

1168-1170 ELK STREET (HOUSE) (Letchaw Building)  
Franklin  
Venango County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5965

HABS  
PA  
61-FRANK  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service  
Northeast Region  
U.S. Custom House  
200 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY  
1168-1170 ELK STREET (HOUSE)  
(Latchaw Building)

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Location: 1168-1170 Elk Street, Franklin, Venango County, Pennsylvania

USGS Franklin, Pennsylvania Quadrangle,  
UTM: 17.598090.4583360

Significance: This former house, also known locally as the Latchaw Building, is part of the Franklin Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The house is significant as a typical example of the vernacular architecture found within the Franklin Historic District and represents a tangible link to the area's historic oil industry, which profoundly altered the course of economic development in the town, region, and nation. Several previous owners of the property were associated with the oil industry, including James T. Hall, an auditor for the Standard Oil Company, and William U. Besley, a late nineteenth-century treasurer with the Eclipse Lubricating Oil Company of Franklin.

Description: The 1168-1170 Elk Street house is a two-story, four-bay, clapboard-sided vernacular frame dwelling that has been gradually altered over time. It has a hipped roof and three corbelled chimneys, situated along the eastern, southern and northern elevations. Primary access is through two main entrances on the western facade which faces the courthouse. The structure shows evidence of several additions to the original core; these include a two-story addition to the northeast, followed by the two-story addition to the southeast. A one-story modification was made to the existing room in what is now the center of the northern facade. No definitive information was found regarding the date of these modifications. A small gabled pediment over the front wrap-around porch near the main doorway is decorated with stickwork lattice. Other stylistic elements include a dentilled cornice along the porch on the western and southern facades, and a second-story oriel with fish-scale shingles, supported by decorative brackets on the southern facade. The house contains several window types, including one-over-one sash windows on the eastern facade, six-over-six windows on the northern facade, and Queen Anne windows with one large pane surrounded by fourteen smaller panes in the upper sash on the northern and western facades. On the southern facade, there are traces of a now-removed oval window. Minor alterations include the replacement of the original front porch with poured concrete, and metal grillwork supports and numerous changes to the rear door location.

There is an associated outbuilding, southeast of the main structure. It is a modest two-story, gable-roofed frame carriage house resting on a concrete block foundation. The building presently serves mainly as a three-bay car garage, but also includes a small unoccupied apartment on the second story.

History: Despite a review of chain-of-title records and other historic documentation, no explicit construction date for the present house at 1168-1170 Elk Street was found. The earliest mention of a dwelling at this location occurs in tax records from 1875 for J. E. Muse, but it is uncertain whether this reference corresponds to the present structure. Deed records indicate that Muse purchased the property that same year from Alexander S. Wilson and wife Hannah. In 1888, Muse's daughter, Clara L. Hall and husband James T. Hall sold the property to Charles W. Mackey, who also purchased several nearby lots at that time. According to 1912 Hall family obituary data in the Franklin Public Library

Genealogical Collection, James Hall served as an auditor for the Standard Oil Company during the early twentieth century. Mackey, a prominent attorney with offices in Franklin and New York, occupied the house immediately south of 1168-1170 Elk Street. By 1890, he was vice-president of the Eclipse Lubricating Oil Company of Franklin, a division of Standard Oil. Mackey sold the 1168-1170 Elk Street property to Marion and William U. Besley in early 1887. An 1894 obituary for Besley's father (William A. Besley) in the Franklin Public Library Genealogical Collection identifies W. U. Besley as a treasurer with the Eclipse Lubricating Oil Company and mentions his residence on Elk Street. In 1922, Marion Besley sold the property to Harry F. McDowell and wife. They, in turn, sold the house and lot to P. S. Counselman and Walter B. Counselman in 1929. Several generations of Counselmans lived in the house until it was sold to L. M. Karns, R. P. Latchaw, and C. B. Latchaw in 1971. In 1990, Karns et al. sold the property to Venango County, the present owner. Although no information about specific use of the house during the period 1971-1990 was found, the degree of structural deterioration observed suggests that it was vacant for some time prior to its acquisition by the county in 1990.

According to a former occupant of the 1168-1170 Elk Street house, dances were once held there and during the period of Counselman ownership from 1929 to 1971, several second-story rooms were rented to roomers (Claire Counselman, personal communication 1993). Much of the structure's architectural integrity has been lost due to general deterioration and the removal of architectural components, including doors, wainscoting, and fireplace mantels. The house and outbuilding are scheduled to be replaced by a county office building.

Sources: Babcock, Charles: *Venango County, Pennsylvania, Her Pioneers and People* (J. H. Beers & Co., Chicago, 1919); City of Franklin Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (1980); Clair Counselman (personal communication 1993); Franklin Public Library Genealogical Collection; Venango County Historical Society; Venango County Planning Commission *Historic Resource Inventory Form*; (n.d.); Venango County Deed Books and Tax Records.

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