

Thomas and John Robinson House
711 Water Street
Saltsburg
Indiana County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5428

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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

THOMAS AND JOHN ROBINSON HOUSE

HABS No. PA-5428

- Location: 711 Water St., Saltsburg, Conemaugh Township, Indiana County, Pennsylvania.
- Present Owner: Ronald J. and Sandra Plahs.
- Present Use: Single-family residence.
- Significance: One of few extant buildings located along the canal route, the House served the same family for more than a half century, including John Robinson, a member of one of Saltsburg's most prolific mercantile families.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1841, according to tax records.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands, historically part of lot No. 183. Reference is to the Recorder of Deeds Office of the County of Indiana, Pennsylvania.

1839 Deed April 16, 1839, Volume 10, Page 421.

James Taylor, Esq.

TO

Thomas W. and John Robison (sic, prior to any construction)

1845 Deed April 3, 1845, Volume 13, Page 624.

Thomas and Elizabeth Robinson

TO

John H. Robinson

1885 Deed August 15, 1885, Volume B-48, Page 124.

John H. Robinson

TO

William and J. Edward Wallace (mentions quit-claim deed from Andrew Boggs, April 9, 1850)

1901 Deed October 5, 1901, Volume A-71, Page 610.
Juliet and J. Edward Wallace (executors for Wm. Wallace, et al.)
TO
Ella M. Beatty

1932 Deed March 31, 1932, Volume 258, Page 81.
Ella M. Beatty
TO
Joseph M. Serene

3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. The building was erected as an L-plan with gable-end chimneys; dormers with windows were probably added later.
 4. Alterations and additions: The addition of asbestos-shingle siding and some porch elements are recently. Historically, a full frame porch existed on the front facade.
- B. Historical context: The residence at 711 Water St. was erected concurrent to construction of the canal, and throughout most of the nineteenth century it served as the home of John H. Robinson. The Robinsons were one of the earliest pioneer families to arrive in the Saltsburg area. Robert Robinson (1739-1836), John H.'s grandfather, emigrated from Ireland to Philadelphia in 1770, and supported the family as a mason. His sons were John, James, and Robert; Robert's nine children included John H. and Thomas W. Robinson, both owners of the property at one point.

Thomas W. Robinson erected the building around 1840, and five years later conveyed the property to his brother John; the latter Robinson occupied the house until 1885. Both brothers were members of the Saltsburg Borough Council in the 1840s.

For additional context, twenty-one reports on other buildings in Saltsburg may be consulted, as well as overview histories of the town of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666). See also, Sara Amy Leach, ed., Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg (Washington, DC: Historica American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This modest, five-bay, one and one-half story dwelling typifies vernacular design of the period, with gable-end chimneys and dormers; it has been significantly reworked over the years.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair, although the exterior cladding is synthetic shingles.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: About 45' x 15'; ell is 20' wide (Sanborns).
2. Foundation: Stone with dressed quoin corners; partially banked.
3. Walls: Asbestos-shingle siding.
4. Structural system: Frame.
5. Porches: A modern one-story shed-roofed porch extends across the central three bays of the front facade; the roof is covered with asphalt shingles, supported on plain wood posts. An integrated porch exists on the interior facade of the ell, underneath the dual-pitch roof.
6. Chimneys: Two interior gable-end brick chimneys.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front facade features a central, single doorway; a second entrance is located at the back porch.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The first floor features six-over-six-light double-hung wood sash; the attic story contains one-over-one-light windows in each of the seven dormers.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable with asphalt shingles.

- b. Cornice, eaves: Plain and simple box with shallow returns.
 - c. Dormers: There are seven dormer windows in the attic story; five on the main block and two on the wing; each with one-over-one-light wood sash.
- C. Description of Interior: The interior of the building at 711 Water St. is arranged on a center-hall plan and includes a modest stairway.
- D. Site: 711 Water St. faces 60' on the east flank of the canal route; Water Street is to its west; Market Street and Coal Alley border it on the north and south, respectively.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Old Views and maps:

The collection of the Saltsburg Branch, Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County, Stone House Museum, contains numerous historic images.

Beers, F.W. Atlas of Indiana County. New York: F.W. Beers and Co., 1871.

Johnson, George B., and Palmer, Ann. Saltsburg--The Way It Was--An Appreciation. Indiana, Pa.: A.G. Halldin Publishing Co., 1986.

Peelor, David, and Barker, W. "Map of Indiana County, Pennsylvania." North Hector, New York: 1856.

"Saltsburg, Pa." New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Co. Ltd., February 1886; New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co. Ltd., October 1891, January 1897, July 1903; New York: Sanborn Map Company, April 1909, February 1927.

B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Indiana County, Pennsylvania, deed books and tax records.

C. Secondary and published sources:

Arms, C.T., and White, E. 1745-1880, History of Indiana County, Pennsylvania. Newark, Ohio: J. A. Caldwell, 1880.

Berringer, Gloria, ed. Canal Days Sesquicentennial: 1838-1988. No publisher, 1988.

Biographical and Historical Cyclopedia of Indiana and Armstrong Counties. Philadelphia: John M. Gresham and Co., 1891; reprinted 1982.

Johnson, George. Saltsburg and the Pennsylvania Canal. Historic Saltsburg, 1984.

McCullough, Robert, and Leuba, Walter. The Pennsylvania Main Line Canal. York, Pa.: American Canal and Transportation Center, 1973.

National Register of Historic Places Inventory, "Western Division of the Pennsylvania Canal: Indiana and Westmoreland Counties." 1979/82.

Stewart, J.T. Indiana County, Pennsylvania: Her People, Past and Present. Chicago: F.W. Beers and Co., 1913.

Wallner, Peter A. "Politics and Public Works: A Study of the Pennsylvania Canal System, 1825-1857." Ph.D diss., Pennsylvania State University, June 1973.

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, Kristin Belz, University of Virginia. 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 Saltsburg, an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Alexandria (Huntingdon County) and an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407) 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).