

Strawberry
Philadelphia, Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-1668

HABS
PA
SI-PHILA
219-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Pennsylvania-1

Historic American Buildings Survey

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

Strawberry Mansion
(Summerville, Somerton)
Vicinity of Dauphin and Edgeley Drives;
Fairmount Park
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1668

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Addendum to:

Strawberry
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania
(as originally recorded)

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20204

ADDENDUM TO
STRAWBERRY MANSION
(Summerville)
(Somerton)
Fairmount Park
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1668

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA
PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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ADDENDUM TO:
STRAWBERRY MANSION HABS NO. PA-1668
(Summerville, Somerton)

Location: Approximately 300' from the southeastern terminus of Strawberry Mansion Bridge, on a lot encircled by Strawberry Mansion Drive (to the north) and Woodford Drive (to the south), East Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Significance: Strawberry Mansion illustrates three phases in the history of American architecture and is associated with two important Philadelphians. Prominent Quaker lawyer, Federalist and abolitionist William Lewis erected a Federal-style house in 1789, naming it "Summerville." The building incorporated an earlier structure and initially resembled other villas built in the Northern Liberties to serve as Arcadian retreats for Philadelphia's elite. Joseph Hemphill, another politically-inclined lawyer, added two large, Greek-Revival wings in the 1820s or early 1830s, and the name Strawberry Mansion replaced Summerville shortly thereafter. Along with other similar estates, the villa and its grounds became part of Fairmount Park in the mid nineteenth century; the benefits of a landscape that had once attracted exclusive private development were thus extended to the public at large. A Colonial Revival "restoration," promoted and executed by Fiske Kimball, transformed the house once again in 1930.

Description: To the east, Strawberry Mansion faces a cul-de-sac and driveway that partially follow the lines of an early approach. The central section of the house is two-and-a-half stories high, five bays wide, one-room deep and capped by a gable roof. It is built on a central-hall plan and consists of stucco-faced stone scored to imitate ashlar. Bay configuration on the east (entrance) facade is roughly symmetrical, while northern half of the west (garden or river) facade has fewer windows than the southern half. Fenestration generally follows a six-over-six-light pattern on the first floor and a three-over-six-light pattern on the second; two aediculated dormers protrude from either side of the roof. Fanlights illuminate the east and west entrances, and a small portico shelters the former. Two end chimneys, rising through the ridge of the roof, are partially incorporated into the wings. A dentilled cornice adorns the roof line.

Greek Revival wings flank the central section and are subtly offset from it. Three stories high, three bays wide and built of stucco-faced brick, the wings maintain the older structure's depth but are set back slightly west of it and employ plain rather than scored stucco. Low-pitched gable roofs cover the additions and, on the east side, are decorated with parapets consisting of panels and massive scrolls. Six-over-six-light

STRAWBERRY MANSION (Summerville, Somerton)
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sashes fill the first- and second-story windows except on the west wall of the northern wing. As on the central section, first-story windows are equipped with panelled shutters, and louvered shutters are used on the second story. The attic windows are paired, four-light sashes located between two recessed stringcourses. A variety of sash types and an off-center door define the northern wing's west wall while the highly-symmetrical south wing has central doors on its east and west fronts. The southern (end) wall of the south wing is blind. Its northern counterpart is pierced by two windows and two doors, the latter leading to an extension that contains a caretaker's room, a storage area and a garage. The wings have centered end chimneys supplemented by another chimney on the north wing's west side. Strawberry mansion's interior contains elaborate Federal-style wood work that is concentrated in the entrance hall. The Greek-Revival "ballroom" on the first floor of the south wing is equally ornate. In the central section's basement, features such as the underpinnings of a long-vanished fireplace survive from an earlier building.

History: In 1783, Quaker lawyer William Lewis acquired a thirteen-acre tract that had been part of the Hood family's large Northern Liberties land holdings during the first half of the eighteenth century. By the time he made this purchase, Lewis had already written some of the nation's first anti-slavery legislation. Lewis went on to serve as Pennsylvania's federal attorney, a U.S. District Court judge, and an unofficial advisor to both Alexander Hamilton and George Washington. He lived in Philadelphia and, like many of his peers, shared the desire to establish a nearby rural retreat for himself and his family. About 1789 he commissioned Summerville, the future core of Strawberry Mansion, on the Northern Liberties lot (Platt, p.7). Like other villas in the area, the building overlooked the Schuylkill River and had similar entrance and river facades. However, Summerville's specific location was determined by a small stone farm house built sometime between 1757 and 1770 and greatly enlarged to create Lewis' villa.

Lewis died in 1819, and Congressman Joseph Hemphill bought Summerville at a Sheriff's sale two years later. Hemphill had studied law too, and in the course of his life was appointed Judge of Philadelphia's District Court, elected six times to Congress and served three terms in Pennsylvania's House of Representatives. In the 1820s or early 1830s he added the Greek Revival wings, encasing an early kitchen attached to the north side of the house. Hemphill's sister-in-law Harriet Coleman bought his country estate when he died in 1842. Sometime before 1844 and perhaps during Hemphill's tenure--at the same time that the name Strawberry Mansion started being applied to the building--new plumbing and heating systems were installed.

STRAWBERRY MANSION (Summerville, Somerton)
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George Crock purchased the property from Harriet Coleman in 1846, using it as a dairy farm. Crock sold it to the City of Philadelphia twenty-five years later. At that time Strawberry Mansion became part of Fairmount Park and was soon rented out as a restaurant. In order to accommodate this function, a second-story veranda seems to have been added to the west facade around 1872. During its restaurant years, Strawberry Mansion grew into such a popular institution that, by the turn of the century, the nearby neighborhood and newly-erected bridge were named after it.

In the early twentieth century, the Fairmount Park police established an office in the house and a large water tower was built next to the north wing. Fiske Kimball, a central figure in the Colonial Revival movement, took a keen interest in a number of the park's villas after assuming the directorship of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1925. He contacted a women's organization that had fancifully recreated an eighteenth-century Philadelphia streetscape for the city's Sesquicentennial Exposition and persuaded its members to raise funds for the "restoration" of Strawberry Mansion. Those involved in the campaign dubbed themselves the Committee of 1926; by 1930 they had accomplished their goal, and work on the building commenced. In accordance with plans conceived by Fiske Kimball and his assistant Erling Pederson, the north wing and all attic spaces were drastically remodelled and an early or original front porch was replaced by the present portico. Since the completion of the project, the Committee of 1926 has maintained Strawberry Mansion. The grounds were re-landscaped in the 1930s and no longer include the multiple outbuildings mentioned or visible in nineteenth-century documents.

Sources:

Platt, Jay. "Strawberry Mansion: The History of a Schuylkill River Villa," a report compiled for University of Pennsylvania Professor Roger W. Moss, 1994; includes bibliography and the following appendices: National Register nomination (also by Platt) and an annotated chain of title.

Strawberry Mansion Files. Fairmount Park Commission. Office of the Park Historian, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Warren, Jack D. "Strawberry Mansion, 1789-1989," a report on file at the Fairmount Park Commission, 1990.

Historian: Aaron Wunsch, HABS Summer Historian

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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