

John Cresswell House  
Main Street  
Alexandria  
Huntingdon County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5400

HABS  
PA,  
31-ALEX,  
11-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOHN CRESSWELL HOUSE

HABS No. PA-5400

Location: Situated 120' east from the southeast corner of High and Main streets, in the southeasternmost corner of town, fronting Main Street in Alexandria, Porter Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Robert Eugene Walters.

Present Use: Single-family dwelling.

Significance: The John Cresswell House is one of the few surviving buildings from the pre-canal period. Also one of the few only remaining stone buildings in the borough--and one of the earliest--it was conscientiously restored for the first time in 1976. Cresswell, a merchant and contractor, occupied the house for nearly fifty years, during which time the canal was built and in use.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1816.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The John Cresswell house lies south of Main Street on lot Nos. 1, 2, and 38-1/2' of lot No. 3, fronting Main Street and extending approximately 200' to the Juniata River on the south.

The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the Recorder of Deeds Office of the County of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

1815 Deed November 24, 1815, recorded in Volume P1, Page 20.

Thomas Rees  
TO  
John Cresswell.

1864 Deed April 2, 1864, recorded in Volume S2, Page 310.

John Cresswell  
TO  
Mary Ann Garland.

1897 Deed November 16, 1897, recorded in Volume N4, Pages 164-67.

David Garland et al. (Moses Garland's heirs) and Samuel Isenberg  
TO  
Mahlon M. Garland.

1900-76 Two owners occupied the structure as a dwelling.

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1976 Deed December 22, 1976, recorded in Volume 134, Page 739.  
Harry and Jewel Frazer  
TO  
Robert E. Walters.

3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. The house is a side-hall plan, two rooms deep. A one-story stone ell with gable roof and brick chimney was constructed at or about the same time as the main block. The two upstairs rooms were probably bedrooms. The large, front room downstairs was probably the living room/parlor; the rear room probably the dining room/hall; and the ell, the kitchen.
4. Alterations and additions: The house was probably unaltered until 1976 when its restoration was undertaken to permit rehabilitation. This process was well-documented by the owner. The interior walls were moved inward approximately 1' to accommodate insulation; the original walls were plaster on stone. Existing baseboards and chair rails were replaced. The exterior, originally stuccoed, is now bare stone.

The rear porch fell off and was rebuilt about 1976, in a design that approximates its original appearance.

- B. Historical Context: Stone houses were common in early-nineteenth century Pennsylvania, but not in Alexandria. The Cresswell House was built in the easternmost corner of the borough, north of the Juniata River and south of the canal path. One other residence occupied a lot to the west, perhaps the only other structure in the area; although a tannery may have stood across Main Street, northeast of Cresswell's house, it was gone by 1819.

Chairmaker Patrick Hayes was an apprentice to John Cresswell, the original building owner; Hayes operated on his own from 1815 to about 1830, prior to other mercantile and civic undertakings that include justice of the peace, county commissioner, canal and bridge contractor, and general merchant.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a three-bay Federal-style structure constructed of stone on a side-hall plan.
2. Condition of the fabric: Good.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 22' x 35,' including the one-story ell.
2. Foundations: Stone.

3. Wall construction: Double stone with rubble-stone filling.
4. Structural system, framing: The double walls have rubble-stone filling up to the gable and diminish in width from bottom to top. (Interview with the current owner who conducted the restoration.) The wall is 4' thick at the base, 3' at the basement, 2-1/2' at the first floor, 2' at the second floor, and a single-wall width at the gable. The walls recede at each floor to support the log floor joists. Thus, the rooms at the top of the building are larger than those at the bottom.
5. Porches: The one-story rear ell that faces west has an extended, shed-roofed frame porch under the secondary roof that wraps around the rear facade of the dwelling.
6. Chimneys: There are two interior gable-end brick chimneys; one on the east gable, the other on the ell's south gable end.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The front doorway is inset about 1-1/2' and the door is a new wood panel; the boxing is original.
  - b. Windows: The windows are new, with twelve-over-eight-light sash on the first floor, six-over-six-light on the second story. Interior boxing is about 1'.
8. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Gable with asphalt shingles.
  - b. Cornice: Simple boxed frame cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
  - a. Cellar: The cellar, a single large room extending the length and breadth of the house, has a dirt floor.
  - b. First floor: The entrance hall is about 5' wide and extends the full depth of the main block. The space in the northeast corner is the living room. Its fireplace features the original wood surround with modest and shallow carved Federal ornament. A door leads from this room south into the dining room, which is also accessible through the hallway. The dining room also has a fireplace, though its mantel may not be original. Beyond the dining room is the kitchen ell. A door under the main

stairway leads to the cellar stairway.

2. Stairways: The main stairway in the entrance hall is open-welled and runs along the west wall to a landing, from which the stairway turns east, then north up to the second level. It is made of cherry.
3. Flooring: The interior woodwork is predominantly cherry. The floor boards, of unequal widths running on a north-south axis, may also be cherry.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster.

D. Site:

1. General setting: Close to the southeastern border of Alexandria and fronting on Main Street, the house is bordered by the river to the south, an appliance shop on the east, and by residences on the west and north. The canal, and later the railroad, crossed Main Street just east of the Cresswell property.
2. Landscaping, enclosures: The property includes a large lawn east of the house.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Old view (in Hartslog Heritage, 27).

B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Porter Township tax records, 1819 to 1859, Huntingdon County Historical Society.

Alexandria Borough tax records, 1859 to 1873, Huntingdon County Historical Society and Huntingdon County Courthouse.

Huntingdon County Deed Books and Probate Records, Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County Tax Map -- Alexandria, 01-02-75.

Huntingdon County Historical Society survey sheets.

Interview with the current owner who rehabilitated the structure in 1976.

Harshbarger, Jean. "Historic Homes in Alexandria, Pennsylvania." Unpublished brochure written for a walking tour of Alexandria, no date.

C. Secondary and published sources:

Harshbarger, Jean P., Nancy R. Taylor, Sara H. Zabriskie and F.R. Zabriskie. Hartslog Heritage. State College, Pennsylvania: K-B Offset Printing, Inc., 1975.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Karen Genskow, Sangamon State University. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Alexandria, an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Saltsburg (Indiana County) and an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).