

Notes on the Clothier Carriage House at 3rd and Main, Riverton, NJ

By Roger T. Prichard

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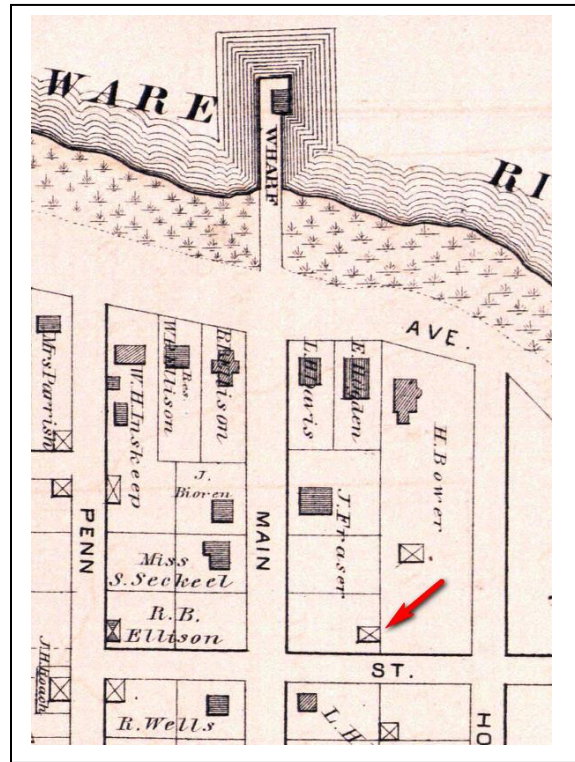


The start of demolition of this structure during February, 2017 prompted the creation of the accompanying 70 digital photographs and the photographic sketch elevations which are also reproduced here.

Brief History

According to the 1998 National Register nomination for the Riverton Historic District, this carriage house was constructed to serve the Italianate mansion at 101 Main Street which was designed by Samuel Sloan for James Clothier but not constructed until the property was purchased by his brother Caleb in 1853.

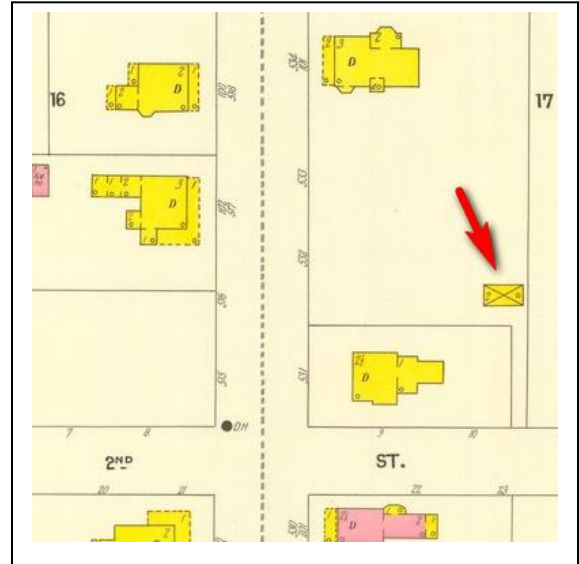
The carriage house is distinct on the Riverton and Palmyra vignette of Hopkins' 1877 *Map of Philadelphia and Environs*, where it is shown as a rectangular building (not yet having acquired its ell which projects toward the river). By this time the entire property was owned by architect John Fraser. The map shows the structure as closer to 2nd Street than it was in 2017, so either it is inaccurate or the carriage house was moved later.



There was 19th C. handwriting in thick pencil or crayon on the inside of the wall on the Main Street side which read "Fraser Riverton". The sheathing in this area suggests that it was intended to provide a smooth surface in a horse's stall.



In 1880, John Fraser sold the portion on the corner of 2nd and Main to Philadelphia merchant John Boyer and his wife, who built 105 Main Street that year. The 1900 Sanborn map shows the relationship of the carriage house to 105 Main as it existed until 2017, with the narrow lane retained to provide access from 2nd Street.



Also in 1880 the carriage house was remodeled with the addition of the cupola, carrying the fancy cast iron weathervane with the date “1880” in its tail feather. The next section discusses that the columns used to support the



cupola were of later manufacture than the body of the structure. It’s tempting to conclude that the coincidence of this 1880 remodeling with the 1880 construction of the new home at 105 Main means that the carriage house was conveyed as part of that real estate sale and was modernized to be in the 1880 style of the

new house it would then serve. However, as the 1900 Sanborn shows, the lot lines do not bear this out and, in fact, the carriage house and the narrow lane as of 2017 still did not belong to 105 Main’s parcel, being part of the 103A Main Street lot. So the rebuilding with the “1880” weathervane may have been a coincidence at the same time as the construction of 105 (and it is possible that the carriage house was moved at this time, if the sketch in the 1877 map is to be believed).

It isn’t clear when the newer ell that projected toward the river was added. As described below, it was framed in modern studding, not post and beam. It is not represented as existing on the later Sanborn map of 1919, though it did carry a slate roof, so it may not

have been built much later than that. The space between the ell and the main body of the building was partially filled in with a shed at some later time, and part of two walls removed, consistent with creating enough room to park a large automobile inside.

By the early 1990s, the carriage house had considerable water and termite damage. (There was no evidence of a masonry foundation.) Deterioration continued to worsen, with nearly all parts becoming more or less out of plumb and numerous slates lost from the roof. About February 1, 2017, the heirs of the last resident of the modern house at 103A Main Street, Teresa Larsen, hired John High, whose business is named Barn Saver (barnsaver.com) to dismantle it piece by piece using a demolition permit obtained years earlier. The structure was completely disassembled by March 3, 2017.

Notes on the structure

See the accompanying interior photographs from 2017. The original rectangular building which paralleled 2nd Street was of post and beam construction, with vertical random-width sheathing and “German board” shiplap siding. There was no ridgepole and, as mentioned, no evidence of a foundation. (The concrete curb visible in one photo was not a foundation, rather it was consistent with a coldframe, and the wall above it still had a single crumbling strap hinge which could have supported a glass sash to act as its roof.)

The larger posts and main beams had mortise and tenon joints with trunnels. The square, regular sawcuts indicated that they all were sawn in a jigsaw-style sawmill. All other members (diagonals and smaller posts) showed circular saw marks and were fastened with nails.

There was one post in the center of the wall on the Main Street side that was made from what was clearly intended to be a residential porch post 5-1/2” square and 8’ tall, Each edge carried a chamfer and a fancy notch. It clearly had not been reused from some other structure since it had no paint and no weathering. It did not match the extant posts on either 101 or 105 Main Street.

The framing supporting the cupola was of later manufacture any other framing. The weight of the cupola was supported by four vertical 4x4 columns which landed on joists

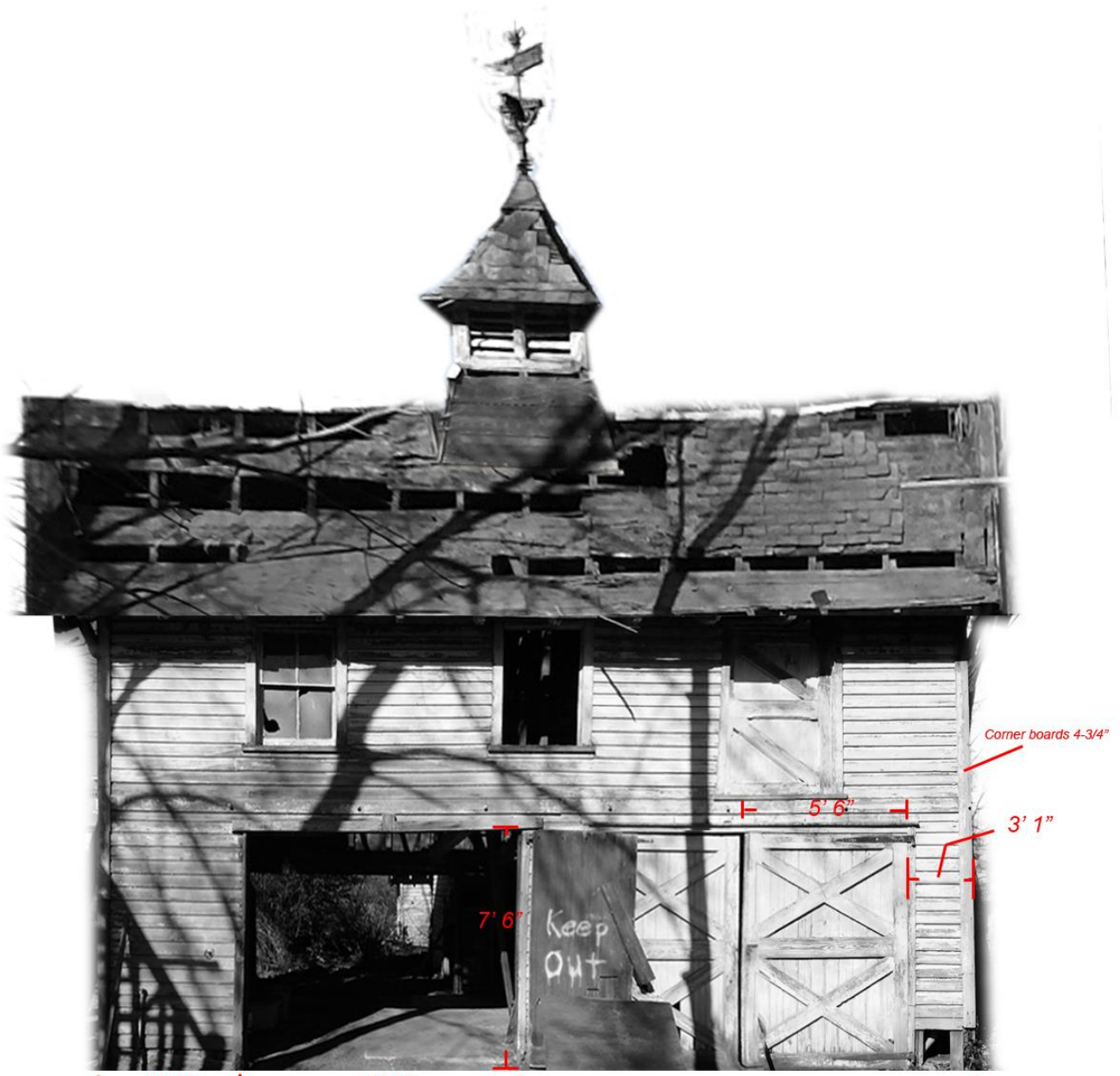
at the 2nd floor level which had replaced original mortise and tenoned beams. These four columns were, themselves, mismatched as if scavenged from other projects.

The ell projecting toward the river was framed in newer 2x4 studding, with horizontal, regular-width sheathing. Its German board siding and slate roof all match those of the older section.



Elevation sketches

The following three drawings were composited from photos taken in February 2017, squared up as much as possible using Photoshop, with some basic dimensions collected in the field. They are not to scale and should be used only as a guide to general proportions and details.



5' 0" 9' 0" 5' 6" 3' 1" 29' 9"

Looking toward river
Clothier Carriage House, 3rd and Main, Riverton, NJ
February 2017



Looking toward Main St.
Clothier Carriage House, 3rd and Main, Riverton, NJ
February 2017



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14' 4"

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Looking upriver

Clothier Carriage House, 3rd and Main, Riverton, NJ

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