

Cookes House
438-440 Codorus Street
York
York County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5190

HABS
PA,
47 - YORK,
13 -

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

COOKES HOUSE

HABS No. PA-5190

Location: 438-440 Codorus Street, York, York County,
Pennsylvania.

Significance: The Cookes House is one of only a small number of structures in York which date to the period (1777-1778) when the city was the seat of the United States government. Additionally, it is the only such structure constructed using techniques of Germanic stone construction. Local tradition, strongly held and strongly disputed, maintains that noted patriot, Thomas Paine, lived here while the Continental Congress met at York.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1761. This date is taken from the slate datestone in place on the second floor, east front, between the second and third windows. The inscription reads:

"A O 1761
H G
H D H G B
G A L D E
S K M M"

This inscription has been variously deciphered as follows:

- a. Anno 1761
Hannes Gugges
Hat dieses Haus gebaut
Gott allein die Ehr,
Sonst Keinen Menschen Mehr.

In the year 1761
Johannes Gugges (Cokes)
Built this house
To God alone the honor,
Not to anybody else.
- b. Anno 1761
Hannes Gugges
Hat dieses haus gebaut
Gearbeitet und lesen die Erde
Stein Kalk mauerkitt mauren.

In the year 1761
Johannes Gugges (Cokes)
Had this house built

Wrought and gathered from the earth
Stone and lime for mortar to built the walls.

2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The chain of title to this property includes the following owners: Hermanus Bott, 1750; Johannes Guckes, 1753; Solomon Miller, 1784; Jacob King, 1790; Samuel Smyser, 1868; Rusk Wilt et al, and George Enders, et al, 1868; Ephraim Hugentugler, 1903; Joseph Hachberger, 1904; Mrs. F. Fahs Smith, 1952; Colonial Restoration Society of York and York County, 1953. The original owner, Hermanus Bott, sold part of his tract to his son-in-law, Johannes Guckes (Cokes), who built the stone house eight years later.
4. Alterations and additions: Between 1904 and 1913 the structure was converted from single to double occupancy. The interior was completely gutted and rebuilt, with the exception of part of the attic and the cellar. Originally a central-chimney house entered from the east side, with two rooms on each floor, the house was reoriented toward the north. The north gable was truncated, a new interior wall run from north to south, and a new symmetrical brick facade put over the stone wall to mask the rearrangement of door and window openings. The original central windows on the south gable end were closed, and new doors cut on the first floor.

B. Historical Context:

The builder of this house, Johannes Cokes, whose name is variously spelled Hannes or Hans and Gugges or Guckes, was an officer in the German Reformed Church in York, appearing in its earliest records (1762). He was also a soldier during the Revolutionary War, serving in various Pennsylvania units of the Continental Army. There is a strongly held, but poorly documented, local tradition associating the Cokes House with Thomas Paine's brief sojourn in York with the Continental Congress.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Prior to its early twentieth century renovation this was an excellent example of vernacular architecture of German immigrants influenced by the academic architecture of English colonists.
2. Condition of fabric: Very poor.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Thirty-three feet wide (four bays) by twenty-five feet deep, two and one half stories high, with cellar under (at least) the south half.
2. Foundations: Coursed, roughly squared limestone.
3. Walls: Light grey limestone, east elevation is squared and coursed with a flush belt course of larger, less oblong stones and a similar course of large stones at the level of the sills. These do not project out of the plane of the wall like the usual belt course and water table of the period. The north, south and west elevations are of random laid field stone, except that there are quoins at all corners. The modern brick verneer on the north wall was laid over the original stone, the quoins of which are still visible.
4. Structural system, framing: Exterior walls solid stone. Interior partitions, not original, are of stud construction. Rafters and floor joists, probably original, could not be inspected due to collapse of the staircase.
5. Porches: There is a simple porch perhaps six feet wide and four feet deep, visible in the 1904 photograph, at the original front entrance. Its sloping roof was supported at the front by two pairs of square posts, which were repeated by half-posts at the wall. There was a low balustrade, open in the center on a line with the stone stairs and the doorway.
6. Chimneys: The 1904 photograph shows a large stone chimney centered on the ridge of the roof, and north of center along this axis about six feet. It was replaced by a smaller brick chimney which presumably served a furnace; no fireplaces remain in the structure, and the later brick chimney has been demolished.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are no original doors or doorways remaining. The original entrance was in the second bay from the north, on the east side. There was apparently a back door opposite this. Both were walled up; two new doors were cut in the north wall, and two in the south wall.
 - b. Windows and shutters: No original sash or shutters remain. Photographs as late as 1937 show six-over-six light sash on the second floor, nine-over-six on the first floor. The south wall had only one window on each floor,

both of which were filled when the house was rebuilt as a duplex. Fenestration of the north wall is invisible behind the brick veneer, but probably grossly altered; the present openings are too numerous and too tall for the period of the house.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The gable roof was originally covered with shakes. It is quite probable that the present covering of the tar paper was laid over the wooden shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The eaves project about eight inches from the plane of the east and west walls over a simple molded cornice, which is hollow. The true plate for the rafters is about a foot up the angle of the roof; from here to the false plate (the box cornice) the angle is slightly closer to the horizontal, producing the characteristic "kick" of Germanic roofs of this era.
- c. Dormers: There is a twentieth century gabled dormer on the north, truncated face of the roof.

C. Description of Interior: Nothing remains of the original interior of this building except probably the attic and the cellar at the south end. Neither of these could be examined, as the stairs going up and down from the first floor have collapsed and the rubble blocks the openings.

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: Not determined.
- b. First floor: From twin entrances, there is one front (north) room and a kitchen at the rear, on each side of the central wall. Adjacent to this wall in the kitchen were staircases, ascending from south to north. The cellar stairs descended from north to south in the west kitchen, prior to their collapse.
- c. Second floor: There appear to be two rooms on each side of the central wall dividing the house on its north-south axis.
- d. Attic: Not determined.

2. Stairways: The stairways have collapsed. They were not original to the structure.

3. Flooring: The original flooring may be under the present floors of early twentieth century hardwood and linoleum.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster over masonry; some are painted and some wallpapered. The plaster does not appear contemporary with the structure.
 5. Doorways and doors: None original; outside doorways covered with plywood sheets.
 6. Decorative features and trim: None original.
 7. Hardware: None.
 8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: No fireplaces; furnace in cellar presumably warmed house by radiators, which have been removed.
 - b. Lighting: None.
- D. Site:
1. Orientation: To the south of the house lies Codorus Creek, across which is a large paper factory. To the west is the parking lot of another factory. To the east is a small recreation area, Martin Luther King Park, surrounded by a steel mesh fence some ten feet high. This fence is less than four feet from the original front wall of the Cookes House, and parallel to it. To the north of the house, a strip of grass thirty feet wide, bounded by the mesh fences of the parking lot and the playground, leads to Codorus Street.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

- A. Early Views: Photographs from ca. 1904 and ca. 1937 in collection of the Historical Society of York County.
- B. Bibliography:
 1. Primary and Unpublished sources:

Rubbing of date stone and translation by Landon C. Reisinger and Norbert Neumann, Historical Society of York County.
 2. Secondary and published sources:

Prowell, George R. The City of York, Past and Present, York, Pennsylvania, 1904. Illustration between pages 18-19 shows

house at the beginning of the century before transformed into 2-family residence.

Aurand, A. Monroe, Jr., ed. W. C. Carter and A. J. Glossbrenner. History of York County from its Erection to the Present Time; [1729] - [1834]. Harriburg, 1930, p. 40.

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