

Marcus McGraw House (Lamont Library)
North side of Main Street, northwest
corner of Main and Church Streets
McGraw
Cortland County
New York

HABS No. NY-5601

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

MARCUS MCGRAW HOUSE (LAMONT LIBRARY)

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Location: North side of Main Street, northwest corner of Main and Church Streets, McGraw, Cortland County, New York.

Present Owner: Village of McGraw, New York.

Present Occupant: Lamont Library

Present Use: Library

Brief Statement of Significance:

The rear portion of the building is said to be one of the first eleven houses built in McGraw Village by 1813. The front or "Greek Temple" part of the house was occupied by John Lamont, whose son, Daniel, later became private secretary to President Grover Cleveland, and later Secretary of War.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Local historians believe that Marcus McGraw, son of Samuel McGraw, a "first settler", probably built the rear portion which was one of the ten or eleven houses on Main Street in 1810 to 1813. There is disagreement as to whether Marcus McGraw or John Lamont built the front or "Greek Temple" part as it was called, and about whether Marcus built or only lived in the older rear portion. However, John Lamont moved to it in 1851 bringing his son, Daniel, just born that year. Daniel Scott Lamont grew to manhood here.

1871 - Deed of July 24, 1871, recorded in the Cortland County Book of Deeds 52, page 275. The first documented owner is William Lord who conveyed the premises to John B. Lamont, who had been living in the house since 1851, according to local historians.

1906 - Deed of June 15, 1906, recorded in the Cortland County Book of Deeds 3, page 49. The John Lamont heirs by Juliet K. Lamont, Daniel's wife, transferred the property to Elizabeth K. Lamont, the daughter of Daniel and Juliet. Juliet had arranged for the conversion of the house into a library in 1906 and she gave the first endowment. Elizabeth carried on this work.

1945 - Deed of August 21, 1945, recorded in the Cortland County Book of Deeds 198, page 19. Elizabeth K. Lamont deeded it to the Village of McGraw to be used as a library.

2. Date of erection: c. 1813 (?) rear section; c. 1851 (?) front section.
3. Architect: Unknown.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.; Grip's Historical Souvenir of Cortland, page 214, puts ten houses in McGraw in 1830 one of which was the rear portion of this house, owned and occupied by Marcus McGraw who is thought to have built it.

The front part or "Greek Temple" is variously attributed to Marcus McGraw and to John Lamont (See Mrs. Wadsworth's Scrap Book listed in the Bibliography).

5. Builder, suppliers, etc.: Unknown.
6. Alterations and additions: The "Greek Temple" front section was added to the older rear portion, by whom and date unknown.

Miss Elizabeth Lamont, in 1906, adapted the front section for use as a library, probably removing a partition to make a second large room back of the front parlor and hall. Possibly a fireplace was removed from the central chimney in this section at that time, although the chimney remains and is in use for furnace heat.

The east porch may have been added then, as three of the original four small second floor windows are closed by this roof, covering what was probably the front door of the old original section, and two windows either side of the door.

In 1929, Miss Lamont provided money for the construction of a third library room, again probably by the removal of another central partition, this time in the old portion. The central chimney in this section seems to have been rebuilt at some time, and no fireplaces are indicated. A bank of three windows replaced an old window in the west wall of this room, and the stairs to second floor and to cellar were moved from the kitchen area to the present location.

At an unknown date a garage was either added or adapted

from a portion of the shed, and about two feet in length added.

The cellar entrance is of apparent recent construction.

A ventilating window was installed in the front gable, date unknown.

- B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure: Marcus McGraw, first known occupant, and possibly builder of the old portion, was the son of the town's first settler, Samuel McGraw, for whom the town is named.

John Lamont operated the first special line grocery.

Daniel Scott Lamont, son of John, started his notable career as publisher of the McGraw Advertiser and later worked on the Albany Argus. When twenty years old he became deputy clerk of the State Assembly. When Grover Cleveland became Governor of New York State he made Mr. Lamont his military secretary and three days later his private secretary. When Cleveland became President, he took Lamont with him to Washington. During his second term he appointed Lamont, by now a Colonel, Secretary of War. In 1897, Col. Lamont became vice-president of the Northern Pacific Railroad. As he became famous, there were noteworthy celebrations in McGraw when he returned to his old home for a visit. Once he came in a special train car called the "Yellowstone," drawn by a special locomotive.

After the death of Daniel's mother, his widow, Juliet K. Lamont, conceived the idea of converting the old homestead into a library, and in 1906, Daniel's daughter, Elizabeth K. Lamont, carried out this idea, remodeling for the purpose. In 1917, she added the corner lot extending to Church Street to the property, and on August 21, 1945, she deeded it to the Village of McGraw. It is still operated as a library in 1974.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: A post card view of the front shows it with no ventilation window in the gable.

2. Bibliography:

Grip's Historical Souvenir of Cortland, 1899. Published by Grips.

New International Encyclopedia, 1926, Vol. XIII, quoted in a clipping in Wadsworth Scrapbook.

Cortland Standard, Cortland, N.Y., August, 1908, paper by Miss Elizabeth P. Corey for Old Home Week.

Wadsworth, Mrs. Frank, Scrap Book, kept by former local historian of McGraw, now in the possession of local historian Miss Grace Greenwood, McGraw, N.Y.

Daniel Lamont material at the Cortland County Historical Society, Cortland, N.Y.

3. Other:

Mrs. Florence Walter, 25 Bellrose Avenue, Cortland, N.Y., librarian.

Mrs. William C. Cain, 2 W. Main Street, McGraw, N.Y., librarian.

- D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Deeds in Onondaga County of which Cortland was a part until 1808 to determine ownership before that of William Lord. Further search for old views among McGraw residents, records, etc. Further inquiry about memorabilia of the house among Lamont descendants.

Prepared by Dorothy E. Graves
Edited by Roger Heppell
For the Cortland County
Historical Society
April, 1965

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A combination of a early settler's "plank house" on its original foundation and a Greek revival addition
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Dimensions: Creek section: two stories (three-bay front elevation); rear section: one-and-one-half stories (three bays on side elevation).
2. Foundations: Stone, cemented under rear section; almost dry-laid under front Greek section, with only crawl space under front half.

3. Wall construction, finish: White clapboards over all. Planks laid flush on front elevation under the portico.
 4. Structural system: Greek section, probably studded walls. Rear section, vertical plank where visible, 8 x 8 posts at five foot intervals on east and west walls.
 5. Porches, stoops, etc.: Two story tetrastyle Ionic portico on south front; one story porch on east side of rear section with four slender turned posts; cellar entrance on north with modern gabled enclosure.
 6. Chimneys: Two. Front section, one central chimney, fireplace either removed or bricked. Rear section, one central chimney, probably not original.
 7. Openings:
 - a. Doors and doorways: Front door with pilasters, four-light sidelights and entablature. East porch door probably modern.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Green louvred shutters on all old windows. Greek section has rectangular windows in the side entablature with grilles, 22" x 40"; other windows in this section have simple trim, and are large six-over-six. Rear section, simple trim, small nine-over-six and six-over-six, and there are three modern windows. Also rectangular second floor windows in the entablature of the rear section, no grilles.
 8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable roofs, shingled on the Greek section, metal on the rear section.
 - b. Gornice, eaves: Simple Greek entablature around entire house; east porch on old section covers all small windows but one.
- G. Description of Interior:
1. Floor plans:
 - a. First floor, Greek section: Now has a hall and two large rooms, the rear or north room made by the removal of a partition (north-south) approximately in the center of the house.
 - b. First floor, rear section: Has a large room the width of house, also made by the removal of a center north-

south partition, and by the changing of the stairway from center north part of this section to southwest corner. (The original location shows in the unfinished part of the second floor of this section.) A bank of three modern windows was installed in the west wall of this room. Back (north) of this room are the kitchen on the east, a pantry in the center and a bathroom on the west. Next north is a narrow shed or back room on the west, and what is now a small reading room on the east with two modern windows in the east wall. Last to the north is the garage, made in part of the old shed.

- c. Second floor, Greek section: Has a hall and front room corresponding to those of the first floor, back of which, to the north, are two smaller rooms with a narrow center hall running north-south between them. The west room has a large corner closet or store room in the north west corner, and in the north wall a horizontally long window into the second floor of the older section of the house. The east room has a small cupboard in the southeast corner using the space made by the curved wall of the stairway. The narrow hall running north-south between these two rooms has a door at the north end opening into the second floor of the rear section, the older part, with two steps down to this level.
- d. Second floor, rear section: Has one plastered room in the northwest corner. Otherwise this is unfinished attic showing vertical plank walls. The original location of the stairway shows here. A smaller low-roofed attic over the shed section is accessible by door from the north end of this attic.

Interior walls throughout the house, except for one or two modern ones, seem to be plank, lath and plaster, judging by their thickness, and what can be seen from the second floor unfinished attic.

- 2. Stairways: Front hall has open stairway curved at the top with a rail supported by turned spindles. The old rear section has a narrow closed stair turned at the bottom and with cellar stairs under.
- 3. Flooring: Largely original random boarding painted, except for modern hardwood floors in the Greek section, first floor. Very wide boards in some cases, second floor especially.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster, except for modern plaster-board on some first floor Greek section ceilings.

5. Doorways and doors: Greek section has simple five-inch casings, capped, and some two-panel doors. Rear section, very simple trim.
6. Decorative features and trim: Greek section has panels under windows, and some carving in hall trim. Old section has remains of horizontal board wainscoting.
7. Notable hardware: Most hardware seems to be original on all old doors and windows.
8. Lighting: Modern.
9. Heating: Central heat now. No known fireplaces, the one may be bricked over in the Greek section central chimney.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation and general setting: Front faces Main Street on the south. The old rear section seems to have faced east.
2. Landscaping: Large old trees and a spacious lawn with flower beds at the rear. The fence along the front of the property and extending on the Church Street side is white wooden pickets with maple posts every ten feet. Part of this fence dates from John Lamont's time and was restored in 1906. The iron fence around the rest of the property came from the Cortland County Hospital in 1917.

Prepared by Dorothy E. Graves
Cortland County
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation of structures in the Southern Tier of New York State, undertaken by HABS in cooperation with the Cortland County Historical Society and the Valley Development Foundation, Inc.

The project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. The historical material was prepared in April, 1965, by Dorothy E. Graves and Roger Heppell of the Cortland County Historical Society. The architectural description was also prepared by Ms. Graves in April, 1965. Photographs were taken by Jack E. Boucher in April, 1966. The project was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Constance Werner Ramirez, August, 1974.