

The Captain Johnson House
Hamburg, Connecticut

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Connecticut

Historic American Buildings Survey
Harold H. Davis, District Officer
29 Whitney Ave., New Haven, Conn.

THE CAPTAIN JOHNSON HOUSE

Hamburg, New London County, Conn.

Owner: George M. Bruestle, Hamburg, Conn.

Date of Erection: 1790

Architect or Builder: Captain Johnson

Present Condition: Good

Number of Stories: One and One-half

Materials of Construction: Stone foundation
Clapboard sidewalls with wood
quoins
Shingled gambrel roof
Stone chimney through building -
brick above roof

Other Existing Records: "Old Houses of Connecticut" -
Colonial Dames of America.

List of Photographs:

1. North East Elevation
2. Front Entrance And Dormer Detail
3. Passage From Entrance Hall To Dining Room
4. Door Detail - Dining Room To Passage
5. Detail - North Wall Of South Bed Room

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The old town of Hamburg lies midway between Lyme and North Lyme at the head of a deep, wild and excellent anchorage cutting in from the Connecticut River, known as Eight Mile River - so called for its being eight miles from Saybrook from which point in early days local distance was reckoned.

The original village was a part of the town of Lyme and used to contain besides its small group of houses, three stores, one at either end of the bridge crossing the river, and a third not far away kept by Captain Johnson and a partner, which was later turned into a private school and still later into a blacksmith shop. This store has since been removed.

Of the four houses of the locality the most interesting and by far the most picturesque is that erected by the same Captain Johnson, as a residence on the waterside facing the river, where in colonial times were built square riggers and other craft which were floated down to the deeper waters on casks. Below the houses may still be seen the remains of the dock which was used for shipbuilding, lumbering, and the drying and salting of shad.

Above rises a hill about 290' in height, which is called Candlewood Ledge, from a certain wood found there and formerly cut to burn as candles.

There are terraces of stone directly behind and to the south of the house on the slope of the hill.

This house, known as the Captain Johnson house, and later as the Old Brickway house, was built in 1790, and faces easterly 50' back from the highway and 100' from the water. It is erected as a terrane which extends the length of the lot and is fenced with the original pickets and runners.

A pine tree, 3-1/2' in diameter, stood at the south easterly road, and it may have been this tree about which the following story is told:

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One of the later owners of the house with characteristic shrewdness contained a bit of Yankee ingenuity. He arranged a guessing match for the neighborhood. Each contestant to pay five cents for the privilege of guessing the height of the tree, and the one guessing nearest to receive the entire sum. The bearers, however, took a hand in the game. A severe thunderstorm came up before the contest was over, the lightning tore off and mutilated the top of the Pine. As this accident made it impossible to determine the height, the shrewd Yankee, instead of calling the game off, pocketed the whole of the money.

The admirable workmanship of the house suggests that the work was done by ship carpenters, who frequently erected houses along the banks of the Connecticut River where shipbuilding was a leading activity.

It contains four rooms in each floor, with a chimney built of stone as far as the first story and of brick above. It has a barrel vault extending through the chimney from the front porch to the dining room, which lies behind. The flues of the chimney, thus separated, meet overhead and continue as a single stack above the roof. The house has a back ell which contains the kitchen, and the ell is probably the original.

In it was a very large fire place that has since been replaced by a modern chimney. The foundation of the house is of field stone squared and dressed above the ground in front. The walls are clapboarded, and clapboards fastened with hand wrought nails. The corners are framed with plain boards 12" wide, which run vertically up the walls at the back with quoins at the front. The entrance is at the center of the front through a porch with a gable shaped roof supported by columns originally square behind which are pilasters against the wall. The door is two beveled panelled with a modern hand made iron lock, and above it are four lights in plain frames.

In the roof are the three dormers ornamented with pediments over their frames with an extremely fine cornice enriched by very delicate modillion brackets. There is a latch way leading to the cellar which for many years seemed to have been so liable to overflow from the springs

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underneath, that for convenience sake a row boat was conveniently kept at the foot of the cellar stairs in which to row across to the Jam closet. In 1902 there was three feet of water in the cellar, but since that time the spring has been drained. Within the house the staircase which is enclosed and without a rail, rises at the rear. The walls which were originally walnut panelling or wainscoted, but are now entirely wainscoted on the first floor, the inside doors are of pine with four panels, and in the two front rooms on the first floor are fire places with cranes, bars, and trammels, In all the other rooms are mantels, one in the south room being ornamented with sunbursts in the colonial manner.

One of the most peculiar features of the house is the evidence which it furnished of the masonic interest of its builder. This evidence appears not only in the dining room which has the keystone over the main entrance through the barreled vault of the chimney, but also and more strikingly in the masonic hall, which is built across the southern end of the house in the second story, and rises to an arched ceiling in what corresponds to the attic in the remainder of the house, In it is an ornamental cornice or moulding and fire place.

Regarding the former occupants of the house but little seems to be known. In a bedroom opening from the dining room may still be seen a staunch hook fastened to the ceiling, which investigated has been found to serve for a block and tackle, wherewith to raise one of the owners who was so crippled with rheumatism that he was obliged to be lifted while his bed was remade. Perhaps this was one of the unfortunate results of living in a house - the cellar of which was more or less regularly filled with water, or it may have come about as one of the results of a seafaring life.

Source of Information: "Old Houses of Connecticut" -
Colonial Dames of America

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