

The Benjamin Real Homestead
Forty-Fort, Pennsylvania

H.A.B.S. No. Pa. 233

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District of Pennsylvania

Historic American Buildings Survey
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THE BENJAMIN REAL HOMESTEAD
Forty-Fort, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania

One of the oldest landmarks of the West Side, the old Benjamin Real Homestead, formerly located at 318 River Street, Forty-Fort, has disappeared within the past few months.

The last owners of the little house had it moved to one side in order to break ground for a new home. The first deed to the grounds of the house, the earliest for the West Side, on record at the courthouse, was granted in 1804, by the proprietors of Kingston Township, which then took in all of Kingston and Forty-Fort, to Benjamin Real.

Mr. and Mrs. Real were Pennsylvania Dutch colonists, who spoke no English. The house descended through their daughter, to their granddaughter, Miss Mary Alice Shoemaker, a school teacher in several towns in this section, until her marriage to Henry H. Hadsall. Mr. and Mrs. Hadsall then occupied the house until 1876 after which it was rented to various tenants until 1899, when Mr. and Mrs. George Youlles, parents of Mrs. Gower, moved in. Mrs. Gower, last occupant of the house was born there and even after her marriage continued to live in the house. The home was bought by Mr. Gower two years ago.

The intent of the original proprietors was that the village of the township was to be at Forty-Fort, and the village of Kingston, as it was called at the time of the Revolution, were both laid out with streets six rods wide in the New England style; and there were located the fort, the sign post, the graveyard and the meeting house. After the Revolution, the village languished and most town lots were used as farm land. It is believed that Benjamin Real was something of a farmer and carpenter, as were many of the other inhabitants of that section.

When the house was built in 1804, the log cabins had been mainly supplanted by homes of frame construction. An ample supply of finest white pine and hemlock was easily obtained upon and over the Kingston mountains. Lime and plaster was easily obtained, in the upper end of

Columbia County and most of the other materials were produced at home, with the exception of window glass, which was brought from Philadelphia and was mainly of English make.

The houses were usually built of oak, hemlock or pine logs, hauled to the site of the intended home by the owner himself, and if he were not capable of carpenter work, would be assisted by a neighboring carpenter. The logs were hewn with an instrument called an adz. The logs were then drawn to the saw mill, and there sawed into rough lumber. When the lumber was properly seasoned, he began the erection of his house. The foundations, of course, were of stone which was readily obtainable at the foot of the mountain, and there was the best of sand in abundance, at the bank of the river. The only things purchased were nails, (if used) and window glass. The roof was covered with wood shingles, usually made by old men who could do little else. The nails, of course, were hand wrought, but were seldom used in the frame of the house. The doors and window sashes were usually mortised together and secured with wooden pins.

Such was the manner in which the Real house was built. It was a one and one-half story structure containing only five rooms. On the first floor were the living room, kitchen, pantry and a bed room. On the second floor were two bedrooms and attic space. The foundations of the house were of field stone. The structure was of frame construction, consisting of corner posts braced to sill and plate with studding spaced approximately twenty-four inches on center. Rafters were hand hewn and fastened together with wooden pegs. Joists were mortised into sill. Floors were original and of white pine of random widths. One bedroom on second floor and one on first floor were the only plastered portion. Other rooms had walls of notched boards nailed to the studs and burlap bags stretched and tacked on. Paper was applied on same. Roof was covered with hand hewn wood shingles. None of the original hardware remained. The cellar appeared under front portion of the house only. The property, until only recently, was especially noted for its flower gardens.

Although the Benjamin Real house has no particular history of its own, it has been definitely identified with the early history of the Valley. It was situated adjacent to the David Culver property where the first ferry crossed the Susquehanna in this section, and was considered one of the oldest houses on the entire West Side.

Historical information obtained from the following sources: "History of the Certified Township of Kingston" - Brewster; "Families of the Wyoming Valley" - Kulp; Newspaper Clipping from Osterhout Library - at time it was announced that Benjamin Real House would be razed; Mrs. Clarence Gower and Mrs. W.F. Newhart (daughter of Mrs. Hadsall, second occupant of the home).

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