

Sterrett Cabin  
Sterrettania, Pa.

HABS No. Pa.-511

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District No. 5 Pennsylvania

*Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings*

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Karl E. Morrison, District Officer  
319 Marine Bank Building, Erie, Pennsylvania

STERRETT CABIN  
Sterrettania, Erie County, Pennsylvania

Owner.

The Sterrett Family. Sterrettania, Pennsylvania.

Date of Erection

1817.

Architect

Unknown.

Builder

Robert Sterrett.

Present Condition

Good.

Number of Stories:

Two, basement and attic, single residence.

Materials of Construction:

Black walnut logs, black walnut mouldings, black walnut interior  
woodwork, smooth (hand-made on premises) plaster, hard finish, creek  
stones of blue shale, modern metal siding.

Other Existing Records:

Family and Court, also biographical records in Erie County  
Histories.

Additional Data-Bibliography:

History of Erie County, Pennsylvania; Chicago, Warner Beers and  
Co. 1884.

A Twentieth Century history of Erie County, Pennsylvania-Chicago-  
1909. The Lewis Publishing Co.-John Miller, historian.

History of Erie County, Pennsylvania, 2 vols. Historical Publishing  
Company 1925. Topeka--Indianapolis, by J. E. Reed (John Elmer).

History of Erie County, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, Lippincott Co.  
1961 by L. G. Sanford (Laura G.). Published by author and  
copyrighted by her in 1894.

Nelson's biographical dictionary and historical reference book  
of Erie County, Pennsylvania, Erie, 1896. Two-thirds of this book  
by Benjamin Whitman. From the press of Wilson, Humphreys and Co.  
Fourth St., Logansport, Indiana.

STERRETT CABIN  
Sterrettania, Erie County, Pennsylvania

James Sterrett (William 2, Robert 1) was born 1755 probably Cumberland County, died October 15, 1822 in Erie County. He married Anna McKnight, born 1750, died March 30, 1815. They lived in Newton township, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania until 1807 when they sold the farm of 200 acres which James had purchased from his father, and moved to Erie County, where he contracted with Thomas Rees, et. al. on June 1, 1797 for 400 acres in the northwest corner of McKean township, and received a deed dated August 15, 1808 from the Population Land Company, consideration \$200.

Robert Sterrett, the brother of James took up two claims and built the first structure on the property of Sterrettania (so called after the wife of James). He built a double cabin, each part being about 16 x 18 feet, and each containing two rooms and attic, the two being joined together by one roof, and having a hall 12 feet wide between them. It was built entirely of black walnut logs, the stairs leading to the attic being formed by driving pegs into holes. Each cabin had a fireplace on the side, and one window in each end.

When David Sterrett (son of Robert) came into possession of the old homestead on which his father settled in 1807, he erected a cabin using a part of the old cabin to live in while erecting the new one. He built the Sterrett Cabin, (the large loghouse) which still stands on the farm, in 1817. Two years later he built a frame addition to it.

The main part of the Sterrett Cabin is two stories in height with a large attic. The logs used were mostly black walnut, well finished and framed together. The joists and beams in the ceiling are all exposed, and planed by hand with beaded edges. Four large fireplaces built of creek stones are on the first and second floors, two on each floor, three of which are merged into one large chimney. The space between the fireplaces and the walls of the rooms are filled in with closets and cupboards faced with black walnut doors, well finished. The stairs leading to the second floor and attic are built of walnut with hand rail and balusters of simple but graceful colonial style, half round rail with a square newel post topped with a four-sided peaked cap.

An outstanding feature of this structure is the ingenious use of a very crooked tree. The beam made from this tree is used as a trimming timber around the stairwell. It is worked out on a circle of about twelve feet radius with two benches in it. The hand-made boards of the floors, paneled doors, casings, mantels, plastered walls all show evidence of aesthetic pioneer skill.

## STERRETT CABIN

The exterior of this cabin was strapped and then sided with bevel siding. Today the wood siding has been replaced with metal. The cabin is trimmed with a simple box cornice and the roof covered with hand shaved shingles. The building was painted on the front and two sides with white lead, but owing to the extremely high price of white lead the back was painted red.

A small platform porch is on the east and north corner, and a larger one on the south side, built on in recent years. There were originally three rooms on the first floor with two closets beyond the cupboards on each side of the fireplaces, three rooms on the second floor and the attic and basement. Some of the partitions have been removed.

The basement of the Sterrett cabin has a dirt floor with a clay hearth and, perhaps is even more interesting than the upper portion for it contains part of the original structure built in 1807. The fireplace and mantel, also the cellar walls, are constructed of flat creek stones of blue shale, the same kind that underlies the surface, for many miles, in and around Erie, Pennsylvania. These stones are laid horizontal in the mantel with no attempt at smoothness, held together with a clay mixture, obtained also from the vicinity. A cellar may seem an odd place for a mantel and fireplace, but its usefulness in 1807 probably was the reason for its construction. The mantel shelf is a huge stone at least seven feet long, about a foot wide and a foot thick. The fireplaces in the other portions of the cabin show that the shale stones used in them were selected with more care for smoothness.

The present occupant of the Sterrett home directly across the road from the cabin is Mrs. Minnie M. (Garver) Sterrett, widow of Theodore Samuel David Sterrett, sixth generation, and fourth in line of descent from Robert, the builder of the Sterrett Cabin.

*Annie Scott Baxter*

Approved

*Karl Ericson - Dist. Mgr.*  
*Sept 29, 1936*

*Rev. Jan. 7 '37 - mlu*