

The Franklin House (Hotel)
Amwell Road
East Millstone, Somerset County, New Jersey

HABS-NJ-648

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

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

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The Franklin House (Hotel)
Amwell Road
East Millstone, Somerset County, New Jersey

Owner: The Wyckoff Farm, Inc.

Date of Erection: Before 1777

Architect: Unknown

Builder: Cornelius Van Liew (1738-1777)

Present Condition: Original, with some alteration to
main stairway and taproom fittings
removed

Number of Stories: Two, with garret and part cellar

Materials of Construction:

Foundation - stone masonry
Exterior walls - timber frame, clapboard siding
Interior walls - lath and plaster on studding
Chimneys - brick, built into inside of gable
end walls
Roof - gable, wood shingled

Historical Data:

The village of East Millstone, situated in the western part of Franklin Township, on the Delaware and Raritan Canal and the Amwell Road from Hunterdon County, became accordingly an important place for shipping of grain and hay by that water route, as also later by a spur of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The original manufactory of famous Fleishman's Yeast was located here. In 1880, the population had become 431, and the property comprised 90 dwelling houses, 3 churches, a district school, a high school, two general stores, two hotels - the Franklin House (here considered) established in 1829 and Pace's Hotel in 1856. Until about 1855 the village was known as Johnsville.(a)

(a) Snell, History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties,
N.J., 1881, p. 816

The history of the farm house which became the Franklin House hotel in 1829 is traced back to a certain Cornelius Van Liew who was born 16 April 1738 and died 29 January 1777*, son of Frederick Van Liew of Three Mile Run, and his wife Ann Van Liewen. He lived at East Millstone "where the tavern at the canal bridge has been kept for about forty years", that village having been built on the western part of his land which extended along the Amwell Road to the line of the property of his brother, Frederick Van Liew of Middlebush. "On the homestead he was succeeded by Henry Disborough, then by Henry's son John Disborough, then by John Wyckoff, Sr., and is now (1874-6) owned by his son, John V. C. Wyckoff". (b) In verification and enlargement of the above accounts, the following summary of the successive owners of this property is derived from contemporary evidences found in the County records.

Cornelius Van Liew of Somerset County, by his will of 10 October 1777, proved 6 January 1778, devised to his wife, Anne Van Liew, the use of his whole estate until their fourth and youngest son John became of age 21, at which time it was to be divided among all the seven children Frederick, Cornelius, Denice, John, Mary, Anne and Helena.

Between the date of probate of Cornelius Van Liew's will, above cited, and 29 March 1822, the part of his real estate on which this house stands had come into possession of John H. Disborough, as is evident from a deed of the latter date by which Disborough and his wife Sarah, of Franklin Twp., conveyed to John Wyckoff for \$5,211.00 two lots "on the East side of Millstone River". One of these is therein described as 25 acre woodlot, and the other an 82 acre farm as follows:

(b) Judge Ralph Voorhees, "Franklin Township Historical Notes", 1874-6; republished in Somerset County Historical Quarterly, 1915, Vol. 4, page 175.

* One Cornelius Van Lew served as a private in Somerset County militia. (W.S. Stryker, Official Register of the Officers and men of New Jersey in the Revolutionary War, page 800.)

Beginning at a stone standing in the road in the line of Cornelius Wyckoff and a southeast corner of a lot of land belonging to Daniel H. Disborough, and nine chains and nine links from a maple tree on the bank of the Millstone River, being a corner of said Cornelius Wyckoff and Daniel H. Disborough land; thence (1) running along the line of said Cornelius Wyckoff land South 71 deg. 6 min. East 28.63 to a stone the southwest corner of said John Wyckoff land; thence (2) along said Wyckoff land North 15 deg. East 23.51 ft. to a stone standing in the road leading from Millstone to New Brunswick and a corner of John Wyckoff land; thence (3) North 73 deg. West 21.92 ft. to another stone, another southwest corner of said John Wyckoff's land; thence (4) along said Wyckoff's land northerly 7 chains to a stone on the bank of the Millstone River; thence (5) up the said river the several courses thereof to the northwest corner of the land belonging to Daniel H. Disborough at the foot of the Millstone Bridge; thence (6) along said Disborough land and the road leading from Millstone to New Brunswick south 86 deg. 45 min. East 14.60 ft. to a stone in the road leading to Blackwell's Mills, and a northeast corner of said Disborough land; thence (7) along said road and said Disborough land South 21 degr. West 13.18 ft. to the place of beginning, containing 82 acres more or less. From this survey description it is evident that the farm extended along both sides of the old Amwell Road through East Millstone for some 1800 feet to its intersection with the Canal Road, and also further west along the north side of Amwell Road^x to include the meadow fronting on Millstone River.

Previously, by deed of 8 January 1801, this John Wyckoff, described therein as being then of Piscataway Township, Middlesex County, had acquired from Hendrick Probasco of Franklin Township, Somerset County, for \$4,655.00, the 185 acre farm adjacent on the north line of the tract described above and having a river frontage extending down to Lodging Brook.

- (x) As it then ran across the meadow to the river bridge whose stone piers are still in place, abandoned since the modern concrete viaduct and bridge was built south thereof.

John Wyckoff# who thus acquired in 1822 the former homestead of Cornelius Van Liew, was born 25 December 1755, in what has become the Village of East Millstone, and died 20 October 1834, evidently in that house. By his wife Hannah Van Cleef, he had a daughter Maria born in 1789, who married Abraham P. Van Dorn, John Eick, and Isaac Van Nuyse in succession, and a son John Van Cleef Wyckoff, of whom further:

By his will of 25 April 1834, proved 25 November, following, John Wyckoff abovenamed, of Franklin Township, devised among other things (quote) Unto my son, John V. Wyckoff, my farm No. 1 on which I now live, and all the lands not included in No.2..... the land No. 1 bounded as follows: being on the north side of the Amwell Road (and bounded) northerly by a thorn hedge, southerly by the Amwell Road, and westerly by the Canal property, the basins, Millstone River, and on the south side of the Amwell Road it is bounded as follows: -- northerly by the Amwell Road, westerly by No. 2, southerly by Thomas Hoagland and others, easterly by John V. Wyckoff, as the several deeds direct, containing 254 acres more or less. Testator also devises to the son personal property not otherwise ordered in this will, he paying my just debts and funeral charges, and appoints him an executor with the wife.

John V. C. Wyckoff* who thus in 1834 inherited his father's farm in East Millstone, including the old Van Liew homestead which had been converted into an inn and opened as the Franklin House five years previously, was born 24 May 1794, and died 17 February 1878. He married on 24 June 1819, Gertrude Van Pelt, who died 1st April 1847, and had an only child and heir, Joanna Wyckoff, born 22 September 1820, who married in that place at the time of her father's death in 1878.

John Wyckoff was a Deacon of the R. D. Church, Millstone (c) and is buried with his wife in the churchyard. (Somerset Hist. Quart. IV, 291).

(c) Streeter, The Wyckoff Family in America (1934) p. 278

* Map of E. Millstone publ. in County Atlas 1873 shows two buildings on the north side of "Commercial Square" on Amwell Road, marked J. V. Wyckoff, Franklin Hotel and Store.

Administration upon the estate of John V. C. Wyckoff, "late of the Township of Franklin", deceased, intestate, was granted in March 1879 to his son-in-law, Lewis T. Howell. The last named, being of Franklin Township at the date of his will, 18 June 1896, which was proved 14 June 1900, thereby devised his estate to his wife during her lifetime, and afterwards to his two daughters. His wife, Joanna M. (Wyckoff) born 22 September 1820, sole heir of her father John V. C. Wyckoff as abovesaid, had accordingly come into possession of his estate which was composed principally of the former Van Liew farm and homestead which had become the Franklin House here considered. She, as Joanna M. Howell of the village of East Millstone, made her will on 29 December 1900, which was proved 1st February 1908, and therein devised all her property to her two daughters, Gertrude V. P. Mettler and Sarah H. De Mott equally, and appointed her grandson, John Wyckoff Mettler, and son-in-law, Howard De Mott as executors.

By deed of 16 January 1931, Sarah H. DeMott, abovenamed, and Howard De Mott her husband, of East Millstone, conveyed to the Wyckoff Farm, Inc., three tracts on the Anwell Road in Franklin Township, the first two of which comprised 243 acres, and the third some 10 acres, describing them as being "all or part of the properties conveyed to John Wyckoff" by deeds from Hendrick Probasco 1801, John H. Disborough 1811 and 1822, Sheriff Martin Schenck 1817, and Philip Eick 1827, and "all of the property conveyed to John V. C. Wyckoff" by deeds from Henry H. Wilson 1829, and Henry Polhemus 1860. The said corporation holds the property at the time of our survey of the Franklin House thereon, April 1940, permission to measure and photograph the building having been granted by Mr. Howard DeMott as president thereof.

The tavern or hotel has not been operated as such for many years, the old taproom having been stripped of its fittings after local option had the license cancelled, and refurnished as the barber shop still in business there. The Franklin Club, a civic and social gathering of representative women from Somerset and adjacent Counties occupies the two parlors for meetings monthly, the partition between these rooms having been removed for accommodation thereof.

Bibliography:

A search of Somerset County records by
Thomas Riley, H.A.B.S. title abstractor,
May 1940

Lewis D. Cook
Supervising Historian

Approved:

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District Officer

WJ 10/2/40