

# The Architectural History of 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 18-21.*

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

The Berry House is a 1 ½ story Dutch stone house with a gambrel roof. With early 18<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Bogerts completed the last in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



South Façade, 2016



North Façade, 2016

## Original Construction, 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..." They may have also slept in an unfinished garret; this was typical for the Dutch in this period. Martin and Maria had at least eight children (some sources say nine) and at least two slaves: a woman named Lease and Harry. According to one source, Lease had a son, Samuel, as well. While by today's standards this would be a cramped house for 13+ people, in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, this was a traditional Dutch vernacular house.

This floor plan has been identified in the Bergen County Stone House thematic Nomination as being Type C which dates between 1740 and 1830. While 1720 is earlier than the years attributed to their construction in Bergen County, in his book *The Hudson Valley Dutch and Their Houses*, Harrison Meeske quotes a 1646 contract for a house similar to the Berry House, "House 30 x 20 [inside measure], having on one side an aisle 8 ft wide, right through..." The Howsel-Wagoner House in Stanton, Hunterdon County found in Bailey's *Pre-Revolutionary Dutch Houses*, attributed to the 1740s, is extremely similar to the original Martin Berry House with its 1 ½ story stone construction, side hall plan, and built into hill giving it a full basement. In Morris County, the Johannes Parlaman House in Lower Montville also began as a three-bay side hall, 1 ½ story stone house.

Remaining architectural fabric from this period is limited to the fireplace base in the basement, the first floor floor framing, and the stone walls. The window openings may also be original.

### **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.

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.

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. While 1833 is a little late for the Federal style, McAlester's Field Guide extends the style through 1840.

According to Janet Foster, the center-hall, five bay Federal influenced Dutch Colonial "was a fully developed and distinctive vernacular architecture in New Jersey" by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>49</sup> This hybrid of Dutch vernacular with the English center hall plan was found all over the Dutch dominated areas of New Jersey including Bergen County, adjacent to this part of Morris County. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch and English cultures and through it the architectural traditions and styles had merged, creating English floor plans built with Dutch influences including the gambrel roof and the stone construction with the frame upper gable end. But the formal hall with doors on each end flanked by stacked parlors of the same size with centered fireplaces and decorative mantels are quintessentially English in the Federal style.

This was a typical development pattern in New Jersey. The first settler, in this case Martin Berry, tended to build a utilitarian, culturally vernacular house on his undeveloped property. He then added again, likely in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, as he became more settled and his wealth increased. The house passed to the next generation and surprisingly, doesn't appear to have been changed by the first Henry H. Berry. It wasn't until the second Henry H. Berry inherited the property in 1833, that the house moved beyond its vernacular origins and became more formal and high style architecturally with use-specific rooms. While this change occurred more typically by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when communal living was no longer acceptable and separate parlors and individual sleeping chambers became the norm,<sup>50</sup> Henry Berry continued this way of communal living until 1833. His son, Henry, added on and changed the way the Berry family lived.

This floor plan is identified in Bergen County as a Type J with four equal sized rooms with four fireplaces separated by a center hall. This type is dated to between 1809 and ca. 1830. In this case, it evolved into this standard plan over three campaigns. This was common. Often a three-bay side hall house was expanded into a five bay center hall house. "The typical centerhall Dutch colonial house was a later development, often built or modified, in response to English balanced and formal styles that came into fashion during the eighteenth century."<sup>51</sup> This occurred at the Johannes Parlaman House in Lower Montville (mentioned previously) and the Van

Duyn-Jacobus House in Montville also evolved this way.



Historic American Building Survey, 1936

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 mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Federal Censuses confirm that there were a lot of people living in this house by 1840, including slaves and free blacks. By 1850, there were 17 people living in the house; they were not relatives nor were they listed as laborers. It is unclear what their relationship was to Henry and Elizabeth Berry. Although the Berrys only had two children, their house needed to accommodate them.

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.

### The Martin Berry House for Pathways to History 2019

The Martin Berry House is set-up with three exhibits for this year's Pathways to History tour. This is the third time that the Pequannock Township Historical Society has participated in a Pathways tour. The first year, 2017, was just after the Township and the Society "moved in." We were able to present the house as we had received it: a recently lived in historic house that had been lovingly restored and cared for the previous owners. The second year, 2018, we were able to not only open the first floor and basement rooms but were also able to talk about the history of the house, open a portion of *Mrs. Bogert's Museum*, and display some of the collection. This year, 2019, while we are on the edge of undertaking construction to stabilize parts of the exterior, improve the electrical system, and other work that is needed, we are able to offer much more.

**Front Parlor:** Learn about the history of the formation of the Society to support the creation of the Martin Berry House as a museum by the Township of Pequannock and the 3-phase construction project.

**Back Parlor:** On display are new acquisitions. We are particularly proud to now have in our collection four pieces of furniture made by a descendent of Martin and Maria Roome Berry. Martin Henry Berry had moved to New York City in the 1850's to work in his brother's carpentry shop, eventually taking over the business. Makers of furniture in the Eastlake Style and sought-after as a fine detail woodworker for homes and businesses, this Martin Berry divided his time between his business, his home in Brooklyn, and Pompton Plains. The furniture passed down through his son's and grandson's family to his great-great-grandchildren Betsy Williams Lancaster and H. Robert Williams who donated it to the Society this year. Another piece was donated by Elizabeth Wiseman Green.

**Dining Room:** An exhibit on the process of turning flax into linen has been prepared using the collection donated by Eleanor Bogert. The exhibit includes a hatchel, a rare spinning wheel with flywheel, a weazel, and (of course) flax in its natural and processed states as well as woven linen.

**Basement:** The area under the original 1720 portion of the House has been cleaned out so that visitors can see the original foundation, first floor flooring and fireplace foundation, and will be able to learn about the five construction phases that created this wonderful example of New Jersey's vernacular Dutch architecture.