

Bush-Holley House
39 Strickland Road
Cos Cob
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-279

HABS
CONN
1-COSCOB
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Addendum to:

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(drawings and photographs first transmitted)
previously

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WRITTEN DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL DATA

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

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ADDENDUM TO:

BUSH-HOLLEY HOUSE

HABS No. CT-279

Location: 39 Strickland Road, Cos Cob, Fairfield County, Connecticut.

The Bush-Holley House stands on the westerly shore of Strickland Brook, adjoining what was for nearly two centuries a busy town dock in Cos Cob, a part of Greenwich, Connecticut. It lies south of U.S. Route 1.

Present Owner and Occupant: The Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich, Inc. (Bush-Holley House), 39 Strickland Road, Cos Cob, Connecticut

Present Use: Historic house museum.

Significance: The Bush-Holley House is one of the important 18th century wooden houses in New England. It is best known for its significant literary and artistic associations.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Built between June 9, 1730 and February 14, 1732/3. See also 1730 and 1732/3 property transactions in the Original and subsequent owners, and in the Sources of Information section, under Supplemental Material.

2. Architect: Not known.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a record of property transactions for the Bush-Holley House. The information is from the Town of Greenwich, Land Records and Probate Court Records, Greenwich, Connecticut.

1728 Gershom Lockwood sold Section A of Lot 18 to Abraham Hays on December 11, 1728 for six pounds. (Greenwich Land Records 3-383). (Mr. Hays also owned other property, Lots 17 and 21, which were bought by him on March 20, 1728 and March 28, 1729, respectively).

1730 Abraham Hays sold Section A of Lot 18, one-half of Lot 17 and Lot 21 to Henry James on June 9, 1730 for one hundred pounds. (Greenwich Land Records 3-576). There was no mention of a house.

- 1732/3 Henry James sold all three lots to Issac Quintard on February 14, 1732/3 for three hundred pounds, including "ye house standing on one of ye parsells of land near sd. landing place." (Greenwich Land Records 5-453). The house is on section A of Lot 18.
- 1734 Isaac Quintard sold all three lots to Jacob Hays on December 5, 1734 for three hundred pounds. (Greenwich Land Records 4-111).
- 1735 Jacob Hays sold all three lots to David Hays on June 26, 1735 for three hundred pounds. (Greenwich Land Records 4-191).
- 1735/6 David Hays sold all three lots to Jacob Hays on January 2, 1735/6 for three hundred pounds. (Greenwich Land Records 4-247).
- 1736 Jacob Hays sold all three lots to Anthony DeMill on April 15, 1736 (Greenwich Land Records 4-338).
- 1738 Anthony and Peter DeMill sold Section A of Lot 18, one-half of Lot 17, Lot 21 and seven other pieces of land to Justus Bush on April 15, 1738 for three hundred forty pounds. (Greenwich Land Records, 4-534). A "Small House" (not the Bush-Holley House) was included in this sale.
- (Note: More lots were added in the subsequent years and the property eventually numbered about 19 lots. The Bush family remained in this property until 1835).
- 1835 Dr. David Isaacs Bush sold the property to the Page Family.
- ? The Page Family sold the property to George Jackson Smith, town clerk. His widow later used the house as a boarding house.
- ? Mrs. George Jackson Smith, widow, sold the property to Robert Wellstood: House used also as a boarding house by his widow.
- 1882 Edward P. Holley bought the property from a Stamford bank.
- 1957 Emma Constant (Holley) MacRae, daughter of Edward P. Holley, sold the property to the Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich, Inc. on July 1, 1957.

4. Original plans and construction: The house is made up of three sections. The main section is the original house, a saltbox. The others are the side and rear wings, added before 1790. The main section has a square layout which includes a space in the lean-to. The two-story front porches of the main section and the side wing are not original; they were added in 1850. Many important architectural elements still remain in the main section, and these include the following: beaded clapboards (nailed over vertical planks), a handhewn frame, wide oak floors, a beehive oven, pine paneling and an unusual yellow brick chimney with a vaulted arch, which is a rarity found in only a handful of houses.
5. Alterations and additions: The rear wing was originally a separate building which was moved from across the road to the back of the house. It contains a rare example of rusticated siding -- large wooden planks cut to look like stone. The side wing, adjoined to the house's south wall, was originally a counting house. In 1810 the chimney breast in the northeast chamber in the first floor was replaced with an Adam style mantelpiece. The 1790 main stair was replaced in 1850 by a heavy stair. At the same time the two-story porches and a kitchen were added. A bay window and a dormer were added in 1901. (Their specific locations were not indicated at the time of this survey). The entire complex was restored in 1958, and it was decided that the evolutionary changes be left intact because it was painted by many of the country's greatest artists from 1890 to 1953. (The paintings are now in the leading museums).

B. Historical Context: The house was used as a military recruiting center during the French and Indian War.

During the Revolutionary War, the house was used as headquarters for Gen. Israel Putnam and it was from this house that he took Miss Sally Bush to the dance the night before his famous ride. The house was also used for two manufacturing operations, salt-works and flour milling, because of its proximity to the water. These operations were closely guarded from the British. (The flour mill burned down in 1889).

During the building of the New Haven roadbed the engineers boarded in the house.

When George Jackson Smith owned the house he was a town clerk. During the debate over the plans for the new Town Hall, he took the plans and papered one of the rooms in the house with them.

In its later years the house was called the "Holley Inn," a summer place for aspiring artists, writers and editors. It later became famous as the Cos Cob School. William Glackens, Childe Hassam, Alden Twachtman, Walt Kuhn and Elmer Livingston MacRae were among the artists who resided in the house. MacRae was married to Constant Holley, who sold the house to the present owner in 1957. MacRae and Kuhn are also very important for their role in the founding of the famous art show, the International Exhibition of Modern Art, best known as the "Amory Show of 1913", held in New York City. Willa Catha, one of the house's residents, wrote some of her most exquisite writing in the original north bedroom.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The main section of the complex is a New England saltbox, having typical features- clapboarding, a lean-to and common double-hung sash windows.
2. Condition of fabric: Restored.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Main section is 36' -8" (five bay front) x 29' -8" ; two-and-a-half stories. The side wing is two stories high and its front elevation is two bays wide. The rear wing is a two-story structure.
2. Foundations: The main section and the side wing sit on an unhewn stone foundation. Foundation for the rear wing was not recorded.
3. Walls:
 - a. Main section: Narrow beaded clapboarding on vertical planks, painted.
 - b. Side wing: Clapboarding, painted on the front and unpainted (rusticated) on the side and rear.
 - c. Rear wing: Rare wood plank siding made to resemble stone, discovered during restoration.
4. Structural system, framing: Wooden framing in the main section, hand hewn. Framing for the wings was not recorded.

5. Porches, stoops: Two-story front porches. The railings have plain unturned balusters. The columns are boxy and have rather simple capitals and bases. Access to the front entrance is through two different sets of stairs. The first set is of stone and is joined on both sides by a stone wall. The second set is all wood and its treads and handrails are painted.
6. Chimneys: Yellow Holland brick chimney with a corbeled cap in the main section, with a vaulted arch in the basement. The rear wing has one wide brick chimney with a corbeled cap and one smaller brick chimney with a corbeled cap.
7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The entrance has an interesting 18th century pedimented frontispiece. Its original pediment was removed when the front two-story porches were added. See HABS drawings and a photograph for a visual observation.

Above this doorway is a second floor doorway. It has paneled French-type doors and a four-light transom.

There is another front door- to the side wing. It has a paneled Dutch door, a five-light transom and a pair of sidelights. The latter are actually double-hung 6/6 sash windows.

There are other doors in the house. (They were not described at the time of this survey).

- b. Windows: The windows for the most part are common double-hung sash windows. The lights are varied: 4/4, 6/6, 9/6, 9/9, etc. In the HABS photograph showing the front elevation of the house, the windows in the first floor main section were replacements, "Victorian" in style.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Steep gable roof and rear lean-to roof on the main section; gable roofs on both wings. There is a pent roof on the south wall of the rear wing.

- C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Central hall plan with a large central fireplace complex in the main section. See also HABS drawings.

(No description of floor plans of the wings was provided).

2. Stairways: The central stair is an open string with a 19th century replacement newel post and railing.

There is an old stone stairway leading to the cellar.

There are also other stairways. (Not described at the time of this survey).

3. Wall and ceiling finish: Handsome pine paneling in the major rooms with central fireplaces in the main section. One or two rooms in the main section contain a rare 18th century wallpaper bearing the tax stamps of George II. (Descriptions of all other walls and the ceilings were not provided).
4. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The doors for the most part are paneled. In one HABS photograph showing the "Wallpaper Room" there is a plain door with a bean latch.
 - b. Windows: (Not recorded).
5. Hardware: H-L hinges. Bean latches. (Other hardware was not recorded).

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Property records. Town of Greenwich, Land Records and Probate Court Records, Greenwich, Connecticut

Various documents, deeds and legal papers from the Bush and Holley families relating to the house, in the possession of the Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich, Inc. (Bush-Holley House), 39 Strickland Road, Cos Cob, Connecticut.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Seton, Anya. The Story of the Bush-Holley House. Greenwich: Greenwich Press, circa 1957.

"Connecticut House Restored" by Guin Hall. New York Herald Tribune. June 30, 1958.

Leaflet titled "Exhibition. Oils, pastels, wood carvings by Elmer Livingston MacRae", published by the Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich, Conn. Show held at the Lever House in New York City; year not indicated.

- B. Supplemental Material: Attached are the notes written in 1965 by Mrs. Robert I. Cummin of Villanova, Pennsylvania. There has been a dispute over the erection date of the house (the main section). In the notes Mrs. Cummin attempts to refute several suggestions that state different dates of this house. The land records that are in parentheses are on file at the Land Records and Probate Court Records, Town of Greenwich, Greenwich, Connecticut.

Prepared by: Anson C. Lowitz
President, The Historical
Society of the Town of Greenwich, Inc.
September 20, 1962

Mrs. Robert I. Cummin
Villanova, Pennsylvania
1965
(property records)

Edited by: Susan McCown
Historian, Historic
American Buildings
Survey (HABS)
November, 1984

1. Greenwich Old and New by Lydia Holland and Margaret Leaf (The Greenwich Press, 1935) states in a caption opposite page 36 that the house was "built in 1685 by Captain Bush, Dutch trader, and said to be the oldest house not standing in the town."

H.F. Randolph Mason in his Historic Houses of Connecticut (Stonington, The Pequot Press, 1963) mentions a tradition that the house "may have been built by a Dutch trader in 1685." He must have noted that the first lands owned by a Bush in Greenwich were bought in 1716. He may also have noted that the first Justus Bush (father of the man who bought the Bush-Holley property) apparently never lived in Greenwich (he was always "of New York" or "of Rye") and, what's more, was 11 years old in 1685.

2. Mr. Mason goes on to suggest that the house might have been built by the town's first parson, Eliphalet Jones. This idea stems from the fact that Spencer Mead in his Ye Historic of Greenwich (the best known local history) mentions a sale to Jones of land "lying by Mianus River and a brook called Strickland Brook." I was in Greenwich when this idea first appealed to members of the Historical Society (and to me) and was disappointed to find it impossible.

Mr. Jones did, all told, own three pieces of land in Greenwich. The first was granted to him by the town May 28, 1668 (Common Place book p. 57) and consisted of fifteen acres upon the eastward side of Cos Cob Neck. He was also given permission to dwell on the land. A transcription of the early records was made in 1857 in a volume filed in the Greenwich Town Hall. This is easier to read than the originals but unfortunately this particular record was mistranscribed by the copyist so as to make it appear that Mr. Jones already had a dwelling on the land (the land had not even been laid out!). A check with the original shows that the word "in" had been omitted. The record actually reads "...Mr. Jones aforsayd is to have his liberty to live uppon it if hee please himself but if he dispose of it to another he or they are...to have the like liberty to reside there as an inhabitant But in reference to Mr. Jones own partikular in Dwelling uppon the land aforesaid it is ordered that ye 15 acres of land shall be so layd out as that other...ncy for turning out u ppon ye commons." Without the word "in" it does look as if Mr. Jones had a house.

There are numerous references to this land in other deeds to nearby properties. It lay south of the land on which the Bush-Holley house stands. It was not sold until May 29, 1724 when one Eliphalet Hill (nephew of Mr. Jones, although the deed does not say so) sold the property to Joseph Marshall. Even then no house is mentioned. (LR volume 3, p. 28).

His second property was granted February 2, 1669 on condition that Mr. Jones settle in Greenwich. It lay "by Moyannos riversid, and a brook called Stickling brook" and was still to be laid out. (Commonplace Book p. 60). On March 2, 1680, (some six or seven years after he left Greenwich) Eliphalet Jones sold this land to Joseph Ferris with a fairly detailed description which places it between the River and the brook for the most part, a little of it lying to the west of the brook but north of the Bush-Holley area. (LR volume 1, p. 23).

The third Jones property was a house lot in Greenwich. This is seen from an instrument recording the laying out of a "hyeway between John Hobby's home lots and ye home lot of Mr. Joanses." Joseph Mead's home lot is also mentioned in this. (Commonplace Book p. 56). This was April 3, 1668. On October 25, 1672 the town appointed a committee to put a value on "the house and lott Mr. Jones liveth upon." (Commonplace Book p. 68). Appraisers were appointed November 12, 1672 (Commonplace Book p. 69) and on June 10, 1673 Mr. Jones sold his house to the town describing the property as containing three acres and being bounded "by ye hom Lott of Joseph Mead on ye North west and John Hubby on ye South east butting to ye streate South west and ye lott of Richerd Bullerd North east also ye House built by ye foresd Mr. Jones upon ye sd lott..." (LR volume 1, p. 46). It will be noted that this lot lay northeast of the "streate," that no water is mentioned, that it is amid other home lots and thus seems to have been on what is now Old Greenwich, the original settlement in the town.

Mr. Jones was a tempting suggestion but he did not own the Bush-Holley house.

3. The Connecticut Antiquarian and Landmarks Society held an open house tour in Greenwich May 10, 1952. At that time a member of the Holley family still owned the house. The description of its history as written by the Society says: "built by Justus Bush, a Dutch trader, for his son Justus Bush Jr. sometime before 1716 because in that year Justus Bush Jr. was permitted to built a grist mill directly opposite his house."

Such permission was indeed granted Justus Bush (not Justus Jr.) but it was granted on Horseneck Brook which is a stream running into Greenwich Harbor and not (like Strickland Brook) into the Mianus River. Justus Bush of New York who established this mill did not live in Greenwich. By 1724/5 Justus Junior was living near the Horseneck Brook mill. (LR 3.11). It was he who bought the Bush-Holley site in 1738 although he does not seem to have lived there. He inherited his father's Horseneck Brook properties and still owned them at his death in 1760. I think he lived on Horseneck Brook consistently.

4. The house may have been lived in by the Reverend Joseph Morgan, minister of the Second Congregational Church in the very early 1700's. This tale stems from an error made by Spencer Mead in his Ye Historic of Greenwich and widely republished.

There are three good Mill sites near salt water in Greenwich. One lies on Horseneck Brook (Justus Bush's mill of topic 3), one lies on the Brothers Brook (that was actually the parson's mill) and the third is on Strickland Brook near the Bush-Holley house. One confusion comes from the fact that Justus Bush Jr. did own the Horseneck and Strickland Brook properties simultaneously. Another comes from a misunderstanding on the part of Spencer Mead.

On January 9, 1704 the town granted the inhabitants of the west bank of the Mianus River the liberty to build a tidemill "upon Sticklin brook or Coscob River." (LR volume 2, p. 6). Mr. Mead interpreted this as meaning that the two streams were synonymous and that the parson's mill lay on Strickland Brook later to be owned by David Bush. Actually, the following year on June 19 the west bank inhabitants informed the town that they had decided to build on Coscob River (LR 2, p. 7). It is possible to follow the ownership of this parson's mill. Mr. Morgan bought land from James Ferris Sr. June 17, 1707 (LR 1-360) and John Ferris May 10, 1707 (LR 1-361). Morgan sold these with grist mill and sawmill to John Lyon June 30, 1709 (LR 1-508). Lyon gave half his gristmill "on Coscob River" to his son Thomas in 1713/4 (LR 2-107). In 1742/3 Caleb Lyon sold his brother Thomas (son of Thomas) one half of this mill saying he had received it through the will of his grandfather John Lyon (LR 5-172). Caleb's mother, Rebecca Lyon, gave her son Thomas the other half which she had inherited from her husband Thomas (son of John Lyon) but reserved an interest for herself as long as she remained a widow. (LR 5-395). John Lyon's will (Stamford probate records Vol. 1, p. 115) also reflects these deeds. Rebecca Lyon did remarry and lost her rights to the mill. Thomas Lyon sold the property to Jonathan Hobby Jr. May 19, 1751 (LR 7-255). Hobby then sold it to David Valentine (LR 8 - 2). David Valentine sold it to Thomas Davis April 23, 1761 (LR 9-43). The Davis family owned the mill and operated it through the rest of the 18th and almost all the 19th centuries. It was not the mill on Strickland Brook. There is a marker about the "Davis Mill" on a millstone in Bruce Park in Greenwich, near but not on the site of the mill.

Only Judge Hubbard's Other Days in Greenwich correctly identified the Davis mill as being parson Morgan's. Other works repeat Mead's error.

So Justus Bush owned the mill on Horseneck Brook and left it to two of his sons (not David). Morgan, Lyons, Hobby, Valentine and Davises owned the Coscob River or Brothers Brook Mill in what is now Bruce Park.

Strickland Brook was later in getting its mill. After the layout of the land including the Bush-Holley site Gershom Lockwood Sr. and Samuel Mills Sr., then the owners of the two waterside lots 18 and 19 respectively, received permission to erect a grist mill by the landing on Strickland Brook. (LR 3-122). This was October 18, 1725 and the mill was to be in operation within two years. The mill was not built. Instead, Gershom divided his lot into small pieces and sold them. It was not until 1763 that a mill right was again granted there and that was to David Bush (LR 9-200).

5. The Connecticut Guide, published by Houghton Mifflin in 1938, claims the house was built "by Captain Justus Bush, a Dutchman" in the mid-18th century. I don't think Bush was a Captain and his Dutchness was a couple of generations back but he did own the property and could have built the house if architects feel it could date after 1738.

One more note:

The published descriptions of the Bush-Holley House of recent years mention that, on removing wallpaper from the southern wing, chalk inscriptions were found on a wooden wall. The inscriptions are somewhat faint and have been covered by glass. The date 1765 was very clear when the paper first came off. A photograph of the inscription was made and, by a chance of light, it looked as if the date were 1745 in the picture. A writer, seeing only the picture, mentioned this wrong date. This has been perpetuated in other flyers since. One item in chalk mentions Sgt. M. Lockwood. This probably referred to Sgt. Moses Lockwood (as the Bush-Holley publicity states) but a check with the records will show that Lockwood (who was very young in 1745) was a private in 1756, a corporal in 1757 and a sergeant in 1759.

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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001