



Hudson-Mohawk Vernacular Architecture

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Newsletter

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Burrowes Mansion, 94 Main Street, Matawan, NJ: Report of a Tour by HMVA Members on 16 August 2025

by Carla Cielo

Historic house museums often boast an early construction date based on deeds or oral histories, but these dates often conflict with architectural evidence. The circa 1723 Burrowes Mansion in Matawan, NJ, however, may be an exception (Photo 1). The oldest remaining section of the house is a formal, first-period, Georgian farmhouse. Front and rear rooms (likely originally a kitchen and a parlor/chamber) and a side entry hall are located on the first floor of the earliest part of the house (Figure 1); four chambers, two having fireplaces, are located on the second floor (Figure 2) and there is a full basement and an attic. The house was constructed using an English box frame for the principal structure and is surmounted with a New World Dutch-framed gambrel roof. The principal front faces southeast. The property was owned by John Bowne III in 1723 and was sold to John Burrowes Sr. (1718-1785) in 1769. Burrowes was a wealthy grain merchant.



Photo 1. Front elevation of the Burrowes Mansion, August 2025 (W. R. Wheeler photograph).

The first clue to the possible age of this house is the full-section corner posts which extend into the four corners of the front rooms and the rear corners of the back rooms (Photo 2). The posts are hidden behind beaded casing and a robust crown moulding. The corner

of one post at the rear first-floor room was chopped out to square the corner, but its full section remains visible at the crown moulding and in the second floor.

The wall between the front and rear rooms is structural and bears on a stone foundation in the basement. In the hallway, the framework is bridged by an archway

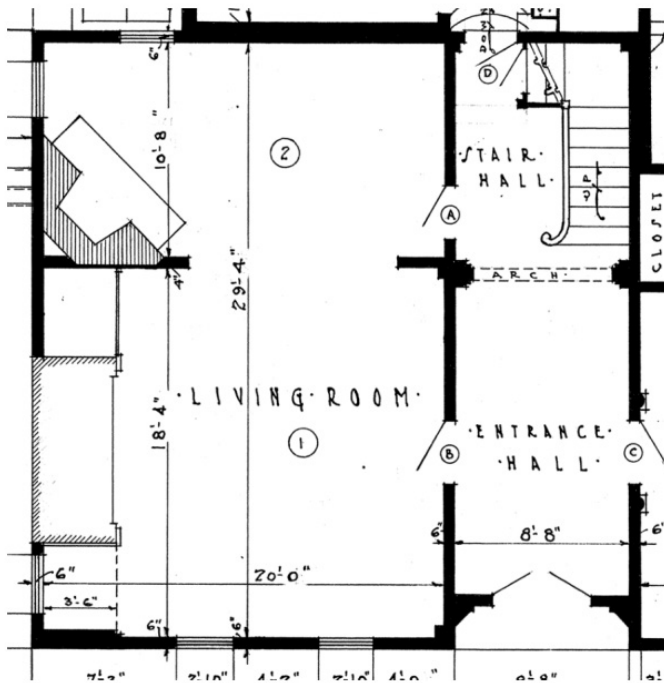


Figure 1. Detail of *First Floor Plan* by J. C. Delatash for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS NJ, 13-MAT,1), ca. 1936.

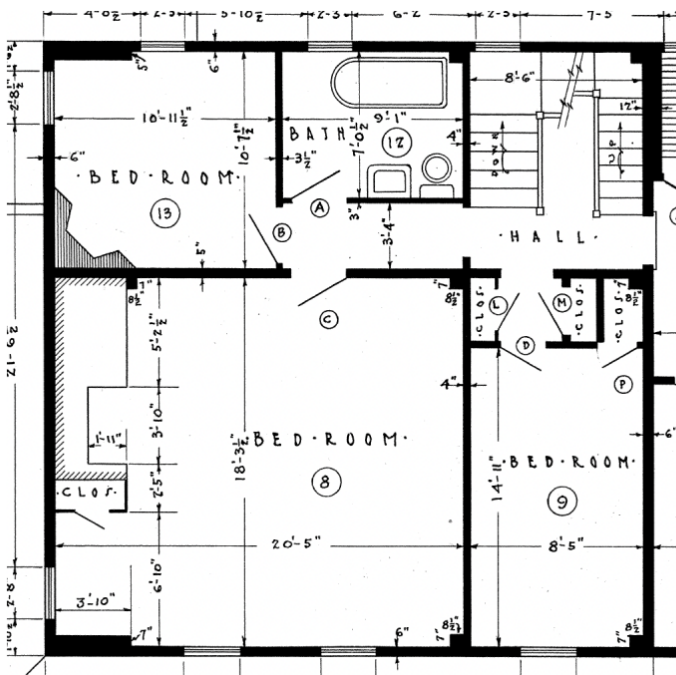


Figure 2. Detail of *Second Floor Plan* by Herbert T. Smith for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS NJ, 13-MAT, 1), ca. 1936.

that is both structural and decorative (Photo 3). The archway is a common feature associated with the presence of a bearing interior wall in center or side hall houses built prior to circa 1760.

The house maintains a high percentage of original or early wall treatments including raised-paneled fireplace walls in the first-floor rear parlor (Photo 4) and in the two second-floor bedchambers (Photo 5). The fireplace surrounds do not incorporate mantels. The rear parlor and the rear chamber fireplace lintels are arched and the woodwork follows the arch (Photos 4 and 6).

Raised panels are also located on the wall beneath the staircase. The panels are simply lined with a thumb-nail profile that is planed into the stiles and rails. The staircase has squat turned balusters, rectangular handrails and a circular newel post with a tilted cap. The two bed chambers have five panel doors with HL hinges. One of the smaller chambers (now a bathroom) has a two-panel door with HL hinges (Figure 3). The floorboards appear to have been fabrication from old growth wood.



Photo 2. View of a full-section corner post and the crown moulding which wraps around the posts, 2025 (C. Cielo photograph).



Photo 3. First floor side hall with archway (HABS NJ, 13-MAT, 1), 1936 (Nathaniel R. Ewan photograph).



Photo 4. First floor rear parlor, 2025 (C. Cielo photograph).



Photo 5. Second floor front chamber (HABS NJ, 13-MAT, 1), 1936 (Nathaniel R. Ewan photograph).



Photo 6. Second floor rear chamber, 2025 (C. Cielo photograph).

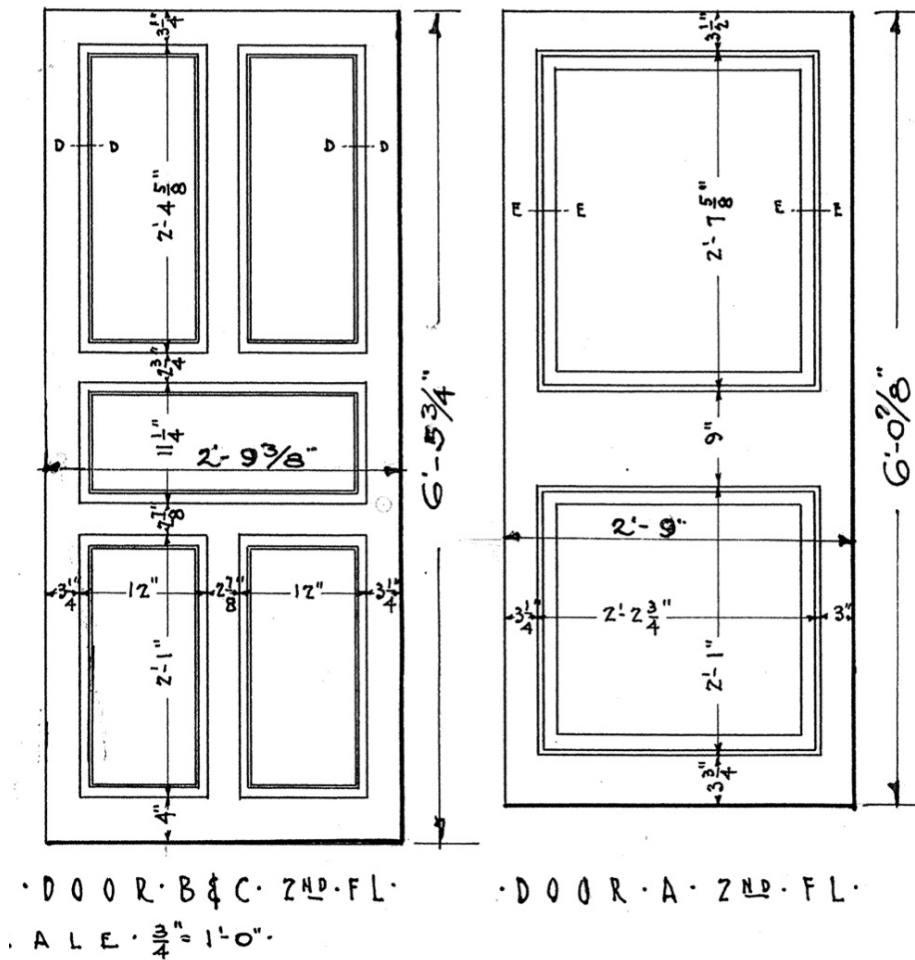


Figure 3. Second floor chamber doors, detail from a drawing by Herbert T. Smith (HABS NJ, 13-MAT, 1), 1936.



Photo 7. Front elevation (HABS NJ, 13-MAT, 1), 1936 (Nathaniel R. Ewan photograph).

Despite the high percentage of original or early features remaining in the house, significant changes have occurred. The first-floor front parlor has been altered in the Colonial Revival style. The alterations included the installation of a “Federal” style mantel that is said to have been taken from another house and which is flanked to the right by a restoration-period cupboard. This room likely originally had paneling like the other three rooms that were heated by fireplaces on the first floor, and perhaps was the kitchen until the rear addition was added in the early 20th-century to house a “modern” kitchen. This is suggested by the size of the chimney and hearth support as seen in the basement (Photo 9). The entryway has been conjecturally “restored” evidently after the removal of the full-width porch that was documented in the 1936 HABS photograph of the façade (Photo 7).

The hewn roof rafters of the existing gambrel roof are spaced roughly four feet apart and are in two sections. The rafters of the lower slope are notched for let-in roof shingle lath for 36-inch-long roof shingles. The rafters of the upper slope are shown on the HABS drawings with the same notches, but we didn’t see any (Figure 4). Wally Wheeler believes that the absence of notches in the rafters of the upper slope indicates that the present gambrel roof is a modification of a steep single-pitch roof that was altered at an early date. When high-peaked roofs fell out of fashion, roofs were sometimes altered to gambrels to give buildings a more modern appearance. This alteration suggests an early initial construction date. The Matawan Historical Society

plans to date the house using dendrochronology. The rafters may be able to tell their own story if both the upper and lower rafters can be dated separately.

The house was evidently originally shingled on all four sides. The shingles are planed and have scalloped bottoms, and they are attached with wrought nails. Unfortunately, most have been replaced within the last eight years. A few original shingles remain on the southwest gable end wall above the brick fireback (Photo 8). The front and rear cornices continue along the side elevations of the oldest portion of the house; the gable end walls above this cornice are covered with clapboard siding. The northeast gable end wall is partially covered by a later addition; its upper portion is however visible within the attic of the addition. This former exterior wall retains clay-straw nogging with let-in horizontal laths to which the shingles were nailed below the cornice but no nogging or laths above the cornice. This suggests that this side was originally finished in the same manner as the southwest gable end, a fact confirmed by small areas of preserved shingles and clapboarding that remain on that end wall above the roof of the addition.

The bricks of the exposed fireback on the southwest gable end wall, which measures 9' wide x 10' high, and the bricks of the arched basement chimney supports for the first-floor fireplaces are both 1³/₄" high x 8¹/₂" wide x 3¹/₂" deep and indicate construction before the standardization of commercial bricks. The form of the chimney supports as seen in the basement is also interesting. Both are built with stone jambs that support a brick barrel arch (Photo 9). The barrel arch that supports the front room fireplace tilts upwards as it meets the face of the support. The



Photo 8. Original shingles, southwest gable end, 2025 (C. Cielo photograph).



Photo 9. Chimney support under the front fireplace as seen in the basement, 2025 (C. Cielo photograph).

barrel arch that supports the corner fireplace of the rear room is oriented parallel to the gable end wall instead of diagonally like the fireplace above it. Double (square) bricks are used in the hearths (Photo 10).

The Burrowes mansion is truly a national treasure. I eagerly await the results of the dendrochronological study.

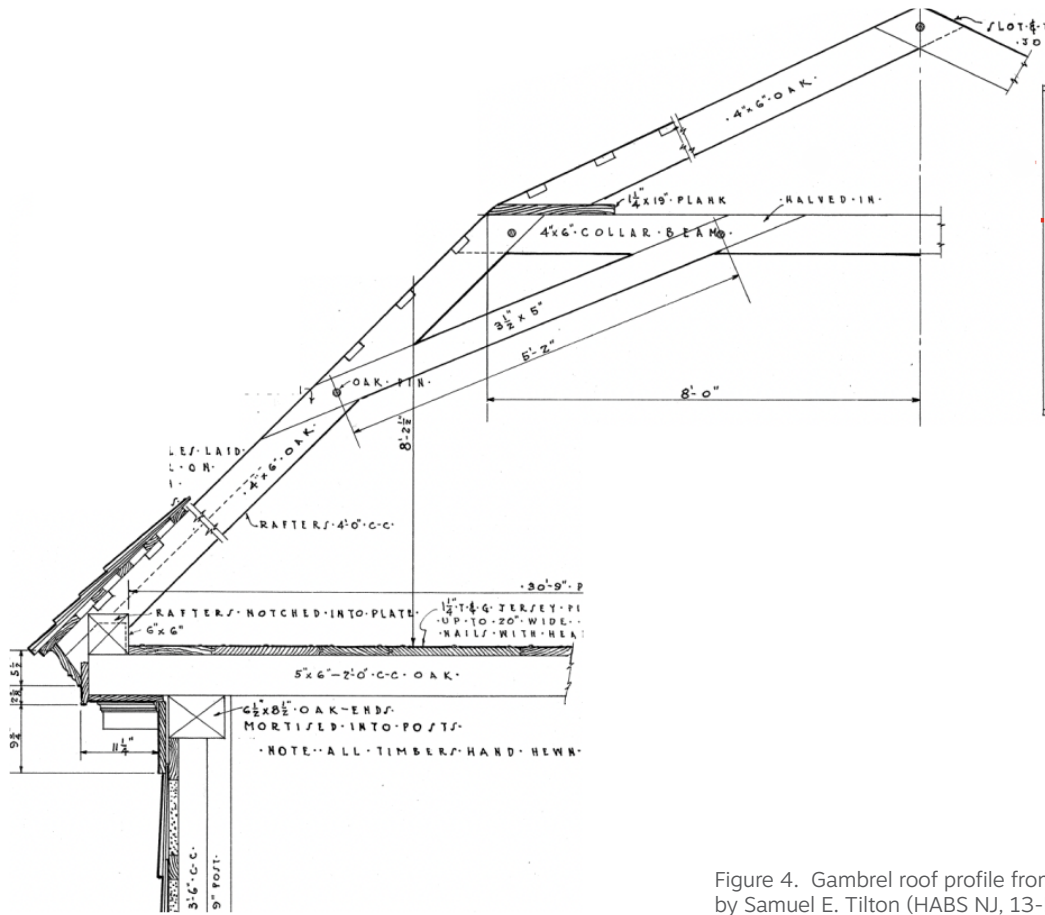


Figure 4. Gambrel roof profile from *Construction Details* by Samuel E. Tilton (HABS NJ, 13-MAT, 1), 1936.



Photo 10. Hearth of the second-floor front chamber fireplace, 2025 (C. Cielo photograph).

Mystery photo from the last issue identified

We received the following letter from a member in Pocono Pines, Pennsylvania:

9/4/2025

HMVA,

I'm responding regarding the unidentified house featured on page 11 of the current newsletter (April-June 2025).

I thought I recognized it from an old postcard I have. I was pretty sure it was the house. I confirmed it with some old photographs I had acquired years ago. The postcard identifies the house as "Fort Minisink" on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River along the "Old Mine Road," in Sussex Co., NJ, c. 1701.

The newsletter photo shows a totem pole to the left of the gable window (hard to make out). If you look closely, at the bottom of the totem pole, you can make out a face. My photo clearly shows the totem pole. All doors, windows, & trees line up.

I did some further checking & found a photo of the house in Rosalie Fellows Bailey's book Pre-Revolutionary Dutch Houses....

Pat Ednie

The photo from Bailey's book is included here (Figure 1). She describes the house as the "Tietsoort" or Titsworth house and notes its location on the "Road to Port Jervis, north of Sussex." She further recorded that

This house is believed to have been built about 1710. It was probably erected by Stephanus W. Tietsoort, who lived in this vicinity, and whose son William is the first known owner. It remained in the family until about 1902. It is typical of a frontier house of this early period. Built of very



Figure 1. "Tietsoort" or Titsworth house, ca. 1932 (photo by Margaret De M. Brown).

irregular stone rubble, it is covered by a steep gable roof which extends in a long, straight slope to form an overhang beyond the front wall. As it is on a hill, a low basement story is exposed on the south front. The early plan was followed, the main floor consisting of two adjoining rooms each with its outside door. Notice the sparsity and small size of the windows, for better protection against the Indians. The east wall of the interior is panelled [sic].¹

In another location of that same book, Bailey offers a slightly different description of the house.

It is a one and a half story house of rough slating stone rubble, with a steep gable roof and very small windows. As it stands on a hill slope, a basement story of white-washed stone is exposed on one side. In the interior at one end there is a panelled [sic] fireplace wall with a huge cupboard. Very wide floor boards, exposed beams, low ceilings, old hinges and doors, are authentic details. Although now used as a refreshment stand, the exterior has not been marred, north the interior very much altered. The house stands above Clove

Membership info

If you have been receiving this newsletter, but your membership is not current and you wish to continue to receive the HMVA newsletter and participate in the many house-study tours offered each year, **please send in your dues.**

Membership currently pays all the HMVA bills and to keep us operating in the black. **Each of us must contribute a little.**

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Creek on the northeast side of the road to Port Jervis. It is two and a half miles northwest of Sussex in Wantage Township, and less than ten miles south of the state border. The original log house formerly stood a short distance northward, and the first church in this section was built on a hill near the stone house.

A ca. 1910 postcard view of the house by William H. Broadwell of Newark, NJ, shows it from another angle (Figure 2). The house does not appear to survive. If anyone can share more of its history, your editor will be obliged.



Figure 2. The house in a view ca. 1910 (photo by William H. Broadwell).

ENDNOTES

¹ Rosalie Fellows Bailey. *Pre-Revolutionary Dutch Houses and Families in Northern New Jersey and Southern New York* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1936), 578.

2025-26 Updated Schedule of Activities

2025

15 NOVEMBER Schaghticoke, Rensselaer County Tour
Keith Cramer, host

13 DECEMBER Holiday Dinner and board meeting

2026

17 JANUARY no tour

21 FEBRUARY Annual Meeting, Elmendorph Inn, Red Hook