

The Eagle School
On State Route #543
South of Deepdale Road
Strafford
Chester County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1129

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
801 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20006

THE EAGLE SCHOOL

Location: On State Route #543, south of Deepdale Road, Strafford, Chester County, Pennsylvania [Reference: Map of Chester County (by County Commissioners) 1956].

Present Owner: Trustees, Old Eagle School Property, Strafford, Tredyffrin Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania.

Statement of Significance: This structure, erected in 1788, with an 1835 addition, is probably the oldest school building standing in Chester County. It was restored in 1897 by the trustees of the school.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The structure is on part of a tract purchased in 1765 by Jacob Sharroden, of which a small plot (unrecorded deed) was set aside for public use. Tredyffrin Township Public School system used the building and assumed ownership. The Courts of Chester County, Pa., appointed new trustees on May 6, 1895, and their successors hold the title.
2. Date of erection: North section 1788; south addition 1835.
3. Architect, builder, suppliers etc.: Unknown.
4. Original plans, construction etc.: Original building had a chimney and fireplace in the north gable and a door to the west with a window on either side of it, and a door to the cellar on the same side.
5. Alterations and additions: When a south end was added, a door and two windows were placed in the south gable. By January 1897, the new trustees had completed the restoration as may be seen from a copy of a contemporary newspaper clipping.
6. Important old views and references: Sources of information to be found in the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pa. - Classified printed and manuscript files under the heading: Tredyffrin Township. Public Schools - Eagle School.

Pleasants, Henry. History of the Old Eagle School. Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1909.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

From the start the building was used for religious and educational purposes and as a public meeting place for the area.

C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

None known.

D. Supplemental Material:

OLD EAGLE SCHOOL

"Following is the report of the Trustees of the Old Eagle School to the contributors to the fund for the restoration of the property.

Old Eagle School, Tredyffrin, 2-22-1897

"Ladies and Gentlemen:-The undersigned persons were by decree of the Court of Common Pleas of Chester County, Pa., made May 6th, 1895, appointed Trustees of the Old Eagle School property, at Strafford Station, Pennsylvania Railroad, in Tredyffrin township, Chester County, 'to hold title to said real estate and to administer this charity, and in the exercise of a reasonable discretion subject always to the further order of the Court to regulate the manner in which the property can most effectively be utilized for the general use and good of the neighborhood for religious, educational and burial purposes.' The Trustees so appointed organized on May 11th, 1895.

"At the time of their appointment the charity which they were called upon to administer was not only without funds in its treasury, but was practically indebted in the sum of nearly one hundred dollars, to meet the expenses incurred by the petitioners for the re-establishment of the trust.

"For the purpose of obtaining the needed funds they prepared and circulated a subscription paper pledging money for the restoration of the property, and published in the Village Record of Chester County, an historical account of the property which they subsequently printed in pamphlet form for distribution and sale. The result of these efforts appear in full in the treasurer's report annexed hereto. It is sufficient here to say that this report shows at this date -2-22-1897- a balance in the treasury of sixty-three

dollars and forty-three cents (\$63.43) after actual payment of all expenses incurred for the restoration of the building and provision made for all outstanding bills.

RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED.

"Inquiries having been made as to the purposes for which the trust was reestablished and the general plans in reference to the property, the Trustees, on July 31st, 1895, formally adopted a resolution that the building "should be preserved as nearly as may be in its present form for use as a public library and reading room and for small gatherings, and that the grave yard be cleared of weeds and trash, and the graves kept in neat and proper condition, but that it is unwise under the present circumstances to make any extensive alterations to the property.

"In July following their appointment they were obliged to incur considerable expense in removing to the Potter's Field, the body of a pauper, which without authority had been interred in the grave yard, but institution of suit by the Trustees against the offender brought a manly acknowledgement of wrong by payment of all expenses and nominal damages.

"The action of the School Board in appealing the equity proceedings for reestablishment of the original trust to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania (to July Term, 1895, No. 60) proved so serious a hindrance to the work of collecting the funds that in August, 1895, the Trustees assumed the entire costs of the equity proceedings in the Common Pleas, amounting to one hundred and eighty-one dollars (\$181), and the School Board thereupon discontinued the appeal, and executed a quit claim deed to the Trustees for their claim in the entire property, thus forever settling the litigation already protracted for nearly a quarter of a century.

VACATION OF THE OLD ROAD.

"In October, 1895, by proceedings in the Quarter Sessions, the Trustees secured the vacation of the old roadbed bisecting the property, which was laid out in part as early as 1705 and again in 1818, thus adding considerably to the amount of their available land and making it more susceptible of systematic ornamentation. They followed this improvement by removing the old western wall of the grave yard, and including within the grave yard limits the triangular lot lying between its original western boundary and the present public road to Strafford Station and threw a curved wall between heavy pillars along the southern boundary of the new part so included in order to

make a bank which at that point is intended to be raised above the level of the public road. In the centre of this curved wall they have placed a large boulder, taken from a farm in Radnor, bearing curious artificial marks of evident antiquity.

"In April 1896, they secured a most careful and accurate survey of the property by Daniel Kinzie and Samuel M. Garrigues, surveyors, showing that the contents of the entire tract was one and eighty-seven one thousandths (1.087) acres, of which one hundred and seventy-eight one thousandths (.178) acre lay west of the present public road, and in November, through proceedings instituted in the Common Pleas of Chester county, they sold this westernmost part of their ground for the sum of five hundred and ten dollars (510) in cash.

"In September, 1896, having obtained very careful plans and specifications through the generous aid of Mr. Isaac Purcell, architect, they commenced the work of restoring the building to its original appearance for use as a public library and reading room in conformity with the resolution adopted in July, 1895, and signed a formal contract with William J. McCone, of Devon, Pa., the successful competitor for the operation.

"The main features of the work were:

"1st. The removal of the plaster on the outside wall and restoration of the old pointing. While this work was in operation several interesting inscriptions and circumstances connected with the history of the old place were reclaimed, including the discovery of the original date stone bearing the inscription "1788" which was carefully removed from the north gable to a more conspicuous position in the south gable, and also the disclosure of the initials and date "A. G., 1794," high up on the western wall just in reach from the old door way which the removal of the plaster veil also disclosed on the northwest side of the building. These marks were a singularly strong corroboration of the traditionary evidence on which the title of the public to the premises and the character of the trust almost wholly depended before the final decree of Court in equity proceedings to re-establish the trust and which fixed the year 1788 as the date of the re-erection of the building and Andrew Garner, a fifer in the Revolutionary War, as one of the earliest schoolmasters in charge of the school.

"2d. The addition of a neat colonial stoop or porch over the front door; the construction of a heavy cornice with sunken gutters, and the substitution of a stone

chimney with capstone for the old brick chimney with terra cotta topping.

"3rd. The enlargement of the old coal cellar so as to accommodate a suitable heater, with ash pit and coal bin, and also to admit of the construction therein of a fire-proof vault for preservation of books and papers.

"4th. Inside of the building a high pannelled ceiling with ample ventilators succeeded the low ceiling of lath and plaster; the walls were carefully stripped and the sides ornamented with pannelled wainscoting and picture moulding. The original open fire-place which has been long bricked up to better accommodate a stove, was restored, faced with hewn stone, and enlarged to permit the use, of the back part for the smoke pipe from the heater without impairing the draft, and over this was placed an ornamental mantel.

"5th. The door, windows and shutters of the restored building are in size, shape and furnishings a reproduction of the style of 1788 and the symmetry thus established will as far as possible be preserved in the furnishings of the room with chairs, table, fire-irons and pictures. So important do the Trustees regard this rule that while the enforcement of it will no doubt compel them to decline many valuable contributions, because they are not in harmony with the appearance of the rest of the building, they are convinced that it would be better to disappoint even generous friends than to vary the rule to the sacrifice of the appearance of so unique a monument of Colonial times. This same rule will, of course, prevent the erection of any private and personal memorial on the property. The only variation deliberately made is in the introduction of the electric light; but the incomparable advantage in the use of the building by its better ventilation and illumination, as well as its safety, fully warranted this single relaxation of the rule. The entire building is also equipped with a burglar alarm sounding in a neighboring property, and is thus fortified, within reasonable limits, against depredations.

"By the special effort of a few specially interested friends they were enabled just before the winter set in to grade a considerable part of the premises on which the old road bed had formerly been located, and to plant along the southern and western lines a handsome private hedge, and in several parts of the premises fine evergreens."

Daily Local News, West Chester, Pa., January 14, 1897.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: With the addition to the south in 1835, the entrance was changed from the west to the south side.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Rectangular, one story; 19'-2" x 31'-10".
2. Foundations: Stone.
3. Wall construction: The entire school is of uncoursed field-stone with the stones of the later south section being smaller than the original section.
4. Chimneys: There was the original brick chimney with terra cotta topping until c. 1897 when the present stone chimney was installed. It is located mid-ridge above the north gable.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Openings now as they were in 1835 when the south extension was made. Original door was on the west wall where the north window now is; the lines of this door can be seen. The door on the south is recessed into the wall. It is a four panelled door.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Late 19th century replacements. The windows are six-over-six light double-hung wooden sash. There are no windows on north end, three on east and west sides and two on south front. One window at north end of the west side has been filled in. Each shutter is a two panelled one.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable of medium pitch, with wooden shingles.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Late 19th century replacements. There are no pent eaves present and the cornice itself is quite simple being a wooden band below the roof.
 - c. Dormers: None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Single room school house.
2. Stairways: None.
3. Flooring: Late 19th century wooden replacement.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster.
5. Doorways and doors: 1835 and late 19th century replacements.
6. Trim: Probably 1835.
7. Hardware: Replacements of original cast iron and 1835 fixtures.
8. Lighting: Modern electricity put in in late 1890's.
9. Heating: Fireplace (rebuilt in late 1890's) and heater in basement put in same time.

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: Structure faces south (originally the 1788 section faced west), on a slight slope, well back from Route #543. A cemetery is located to the north side.

Prepared by Bart Anderson
Curator, Chester County
Historical Society
National Park Service
August 1958