

Dr. John R. Sudler House
North Main Street
Bridgeville
Sussex County
Delaware

HABS No. DE-184

HABS
DEL,
3-BRIVI,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

APPENDICES
FOLLOWS...

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

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DR. JOHN R. SUDLER HOUSE

HABS No. DE-184

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DEL,
3-BRINI,
1-

Location: East side of North Main Street (U.S. Route 13A), just north of Bridgeville Branch, Bridgeville, Sussex County, Delaware.

Latitude 38° 44'50" Longitude 75° 35'58"

Present Owner/
Occupant: Thurman W. Adams

Present Use: Residence

Significance: The Sudler House, the oldest known house in Bridgeville, bears the name of Dr. John R. Sudler, a successful physician and farmer, who purchased the property in 1833. The original three-bay, hall-and-parlor section of this shingled house was constructed about 1750. Its floor plan, featuring an exterior end chimney and an interior corner chimney, is very unusual in North West Fork Hundred. The house was enlarged during the Federal period to its present six-bay facade. Its fine interior decorative features include a delicately carved wooden swag cornice in a second-story bedroom and a panelled staircase. The only known brick ice house in the hundred is located on the property.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Mid-eighteenth century. Documentation has shown that the house was standing by 1776, when John Jessop had his land surveyed.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is the office of the Recorder of Deeds, Sussex County.

1776: July 2, 1776 in Survey Book J2 #21, page 212. In accordance with a Proprietors warrant, dated February 23, 1776, a 50-acre plot of land was surveyed by Rhoads Shankland. This survey mentions John Jessop's dwelling house as being in a plot of his land known as Jessop's Meadow.

After the death of John Jessop, the property came into the ownership of his son William Jessop, a preacher.

1793: Bond of Conveyance, December 5, 1793 in Deed Book A-B #25, pages 259-260.

William Jessop
to
Daniel & Trusten L. Polk

William Jessop was bound to Daniel and Trusten L. Polk for 1,000 on condition that he convey a part of the Attowattocoquin tract called Jessop's Place. The property contained 400 acres.

1808: Deed October 8, 1808, recorded on the same date in Deed Book A-E #28, pages 82-85.

William Jessop's Administrator
to
Trusten L. Polk's & Daniel Polk's Heirs

This deed mentions the bond from the year 1793 and says that William Jessop died intestate before he conveyed the lands to Daniel and Trusten Polk. Thus all his property came under the control of his administrator, William Lowber. Trusten Polk then died intestate in 1796 leaving his widow and five children to survive him. Daniel Polk died in 1797 intestate leaving his five children to survive him. William Lowber in 1806 petitioned the Court of Common Pleas asking permission to convey the land in accordance with the Bond of Conveyance and an Act of Assembly. This was granted on April 23, 1806, and William sold the property for \$1 to the Polk heirs. One part went to Daniel Polk, son of Daniel. The other part went to the five children of Trusten Polk subject to right of dower of his widow as tenants in common. One of the children was Sirah Polk who married Doctor John Carey.

1833: Deed April 11, 1833 recorded on the same date in Deed Book 43, pages 219-221.

William N. Polk & Wesley Smith & Others
to
John R. Sudler

298-1/2 acres Price: \$2,784

In accordance with the will of Doctor John Carey, January 1832, his executors William N. Polk, Wesley Smith, and John Richards and his widow Jane Carey sold his property. Doctor John R. Sudler bought the property, which consisted of two lots, one of which included Doctor Carey's mansion farm. The house remained in the possession of Dr. Sudler and his descendants until 1971.

In the Delaware Archives, there is an insurance policy which describes the Sudler House in the year 1866. Dr. Sudler had taken out the policy with the Kent County Mutual Insurance Company and it describes his house as a two-story, frame dwelling and barn.

1971: Deed December 23, 1971, recorded in Book 678, page 801.

Lilian & Prospere S. Virden & Others
to
Thurman W. Adams

2.715 acres Price \$35,000

This deed conveys the dwelling house and other buildings on the east side of U.S. 13-A leading northward from Bridgeville.

4. Original plans and construction: As built in the mid-eighteenth century, the house was probably two rooms, one story. On the south end, there was an exterior chimney, and in the other room, a corner fireplace--a highly unusual feature.
5. Alterations and additions: Around 1800, the house was roughly tripled in size. The three-bay addition on the north was made, consisting of a stairhall and parlor, with an interior end chimney. This addition was two stories, and a second story was added to the original section of the house. The two rooms over the original portion have no fireplaces.

In the twentieth century, the rear wing replaced an earlier kitchen wing. Other alterations were probably the Palladian doorway and the south chimney, which appears to have been rebuilt.

B. Historic Events and Personages:

Dr. John R. Sudler, for whom the house was later named, acquired the house in 1833. He was born in 1797 in the town of Milford, Delaware, where his father was a practicing physician. Having received his medical training from the University of Pennsylvania, the younger Dr. Sudler established an extensive practice of medicine in Bridgeville, Delaware, which he maintained for fifty years. Like the previous owners of the property, he also engaged in agricultural pursuits and won recognition as a pioneer in the raising of peaches and strawberries. Besides his active career as a physician and

farmer, he also served a term in the state legislature. On April 3, 1870, at the age of 73, Dr. John R. Sudler died at his residence in Bridgeville.

Prepared by: James Stewart
Project Historian
Delaware Division of Historical
and Cultural Affairs
1975

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This eighteenth-century vernacular farmhouse has an unusual floor plan, with a corner chimney.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all Dimensions: Approximately 56'-3" (six-bay front) x 18'-6", two stories. The two-story rear wing measures approximately 18'-3" x 13'-0", and a one-story room on the southeast corner was a screened porch at the time of recording, but was enclosed after 1975.
2. Foundations: Brick, with concrete block under the north end.
3. Walls: Frame walls with wood shingles, weathered naturally.
4. Structural system, framing: Wood framing walls and second-floor roof rafters.
5. Porches: There is a covered porch on the east (rear) facade with a brick floor, gable roof, scalloped frieze, and two turned wood posts each side of the porch, one at the front and one at the rear. There is a wide wood board rail each side between the columns. The wood plank ceiling is arched and the gable end has horizontal planks. There is one brick step.

There is a gabled hood over a brick stoop on the north door of the rear wing, with scalloped frieze and shingled gable end.

There is a large brick stoop, with a rowlock edge course around the perimeter, at the main entrance on the west. It is uncovered.

There is a concrete block bulkhead with wood doors on the east side of the house, north of the rear porch, leading to a crawl space.

6. Chimneys: The exterior chimney on the south end has shoulders between the first-floor windows. It appears to have been rebuilt because the bricks are in stretcher bond. The interior chimney on the north end is exposed and stuccoed at the first-floor level, on the exterior. There is a brick chimney near the center of the house towards the rear and a projecting plastered chimney on the southeast at the gable of the rear wing.
 7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The entrance near the center on the west facade is in the Palladian style, with four-light sidelights and a fanlight above the door only. The door has six panels. The two doors on the rear are also paneled.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The first-floor windows have nine-over-six-light single-hung sashes and the second-floor windows have six-over-six-light single-hung sashes. There are louvered shutters on the north and east windows, second floor, and east and south, first floor. The window surround and shutters are painted green.
 8. Roof:
 - a. Shape: Gable roofs over the main house, rear wing, and one-story wing are covered with asphalt shingles. A hip-roof addition is on the rear of the wing and is also covered with asphalt shingles.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Boxed cornices have metal gutters with downspouts. There is a simple rake board.
- C. Description of Interior:
1. Floor plans:
 - a. First Floor: The main entrance leads to a stair hall. There is one room north of the stair hall and two rooms south. There are fireplaces in the far end walls and in the northeast corner of the middle room. East of the south room in an addition.
 - b. Second floor: The second-floor rooms are in the same location as the rooms on the first floor, except the stair hall is wider and the north room smaller. Only the north bedroom has a fireplace. There is a bathroom in the west part of the stair hall.
 - c. Attic: The unfinished attic has a wood floor.

2. Stairways: The main stairway is an open-well, open-string stair, with one landing. There is a decorative wood scroll trim on the string at each tread and wood paneling enclosing the area under the stairway. There is a very simple wood handrail and small square balusters.

The rear stair is open-well, closed-string, open-rise with simple wood handrail and one landing.

The enclosed stairway to the attic is a winder with vertical wood paneling enclosing a small closet underneath.

3. Floorings: There is varnished wide plank flooring on all floors. Linoleum covers the rear stair hall, first and second floors, and utility room. Asphalt tile covers the rear bath, second floor.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceilings are painted plaster. There is a chair rail in the center hall, first and second floors, with the wainscot panel below painted gold. In the parlor and dining room are simple cornice moldings. The center bedroom has a chair rail. The south bedroom has a small plaster garland cornice. The ceilings in the north and center bedrooms have exposed wood beams with cove moldings at the ceiling and frieze boards around the room. The beams have quirked edges. In the second-floor center hall and bathroom are exposed beams and wood ceilings.
5. Doorways and doors: Wooden doors with raised panels on both sides are in the parlor and south bedroom. Other doors have raised panels one side. There are some vertical plank doors on the second floor. All door openings are low and have wood surrounds. In the parlor and stair hall, surrounds have plinth blocks with an ogee curve. The dining room door trim has simple small plinth blocks. There is a wide paneled jamb between dining room and center hall.
6. Fireplaces: The fireplace in the parlor is brick with a rowlock arch opening. There is a large wood surround and mantel. The brick hearth is edged with a rowlock and sloped wood flooring, mitred at corners. Cupboards on each side of the fireplace have round-arched openings and paneled wood doors below.

The dining room fireplace is brick with a rowlock arch opening, brick hearth and heavy wood surround and mantel. Surround has pilaster effect on sides.

The fireplace in the kitchen is brick with a rowlock-arched opening, wood surround with pilaster effect on sides and wood mantel. The wide wood board around the brick hearth is mitred on the corners.

The simple plaster fireplace, painted slate gray, in the north bedroom has a brick hearth, wood surround and mantel.

7. Hardware: There are porcelain knobs, brass knobs and wrought thumb latches on doors. On the door to the dining room are wrought-iron strap hinges. The doorbell is a porcelain knob on the outside connected through a pulley to a bell mounted on the interior trim.
8. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating: Heating is hot water baseboard heat.
 - b. Plumbing: Modern plumbing fixtures except a roll rim bathtub with claw feet and a porcelain enamel pedestal lavatory in the front bathroom.
 - c. Electricity: A wall light is in each bedroom and a hanging chandelier is in the dining room, all reproductions. A hanging candle holder with glass chimney is in the center hall.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces west on a large site about 30 yards east of the street. Cultivated land surrounds the house on three sides. A few small houses are across the street. There is a flagpole to the southwest in the front yard. The house sits on the north edge of a small town on the business route to the city. A small creek is approximately 100 yards to the south of the house.
2. Landscape: Many large trees surround the large site. The grassy lawn slopes to the creek. A boxwood-lined gravel walk leads from the street to the main entrance. A gravel drive leads up from the street to the rear and forms a large circle. A gravel walk leads from the drive to the front entrance and a brick walk leads from the drive to the rear entrance. A gravel walk leads from the circle to the rear entrance. Large boxwood surround a brick terrace on the southeast of the house, approximately 50 feet from the house.
3. Outbuildings: There is a brick ice house approximately 25 yards to the south. It has a brick basketweave floor and a gable roof, which has been replaced. The earth is mounded up around the exterior walls, which are corbelled on the interior. There is a garage and storage shed northeast of the house. It has wood shingle siding, gable roof with asphalt shingles and double

hinged wood doors. The storage shed has two clerestory windows on a pent roof with a pent roof open shed on the south. Outbuildings are in good condition.

Prepared by: John P. White
Project Supervisor
Historic American Buildings Survey
August 1975

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

Deed Books: Sussex County Court House, Georgetown, Delaware; Dorchester County Court House, Centerville, Maryland; Maryland Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

Survey Books: Sussex County Court House.

Orphans Court Books: Sussex County Court House.

Assessment Books: Sussex County Court House.

Kent County Mutual Insurance Company records: Delaware Archives, Hall of Records, Dover, Delaware.

B. Secondary Sources:

Beers, D. G. Atlas of the State of Delaware. Philadelphia: Pomeroy and Beers, 1868.

Scharf, J. Thomas. History of Delaware 1609-1888. 2 vols. Philadelphia: L. J. Richards and Company, 1888.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs, State of Delaware. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed during the summer of 1975 at the Historic American Buildings Survey Field Office, Dover, Delaware by John P. White (Assistant Professor, Texas Tech University), Project Supervisor; James Stewart (University of Delaware), Sally Schwartz (Harvard University), Project Historian; Charles B. Tonetti (Syracuse University), Architect; Student Assistant Architects, Scott Barnard (University of Pennsylvania), Frederick K. Read (University of Notre Dame), and Mark T. Wellen (Texas Tech University). The written data were edited by Alison K. Hoagland, Historian, in the HABS office in January 1983.

ADDENDUM TO
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