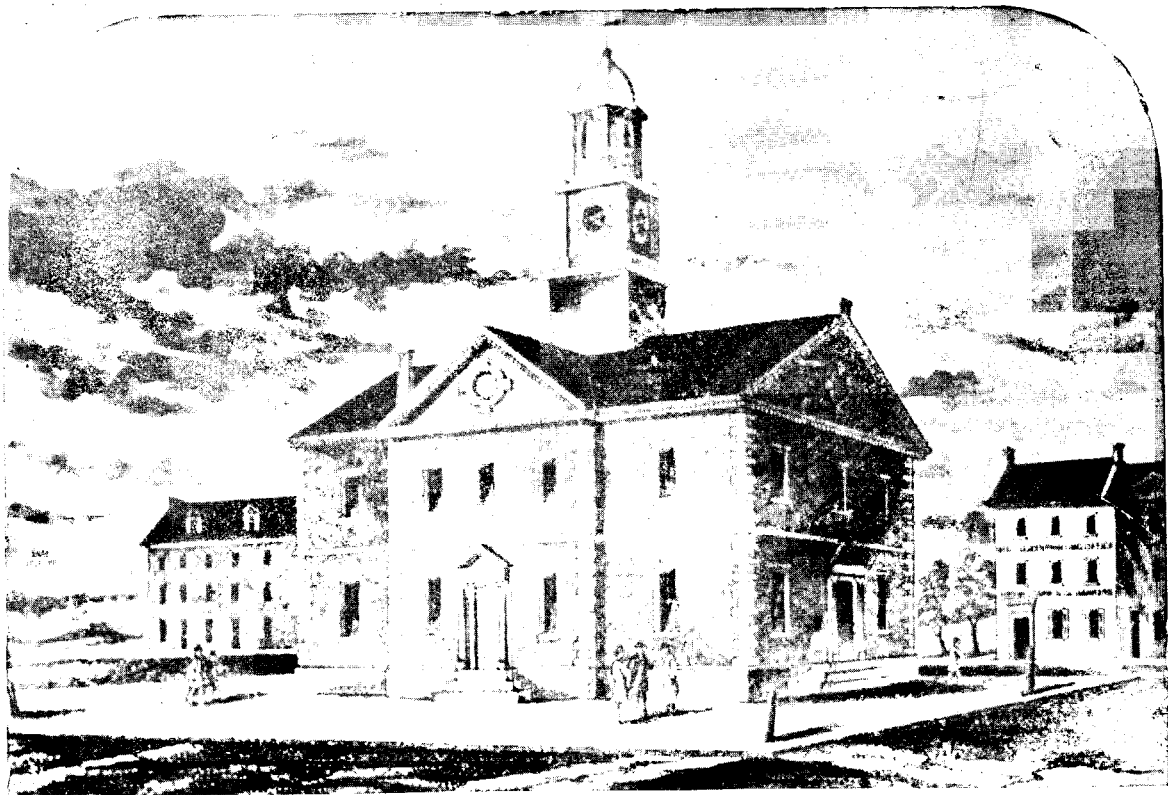


CITY HALL IN EARLY DAYS.

"Builder's Jewel" by Batty Langley. The latter published on its title page, assures you that it makes the knowledge of architecture "easy to the meanest capacity." The common use of these books meant that any one with a modicum of taste could design a facade, and—if he followed the rules—his proportions would probably be pleasing. The carpenters in particular made use of them. The effect was that the architecture of Lancaster County, as well as the entire state, was stamped with an English appearance.

There is abundant evidence of the influence of the "handbook architecture" in the city of Lancaster. The old Court House has its prototype or inspiration in Batty Langley's "Builder's Directory or Bench Mate;" the original City Hall could also be traced to drawings in a "Carpenter's Companion."

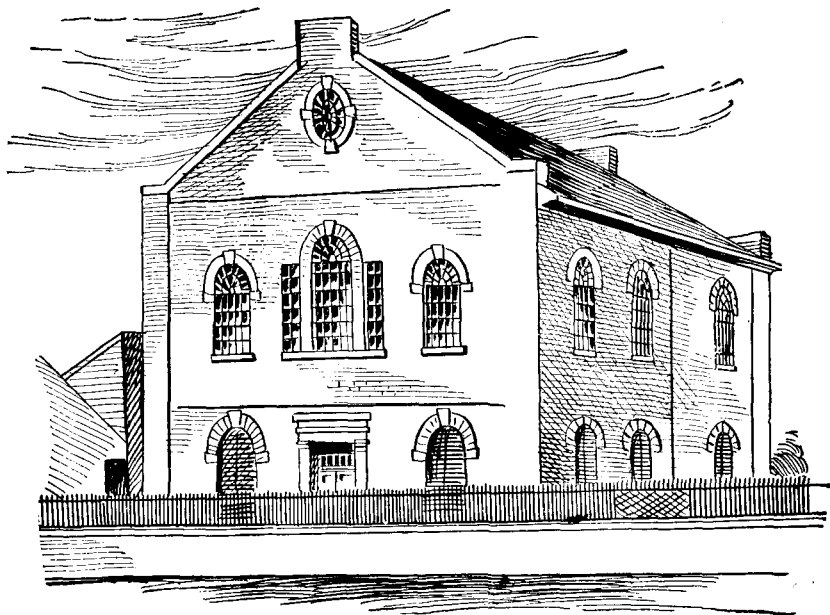
One should not assume that the buildings of the period were direct transcripts from these English works. The architecture thus inspired was



THE OLD LANCASTER COURT HOUSE.

adapted to new needs. Buildings were frequently lengthened, stories added, a doorway or tower included to serve a use and to increase the pretentiousness of the structure. That originality was freely drawn upon is shown by the variety of buildings erected; no two of which have been found to be identical in every particular. On the other hand, that they are derived from a similar source is attested by the general family resemblance that pervades their physical appearance.

The balanced regularity of Colonial architecture lent itself to the rapid mastery of the principles of design on the part of the builders. The checker-board spacing of windows on each side of a doorway, the observance of the

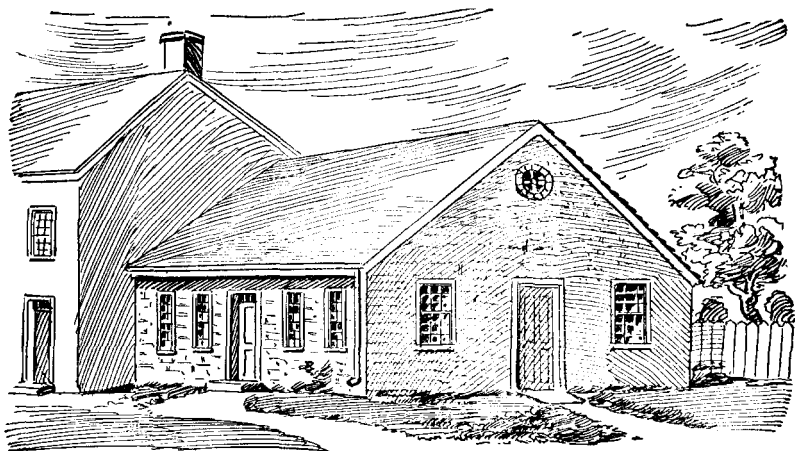


EARLY LANCASTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

rule that the doorway opening should be twice as wide as high, the regulation stipulating that the cornice be in proportion to the height of the wall, were readily grasped and put to practical use. The residence of William Henry Steigel at Manheim may be taken as typical of many a house of the eighteenth century. The stately home of General Hand at Rockford is almost a duplicate in appearance. The Mill House upon the outskirts of Lancaster is another early building with the same treatment. There is always the central doorway with a hall extending through the depth of the house, a drawing room on one side and a dining room and kitchen on the other. In most instances, the kitchen extends beyond the dining room forming a wing or "ell."

Occasionally,—for purposes of economy, or because of an abridgment of the more ambitious scheme, the doorway and one side of the house with

the "regulation two windows, are adopted to form a design. Similarly curtailed and sometimes enlarged homes were built in Lancaster and elsewhere. The George King home which originally stood on the corner of West King and Prince Streets had two windows on one side of the doorway and one on the other. The George Ross House of this city corresponds to the Steigel residence, excepting that it is adapted to a location in a town where building neighbors stand side by side on the sidewalk edge, and where higher property values encouraged the addition of a third story.



EARLY LANCASTER MORAVIAN CHURCH AND DATE-STONE.

The most evident note of originality in Lancaster architecture is shown in the small house with a single story. The stairway of this characteristic dwelling is usually placed parallel to the front of the house so as not to obstruct the sidewalk, and with a small porch and seat beside the door. It was such houses as these that were described by an English officer who was

captured at Saratoga and brought to Lancaster—a prisoner—in December, 1778, when he wrote: "Lancaster is the largest inland town in the United States, containing a population of about 3,000 Germans and Scotch Irish. Most of the houses have an elevation before the front door and are entered by ascending high steps, resembling small balconies, with a bench on either side, where the inhabitants sit and take in fresh air and view the people passing."

The porch arrangement which then was so popular speaks volumes concerning the life of those days. How much friendly gossip was exchanged with passers-by over this rail in the evening hours. How many a note of welcome, and otherwise, greeted the return of a home-coming spouse!

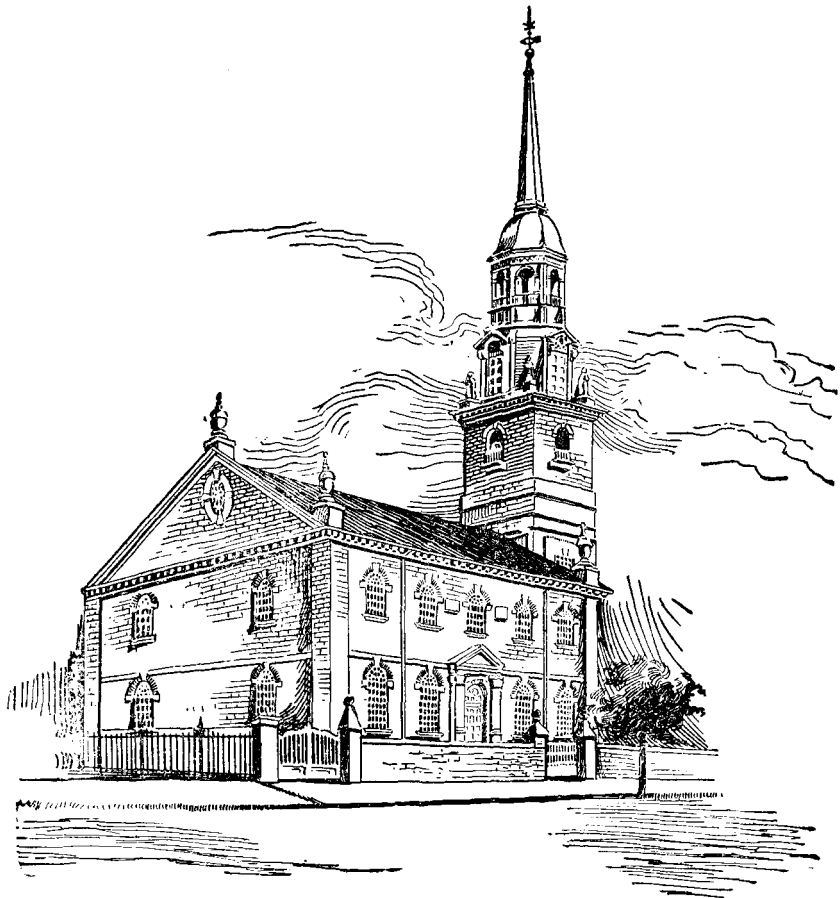
More than passing mention should be made of the various buildings of a religious use. Due to the religious ardour of the forefathers,—meeting houses and churches were subjects of careful attention, and frequently received the most generous gifts from church-wise adherents. But the diversity of styles; from the barn-like interiors of the simplicity-loving Moravians, to the dignified and magnificent structure known as the Trinity Lutheran Church in Lancaster.

In Trinity Lutheran Church, a work of the greatest importance was achieved. It represents the passing from the provincial forms (resulting from the location of Lancaster, away from the coastal cities of the first order) to the attainment of the highest results to which architecture of Colonial America was evolved. Trinity Lutheran Church stands at the crest of the wave development and must be ranked alongside of such worthy monuments as Christ's Church, Philadelphia, the old State House, Philadelphia, St. Paul's Chapel, New York, and St. Michael's Church, Charleston, S. C.

The corner stone was laid on May 18, 1761, and the construction progressed in a leisurely fashion until the dedication in 1766. That the builder took no small pride in his work is shown by the inscription at the base of the tower, Johannes Epple, 1761. The spire was erected at a later date as was also the case with the spire of Christ's Church, Philadelphia. There was a wave of interest or pride in the building of spires in the last decade of the eighteenth century, during which time eight or more examples were built in different parts of Pennsylvania, all possessing a certain similarity of base, bell tower and spire. That the builder of the body of the church was not responsible for the design of the spire is clearly indicated by the dissimilarity of the treatment of the woodwork in the two places. The spire is light, refined, and graceful; while the mouldings and pilasters of the door and interior are heavy and almost coarse. The woodwork crowning the tower was begun in 1792 and carried to completion in 1794. The wood figures representing the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, placed on the northeast, southeast, southwest and northwest angles are the only examples of sculpture in conjunction with architecture in central Pennsylvania and a rather rare use of carving in the Colonial style.

The rather odd and meaningless doorways at the spire base is a slight defect, for certainly they have no use at the level that does not serve to accommodate spectators who may make use of the tower. Trinity Lutheran

Church in York, Pennsylvania, has a similar hooded arrangement at the same location but the clock dial is the reasonable excuse for the pedimented roof and the projection at the four sides.



TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH AND DATE-STONE.

Having considered the various forms of building indigenous to Lancaster County, attention should be called to special features that formed integral parts of the exteriors and interiors of these structures.

The doorway seems to have received the closest attention of any part of the entire exterior. It is not uncommon to find a simple or severely considered front, having a richly treated doorway. It was the one object on which was lavished the greatest thought and pride. There is an admirable theory or tradition that the front door is, so to speak, a bit of the inside whose duty it is to come to the front door with a welcome to the passer-by and to show without some touch of the hospitality within.

William Penn at the beginning of the founding of the colony seems to have set an example in this respect for he disapproved of the door that adorned his main entry way, and after his return from England, he ordered a new front door because, "the present one is more ugly and low."

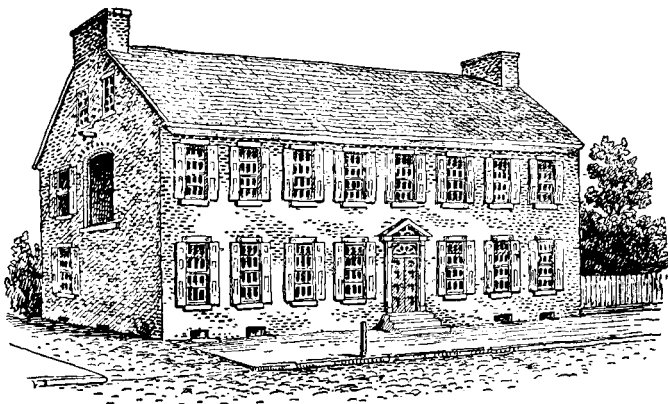
The adorning of the entryway frequently took the form of a pilastered framework, with a pediment or entablature above and with a semicircular or rectangular window over the door. The doorway of the old Mill House in Lancaster is an excellent specimen of the colonial style. There is a marked grace and refinement in the delicately turned and carved mouldings and an admirable practicalness of adopting the arched head in a door that penetrates a stone wall. Less ornate is the door from the house on the corner of Orange and Lime streets.

Doors are usually pannelled with the panels arranged crosswise or vertically, with the characteristic brass knocker. Occasionally the door is divided horizontally and swung in two parts like a Dutch door. The convenience of this form of door may be appreciated by one who has read the description of Townsend Ward: "Quaint it was, but how appropriate for a single-minded, hearty people among whom no deprecation was ever known until there came among them the evil days of single doors and locks and bolts,—while the lower half of the door was closed no quadruped could enter the dwelling house, but the refreshing air of heaven could, while the rest it afforded a leisure-loving people was most agreeable."

A somewhat similar door was peculiar to this locality, or at least it does not seem to occur elsewhere. It is a door of the Zahm house with a movable half, which may be raised to cover the glass halves in the upper portion at night or during a storm and lowered when shutters are thrown back and light admitted.

The fireplace was given a special prominence because of its being the sole means of heating the spacious interiors and found in every room. In the kitchen this feature served also for cooking purposes and was often of great width. The fireplace was sometimes built with exposed stonework having a great oak or walnut beam across the top of the opening and called the "mantel tree." It was most common to give grace by surrounding the fireplace with wood mouldings and with a mantel shelf above. The most pretentious designs were found in the living and dining rooms where fluted and reeded columns and pilasters and enriched moulds add dignity.

After the Revolution and coincident with the increased prosperity of the State, mantels were frequently imported from Philadelphia. Makers of mantels, doorways and window frames are known to have existed in Philadelphia and such objects of adornment were often a part of the cargo transported in the Conestoga wagons along the Philadelphia-Lancaster Turnpike. The rather unusual and elaborate mantels from the Diller House on Queen Street were of the imported variety and show a close resemblance to one



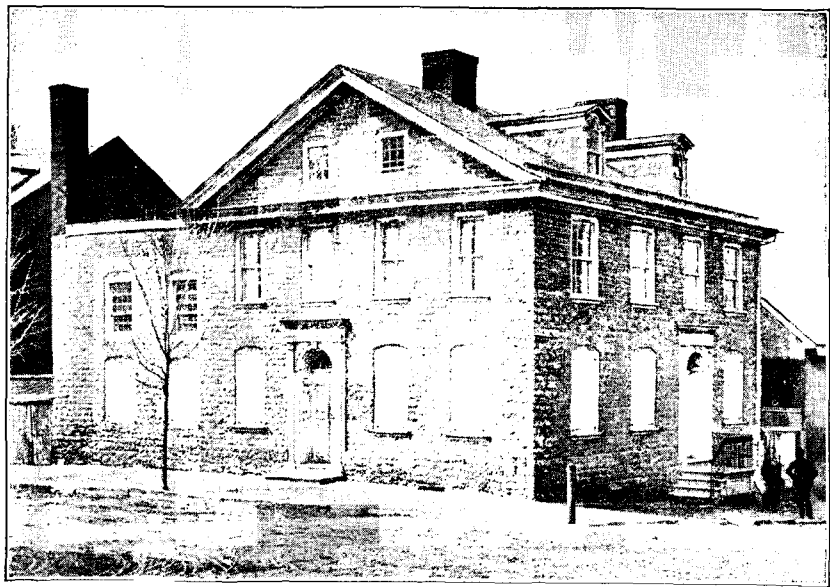
OLD LANCASTER STOREHOUSE.

another. The character of the classic ornament suggests affinity with the work of the Brothers Adams of England, who are known to have made popular the use of stucco ornament in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. That these specimens are American-made is attested by the close resemblance to similar examples recently found in Carlisle, one of which was inscribed by the maker, R. Wellford, Philadelphia, Deit. The name of "Robert Wellford, ornamental composition manufacturer," appears in the Philadelphia Directory for 1801.

The peculiar interest of the Lancaster specimens is due to the simple beauty of the ornament which consists of panels of female figures of Wedgewood inspiration, the garlands of roses, daisies, corn husks, Grecian urns and pendant drapery. The colonnettes with graceful caps are unique, being so unlike the work of local craftsman as to make their Philadelphia origin certain. Much could be said of stairways, cornices, windows, ironwork and other details which were treated so admirably by local builders, but the time does not permit.

In glancing in retrospect over the architectural remains of these pioneers we should not raise the objection that so little importance was done. Rather the more praise is due when we consider the circumstances under which the work was created. If the buildings to which attention has been called seem insignificant, we must remember that the creating occurred at a distance from the main stream of the true and accepted architecture. The

builder had to create his architectural vocabulary, or to design from recollection or from plates of "orders" to aid in the detailing of special features such as windows or mantels, and which, generally speaking, were most freely interpreted. We must remember that he had to interpret, create and recreate his motives and that he had to construct the tools for fashioning them, for he found himself in the deepest obscurity, without material, without models, and without instruction.



THE OLD KRUG HOUSE.

We cannot but feel the highest respect for the skill and energy of the men who, while subduing the wilderness, and laying the foundation for the development of this country, also found time and energy enough to build buildings that were to be, not merely shelters, but that show a considerable degree of inspiration and excellent good taste. That we are to-day returning to the study of colonial forms, proves the sound judgment of these builders.

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