

CADWALADER MANSION  
137 Stenton Avenue  
Blue Bell  
Montgomery County  
Pennsylvania

HABS NO. PA-6045

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PA  
46-BLUEB,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CADWALADER MANSION

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Location: 137 Stenton Avenue, Blue Bell, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

Significance: The Cadwalader Mansion is of interest as a structure that began as a vernacular stone farmhouse and evolved through several stages to become a Greek Revival style mansion. This evolution reflected the changing aesthetics of its owners and the general revival of interest in classical models from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.

Description: The Cadwalader Mansion is a five-bay, three-story house with a recessed two-bay, two-story wing to the northeast, a recessed three-bay, three-story wing to the southwest, and two-story rear addition. The house faces southeast from an elevated position overlooking the grounds. It is constructed of stone and covered with stucco. The main block has a two-story, full-facade Doric order balconied porch and monumental pilasters, giving the mansion a Greek Revival appearance. The principal entrance is centered and has a Greek Revival style full transom light, pedimented door surround. The windows on the first and second floors have nine-over-nine double-hung sash, while those on the third floor are smaller and have six-over-six, double-hung sash. The windows on the second and third floors are flanked by louvered shutters. The flat roof has a slight eave overhang with a modillioned cornice.

Although the principle entrance is on the southeast facade, the school uses the doorway on the northwest facade as its main entry. Like the remainder of the building, this portion has been added to and altered several times and currently has an Italianate appearance. The central bay features an enclosed entry porch with a wood and glass door flanked by sidelights and Doric columns on the first floor, a multi-light, tripartite window on the second floor, and a full-length, multi-light window with an arch above on the third floor. The two-story wing to the northeast is a sun room with full-length, multi-light doors with arched transoms above on the northeast facade, a full-length Palladian window on the northwest facade and a screened porch currently used as a pigeon coop on the southeast facade. The northeast facade of the rear addition has full-length, multi-light doors with arches above on the first floor and six-over-six, double-hung windows on the second floor. There is a large exterior chimney on the northwest facade of the rear addition and a projecting bay with eight-light casement windows on the southwest facade of the southwest wing.

The interior has been significantly altered for classroom and administrative use. The center hall, however, retains a classically decorated staircase that rises three floors and the

CADWALADER MANSION  
HABS No. PA-6045 (page 2)

east room, which runs the full length of the house, contains an early marble fireplace.

History: The Cadwalader Mansion was likely built ca. 1800-1825 by Jacob Weber. During Weber's tenancy, the homestead was called Fairview Farm due to its elevated position from which the surrounding country could be seen for many miles. According to wills and deeds of the period, it was originally built as a two-family dwelling (with one family getting water from a springhouse to the west and the other family getting water from a well to the east). In 1914, John Cadwalader bought the house and the sixty-seven acres accrued by Jacob Weber one hundred years earlier from the Stannard family. By this date, the house had become a single family dwelling. In 1929, Cadwalader bought thirty-eight acres which adjoined the old Weber farm, increasing the estate to 105 acres. This is a good example of a large parcel being broken up and reassembled in later years.

The Cadwalader family owned and resided in the mansion from 1914 to 1963. During this period, they made many additions to the house, greatly altering the appearance. According to Cadwalader's son (also named John), the Greek Revival porch was added shortly after 1914 and the rear wing was added in the 1920s. He also remembers that when his parents bought the house it had a mansard roof. The building was plausibly altered many times during its existence, changing from a double farmhouse to a Greek Revival style mansion (a thorough structural analysis would be necessary to accurately determine the changes). The twentieth century Neoclassical additions, particularly the Greek Revival style portico and modified Palladian windows, reflect the revival of interest in classical models inspired by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition that was held in Chicago. Many of the smaller pavilions were Georgian, Early Classical Revival and Greek Revival domestic designs, which inspired countless Neoclassical style houses throughout the United States.

The property still includes a barn, a springhouse and a smokehouse. The large barn has a datestone with the year 1841 and the initials WZ engraved on it. It was presumably built by William Zorn, who bought the estate from Jacob Weber in 1833. The barn burned in 1933, but the stone walls remained and it was rebuilt to match its original construction. The only difference was that sawed pine was used instead of hand hewn oak. White oak still grows above the hole where stone for the house and barn was quarried and suggests where the original oak came from. The springhouse is dug out of the side of the hill which slopes to the south and the smokehouse is located just above the springhouse.

CADWALADER MANSION  
HABS No. PA-6045 (page 3)

In 1963, the Cadwalader property was sold and subdivided. The Oak Lane Day School purchased the main house, barn, outbuildings, and twenty-eight acres of land. The school is an independent day school that was among the first of the private schools in the Philadelphia area to admit students without regard to religious, social or racial background. The house is used for the music and the reading programs as well as administrative offices. The interior of the barn has been gutted and converted to an art studio. The only change to the exterior has been the replacement of doors to the central section. The school also built a modern, one-story classroom building north of the mansion when they bought the property.

Sources:

Cadwalader, John. "Cadwalader Property," in Whitpain ... Crossroads in Time. Whitpain Township Bicentennial Commission, 1977. p. 321-23. This chapter includes information contained in deeds and wills pertaining to the Cadwalader property.

\_\_\_\_\_. Interview with HABS Historian. July 1994.

De Vincent, Elizabeth M. "The Oak Lane Day School," in Whitpain ... Crossroads in Time. Whitpain Township Bicentennial Commission, 1977. p. 324-25. This chapter references an article titled "Fairview the Homestead of the Weber Family at Sandy Hill," which was written many years ago about the property. Unfortunately, the author did not have any information about how to obtain this article and I have not been able to locate it.

Historian: Janet G. Blutstein, HABS Historian, 1994.