

Foster-Armstrong Farm  
West side Old Mine Road  
Montague Vicinity  
Montague Township  
Sussex County  
New Jersey

HABS NJ-817

HABS  
NJ,  
19-MDGU.V,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

FOSTER-ARMSTRONG FARM

HABS No. NJ-817

Location: West side of Old Mine Road (State Route 521), .5 mile northeast of Montague, Montague Township, Sussex County, New Jersey.

USGS Milford Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.517660.4572890.

Present Owner: United States Government (1980).

Present Use: Vacant. Barn demolished ca. 1978.

Significance: Probably built in the 1790s by Julius Foster as a public house, the wood frame portion of the house is more characteristic of coastal Dutch architecture than of the upper Delaware Valley. Foster's son-in-law, James Britten Armstrong, added the stone portion sometime after 1812. Between the two of them, Foster and Armstrong operated a ferry, sawmill, distillery, general store and blacksmith shop in the vicinity. The house was owned and occupied by the Armstrong family until the 1970s.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The frame portion of the house probably dates from the 1790s. The stone portion could date from 1812, as family tradition holds, or from 1843, which is Decker's theory.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners:

Records in Hall of Records, Sussex County Court House, Newton, N.J.

1791 Date: 23 May 1791 Rec. 24 May 1791  
Deed Book Vol A p. 408  
Roger Clark to Julius Foster  
250 pounds for 3 tracts 1) 50 acres; 2) 15 acres; 3) 1 acre  
Surveyed by M. Chapman, 25 August 1787

- 1853 Date: 15 Jan 1853 Rec. 10 Nov. 1853  
Deed Book Vol. 0-4 p. 619  
Julius Foster to James B. Armstrong  
4 tracts 1) "mile lot" 70.75 acres bought in 1823 from  
Simon Courtright; 2) 61 (66) acres "farm on which the said  
Julius Foster now lives which he bought in 1815 from  
John Rutherford; 4) equal undivided 1/2 of 76.5 acres  
bought with James B. Armstrong in 1830 from  
John Rutherford.
- 1856 James B. Armstrong died intestate.
- 1856 Date: 19 Sept. 1856 Rec. 15 March 1858  
Deed Book Vol. V-4 p. 215  
Mary D. Armstrong (widow of James B.) to George Armstrong  
\$1 for 3 tracts 1) 66 acres; 2) 76.5 acres; 3) 6.80 acres.
- 1856 Date: 20 Sept. 1856 Rec. 17 March 1858  
Deed Book vol. V-4 p. 216  
Susan E. Westbrook, Julius F. Armstrong and wife,  
Sally Jane Finch, Francis Armstrong, Louisa Armstrong,  
Robert Armstrong and wife, Isaac J. Everitt and wife,  
William Price and wife  
to  
George Armstrong  
\$100 for 5 tracts 1) 50 acres; 2) 15 acres; 3) 1 acre;  
4) 76.5 acres; 5) 6.80 acres
- 1916 Will of George Armstrong Probated 31 Jan 1916  
Will Book vol Q p. 80  
George Armstrong, extr.  
The farm went to George Armstrong, Jr.
- 1959 Date: 5 Feb. 1959 Rec. 5 Feb. 1959  
Deed Book vol. 646 p. 232  
George Armstrong II & Lydia K. (wife) to George Armstrong II  
and Evelyn (wife)  
Including 3 tracts, 1) 50 acres, 15 acres, and 1 acre; 2)  
76 acres; 3) 6.80 acres.
4. Builders, suppliers: Julius Foster was probably the builder and  
supplier, as he ran a sawmill in partnership with a neighbor,  
Captain Abram Shimer. Later, James Britten Armstrong also ran a  
sawmill on the property.
5. Original plans and construction: The frame portion preceded the  
stone section, as indicated by the beaded siding on the outside  
wall of the wooden part where it is common with the stone  
section. It is not known exactly when this frame portion was  
built, but the building is very distinctly a tavern style of

building with its large double porch. Incomplete tavern license records show that Foster ran a public house in 1798-99, and a 1916 newspaper obituary of George Armstrong noted that there was an inscription in the house "dated 1817, stating that this house had been for a long time known as a road house." (This was not found, but may have been removed, painted over, etc.) Family tradition holds that Julius Foster lived across the road in a log house, of which the stone foundations remain.

In 1812 James Britten Armstrong married Julius Foster's only child, Mary Dayton Foster. According to family tradition, the couple settled on the present house lot, which Julius Foster owned. Whether James B. Armstrong built the stone wing at this time or later is uncertain. In his later years, Julius Foster moved in with the Armstrongs. Thus it would seem that the stone wing, with its large oven, was built by James B. Armstrong either when he first moved there, or when his family (13 children) started to grow, or when his father-in-law came to live with him.

The following information on outbuildings came from an interview with George Armstrong III and his uncle, Britten Armstrong: A store was located in a large building in the orchard north of the house, at the place where the Old Mine Road met the road coming up from the Foster-Armstrong Ferry. The store was out of operation by 1895 and was used for storage at that time. A blacksmith shop was located across the Old Mine Road from the store. A large hay storage barn was located across the road from the house, part way up the hill. It was in use around 1900. An apple cider press was housed in a large barn-like structure standing south of the house and across the road--standing around 1895. A distillery was located south of the house part way down the bank toward the river. Only foundations remained by 1895. An ice house was located south of the house and was torn down by George III. Foundations remain along Shimer's Mill Brook where it joins the Delaware River, probably from a series of grist and saw mills from various periods.

6. Alterations and additions: According to an interview with George Armstrong III, the cement floor on the kitchen porch was put down by George Armstrong II (d. 1962). The second floor of a two-level porch, indicated in old photographs, was removed by George III in his youth. The second-floor doorway was changed to a casement-type window. In the early 1930s, a bathroom replaced the small kitchen and basement stairs in the rear of the hall of the frame portion. Also at that time, the house was set up for occupancy by two families. George III made a second doorway from the stone to the frame portions, angling the stone wall on the exterior. An old photograph indicates that the westernmost door in the front elevation of the stone portion is an addition.

B. Historical Events And Persons Connected With The Structure:

Julius Foster (1765-1856) came from Southampton, Long Island, and settled on this tract in 1791. He may have been a carpenter, besides joining his son-in-law James Britten Armstrong in various business enterprises, including saw and grist mills and a ferry operated from around 1800 to 1835.

James Britten Armstrong (1782-1856) married Julius Foster's daughter Mary D. in 1812. He was a distiller, blacksmith, miller, postmaster, shoemaker, and kept a general store.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished:

Deeds, surveys, family histories, and newspaper clippings in possession of the George Armstrongs, R.F.D. #1, Port Jervis, N.Y.

Interview with George Armstrong, living in the house, and Britten Armstrong (b. 1885), his uncle, 8 August 1970.

Tavern Licenses, New Jersey Archives, Trenton, N.J.

2. Secondary and published:

Decker, Amelia Stickney, That Ancient Trail, Trenton, 1962, p. 134.

Prepared by William C. Badger  
Wesley Shank  
Project Historians  
HABS  
August, 1970

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The late eighteenth-century frame house features a Dutch gambrel roof and an early nineteenth-century frame addition.

2. Condition of fabric: fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The two-story frame portion measures 40'-2" across its five-bay front by 30'-4" deep. The adjoining one-and-a-half-story stone portion measures 30'-2" across its front by 28'-1" deep.

2. Foundations: Mortared rubble walls of local sandstone extending below the cellar floor.
3. Wall construction, finish: Frame portion: Lapped wood siding, painted white, over a timber frame. Siding of front (south) wall with a bead (6" to the weather); other walls plain siding (5" to the weather). On the first floor on the east end, the red brick wall of the fireplace is exposed, not covered with siding.

Stone portion: Mortared rubble stone walls, 20" in thickness. Exterior roughly stuccoed; interior smooth plaster finish.

4. Structural system, framing: Frame portion: Plates, studs, beams, joists and rafters all mortised and pinned. In the cellar and attic the framing is exposed. In the attic and elsewhere the nails are both hand-forged and machine-cut.

Stone portion: Masonry perimeter walls; wood floor and roof framing. The framing, exposed in cellar and attic, is mortised and pinned. Clapboards of the former west exterior wall of the wooden portion are visible where the attic of the stone portion connects.

5. Porches: The south (front) elevation of the frame portion has a one-story porch extending the length of the facade. It has beveled 6" by 6" wood posts, and a wood flooring that is badly rotted in places. Across the front of the stone portion is a one-story porch with turned wood posts and a concrete floor.
6. Chimneys: Frame Portion: Originally there were large red brick chimneys at each end of the house; each chimney served four fireplaces, two on each floor. On the east end the original chimney is in place, 2'1"x3'4", extending 2'0" above the ridge. On the west end the large chimney has been removed above the attic floor, and replaced with a 1'5"x1'5" concrete block chimney which vents the coal furnace in the cellar. All fireplaces in the house are no longer in use; some are boarded up.

Stone portion: There was a "Dutch" oven on the west end of the house; the major portion is within the kitchen (sealed up), but there is an 8" bulge on the outside wall.

7. Openings

- a. Doorways and doors, frame portion: The front doorway is trimmed with tapered, fluted pilasters and a decorative glazed transom window. The head is partially concealed by the lowered ceiling of the porch. The door opening measures 3'-3"x6"-2". The door is 1 1/2" thick, paneled but with no

molding around the panels. The dutch door has three square panels over two rectangular panels in the upper half, and two rectangular panels in the lower half.

Stone portion: Two exterior doors opening on the front porch; one door to rear. Plain paneled doors, one door half glazed, one with a small glazed transom above.

- b. Windows: In the frame portion, windows have six-over-six-light single-hung sash. The panes are 8"x13"; there are no balances or pins. In the second-floor stairhall is a casement window, which replaced the door to the upper-level porch. In the stone portion, the single-hung windows on the front wall measure 3'-1"x6'-6". The windows in the gables have four-over-four-light sash.

#### 8. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: Over the frame portions is a Dutch gambrel roof with flared eaves. The upper pitch is 3 1/2 in 12; the main pitch 9 in 12. Over the stone portion is a double-pitched gable roof. The central pitch is 7 in 12; lower pitch is 4 1/2 in 12 over the front porch area and the rear portion of the house. Both roofs were originally covered with wood shingles. The frame portion is now covered with composition shingles; the stone, with raised-rib sheet metal.
- b. Cornice, eaves: On the frame portion, the boxed cornice projects 8" from the wall. On the north side there are paint marks indicating that there were originally dentils. The front (south) cornice was rebuilt after the porch was altered; it is patterned after the north cornice.
- c. Dormer: There is one gable dormer on the south side of the stone portion.

#### C. Description of Interior

##### 1. Floor plans:

- a. Frame portion: Both first and second floors have a center hall with two rooms on each side. Each of these nearly square rooms has a corner fireplace. A small room is enclosed at the rear of the stairhall on the first floor.

- b. Stone portion: One room on each floor.

- 2. Stairways: In the frame portion, the main stairway to the second floor is a single run with 8" risers, 10" treads. Neatly proportioned, it featured a simple railing, a square newell post

and thin square spindles. Before the addition of the bathroom in the stairhall, there had been a stairway to the cellar under the main stairway. From the second floor, a steep enclosed winder stair leads to the attic. In the stone portion, an enclosed straight-run stairway runs from the kitchen to the upper floor. Beneath it is a steep stairway to the cellar.

3. Flooring: Cellar floor, originally all earth, now partially concreted. Ceiling of cellar indicates the floor systems. Under the stairhall partition walls there are 9"x9" sawed beams with post supports near the middle. A longitudinal beam, 9"x10", supports 3"x8" joists spaced 26" on center. The one inch floor boards are 8" to 12" in width. Almost all floors are now covered with linoleum or carpeting. The flooring of the attic is one-inch boards, 9" to 16" in width.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: In the frame portion, all original partitions are wood lath and plaster, now papered or plastered. In the stairhall and most rooms there is a baseboard (7 1/2") and a chair rail (4").

The stone walls are plastered. Most partition walls in the stone portion are 1" boarding. The kitchen has been recently refinished with wood paneling and modern appliances.

5. Doorways and Doors: Door openings are surrounded with painted wood trim, heavily molded, 3 1/2" in width. Doors, 1 1/4" in thickness, are six-paneled, no moldings around the panels. There is little molded trim in the stone portion.
6. Decorative features and trim: The best formed mantelpiece is the southwest front room. In the southeast front room the mantel has been recently rebuilt in a rustic manner. Five of the eight fireplaces have the openings boarded up; others are no longer functional.
7. Hardware: The entrance door has for each section a pair of strap pintel hinges. Locks on this door and the interior doors are conventional late nineteenth-century type.

D. Site:

In earlier decades there had been an intersecting road approaching from the Delaware River. At this cross road there was a thriving community which included a store, a blacksmith shop, and several other houses.

The house faces south and is parallel to the Old Mine Road. To the west of the house there are two barn structures. To the northwest there is a view across the Delaware Valley.

Prepared by Prof. Melvin M. Rotsch  
Project Supervisor  
HABS  
August 1970

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, supervised by the National Park Service and funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The project, which extended from 1967 to 1971, was under the general direction of James C. Massey, Chief of HABS. This structure was measured and drawn in the summer of 1970 under the direction of Melvin M. Rotsch (Texas A & M University), Project Supervisor, by student assistant architects John Albers (University of Florida) and Gary Kreger (University of Virginia) in the HABS field office at Millbrook, New Jersey, in the project area of the Tocks Island Reservoir and the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. The historical data was written by Wesley Shank and William C. Badger, project historians, in 1970. The written data was edited for transmittal to the Library of Congress in the summer of 1980 by Alison K. Hoagland of the HABS staff. The photographs were taken by George Eisenman in 1970.