

Matlack-Townsend House (David Townsend House)
225 North Matlack Street
West Chester Borough
Chester County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-243

HABS
PA,
15-WCHES,
10-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

MATLACK-TOWNSEND HOUSE
(DAVID TOWNSEND HOUSE)PA,
15-WCHES,
10-

Street Address 225 North Matlack Street, West Chester,
or Location: Chester County, Pennsylvania

Present Owner: Chester County Historical Society, 225 North
High Street, West Chester, Pennsylvania

Brief Statement This house, part of which dates from about 1785,
of Significance: was the residence of the well-known botanist,
David Townsend.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Owner of land when the west end of the north wing was standing was Isaiah Matlack 1768-1793; Jesse Matlack 1793-1830; Robert Matlack 1830-1835; David Townsend 1835-1858; Lydia A. Townsend 1858-1890; Richard H. Downing (her son) and his estate 1890-1920; Margaret W. Hoopes (wife of Edward Hoopes, a grandson of David Townsend) 1920-1923; Marion Hoopes Stevenson, her daughter, 1923-1951. By her will it came into the possession of the Chester County Historical Society.
2. Date of erection: West end of the present north wing c. 1785; south section 1830; east end of north wing 1849.
3. Architect, builder, suppliers, etc.: Unknown, except for builder of the 1849 section - Thomas Bateman. For copy of his contract, see Part I, D, of this report.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Oldest part, west end of north wing, has a large arch in cellar which supported a cooking fireplace - floor of first floor shows numerous marks of embers which came from fireplace. Evidence shows only one room downstairs. The stairway was in the south end of this room, as evidence still shows. Second floor had two rooms in it. South addition was added 1830, two and a half stories. East end of the old north wing built 1849 (see Part I, D of this report for plans and contract). Roof of the south section was raised to a full three stories, as it is today, by 1874. It is so pictured in the 1874 "Bird's Eye View of West Chester, Pa. Drawn by O. H. Bailey Breuker & Kessler, Lith. Philada."

5. Notes on alterations and additions: See preceding paragraph.

6. Important old views and references:

Views: There are no old views of the house known, except the representation on the 1874 bird's eye view mentioned under Part I, A, 4 above. A collection of photographs of the twentieth century may be seen in the Chester County Historical Society.

References: Sources of information all to be found in the Chester County Historical Society unless otherwise mentioned.

Classified printed and manuscript files in the Chester County Historical Society under the headings: West Chester, Streets--Matlack, and David Townsend.

J. Smith Futhy and Gilbert Cope: History of Chester County, Pennsylvania. Louis H. Everts, Philadelphia, Pa., 1881.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: The original small house, now the west part of north wing, was on the property of the Green Tree tavern farm and was probably the residence of the farmer. When the first railroad was built into West Chester, it was planned to make this the site of a tavern, and a two-and-a-half story brick house was attached to the south part of the old house. The petition for a license was refused, and the property soon passed into the hands of David Townsend, who was living there at his death. He was a noted botanist and a man of broad interests in the community in educational, civic, and business matters. He and his friend, Dr. William Darlington, were probably the most versatile men the town has ever produced. See copy of newspaper obituary under Part I, D, of this report.

C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: None known

D. Supplemental Material: Direct quotations from the following -

1. Copy of original petition (c. February, 1833) in possession of Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pa.

"To the Honorable Judges of the Court of Quarter sessions of Chester county.

"The petition of Samuel Osborne of said county respectfully represents

"That he has lately rented of Robert Matlack, and intends to occupy during the coming season, that new and commodious house on the south side of Chestnut, and near the corner of Chestnut and Liberty streets, in the borough of West Chester, and well known by the name of the 'Rail Road house.' It is situated near the termination of the West Chester Rail Road, upon which there is considerable

travelling and which is constantly increasing and is particularly well adapted to the accommodation of persons passing along said Rail Road. As soon as the season opens it is designed to erect such stabling and sheds sufficient for the accommodation of all persons who may favor the house with a visit. Your petitioner therefore prays your honors to grant him license to keep a public house of entertainment, and he trusts he will not be found to abuse the confidence thereby reposed in him.

"And he will &c.

"Samuel Osborne

"We the subscribers inhabitants of the Borough of West Chester and its vicinity beg leave respectfully to represent to your honors, that we are well acquainted with Samuel Osborne the above petitioner, and that we have great confidence, should your honors grant his petition, that he will keep an orderly and quiet house of entertainment, to the satisfaction of the public; and that in our opinion the 'Rail Road House' is commodious, convenient, and elegibly situated for the accommodation of the public; and that a public house, of its description is much needed in the neighborhood of its location.

"Joshua Gibbons

and 32 other names

"We the subscribers, inhabitants of the Borough of West Chester, take pleasure in recommending the above petitioner Samuel Osborne to the favorable notice of your honors, as a suitable person to keep a public house of entertainment; and do certify that he is of good repute for honesty and temperance; and is well provided with house room and conveniences for the lodging and accommodation of strangers and travellers.

"Wm. Darlington

and 14 others

[Endorsed on back]

"Petition for
Tavern License
Saml. Osborne

"1833 Feb:8 Read &
held under advisement
Rejected"

2. From original manuscript, dated May 4, 1849, in possession of Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pa.:

"David Townsend agrees to employ Thomas Bateman to build an addition to the house of the said David Townsend on Matlack Street in West Chester, of the following dimensions and description, an outline of which is hereto annexed. The said Thomas is to find all the materials and labor and finish the said building in a plain and substantial manner. The materials all to be of good quality. The building is to be attached to the eastern wall of the north wing of the present house. The south wall is to commence upon or in a line with the north wall of the main building. The dimensions to be thirty one feet by sixteen,

extending six feet further northwardly than the north wall of the said north wing, the walls to be of the same height and same pitch of roof as the said wing. The cellar to be of the same depth as the cellar of the said wing and the earth therefrom removed to the south side of the main building. The cellar walls to be of stone, and the walls above ground to be of brick well burned all to be laid in good sand and lime mortar; the brick walls to be nine inches thick, and the stone walls fourteen inches thick, and plastered inside and outside to correspond with the said main building. The first floor and stairs leading to the second story to be of good white oak or yellow pine boards. Both stories to be ceiled. The first story to have a partition across it running from east to west at the distance of eleven feet from the north wall, which partition is to be studded and well braced to prevent sinking, and lathed and plastered, on the north side with one coat of mortar on the partition and walls, and the partition, and the walls south of it, to be well plastered and white coated, on the inside. The floor of the apartment north of said partition, in the first story to be laid with undressed white oak or yellow pine boards of good quality. The joists to be of pine, three inches by ten and not more than sixteen inches apart. The southern portion on the first floor to have one door with marble sill and one window in the south wall, two windows in the east wall and one door in the partition; and one door in the north wall and one window in the east wall north of said partition. The doors and windows to correspond in style of finish with those of the said wing and to be of the same size. The southern apartment to have a cupboard the height of the story, five feet wide with two doors with suitable fastenings, and stile up the middle, and with five shelves sixteen inches deep. A chimney, and fire place of suitable construction to insert a kitchen range or boilers, is to be carried up to the height of one foot above the comb of the roof of the main building, and to be of such construction as to prevent the smoke from issuing into the apartments or rooms. The stair way to the second floor is to be a closed one, three feet inside in the clear, also a stair way of same width of passage, and stairs, to the cellar. The second story to be partitioned off by a partition dividing it in the same manner as the first story, to have two windows in the south wall, three in the east wall and one in the north wall, one door in the partition and two doors inserted in the west wall, being the east wall of said wing before mentioned. The windows in the north and south walls to be of the same size as those in the first story, and those in the east wall to be of half the same size. One window in the said west wall to be removed and the opening well built up and plastered on the west side thereof and white coated. At the head of the stairs on the second floor is to be a suitable railing for a guard. The said second story to be plastered ceiled and white coated. The roof to be of good pine shingles well put on, and to weather not more than nine inches with tin gutter & spout. All the window shutters of the first story, and the north and south ones of the second story, one to be close ones, to be hung with good strap hinges and have good fastenings for each. Those for the windows in the east wall in the second story to be plain,

hung inside with good butt hinges and fastened with suitable bolts. There are to be three cellar windows, one in the south wall and two in the east wall, large enough to give sufficient light to the cellar; the south to be hung with butt hinges so as to swing upward. A door to be opened in the eastern wall so as to communicate with the adjoining cellar. The walls of the cellar, the joists and floor above, to be whitewashed. The pump is to be taken out of the well, the well wall to be taken down two feet below the bottom of the cellar and then built up level with the bottom, with stone or brick laid in good lime and sand mortar, and a cast iron grate framed over the opening so as to open and shut with convenience. All the woodwork of the building above ground including all the windows, to be painted with three coats of white lead and oil on the outside, and two inside. A privy to be built, with pit under of at least eight feet in depth, walled with stone or hard burned brick laid in good mortar. The house to be of wood, close framed and jointed, planed inside and outside, seven feet high, five feet eight inches long, and four feet seven inches wide in the clear inside, and painted with white lead and oil inside and outside. To the building first mentioned are to be tin spouts to carry the water from the roof to the ground. The said reserves liberty to furnish such materials as he has about the buildings before mentioned to be accounted for at the usual price of such materials, by the said Thomas. In consideration of the foregoing premises the said David agrees to pay the said Thomas or his order the sum of five hundred and twenty five dollars when the said building is wholly finished and receipt or discharges for materials furnished for said buildings are exhibited to him the said David. And the said Thomas doth obligate himself to complete the said buildings within ten weeks from the date hereof. In witness whereof the parties hereto have set their hands and seals this fourth day of may Anno Domini one thousand eight hundred and forty nine.

"David Townsend
"Thos. Bateman"

3. "Village Record," West Chester, Pa., December 21, 1858:

"OBITUARY.

"When a veteran in the Cause of Human Improvement passes away, it well becomes the aged to bear testimony to his worth, and the young to profit by his example. When the wise and good devote a long life to the generous aims, and elevating pursuits of the community in which they move, their career leaves a bright page in the history of our race. Of such was the lamented friend, whose mortal remains we have recently followed to the tomb, - and whose memory we all fondly and gratefully cherish.

"DAVID TOWNSEND, son of Samuel and Priscilla Townsend, was born in the village of Pughtown, Chester county, Pennsylvania, on the 13th of December 1787.

"He was brought up to the business of Agriculture, on his father's farm, and received a plain English education, including some elementary mathematical instruction, at the country school of the vicinage. Possessed of an intelligent and active mind, - and being, withal an excellent

penman, - he was appointed, in 1810, a clerk in the office of the Register and Recorder of Chester county; which appointment brought him to reside in the Borough of West Chester, - where he continued (with the exception of a year on the paternal farm) during the remainder of his life.

"After the service of a year or two in the county offices, he engaged in the business of Conveyancing - and also became concerned, for some time, in a mercantile establishment in the Borough.- In the year 1813, he was elected a Commissioner of Chester county; and at the expiration of his term, in 1816 he became (as was then the usage) County Treasurer for the ensuing year.

"On the establishment of the Bank of Chester County, in 1814, David Townsend was chosen one of the Directors, and served from November of that year until November, 1816. At that period, a restless little cabal, among the Stockholders, clandestinely forestalled proxies enough to revolutionize the Board. By that operation, several of the most responsible and judicious members of the Direction - among whom Mr. Townsend was included - were thrown out. The new Board, however, were not long in discovering the incompetency both of themselves and their subordinates; and before the year expired the Institution was in such a condition, that David Townsend was solicited by the very men who had excluded him, to accept the cashiership, in order to extricate it from its embarrassments. He received the appointment on the first of October, 1817; the old Board were presently re-instated; confidence was completely restored; and the Bank continued under the sagacious management of the new Cashier, for nearly the third of a Century, with unparalleled success. His resignation in 1849, was induced by an accidental injury to the brain, which finally disabled him, and caused his death.

"Notwithstanding the drudgery and responsibilities of his position, as cashier, his public spirit led him to participate in every useful enterprise; and whenever a liberal Institution, for the culture of Intellect, was projected in West Chester, David Townsend was among the earliest and most efficient in promoting its success.

"In 1821, he was chosen a Trustee of the West Chester Academy; and in 1826, was appointed Treasurer and Financier of the Board, - which office he held until 1854; by which time he had engineered the Institution completely out of debt.

"In 1827, he was appointed Prothonotary of Chester county, to fill a vacancy; but the Directors of the Bank anxiously interposed to retain his services, - and he resigned the office of Prothonotary at the end of two weeks.

"In all his varied pursuits, David Townsend was emphatically a practical man, - ingeniously and successfully adapting the requisite means to the end proposed. To unite the useful with the agreeable, was his constant aim.

"Trained in the philanthropic tenets of the Society of Friends - though without exterior peculiarities - he was still a noble scion of that estimable stock. His disposition was ever gentle; his habits peaceful and retiring. The public confidence in his integrity and capacity, it is true, repeatedly drew him into the service of those

around him - as Guardian of the Orphan, or Trustee of the helpless, - and gratefully do his wards confess their obligations to their watchful benefactor. But, it is within the sacred precincts of the Domestic Circle, that his character of Husband and Father is most thoroughly appreciated, while those only who have fathomed such a Parent's love, can adequately estimate the filial devotion of his descendants.

"David Townsend was one of the Founders of the Chester County Cabinet of Natural Science, in the spring of 1826; was the faithful Secretary and Treasurer of that interesting Institution from its origin until the failure of his health; and was at all times one of the most active, public-spirited and valuable contributors, - whether to the Treasury, the Museum, or the Library. About the time the Cabinet was organized, a taste for Natural History was decidedly manifested by several of the members, - among whom Mr. Townsend was ever prominent. He soon, however, had his attention specially directed to Botanical studies, and was ever after distinguished for his devotion to 'the amiable science.' The discriminating eye, and habits of close observation, so important in a Bank officer, were equally available to the Botanist, and quite germane to the investigations of general and species. The Plants of Chester county, and the surrounding districts, became familiar acquaintances, and were duly arranged in his Herbarium. His aptitude and pains taking skill in preparing specimens, were very remarkable, and led to a delightful correspondence with those eminent Botanists, Doctor F. Boott of London, and Sir WILLIAM J. HOOKER, formerly of Glasgow, Scotland, now Director of the Royal Gardens at Kew. The last named gentleman writing from Glasgow (while Professor of Botany, there,) to a friend in West Chester, in March, 1833, says: 'I thank you a thousand times for introducing me to the correspondence of David Townsend. His copious and beautiful specimens have delighted me.' Sir William - whose contributions flowed in on him from every region of the globe - subsequently declared, that the handsomest specimens he ever received, were prepared and sent by David Townsend, of West Chester, and Professor Short, of Kentucky.

"In the latter end of 1833, a genus of plants, allied to the Asters, was named TOWNSENDIA, - in compliment to David Townsend (who had done much to elucidate the characters of that family). The Genus was established and published by Sir Wm. Hooker, with a figure, in his splendid work, the Flora of British North America. The plant was first collected on the banks of the Saskatchewan, in Latitude 53 deg. North, by Doctor Richardson, the intrepid and hardy Botanist who accompanied poor Sir John Franklin, in one of his hyperborean expeditions.

"Five species of the TOWNSENDIA are now known, and described in Torrey & Gray's North American Flora. They are all found along the streams which rise on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains; and while these Alpine beauties shall continue to grow, they will attest the merits of our Chester county Botanist, and be perpetually associated with his honored name.

"When the Cashier's feeble health compelled his resignation, the Directors of the Bank proclaimed their appreciation of his long and faithful services, by presenting to him a pair of Silver Pitchers, with an appropriate Inscription; and around the Inscription was the

delicate and significant accompaniment of engraved representations of the TOWNSENDIA.

"The whole affair was in exquisitely good taste, and did equal honor to the givers and the receiver.

"The new and classical Banking House, planned by T.U. Walter, Esq., was erected in 1835-6, under the auspices of David Townsend, - to whose fine taste and salutary influence, most of the Architectural Improvements of the Borough are largely indebted.

"On the retirement of Mr. Townsend, from the charge of the Bank, he found genial employment in the various branches of Horticulture, - especially in the culture of Fruits, and ornamental Plants. In those attractive pursuits, in the bosom of his amiable family, he quietly passed the residue of his days, - the latter portion of the time with his bodily strength greatly prostrated. He departed this life at his residence in West Chester, on the 6th of December, 1858, at the age of 71 years, lacking one week; and on the 9th, was interred in the Family apartment of the beautiful Oaklands Cemetery, - whither devoted friends will oft repair to hallow the last resting-place of an upright Man, and where the Plants that he loved so well shall long be trained, by the hands of affection, to bloom upon his grave.

"W.D.

"West Chester, Pa., Dec. 13, '58."

Prepared by Bart Anderson - July 1958
Curator, Chester County Historical Society

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This town house has sections dating from c. 1785, 1830, and 1849 and belonged to a prominent citizen.
2. Condition of fabric: Good

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Three-story section about 28' x 36'
One-and-a-half story section 24' x 31'-6"
2. Wall construction: Brick, plastered on the outside and the south section, marked off so as to imitate blocks of marble.
3. Chimneys: Original in the 1830 section; original in the 1849 section. Original chimney for the large cooking fireplace in the oldest part removed.

4. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Doorways in the 1830 south section are all original, except the doorway onto the second-story porch. In the original little west end of the north wing the window to the north, at least, has been added as was the door - fireplace covered that wall. In the 1849 addition, the south door is a window and an east window a garden door.
- b. Windows and shutters: Windows in the 1830 section all are original, except those added when the roof was raised before 1874. Shutters all seem correct.

5. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roofs; low pitch tin roof in three-story section; steeper pitch tin roof in story-and-a-half section.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Original from the time roof was raised.
- c. Dormers: None in 1830 section, three in north wing, two of them 1849.

C. Technical Description of Interiors:

1. Floor plans: Three-story (1830) section is as built; wide hall through the house with two rooms to its west. The second and third floors have small bedrooms made from the south end of this wide hall. The story-and-a-half (1849) section is almost as built, while the oldest section now has one large room on the second floor and a single room on the first with entry.
2. Stairways: Original except for the ones in the oldest section, which have been removed.
3. Flooring: No information
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster
5. Doorways and doors: Nearly all original in 1830 section. Oldest section probably all replaced.
6. Trim: Original in 1849 and 1830 sections.
7. Hardware: Mostly original in 1830 and 1849 sections.
8. Lighting: Nothing original left, except possibly a hall light from ceiling in 1830 section. It has been converted to electric but plainly had had candles in it.
9. Heating: All original fireplaces left, except that in oldest part of house. Franklin stove built into fireplace of south bedroom in the 1830 section.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces south and is situated on the east side of Matlack Street, with the building on the sidewalk line. There is a large yard and garden to the east and north of the house.
2. Enclosures: Picket fence
3. Outbuildings: None. A spring house disappeared about 1910. It was to the north of the house.
4. Walks: None laid out now. The 1856 plan of the garden shows well laid out walks.
5. Landscaping, gardens, etc.: Well planted garden, which suffered much by "Hazel" (hurricane) and the 1958 storm when 42 inches of snow accumulated.

Prepared by Bart Anderson - July 1958
Curator, Chester County Historical Society