

Livezey House (Glen Fern)  
Livezey Lane  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-14

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51-GERM,  
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PHOTOGRAPH

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

"GLEN FERN" (Residence)  
Wissahickon Creek, Fairmount Park  
Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania

Owners - Commissioners of Fairmount Park, City Hall, Philadelphia.

Date of Erection - Original house between 1733-39; enlarged about 1765.

Present Condition - Fair state of preservation. No material departure from original appearance as regards exterior. Some partitions have been removed and there are other minor changes in the interior.

Number of Stories - Varying from one to two and a half.

Materials of Construction - Foundations, stone; floors, wood; exterior walls, stone; interior walls, frame and stone; roof, wood shingles.

Additional Data - "Glen Fern" stands on the bank of the Wissahickon Creek at the foot of Livezey's Lane, which runs down from Allen Lane (formerly Livezey's Mill Road) near its junction with Wissahickon Avenue (formerly Township Line). Surrounding the house are the numerous remains of the mill, barn, granaries, cooper shop, etc. which once flourished here.

The land on which the house stands has had many owners since it was first patented in 1683 by James Claypoole, one of William Penn's resident land commissioners. Claypoole's executors sold it to Hugh Roberts in 1696. His heirs in turn sold it to George Evans in 1706. From Evans it came into the possession successively of John Cunrads, 1709, Johannes Gumree, 1719, Henry Sellen, 1733, John Hammer, 1739, Thomas Shoemaker, 1746 and finally to Thomas Livezey in 1747.

The records do not show to what use the land was put during these years, but sites where water power could be developed were in demand even in that early day, and it is not improbable that some sort of a mill run by the waters of the Wissahickon was in operation during this time on the site where Thomas Shoemaker built his grist mill. It is interesting to note that a stone dated 1717 stands in the north wall of the ruined Livezey mill. Until about 1905 this stone was part of the east abutment of the bridge which spanned the creek just below the mill. Since the bridge was not built till 1839 it is possible that this dated stone comes from a demolished building of an earlier date.

No mention of a house appears in any of the deeds down to 1739. The deed from Sellen to Hammer in that year speaks of a house and

garden. We therefore assume that the original house dates from 1733-39. A drawing made in 1760 shows the middle section of the house in substantially its present form, and the west section 1 1/2 stories high. A few years later a story was added to the west or main part of the house by building rooms at the rear or north side, and bringing a new roof line forward over the roof of the 1 1/2 story building. The jointure between the original house and the addition is plainly visible. The one story section at the east does not appear in the drawing of 1760, and this omission apparently disposes of local belief that this was the original portion of the house and built about 1696.

There is no record of the size or appearance of the dwelling part of the property when Thomas Livezey bought it from Thomas Shoemaker in 1747 and named it "Glen Fern". That it was a veritable community at one time is apparent from a pen and ink sketch made in 1833, which shows besides the house and mill, a corn mill on the hillside behind the large mill, an ice house and workshop in the space between the two mills and the road, and on the other side of the road, the barn, carriage house, smoke house and spring house. A cooper shop stood between the west end of the house and the creek. Under Thomas Livezey's guidance the grist mill prospered. It is said that in the autumn, when the farmers brought in their grain, the line of wagons extended all the way to the "main road" (Germantown Avenue). The property remained in the family until 1869 when it was bought for Fairmount Park, and a few years later the mill was torn down. The house is now occupied by the Valley Green Canoe Club.

Thomas Livezey's great grandfather came from Chester, England about 1680, and settled in Lower Dublin Township. Thomas besides being a successful miller was a man of mark in other ways, being a founder of the Union School (Germantown Academy), Justice of the Peace and member of the Provincial Committee of 1765. Being a member of the Society of Friends he took no part in the Revolution.

The house has walls of Pennsylvania ledge stone construction and presents an interesting arrangement of three adjoining gable roofed structures in diminishing order with quaint fenestration. In front of the house is the remains of a terrace with stone steps leading up to the front door. A second story balcony runs the full length of the south side of the main portion of the house. Was this always there, or was there a small balcony set into a pent eave, as at "Wister's Big House" before the alterations of 1806? We can find no answer to the query from the records. Panelled wainscots and fireplaces occur in all the principal rooms. The kitchen fireplace of huge dimensions forms an angle nook with a window beside the seat. Old box bushes in front of the house denote the presence of a garden. Surrounded by virgin forest, the house presents an attractive picture at all times of the year.

References: "The Livezey Family, a Genealogical and Historical Record Assembled for the Livezey Association", by Charles Harper Smith, 1934. See also Eberlein, H.D. and Lippincott, H.M. "Colonial Homes

of Philadelphia and Its Neighbourhoods", 1912, pp. 267-274; Cousins,  
Frank and Riley, P.M. "Colonial Architecture of Philadelphia", 1920  
pp. 56-59.

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