

Mathias Rombach House
(Saltsburg General Hospital)
321 Basin Street
Saltsburg
Indiana County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5430

HABS
PA
32-BASIN ST,
15-

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

MATHIAS ROMBACH HOUSE
(Saltsburg General Hospital)

HABS No. PA-5430

- Location: 321 Basin St., Saltsburg, Conemaugh Township, Indiana County, Pennsylvania.
- Present Owner: Guy and Dorothy Miller.
- Present Use: Single-family residence.
- Significance: This building, which was occupied as a residence by merchant Mathias Rombach for the last half of the nineteenth century and subsequently served as Saltsburg's first hospital, represents a large but modest Federal-style vernacular structure that reflects progressive enlargement and modification over the years.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1838-50. Mathias Rombach acquired the land in two sections, the first thirty-five acres in 1837, and twenty-eight additional acres in 1850. It is not known whether the building was constructed before or after the two parcels were combined.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands, historically lot Nos. 1, 2, and 3 in the Riverview Addition. Reference is to the Clerk's Office of the County of Indiana, Pennsylvania.

1837 Deed July 12, 1837, Volume 11, Page 634.
Stewart Steel (administrator for Thomas Johnston)
TO
Mathias Rombach (35 acres, part woodland, adjoining Saltsburg)

1850 Deed January 5, 1850, Volume 20, Page 459.
Andrew F. Boggs (for his mother)
TO

Mathias Rombach (28 acres adjoining Saltsburg on the east)

1908 Deed October 26, 1908, Volume 109, Page 321.

Elizabeth R. Martin

TO

Dr. E.B. Earhart

1915 Deed May 6, 1915, Volume 146, Page 202.

Walter G. Alcorn (administrator for Dr.E.B. Earhart estate)

TO

Elvira Earhart (deed names it as Saltsburg General Hospital)

1917 Deed November 26, 1917, Volume 162, Page 246.

Elvira Earhart

TO

James E., Nannie B., and Mary E. Love

3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. The five-bay building was an L-shaped block prior to various additions.
 4. Alterations and additions: The northernmost four bays, with its attached ell, were added after 1871, as were the pair of Italianate porches on the south facade. With the agglomerated additions, the building has become a modified U-plan, nine bays long on the main facade.
- B. Historical Context: The building at 321 Basin St. was built, and served for many years, as the home of the Rombach family. Sometime after 1871 the building was substantially enlarged. Matthias Rombach was a "dealer in groceries, hardware, [a] watch maker, [and a] jeweler" (Beers). He donated one acre of land to the congregation of the St. Matthew's Catholic Church for the construction of a new facility; and he gave one-half acre to Saltsburg for use as its first burial ground. Rombach's daughter married local stone mason John Martin.

On August 15, 1905, Dr. E. Bruce Earhart converted the building from a residence into Saltsburg General Hospital. Earhart, a native of Indiana County, studied and practiced at an Ohio institution--specializing in surgery and preventive medicine--before settling in Saltsburg in 1892. He was also a member of the I.O.O.F. and the Presbyterian Church. As a medical facility with accommodations for thirty-five patients, its location on the edge of town minimized the threat of highly infectious disease, and it was "equipped with all

the modern appliances for the treatment and care of the sick" (Stewart, 635).

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: The additive building at 321 Basin St. is a brick vernacular Federal form with a period frame addition, though its most notable feature is a pair of Italianate porches added to the front facade during the late nineteenth century.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Foundation: Stone, partially banked.
2. Walls: Brick laid in Flemish-bond pattern in original block; addition is constructed of brick laid in six-course American bond; corner additions are clapboard.
3. Structural system: Load-bearing brick and wood frame.
4. Porches: On the west elevation there are two raised, one-story frame porches centered over the entry and flanking windows of each residence. These boast Victorian details that include columnar supports; a wide, bracketed cornice and posts; gingerbread balustrade, and stone steps.

The interior facade of the original wing features an integrated, two-story frame porch under a continuous roofline; it is plain and in poor condition, having lost its turned posts. An exterior stair exists between the two levels here. The one-story entry porch on the south facade, Basin Street, has a gable roof, wood supports and a brick base.

5. Chimneys: There are six brick chimneys in all: one on the interior of each gable-end wall of the original block and its ell; one off-center ridge chimney in the block telescoping from the original; and one single stack in the northeast corner of that unit that probably vents a stove.
 6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main doorway in the south facade is Federal, with a single paneled door, flanking sidelights, and a solid transom (originally glazed).

A second door on this facade appears to date from the time of the addition. At least two doors exist on the rear facade, first floor; and one on the second floor, in the porch ell.
 - b. Windows: Modern aluminum one-over-one-light double-hung-sash are installed throughout the structure. On the front facade this includes seven window bays on the first floor, and nine bays on the second; and four bays on the south facade. The rear (east) and north facades feature irregular placement and form of fenestration that dates from at least the late nineteenth century. Lintels and sills are wood.
 7. Roof: Gable roofs throughout; coverings included standing-seam metal and asphalt shingles.
- C. Site: Located north of the Saltsburg Borough line, in the north corner of the intersection of Basin and High streets, the original L-plan faced the cemetery to the west, probably the one founded on land donated by Rombach; the balance of the town is to the south; and nothing substantial exists to the east or north.

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 historical 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.

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).