

The Martin Berry House

Pompton Plains, Pequannock Township, NJ
Pequannock Township Historical Society



Excerpts from *Martin Berry House Preservation Plan* by HMR Architects, 1 March 2016, Pages 13-21.

<http://www.pequannockhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Martin-Berry-House-Preservation-Plan-HMR-Architects-Mar-2016.pdf>

History of the Martin Berry House

The Berrys

According to local historians, the Berry family arrived in this area between 1710 and 1712, making them some of the first families of Pequannock. The progenitor of the family, Samuel Berry, emigrated from Holland before 1690 and married Catalyte Ryerson, daughter of Martin Ryerson and Annetje Rapalje on May 31, 1690. Upon the death of Samuel in 1702, Catalyte married Paulus Van Der Beck in 1703. Van Der Beck had significant land holdings and through him, Martin Berry, his stepson, acquired his land which extended from today's Newark-Pompton Turnpike to the Pompton River and on both sides of Jackson Avenue.

Martin Berry was born in 1693 and married Maria Roome (1693-1734) on April 15, 1720. With the establishment of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1736, Martin Berry was named a deacon and his stepfather, Paulus Van Der Beck was named an elder. It is believed that at some point after his marriage in 1720 but before 1736 when he was known to live locally, he built the original house on the property...

Upon his death in 1784, Martin Berry passed to "sons Henry Berry and Jacob Berry my old place I now possess and live in, the land to be divided between them, Henry to have the Northernmost with the improvements there on..." The "improvements" mentioned are the house; the house, therefore, passed to Henry and his wife Keziah DeMott Berry... Henry passed away on February 19, 1817...

The house passed to his son Henry H. Berry... In his 1833 will, Henry H. Berry left, "my beloved wife Leah Berry the use and occupation of one room in the home I now live in during her widowhood and that my youngest son Henry H. Berry furnish her with such necessaries during said term she may need...I give my said loving wife the bed and bedding [sic] on which I now lay... I give and bequeath to my youngest son Henry Berry and to his heirs and assigns forever my homestead whereon I now live together with all the residue of my lands..." Upon the death of Henry H. Berry in 1833, the property passed to his son Henry H. Berry and Elizabeth Mandeville Berry...



South Façade, 2016

The Grahams

In 1862, Henry H. sold the 34 ½-acre property to James and Eliza Kidd Graham. They had seven children. The Grahams lived in the house for 14 years. According to his obituary, James Graham left farming to run the Passaic Spring brewery in Paterson in 1872. He missed farm life so returned to Pompton "in later years." He died in 1902 at the age of 74. The Grahams do not seem to appear in the 1870 census but in 1880 they are in Wayne; he was listed as a farmer. According to local tradition, the Grahams moved directly across the river from the Berry farm having purchased the Philip Schuyler farm.

Mary W. Dwight

In 1876, the Grahams sold the 19.89-acre farm to the widow, Mary W. Dwight.

James R. and Julia A. Evans

In 1879, James R. Evans and his wife, Julia, purchased the farm... James R. Evans was a decorated Civil War hero... In 1895, James R. Evans received the Congressional Medal of Honor. His citation read, Evans "went out in front of the line under fierce fire and, in the face of the rapidly advancing enemy, rescued the regimental flag with which the color bearer had fallen." His act got him promoted to Captain.

Evans was the local postmaster and served as justice of the peace; he also was employed by the Greenwood Lake Railroad company.

The Mays

In 1891, the Evanses sold the 19.89-acre farm to Lockwood R. May of Brooklyn, New York for \$5,000. Lockwood worked at the Custom House in Brooklyn and like Evans, was a Civil War veteran... He and his wife, Jessie M. (born on May 1, 1864) and son, William (born in 1889) lived in the house for five years when Lockwood died and Jessie and William inherited the property. After the loss of her husband, Jessie married August R. Schulz in 1898. In 1910, they were listed as living on the Boonton Turnpike in Lincoln Park. The farm, therefore, may have been rented out, although later in life, William recalled spending his teenage years on the Farm. According to Eleanor Bogert, Mrs. May took in boarders and called it "Mayfield."



North Façade, 2016

Jessie was an amateur photographer who had a dark room in the house. Several photographs attributed to her survive. Jessie sold off 11+ acres. The area behind the house became known as "Mayfield Park;" the houses on the 25' X 100' building lots at Highland and May Avenues and a section of Cedar Road remain today. Under the May family tenure, the property ceased to be a farm.

The Eberles

In 1916, Warren C. Eberle and his wife, Ellis, purchased the 8.25-acre property... The Eberles may have been the first to add a heating system to the house. They owned the property for five years and according to Eleanor Bogert, closed up four of the fireplaces.

The Meekses

In 1921, Ludlow and Louise Meeks purchased the 8.25-acre property... At some point in the early 1930s, the State of New Jersey reduced the property to 6.62 acres by taking the eastern edge of the property for rerouting of State Highway 23 through the meadows and out of the center of town...

Following the opening of the Route 23 in 1936, the Meekses opened a few rooms of the house for dining calling it the "Stone House Inn." The Meekses had their kitchen in the basement in the northeast corner. They installed a dumbwaiter to bring up food for the restaurant; it remains in the basement but was removed from the upstairs by the next owner. The parking lot for the restaurant was south of the house on Route 23; they added the stone steps that connect this area to the house. The Meekses had chickens and built the chicken house that remains today... In 1938 during the Great Depression the Home Owner's Loan Corporation foreclosed on the property...

The Glens

In 1941, Mr. and Mrs. John Glenn purchased the house and 6.62 acres from the Home Owners' Loan Corp. The Glens moved the kitchen upstairs to the northeast room (where it is today) and converted the basement to a shop selling southern crafts like woven rag runs, splint baskets, hearth brooms, hooked rugs and mats and hand thrown pottery...

The Bogerts

In 1951, Eleanor and Charlie Bogert purchased the house and property along with the 150-foot lot which resulted in 2.75 acres property. When the Bogerts bought it, the house had been on the market for two years and was in need of repair. They removed all the wallpaper, extensively patched the plaster and painted. They also removed years of paint from the wood floors. They kept the existing sash but replaced the glass and muntins, changing their configuration from one-over-one to the present twelve-over-twelve. They removed a modern roof (red hexagonal tiles) and installed cedar shakes. They opened up all of the fireplaces; they used a coal burning furnace until upon the death of Charlie, Eleanor had an oil furnace installed.

Construction Chronology

The Berry House is a 1 ½ story Dutch stone house with a gambrel roof. With early 18th century beginnings, the current house likely went through at least five phases of construction. The first three were completed by the Berry family over its 150 year tenure in the house. The fourth phase was completed by the May family at the very end of the 19th century. The Bogerts completed the last in the second half of the 20th century.

Original, Martin Berry, ca. 1720

Assuming that oral tradition and previously completed archival research is correct, Martin Berry was married in

1720 and first showed up in the local public records in 1736. This, in conjunction with his reference to his house being “old” in his 1784 will, has caused the assumption that ca. 1720, Martin Berry constructed the original section of the house. This is both plausible and likely. There is a distinct difference between the first-floor framing at the southwest corner of the building and the other first floor framing. There is also a large fireplace base along the west wall, indicating that at one time, it supported a much larger fireplace above it. Finally, there is documented proof of European settlement in the area by this time. While not many of these original buildings survive, this one seems to have, at least in part.

The original house was roughly 30 ft. across the south and 21 ft. deep. It was one to 1 ½ stories, stone, oriented south, built into the hill with a full basement that likely had grade level access at the east. It had a “family room and hall” plan with a side hall running the full depth of the east end. The hall was one room, slightly deeper than the southwest parlor today and was the kitchen and living space for the family. There was a large cooking fireplace on the west wall, possibly jambless as this was typical for the Dutch at this point. The floor joists were likely exposed and there were probably two windows at the front. The interior walls were likely plastered; tradition holds that the Dutch tended to plaster their interior walls. This room was the center of the Berry family life. Here is where most of the indoor living—cooking, eating, and laboring—occurred. In addition to the numerous activities during the daylight hours, sleeping may very well have occurred in the dwelling room. “The division of public rooms and private bed chambers was a late eighteenth-century development. In early homes, and in small houses into the later colonial era, rooms were seldom used for a single purpose... Many families did all their living in one or two rooms...”

Remaining architectural fabric from this period is limited to the fireplace base in the basement, the first-floor framing, the stone walls [and possibly] the window openings...

2nd build, Martin Berry, pre-1784

The original house was the typical beginning to a Dutch farmstead. Because of the necessity to quickly establish shelter, first houses were often small with only a single room topped by an attic. However, given the prominence of Martin Berry as well as the number of children in the family, it seems likely that by 1784, 60 years after initial construction, he had added onto the original building. There is evidence of this second build visible in the floor framing in the basement at the northwest corner. In addition, the three

stuccoed sides of the building with the distinctive single uncovered stone gambrel end, seems to point to an evolving building with building seams on three of four sides, meaning the stucco could have been applied to hide the joints between construction campaigns.



Mayfield, October 1, 1893

We believe that during this campaign, Berry added to the north, adding a wing almost 16 ft. deep. This created a three-room plan—two stacked rooms roughly the same size and a hall running along the east side. The building’s footprint was 35 ft. deep by 30 feet across. This addition, therefore, increased the house by about 1/3. It seems likely that he extended the hall too, giving a footprint of two rooms on the west with the hall running the full length of the building... The house likely had a gambrel roof as the two-room deep Dutch houses rarely had a gable roof.

Remaining architectural fabric from this second build is limited to the first-floor framing, the northern stone walls, and the fireplace base in the basement. It is possible the window openings on the north wall date to this period.

3rd Phase, Henry H. and Elizabeth Mandeville Berry, ca. 1833

When Henry H. Berry died in 1833, his will and inventory point to the fact that the large addition that created the house that is extant today had not yet been constructed. There are two things that point to this conclusion. First, while his inventory is long and totals \$1,481, it is dominated by farm implements, livestock and crops. The domestic list is very limited and totals only \$111.50. Between his will and inventory, there are only four beds mentioned. These things point to a small house... Second, in his will, Henry gave his daughter Jane the bed “standing in the parler.” This seems to mean that through 1833 the Berrys continued the

tradition of multi-use rooms as the parlor continued to be used for sleeping as well as living. From this, we surmise that the eastern 1/3 of the house wasn't built until after 1833.



Historic American Building Survey, 1936

Following their inheritance of the house, Henry and Elizabeth made dramatic changes. They added the eastern 1/3 of the house as well as a new roof structure over the entire house and completed a complete overhaul of the first and upper floors, creating the five-bay center hall house topped by six bedrooms extant today. The vast majority of the architectural fabric of the house dates to this construction campaign. Some features have Federal style influences including the pedimented entrance on the south and the fireplace mantels with projecting embellishments and pilasters and columns. The sash were six-over-six, also typical for the Federal period...

During this construction campaign, Henry H. Berry moved the kitchen from the first floor and put it in the new section of the basement level. He built the small stone wing to the east as well... Henry Berry totally redid the existing first level making the original kitchen into a parlor and adding two more formal living spaces. He also totally redid or possibly heightened the second floor...

The flooring, woodwork, mantels, stairs and exterior doors all date to this period. In the basement, the fireplaces date

to this period and possibly one built-in cupboard in the kitchen. The second level also dates to this period. Because the roof framing is all consistent, he reroofed the entire structure at this time. It is possible that the small dormers are original to this time period too although they may have been added later. The unstuccoed east gambrel wall also dates to this period. Its uncovered appearance lends further credence to the idea that the house evolved in three campaigns. This is the only wall that doesn't have a construction seam between building eras so it was left natural.

4th Phase, May Family, 1894-1896

The May family acquired the property in 1891. William May gave Eleanor Bogert a photograph from January 28, 1894. In 1896, Lockwood May died. From these dates, we can attribute certain changes to the house that were completed by the Mays and date them to after 1894 but before 1896. These include the replacement of the six-over-six sash with one-over-ones, the removal of a small entrance porch at the south side and the construction of a larger porch with Victorian detailing and the addition of large center dormers on the north and south elevations. The Mays reroofed the main roof with red hexagonal tiles and put them on the new porch roof as well. They also added a trellis to the west gambrel end. It is possible they also added the small entrance porch on the north elevation; its date is unknown. They also may have added the beaded board ceilings to the east basement rooms; again the date of these are unknown.

5th Phase, Bogerts, ca. 1951

For the most part, the changes the Bogerts made were to restore the original configuration. They removed layers of wallpaper from the walls and ceilings and paint from the floor, patched the plaster and repainted. They added some millwork and cabinetry to the interior. Larger changes included the reconfiguration of the one-over-one sash; they removed the muntins and glass but kept the sash, making them twelve-over-twelve. They also removed the May family Victorian porch and added the large Colonial Revival porch across the south façade.