

Senator John R. Thomson House
(Belgarde, Borough Hall)
50 Stockton Street
Princeton
Mercer County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-799

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Historian's Work Sheet for "Photo-Data Books" (Part I)

Name of Structure THOMSON HALL originally known as "BELGARDE"

State New Jersey County Mercer Town or vicinity Princeton

Street address or location 50 Stockton Street (Located in Thomson Hall Park which occupies Princeton Borough Lots # 15 and # 15A between Bayard Lane and Library Place from the south side of Stockton Street to the North side of Mercer St.)(See plot plan)
Present Owner (give address) TRUSTEES OF THE ESTATE OF J.A.T. SWANN (Josephine Ward Thomson Swann)
See section Twelve, her will, attached.

Present Occupant Municipal Gov't. of Princeton Present Use Borough Hall of Princeton

Brief Statement of Significance: Built in 1825 and held by members of the same family, many of whom were prominent in local, State and National affairs,- until it was left for the use of "The People of Princeton", by Mrs. Swann in 1906.

A primary source for all statements and for later authors writing on Princeton is History of Princeton and Its Institutions, John Freylinghuysen Hageman, Philadelphia, 1879.

PHYSICAL HISTORY (indicate sources of information for all statements) Sources are: 1879.
Archives of Princeton University; Will of J.A. Thomson Swann

Original and subsequent owners (chain of title)
The house was ordered to be built by Richard Stockton ("The Duke"), son of the Signer, in 1825 for his daughter, Annis on her marriage to John Renshaw Thomson, Princeton, Class of 1817, Honorary A.M., 1846. She died in
Mr. Thomson became a U.S. Senator in 1853 and continued to occupy the house with his second wife, Josephine Ward Thomson, until his death in September, 1862.
After the death of Senator Thomson in 1862, his widow continued to live there. In 1878 she married Governor Thomas Swann of Maryland, and in 1906 left it to her Trustees for People.
Date of Erection 1825 Architect No written record, except [] of Princeton

Builder, suppliers, etc. Unknown. Statement by Hageman that Charles Steadman " Built all the houses on Stockton Street except Morven". It is known that he was the architect for the house at One Bayard Lane built in the same year for Richard Stockton's son, Robert, and his bride, Miss Potter.

Notes on original plan and construction of building
No contemporary written records known. It is supposed that it resembled the house at One Bayard Lane, originally.

Notes on known alterations and additions, with dates and architects
See photograph in Princeton University archives of Mrs. Thomson and student friends taken in 1872. This shows west pavillion which Mrs. Thomson probably had added when she changed the roof to a Mansard type.
Sketch and plans for alterations were made by Shirley Morgan, Architect in 1929. Apparently no change was made until 1936-39 when W.P.A. Funds became available,- at which time changes were made at the back(south), enclosing a porch, and making rooms in basement useable for Borough purposes.

See photograph in office of Borough Administrator taken before changes to north facade were

made in 1953, - at which time two small rooms were added on either side of front hall, and French windows were shortened to conventional length.

The original small house on this plot of land was known as Rose Cottage. It was there, as early as 1803, and was occupied by Mrs. Robert Field, sister of Richard, "The Duke," who built "Belgarde". It occupied the north-east corner of the plot, and was torn down in 1959.

HISTORICAL EVENTS AND PERSONS ASSOCIATED WITH BUILDING

Annie, Granddaughter of Richard Stockton, Signer of the Declaration of Independence was the first mistress of the house, on her marriage to John Renshaw Thomson, who later, became United States Senator from New Jersey.

After Senator Thomson's death, his widow and Second wife, married former Governor of Maryland, Thomas Swann.

From 1909 until 1936, the house served as a community center for Princeton, where Community organizations met, theatricals, and dances were held. During this time, the "Stable" of the estate was used for Municipal offices. This small building, about which there is no earlier record, was used during the World War II for the Ration Board. Since then it has been used as headquarters for the local American Legion. A branch of the Princeton Public Library was maintained for a while in Thomson Hall.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary and unpublished sources: Fully describe and give the locations of any original or later drawings, specifications, old views, manuscripts, or other papers. Transcribe or make appropriate citations to public documents and give their locations. See Will of Josephine Thomson Swann, attached, and other notes.

1. Unpublished views of the building are held by the Historical Society of Princeton
2. Photograph of Mrs. Thomeon and Student friends taken in 1872 is in Archive of Princeton University.
3. Architect's Pencil sketch of North (main) facade is in files of Borough Administrator, Thomeon Hall, made in 1929, by Shirley Morgan.
4. Photograph taken before alterations to North facade in 1953, is also on file there.
5. Plot plane, and floor plans dated 1929, 1939-40, and later are in Borough Engineer's office at 102 Witherspoon Street.

Secondary and published sources: For books and articles give the complete facts of publication (author, title, place of publication, date). Identify and give addresses of interviewees.

1. Princeton University Archive, data about John Renshaw Thomson, born ca. 1796. Graduate of Princeton, 1817. Honorary A.M., 1846, United States Senator Mr. Halsey Thomas, Archivist, Princeton University Library.
2. Administrator of the Borough of Princeton, Mr. Robert Mooney
3. A House Called Morven, Alfred Hoyt Bill in collaboration with Walter E. Edge Princeton University Press, 1954
4. Princeton Past and Present, V. Lansing Colling, Princeton University Press, 1931
5. Historic Princeton, published by Princeton Municipal Improvement, Inc., 1940
- ~~6. Princeton, New Jersey Issued by Chamber of Commerce of Princeton, 1924~~
6. Princeton, New Jersey Issued by Chamber of Commerce of Princeton, 1924
(One known copy in office of Borough Administrator)
7. Old Princeton's Neighbors, written and illustrated by the Federal Writers' Project, Printed by the Graphic Arts Press, 1939.

Prepared by Jeanette S. Webster (Mrs. R.B.)

Date May 1, 1964

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION OR CONTINUATIONS: Any of the above entries may be continued or exact transcripts in quotes from pertinent documents may be appended on additional sheets.