

Notes regarding the following text

The following text was taken from the original National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, dated June 30, 2005. Corrections were made to typographical, grammatical, and formatting errors. No intent was made to alter the facts as presented, only to improve the readability of the document.

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT:

Built in 1773, the Pearson house was the home of Isaac Pearson, an important political figure in Burlington County and leader of the Burlington County delegation to the New Jersey Provincial Congress in 1775-76. As the colonial period ended, he was Nottingham Township's most successful officeholder. He was a leader of the congress when its objective was to protest to the British Crown for redress of grievances, but he was defeated for re-election in the spring of 1776, when public opinion turned decisively toward independence, a goal he evidently did not share. Pearson (1739-1776) was a conservative Anglican who held office under appointment from the royal governor, and he was thought by some Tories to be a Tory himself, but he was cautious and evidently took no immediate position. He was killed by Continental Army soldiers two days after the battle of Trenton, before he could make his true position known. In the circumstances of his life and death, he was, symbolically at least, a larger figure in the American Revolution than he has ever been given credit for being, for his experience, perhaps more than anyone else's, distills the essence of what it meant as a civilian to be caught up in Trenton's "ten crucial days," when the fledgling United States came as close as it ever would to losing the Revolution. The nominated property possesses statewide significance under National Register criterion B in politics and government for its association with Pearson, and local significance under criterion A for association with the Hessian occupation of Trenton and Bordentown. It also meets criterion C for local architectural significance as an outstanding example of the blending of a vernacular Georgian farmhouse with the southern New Jersey patterned brickwork tradition.

Background History¹

The land that today contains the Isaac Pearson house started out as part of a farm, actually two farms that Isaac Pearson's father, Robert Pearson II bought in 1716 and 1723 and merged. One was the Rogers-Atkinson farm, and the other was the Schooley-Lambert-Tindall farm. From the 1680s until the 1840s, this land was part of Nottingham Township in Burlington County. Today it forms part of the western edge of Hamilton Township in Mercer County.²

PEARSON HOUSE DESCRIPTION:

The Isaac Pearson house is a large, unusually fine, 2-story, 5-bay, double-pile, brick house, with a center-hall plan, built in 1773 in a vernacular interpretation of the Georgian style and in the southern New Jersey patterned brickwork tradition. The date "1 7 7 3" is worked into the west gable, in vitrified headers. The foundation of the house is composed of fieldstone, and a cellar extends under the entire house. Both the south and west elevations have been stuccoed. The north facade is painted, but not stuccoed. The east elevation exhibits rough brick masonry. The house has a gable roof with a ridge that parallels the facade. Two interior end chimneys, one on the east and the other on the west, pierce this ridge and maintain the Georgian symmetry. The roof had originally been of wood shingle and was resingled in wood several years ago. Most of the original 1773 interior wood and plasterwork remains intact. Some interior changes of a minor nature were made during the Federal period, and somewhat more extensive but still minor changes were made during the early Victorian era. Replacement windows were installed throughout the house during the second half of the 20th century, but they were installed within the original openings, leaving the original frames intact. Utilities were also added during the 20th century, and other minor changes made.

Setting and Outbuildings

The Pearson house stands on the south-facing bluff that overlooks Interstate 195, Crosswicks Creek, and the Trenton marsh in what is called the White Horse section of Hamilton Township, Mercer

County, New Jersey. The house, however, faces northerly, toward U.S. Route 206 (South Broad Street) about a quarter mile away. Thus, its rear elevation overlooks the marsh. It stands on a parcel of approximately three acres-the nominated property-that extends from Hobson Avenue on the west side easterly along the south side of Erneline Avenue from its intersection with Hobson. The alignment of Hobson jogs slightly to the westward as it approaches the Pearson house, and the easterly curb line of Hobson comes within a few feet of the west wall of the house.

The house as it stands today is missing a kitchen wing that it originally possessed, and it is missing its entire complement of historic outbuildings. Archaeological testing was undertaken on this property during the late 1970s and afterward for the "Trenton complex" highway project, and the results of that testing are explained in published archaeological reports (see the Significance Statement and Major Bibliographic References). The property is currently owned by Hamilton Township. Most, if not all, of the historic outbuildings of the property would have stood on this parcel. The road from Trenton to White Horse that existed in 1773, prior to the creation of South Broad Street along its current alignment, may also have extended through this property, but its precise alignment is not known.

Exterior

North facade

The north-facing elevation of the house is its front side. The brickwork of this elevation is stuccoed only up to the water table course and painted above. The brick is laid in Flemish bond, and although the headers are covered by the paint, judging from their textures they do not appear to be vitrified. This facade, like the south elevation, is symmetrical; it features a first-floor entrance in the center bay flanked by two windows on either side and five windows across the second story. This entry is accessed by a small concrete porch probably added during the early 20th century. The first-floor windows feature splayed, flat arch lintels constructed of limestone or marble. These lintels were undoubtedly expensive, as they were not used for the window lintels of the second story or in the rear

elevation. They are each formed apparently from a single piece of stone and have been carefully cut and tooled to display a keystone flanked by two voussoirs on either side. The second-story window lintels are keystone flat arches constructed inexpensively of wood. One original wrought iron shutter dog remains in place on a first-story window, but all the original shutter pintles remain. Shutter dogs for the second-story windows are 19th-century replacements, presumably to accommodate 19th-century replacement shutters, now missing. The windows still contain their original wood frames except that the sills have been replaced with early 20th-century brick (1920s?) and that considerable deterioration is evident in some of the frames. As was common during this period, the window frames were constructed with mortise and tenon joints pinned through the face, and these pins are quite evident in the upper corners of the frames. The frames are characteristically finished with a Roman ovolo molding terminated with a quark. As noted above, the window sashes were replaced in the 20th century. Two electric service meters have been installed near the northwest corner, at breast height. An exterior electrical plug has been installed easternmost window.

South elevation

This elevation is finished in a gray, Portland-cement stucco. Like the north facade, this elevation presents a 2-story, 5-bay appearance with a single door in the center bay of the first story. A concrete porch of 20th-century construction accesses the entry. The entry door is a 20th-century replacement in the original 18th-century opening that has its original door frame largely intact. At cellar level, a bulkhead entrance into the basement occupies the southwesternmost bay. The present bulkhead doors are constructed of steel and were installed during recent decades. The windowsills are stuccoed over. They are probably brick replacement sills under the stucco (jutting from the north elevation). There is a stringcourse running under the sills of the second-story windows; that, too, is stuccoed over. This stringcourse suggests that a pent roof was originally present across the south elevation, but the stucco prevents confirmation of this hypothesis. The windows, like those in the north facade, exhibit horizontal 2/2 replacement sash in original window frames. These face-pinned window frames all exhibit their original

lintels and original perimeter Roman ovolo moldings. The window lintels in the first story are plain (stuccoed over); those of the second story are splayed, wooden lintels with a keystone flanked by two voussoirs in flat arches. The original cornice has been replaced with a colonial-revival box cornice in wood, not based on any careful research. There are no cellar windows in the south elevation. A rectangular opening has been cut into the south wall between the first and second windows to the left of the front door. A vent with cover has been installed between the door and a flanking window during the second half of the 20th century, suggesting that after the demolition of the kitchen wing, the southeast first floor room was converted for kitchen use. Utility-related connections have also been made through this south wall.

West Elevation

Stucco covers the west end wall of the house, obscuring all detail of the brickwork except the date "1773" worked into the gable with vitrified headers as noted above. Only one window in the first story and two garret windows, one each on either side of the chimney stack, pierce this wall. In addition to the date, this end wall features an pent roof at the base of the gable, just below the date. The box cornice is continuous around the comers of the house, but whether this cornice was entirely replaced during the re-roofing several years ago is unclear. The presence of the pent roof and the date in the gable mark this house as an example of patterned brickwork and domestic architecture usually associated with southern New Jersey Quakers (even though its owner was not, himself, a Quaker).

East Elevation

The east elevation is a nearly featureless wall of common brick, roughly cemented. A kitchen wing originally stood attached to this side of the building, but it was long ago demolished, leaving no clear ghost of its size in the masonry. A doorway has been cut into the first story, from the southeast room, but the framing that encloses this doorway is clinched with cut nails, indicating that the doorway is a 19th-century alteration, not an original feature. Whether an original doorway once enabled access from the first story to the kitchen wing would seem entirely likely but is not apparent. A small

cinder-block porch of possibly ca.1950 gives access to this doorway, indicating its continued use in the second half of the 20th century, probably by the last private owner. This also suggests that the demolition of the kitchen wing occurred at that time. Since the cinder block is covered with a thin layer of the same pink stucco that appears on the west elevation wall (underneath the gray stucco outer coat), this may indicate that both layers of stucco were applied during the second half of the 20th century. Two small windows in the garret pierce the brick wall, and their location may indicate some limit to the height of this wing. One small window in the second story lights the transverse passage (see below); it may be a later window resulting from an alteration that may be associated with the demolition of the missing wing.

The Interior **Cellar**

The cellar is accessed down a set of rough, wooden steps that descend under the principal staircase. These steps may be original construction. The basement is divided into north and south halves by a transverse bearing wall constructed of fieldstone. The cellar has a dirt floor. Access from the outside was through a bulkhead on the south side, still very much present, with stone steps and cheek walls and a wood lintel. Twentieth-century plumbing, heating, and electrical equipment were concentrated in the basement. Two stacks support the chimneys of the east end wall. Several of the exposed first-floor joists in the cellar have been replaced during the 20th century, especially underneath the approximate location of the principal staircase. Two doorways in the transverse partition wall are framed with unfinished, heavy oak posts and lintels.

First Story

The first story exhibits a center-hall plan, with a central stair hall flanked by two parlors on the west side and front and rear halls on the east side. The flooring is undoubtedly a wide board flooring, probably like that of the second floor, but has been obscured by the addition of plywood and linoleum over the years. The original ceiling throughout the first story is approximately nine feet above the floor. The effective ceiling height is several inches lower where drop ceilings have been installed. Heating is delivered throughout

the house through baseboard units.

The center hall has been modified by the installation of a hall closet during the second half of the 20th century. The present stair balustrade and other finish surfaces are of Victorian construction, but the stair, itself may, indeed, be in its original location. Inexpensive 20th-century paneling has been applied to the walls and a suspended ceiling has been installed over the hallway. The south entry door is a late 20th-century replacement; the north (front) entry door is a 2nd-quarter 19th-century replacement butt hung on approx. 30-inch-long strap hinges that may be reused from the original door. The door features four horizontal panels with shallow, raised fields and framed at the stiles and rails with unornamented Grecian ovolo moldings. This door has a set-in four-light horizontal transom, also apparently of 18th-century origin, probably original.

The northwest room has an original comer fireplace with a fancy, marble fascia around a shallow firebox. The replacement chimney piece (fireplace mantel) is of vaguely Colonial Revival design, but the original 18th-century overmantel paneling is still in place above it. A stovepipe was pierced through this overmantel during the 19th century. The rest of the room exhibits plaster walls over which inexpensive 20th-century paneling was installed. A cheap, 20th-century cornice was installed over this paneling. The presence of an original, 18th-century cornice above the overmantel is suggested, but is disguised by some sort of 20th-century covering. Confirmation of the cornice will require removal of this covering. No other original features are apparent, but a careful dismantling of the 20th-century accretions should be undertaken to determine whether other original features are hidden.

An opening formed in the 20th-century by partial removal of the transverse brick wall between the front and rear rooms gives access from the northwest into the southwest room. The wall that originally occupied the space between these two rooms was taken out and 2x4s installed to take up the space. It is unclear what the original configuration of this wall between these rooms was, whether there originally was a door in this location, when this wall was altered, or

whether it was altered before these 20th-century changes were made. There is a suggestion in the physical evidence that the wall was taken out at some prior time. In the southwest room a corner fireplace shares the chimney stack that provides the corner fireplace for the northwest room, in good, 3rd- quarter 18th-century fashion. This fireplace is better preserved than its mate, with a hearth of bricks, a shallow firebox as in the northwest room, but without marble facing. The fireplace is surrounded by the original chimney piece. This includes the heavy bolection molding that covers the joint between the firebox and the surrounding paneling. The entire, original overmantel is present, except where a stovepipe was cut through.

The hearth is paved with regular common bricks; no special paving bricks were used. An iron plate serves as a lintel in the firebox. There is some evidence that this room served as a kitchen or pantry in the 20th century because there are some cabinets from that period still in place. The west end wall of the room contains a large window surrounded with an original, large roman ovolo molding like that around the interior window frames of all the other original windows. This window, too, has been replaced, like the others, with horizontal 2/2 sashes. There is a small, possibly original cornice treatment around the entire room. This may be the best preserved of the downstairs rooms.

In the southwesterly corner of the room, one wall of the room is an 18th-century corner cupboard, divided into upper and lower closets. The top closet includes a three-panel door with raised, fielded panels. It is held with L-shaped strap hinges that are butted on the left side, top and bottom (butt-L hinges). The bottom closet has a single-panel door is also held by butt-L hinges. (These are, in effect, transitional between the "H-L" hinges that were previously popular and the butt hinges that would become popular during the Federal era). The latch hardware for the closet doors is brass and probably of 20th-century make. There is no physical hint of what the original closet door handles were, but small knobs seem likely. The top closet contains five shelves (including the bottom) with a double bead on the shelf edge, but the shelves are simply triangular, and not scalloped. The top closet door has three hooks

on the inside of the second rail and the ghost of a rim lock. The lower closet has a ghost of a missing rim lock, seemingly the mate of the one above.

The southwestern room also has an original cornice running all the way around the room. The east wall exhibits unclear evidence of its history, evidently having been altered in the 20th century, but with a sequence of alterations and for purposes that are not entirely clear. This wall deserves further investigation. (One speculation is that the east end of the room may have been altered to accommodate a moving of the staircase in the 19th century from a different original location to its current position, but there is no convincing evidence that the stair was moved. There are two openings from the southwest room into the hallway and to the basement steps.

The **northeast room** shows evidence of many changes, including some 19th-century changes to the window frames, probably in the Victorian era. A late 20th-century dropped ceiling covers a higher ceiling (probably the original ceiling) and this recent installation will need to be removed to investigate whether an original cornice is still present in this room. A chimney in the east wall projects into the room and faces the door from the stairhall. It has a firebox that is finished with a marble (or faux marble) fascia and probably dates from the late Federal period or the Greek Revival era. It appears to be complete with outer paneling from that period.

The firebox is fitted with a fancy, Federal style, cast iron firebox liner, worn, but still of a recognizable pattern (acanthus leaves?). There are no breast closets. The walls are covered in late 20th-century cheap paneling. The door from the stairhall is finished with 19th-century Greek Revival (probably) molding profile with a double architrave (ck) motif with corner blocks that display a Grecian ovolo molding within the block. The baseboard also has a Grecian ovolo molding, indicating that the entire room was refurbished during the Greek Revival period. Its original appearance is not evident from the physical evidence currently available. There is an opening between the northeast and southeast rooms, apparently also of 19th-century construction.

The **southeast room** has a similar fireplace, partly disfigured by 20th-century alterations. It does not have a fancy firebox liner but may once have had. The floor has been built up with linoleum and possibly plywood. Baseboard heating units extends along the perimeter of the room, as elsewhere in the house. The doorway from the hall is original, but the door, itself, is also of the same four-panel construction as the front door previously described.

The stairway is a mid-19th-century staircase, with a balustrade featuring an elliptical handrail, a Italianate newel post with a tapered, octagonal shaft, a mortgage button. The balusters are turned from top to bottom. There is a landing sixteen steps above the floor, at about 80 percent of the distance between the floors, at which the direction of the stair makes two 90-degree turns before climbing a few more steps to the second floor. The landing is lit by the middle, second-story window.

Second Story

The second story also possesses nine-foot-high ceilings. In the second story, the center hall is truncated by the original northeast room, which originally extended in a transverse direction to the northwest room. Part of this space has been reconfigured for a pair of closets along the wall between the northeast and northwest rooms (see second floor plan). From the upstairs hall, doors open into a closet and into four bedchambers. The original flooring can be seen in this upstairs hall, a wide but random-width flooring of usually seven to eleven inches.

The southwest room is entered through its original door from the hall. This room has a 20th-century clothes closet built out from the southwest corner. The northwest corner has its complete original fireplace, with hearth, firebox, its molded surround and its overmantel paneling. Original, square paving bricks survive in this hearth. Such bricks were a fine and fancy touch, usually seen only in the better houses of this period. The floor has been built up with plywood. A cornice extends around the room; it may be original or may not. The door from the hallway into the southwest room is probably the original door into this room. Like most of the doors on

this floor, it is a six-panel interior door with raised, fielded paneling, currently painted a dull brown.

The original latching hardware is gone, and the original hinges were replaced in the 19th century with a pair of two-cylinder butt hinges, leaving a ghost behind. A passage has been cut into the partition wall between the southwest and northwest rooms sometime in the 20th century, as was done on the first floor.

The northwest room features an original corner fireplace in the southwest corner. It contains a shallow firebox with regular 18th-century common brick (not a fancy treatment) used in the hearth, a wrought iron lintel supporting a brick flat arch, and the original wood moldings surround the firebox. Above the firebox and flanking it, however, where one might expect overmantel paneling, a stone veneer (or possibly a fake stone veneer) has been installed, set in cement. A door in the northeast corner of this room accesses a closet (one of the two noted above) constructed probably during the 19th century, within space that was probably originally the end of the northeast bedroom. The closet shows evidence of having been fabricated with cut nails. The doorway into the northwest room from the center hall is a late 19th-century replacement door hung on butt hinges and other Victorian-era hardware. It provides access to the other 19th-century closet constructed within space taken from the northeast room.

The bedroom at the north end of the center hall-the northeast room-is accessed through an original opening, which indicates that it accessed what was an original room of the house. The door into this room is an original, 18th-century, six-panel door, without its butt-L hinges. It is currently hung on 20th-century butt hinges, but ghosts remain from the original hardware. A 19th-century doorknob that it once possessed is also missing.

This bedroom is currently small, but once evidently extended to the northeast corner of the floor (see below). This room contains an original two-panel closet door, but in an opening that is suspect, seemingly having been altered. This closet door was originally supported on a pair of butt-L hinges, the ghosts of which are plainly

visible. The closet that the door provides access to is apparently original; in it there are hand-headed nails (but unclear whether they are cut nails or wrought nails).

The **southeast room** is an original room, with its original doorway from the hall and its original 6-panel door like the others already described. It evidently was the principal bedchamber and is the best-preserved of the upstairs rooms. The room still possesses its original cornice and its entire original fireplace panel wall. The fireplace opening is flanked by large closets on both sides with original doors. There has been some deterioration of the wood paneling in the southeast corner of the room, near the window, which offers the wood no protection from sunlight streaming in.

A chair rail extends around the sides of the room; it may be either original or a 19th-century replacement. The age of the existing baseboard also deserves to be questioned. The doors are carried on butt-L hinges, and some of the hinges are held in place with screws of undetermined age. The firebox is shallow and been built out a couple of times and is currently finished with a white brick veneer set in cement. The hearth is finished with original, square hearth bricks that have almost a red glazed finish.

A 19th-century four-panel door set into a Victorian period opening occupies the northeast corner of this southeast room. This opening accesses a short, transverse passage that gives access to the original door to the attic and the attic stair. This passage is positioned between the southeast room and the northeast room. Four steps lead up to the door to the attic. This door is original, a board-and-batten door, with one wide and two relatively narrow boards. It is held by an original wooden, hand-carved latch, and the door is held with two original H-L hinges (no need for the fancier, more stylish, butt-L hinges here).

The northeast corner room was in recent decades a bathroom. This was probably originally a small bedroom and possibly was one with the adjacent room that contains the 18th-century closet. A partition has set off this corner room at least since the 19th century, but there do not appear to be any 18th-century indicators of a partition. There is still a firebox in the original chimney and possibly some evidence of original finish treatments. The ceiling in this northeast room was

replastered in the 19th century and a suspended ceiling was added in the 20th century when the room was converted to a bathroom.

Garret

Beyond the attic door in the transverse passage, the stair to the garret, or attic, is a straight flight, with several additional steps. The north side wall of this closed staircase is finished with rough 1+1/2-inch boards, some of which still show bark or wane edges right out of the sawmill (no need for finish treatment in this location). The south side wall is the brick, transverse wall that runs up through both sides of the house. A railing at the top of the stair appears to have been fashioned with old materials but fastened with wire nails.

The garret is a single, open space. The rafters are a combination of original rafters, and new wood rafters of the same sectional dimensions, used in the two ends of the roof nearest the chimneys. These new rafters were installed during the re-roofing of the house several years ago. This re-roofing job did away with the original furring strips and the original shingles, which had remained in place under later layers of roofing. One original shingle was secured during this re-roofing project. Later testing revealed that the wood species used was bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), an unusual and probably expensive shingle at the time of installation. The original shingles were two feet long, hand planed, and were set with a ratio of 2.5:1 (length to exposure), or about 9 and a quarter inches exposed, and the original battens or furring strips were spaced to foster this exposure. This was not understood by the contractor who undertook the recent reroofing, who unnecessarily removed these furring strips and installed new ones set to an 8-inch reveal pattern that is not historically correct for this house. The new shingles are also narrower on average than the original shingles were, by about one-quarter to one-third (the salvaged shingle, which was observed to be of about average width). There are no collar beruns or other ties. The roof is supported on stout and closely spaced common rafters from plate to apex. During the reroofing, 2x4 lumber was used to provide some additional transverse support for the rafters.

The openings on the west end are original but filled with fixed louvered sash and there is a considerable runout of deterioration that will require repair. The original windows were probably single, hinged casements

of six lights. The chimney on the west end ascends straight without corbeling. The two chimney stacks of the east end corbel together. There are two original openings on this end also, which probably held four-light casement windows that are no longer present. The masonry and carpentry elements here will also require considerable repair.

SOURCES:

1. William M. Dwyer, in his book *The Day is Ours!*, mistakenly thought Pearson was an old man in 1776 (he was 37), but he did contribute that Captain Thomas Rodney of Delaware was an important witness concerning the events surrounding Pearson's death.
- 2 Trenton Complex Archaeology, Report 12 (hereafter simply "*Trenton Complex Archaeology*"), chapter 5 (Tindall-Pearson farm), esp. 170-207.
- 3 Ibid., 184.
- 4 Hamilton Schuyler, *A History of Saint Michael's Church, Trenton* (Princeton, NJ: 1926): 27, 42-46.
- 5 Schuyler, 103-104; *Trenton Complex Archaeology*, 189.
- 6 *Trenton Complex Archaeology*, 188.