

#7 1945
PROGRESS REPORT

1964 - 1968



Parson Thorne Mansion

"SILVER HILL"

Milford, Delaware

Presented by
Milford Historical Society
Milford, Delaware

Suggested Restoration of the Parson Thorne Mansion



WORK TO BE DONE
AS LISTED IN
1964 PROGRESS REPORT

1. Re-wire the central portion and rear addition using appropriate fixtures in accordance with the final restoration.
2. Install blower type electric heaters in the fireplaces of central portion and rear addition.
3. Paint interior walls and woodwork of central section and rear wing.
4. Sand floors and finish with dull floor finish to simulate natural, sand scrubbed finish.

CHANGES IN PLANNING

Because of persistent vandalism, a decision was made, after consultation with persons of experience, to make the second floor of the main part of the Mansion into an apartment to be rented. Having an occupant in the house will change the conception of it from an old empty house to a revered residence as in the past.

To accomplish this, the west room was chosen as the bedroom and the east room as a living room-kitchen. A bathroom has been installed in the closet space adjoining the bedroom and a clothes closet built in the bedroom. In the east room a kitchen area has been partitioned, complete with cabinets, sink, refrigerator, and stove.

USE OF BUILDING

As the property of the people of Milford, through ownership by the Milford Historical Society in which membership is open to all, the Parson Thorne Mansion can be used for appropriate civic events. In addition, the society's growing collection of historical items pertaining to Milford's past will be displayed in one of the first floor rooms. The west wing, known as the Plantation Office, will be a suitable society office.

WORK COMPLETED SINCE 1964

1. The re-wiring of the central portion has been completed with the exception of installation of the reproduction colonial fixtures. These have been purchased and will be installed as soon as the house is occupied.
2. Electric heat was advised against because of operation cost. The solid brick walls cannot be insulated as required. Oil-fired hot air furnaces have been installed, one in the cellar to heat the first floor and one in the attic to heat the second floor.
3. Painting of interior walls and woodwork of the central section is in process.
4. As soon as all other work on the second floor of the central section is completed, the floors of that area and the first floor stair hall will be re-finished.

ADDITIONAL WORK

All fireplaces in the central section and in the Plantation Office have been repaired, dampers installed, and the hearth bricks re-laid.

Two lavatories, one for men and one for women, have been installed in the space behind the east arcade.

WORK TO BE DONE

1. Restoration of the West Wing and the room put into condition for the society's office.
2. Restoration of East Wing to a colonial kitchen.
3. Restoration of roof levels of main section and of the two wings.
4. Restoration of the interior of the rear wing. The walls of the first floor must be lathed and plastered.
5. Landscaping of the grounds.
6. Grading of driveways and paving a parking area.

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Parson Thorne Mansion



**An Historic House Museum
owned and operated by the
Milford Historical Society.**



501 Northwest Front Street
P O Box 352
Milford, Delaware 19963

Parson Thorne Mansion at Silver Hill in Milford, Delaware, is a Colonial Georgian house layered with Gothic Victorian architecture. A dwelling was located at the house site by circa 1731 and transformed over the years to the appearance it has today by circa 1863. This building was the center of what once was a large working plantation whose boundaries once reached the Mispillion River, Mullet Run, and beyond Route 113 and North 10th Street. Today the house sits on about two acres of the original plantation.

The style of architecture is typical of a southern house with a central section flanked by symmetrical wings. It has a rear frame wing, five chimneys, and eight fireplaces. Current exterior colors, found by microscopic analysis, date to the time the house was Victorianized circa 1863. On entering the center section, there is a stair hall with an original uniquely placed stairway running from first floor to attic.

Behind the first floor hall is the



parlor with elaborate paneling, two cupboards with butterfly shelves, and a fireplace containing an original rare fire back cast by the Deep Creek Furnace of Sussex

County prior to the American Revolution. The chamber above the parlor is decorated with fine paneling on its west wall and contains two closets. There is another chamber on the second floor, over the dining room, that is much plainer than the other.



The dining room, entered from the entry hall, is graced with an original corner cupboard with butterfly shelves and possesses a fine mantelpiece that replaced the original circa 1840. First finish colors now adorn this room with Prussian Blue being predominant. Also, all three doors in the room are grained in a faux mahogany finish to simulate the graining that was originally on the doors.



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Beyond the dining room is the frame wing. This contains a one room sitting area on the first floor graced with fine paneling and a stair box with winding stairs leading to a second floor chamber also with a paneled wall.

The side wings of the house are accessed by walking outdoors onto brick floored arcades. Each one of these contains a storage room.



The west wing contains a finely paneled west wall with fireplace. This may have served as the plantation office over the years. The east wing appears to have once served as a kitchen with its large fireplace. When the roof was raised on this wing, a finished loft was added being accessed by winder stairs. Beneath the frame wing is a full root cellar with a shallow one beneath the parlor.



Owners and Occupants

The plantation began as 510 acres in Kent County carved out of the 1,750 acre Saw Mill Range tract granted to Henry Bowman in 1680 and sold to Joseph Booth, Sr. by Bowman's grandson in 1730. Booth, a Quaker and early Sussex County Magistrate and miller, died in 1732 but his will showed this had become his dwelling plantation. His son, Joseph, Jr., inherited it but he died of smallpox in 1736. The heirs of Booth, Jr., lost 263 acres of the land at Sheriff's Sale to John Cullen in 1746. Cullen made this his dwelling plantation and lived there until his death in 1775. His estate inventory shows that he held slaves. He had arranged to divide the property between three of his children; William, Jonathon, and George Cullen. George acquired Jonathon's portion giving him about 200 acres. He arranged to sell this to Sydenham Thorne, for whom the mansion is named, in 1785. However, conveyance was not made until 1787 by George's son, named John Cullen.

Rev. Sydenham Thorne arrived in Milford in 1774 as the first resident rector of Christ Church Mispillion, an Anglican congregation located outside of Milford. Thorne brought the church into Milford and building began on one of Joseph Oliver's lots. Thorne married Betty, widow of Levin Crapper, former owner of the present Causey Mansion. Rev. Thorne is also responsible for damming the Mispillion River to create Silver Lake for his mill. He died young in 1793 and was interred on the mansion grounds. His will shows us that he too held slaves.

Thorne's nephew, Peter Caverly, inherited the mansion farm. He was first cashier for the Farmers Bank of Delaware that opened in Dover in 1807. He also later became State Auditor. He sold the property to James Clayton, father of John M. Clayton.

John M. Clayton was Secretary of State under President Zachary Taylor. His parents, grandmother, and sister are buried on the mansion grounds. Clayton's father was a tanner and miller but fell upon difficult times and the property was sold to Col. Benjamin Potter and his son, Edmund. Col. Potter was a large land owner and philanthropist and made the mansion farm his dwelling. His son, daughter, and wife passed on before him and at his death he left the mansion and farm to his grand nephew, also named Benjamin Potter.

Dr. William Burton became a tenant on the farm in 1845 and became guardian of young Benjamin Potter in 1849. Burton was Delaware's governor from 1859 through 1863, a time during the early years of the Civil War. Delaware was a border state and Burton kept it in the Union. Young Potter became a physician too and sold his interest in the farm to his father-in-law, Col. Henry B. Fiddeman, the first president of the First National Bank of Maryland and a founding director of the Delaware Breakwater and Junction Railroad. Fiddeman was responsible for the Victorian architecture layered upon the mansion.

The property passed to Fiddeman's daughter and onto her son Henry Fiddeman Lofland then to his siblings who sold the property to George H. Draper, Sr. in 1916. For many years, the Draper family farmed the property with the farm manager living in the mansion. The site also became home to the dairy cattle whose milk supplied the Silver Hill Dairy that was operated in Milford for many years.



The mansion passed into the hands of the Milford Historical Society in 1961. J. Richard Draper, a grandson of George H. Draper, wanted to see the mansion preserved. A handful of preservation-minded people rallied to the cause and founded the Milford Historical Society in 1961 as a Delaware non-profit corporation in order to accept the gift of the mansion. The founding members were M. Catherine Downing Holcombe, Edw. Millis Hurley, and Rev. E. John Dyer. The mansion was so important to Mrs. Holcombe that at her death her ashes were interred within the east arcade floor.

The mansion was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971. Today it is operated as a house museum by a Board of Trustees with a general membership. Since 1962, the Society has completed numerous preservation projects with the mansion and these continue into the 21st century. Our furniture and collections, that allow the rooms to have a lived in appearance, are primarily due to the generosity of various individuals over the years.



The museum is open to the public and for school tours by appointment and during special events and festivities such as our Antiques Market, Milford Open House tours, and the River Walk Festival.



The Parson Thorne Mansion, located on Silver Hill in Milford, Delaware, is a Georgian brick house whose beginnings date back to 1730-1735. Built for the dwelling house on a large plantation, it retains this character in its setting. The house is placed well back from the street with spacious lawn shaded by ancient linden trees.

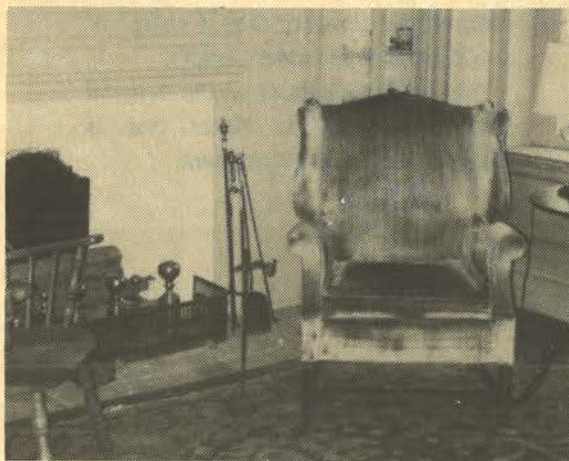
The style of architecture is typical of the southern house, with a central section flanked by symmetrical wings. On entering the central front door of the house, we come first to a stair hall with original stairway running from first floor to attic. Behind this hall is the parlor where we find elaborate panelling, corner cupboards with butterfly shelves, mouldings and trim, all original. In the fireplace is a rare fireback cast by The Deep Creek Furnace of Sussex County before the American Revolution. To the right of the hallway is the dining room. In this room is a corner cupboard with butterfly shelves, all intact. The original mantel graces the fireplace. On the second floor are two large bedrooms, each with its fireplace.

The one and a half story rooms at each end of the main house appear to have served important purposes. The west wing, with its panelling and chair rail, gives the appearance of having been the plantation office while the east wing with its large fireplace indicates that it may have once served as kitchen for the household. Connecting these wings to the main house are arcades, behind each of which was a storeroom. An odd feature is that there is no indoor communication between these wings and the main house.

The house gives evidence of more than one remodelling, but the most extensive one was in 1879 when an attempt was made to change the Georgian style of architecture to

Victorian. This remodelling was confined to the exterior of the building. At that time the roofs were raised to give the present sharp pitch and the three peaked gables were added. Inside, much of the original woodwork, plaster, and wide board pine floors survive.

The oldest part of the house is the one room, two story rear wing which was built by Joseph Booth some time between his purchase of the land in 1730 and his death in 1735. This section is of frame construction with brick nogging inside the plastered walls. The front part of the house, which is entirely of brick construction, was added to the little one room house by John Cullen about 1750. At that time there was no town - only the open country. The house, standing as it does on high ground, furnished a clear view of the Mispillion River and of the ships



coming and going to the wharves at Cullen Town located a mile upstream.

In 1785 the property was bought by the Rev. Mr. Sydenham Thorne, an Anglican clergyman who had arrived on Christmas Eve 1774 to take charge of Christ Church, Mispillion, then located about four miles to the west. Mr. Thorne entered into an

agreement, tradition tells us, with his neighbor Mr. Joseph Oliver whereby he, Thorne, would build a dam across the river at his mill if Oliver would lay out his lands into building lots. The two men carried out their agreement and the town of Milford was begun in 1787. These two men, Sydenham Thorne and Joseph Oliver, are considered the founders of the town. It is to be expected that the house should be known by the name of its distinguished owner, a co-founder of Milford.

After the death of Parson Thorne, the property passed to his nephew Peter Caverly who became the first cashier of the Farmers Bank of Delaware which opened at Dover in 1807. Being required to live in the bank building, Caverley sold his property and moved to Dover. The new owner was James Clayton, father of the internationally known statesman John M. Clayton who, as Secretary of State under President Zachary Taylor, negotiated the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty with Great Britain. Here John M. Clayton spent a part of his boyhood years, and in the walled family graveyard to the rear of the house his parents and other members of his family are buried. Many years later he bought this family burial plot from the owner of the property and set up a trust fund for its perpetual care.

The property passed on to other owners, all of whom were important citizens of the community. Col. Benjamin Potter, who lived in the house more than a century ago and on his death in 1843 was buried on the property, was an early philanthropist. By his will he left part of his estate to the poor of Kent County outside the poorhouse. Until 1963 this Potter Estate was still in effect and the various farms so devised were known by that name. From 1858 until 1861 the Parson Thorne Mansion was the home of Dr.

William Burton who served the state as governor during those trying early years of the War Between the States and who made such valiant efforts to maintain the neutrality of his state during that conflict. The next owner of note was Col. H. B. Fiddeman, the first president of the First National Bank of Milford (now the Milford Branch of the Wilmington Trust Co.) founded in 1876. It was Col. Fiddeman who made the extensive alterations to the exterior of the house in 1879.

In 1927 the property was bought by Mr. George H. Draper who ran the large farm and rented the house. The house passed from father to son to grandson. The grandson, James Richard Draper, loved the house and thought seriously of making it his home but decided against it for practical reasons. However, wishing to see the house in good hands and lovingly cared for, he gave it in 1961 to the Milford Historical Society. On September 22, 1962, as a part of the celebration of the 175th anniversary of the founding of the town, the house was formally presented to the society at a public ceremony held on the lawn of the house.

Since accepting ownership of the property, the Society has completely restored the interior and made extensive restorations to the exterior under the direction of two eminent restoration architects, the late Albert Kruse AIA and John Milner AIA. Over the years gifts of furnishings have been received which give a lived-in appearance to the rooms. The Mansion and its grounds have been the scene of numerous festivities and community events.

The Parson Thorne Mansion is open regularly the first Sunday of each month April through October between 2:00 and 4:00 P.M., and other times by appointment - call 422-3115. Members and children are admitted free; a charge of \$1.00 is made for other visitors.

This property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is designated a Milford Landmark.

THE PARSON THORNE MANSION

501 N.W. Front Street
Milford, Delaware



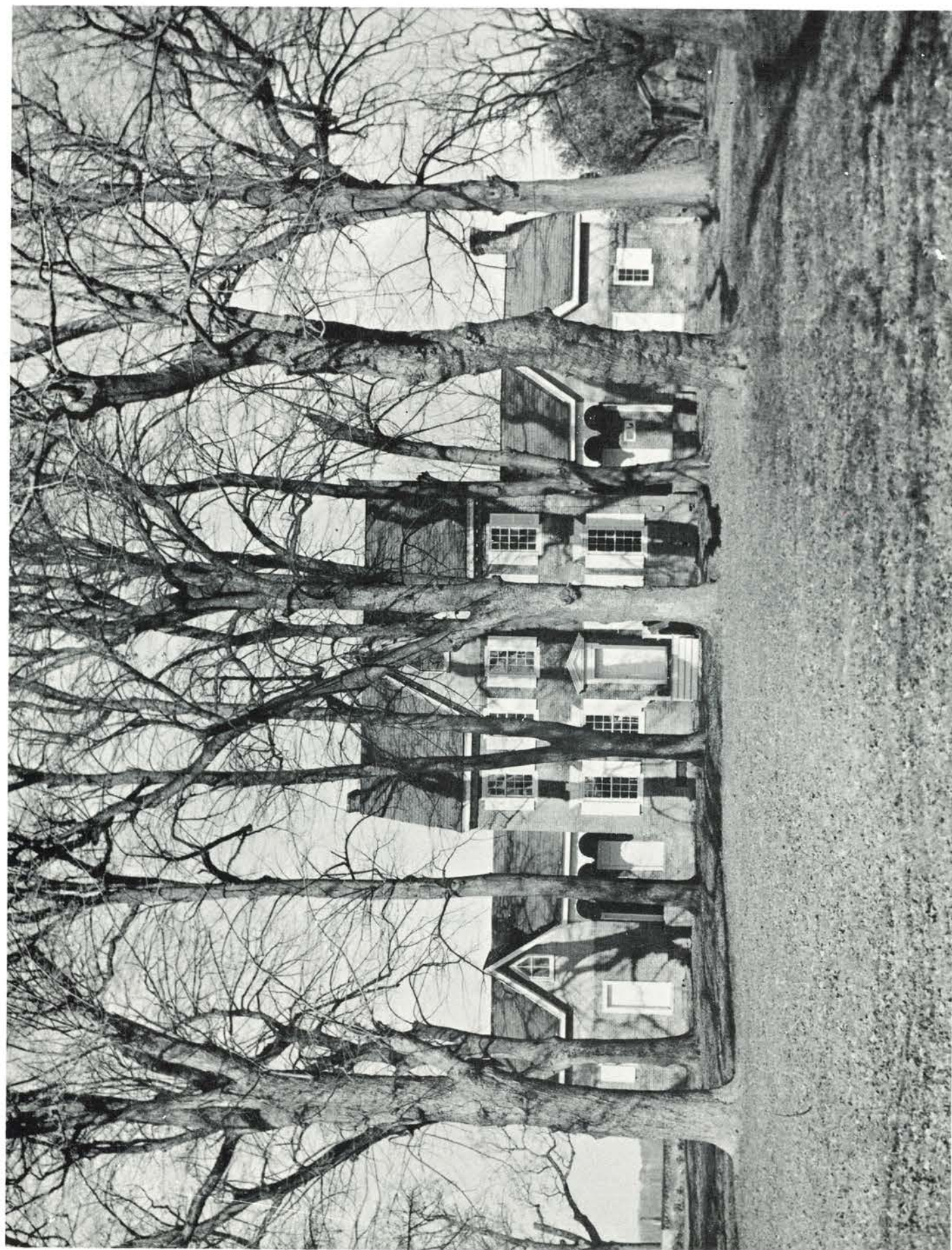
owned and administered by

Milford
Historical Society

#7 Mrs

THE PARSON THORNE MANSION





THE PARSON THORNE MANSION
MILFORD, DELAWARE

The Parson Thorne Mansion, located on Silver Hill in Milford, Delaware, is a colonial brick house whose beginnings go back to 1730 - 1735. Built for the dwelling house on a large plantation, it retains this character in its setting. The house is placed well back from the street with spacious lawn shaded by ancient elm trees and surrounded on two sides by farm lands. On the other side, the hill slopes gently to a little stream called Mullet Run.

Description

The style of architecture is typical of the southern plantation house, with a central section flanked by curtain wings. On entering the central front door of the house, we come first to a stair hall with original stairway running from first floor to attic. Behind this hall is the parlor where we find lovely panelling, corner cupboards with butterfly shelves, mouldings and trim, all original. In the fireplace is a rare fireback cast by a Sussex County foundry before the American Revolution. To the right of the hallway is the dining room. In this room is a corner cupboard of shell design with butterfly shelves, all intact. The original mantel graces the fireplace. On the second floor are three large bedrooms, each with its fireplace.

The one and a half story rooms at each end of the main house appear to have served important purposes, one as the plantation office and the other as a kitchen. Connecting these wings to the main house are arcades, behind each of which is a storeroom. An odd feature is that there is no indoor communication between these wings and the main house. The west wing, with its panelling and chair rail, gives the appearance of having been the plantation office while the east wing with its enormous fireplace and smoked ceiling indicates that it once served as kitchen for the household.

The house gives evidence of more than one remodelling, but the most extensive one was in 1879 when an attempt was made to change the colonial

style of architecture to Victorian. At that time the roofs were raised to give the present sharp pitch and the three peaked gables were added. This had the unfortunate effect of imposing vertical lines on a structure built with horizontal lines. At the same time the windows on the front were changed from the small paned eighteen light sash to the four light sash then in vogue, and the front stoop was exchanged for a porch.

History

The oldest part of the house is the one room, two story rear wing which was built by Joseph Booth some time between his purchase of the land in 1730 and his death in 1735. This portion is of frame construction with brick nogging inside the plastered walls. The front part of the house, which is entirely of brick construction, was added to the little one room house by John Cullen about 1750. At that time there was no town - only the open country. The house, standing as it does on high ground, furnished a clear view of the Mispillion River and of the ships coming and going to the wharves at Cullen Town located a mile upstream.

In 1785 the property was bought by the Rev. Mr. Sydenham Thorne, an Anglican clergyman who had arrived on Christmas Eve 1774 to take charge of Christ Church Mispillion, then located about four miles to the west. Being enterprising and a man of vision, "Parson Thorne", as he was called, had ideas for the locality. He entered into an agreement with his neighbor Mr. Joseph Oliver whereby he, Thorne, would build a dam across the river at his mill if Oliver would lay out his lands into building lots. The two men carried out their agreement and the town of Milford was begun in 1787. These two men, Sydenham Thorne and Joseph Oliver, have always been considered the founders of the town. It is natural that the house should be known by the name of its distinguished owner, a co-founder of the town of Milford.



PARLOR SHOWING FIREPLACE WALL
AND CORNER CUPBOARD

Occupants

After the death of Parson Thorne, the property passed to his nephew Peter Caverley who became the first cashier of the Farmers Bank of Delaware which opened in Dover. Being required to live in the bank building, Caverley sold the property and moved to Dover. The new owner was James Clayton, father of the internationally known statesman John M. Clayton who, as Secretary of State under President Zachary Taylor, negotiated the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty with Great Britain. Here John M. Clayton spent a part of his boyhood years and in the walled family graveyard to the rear of the house are buried his parents and other members of his family. Many years later he bought this family burial plot from the owner of the property and set up a trust fund for its perpetual care.

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After the death of Col. Fiddeman the house was no longer occupied by its owner and became a tenant house. In 1927 it was bought by Mr. George H. Draper who ran the large farm and rented the house. No further alterations were made - work was restricted to essential repairs. The house passed from father to son

INTERIOR OF REAR WING





REAR WING UNDER CONSTRUCTION
SHOWING NOGGING BETWEEN STUDS

to grandson. The grandson, James Richard Draper, loved the house and thought seriously of making it his home but decided against it for practical reasons. However, wishing to see the house in good hands and lovingly cared for, he gave it in 1961 to the Milford Historical Society. On September 22, 1962, as a part of the celebration of the 175th anniversary of the founding of the town, the house was formally presented to the society at a public ceremony held on the lawn of the house.

Restoration

Since accepting ownership of the property the society has begun the work of restoration. However, most of the work has necessarily been limited to repairs. The greatest changes in appearance are those made to the front of the structure. The Victorian porch has been removed and replaced by a stoop following the lines of the original one, new windows duplicating the few original ones which remain have been installed, frames and lintels repaired or replaced and all of the woodwork given a coat of paint. In the rear wing, the imitation brick siding was removed and the worn weatherboarding replaced with new copied from a fragment of the original. As funds become available the society will continue its work of restoration until the house regains its colonial appearance. The interior needs little alteration aside from putting the fireplaces in working order and a thorough job of refinishing walls and woodwork. However, there is major interior work to be done to give modern comforts; namely, the installation of electricity, plumbing and heating. And then will come the furnishing of the mansion in keeping with its period. Already the society has received a few pieces of furniture and has been willed other valuable pieces. The society has many prospective uses for the house as soon as any part can be made fit for its occupation. The Parson Thorne Mansion will be maintained as an historic shrine and local museum as well as the society's headquarters.