

LUKENS HOUSE
(Conshohocken Free Library)
301 Fayette Street
Conshohocken
Montgomery County
Pennsylvania

HABS NO. PA-6027

HABS
PA
46-CONSH,
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LEWIS LUKENS HOUSE
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Location: 301 Fayette Street, Conshohocken, Montgomery Co., Pennsylvania.

Significance: The Lewis Lukens House, currently known as the Conshohocken Free Library, is of interest in its association with the Lukens, a family that contributed greatly to the commercial, cultural and civic life of Conshohocken. It is a good example of an upper-class residence built along Fayette Street in the mid-nineteenth century.

Description: The Conshohocken Free Library is a two-and-one-half-story, five-bay Gothic Revival brick structure covered with stucco. The roof has a steep-pitched center gable forming a dominant central focus of the symmetrical facade. A Gothic lancet arch window is centered within the side and front gables. The front facade faces northwest and runs parallel to Fayette Street. The first floor has four two-over-two-light double-hung sash windows evenly spaced around a central double-door transomed entrance. The second floor has five evenly spaced six-over-six-light double-hung sash windows. Facade woodwork includes window shutters panelled at the first floor and louvered at the second floor, decorative eave brackets, and a full length porch with chamfered square posts and milled balustrade. A perpendicular two-story, gable-roofed wing intersects the rear, coplanar with the southeast elevation. To the rear of that is a single-story shed roofed addition. The building was one of the first in the area to have central heating installed.

The interior has been significantly altered for use as a library. However, a very detailed description of the interior (including floor plans) and exterior of the Lukens house appears in the Franklin Fire Insurance Company of Philadelphia Policy # 26453. The following is a summary of the main component of the policy:

The Lukens House is a 40' x 32', two-story, brick dwelling house with a 20' x 20', two-story, brick back building. The house is plastered and painted a uniform light brown color. The doors are all panelled with facings. There is portico that wraps around the front and southwest side of the house. The double pitch roof has a center gable over the front door rising to a peak level with the other roof, about 14' high. The roof projects over the front and back end with a box eave and block moulding. The cornice runs around the entire roofline and follows the peaks at the end and center gables. The roof is built of hemlock rafters covered with cypress shingles in 8" courses.

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The interior walls were plastered and painted, the floors were constructed of narrow pine and 4" mouldings existed throughout. The first floor was divided into four rooms and a hall; living room in south corner, sitting room in west corner, parlor in northeast end, and kitchen in the back. A large pantry (4' x 7') separated the living room and kitchen, and a large closet was located under the stairs in the hall. The hall ran 8' from front to back and featured double wood and glass doors with narrow sidelights, open newel stairs with a mahogany hand rail and post, turned maple balusters, and a continuous rail around the platform to the second story. The parlor had plaster cornice and ceiling moldings as well as double doors with a mortise lock and agate knobs. The windows in the living room and kitchen were six-over-six light double-hung sash while those in the parlor and sitting room were two-over-two light double-hung sash. All windows had double panelled shutters with iron strap hinges and bolts. There was also a back stair leading from the kitchen to the second floor.

The second floor was divided into a front and back section separated by a cross entry hall. The front portion contained five bedrooms and a stair hall. The north, middle and west rooms had two-over-two light double-hung sash, double panelled blinds with iron strap hinges and bolts, and wardrobe closets. The east room had six-over-six light double-hung sash, yet there is no mention of the type of windows in the south room or the stair hall. The back section contained a bedroom in the east end, a bathroom in the south corner, and a stair in the cross entry. Both rooms had six-over-six double-hung windows with double panelled blinds. The attic, or third floor, contained two rooms with a stair hall between. Both rooms and the stair hall had ten lights with Gothic heads in double-hung sash on butt hinges.

History: The Lukens family, descended from eighteenth-century immigrant Jan Lukens, settled in the Conshohocken area as farmers. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Harry and Lukens families owned most of the southern half of town, while the descendants of David Jones owned the northern half. In 1832, James Wood purchased a portion of the David Lukens farm. Lewis Lukens, son of David Lukens, joined Alan Wood's iron company in 1857. During this same year he built this house at the corner of Third Avenue and Fayette Street. Lewis Lukens served as the Borough Burgess in 1859, '60, '61, and served as director and president of the First National Bank of Conshohocken for seventeen years. His sons Charles and Jawood were involved in many Conshohocken businesses, including the Schuylkill Iron Works, the J. Ellwood Lee Company, the Longmead Iron Works, the Conshohocken Tube Works, and the Alan Wood Company. The Lewis Lukens house was given to the Borough of

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Conshohocken in 1909 to house a library. If its use as a library does not continue, the property reverts to the Lukens heirs.

The house was also the setting of the novel The Quakeress, a best seller of its day. It was written by Charles Heber Clark in 1905. The heroine was thought to be modelled after Clark's first wife, Eleanor Lukens. Clark, whose pen name was Max Adler, was a well-known humorist and writer of his era.

Sources:

Clark, Charles Heber. The Quakeress: A Tale. Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1905. Charles Heber Clark's pen name was Max Adler.

Conshohocken Historical Society files.

Franklin Fire Insurance Company of Philadelphia, Policy # 26453 (Mary Lukens), located at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Trumbull & Wiesenthal Consultants. "Pennsylvania Historical Resource Survey Form: Conshohocken Free Library (Lewis Lukens House)." July 1989. This survey form provided the date of the building's construction and much of the family history.

Historian: Janet G. Blutstein, HABS Historian, 1994.