

Major André House,  
Tappan, Rockland County,  
New York.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District No. 4  
Southern New York State

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Wm. Dewey Foster, District Officer,  
25 West 45th Street, New York City.

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44-TAP  
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THE ANDRÉ PRISON HOUSE  
Tappan, Rockland County, New York

Historical Introduction

The circumstances connected with the arrest of Major André, his trial and execution as a spy are familiar - at least in general - to students and readers of American history. The landmark history of this most critical episode of the Revolution is not so well known even to scholars.

For the purposes of the Historic American Buildings Survey, a single magazine article, written by John Austin Stevens and published by Mrs. Martin J. Lamb in her Magazine of American History, Vol. III, No. 12 (Dec., 1879), pp. 743-746, can fittingly serve as the best authority obtainable in regard to the André prison-house at Tappan, even after a lapse of more than 50 years. Mrs. Lamb, a friend of the present writer in his youth, was succeeded in the editorial chair of that famous magazine, first, by Gen. James Grant Wilson, and eventually by Mr. William Abbatt, a writer, lecturer and publisher of reprints of scarce Americana. The undersigned collector and historian has in his keeping Mr. Abbatt's lantern-slides, made from rare photographs which he gathered through several years of research, and which show the homes, taverns, and other places where André stopped both before and after his capture, from the time he left New York on his venturesome undertaking until his execution at Tappan. These negatives may be consulted, with Mr. Abbatt's consent, by persons interested.

Mr. Steven's article is entitled "The Seventy-Six Stone House at Tappan". It was published in anticipation of the centennial,

The André Frison House

2.  
N.Y.,  
44. TAP,  
1.

in the following year, of that épic tragedy of the War. These are the facts recited by Mr. Stevens:

"The house to which the prisoner was brought by Major Tallmadge, on the evening of Thursday, the 28th of September, 1780, in which he was confined until the morning of Tuesday, the 2nd of October, and from which he was led to the hill upon which he suffered, is still standing in the highway which runs through the quaint village of Tappan.

"There is nothing in the history of this quiet, secluded spot to distinguish it from innumerable other of the old Dutch settlements, beyond this dramatic incident of the Revolution. At the time of the discovery [of America], the wigwams of the Indian tribe of the Tappans spread over the country, from the Hackensack river to the Highlands, from the Hudson to the western hills. . . . . The tribe has long since disappeared, but the name is preserved in the old village and the now famous Tappan Sea [that wide stretch of water in the Hudson River extending from Tappan northward to Stony Point].

"This village was during the Revolution indiscriminately known as Tappan or Orangetown, and is set down by both names on the map made in 1779 by Robert Erskine, Geographer to the Continental Army, [reproduced in the same issue of the magazine opposite p. 750]. Orangetown, however, was not organized until 1738. It is about three miles from the Hudson, from which it is separated by the high ground which completes, beyond a deep gulley, the impr<sup>e</sup>gnable natural defence of the Palisade range; through this gap runs the road which leads to the western terminus of Dobbs' Ferry, where Captain Corbet

The Andre' Prison House

3.

N. Y.

44-TAP

kept a tavern in the days of the Revolution. Here is now the small village of Rockland or Palisades, which is locally known as Sneedens Landing. The road from Tappan village to the Hudson follows the sinuosities of the ground, and is about one and one-half miles long.

"North of the highland, and at its foot, runs the Sparkill, which, widening at its mouth, becomes the Sloat, or ditch, and pours its waters into the Hudson. At the Sloat is now the thriving village of Piermont, the late terminus of the Erie Railroad. The distance from Dobbs' Ferry to the Sloat is about a mile.

"The lot on which the Seventy-Six House stands, there is strong evidence to show, made a part of the Van Voorst share of the original patent which was conveyed to Cornelius Meyers. It is situated on the west side of the highway, and is sixty-three feet front by one hundred and twenty feet deep. In 1753 it was purchased of Meyers by Casparus Mable, whose name may be seen on Erskine's map, of 1779 as owner of other property in the neighborhood.

"When the house was erected is not recorded [presumably about 1755]. During the Revolution it was known as the Mable Tavern, and from that period until quite recently it has been used as a place of public entertainment. From Mable it passed to Frederick Blauvelt, and was by him sold in 1800 to Philip Dubey, after whose death it passed successively to the ownership of Henry Gesner, Henry Storms, Thomas Wandle, Laurence T. Sneedens and Henry Ryerson, all of whom kept it as a public house. In 1857 it was purchased at mortgage sale by Dr. James T. Stephens, a resident of Tappan since 1846, in whose possession it still [in 1879] remains.

"In 1876 Dr. Stephens planted an elm tree in the rear of the

The Andre Prison House

building, in commemoration of the one hundreth anniversary of American Independence.

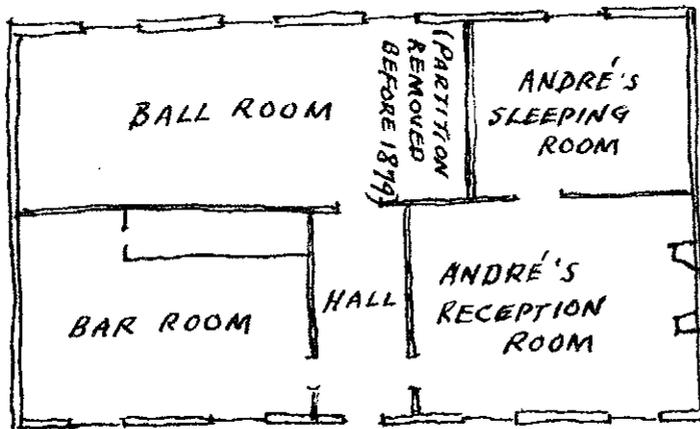
"The village proper was on a diminutive scale when Erskine made his surveys. This conscientious topographer never neglected to mark down every house or hamlet on his routes. The little cluster which bears the name of Tappan consisted of six houses and the church. The old Dutch Church, where the court-martial trials were held, and in which André was brought before the Board of General Officers by Washington's direction, was built in 1716. In 1788 it was rebuilt and enlarged; in 1835 demolished, and the present edifice erected. It stood at the northeast end of the village, where the road bends sharply to the northward, and from it led a lane, which ran westerly over the hill, on the north of which a part of the American army was encamped. Remains of the army ovens were until lately visible there. On the southeastern outskirts of the village still stands [in 1879] the building where Washington had his headquarters. Of the other houses designated by Erskine, that of Ryerson is still standing [1879].

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"The Seventy-Six House is built of stone, with brick trimmings on the doors and windows. A hallway, which divides the front equally, leads to a room, which extends over the entire rear of the building. This was originally a lean-to, with a partition wall, which was later removed, when the whole space was thrown together and used as a ball-room about a quarter of a century ago [about 1850]. Its southern front room was the public place of entertainment. In its rear stands a bar of peculiar construction: a projection of wood, with a canopy, supported by posts. The fireplace was ornamented by tiles, which

The André Prison House

4-A  
N.Y.  
44-TAP,  
1-



Sketch plan of house as shown by Stevens in his article,  
published in the December, 1879 issue of  
Magazine of American History

The André Frison House

5.  
N.Y.  
44-TAP  
1-

have been removed [1879]. A few remain in the possession of Dr. Stephens, but the greater part were carried away by unscrupulous visitors. The northern front room and the smaller chamber in the lean-to were arranged for the confinement of André. In the latter is a window, from which tradition is that André saw the raising of the scaffold, a statement which is entirely at variance with the shock he received when he saw the gallows, and first knew the manner of his death. In this room, it is supposed, he slept. The lock of the door which opened from the other rear chamber, is now, with due authentication, the property of the New York Historical Society. In the front room Major André received Col. Hamilton, Major Tallmadge, and other officers of the American army.

"Modest as this building must always have been it nevertheless was the equal of any in the village. In the orders to Tallmadge, Washington particularly instructed him, while keeping close watch on his prisoner, to treat him with all the lenity his situation admitted of, and to see that he was comfortably lodged. The stonework of the building is in excellent preservation, but the wood-work, within and without, is much decayed, and even what is left is with difficulty preserved from the rapacity of the relic hunter. The worthy owner, after repeated efforts to turn it to some practical use which would still leave it open to curious visitors, has found it necessary to close the building to save what remains. It is hoped that it may become the property of the State or County. Certainly there is no house in the land over which hangs a more romantic and melancholy interest".

Mr. Stevens' article is accompanied by a full-page wood-cut view

6.  
N.Y.  
44-TAP

## The André' Prison House

of the prison-house, and a full-page portrait of Major André etched by H. B. Hall.

Lossing's observations in 1850 [nearly 85 years ago], at the time he published his Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, Vol. I, pp. 764-65, anticipated by about 30 years some of those made by Mr. Stevens: "The whole appearance has been materially changed," Lossing wrote. "The room wherein the unfortunate prisoner was confined, and which was kept with care in its original condition more than half a century, has been enlarged and improved for the purposes of a ball room! I was there a few years ago, when the then owner was committing a sacrilege, and he boasted, with great satisfaction, that he had received a 'whole dollar for the old lock that fastened up Major Andrew!' Sentiment does not obey the laws of trade-- it seems to cheapen with a decrease of supply."

### Its Present Appearance

The present owner, Mrs. Callignon, quite appropriately permits its use as a restaurant, on account of its convenient situation on the King's Highway. The André' room is open to the public.

She says that the east or front wall fell out some years ago but was rebuilt, presumably as originally planned. This was in 1897. The building is again in poor condition. A new roof is needed and much general repair.

The second, or attic, floor has recently been partitioned off to make six or seven small bed-rooms.

The exterior walls are brown stone to the height of the eaves, with clapboard above. Some of the windows and doors have brick arches at heads, brick quoins at sides and stone sills.

The André Prison House

7.  
N.Y.  
44-TAP  
1-

The shutters are hung on one side of the windows only, and hinged in the middle to fold back upon themselves.

An old photograph of the house shows a porch at the front. Whether this was in the original construction is uncertain, as the porch floor covered two windows into the cellar, which is under only a part of the house.

The chimneys are brick; the roof is covered with shingles; the walls and ceilings are plaster; the sitting-room and prison room have beamed ceilings.

The bar-room (shown in the little drawing made by Stevens) still has the old bar with its  $4\frac{1}{2}$ -inch round bird's-eye maple hand-rail.

(From field-notes of Mr. Felix Bowen, Architect, N. Y. City, made during the present survey.)

It is still a "house of entertainment." Its historic interest is still made the basis of trade.

Written, May 8, 1934, by

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Approved:

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*Revised 1936. by H.C.F.*