

The Hermitage  
Ho-Ho-Kus, Bergen County, New Jersey

HABS-NJ-98

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer  
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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The Hermitage  
Ho-Ho-Kus, Bergen County, New Jersey

Owner: Miss Mary Rosencrantz

Date of Erection: Early eighteenth century; the  
south wing added 1845

Architect:

Builder: Dr. Rosencrantz built the south wing.

Present Condition: Good

Number of Stories: Two

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - stone

Interior walls - plaster

Inside brick chimneys

Roof - hip with dormers

Historical Data:

The original part of this English Gothic dwelling was probably built at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Its owner was called the Hermit by the early settlers, which accounts for its present name. Little was known about this Englishman except that he lived a life of ease and plenty. It has been thought that the early owner had reason for the secrecy that he preserved. On the front wall of the house are two carved stone Masonic Tablets. The original owner may have been connected with Freemasonry.

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The presence of a secret room in the house suggests that some early Freemasons may have met there. However, this may all be a story, for the secret room is small and masonic devices may have been, as has been suggested, used for decoration.

The house passed to Captain Philip De Visme of the British Army in 1746. Shortly before this Captain De Visme married Anne Bartow, the widow of Theodosius Bartow, who was buried in the south isle of Christ Church, Shrewsbury (see survey history of Christ Church, Shrewsbury). Theodosia, the daughter of Theodosius and Anne Bartow, took the name De Visme. In 1763 Theodosia married Colonel Marc Provost. Colonel Provost was sent to the West Indies and died there in 1777. The family remained at the Hermitage.

During the early years of the Revolution when Bergen County was the scene of many skirmishes between the British and the Americans, the Hermitage enjoyed immunity from all raiding. The British refrained from raiding the house because it was the home of a wife of a British officer and the Americans because General Washington and his officers were entertained there by Mrs. Provost. Lafayette was also a visitor to Mrs. Provost.

Another famous visitor there was Peggy Shippen Arnold, the wife of Benedict Arnold, who stopped at the Hermitage on her journeys between her home in Philadelphia and West Point where Arnold was stationed. Mrs. Arnold arrived one night at the Hermitage and confessed to her trusted friends the part she had played in the negotiations with the British and declared that it was she who induced her husband to do what he had done. (See Travell)

The secret room is to the left of an addition that was probably used as a milk house and cold room. From the ground floor room, there is no scuttle and from the outdoors there is no door or window, but on the landing of the back stairs of the

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main house, there is a panel in the wainscoting that slides aside to permit entrance into the hidden chamber.

We are told that Aaron Burr often sought concealment in this room when he was courting the Widow Provost. Burr courted the Widow Provost and married her in 1782. There are many tales told of the brilliant and daring courtship and how Burr would often visit the Hermitage at night, many times when the territory was in the possession of the enemy. According to tradition Burr would leave West Point after tattoo and ride his horses in relays to Paramus to make his calls upon the widow and then ride back to his post before reveille.

The ownership of the Hermitage went from the Burrs to La Rue and then to Dr. Elija Rosencrantz, who purchased it in 1804. His granddaughter is the present owner of the house.

Bibliography:

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Travell, Ira W. Bulletin February,  
1932, Alexander Hamilton Printing  
Company

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The Hermitage (Provost, Col. Marc, House)  
335 N. Franklin Turnpike  
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Addendum to  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127