

KEASBEY & MATTISON CO., THREE-STORY HOUSE

HABS NO. PA-6048-AE

TYPE

417 Upper Church Street

Ambler

Montgomery County

Pennsylvania

HABS
PA
46-AMB,
10AE-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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Location: 417 Upper Church Street, Ambler, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

Significance: This three-story single house is one of a series of twenty-one similar houses completed in the early 1920s by the Keasbey & Mattison Company to house their foremen and/or lower level supervisors. The houses on this street represent a transition between the duplexes closer to the railroad tracks intended for factory employees and the larger single homes for executives closer to Trinity Church and Lindenwold. As such it completed the hierarchy of employee housing constructed by the Keasbey & Mattison Company in Ambler, Pennsylvania. Architecturally, the houses represent an attempt to employ some of the more progressive design elements and variations suggested by writers familiar with company towns. They were designed for the company by Architect John Bothwell.

Description: The house is three bays by five bays, and is three stories high. The foundations and walls are of locally quarried square-cut stone set in irregular courses. The house has both full front and rear porches. The one-story front porch is supported by monolithic columns ringed by belt-courses of stone at regular intervals. A concrete slab serves as the porch floor. The porch has a modified shed roof with a large overhang and exposed rafters. The rear porch has a partial pyramid roof and a wooden deck. Wooden posts support the roof, with wooden railings. A short stone wall on each side supports the rear porch. The porch also serves as an enclosure for the basement door, reached by a set of steps descending from the backyard.

The house has one multi-flued stone chimney protruding from the west wall. The chimney is built of the same stone as the house itself and is topped with pointed castellations around its lip. This chimney style and location is standard for all the three-story single houses on Upper Church Street.

The front door is enclosed by the one-story front porch and is topped by a one-light transom light. On the south rear elevation there are two doors, one on the first floor enclosed by the rear porch and a basement door set underneath the rear porch.

The windows are a combination of older two-over-two, and modern one-over-one, double hung sash windows. Windows appear in a variety of shapes and groupings. These variations include a ribbon of three one-over-one windows in the north wall of the first floor, and another of three smaller three-over-three windows in the south wall of the first floor. Pairs of windows occur in the third floor parapets at the front and rear elevations. Pairs also occur in each dormer on the third floor,

and on the first floor adjacent to the main entry.

The house has a dual-pitched hipped or mansard roof with a wide eave overhang and long modillions which appear as false exposed rafters. A high parapeted wall dormer appears on the third floor front and rear. On both the west and east sides of the building there are continuous shed dormers running nearly the length of the roof. These each have a wide eave overhang with modillions. Each dormer has four windows: one centered pair flanked by windows.

The original floor plan is similar to those found in other Keasbey & Mattison duplexes. That is, the entry door is set to one side of the unit's main facade. The door enters into a long hall leading to a stairway to the upper floors. There is an entryway into the front room with a double-doorway into the middle or dining room. The room in the extreme rear of the first floor was used as the kitchen. A door exited from the kitchen onto the open rear porch. In many of the Keasbey & Mattison Company houses, interior walls have been removed, leaving one large front room and the kitchen.

The stairs have simple ballisters and finials atop the newel-posts. The houses on Upper Church Street were finished with simple baseboard moldings, though they were slightly more detailed than those in the duplexes on Renfrew Avenue for instance. The houses had the typical trap door in a top floor closet which provided access to the attic space. As was common in many of the three story buildings built by Keasbey & Mattison, some of the single-homes on Upper Church Street were later divided to accommodate multiple or extended families residing in the same unit. This happened on Randolph Avenue as well.

History: The houses on Upper Church Street were built in the late teens and early nineteen twenties and were designed for Keasbey & Mattison by Architect John Bothwell. In fact, Bothwell lived in at least two of the units. One was at 435 Church Street, the last house completed in the row. The houses on Upper Church street were intended for foremen and supervisors. This included, as an example from a 1928 Ambler Directory indicates, two income family of Franklin and Caroline Coldren who were employed as a clerk and an inspector respectively. It also included a fireman and paper worker who all presumably worked for Keasbey & Mattison. As the only three-story single houses that can be classified as 'row' homes, these houses represent an important link between the workers duplexes and the supervisors' detached dwellings. Their late date shows that the occupational segregation in housing did not reach its most complete form until the 1920s.

A number of roof styles are represented on Upper Church

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Street including dual-pitched-hipped roofs with inset dormers, gambrel roofs with gable ends oriented perpendicular to the street-these had hipped dormers rear and front, two types of parapeted wall dormers.

Sources: Field Survey, Summer 1994.

Sanborn Insurance Maps. Map of Ambler, 1916, 1921,
1930.

Historian: Tom Heard, HABS, Summer 1994.