

Old Village
Batsto, Burlington County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

Old Village
Batsto, Burlington County, New Jersey

Owner: Wharton Estate

Date of Erection: Manor House enlarged about 1876;
date of erection of older portion
uncertain; stone barn: 1830; saw
mill: about time of furnace, 1766

Materials of Construction:

MANOR HOUSE: three and one-half stories with a
116 foot tower; stone foundation; exterior brick,
stuccoed; interior plaster; inside brick chimneys;
pitch roof with dormers

WORKMAN'S HOUSE: two and one-half stories; stone
foundation; frame construction, clapboards; interior
plaster; inside brick chimneys; pitch roof

BARN: two and one-half stories; stone foundation;
stone; rough finish inside; pitch roof

SAW MILL: two stories; stone foundation; frame;
rough finish inside; pitch roof

WHEEL BARNS: two stories; stone foundation; frame;
rough finish inside; pitch roof

(See NJ-366 for Store and Post Office, NJ-367 for
Grist Mill, and NJ-445 for Store House)

Historical Data:

Batsto or Batstow Furnace is located on
Batsto River or Creek, a branch of Little Egg Harbor
or Mullica River. The Indians had a summer village

here called Mescochague, later Sweetwater. Batsto was formerly the property of Israel Pemberton and was known as Whitcomb Manor; it was sold to Charles Read, a nephew of Pemberton by marriage. Read began buying and selling properties as early as 1754 and by 1766 he had a large estate; he had a quarter interest in Batsto. In 1766 the furnace was built on a site now covered by an artificial pond. Boyer says that the owners in 1767 were Reuben Haines, brewer of Philadelphia, John Cooper, gentleman, Burlington, Charles Read, Esquire of Burlington, William Franklin, a merchant of New York City, and Joseph Wilson of Burlington County; but Hall lists Colonel John Knox as the owner in 1767 and Thomas Mayberry in 1768. Boyer is, however, the more reliable source.

John Cox became the owner about 1773. He was a merchant of Philadelphia, an active patriot, a member of the first General Committee on Correspondence and the Council of Safety. When the Philadelphia Association was organized he was chosen major and later lieutenant-colonel. In 1778 he became assistant quartermaster-general of the army. He purchased in 1780 the old manor at Bloomsbury, Trenton, built by William Trent (NJ-200). Here he spent about ten years.

Cox wanted a fort erected to protect Batsto from the British ships near Little Egg Harbor. In a memorial to the Council of Safety, July 5, 1777, a petition was presented to fortify Little Egg Harbor inlet; however, the Council felt that it was without jurisdiction. In September, 1777 the general assembly authorized an appropriation of four hundred and thirty pounds one shilling and three pence for the erection and equipment of a fort at Foxbarrows on Chestnut Neck. There was a delay in mounting the guns and the British attacked the fort on October 15, 1778. Then followed what is known as the massacre of Chestnut Neck. On

June 5, 1777 Cox was granted power to raise a company of fifty men and two lieutenants with himself as captain for the defense of Batsto Furnace. In October, 1777 after considerable property had been destroyed by the British at Egg Harbor Meeting House (Tuckerton), Captain Ferguson in charge of the British troops planned to destroy Batsto; however, Pulaski's foreign legion prevented this.

Joseph Ball was connected with Batsto as early as 1776, if not earlier. He was the chief proprietor of the furnace in 1778 and became the sole owner in 1781. After 1784 William Richards was connected with Batsto. He was an uncle of Ball and served as his manager. According to the New Jersey Archives, Charles Pettit was one of the owners in 1781. This point, however, is hazy. By an agreement of June 5, 1784 William Richards purchased the Batsto Iron Works from his nephew Joseph Ball. However, Joseph Ball and Charles Pettit had each agreed to take one-third of the property. Richards was the manager and held the principal interest between 1786 and 1790.

The set-up at Batsto represented a kind of feudal relationship between the owner and his workmen and tenants. However, Batsto different from many furnaces; there was no slave labor used, but William Richards lived as a kind of feudal lord, settling disputes among his people, purchasing their supplies for them, and in general administering to their welfare.

After the death of William Richards in 1823, the estate was sold. It consisted of about fifty thousand acres and the members of the Richards family bought the land around Batsto. At that time Batsto Furnace and farms were appraised at fifty-five thousand two hundred dollars.

The furnace was rebuilt twice - once in 1726 and again in 1829. In 1835 the profits began to lessen. It was due largely to the competition of Pennsylvania furnaces. Jesse Richards, who had become the manager as early as 1807, after his father's death started a

glass factory and a paper mill. Soon after the death of Jess Richards in 1854, fifty-five thousand acres out of the total of eighty thousand were sold to pay encumbrances. The industries were closed and a sheriff's sale finally cleaned up the interest of the Richards family in the Batsto property. A fire in 1874 destroyed the old iron works and most of the village.

In 1876 Joseph Wharton of Philadelphia purchased the Batsto estate, approximately one hundred square miles. The big house was enlarged and improved to the extent of over \$40,000. The manor house now contains thirty-six rooms. The dining room is finished in ash, the parlor in cherry and walnut, and the stairway in oak.

Batsto Furnace furnished cannon balls both for the Revolutionary War and for the War of 1812. In its early existence pots, kettles, grate bars, sash weights, pestles, and forge hammers were made there; also, many decorative stove plates or chimney backs. Later on grave-markers, ornamented iron fences, and iron columns were cast. The steam cylinders for John Fitch's fourth boat were made at Batsto. In later years mostly iron water pipe was produced.

Bibliography:

Boyer, C. S. Early Forges and Furnaces in New Jersey Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931

Hall, J. P. The Daily Union History of Atlantic City and County, New Jersey Atlantic City, The Daily Union Printing Company, 1900

Material from George De Cou, Historian for Burlington County Historical Society

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Approved:

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THU Oct 26 1977