

Timothy Pickering House
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania
LUZERNE Co.

HABS No. Pa. 230

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Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings
PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Ralph W. Lear, District Officer
311-312 Dime Bank Building
Wilkes-Barre, Penna.

TIMOTHY PICKERING HOUSE

Wilkes-Barre, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania

Custodian

Miner Estate.

Date of Erection

1787.

Present Condition

Torn down, but good Colonial detail has been saved. All well preserved.

Number of Stories

Formerly had two stories.

Materials of Construction

Wood siding, slate roof, mantels, stairs, panelling, etc. of good Colonial detail. All of wood. Some of the faces of the fireplaces of brick, others of tile.

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TIMOTHY PICKERING HOUSE
Wilkes-Barre, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania.

The most valuable historic landmark in the city of Wilkes-Barre, and one which was a very fine example of Colonial or Georgian architecture, was torn down, in 1931. For many years, this was known as the Ross House; it should rather be called the Pickering House.

At one time, it was planned to remove this historic old building to Kirby Park, in Wilkes-Barre, in three sections, which was the only possible way. The city expected to use it as a museum and fill it with historic relics and mementoes, but eventually, the plan was discarded, and the building torn down. However, the mantels, doors, staircase, wall panelling, and wainscoting has been preserved and photographs, taken before the house was razed, so that we have a fairly definite plan of this once-famous old home.

The home was built in 1787, by Colonel Timothy Pickering, after brilliant service under Washington, when he came home with his family, to undertake the settlement of a discord which cost many lives and no end of bitterness in the struggle for the soil for this Valley, waged between the Yankees of Connecticut, and the Pennamites, and as is known, the grants to the Connecticut settlers by one monarch of England, which grants extended from "sea to sea", included this section. Later grants to William Penn, conflicted with this one to Connecticut. Pickering was also sent here to organize the first County of Luzerne.

Pickering underwent many hardships, in his struggle to introduce the Pennsylvania laws here, among them was his abduction by the radical Yankees.

John Franklin, the hero of Wyoming had been seized by several of the friends of the government and brought on to the city. Immediate measures were adopted by the partizans of

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the Yankee Leaders to seize Colonel Pickering and carry him off as a hostage for the safety of Franklin. A guard had been detached for the protection of his family. Colonel Butler volunteered to take command. The wild Yankees surrounded the house and demanded admittance, threatening to set fire to the house, if they were refused. The fire was actually kindled when Colonel Butler intervened and allowed them to search the house for Colonel Pickering. He, apprised of their approach, had escaped to the fields. He finally escaped to Philadelphia, after much hardship, and returned to within 25 miles of Wilkes-Barre, some months later, but finding it was not safe to return as yet, returned to Philadelphia, and did not come back to Wilkes-Barre until January, 1788. During his honorable exile to Philadelphia, he performed the acceptable service of a delegate to ratify the Federal Constitution.

It was not until June, 1788, that another attempt was made to abduct Colonel Pickering, and this time, the Radicals succeeded. He was taken from his home, his arms pinioned and hurried through the streets of Wilkes-Barre, to Pittston, and then, a little further up the river. Captain Ross marched his company to release Colonel Pickering, and arrest the rioters. Engagement ensued, and Captain Ross received a severe wound in the body, which was at first, regarded as mortal. Recovering, the gallant services he had performed, were so highly estimated that the Executive Council of the State, presented him with an elegant sword with an appropriate inscription.

When Colonel Pickering left the Valley, he sold his plantation to Captain Ross, on easy terms of payment, which by improvements and the rise of property had advanced in value to \$80,000.00. Captain Ross purchased this house in 1796, and resided here for a period of 46 years.

A word about Pickering, the man, his career, and ambitions, might be of interest at this point. Pickering was born in Salem, Massachusetts, of puritan stock. While a youth of 30, he was made commander of the Salem Minute Men. He was graduated from Harvard in 1783, became one of leaders of his section, and 1776, with about 700 Massachusetts militia, he joined Washington in New Jersey. The great chieftain noted Pickering's quality at the outset, and he became Washington's adjutant general. He was present at Brandywine, and at Germantown, and was with Washington at Yorktown. He was elected by Congress a member of the Board of War with Gates and Mifflin. For four years, he served at the appointment of Washington on Indian matters, and he became the sole arbiter in disputes of the Six Nations.

He served in Washington's Cabinet as Postmaster General, became Secretary of War on Knox's resignation, and Secretary of State after Randolph resigned, but was removed by President Adams. Pickering was United States Senator until 1811 and was even, after that elected to serve a constituency of Massachusetts in the House of Representatives.

He was deeply interested in American History and planned extensive literary work. He published several rather important things, but his more ambitious literary efforts failed to materialize. His interests were broad and varied, but he had too large a share of the Puritan temperament to make him an attractive figure. However, he was perhaps, the only man who could have introduced the laws, and averted the calamity of a new and more disastrous civil war in Wyoming.

The beautiful old home which Pickering built and lived in, was Colonial in design, built perfectly square, with the kitchen and terrace extending out on the rear. It was a frame structure with a very small Colonial porch with square columns. Windows were glazed with small lights, protected by wooden shutters.

The main stairway was of wood, Colonial design. The entire hall had about three foot wainscoting. Floor boards are random widths. There were four rooms leading off the main entrance hall, and a door to the rear terrace, under the stair landing. On the first floor were the parlor, sitting-room, and dining-room, and a small office.

In the sitting-room, is a wood mantel with a fireplace of tile face. The doors are panelled, with the original locks, and in all the first floor rooms, there is a chair rail about 2 foot, 6 inches high. In the sitting-room, is a wood cornice which was typical of this period.

In the parlor, which is one of the newer parts of the house is an old, Colonial fireplace with a brick face and natural finish wood mantel, and narrow iron bars for grate. In this room, were full-length, panelled natural finish wood cupboards, with the original latches.

The dining-room is also in the left portion of the house, which is considered the newer part. It was papered instead of being panelled as the right portion of the house. The dining-room also had a fine example of Colonial fireplace.

The face was of tile with a metal front, and narrow bars for the grate, with a stone hearth. The mantel was wood. The doors were the same as in the other downstairs rooms.

The office in the rear, also had a fireplace, but this was destroyed. The mantel was of wood, and panelled. The full-length cupboards also had the original locks and latches on the doors.

There was an open grate fireplace in the kitchen, but this was destroyed when the house was razed, and there is no record of it.

On the second floor, there was a main hall with four bedrooms leading from it; the bath was in the front of the hall opposite the stairs. There were only two fireplaces on the second floor. In bedroom No. 1, the fireplace has a brick face, with a wood mantel. This room also has a chair rail around the wall. Bedroom, No. 2, is the room from which Pickering was abducted. This has white panelled walls on one entire side, part of it forming a cupboard. This has a fireplace, with a mantel shelf and a brick facing, with a small stone hearth.

Historic material obtained from: "Miner's History of Wyoming Valley" Wilkes-Barre Record, (newspaper) 1921, also, Wilkes-Barre Newspaper of 1931.

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Date

June 1936