

Perry Memorial Building
Erie, Pennsylvania

HABS No. Pa.-52

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PHOTOGRAPHS,
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 5- Pennsylvania

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey,
Karl E. Morrison, District Officer
319 Marine Bank Bldg., Erie, Pennsylvania

PERRY MEMORIAL BUILDING
Erie, Erie County, Pennsylvania

Owner.

City of Erie.

Date of Erection

1812.

Architect

Unknown.

Builder

John Dickson.

Present Condition

Good.

Number of Stories

Two, also attic and basement, or ground floor.

Materials of Construction:

Native woods, flat stone, brick. Original building, remodeled and repaired.

Other Existing Records:

Historical, Court Records, biographical records and personal.

Additional Data-Bibliography:

History of Erie County, Pennsylvania; Chicago, Warner Beers and Co. 1884.

A Twentieth Century history of Erie County, Pennsylvania-Chicago -1909. The Lewis Publishing Co.-John Miller, historian.

An illustrated History of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Egle, William H., M. D. Harrisburg, DeWitt C. Goodrich & Co. 1876. (Erie County by Isaac Moorhead).

History of Erie County, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, Lippincott Co. 1861 by L. G. Sanford (Laura G.) Published by author and copyrighted by her in 1894.

Nelson's biographical dictionary and historical reference book of Erie County, Pennsylvania, Erie, 1896. Two-thirds of this book by Benjamin Whitman. From the press of Wilson Humphryes and Co. Fourth Street, Logansport, Indiana.

Newspapers: Erie Daily Times, Erie Dispatch-Herald, Erie Observer. (Newspaper files of Erie Public Library.)

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The community, which in later years became the City of Erie, was but seventeen years old when Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry arrived to begin the construction of his famous fleet. A small community huddled on a few streets that now would be designated alleys, with buildings to match. The old hotel on the corner of French and Third Streets was used by Commodore Perry as headquarters during his stay in Erie. When Commodore Perry came here to superintend the building of the fleet his headquarters were at Buehler's.

"Some who read these words will remember seeing Commodore Perry, with the wounded Englishman, Commodore Barclay, leaning upon his breast, and General Harrison and all the others, coming up the hill at the foot of French Street and going to Duncan's corner of French and Third----during the war it was the headquarters of Commodore Perry and General Harrison." "Commodore Perry's room was on the south side, second story." This building is still standing (1862) but it is in ruins." These extracts from several histories give the story of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry's headquarters, except that a few years after 1862 the building was entirely demolished,* and it explains why the Perry Memorial was not the building used by him for his headquarters.

However, there is much to be said for the memorial selected. During the building of Perry's fleet, the little hamlet of Erie was filled to overflowing with five hundred or more extra people. This was a time of not only building the boats, but of building taverns, houses and stores, all of which were needed to take care of the increased population.

History again takes up the story, "Soon after the war closed John Dickson built a tavern on the corner of Second and French, known as the Steamboat House, which he carried on for many years, as in June 1825 LaFayette was here entertained at a grand banquet given in honor of his visit." "Just before the war (1812) John Dickson erected the three story frame building on the southeast corner of Second and French Streets that still stands, an antique monument of Old Erie. It was in Dickson's Hotel that the great public dinner was prepared which was served in LaFayette's honor on the Second Street bridge." "In 1809 Susan Gillespie, daughter of John married John Dickson who came from Baltimore, Md. to Erie in 1803. Just before the war of 1812 John Dickson built a tavern at the southeast corner of Second and French Streets 30 x 40 feet, two stories and basement, later he built an addition along French Street." "John Dickson served with Commodore Perry and was one of the heroes of that victory. He afterwards sailed the lakes as Captain and was interested in commerce. He built the first dock at Erie, a store and warehouse situated

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at the foot of French Street."

John Dickson's daughter Nancy married January 15, 1839 James Hoskinson. Her grandson James Hoskinson, a graduate of the class of 1889 Erie High School was accidentally killed while with the Spanish American troops preparing for service.

The ancient and historical building now designated as the Perry Memorial Building by the City of Erie, located at the southeast corner of Second and French Streets, Erie, Pennsylvania, begins its history in the patent issued by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to George Coda, to which the following record Vol. F, page 376, Erie County Court records attest- "Said lot 3229 being the same which was patented by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to George Coda by patent acted 29th of September 1806, which conveys the same to James Smith, George Thompson and James Boggs by deed bearing date 5th day of December 1807." These three men on the eleventh day of January 1808 conveyed the property to Samuel Graham who in turn conveyed it September 9, 1814 to John Dickson who erected on the plot of ground this building before or after the building of Perry's fleet in the Erie Harbor. The property was later transferred by John Dickson January 10, 1831 to Daniel Gillespie together with lot 3233 which said lot was granted to said John Dickson by the legislature of Pennsylvania by an act of General Assembly February 23, 1827. These records almost dispute the stories of the historians, and it would seem that the building was erected in 1814 and that for his services during the war John Dickson received lot 3233, but so long as there is some doubt, the records must speak for themselves.

On February 8, 1831 Daniel Gillespie conveyed the property to George Kellogg and Josiah Kellogg. November 25, 1833 George Kellogg and wife transferred to Albert C. Ramsey, consideration \$1,500 described as follows: "Beginning at corner of Second Street and French Street thence southwardly along French Street 165 feet to the corner of lot 3230 thence eastward, 165 feet by a line parallel to Second Street and thence northwardly to Second Street by a line parallel to French Street and thence westwardly along Second Street 165 feet to corner Second and French the place of beginning said lot 3229 being the same, etc."

From this record there is a gap to 1924 when the City of Erie acquired the property described as follows in the court records: Sherriff's Deed-Bridget Stanton Estate by William F. Brown, Sheriff to \$47.04 City of Erie March 3, 1924." "All the right, title, interest and claim of the defendant Margaret Stanton Executrix of Bridget Stanton, deceased of, in and to the following described real estate to wit: "All that certain piece or parcel of land situate in the First Ward of the city of Erie, County of Erie and State of Pennsylvania bounded and described as follows: Beginning at the point of intersection of the south line of Second Street with the east line of French Street;

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thence east along said south line of Second Street 115 feet to an alley, thence parallel with the south line of Second Street 115 feet to an alley, thence south along the west line of said alley 142 feet to a point; thence west and parallel with the south line of Second Street 115 feet to the east line of French Street; thence north along east line of French Street 152 feet to the place of beginning. Having erected thereon a large frame dwelling house and other out-buildings."

The Perry Memorial may have been lifted up in a New England State and carried to Erie, if it is to be judged by its exterior, which is of identical design with many old New England colonial taverns. It fronts on French Street, and originally had one wide wooden step to its front door. The door is placed exactly in the center of the building with two windows on each side of it. When the sidewalk was laid it was found necessary to add the three stone steps. It is a two-story, basement and attic building. The second floor has five windows on the French Street side, facing the west.

On the north or Second Street side, entrance is gained through the Tap Room which is located at the corner of Second and French Streets, a small room with a window on the French Street side and a door placed between two windows on the Second Street side. All of the windows on the first and second floors are 6' by 33" with 24 lights of glase. The basement has an exit on the east side of the house and there is one door on the first floor leading from the hall, and one window on the second floor. The south side of the house has two windows on both first and second floors. In the basement, to the east of the tap room, in what is now occupied by the furnace, there are two additional windows. There is another room in the basement used mostly for storage at present. When the City of Erie acquired the property in 1924 they removed a kitchen which was built toward the east of the original building, and other structures toward the south.

Perhaps the most intriguing part of this tavern are the tunnels and rooms under the basement. The walls of these tunnels and part of the supporting walls of the house are built of soft blue shale slabs laid in a rip-rap fashion on top of each other. There are many such tunnels under taverns in the New England States. It is said the tunnels under the Perry Memorial were used during the pre-Civil War days as a part of the "underground railroad" which operated in Erie and vicinity.

As you enter the front door a small vestibule confronts you, with seven steps to the wide hall and its fine colonial stairway with mahogany rail and treads set off by white risers and balustrade hand turned and scroll work. On the side of the hall are two large almost square rooms, the two on the north side being used as parlors and the southeast rooms

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as a kitchen and dining room. Under the stairway are steps leading to the cellar or basement terminating at the large sliding doors of the tap room. These doors are fitted with glass tops. On the second floor originally were six bedrooms, one of which has been changed into a bath room.

The exterior of the house on the French Street side is fitted with a colonial cornice, and a hip roof with half pitch. It has two chimneys, but no cornice on any other part of the house. The original shingles are said to be still on the roof, covered with slate, and all original doors even in the basement have been retained. A small part of a cellar wall has been broken through for a door and an outside entrance walled up. The well in the yard is still there. Flagstones of shale are under almost the entire east yard a few feet below the surface.

In the northeast room on the first floor, on either side of the fire place bookcases were built, each with two solid wooden doors ornamented with glass knobs and old catches. The left hand bookcase has seven shelves, three of which are fitted with pigeon holes. The right hand bookcase has five large roomy shelves. The doors of the rooms have solid butt hinges and old style double locks. There is one attic window facing south, two chimneys, one on the north and one on the south. The roof has two gables. The main entrance has double doors swinging inward. The floors are of white pine tongued and grooved by hand, random widths. In one of the rooms of this Memorial the first Roman Catholic services held in Erie were conducted. The City of Erie is restoring the Tap Room.

Anne Scott Baxter

Approved

Paul E. Morrison Dist. off.
July 24, 1936

* See Erie Weekly Observer of January 14, 1869, article entitled "Commodore Perry's Head-quarters. Another old Land Mark Removed."

"Buehler's Erie Hotel, "latterly known as the "McConkey House", northeast corner of French and Third Streets, is rapidly being demolished."

Reviewed July 30, 1936 TFCW.

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"Mch. 26, 1874 - The Erie Observer - "Old French Street and Presque Isle Bay by John Ashbough - "Mr. Editor: "It may be proper to state that the articles of mine (save the last) written for the Observer resulted from recollection and observation. In this paper and the one published last week I have - save in a few items - gathered from history and the lips of those advanced in life such facts as I present. I find some discrepancies and trust such of your readers as discover errors will rectify them.

Upon the northeast corner of French and Second streets there was a log house occupied by Mrs. Catharine O'Neil. A high bridge extended on Second, between French and State streets. Southeast corner French and Second was Dicksons in 1815. Dickson came to Erie in 1809, had been a sailor and was generally engaged in the lake trade. In his house the dinner was prepared which was given to La Fayette and suite under the bower on the Second street bridge.

"The Mirror", the first newspaper in Erie, was issued from Dickson's corner by Mr. Wyeth from Dauphin county. In front of Dickson's house, it is said, was placed the first brick pavement laid in Erie. Just east of Dickson's was the two-story log store of Thomas Wilson*** P. S. V. Hamot commenced selling goods here with Mr. Wilson. Opposite Dickson's west (south-west corner), was the well-known Cummin's Tavern. It was a large building.*** Capt. John Cummins was an army officer and kept this house for more than a score of years.*** very near the corner of Third and French was a log house built in 1804 and owned by Conrad Brown. It is said the first Court held in Erie county was organized in this building.*** Directly east and opposite was the house known as Duncan's in 1812 and subsequently known as Buehlers, Bees and McConkey's. (Bees should be Rees, evidently typographical error). John McElroy and John Warren built this house, John Warren came here in 1800. During the war it was the headquarters of Commodore Perry and General Harrison. Commodore Perry's room was on the south side, second story. Here Purser Magrath committed suicide.***

Midway between Third and Fourth streets and on the west side of French was the famous Old Red Store and warehouse of Reed. Giles Sanford (father of the historian) Stephen Woolverton, William W. Reed and Thomas Forster clerked for Mr. Reed. "Old Judd", preached there occasionally. Camp started the Academy in the old store and here the Presbyterians organized the first Sunday school in 1821. Miss Elizabeth Rees was one of the teachers.*** Opposite the Red Store was a two-story log house which in 1812 was known as Dickson's Tavern. It was built by a German named Lehman in 1808. Cowgill, the old Quaker, afterwards lived there, and died in 1822 aged 76. Captain M. Connor had a sail-makers' shop here after the war."

Information furnished by

Miss Annie Scott Baxter, Sept. 6, 1938
218 Peach St., Erie, Penna.

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Quotation from Miss Baxter's letter:

"Please note that in 1812 and to 1815 Dickson was located in a Tavern between Third and Fourth on French (Streets here, numbered from Bay south). But in 1815 (quite a while after the Battle of Lake Erie) Dickson evidently built at Second and French streets the place now designated as the Perry Memorial. The writer makes a point of the 1815, with the follow-up of his Tavern in 1812. So that some writer, coming along has presumedly thought that the two places were one and the same. But he is extremely clear in regard to the tavern at which Commodore Perry stopped, even quoting the suicide to impress the fact. The facts as presented by this writer and the former one and backed by Miss Laura G. Sanford, whose father, as noted above, clerked across the street, would seem to be indisputable."

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