

The Joseph Pearson House
East Avon, New York

Livingston County

HABS NO. NY-216

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NY,
26-AVOE,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Walter H. Cassebeer, District Officer
84 Exchange Street, New York City

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THE JOSEPH PEARSON HOUSE
EAST AVON, NEW YORK

Owner: Heirs

Date of Erection: 1812

Architect:

Builder:

Present Condition: Excellent

Number of Stories: 2

Materials of Construction: Frame, Stone foundation.

Other Existing Records:

Additional Data:

THE JOSEPH PEARSON HOUSE

The house is of rough-hewn log frame with clapboarded exterior, stone foundation walls, and brick chimneys, the timbers from the farm of the pioneer, the stone from the fields and cellar excavation, and the brick from a kiln on the banks of the Genesee River. Except for new sills, put under the house in 1920, and the alteration of the east chimney into a vault, about 50 years ago, the structure of the main house is still in its original state. There are the usual one-story extensions at the rear, consisting of kitchen, servants' room, wood shed, carriage room, etc., which add greatly to its charm.

The interior has undergone no major alterations, except for the reconstruction of the east chimney into a vault on the first story. The vault is large enough for several people to stand upright and was used for the safe keeping of large sums of money before the advent of a bank in the district. In the northeast room and in the cellar below, there still may be seen the evidence of a once large kitchen hearth with its brick ovens.

The Parlor is supposed to have been the public room, as the house was used for the entertainment of travelers, as were most of the houses of the place and period. The floor has a painted pattern in black and white which has nearly been obliterated. It is now quite indistinct, in spite of the attempts to preserve it in past years. The excellent condition of the house speaks well for the workmanship of the early builders.

Joseph Pearson, his wife, Sarah Watrous and four children settled in the thriving community which is now East Avon in 1798. They were both born in Connecticut. Their families moved westward after the Revolution and they were married near Albany. In search of a permanent home they followed the trail made safe by Sullivan's military expedition of 1787 when the Indians hostile to the settlers were gradually confined to reservations. One of these was Canawaugus on the west bank of the Genesee River, three miles west of Joseph Pearson's home.

The road from Albany was rough, in many places made of

logs laid across muddy spots called corduroy roads, and often the journey took two weeks. Sarah Pearson, carrying in her arms the baby six months old, rode horseback, while Joseph brought the other three children and the household furniture in a wagon. Their first night in the Genesee country was spent at the famous hostelry west of Lima called "The Yellow Wasp."

After living on a farm east of the present village of East Avon, which was later sold to his nephew, John Pearson, Joseph purchased land from John Beach at the four corners where the village was located, and moved into a log house on the Albany-Buffalo highway. His family of four increasing to nine he built the present homestead, which was built in the year 1812.

For several years Joseph Pearson kept a public house here. As one of the momentous migrations of history was taking place from New England to the Middle West there were hosts of travelers needing wayside entertainment as there are today when so many are touring by auto. He became widely known for his genial hospitality.

Sarah Watrous Pearson, the mother of the family, died suddenly in her kitchen at the age of thirty-eight and Joseph Pearson married her older sister, Claranda, widow of Obadiah Jenks, who also had a family of several children.

It was the custom to marry young; so numerous homes were formed in the surrounding country by young people from the big house. Two sons, Frederick and Bradley, were given farms near by; a third son went to Flint, Michigan to open a new country; a daughter, Maria, married a lawyer, one of the first in Livingston County, Augustus Aristides Bennett; three of their sons became physicians; and their daughters were women of influence. Mary, or Polly Pearson, as the family called her, married William Jenks and their son, James, was widely known as an Avon doctor.

Catherine, the oldest daughter of Joseph and Sarah Pearson, married Matthew Hanna when sixteen years old, but was left a widow with three little girls at twenty, and came back temporarily to her father's home, the new house on the corner in the year 1815. Later she married David Kneeland with whom she removed to LeRoy. Her children held prominent places there and in Wisconsin several of them became founders of Milwaukee.

Another daughter of Joseph Pearson, named Wealthy, married Guerdon Cook and they became pioneers of Grand Blanc, Wisconsin.

During his long life of seventy-four years Joseph Pearson, grown to be a prosperous land holder, aided his community by supporting the church across the strsst from his house, of which his wife Clarendia was an active member for many years. Their home was always open for meetings and conferences, and one room, known as "the prophet's chamber", was always available for the entertainment of visiting ministers.

After Clarendia's death in 1834, Joseph married a third time, the new bride being a teacher of the early Avon schools, "Pedia" Wheelock, who, with him enjoyed life in the family home for nine years, until the death of Joseph Pearson, at the age of 76, in 1844. Pedia Wheelock Pearson after a few years removed to a smaller house on a hill at the west end of the farm, opposite the present State troopers headquarters.

It was at this time that Catherine, the oldest daughter of Joseph Pearson came from LeRoy to the old homestead with her husband, Enos Bachelder and two daughters. Together they established their home here, satisfying the other heirs to Joseph Pearson's estate. One daughter, Wealthy, was a widow and dying young she left a little son David Kendrick White, who was brought up in this home by her younger sister Harriet (afterward Mrs. Solomon Taintor,) and later he enlisted as a drummer-boy in the Civil War and died in camp of disease at the age of fifteen.

Mr. and Mrs. Bachelder lived to celebrate their golden wedding and the homestead was filled to overflowing with their descendants and relatives coming from prosperous homes in New York, Michigan, Wisconsin and California, to make merry with them. On various other occasions there were family re-unions from many states when the Pearson Homestead was crowded with guests coming back to the family roof-tree.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Bachelder, though quiet and unassuming, had firm convictions of justice and were courageous and consistent in their conduct. When harboring fugitive slaves was legally a crime, this house in East Avon corner proved a shelter and protection to many a slave on the

way from the south to Rochester and Canada. It was also the rendezvous of a secret society of Masons for some years, until the disappearance of the leader William Morgan, when Enos Bachelder resigned from the masonic order. Also in the Bachelder home numerous young people outside of the family were given a start in life until they were able to support themselves.

The youngest daughter of Catherine and Enos Bachelder, Harriet Bachelder, in 1856, married Dr. Solomon Taintor of Colchester, Connecticut. Their wedding was the occasion of another gala day in the history of the old home when a large number gathered as two other Pearson cousins in the village were married the same day. The new family, Dr. and Mrs. Taintor, spent their married life in the home, caring for the old couple and continuing the traditions of the Bachelders and Pearsons in their devotion to the church and the community, beloved of all who knew them. Dr. Taintor planted the elm, pine and cedar trees now beautifully shading the lawn, repaired the house and built new farm buildings. He also built the vault in one of the large chimneys.

Edgar Guest says:

"It takes a heap of livin'
In a house to make it home."

True was this of the Taintor home. Seven children were here born to Dr. and Mrs. Harriet Taintor, two of whom still survive and for years have made it their summer home. The older daughter, Grace Pearson Taintor, married William James Sly, their wedding September 1, 1896 in the house and church bringing another day of reunion of relatives from near and afar and filling the house with happy guests. Dr. and Mrs. William J. Sly, after living in a number of different states, east and west, as Dr. Sly pursued his chosen profession of teaching, preaching and writing, have returned to the ancestral homestead. He is the author of a number of popular books, "World Stories Retold" and others. Mrs. Grace Sly has been active in social life, member of numerous women's clubs and Regent of the Yamhill Chapter of D.A.R. in Oregon. The youngest daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Taintor, Sarah Augusta Taintor, whose life has been spent in study, travel, teaching and authorship and who for several years

has resided in New York City teaching in the Theodore Roosevelt High School and in Columbia University, makes the ancestral home her summer vacation delight. Following the traditions of her parents and grandparents she has been indefatigable in repairing and improving the house inside and out.

Giving careful study to colonial architecture and interior decoration, she has preserved the ancient features of the house, allowing nothing of value and beauty to be destroyed. Old furniture, long relegated to the attic has been reconditioned and restored to the rooms. Gardens have been planned on the lawns, covering one acre, all that is left of the original farm which extended down the north road for a mile. New trees and shrubs have added beauty to it. Miss Taintor, collaborating with Miss Munroe, is the author of the "Secretary's Hand Book" and the "Book of Modern Letters."

On the first of August 1935, the house was opened to the public for inspection and the spacious porch in the rear and the grounds became the scene of an historical pageant, presenting vivid pictures in color and costume of the past of the East Avon community. Few occasions in the life of East Avon have brought together more people from near and far than this pageant given in this old colonial Pearson Homestead for the benefit of the new church social hall across the way.

By Mrs. William J. Sly.

Rev. Dec. 23. 36 Tlu