

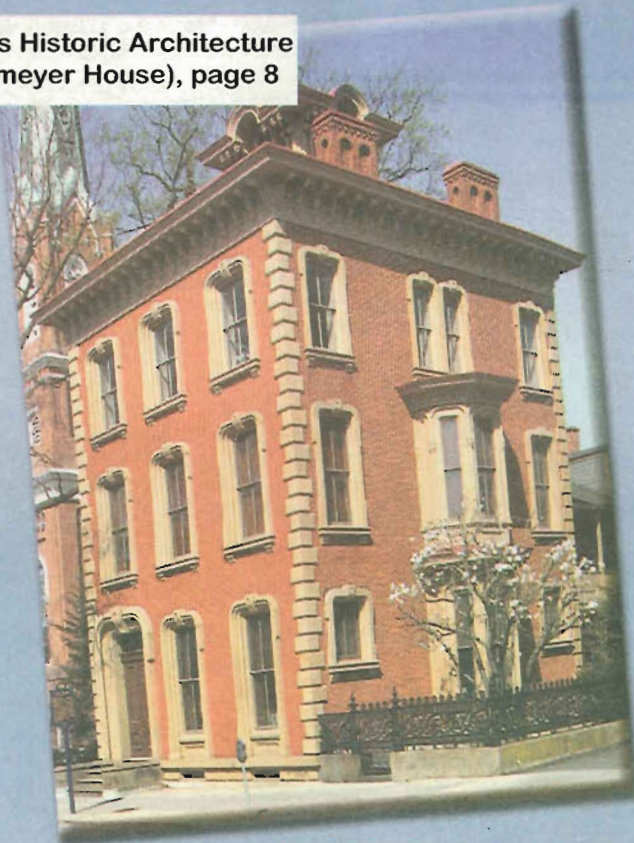
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YORK'S HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE

Part II

—Scott D. Butcher

Note: This is the second installment of a three part series on the City of York's rich architectural heritage.

Last month we reviewed the early architecture of York, including the Golden Plough Tavern and General Horatio Gates House. While these buildings are basically as they appeared in the 18th Century, their next door neighbor isn't quite so old. In 1841, many Yorkers watched in dismay as the courthouse in Centre Square (known today as Continental Square) was demolished. But this building was destined to be a part of York's history, and in 1976 the Georgian style courthouse was rebuilt along the banks of the Codorus Creek. This building is a replica of the original 1756 structure. The Colonial Courthouse, as it is known today, played a somewhat forgotten role in the birth of our great nation. It was here that the Second Continental Congress met from 1777 – 1778, debating and ratifying the Articles of Confederation, signing a treaty with France, and declaring the first National Thanksgiving to celebrate a Colonial Army victory over the British in Saratoga, NY.

Despite these accomplishments, it was not a great time for the Founding Fathers. Washington's troops were enduring a brutal winter in Valley Forge and the British Army was too close to Philadelphia for the Congress to return home. As Thomas Paine wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls." While Paine was in York, he is believed to have lived at a structure known as the Cookes House, working on the fifth part of "The American Crisis." The building, located in Martin Luther King Park, is still standing today and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was constructed in the 1760s in the German Colonial style.

Also constructed in the 1760s was the Society of Friends Meeting House on West Philadelphia Street. It is one of the oldest Meeting Houses in the United States, and the oldest house of worship in

York County. The structure continues to serve as a Friends Meeting House today, almost 240 years after it was built.

market the area to tourists, the phrase "Victorian York" is perhaps more appropriate architecturally.

paintings from over 170 years ago, we know that several structures still remain. One of the most notable of these buildings is the National House, an 1828 hotel known originally as the White Hall Hotel. The red and green structure of today reflects its 1863 appearance, though the paintings of 1830 show a white building dominating the streetscape. The stacked verandas actually resemble the grand antebellum hotels of the South. The hotel played host to President Van Buren in 1839 and Charles Dickens in 1842.

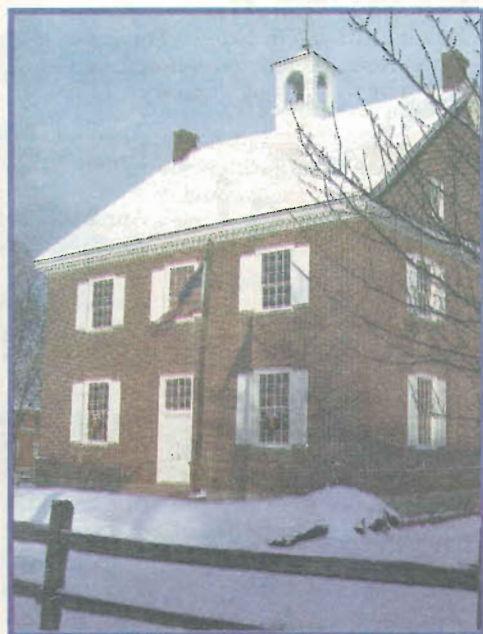
Next door to the National House, on North Beaver Street, is the Gothic Revival Masonic Hall, which draws its inspiration from medieval European architecture. This building was York's first Masonic Hall and was built in 1863. Also constructed during the 1860s was one of the most striking Italianate buildings in the region, the Billmeyer House. Charles Billmeyer was a railroad car manufacturer, and his beautiful home along East Market is a great example of the Italianate architectural style so prominent in York City.

Of note, many of the buildings along Market Street witnessed a very uncommon event for a northern city: a visit of the Confederate Army. Perhaps another footnote in American history, York was actually the largest city north of the Mason-Dixon Line to be occupied by the Confederate Army. Thousands of mostly ragged soldiers under the direction of General Jubal Early marched through the streets on June 28, 1863. Depending upon your viewpoint, either some quick thinking – or an unpatriotic act – spared York from going up in flames. As there were few Federal troops available to protect the town, community leaders agreed to pay a ransom to save everything they had built.

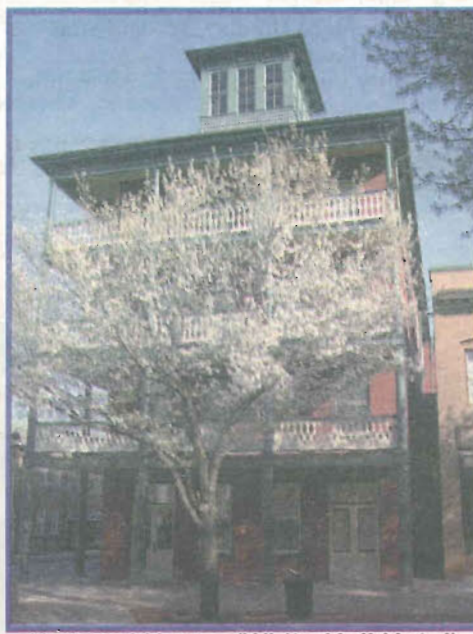
Little did those community leaders realize that they were also saving a rich architectural legacy that we are still enjoying 140 years

later!

In next month's installment, we'll continue with the Victorian period and conclude with the early and mid 20th Century.



Colonial Courthouse
© Scott D. Butcher



National House (White Hall Hotel)
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Cookes House
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Friends Meeting House
© Scott D. Butcher

There are over a dozen buildings in the City of York that date from the 1700s – and many more in the surrounding areas; however, York didn't really "come of age" until the 1800s. While the phrase "Colonial York" was formerly used to

In 1830, a local engraver by the name of William Wagner produced numerous paintings of York. The York County Heritage Trust published many of those images in "Views in the Borough of York and Vicinity." Based upon these

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717.891.1393
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