

The James Townley House
Corner Morris Avenue and Green Lane
Union Township, Union 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

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The James Townley House
Corner Morris Avenue and Green Lane
Union Township, Union County, New Jersey

Owner: The Hon. Hamilton Fish Kean

Date of Erection: Before 1796, remodelled 1820

Architect: Unknown

Builder: William Townley before 1796; additions by
son James Townley (1760-1823)

Present Condition: Good

Number of Stories: One, two and two and one-half
with cellar

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone masonry
in coursed ashlar work

Exterior walls - timber
frame, clapboard siding

Interior walls - lath
and plaster on siding

Chimneys - brick built
into inside of gable end
walls

Roof - gable, shingled

Historical Data:

On 17 October 1796, James Townley of
Elizabethtown with wife Mary mortgaged to Brockholst
Livingston of New York City, counsellor-at-law,
these three adjacent pieces of land in the said town-
ship, (1) A 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ acre parcel bounded northwest by the
middle of a road, northeast by a road, and southwest
by lands of John Chandler, deceased, reciting his
purchase thereof from John Stites (or Stiles) and wife

Susannah on 28 August 1796, (2) A parcel of 3 3/4 acres and 5 rods, in the same township, beginning at the east corner of land of John Potter 3rd, on the southwest side of the road from Elizabethtown to Springfield (Morris Ave.), thence south 45 degrees west 6.8 chains, thence south 42 degrees 40 minutes, east 6.19 to a road from the aforesaid road to John Littel's (it was later called the road to Obadiah Elliott's and today Green Lane), thence north 39 degrees 50 minutes, east 5.86, thence north 40 degrees 50 minutes, west 6.67 to the beginning, (3) "also the house and lot which I bought of my father containing one quarter of an acre and three rods", all three lots being hereby mortgaged as security for payment of 160 Spanish milled dollars. The cancelled mortgage was recorded for James Townley on 26 September 1818, in Essex County Mortgage Book D, p. 215.

This James Townley of Elizabethtown, Essex County, was evidently the one of that name who was baptized there in St. John's Church on 31 August 1760, son of William Townley.^(a) He married Mary Ogden (born 16 March 1760) daughter of John Ogden Jr. of the same place.^(b) In 1808 the part of Elizabethtown in which his property was situated was set off as Union Township; it was included in the new County of Union at the division of Essex County in 1857.

By his will of 13 September 1822, proved 26 April 1823, this James Townley of Union Township devised the use of all his estate to his wife Mary during her widowhood, and possession thereof afterward to the children (not named), and appointed his wife and son John Townley, executors.

(a) The Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey, vol. 3 page 82.

(b) Essex County Deed Bk. F-2, pp. 355 and 358.

Accordingly, by deed of 13 July 1848, Joseph Burril and wife Abigail, Phebe Sickles, Ann S. Crane, Elijah Gary and wife Elizabeth, and Ezekiel Crane and Abraham S. Townley, all of Morris County, New Jersey, John I. Sandford and wife Rhoda of Hudson County, New Jersey, Isaac Porter and wife Mary of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, and John Townley and wife Elizabeth of New York City, heirs and devisees of said James Townley late of Union Township, Essex County, New Jersey, deceased, conveyed to Christian and Barbara Duckweilder of New York City, for \$1150, the two lots of which he died possessed, containing 3.91 and 11.85 acres, (which he had acquired in and before 1796 as above cited).

By deed of same date, C. and B. Duckweilder, the grantees, conveyed the same property to Noah W. Parcell, describing the two lots as bounding on the southwest side of the Morris Turnpike, the upper one of 3.91 acres and 6.55 frontage being separated from the lower one of 11.85 acres and 3.65 frontage by "the road leading from the Morris Turnpike road to the farm of Obadiah Elliott". The house here considered is situated in the front part of the lower lot.

On 27 June 1912, J. Williams Crane, surviving executor of the will of Noah W. Parcell above-named, gave a deed to Helen L. Faitoute, Lizzie J. Benedict, and Moses F. Faitoute conveying the 11.85 acre lot mentioned above, and by their deed of 8 January 1917, these parties in turn conveyed the same to Julian Halsted Kean and Hamilton Fish Kean. Finally by deed of 29 January following, the former of these two passed his share of the property to the latter, and the lot thus became the estate of that member of the United States Senate (1929-1935). The house thereby acquired has been assigned to the superintendent of the estate, and behind it have been erected extensive modern buildings in a totally different style. Across Morris Avenue lies the famous "Liberty Hall" (now "Ursino") estate and mansion house which also we have surveyed (NJ-515).

Bibliography:

A search of title in Land and Probate records of Essex and Union Counties by Cornelius McPhillips, H.A.E.S. abstractor

Architectural Analysis:

This comparatively modest homestead exhibits an informal plan and composition, the result of two or three successive building operations. The lesser and original unit, a one and one-half story frame cottage with its gable roof unbroken by dormer windows contains the dining room, pantry, and back stairs in the final arrangement of rooms, and the one-story kitchen was probably contemporary. This house was built by or for William Townley who conveyed it to his son James in or before 1796 as recited above. The present front porch is probably not original.

James Townley the grantee was evidently responsible for the major unit built unto the northwest end of the original house between 1796 and his death in 1823. This provided a stairhall from front to rear of this 22 by 27 feet addition, serving a front and rear parlor to the right and giving access to the older unit at the left. The use of so-called "belly windows" in the front and rear walks instead of dormers is typical of the period of design, being a more economical method of fenestration for second floor rooms in which the eave line is lower than the ceiling line.

The very formal entrance porch composed of two fluted wood columns and a tryglyphed entablature all in approximation of classic Greek doric marble is evidently a replacement of the original entrance feature, and can be ascribed to the period of ownership of Noah W. Parcell, in or soon after 1848, as also the marble mantelpieces of the fireplaces in the two parlors.

Lewis D. Cook

Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams

SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, F.A.I.A.
District Officer

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