

ABEEL HOUSE
(J.M. Kessler Building)
37 Saybrook Place, Block 17, Lot 103
Newark
Essex County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1057

HABS
NJ
7-NEARK,
42-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Northeast Region
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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Location: 37 Saybrook Place, Block 17, Lot 103
Newark, Essex County, New Jersey
USGS: Elizabeth, NJ
UTM Coordinates: 18.570300.4510110

Present Owner: New Jersey Economic Development Authority

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Abeel House, built in 1890, is an important example of one of the few remaining rowhouses built within Newark's major historic center at the end of the nineteenth-century. Originally one of seven townhouses built along the northside of Saybrook Place by members of Newark's social and business elite, this residence was constructed for Cornelia, Joanna and Helen Abeel, the daughters of prominent Newark attorney Gustavus N. Abeel. An excellent example of late nineteenth-century townhouse architecture, this house combines various elements of the Queen Anne, and Richardsonian-Romanesque styles and even a few from the late nineteenth-century Chicago style, most clearly exemplified in the plain and taut facade at the second and third floors.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1890
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and Subsequent Owners:
 1889. Executors of estate of William H. Wright to Cornelia (d. 1919), Joanna (d. 1933) and Helen (d. 1939) Abeel. (N25-99).
 1944. Executors of Helen Abeel; The National Newark and Essex Banking Company of Newark to Marlane, Inc. (Y102-541)
 1944. Marlane, Inc. to Saybrook Holding Corporation. (Q103-177)
 1946. Saybrook Holding Corporation to Joseph and Hermina C.R. Kessler (C107-87)
 1980. Joseph M. Kessler and Emma Kessler to Judy-Mae Dietz et al.
 1992. Judy-Mae Dietz, et al to the New Jersey Economic Development Authority
4. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers: Unknown
5. Original Plans and Construction: None found.
6. Alterations and Additions: Except for a few minor changes, the Abeel House remains essentially as originally constructed. Minor interior changes include the addition and modernization of bathrooms, the re-surfacing of several interior walls with wood paneling, and modifications of the building's heating system. Additions also include wall-to-wall carpeting, built-in shelving, non-skid treads on the stairway and several heating vents which appeared when the heating system was modified. The original built-in bench located at the base of the first floor stairway has been removed, but evidence of its location is easily discernible. The dates of these changes are unknown, but they appear to have been made sometime after 1946, when J.M. Kessler purchased the home for use as an office for his advertising company.¹ The exterior, unlike its neighbors, has never been painted. Alterations to the exterior include the removal of the first floor parlor sash, the replacement of the original

exterior vestibule doors, and the replacement of the original window sash at the third story front.

B. Historical Context

The neighborhood in which the Abeel House was built in 1890 is one of the city of Newark's most historic areas. As the monument at Landing Place attests, it was along the nearby Passaic River, within sight of the house, that settlers first came ashore in 1666. It is notable that Park Place, Rector Street, Centre Street and Front Street, which has since been realigned as the McCarter Highway, are elements of the city's original plan.² Military Park, once variously called the Training Ground, the Large Common, and the Military Common remains as one of Newark's most prominent parks. Except for a few modern additions, it appears much like it did in early engravings and photographs.³

Until the first rowhouses were constructed along Saybrook Place, a new street named by members of the local Wright family, the neighborhood east of Park Place and between Centre and Rector Streets was probably much as it had been during most of the nineteenth-century. Despite the fact that the busy Ballantine Brewery was located along the banks of the nearby Passaic River and even partially intruded into the northeast corner of the large block, the neighborhood was dominated by the well-tended mansions of some of the city's and state's most illustrious families. In addition to the large homes of the Frelinghuysen, Wright and Peddie families, a quiet cemetery known as Trinity Church Yard was located in the northeastern sector of the block, acting as a buffer between the elegant world of the Park Place mansions and the busy industries which fueled the city's economy. An archival photograph taken in March 1920 and now in the collections of the Newark Public Library, presents what appears to be one last glance of the neighborhood's appearance on the eve of its most dramatic change.⁴ Though the stacks of the brewery and the other industries can be seen in the background, the reminders of well tended lawns and green trees still remain. Indeed, the large properties of the Frelinghuysens and the Wrights, which once extended all the way east to Front Street suggest that there was plenty of room for the fruit trees, ornamental and vegetable gardens in which nineteenth-century homeowners took great pride.⁵

A clue about the development of the rowhouses along Saybrook Place, and indeed about the establishment of Saybrook Place itself, might be suggested by studying the Atlas of the City of Newark, 1912, which was issued by Feist and Feist. As the map indicates, by the time the row houses were built, a piece of property 100 feet wide and 170 feet long had been partitioned out of the extensive Wright estate between the property owned by the Frelinghuysen family and the newly cut Saybrook Place.⁶ Three of the townhouses built upon this property included

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identical buildings for Catherine Wright Gevers, the daughter of William Wright. Apparently built as rental properties, these houses were in the same row of buildings built and occupied by families who apparently had strong connections to the Frelinghuysens, and most likely to the Wrights. The rowhouse built for Cornelia, Joanna and Helen Abeel, for example, was occupied by the three daughters of attorney Gustavus N. Abeel who had studied law as a young man in the office of Frederick T. Frelinghuysen.⁷

Apparently with the means to be involved in charitable work, Cornelia Abeel was well known for her work in the Newark Orphan Society, of which she had onetime been secretary. Historical sketches and data concerning women's organizations and charitable institutions in Newark collected by Miss Cornelia R. Abeel between 1871 and 1876 are now in the collections of the New Jersey Historical Society. It is tempting to speculate that these charitable interests may have been influenced by Miss Abeel's ancestry, which included several well-known Reformed ministers of the eighteenth century.⁸ The house remained in the Abeel family until 1939 when Helen, the last surviving sister, died.⁹ By that time, the area had long changed from one of quiet residences on a non-through street, to that of a busy inner-city character.

While the properties fronting both sides of Saybrook Place are shown sub-divided into numerous narrow residential lots on the Scarlet and Scarlet 1889 Atlas of the City of Newark, New Jersey, only those properties along the first 200 or so feet on the south side of Saybrook Place and the seven properties on the north side were developed. Though no archival photographs of the rowhouses between 25 and 37 Saybrook Place have been found, one taken of the residences located on the south side of the street was found in the collections of the Newark Public Library.¹⁰ By 1911, however, these buildings were removed for the construction of the Pennsylvania Railroad's Electric Service Station, also known as the Hudson and Manhattan Tubes, where passengers could get direct service into New York City. The development of this large scale and very busy transportation facility significantly altered the quiet, genteel character of the neighborhood and eventually encouraged the construction of the commercial garage which was built adjacent to the Abeel House, circa 1925.¹¹ Quiet Saybrook Place and its neighborhood had been changed forever when the street was connected through to the Passaic River waterfront.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character:

The Abeel House is of architectural interest because it represents an excellent and relatively unchanged example of the home

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of an established Newark family at the end of the nineteenth-century. It is of further importance because its location represents late nineteenth-century residential development within the borders of the socially prominent Military Park neighborhood. Adaptation to changing social and economic conditions is also well represented by the Abeel House for its reuse, after 1946, as a business office for the advertising company owned by J. M. Kesslinger.¹²

2. Condition of Fabric:

Despite the poor physical condition of its neighboring houses, the Abeel House is in good condition. The house was well maintained during the ownership of J. M. Kesslinger. While only minor changes have been made to the building, none adversely intrudes upon the historic character of the building or represents extensive construction. For the most part, the Abeel House is a largely extant example of an upper middle-class Newark townhouse of the late nineteenth-century in good physical condition. (Photo No. 1)

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions:

The Abeel House is a rectangular building with a street frontage of 21 feet and a side frontage of approximately sixty-feet. (Refer to the floor plans on page 17.)

2. Foundations:

The foundations of this rectilinear building are of rubble stone and brick. The basement, constructed at two levels, is constructed of stone at the south (street front) as well as on the east and west (side) walls. The basement, which is only a few feet below grade at the north (rear) wall is constructed of brick. As indicated in plan, the front two-thirds portion of the basement is approximately two feet lower than the back third of the basement which originally functioned as the kitchen.

3. Walls:

The frame of the building was not examined but is assumed to be of conventional wood frame construction with brick and stone exterior facings. The front facade of the house is distinguished by Belleville Stone at the basement and first floor level which is laid, from the window sill height, in alternating

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layers of narrow and wide blocks, terminating just below the stone sills of the second floor windows as a belt-course in the form of a cornice. The mortar joints are natural-colored. Of special note is the presence of two small foliated blocks, one of each of which is located at the head height of the front door and window at the north and south edges of the house. These blocks are the lower terminations of a shallow reveal which extends vertically from the door and window sill head height to just below the roof cornice. The second and third floor facade is faced with smooth-faced red brick laid in common bond with thin red mortar joints. The window sills at the second floor windows are made of the same Belleville stone as the facade of the base. The window lintels at the second and third story windows are made of smooth-faced yellow Roman brick, of the same units which are used in the Ionic-style entablature above the second-story windows as well as the interlocking geometric decorations that enframe both sides of the two wide third-story windows. The partially exposed side wall at the east of the house could not be examined, but it is likely that it is constructed of the same red brick as the rear wall, which is laid in common bond with red mortar joints. All window sills and lintels on the rear facade are stone. (Photo Nos. 1, 2)

4. Structural Systems, Framing:

The structural and framing system could not be thoroughly examined but are believed to be of a conventional wood-frame system with masonry exterior cladding resting on stone and brick foundation walls. Both floor and roof framing are likely of conventional wood framing.

5. Porches, Stoops, Balconies, Bulkheads:

The front stoop is reached by six stone steps, each of which is framed by a two-tiered cheek wall of the same Belleville stone used at the front facade base. An areaway leads to basement access directly below this stoop. Its stone steps are extant and examination indicates that there were originally no iron rails between the steps and the sidewalk. There is no indication that there were iron rails at the front steps. At the rear, the entrance into the kitchen was through a door only a few feet below grade. There was no bulkhead. Heavy overgrowth prevented closer examination. (Photo No. 2)

6. Chimneys:

There are three chimneys visible at the roof. Two of the chimneys are faced with brick and capped with yellow brick which forms a "cornice." These are located along the east (side)

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wall. The third chimney is faced with cement stucco and is located at the rear of the house. It vented the kitchen range, as well as two fireplaces above it. (Photo Nos. 1, 2)

7. Openings:

- a. The principal entrance to the rowhouse is located on the south side of the main plan form fronting Saybrook Place. The original exterior door, which was probably a double door, and its frame are no longer extant but have been replaced with a newer double door which has two lights in each leaf. The transom bar and the light above it appear to be original. Two wrought iron security gates, probably installed during the Kessler occupancy, are in place inside the vestibule. A hall door, which leads from the vestibule into the residence is made of oak and is original. Original glass and hardware have been removed. (Photo No. 3) The doorway beneath the front stoop could not be examined because it was blocked at both the exterior and the interior. The rear door, giving original access to the kitchen at the north facade was also blocked and, because of heavy undergrowth, was unobservable. (Photo No. 2)
- b. Windows and Shutters: The window openings at the front basement level have been covered over from the inside, but they still retain their decorative wrought iron security bars which are distinguished by an undulating pattern of vertical bars. The first floor parlor window has been removed and the opening blocked in. The only remaining original fenestration at the front facade is a row of three one-over-one double-hung sashes at the second-story level. The original trim is in place but is unremarkable. Two large nearly square window openings on the third-story have been fitted with modern window replacements. (Photo No. 1)

At the rear facade, original fenestration is in place. At the basement level, the sash has been boarded over from the inside and is the one-over-one double-hung variety. On the second and third stories, the window sash flanking the fireplaces in the larger rooms are one-over-one double-hung sash, while the two smaller windows in the north-east rooms on each floor have two-over-two lights. A variety of metal grates and bars has been added at the rear windows. (Photo No. 2) Until about 1925 when the garage for the American Railway Express Company was constructed at the east side of the Abeel house, two square leaded glass windows admitted light into the house's

first-floor living hall. Still in place above built-in bookcases flanking a fireplace, these windows along with the original skylight located over the stairway flooded this central core with light. The outside faces of these fixed-in-place sashes have since been covered over but the pattern of the lead bars is still visible. (Photo No. 5) There were no indications of shutter hardware on any of the windows at the front of the house. However, shutter hardware is visible on all of the windows at the rear facade. Original awning hardware, including a horizontal rod at the window head and hooks at either side of the window opening are in place at the first floor parlor window. Since this was a southern exposure, sun shading would have been logical.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, Covering: The north-sloping shed-style roof of this house is built in two sections, owing to the fact that the first and second floors both include intermediate or mezzanine levels at the rear, back third of the building. Therefore, the roof over the third floor "steps down" over the second floor's intermediate level and then slopes gradually to the rear. This difference in roof levels allows for a series of north-facing windows in the resulting clerestory at the rear of the house. Further roof examination was not possible due to building conditions.
- b. Cornice, Eaves: The cornice at the front of the house is wood of a typical Doric entablature design, the architrave of which is characterized by a Greek Key motif. Although the unit could not be closely examined, there appears to be no gutter at this area since the roof slopes to the rear and would allow water run-off along the parapet sidewalls to the rear of the house. At the rear cornice, there is a wooden built-in box gutter. One modern aluminum leader is in place at the northeast corner of the building. (Photo Nos. 1, 2)

C. Description of the Interior

1. Floor plans: See floor plans, page 18.
2. Stairways:

The main stairway defines a major interior space and suggests a domestic hierarchy of room usage and lifestyle. Located at the

middle of the house, the half-turn stairway has two landings, the first of which is located seven risers above the first floor. Reached by a set of steps about five-and-a-half feet wide, a large landing gives access into the dining room through an imposing 54-inch wide eight-paneled doorway. A narrower run then continues to the second floor. The stairway continues in like manner to the third floor. Of surprisingly plain design, the stairway is embellished with simple, almost primitive newel posts and turned spindles. A bench originally located at the base of the staircase and facing the fireplace has been removed. (Photo Nos. 6, 7) The secondary or service stairway is located in the narrow area in the northeast corner of the house and links the basement with the first and second floors. It would seem logical that there would have originally been service-stairway access to the intermediate levels. However, alterations of an indeterminate nature in this area have obliterated any traces of this connection. There was no service stairway access to the third floor. The service staircase is simple and unadorned.

3. Flooring:

There is wooden strip flooring throughout the house. Modern wall-to-wall carpeting covers the floors in most all areas. The original encaustic-tile vestibule flooring is extant and in good condition. The floor is composed of terra cotta colored octagonal tiles interposed with small, square ochre-colored tiles. A border of ochre and narrow black tiles form a perimeter border. (See Photo 3)

4. Wall and Ceiling Finish:

The wall and ceiling finishes throughout the building are of plaster. There are no decorative cornices or ceiling moldings in place. During the Kessler ownership, several rooms were paneled with modern four-by-eight wooden sheet paneling. In the former dining room, modern paneling has been installed up to the base of the original wooden plate rail, which is still in position. The only original paneled wall area extant and likely to have been the sole example in the residence is that which originally formed the side of the now missing seat at the base of the main stairway in the first-floor living hall. Simple tongue and groove siding is extant along the wall which supports the railing at the first run of the main stairway and formed the back of the built-in seat. (Photo Nos. 7, 8, 9)

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and Doors: Most of the original interior doors are extant. The sliding doors between the front hallway and the parlor and the parlor and the living hall appear to be in position but are jammed into their pockets and were, therefore, unobservable. The most notable doorway is the 54-inch wide eight-paneled cherry door which opens into the former dining room for the first-floor stairway landing. Except for the hinges, the original hardware, as on other doors, is missing. (See Photo Nos. 6, 8) Bedroom doors on the second and third floors are original and composed of five vertical panels.
- b. Windows: There are no interior windows. Typical interior window trim is best characterized by that seen surrounding the original sash in the former dining room. Of simple design, the trim consists of standard molding with corner blocks at the top, both of which are inscribed with circles. (See Photo. No. 9)

6. Decorative Features and Trim:

The major interior decorative elements include the impressive wooden mantelpieces and overmantles, the central or main stairway (Refer to C.2 above) and several of the interior doors. (Refer to C.5 above)

The Parlor Fireplace surround is the largest and most impressive in the house. Constructed of wood, the mantelpiece is characterized by a paneled architrave with a central block decorated with composition swag and ribbon supported by two pairs of free-standing Doric-type columns on plinths. The overmantle is composed of two pairs of slightly taller freestanding columns which support a denticulated cornice similar to that which forms the mantle shelf below. An oval mirror is enframed above the mantleshelf. An encaustic tile hearth remains, but has been covered over with carpeting. It is likely that the fireplace surround and its overmantle have always been painted. (See Photo No. 4)

The fireplace in the central Living Hall is composed of a wooden fireplace surround, mantleshelf and a five-paneled overmantle, the end two panels of which are mirrored. Constructed of wood, and probably originally painted, the fireplace surround is distinguished by a Doric-style entablature which is supported by a pair of paneled pilasters. Built-in bookcases of similar detailing flank the fireplace. (Photo No. 5)

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The fireplace surround located in the former Dining Room is an example of the late nineteenth-century Federal-Revival style. Along with an overmantle comprised of two narrow inset mirrors flanking a larger central mirror, the ensemble appears to be built of cherry. Like the baseboard, plate rail and the other trim in this room, the mantelpiece has never been painted. Roman bricks form the firebox and hearth-opening surround. The hearth floor is of ochre encaustic tile with two narrow black perimeter bands. (Photo No. 9)

Similar, smaller-scaled versions of the Dining Room mantelpiece can be seen in the second and third floor bedrooms. The example in the third floor south-west front bedroom is also of a Colonial-Revival or, more specifically, Federal-Revival style, and was probably originally painted. Its glazed tile hearth surround is of a mottled-light to medium blue, and the hearth floor of cream, rose and blue tiles, with a border design of blue daisies. This fireplace retains its original stamped metal lining in a regular pattern of stylized daisies and leaves, as well as its finely reeded frame. (Photo No. 10)

7. Hardware:

Except for door hinges, little original door hardware is extant.

8. Mechanical Equipment:

- a. Heating, Air Conditioning, Ventilation: Original system removed and replaced by late twentieth-century HVAC systems.
- b. Lighting: There are no existing original lighting fixtures.
- c. Plumbing: Original location unknown. Existing systems mid to late twentieth century.

9. Original Furnishings: Whereabouts unknown.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation:

The house is located on Saybrook Place between the three identical brick rowhouses at numbers 31, 33 and 35 Saybrook Place and The American Railway Express Company Garage at 39 Saybrook Place.

2. Historic Landscape Design:

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None extant. Concrete sidewalk paving runs directly from the street curb up to the base of the front facade wall. The rear yard no longer has defined boundaries and is partially overgrown. (Photo No. 1,2)

3. Outbuildings:

None extant. Maps examined, including The Sanborn Map of Newark, 1892 and Feist and Feist's Atlas of the City of Newark, Vol. I, 1912, do not indicate the existence of any outbuildings.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

No original architectural drawings were found. Refer to the floor plans on page 17 which were prepared for this report.

B. Historic Views:

Center Street and Saybrook Place. Archival photograph, circa 1910. Newark Public Library.

Center Street at Saybrook Place showing the apartment house that was born down to make room for the Hudson and Manhattan Railroad Station. Archival photograph, 1911. Newark Public Library.

Military Park after severe snowstorm, April 24, 1875, showing Senator Wright's mansion and greenhouse. Archival photograph, 1875. New Jersey Historical Society.

Military Park at Park Place showing the Hudson and Manhattan Tubes Station. Archival photograph, August, 1922. Newark Public Library.

Park Place from Military Park with Saybrook Place. Archival photograph, August 1922. Newark Public Library.

Park Place; Site of Newark Athletic Club. Archival photograph, March, 1920, Newark Public Library.

C. Interviews: No interviews were conducted.

D. Bibliography:

Cunningham, John T. Newark. Newark: The New Jersey Historical Society, 1966.

Cunningham, John T. Newark. Newark: The New Jersey Historical Society, 1966.

Essex County Deeds. Essex County Courthouse, Hall of Records. Newark, New Jersey.

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Feist and Feist. Atlas of the City of Newark, New Jersey. Vol. I, 1912. New Jersey Historical Society.

Hunter Research, Inc. Report: A Historic, Architectural and Archeological Assessment of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center Site, City of Newark, Essex County, New Jersey. Prepared for the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Newark, New Jersey (Trenton: 1991).

Mueller, A.H. Atlas of the City of Newark, New Jersey. Plate VI, 1911. New Jersey Historical Society.

Newark Map. 1806 Republished in 1891. Newark Public Library.

Robinson's Atlas. City of Newark, New Jersey. Vol. I. New York: Robinson and Company, 1926. New Jersey Historical Society.

Sanborn Map Company. Insurance Maps of Newark. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1908. New Jersey Historical Society.

Sanborn Map Company, Insurance Maps of Newark. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1930, corrected 1958-1962. New Jersey Historical Society.

Sanborn Map Company, Insurance Maps of Newark. New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Company, 1892. New Jersey Historical Society.

Scarlet and Scarlet. Atlas of the City of Newark, New Jersey. Newark: Scarlet and Scarlet, 1889. New Jersey Historical Society.

Shaw, William H., compiler History of Essex and Hudson Counties, New Jersey. Vols. I, II. Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1884.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

New Jersey Estate Inventories. New Jersey State Archives, The State Library, Trenton, New Jersey.

New Jersey Wills. New Jersey State Archives, The State Library, Trenton, New Jersey.

F. Supplemental Materials:

¹Hunter Research, Inc. Report: A Historic, Architectural and Archaeological Assessment of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center,

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City of Newark, Essex County, New Jersey. Prepared for the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Newark, New Jersey (Trenton, 1991), p. 8.

²Ibid.

³Military Park after Severe Snowstorm, April 24, 1875, showing Senator Wright's Mansion and Greenhouse. Archival photograph, 1875.

⁴Park Place: Site of Newark Athletic Club. Archival photograph, March, 1920.

⁵Scarlet and Scarlet Atlas of the City of Newark, New Jersey. Newark: Scarlet and Scarlet, 1889.

⁶Feist and Feist Atlas of the City of Newark, New Jersey, Vol. I., 1912.

⁷Shaw, William H., compiler History of Essex and Hudson Counties, New Jersey. Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1884.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Essex County Deed (Y102-541), 1944.

¹⁰Centre Street at Saybrook Place showing the apartment house that was torn down to make room for the Hudson and Manhattan Railroad Station. Archival photograph, 1911.

¹¹Park Place from Military Park with Saybrook Place. Archival photograph, August, 1922.

¹²Hunter, p. 18 and Essex County Deed (C107-87), 1946.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

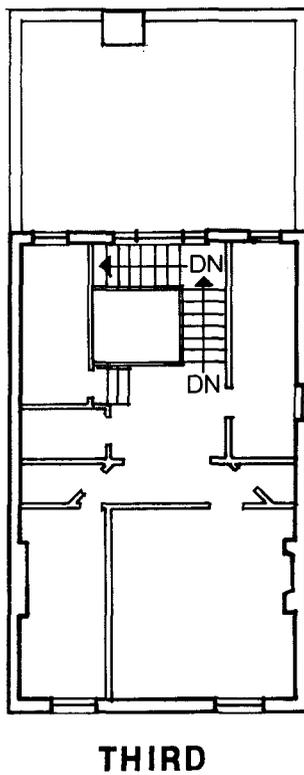
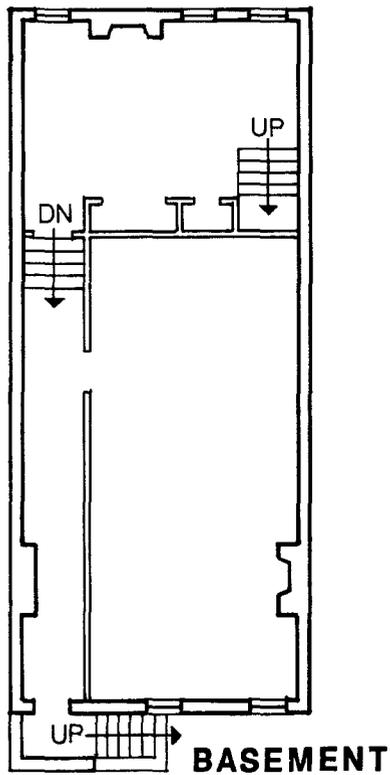
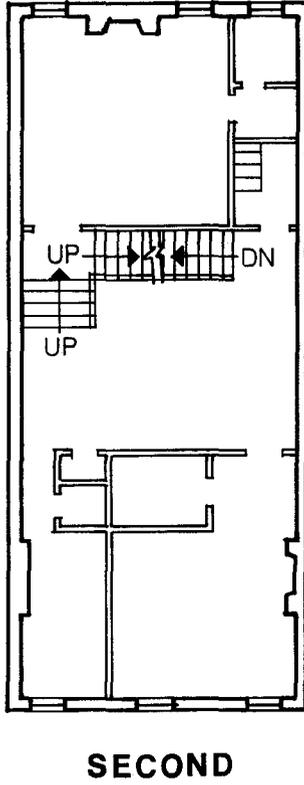
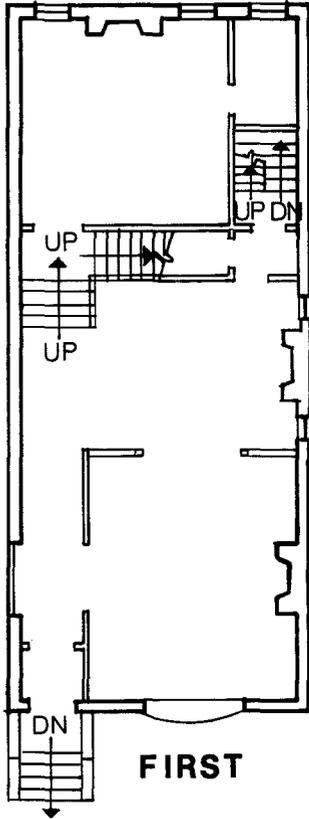
This documentary recording was undertaken to facilitate the construction of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. The former Abeel House is located in the National Register-eligible Military Park Commons Historic District, and is to be demolished for the construction of the Performing Arts Center. The information gathering and the photographic recording took place in July, October and November of 1992.

Prepared by: Herbert J. Githens, Historic Architect
Montclair, New Jersey

Tony Masso, Photographer
New Brunswick, New Jersey

Lawrence Schwin III, Architectural Historian
Clark, New Jersey

25 November 1992



NOV 1992
FLOOR PLANS

