Smyth-Letherbury House
(also known as "River House" and Denton House)
107 Water Street
Chestertown
Kent County
Maryland

HABS No. MD-231

HABS
MD
15-CHETO
6-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. MD-231

SMYTH-LETHERBURY HOUSE ("RIVER HOUSE," DENTON HOUSE)

HABS
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Location: 107 Water Street (formerly Front Street), between Maple Avenue and High Street, Chestertown Historic District (National Historic Landmark), Chestertown, Kent County, Maryland (latitude: 39° 12' 29"; longitude: 76° 03' 46.5")

Present Owner: State of Maryland, Maryland Historical Trust

Present Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. Karl E. Miller

Present Use: Residence

Statement of Significance: The affluence and influence of late eighteenth century Chestertown as a college town on a navigable river is exemplified by the architecture of "River House," a waterfront residence.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: "River House" stands on "water lots" number 12 and 13 which were part of the original survey of Chestertown and were first granted in 1732 to Jude Clarkson and John Tennant for six and five pounds respectively. In 1736-37, William Timbrill, a Barbados merchant, purchased the lots from Tennant and Clarkson. At the time of Timbrill's death in Barbados in 1743, he had built a house on the lots as recorded in later legal transactions. His will, probated July 25, 1743, directed that his Maryland property be sold and divided between his son and daughter, the children of his wife, Elizabeth Sober Timbrill. William Timbrill, Jr., whose name remained on the Debt Books of Kent County until 1757, died at the age of nineteen. On March 8, 1762, Sarah Timbrill of St. Michael's Parish, Barbados, married Joseph Price. They immediately started proceedings for the sale of the Maryland property and presented papers in Barbados which named them as owners of two lots in Chestertown, a dwelling house, household furniture, merchandise, plate, watches, and five Negro slaves.

   John Stone acquired the property from the Timbrill family heirs and subsequently filed three petitions with the General Assembly of Maryland in 1774, 1778, and 1779 to clear the title. By a petition to the assembly in 1784,

legal title went to Eleazer McComb. Upon McComb's acquisition of the property he immediately sold it to Thomas Smyth on March 12, 1784, for 300 £. On October 6, 1786, Smyth sold the property to his son, Richard Gresham Smyth, for 300 £. The younger Smyth sold the property nine months later on July 19, 1787 to Peregrine Letherbury for 1,200 £. Letherbury deeded the property to his daughter, Mary, and her husband, Dr. George Washington Thomas, April 17, 1808. The house was inherited by the Thomas' daughter, Mary (Polly) Thomas, who owned it until her death in 1849 when the house and the stable across the street were devised to Ezekiel Wickes, her cousin. Remaining in the Wickes family until 1870, the house was sold to William H. Meeter, who used it as a school.

In 1877, the house was purchased by Mary Elizabeth Willson Brown, the granddaughter of Thomas Smyth. During her ownership the house was used as a school for girls. Mrs. Brown, and later her son, Henry Clay Brown, occupied the house until 1938, except between 1912 and 1923 when it was owned by Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Beck. Miss Frances Denton purchased the house in 1938 from Mrs. Henry Brown and Bequeathed it to her niece Miss Marion Weeks in 1948. Prior to Miss Weeks' death in 1968, she deeded the house to the Maryland Historical Trust to secure its preservation and restoration.

2. Date of erection: Judging from the inflation of the purchase price of the property between 1786 and 1787, construction of the house may have been initiated by Robert Smyth, who sold the structure to Peregrine Letherbury, who may have completed construction. It can also be suggested that Thomas Smyth may have built the house after 1784, sold it for a nominal sum in 1786 to his son, who sold it at a profit to Letherbury. Brick veneer around the basement doorway of the southwest elevation suggests that the earlier Timbrill house may have been incorporated into the existing structure.

3. Architect: Unknown

4. Construction information: None known

5. Alterations and additions: In the nineteenth century the original chimneypiece appears to have been removed from the first floor parlor updating the room in style when the chimney breast was probably furred out for symmetry. Also during the nineteenth century, the rear windows of the parlor were lengthened as indicated by rebuilt brick jambs below the original sill heights. The original

pediment at the doorway frontispiece of the facade was removed in the mid nineteenth century and replaced with a flat roofed, Greek Revival, tetrastyle porch, having unfluted Doric columns and a double flight of steps. It has been suggested that at the main floors the semicircular arched openings at the stairhalls may have been installed during the same period. A doorway was later cut in between the stairhall and library. Evidence of earlier rebates indicates that there had been an earlier set of exterior shutters or blinds which were replaced with louvered blinds, removed during the 1970-71 restoration.

During the Beck ownership after 1912, the original three-story, galleried porch extending the length and height of the rear elevation was removed and replaced by a three-story (including basement) one-room deep wing having a one-story porch above the basement. The rear windows of the original structure at the first and second floors were closed at the stairwell, where a landing window was cut into the southwest end elevation, or were cut to the floor for French-type doors. Salvaged interior window reveal shutters were used for built-in cupboards and for blocking behind basement wall finish. Additional windows were cut in at the northeast end elevation for the parlor and south second floor bedroom. The basement kitchens were abandoned in the basement; and a kitchen was installed on the first floor of the wing. A bathroom was constructed in the northwest end of the second floor hall, after the partition between the room and north chamber was moved to enlarge the space. The new hall partition was trimmed to match the existing work, including the modillioned cornice. A similar bathroom was installed directly above on the third floor. The first floor was covered with oak flooring and most of the original hardware was removed and replaced. At the rear elevation the original doorways to the galleries were converted to cased openings.

In 1926 the chimneypiece, paneling, and trim including architrave moldings and cornice of the east, second floor bedroom were sold by Mrs. Henry Clay Brown to Henry F. DuPont for a "Winterthur" breakfast room. Now in the "Chestertown Room" of the Winterthur Museum, the paneling was somewhat altered to fit the space and the trim at the window openings was restored, although the shutters were not. The room in the Smyth-Letherbury House was fitted with new woodwork, which was a poor imitation of the original woodwork, and dry walled.

During the restoration of 1970-71 the wing was removed and the galleried porch was reconstructed. All the window

frames, sash and doorways of the rear elevations were restored. Existing blocking and paint ghosts provided for the restoration of the pediment of the doorway frontispiece of the facade. The stoop with the straight flight of steps was constructed to a late eighteenth century design. The chimney caps were rebuilt and the southwest basement doorway, which had been bricked up, was opened to provide a service entrance to the modern kitchen. A dining room was completed in the northeast basement space adjacent to small utility and furnace rooms. Both basement kitchen fireboxes were rebuilt to decrease their size. All the woodwork was refinished and restored where necessary which included replacing reveal shutters and missing trim and shelves of the arched closet of the west, second floor bedroom. Antique chimneypieces were installed in the parlor and the east second floor bedroom where the remainder of the replacement woodwork was left in place. Modern bathrooms were installed in the earlier locations. The stairway landing window was closed as were the northeast windows. The later library doorway was closed. Under the direction of Orin M. Bullock, Jr., FAIA, the restoration was supervised by James T. Wollon, Jr., AIA. The contractors were H. and J. Coleman, Inc. of Chestertown. John T. Drew of Bel Air, Maryland, carved the cornice molding enrichment and the pineapple block replacements for the restoration. The tenants of the house, Mr. and Mrs. Karl Miller, removed all the paint from the woodwork and generally supervised the refinishing, as well as the refurnishing of the house with their fine collection of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century furniture, much of which is of Baltimore origin.

6. Old views: Contained within the Marion Weeks collection owned by the Maryland Historical Trust are three early rear views of the house showing the galleried porch. Two show the house and environs from the Old Chester River bridge and the other is a detailed view of the rear porch structure from the east. The latter along with paint ghosts provided much of the detail for the reconstruction of the porch and galleries.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Thomas Smyth (1729-1819) was one of the wealthiest merchants of Chestertown and Kent County prior to and just after the Revolution. He was a Judge of Court of Kent County (1757-1769), a member of the Maryland Conventions of 1774 through 1776, a signer of the Association of Freemen in 1775, and a member of the Council of Safety for the Eastern Shore in

1775-76. During the Revolution, he was actively involved in securing supplies for the continental army.

Peregrine Letherbury practiced law in Chestertown, and was the first professor of law (1782-1801) at Washington College. He, as well as Thomas and Robert Smyth, contributed to the founding of the college in 1782. Letherbury served as Secretary, and later as President, of the Board of Visitors and Governors of the college. In 1776 and again in 1779, he was elected to the General Assembly of Maryland. After the Revolution he was actively involved in Masonry and in 1791 was elected Grand Master of the Maryland Masonry for one year.

Miss Frances Denton was the private secretary to Colonel Edward House (1858-1938), who was an advisor to President Woodrow Wilson.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: The land records and wills of Kent County, on file at the Maryland Hall of Records, Annapolis, and the Kent County Court House, Chestertown, provide much of the legal history of the property. A report titled "107 Water Street" is on file at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The compiler is unknown and it is undated, though it was apparently prepared when the National Trust was considering acquisition of the house. The National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form prepared by the Maryland Historical Trust is on file with the National Register, National Park Service, Washington, D. C. Various files, reports, and photographs of the house under restoration are located at the office of Orin M. Bullock, Jr., FAIA, and the Maryland Historical Trust. The restoration working drawings are on file with the architect, 1432 John Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

   A report, "The Chestertown Room at Winterthur" by John Snyder, Jr., dated May 1969 and located at Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, describes the paneling removed to the museum. At Chestertown at the Washington College Library, in the vertical files, is the report "History of Washington College." Information on the Smyth family is contained within the vertical files of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, Maryland.

2. Secondary and published sources: Though little has been published concerning the architecture of River House beyond an occasional photograph, biographical material is available in Edward T. Schultz, History of Freemasonry

in Maryland (Baltimore: 1884), Vol. I and the Biographical Cyclopedia of Representative Men of Maryland and the District of Columbia (Baltimore: 1879).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement: A fine example of late eighteenth century Georgian architecture, this dwelling is advantageously situated on the river front with a galleried porch at the southerly exposure. On a high English basement, the three-story, five-bay, gabled roof town house is in excellent condition and is carefully maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 40'-7" x 28'-4" (excluding the porches)

2. Foundations: Brick on stone footings

3. Wall construction, finish and color: Constructed of red brick with white painted Aquia Creek sandstone and wooden trim, the facade, laid in Flemish bond, is characterized by full height (three-story) corner pilasters which extend from a sandstone watertable of a cavetto-ovolo profile. Pilaster pedestals extend to grade below the watertable. A plain sandstone belt course is stopped by the pilasters which, like the pedestals, project approximately 3" from the facade and the end elevations. Splayed and beveled flat arched sandstone lintels with keystones and flanking pairs of voussoirs are located over the basement, first, and second floor window openings. The basement lintels have plain keystones, while the windows of the main floors have stepped keystones with the center second floor opening having a molded keystone. The masonry openings of the facade's third floor and the rear elevation, which is also laid in Flemish bond, have no arches. At the gabled end elevations, with small, four-light attic windows flanking each chimney, the walling is laid in common bond with a header course every fifth course. Within the facade masonry, closer bricks are in the walling which abutts the pilasters, at the pilaster pedestals, and generally at the window jambs. Closers are inconsistently used at the window jambs of both front and rear elevations.

4. Structural system: The exterior masonry walls and an interior masonry partition extending the depth of the house carry the floor joists which span between the end walls and the partition. First and second floor joists are 12"

deep and are 10" deep at the third floor. The 10" deep attic floor joists, which span between the front and rear walls and are tied into longitudinal beams spanning over the partition, extend beyond the walling to support the cornice and the rafters of the roof structure. Collar beams are half lapped into the rafters. Handmade nails were used throughout the original structure.

5. Porches: A shallow stoop and a straight flight of steps has been restored to the entrance facade. The wooden stairway rises from a stone step, has plain railings, and turned colonette newels. Reconstructed across the rear (river) elevation is a galleried, hexastyle porch with superimposed orders. Pilasters terminate each side bay at the walling. Square, stuccoed piers at the brick paved basement level support the first floor gallery. The flush board ceiling is flush with the top of the piers where a facia is set with a small crown molding below the overhang of the flooring of the first floor gallery. Square, Tuscan-type columns on pedestals support the second floor gallery. Balustrades with beveled bottom railing, square balusters and a molded top rail with the same profile as the pedestals and at the same height as the pedestals, infill the columns. A cornice with bed and crown molding extends below the flooring overhang of the second floor gallery with its two-story, round, Tuscan columns with attic bases. The columns are set on square pedestals, are infilled with similar balustrading, and support the eaves. Reconstruction details were provided by sections of original bed molding used as blocking in the 1912 wing and paint ghosts provided full size profiles for much of the new work. In addition the early photograph of the galleried porch, which indicated its overall character, showed a straight run stairway extending perpendicularly from the first floor, east bay of the porch. For convenience a dog-leg stairway was built within the porch behind the south bay. Below the landing and runs of the stairway vertical boarding encloses outdoor storage space. Excavations revealed the stone footings and a few bricks of the original porch piers approximately 6'-0" from the rear wall. However, the reconstructed porch was widened by approximately 2'-0".

6. Chimneys: A flush chimney rises from the apex of each gable end. The chimneys have a drip course above the roof slopes and have reconstructed, corbeled caps.

7. Openings:

   a. Doorways and doors: At the facade the aedicule door

surround consists of Tuscan pilasters supporting an entablature and a reconstructed pediment. Blocking and paint ghosts of the original pediment remained behind the 1912 porch and provided the design source for the new pediment. The moldings are a small version of the modillioned main cornice. The top step is within the paneled reveal and is at the height of the plinth blocks below the architrave trim at the opening and the high plinth blocks of the pilasters. Replacing the original six-panel door, which was deteriorated, is a reproduction door painted a dark red color. The original door was hung with H-L hinges which were salvaged and used at the parlor door. Modern butt hinges hang the new door which has an antique lock. Double outswinging louvered doors, which had a cast iron box lock with porcelain knobs were removed during the restoration.

At the doorways onto the galleries of the rear elevation six-panel doors with modern hardware, four-light transoms, paneled reveals, and double facia architrave trim with an ovolo backband applied to the face of the opening were restored to the openings. The original wooden lintels of the doorway openings extend beyond the applied architrave trim. At the rear basement doorway the door, constructed of vertical interior beaded boards and lozenge pattern exterior boards, is hung in a plain, beaded frame on long wrought iron strap hinges. Remnants of a wooden box lock and various dead bolts remained prior to the restoration of the door. An antique wooden box lock has been installed. A nine-light glazed door was designed for the restored opening of the southwest basement door with its segmentally arched head.

b. Windows and shutters: Typically the windows have double architrave trim with an ovolo backband set flush within the masonry opening. The sills are molded. Eight-over-eight light sash designed from original fragments were restored to the rear basement windows which retain a few original sash. The six-over-six light sash with the same muntin profile and located at the first and second floor windows were repaired or restored. The three sets of sash and frames in the 1912 end elevation window openings were restored to the rear openings from which they had come. The third floor and front basement windows have three-over-three light sash. Four-light casement sash and a louvered blind were at each attic gable window.

During the restoration the southwest casemates were replaced with louvered inserts for ventilating the air conditioning system. All the pairs of single-panel louvered blinds of the facade windows as well as the blind or shutter stops and the aluminum storm windows have been removed.

8. Roof:

a. Shape and covering: The asbestos shingled, gabled roof, installed in the 1930's was damaged during the restoration and was recently replaced with asphalt shingles. At the gables beaded bargeboards extend up the rakes and have a cyma backband. Extending at a slightly shallower pitch, the porch structure is shed roofed. The half gables are infilled with horizontal boarding.

b. Cornice and eaves: At the facade, the corner pilasters have stone necking, echinus capitals, and abacus blocks. Each capital supports an entablature section complete with a stone, double facia architrave and frieze. The frieze, like the capital and the architrave, extends around onto the end elevations and is ornamented with a square panel set with a square rosette. A wooden, modified Corinthian cornice extends below the eaves and is complete with modillions and plancers. Bed-molding consists of a cyma reversa below an "i" dentil course and an egg and dart ovolo. The modillions support a corona with a restored crown molding, based on original sections, having an enriched, carved cyma reversa and a large cyma recta. At each pilaster the cornice, which forms returns at the gable ends, steps out and the modillions are carved and foliated as are the plancers matching the frieze rosettes. Carved pineapple blocks terminate the corners of the dentil course. An unenriched version of the facade cornice, without modillions, was restored to the galleried porch cornice which has returns at the end elevations extending to the brick walling.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. Basement: Basically two spaces on either side of the masonry partition, the northeast area of the basement is partitioned to provide space for utility and furnace rooms. The southwest room is one large space with a

kitchen and a breakfast room and a powder room under the stair landing.

b. First floor: A central hall extends the depth of the house to the gallery and opens into the northeast parlor and tbe west library. An archway at the south end of the hall opens into the stair hall.

c. Second floor: A similar archway opens into the second floor central hall which provides access to the east and west bedrooms. At the northwest end of the hallway, which originally extended the depth of the house, a bathroom opens into a small north chamber which opens into the east bedroom through a nineteenth century doorway.

d. Third floor: The plan is similar to the second floor. However, a board partition originally divided the north space into two rooms, one small room opening into the east bedroom and one large room opening into the hallway.

2. Stairways: Rising from the first floor to the attic, the main stairway, which has intermediate landings between each floor, has a long oval, open well between the runs. Molded hand railing, extending to the attic, volutes above the bottom step on a colonette newel and is carried on square section balusters, three to a tread. Silhouette scroll motifs ornament each step end and the concave landing facias. A molded wall stringer and a dado rail extend up the runs to the third floor and are interrupted by the architrave trim of the window openings where the mitered step ends are completed with nosings. Fully raised paneling, below the first run, screens the basement stairway which has a plain oval section rail, square section balusters, two to a tread, and terminates at top and bottom, tapered, square section newels with plain caps. During the restoration the floor level below the first of the main stairway landing was dropped to provide additional head room for the basement stairway.

3. Flooring: The basement floor is concrete with modern sheet vinyl tile. Probably in 1912 narrow oak flooring was laid over the first and second floors' original, random width, tongue and groove pine flooring, which still survives at the third floor. The attic flooring is pine planks. Second and third floor bathroom flooring was removed and replaced with plywood subflooring and vinyl tile.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Generally, the walls of the first, second and third floors are plastered on handsplit lath. The basement walls, which were originally plastered, were furred out and dry walled. Within the second floor hallway, a flush, horizontal board wainscot extends around the walls below the chair rail. The wainscot has vertical battens half-lapped into the horizontal boards on the back side. Paneling was replaced with dry wall in the south, second floor bedroom after 1926. However, paneling and wainscoting survives in the other second floor rooms at the chimney end walls and is similar to the paneled chimney end wall of the north third floor bedroom. Vertical beaded boarding, which partitioned the third floor bathroom area from the small east chamber, was reset on a modern partition during the restoration. All the ceilings, except in the attic which is unfinished, were removed and drywalled during the restoration to accommodate new mechanical systems.

5. Doorways and doors: Typically, the doorways have single and double facia architrave trim with a cyma backband and paneled reveals within the masonry partition. Double facia trim is used principally at the second floor doorways, whick like the first floor, are hung with molded, sunken panel, six-panel doors. The third floor doorways have six-panel doors with one side having raised panels. Modern millwork trims all the basement doorways, several of which have salvaged five-across panel doors from the 1912 wing. The dining room doorway is a cased opening. A board and batten door originally hung at the basement doorway at the first floor and was similar to the low attic door. Semielliptical archways open into each first and second floor central hallway. The arches have Tuscan pilasters with sunken paneled shafts forming the cased openings. Capital-imposts receive single facia architrave trimmed arches with cyma backbanding and plain keystones. A flat archway at the third floor stair hall is trimmed matching the other third floor openings and is hung with modern, paneled doors with antique hinges.

6. Special decorative features, trim and cabinet work: All the trim of the basement is modern reproduction work including the mantel shelves, crown mold cornice, and beaded chair rail and casings. The window reveals are drywalled and have plain wooden sills without aprons.

   At the first floor, which has an "i" dentiled cornice, molded baseboarding extends around all the rooms and into the window reveals, as does pedestal type chair rail

forming window sills and aprons. In the parlor the window reveals, which extend to the floor, have single facia architrave trim and original paneled shutters similar to all the windows of the first and second floors, except those of the stair hall which are drywalled. Now located at 33 West Street, Annapolis, the colonetted chimneypiece in the parlor was replaced with an antique chimneypiece from the Centerville, Maryland, area. Crosettes support the dentiled and molded mantel shelf of the replacement chimneypiece. The library, with simple woodwork typical of the first floor, has an architrave trimmed chimneypiece having a molded mantel shelf above a frieze space ornamented with Chinese fretwork, restored from original ghost marks.

At the second floor, the trim of the bedrooms was and is considerably more elaborate. The interior of the east bedroom, sold to Henry DuPont, was characterized by wall paneling and a chimneypiece patterned after Plates XXX and XXXIX of William Pain's The Practical Builder (London, 1774). The chimneypiece has a broken pediment, matching the doorways, above a crosetted overmantel. A fluted frieze with a serpentine motif supports the mantel shelf. Paneled pedestals with Chinese fret insets extend below the window architrave trim and Wall-of-Troy chair rail. With moldings typical of the room, the cornice profile consists of a cavetto-ovolo bed molding with "i" dentils, a fluted corona, and an enriched cavetto crown molding. A rope molding surbase completes the baseboarding. Installed in the bedroom, to replace the poor reproduction of the original chimneypiece, is an antique, late eighteenth century chimneypiece from the Reisterstown, Maryland, area.

The small, north chamber of the second floor has similar cornice and chair rail and "Gothick" fretwork pedestals at the dado which has sunken panels bordered with small half-round molding of poplar applied with sections of needles. At the southeast end of the room the paneled chimney breast with its backband trimmed firebox is infilled with upper and lower cupboards on either side having overdoor panels. The two east cupboard doors which had been replaced with a single door for a clothes closet, were restored.

In the west bedroom the chimney breast at the southwest end of the room is paneled. The tall, sunken panels and small frieze panels flank the chimneypiece which is the dominant feature of the room. A crosetted ovolo architrave extends around the firebox and supports plain blocks

carrying a stepped out, molded, dentiled mantel shelf from which fluted Tuscan pilasters on high plinths extend to a full entablature with an egg and dart ovolo supporting end frieze blocks and stepped out, enriched cavetto cornice. The overmantel is ornamented with applied molding forming a square motif with each quadrant corner having a foliated roundel and vines. The composition is patterned after Plate I from the 1762, 1767, and 1773 editions of William Salmon's Palladio Londonensis. Below the mahogany capped chair rail, which is ornamented with a Wall-of-Troy dentil motif, fully raised dado panels with quadrant corners extend around the room. The chair rail forms capitals over fluted pedestals at the window architrave trim which is crosetted at the chair rail and at the heads where the backband steps up forming central block and matches the door trim. Beside the chimney breast, a closet with semicircular architrave trim, a molded keystone, and fluted Tuscan pilasters within an architrave trimmed opening has a paneled dado door and shelves cut in a half round-cyma profile. Original doors, sections of the pilasters, the chair rail, and all but one shelf were removed when the cupboard was altered into a clothes closet. Except for the upper door the millwork was restored.

The hallway with its horizontal, flush board wainscot, with vertical splines half rebated in on the reverse side, has a cavetto cornice set with simple modillions cut in a cyma profile. The bathroom space also has modillion blocks concealed above the modern suspended ceiling.

At the third floor, the trim consists primarily of crown mold cornice, pedestal type chair rail, molded baseboarding, and architrave trim at the openings. The window reveals do not extend to the floor. The east bedroom, with its shallow chimney breast, clothes closet with peg hangers, has single facia architrave trimmed chimneypiece with a Chinese fretwork ornamented cushion frieze and a molded mantel shelf. The west bedroom chimneypiece has fluted frieze blocks above the architrave facia trim and is set against the fully raised paneling of the chimney wall and the adjacent shallow clothes closet.

In the attic a ships ladder provided access to the skuttle on the rear slope of the roof.

7. Hardware: Throughout the interior most of the original hardware, including H-L hinges and box locks, were replaced with mortise locks and butt hinges in 1912 and

later nineteenth century cast iron rim locks on several secondary doors. Originally the jamb leaf of the H-L hinges was hidden by the architrave trim.

8. Mechanical equipment:

   a. Heating: The house is beated and cooled with a modern hot water system. Cast iron steam radiators and a furnace, probably installed in 1912, were removed during the restoration.

   b. Lighting: A new electrical system was installed during the restoration. All the old electrical fixtures, except the pressed glass chandelier in the parlor, were removed including the duplex drop fixtures with inverted molded glass shades and various wall sconces. The parlor chandelier was restored, though the late nineteenth century plaster ceiling ornament was removed. Antique and modern fixtures were installed in all the rooms.

   c. Plumbing: The bathrooms of the second and third floors retained early plumbing fixtures prior to the restoration. Of note, the second floor bathroom had a footed tub of large proportions with a mahogany rim. The marble topped wash basin was retained in the third floor bathroom.

D. Site and Surroundings: The house, on an approximately 80' x 100' lot, is located on the northwest side of Water (formerly Front) Street approximately seven feet from an adjacent house at the southwest side and is separated by a small areaway providing access to the kitchen doorway. A herringbone pattern, brick paved sidewalk extends to the facade, set back a few feet from the front property line. The front tree has been removed. A wide side yard provides access to the rear yard which slopes down to a concrete retaining wall at the river's edge. The garden has been restored by Mr. and Mrs. Miller with appropriate late eighteenth century plant materials and retains a magnolia, a holly, and a hawthorne tree along with several boxwoods. The house forms an integral part of a row of eighteenth and nineteenth century, detached town houses which form the northwest elevation of Water Street and contribute to the landmark quality of Chestertown.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The photographs of the house, taken by Jack E. Boucher for the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1964, were supplemented by historical and architectural data prepared by Rodd L. Wheaton, Architect, HABS, in May 1973 with assistance from James T. Wollon, Jr., AIA. Drawings were prepared by Susan Dynes, Architect, HABS, in June 1973 in the Washington office of HABS from architectural drawings for the restoration which were donated to HABS by Orin M. Bullock, Jr. FAIA.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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(River House, Denton House, Denton-Weeks House)

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Location: 107 Water Street, Chestertown, Kent County, Maryland. The Smyth-Letherbury House is located at latitude: 39.208136, Longitude: -76.062943. This point was obtained in 2016 using Google Earth (WGS84). There is no restriction on its release to the public.

Significance: Built ca. 1785 for a wealthy local merchant Thomas Smythe, the Smyth-Letherbury House is among finest residences in Chestertown, exemplifying the town's eighteenth century prominence as Maryland's chief shipping port for tobacco and wheat. The house is an exceptional example of the transition from the Georgian to the Federal period, exhibiting numerous high-style identifying features. It is located along Water Street, where many of Chestertown's most fashionable merchant and planter class dwellings were built and still remain. The house is recognized for its exception interior appointments, so much so that one room was removed to create the "Chestertown Room" at Winterthur Museum, in 1923.

Description: The Smyth-Letherbury House is a detached Federal townhouse that stands three stories in height above a raised basement and is a full five bays in width. Exemplary of the Federal style is its narrow-gauged Flemish bond brick, molded water table and belt course and its large six-over-six-light sash windows with flat-arched lintels with keystone. Among its most significant stylistic ornamental features are the full-height corner pilasters and Corinthian cornice. The Smyth-Letherbury was erected on two of the town's "water lots" fronting the Chester River and has a double height porch along the rear façade to take advantage of its privileged site. Slightly banked, the basement to the rear is at ground level, where the original kitchen and dining room were located. The elaborate drawing room and library were on the first floor, commanding superb vistas of the surrounding riverfront landscape.

History: Chestertown was first established as New Town in 1698 as the site of a county courthouse and one of Maryland's six designated ports of entry (it was renamed Chestertown in 1780). However, it did not develop significantly until about 1730 when the current town grid was established. Chestertown's hey-day was the period between 1750 and 1790 when it functioned as the primary shipping port for tobacco and wheat on the eastern shore. It was during this period that the wealthy planter and merchant classes erected the town's finest buildings and residences, of which the Smyth-Letherbury House ranks among the very best. Chestertown rivals only Annapolis in its collection of intact Colonial era structures, including a number of prime examples near the Smyth-Letherbury

House, such as Wide Hall and the old Custom House. In addition to its prominence as a significant commercial port and location on route to Philadelphia to the north and Virginia to the south, Chestertown was the seat of county government and a center for culture and learning, including Washington College, founded in 1752. Although by 1800 it was overshadowed by the port at Baltimore, Chestertown remained significant to the development of Maryland's Eastern Shore throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The original owner of Denton House was likely Thomas Smythe, one of Chestertown's wealthiest merchants and a patriot who helped to secure supplies for the Continental army during the American Revolution. Smythe also played a prominent role in state and local politics. He was a Judge of the Court for Kent County, a member of the Maryland Conventions of 1774 through 1776, and a member of the Council of Safety for the Eastern Shore. The house was sold in 1787 to Peregrine Letherbury, a practicing Chestertown attorney and Washington College's first professor of law. It was purchased in 1877 by a granddaughter of Thomas Smythe, Elizabeth Willson Brown, who operated it as a school for girls. In 1938, Ms. Frances Denton, a private secretary to Colonel Edward House, from whom it derives its current name, purchased the house. It was deeded to Maryland Historical Trust in 1968 to secure its preservation. It was subsequently restored and is once again in private ownership.

Sources: Bourne, Michael. "Chestertown Historic District Nomination," Kent County, Maryland, 1976. National Register of Historic Places, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.

City of Chestertown. "Chestertown Historic District Nomination, Boundary Extension," Kent County, Maryland, 1983 National Register of Historic Places, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.

Historic American Buildings Survey, "Smythe-Letherbury House," Chestertown, Kent County, Maryland; HABS No. MD-231, 1973. Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC. Records available through the Library of Congress.

Parish, Mrs. Preston. "Denton House (Denton-Weeks House, River House, Smyth-Letherbury House)," Chestertown National Landmark Historic District Nomination," Kent County, Maryland, 1971. National Register of Historic Places, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.

Historian(s): Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS Historian, 2016