

ROCK HALL  
LAWRENCE, (BROADWAY,  
NASSAU COUNTY,  
LONG ISLAND, N. Y.

HABS NY-534

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N.Y,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District no. NY-5

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Building Survey,  
Lester B. Pope, District Officer,  
Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, N.Y.

REPORT OF THE HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
on the  
ROCK HALL, LAWRENCE  
NASSAU COUNTY, LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK STATE  
(H.A.B.S. N.Y. #534)

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HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY

Before 1720 the records of sale of this land are uncertain. The earliest information we have is recorded in a transfer made September 1, 1767, when John Cornell sold some 600 acres of "beach and meadow" to Josiah Martin.

This old record reads in part "a Parcell of or and Alotment of Salt Meadow and fresh Meadow Situate & Lying at a place called far Rockaway--With all Rights priviledges of the upland thereto belonging according to a former Town Order Made in Hempstead which said parcell of Meadow one William Cornell bought of Samuel Carman by a deed Dated the fifteenth Day of September Anno Domini One thousand Seven Hundred and twenty Who purchased the same of William Valentine John Dusenbere Hicks Embry as by three Several Deeds may more fully appear--Together with all and Singular the Dwelling House out Houses Barnes Gardens Orchards Woods Fences Ponds Spring water courses, etc."

It is not clear from this description whether the house which Josiah Martin built was a new one or a remodel of the Cornell house mentioned. It seems rather likely from the circumstances that Martin, the traveller, the well-to-do, commenced a new building on a larger scale than any previously on this site.

Josiah Martin was born in Antigua W. I. in 1699. He came to Hempstead in 1730, but travelled back and forth to Antigua. Thus, in 1733, his daughter was baptized in Hempstead, but in

"ROCK HALL" (Residence)

Lawrence, Nassau County, New York

Owner or Custodian

George Hewlett

Lawrence

Nassau County, New York.

Date of Erection

1767.

Architect

Gerhardus Clowes.

Builder

Josiah Martin.

Present Condition

Good. Some alteration in two west parlors were made about 1850. The interesting and unusual front porch and possibly the delightful dormers were probably added at this time.

Number of Stories

Two, and attic.

Materials of Construction

Hudson River Brown Sand Stone foundations, Wood construction throughout otherwise. Shingle siding; gambrel shingled roof with roof railing at curb. Double end enclosed chimneys.

Additional Data

1735 his wife having died, he remarried in Antigua.

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Martin originally bought land in Manhasset, but not liking its situation he purchased the Rockaway property, which is now in the Village of Lawrence.

In the letters of John Singleton Copley, the famous portrait painter, there is one to his half brother, in which he describes a trip to Rock Hall from New York, and of painting a picture of Mary Elizabeth, niece of Josiah Martin, for a panel over the living room mantel. He speaks particularly of the interesting cresting on the roof "in the Chinese style", probably after the Chippendale fashion.

Josiah's portrait and that of his second wife were painted by Robert Feke and hung in the north parlor.

These three paintings were removed for safer keeping to the galleries of the Brooklyn Institute Museum when the house ceased to be used through the winters.

Six slaves were recorded in the old inventories of the estate. They lived in quarters to the west of the house, which were removed in 1881, but visible in a photograph taken in 1874, in the Owner's possession.

Josiah died in 1778 at Rock Hall. The property went to his eldest son Dr. Samuel Martin. This well-beloved physician, a bachelor, added wealth and luxury to the estate, which in his day was almost self-sustaining.

At Samuel's death in 1806 an interesting, and to us, helpful, inventory was taken. One item, fifteen pictures, \$105.,

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includes the Copley and the two Fekes. Nine slaves are mentioned.

The estate passed on to Samuel's sisters, Alice Martin and Rachel Bannister. Alice mortgaged her portion and Mrs. Bannister's daughter Alice, "married Wm. McNeill who proved a spendthrift and a waster." Alice Martin in dying left her portion to Mrs. McNeill, and debts being many, a great amount of furniture was sold; one item of 16 cartloads of furniture was sold in Jamaica.

Mrs. McNeill was mother of four children when her husband left her. She was ill with cancer and without money. She was taken in with one son by Thos. Hewlett and his wife, the neighbors caring for the other children. She was deeply grateful and gave them the pictures in Rock Hall.

Mrs. McNeill died in 1823 and Thomas Hewlett assisting in settling the estate was advised by the lawyer to buy it, which he did in March 26, 1824. McNeill returned and tried to take possession, but without success.

Thomas with his family moved into the dreary house, in bad repair and poorly maintained. Two old negro slaves, Quagh and Nannie, still lived in the slave quarters and continued so until their deaths.

There were nine children in this Hewlett family and the parents needed all their strength and ingenuity to educate and care for them.

Thomas died in 1841, but not until 1870 did James Augustus Hewlett, a younger son, come out from New York to bring

out the other heirs and preserve the homestead. He it was who built the present barns, in 1881, removing all the west buildings.

The property today is in the hands of James' oldest son, George Hewlett. The whole family is very sympathetic to the study of the structure, its history, and the changes it has seen. Mr. Munroe Hewlett, brother of George, is a fellow of the American Institute of Architects, past president of the Architectural League, and now completing a term as director of the American Academy at Rome. Their sister wrote a short history of the property at the time of the Hewlett centennial in Rock Hall in 1924.

#### THE BUILDING

As was stated above, Rock Hall dates back to at least 1767. The name is probably a contraction of Rockaway Hall.

It is believed that the architect was Gerhardus Clowes, father of Timothy Clowes who was architect of St. Georges Church in Hempstead, reported in this survey under #4-403.

In an article in the magazine ANTIQUARIAN, <sup>JAN.</sup> ~~August~~ 1931, now out of print, Harry Lorin Bin<sup>s</sup>se describes this early building to be of Georgian Colonial character in general design, but constructed by workmen from New York trained under Dutch influence.

It was probably under Samuel Martin's ownership or between 1795 and 1800 that the two west parlors were redone. The mantels and paneling are a different character from those of

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the other rooms.

The unique front porch is also supposed to have been added at about this time.

The dormers may date from about 1800 and are particularly pleasing.

The roof railing is mentioned by Copley as "Chinese" and "excellent." It seems to bear the influence of "Chinese" Chippendale in vogue in furniture.

The interior woodwork seems to be of a redish wood and may be cedar, probably local.

The original colors included "Spanish Brown," grays, greens, and light buffs.

The stone of the foundation is brown sandstone and came from New Jersey along the Hudson River.

EUGENE NOSTRAND

Leader of Field Party  
Nassau County, New York State

Approved Lester B. Pope,  
Lester B. Pope, District Officer  
Historic American Buildings Survey,  
Brooklyn, (Long Island), New York

Pratt Institute, Brooklyn

See Aug. 20 '36 - TFW