King of Prussia Inn
Medial strip of Swedesford Road
(U. S. Route 202), west of
intersection with Gulph Road
(Pa. Route 23)
King of Prussia, Upper Merion Township
Montgomery County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1009

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PA
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An addendum to
King of Prussia tavern sign
Norristown Vicinity, Pennsylvania
in HABS Catalog Supplement (1959)

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1009 HABS PA-46-KING 1-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

KING OF PRUSSIA INN

Location: Medial strip of Swedesford Road (U.S. Route 202), west of intersection with Gulph Road (Pa. Route 23) [on the east side of intersection of Swedesford Road with former King of Prussia Road (now vacated)], King of Prussia, Upper Merion Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Present Owner and Occupant: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Highways.

Present Use: Maintenance and storage.

Brief Statement of Significance: King of Prussia Inn, a widely known, early eighteenth-century inn, is situated at the site of an early crossroads in a historically important area.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History: The King of Prussia Inn, located at the intersection of Swedesford Road and Gulph Road in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, was built in the early 1700's. An exact date for the construction of the building cannot be assigned at this moment. It is known that the King of Prussia Inn was associated with the Rees family. The earliest reference to the land in the immediate area of the King of Prussia Inn is a deed recital "Under the hands and seals of Rees Thomas and James Logan dated November 16, 1714" for land from the proprietor William Penn granted to Thomas Rees.

It is believed that Griffith Rees had two sons, William and Thomas. On June 3, 1719 he granted 150 acres to William and on April 28, 1737 (or December 27, 1728) granted 150 acres to Thomas. It is believed that the King of Prussia Inn was built either on the original tract of Thomas Rees around 1714-1715, or on the tract granted William Rees around 1719. This would place the date of construction of the original building (assuming that the King of Prussia Inn is the original building erected on these tracts) somewhere around 1715 or 1719 (see Part I.C.1. of this report).

The earliest documentary reference to the King of Prussia Inn is a Tavern License issued to Philip Rees in 1762, who was the grandson of Thomas Rees, Sr. However, we believe that William Rees, Jr., owned the King of Prussia Inn during this period since his tax in 1769 for 20 acres was much greater than the other members of the Rees family whose land holdings were much larger (see tax assessments of Upper Merion: Part I.C.2. of this report). Philip Reese was licensed as a Tavern Keeper in Upper Merion Township in 1761, 1764, 1765, 1766, and 1770 (see Part I.C.3. of this report).

The only description of the Inn which can be verified at this time is found in the 1798 Federal "Window" Tax records when the King of Prussia Inn was owned by John Elliott. The description in this record exactly coincides with the measurements of the present Inn building (with the exception of the modern kitchen addition of cinder block and the missing outbuildings) even insofar as the number of windows and doors is concerned. (See Part I.C.4. of this report.) James Barry is designated at the location of the King of Prussia Inn on William Parker's "Spy Map" of the Valley Forge encampment made in 1777. Barry also is listed as a licensee in Upper Merion during this period.

The earliest reference to the name "King of Prussia" is in a "petition for a road from George George's Saw Mill to Sweeds Ford near the sign of the King of Prussia" in the Montgomery County Court House, Clerk of Courts Office, dated December 26, 1786.

We believe the King of Prussia Inn to have existed as a small building owned by William Reese, Sr., and probably built by him around 1719. The earliest official records uncovered at this time referring to the King of Prussia Inn are found in a Tavern License issued to Phillip Rees of Upper Merion Township dated 1762 and in the road petition dated 1786 which refers to the Inn by name. We know the King of Prussia Inn to have existed in its present size and shape (with the exception of the modern kitchen addition) as early as 1798.

B. Sources of Information:

1. Pennsylvania Historical Society
   Reading Room - Mr. Sutcliff
   Manuscript Room - Miss Miller

2. Radnor Historical Society
   Mr. Dallett and Mrs. E. Dorothy Finlay

3. West Chester Historical Society

4. Delaware County Historical Society

5. Baptist Church of the Great Valley
   Reverend Chester Winters

6. Montgomery County Historical Society
   Mrs. Leroy Burris

7. Breweries contacted
   Valley Forge 1865 - Mr. Shannon
   William Burton, Sec. State Breweries Assoc., Penn Savings Society Bldg.
   Perot Malting Co. - Mr. Myers
     Anthony Morris owned before 1800
     Elizabeth Morris married Perot in 1823
     Known records date to 1803

8. Pennsylvania Historical Society
   Manuscripts
   - Peter Papers, cash books of licenses issued
   - Hughes Papers
   - Boggs Papers
   - Brenner Manuscript on early taverns

9. Montgomery County Historical Society
   All available material was again searched but there is NO authentic material there

10. County of Philadelphia Archives
    - Tax assessments
    - Wills
    - Orphans Court records
    - Quarter Sessions Court records
    - Deeds

11. Welsh Society of Philadelphia
    Sec. John Ellis Rosser, 310 Shadeland Ave., Drexel Hill, Pa. Business address: Girard Estate
    Pres. Mr. Bennett Tousley, Adelphia Hotel, Philadelphia, Pa.

C. Supplemental Material:

1. Material relating to the chain of ownership: Copy of Deed with plot description, Montgomery County Records Deed Book 3, page 30, establishes that 150 acreswere deeded originally to William Rees, an early settler, on June 3, 1719. This land, in turn, passed to his son, William Rees, at the elder Rees' death on February 18, 1756. The following is taken from the elder Rees' will on file in Philadelphia:

> "I give and bequeath to my son, William Rees, all my land and plantation whereon I do live in Upper Merion, aforesaid with its appurtenances whatsoever thereunto belonging to hold by him and his Heirs and Assigns forever and also the two tracts of land or plantation Charlestown in County of Chester now in tenure of John David and Thomas John."

William Rees, the son, died intestate, and administration papers were given to Martha Rees, wife, or widow, August 13, 1776. The land was then taken through the Orphans Court from 1776 to 1782. /Page 400, Docket #11, File D. R. 208, "Ordered to give Bond in the Clerk of this Court Accordingly." Page 418, Docket #11, gives description of property./

The property was finally given to the eldest son, Griffith Rees, in 1785-1786 to sell in order to settle the estate. It was bought for 1,043 pounds, which was divided among the other heirs: George, Hannah, William, Job, Ann, and Alexander. /File G. R. 197, Docket #13, 1785-86./

The property was either sold directly to or very soon became the property of John Elliott, who was recorded as keeping the inn in 1786. See letter from G. W. Holstein, Part I.C.5. of this report.

2. Tax Assessments of Upper Merion:

		Acres	Horses	Cattle	Tax
1769	Thomas Rees	350 A	4	8	45.16.0
	William Rees	20 A	1	1	18.14.0
	Isaac Rees, Sr.	100 A	2	2	12. 4.0
	Isaac Rees, Jr.		1	1	1. 0.0
	Philip Rees	28 A	1	2	8.10.8
	John Rees	100 A	2	3	13.10.8
	David Rees -- Mason				

Compare William Rees' tax for 20 acres with John Rees' tax on 100 acres. Probably taxed more because of Inn property.

1774	Thomas Reese	300 A	4	6	36. 7.4
	William Reese	50 A	3	3	31.16.0
	John Reese	100 A	2	3	11.10.8
	Philip Reese	28 A	1	2	10. 6.8
	Isaac Reese, Jr.		1	1	1. 3.0
	Isaac Reese	100 A	2	2	9. 4.0

3. Tavern Licenses in Upper Merion Township, 1762-1774, for King of Prussia Inn:

Oct. 10, 1762	Philip Reese
Mar. 28, 1764	Philip Reese
Aug. 18, 1764	Abel Reese
Jan. 19, 1765	Philip Rees
Oct. 19, 1765	Philip Rees
Apr. 27, 1767	Philip Rees
Mar. 8, 1769	William Rees
Mar. 8, 1770	Philip Rees
June 1, 1771	William Rees
Sept. 5, 1772	John Meridith
Sept. 8, 1773	John Meridith
Oct. 15, 1774	James Barry

[Records are missing for years 1759-1761 for licenses.]

4. Federal "Window Tax" Census of 1798:

John Elliott:
- 1 stone dwelling house 33' x 50':
  - 2 stories
  - 9 windows 15 lights
  - 10 windows 12 lights
- 1 milk house 8' x 10'
- 1 stone barn 30' x 80'
- 1 stone waggon house
- 1 stone smith shop
- 174 acres

5. Copy of a letter written by George W. Holstein:

Bridgeport, Pa.
April 30, 1902

Mr. J. Elliott Shaw,

My dear young friend:

Your esteemed favor of the 28th is at hand, and the reference therein made to your uncle Chas. J. Eliott awakens associations that have long lain dormant, and which it gives me pleasure again to recall.

He was much interested in the prosperity and welfare of the King of Prussia. He thought it commanded a position which should make it valuable as a business centre, and attractive as a place of residence. He could not understand why, with all its apparent advantages, it should remain so sluggish, as though it had reached its ultimatum, when so surrounded by possibilities.

Speaking of the location of the village, Col. Bean in his "History of Montgomery County" on page 1188 - says "King of Prussia is situated near the centre of the Township, at the intersection of the Gulf and State roads - this name was derived more than a century ago from an inn kept here by John Elliott in 1786" - and on page 1120 "a road was laid out from Whiteland, Chester Co. in 1723 to the Swedes Ford, now the borough of Bridgeport, by way of the present King of Prussia; thus showing that the travel at an early period must have been considerable in this direction. The Gulf Road, as it is called, leading from Valley Forge through the King of Prussia, and the Gulf Mills toward the City is denoted on Lewis Evans' Map of the Middle Colonies, published in 1749, thus clearly indicating, that this, too, was an early highway."

Your uncle, knowing all this, and that another road around the Inn, opened up all the country South along the line of the P.R.R. foretold a day of prosperity for the village of King of Prussia. It may yet come: a Trolley line would bring it.

Your uncle Charles and I had many talks and surmises in regard to the old inn: we knew that among the Soldiers encamped under Washington at Valley Forge, were many French, Polish and Prussians: we knew that the King of Prussia was an important outpost of the Army, and that frequently distinguished officers gathered there for consultation; among them Baron DeKalb, Lafayette and Washington himself. Tradition has it that during these conferences, out of respect to the large number of Prussian Soldiers in the Army the Inn should

be named after their great King, and it was ever afterward known as "The King of Prussia". Of course this was tradition but as there was no authentic history to point otherwise, we accepted it as reliable. I have no doubt of its correctness, and history shows Washington was deeply indebted to the French and Prussian Soldiers for valuable services rendered.

In Marshall's Life of Washington, page 381, we find that in February 1778, whilst the army lay at Valley Forge, Baron Steuben arrived at camp. He was a Prussian officer of high rank, who came very highly recommended, having served many years in the Armies of the great King Frederick, as an Aide-de-camp of that....Commander holding the rank of Lieutenant General. He was unquestionably well versed in the System of Manoeurves which the King of Prussia had introduced, and was well qualified to teach our troops. He was as modest as brave, claiming no rank, only requesting to render as a volunteer those services which might be in his power and might be most useful to the American Arms. He was appointed to the office of Inspector General, with the rank of Major General. Speaking of him, Chief Justice Marshall, on page 383, says, "This gentleman was of real service to the American forces, - he established our uniform System of Manoeurves, and by his skill and persevering industry effected, during the continuance of the troops at Valley Forge, a most decisive and important improvement through all ranks of the Army." As his duties brought him into close touch with all the surrounding country and among them the important point of the King of Prussia. As he had been in such intimate relations with Frederick the Great, I have never had any doubt that the tradition is correct and that this noble officer was among those chiefly instrumental in calling the Inn after the great King of Prussia. This was only eight years (1786) before we have any information of your Great Grandfather John Elliott being proprietor of the Hotel. He was ever afterwards called "King Elliott". As a boy I remember the old gentleman, then keeping a hotel on Lancaster avenue near Philadelphia - stopping there as I was going to the City in a sleigh with my father.

I judge you are now wearied enough, and will only add that King of Prussia and its surroundings are very intimately associated with many pleasing memories of my early years, and if at anytime hereafter I can be of any service in your researches it will afford me pleasures to render it.

With kindest regards to those around you.

Yours very truly,

G. W. Holstein

6. The following was written by Charles Francis Saunders, who conducted his research in the Friends' Historical Library in Swarthmore. His piece is entitled "Country Walks in 1889" and describes a hike by a group of young walking enthusiasts who called themselves the "Inns and Outs" in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

"To the eye of the traveler who has never been in England the village of the King of Prussia looks like an English hamlet. As you enter you pass a number of near little dwellings, each with its old fashioned gardens, an shady old bridge over the little creek that runs through the middle of the village; then comes the blacksmith shop, the store, the doctor's and opposite the latter, the King of Prussia Inn which for a century and a quarter has dispensed good cheer to man and beast.

"There are inns which have fallen into evil ways and whose landlords are careless of their looks - the 'King' has made no effort to accommodate itself to the changing fashions of the times.

"As it stands at the present writing (1889), the landlady, a buxom widow of 45 meets you at the door and invites you in. An old fashioned clock ticks in the hall and the floor slants invitingly to the sitting room with its low ceiling and broad window seats carry back to the time George III was King.

"The meals are of the Country kind---plain, well cooked and substantial and apt to terminate in three kinds of pie. If you come to supper you will probably have waffles, than which a no pleasanter fate can befall you. The kitchen which supplies the tables with the delectables referred to is one of the kind you read about - the big old fireplace and the crane and ceiling ribbed with smoky rafters.

"When you leave you will feel glad that you have been and sorry that you are leaving so soon."

Prepared by the King of Prussia Historical Society, Robert D. May, M.D., President, under contract to the National Park Service. Information compiled by Historic Data and Sites Committee of the King of Prussia Historical Society under the supervision of Mrs. John F. Nolan and Mr. Benjamin Wilson, Co-chairmen - December 1959

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Original structure added to several times. One-story frame enclosed porch on south and concrete block one-story kitchen on east are modern. Stone structure over basement seems to be entirely eighteenth century or earlier, but built at at least two different times.

2. Condition of fabric: Center foundation on wall in basement badly split. Wood lintels at exterior basement wall decaved. Interior framing firm. Front porch and exterior trim rotted.

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Three stories and basement; 48'-2" x 33'-4".

2. Foundations: Foundations are of rubble masonry, ordinary uncoursed fieldstone type. Walls above same general construction. Wood lintels over openings used in west side of main basement. Stone lintels (arched) used in east side.

3. Wall construction: Rough uncoursed fieldstone with stucco. Walls of upper three floors are also stone masonry of same type varying in thickness from about 2'-0" at first floor to 1'-6" at third (attic) floor. Exterior is stuccoed; interior walls are plastered except for third floor east side, which is unfinished.

4. Porches: Wide two-story porch on north. Second story is in dangerous condition.

5. Chimneys: Masonry chimneys are in poor repair.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Exterior paneled wood doors in fieldstone part are old but probably not original. Wide stone threshold, probably original, at first floor exterior doors in fieldstone part.

b. Windows and shutters: Old louvred type shutters intact on both floors of north elevation. Sash are quite old and in bad condition.

7. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Pitched roof of three-story stone block has modern asphalt shingles over old roof of wood shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: Simply detailed cornice and eaves in bad condition, particularly on north side.

C. Technical Description of Interiors:

1. Floor plans: Center hall type plan. First floor: west half of stone part - wide opening between north and south rooms had folding doors. Upper floors of this half do not

seem to have been altered. East half first floor has old kitchen on south side, bar on north. Second floor made into three rooms and bath.

2. Stairways: Main stairway in West half may not be original because of changes in floor framing. Woodwork is old and intact, however. Stair is structurally firm. Second stairway from old kitchen in east side of stone portion only from first floor to second floor is fully enclosed.

3. Flooring: Flooring in first floor is narrow boards laid over original wide board flooring. Upper floors are wide board flooring, random widths.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Except for east side of third floor, walls and ceilings are plaster. Wainscoting appears in the old kitchen and bar on first floor and in the second floor bath, as indicated on measured drawings. Wainscoting not original. Chair rails are indicated.

5. Doorways and doors: Doors and trim of west portion are intact and old, but do not appear original. East part doors and trim appear much newer.

6. Trim: Trim in west side nearly intact, but probably not original. Part of large, possibly original, plaster cornice over corner fireplace in south room is left from earlier scheme. Trim in west side of stone part newer and quite cut up by alterations.

7. Hardware: Little that seems original.

8. Lighting: Gas fixtures have been wired.

9. Heating: Steam radiators have been added.

D. Site:

1. Orientation and general setting: Entrance nearly due north. Original setting entirely changed; now located in medial strip of Route 202.

2. Walks, driveways, etc.: None. Front porch at grade is flagstone.

Prepared by David G. Rowland, Architect
Paoli, Pennsylvania
For the National Park Service
March 1960

ADDENDUM TO
KING OF PRUSSIA INN
U.S. Route 202 (Upper Merion Township)
King of Prussia
Montgomery County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1009

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PA
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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240