

Keyser House (Residence)
6205 Germantown Avenue
Germantown (Philadelphia)
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

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THE KEYSER HOUSE (Residence)
6205 Germantown Avenue
Germantown, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania

Owners - Mr. and Mrs. William B. Prichett

Date of Erection - Earliest portion about 1690 (see below)

Present Condition - In good state of preservation.

Departure from original appearance - window sash and entrance door of street facade, grade of street lowered requiring flight of steps to front door, tin roof.

Number of Stories - 2 $\frac{1}{2}$

Materials of Construction - Foundations, stone; floors, wood; exterior walls, stone; interior walls, stone and frame; roof, tin on top of shingles. Small paned sash of windows facing street changed to sash with larger panes, modern door substituted for original Dutch door, much of interior wood finish replaced with finish of period of 1860-70.

Additional Data - Dirck Keyser, who built the original house came from Amsterdam, Holland, in 1688 and settled in Germantown. He was of the Mennonite faith and, upon the death of William Rittenhouse, the first regularly ordained preacher in 1708, he was chosen one of the preachers and served until his death in 1714. Dirck Keyser was one of the original lot owners of Germantown and, when the lots were drawn in 1689, No. 22 "east of the main road" (now Germantown Avenue) fell to his share. The house has come down in unbroken succession from Dirck Keyser, Mrs. Prichett being a direct descendant.

There is a long-standing tradition in the Keyser family that the earliest portion of the house, now the southwest end, is older than "Wyck", its attractive neighbor, one block away. The oldest part of "Wyck" built by Hans Milan in 1690 is claimed by historians to be the oldest existing house in Germantown. Two time-worn stones are pointed to by the Keyzers to support their claim. One is embedded in the wall behind the right shutter of the window nearest the front door, on which

are carved the initials "D.K." and the date "1738". This date the Germantown Historians fix as the time when the house was built. But on the left hand side of the window is another stone which bears the same initials and a crude cross. The family maintain that it was a grandson of the first Dirck who carved the misleading date when he enlarged the house, and as the first Dirck died in 1714 he obviously could not have carved the later date.

There is evidence that the original house was once lower than the house as enlarged by the grandson of Dirck Keyser, and the line of the original gable still shows on the north-east gable wall of the present house. The original house was said to have been composed of two rooms along the front, with a wing containing a kitchen, bake oven and smoke house.

A curious feature of the house is that there are three cellars without any communication with each other. With only one is there direct connection with the floor above, and this is by a flight of stone steps down from the hall below the stairs leading to the second floor. To go into another of the cellars it is necessary to go outside and enter by a door on the street side. Access to the third cellar is by a trap door cut in the floor and a flight of wooden steps. The original well is still in existence, and at present is reached from the cellar only, by an opening cut in the foundation wall.

The above account has been derived from a book entitled "The Bicentennial Reunion of the Keyser Family, 1688 - 1888", privately printed, 1889.

E. Perot Bassett

District Officer.