

ODD STONE TAVERN, LITTLE CREEK, DEL.

The earliest tracts of land patented in Kent County, Del., were near the coast and on the navigable streams. In 1675, William Simpson took up 400 acres on the north side of "Ye Creeke Creeke, called Little Creeke." This was patented to him March 2, 1676, by Edmund Anderson, esq. "Lt. and Governor General under his Royal Highness James, Duke of York and Albany...of all his territories in America" and had an annual "Quitt rent of fore Bushells of good winter wheat." In the next fifteen years it changed hands often belonging to John Brinckloe, then to John Edmondson and John Richardson Sr., and then to John Richardson Jr., who sold part of it to Thomas Clifford in September of 1691, and part to Robert and Lawrence Porter, and part to Samuel Berry.

The old stone farm house was built before 1768. Mary Bell (Hunter) owned it in that year and was living in the house and apparently keeping a tavern there, for she mentions the "tavern house" in a deed to her son Henry Bell. The house is on one of the oldest roads in the hundred, a road mentioned as early as 1714, in old deeds. It was laid out on the western boundary of "Simpsons Choice." Dividing it from the adjoining tract belonging to John Stevens, called "London." It naturally led from the Little Creek Landing "north to "Fast Landing" on Little Duck Creek, the present Leipsic. A road also led into the landing on St. Jones River, now Dover. The house was therefore built on an advantageous spot and very naturally was used as a tavern.

Mary and Robert Bell, of north Ireland, had come to Delaware from Elizabeth, New Jersey. Of their seven children, four sons and three daughters, at least two of the daughters married well-known colonial Delawareans--Mary, who became the wife of James Sykes, and member of the Committee of Safty and of Congress during the Revolution; and Lucy who married Rev. Samuel Magaw, pastor of Christ Church, Dover, at the time of the Revolution, and later rector of St. Paul's Philadelphia, Pa.

Henry Bell and his wife ^{Elizabeth} Mary Lewis, were still living in the stone tavern-house in 1793. Perhaps they were there in April of 1813, when a boatload of men from the British schooner "Pilgrim" appeared in the creek. The warship "Poitiers" as blockading the Bay and had sent them for food. When the people refused to supply them, the men spread terror through the neighborhood as they foraged for thirty-six hours.

The last Bell to own the homestead, John Bell, died insolvent and the estate was sold on judgement by the Farmers Bank about 1840. The Hayes family, friends of John Bell and apparently distant connections, had gone on John Bell's note, and they bought the property. Charles Hayes, brother of Mahove Hayes, as comfortably installed on the farm by his father. There he indulged in his great fondness of plants and flowers, the best varieties of seed and grain, stock, including Chinese Hogs and Shanghai geese. He grew tired of farming and it was sold. In 1888, it belonged to Capt. Abraham Nowell of Dover. In the old days the boats that tied up at the landing must have carried settlers, supplies, tobacco and pelts. More recently they have carried marsh grass, grain, oysters and the sports fisherman.

The house is a two story stone building with dormers. Its plainness is relieved by a ~~sopped~~ stepped-brick course at the eaves. There is a big chinmey at each end. The windows are spacious and fortunately those in back still have most of their charming small panes. There are small lights above the deep-set paneled ~~from~~ front door. The old lock and key still exist. The most interesting aspects of the inside are the graceful old stair rail in the central hall, and the handsome carved ~~mantle~~ ^{mantle} ~~above the~~ ^{in the} bay-window south room. There is some panelling. The house has been put in quite good condition by its present owners.

This is one of the few early stone buildings in Kent County. Such stones are said to have come as ballast on the sailing ships. Over 200 years ago these stones must have been unloaded at the "Landing" and carried up the rough cart track through the marsh grass to the place where the house still stands beside the old road.

Bibliography:

- Dike of York Records p. 112
- Paten--Deed B, 6 Recorder of Deeds Office Dover, Court House L676
- Scharf History of Delaware P. 1119, 1120
- Deed S, 251 & 252 Mary Bell (Hunter) to her children 1758
- Manlove Hayes "Reminiscences" p. 10, 11, 40, 41, 43
- Deed D2 p. 39 Deed Elizabeth Lewis to Jas Sykes 1793
- Delaware Guide p. 480

Copied by Gladys A. Paradee April 14, 1970

"Old Stone Tavern, Little Creek, Del."

This article is not a transcript but was assembled from the following sources:

Reminiscences, by Manlove Hayes, pp.10-11, 40-41.
History Of Delaware, by J. Thomas Scharf, Vol. I, p.1118-1121.
Original Land Titles In Delaware, ... p.112.
Delaware A Guide To The First State, by Jeannette Eckman, p.480
Historic Houses And Buildings Of Delaware, by Harold Donaldson Eberlein, pages 72-73.

I found these errors: Paragraph 1, line 4, the Duke of York's governor was Edmund Andros, not Anderson. Paragraph 3, lines 3-4 have several typographical errors indicated in the margins, and "Congress" should be Continental Congress. Paragraph 4 - Elizabeth Lewis was Mrs. Henry Bell; it was John Bell, Henry's brother, who married Mary. There are also several typographical errors which have been corrected. Paragraph 5, line 7, the indicated sale was at least ten years after Charles Hayes first occupied it, for his father bequeathed it in a will not probated until 1849. I have therefore inserted "eventually." I also question the boats at Little Creek carrying many "settlers" or much tobacco at any period.

The attached notes indicate the source of each statement in the article for which I was able to find documentation.

"Old Stone Tavern, Little Creek, Del."

Notes Indicating The Source of Each Statement

- Paragraph 1 - 1. 4 - Edmund Andros - Duke of York Record p.112 confirms patent data. 1. 7-10 - gives the title as stated in Scharf II p. 1118, omitting only the statement that John Hann [sic] in 1784 became owner of John Bell's former portion.
- " 2 - Data concerning the Mary Bell deed in 1764, the road pattern and abutting lands are from Scharf II p.1020
- " 3 - The statements concerning Robert and Mary Bell and their seven children is from Reminiscences by Manlove Hayes, pages 10 - 11.
- " 4 - According to Reminiscences p. 10 - 11, the wife of Henry Bell was Elizabeth Lewis. Mary Lewis was the wife of John Lewis who was Henry's brother and the grandfather of Manlove Hayes. Eberlein, Historic Houses And Buildings Of Delaware p.73, states that Henry Bell "was still living there with his wife in 1793." He does not give her name or guess whether they were still there in 1813. Delaware Guide p. 480-481 is the source of the account of the Poitiers raid, described in more detail in Scharf I p.292. Neither mentions the stone house or its residents.
- " 5 - The statements concerning the purchase and operation of the house and its farm by the Hayes family is abstracted from Reminiscences pp. 40 - 41. Abram Nowell's ownership in 1888 is from Scharf II, p.1120. Found no source for the guess about the cargoes at the landing.
- " 6 - The description appears to be original with the compiler. The stepped- brick cornice is mentioned by Eberlein as the principal surviving architectural amenity of the building's exterior.

- Manlove Hayes - p. 10-11 Robert Bell, Mary O'Brian, from Northern Ireland via Eliz. N.J. - 4 s., 3 dau. (latter attractive & well married, to J. Sykes (m.c. & Comm Safety), & Wm. McGau m. Mary Lewis who d. 1835 (as Mrs Wharton) - Her farm in Hayes possession later.
- ibid 40-41 M.H. Sr. had bought farm at L.C.L. - of J.B. who died insolvent; 43 - M.H. Jr. takes over farm in 1842 as tenant
- Guide - 480 Nowell House built of stone brought by vessel; April 1813 - raid by crew of Pilgrim trying to supply Poitiers
- Duke of York - 112 Edmund Andros to Wm. Simpson 400 acres "Simpson's Choice" - 4 bu - War. May 1675- sure date defaced.
- Scharf 1118-21 - L.C.L. on road bet "London" & "Simpson's Choice" - "oldest in the Hd." Parcel with tavern & stone farmhouse - conveyed to Henry Bell by mother Mary 1764; rest of acc't is history of the town in contexts not associated with the Bells - Early owners of "Simpson's Choice"
- Eberlein 72-73 Built of stone brought in ballast; standing before 1768 when mentioned as a "Tavern house"; on Little Cr.-Fast Landing road & inland to Dover.
Robert & Mary Bell from Northern Ireland via Eliz. N.J. seven children. Started tavern in stone house; dau. m. Jas. Sykes - Rev. S. Mag. Henry Bell still living there in 1793 - Last Bell was John who d. insolvent in 1840 = Hayes fam. then bought.
Most of Eb. space is given to architect. desc.