

Hoyle House, Dallas vicinity, Gaston County, North Carolina

The one day investigation of the Hoyle House in Gaston County, North Carolina, focused on the analysis of the earliest section of the dwelling. Specific questions dealt with the original and subsequent plans of the core house and construction traditions. The following observations are not definitive, but intended to relate the house to late 18th-century Pennsylvania-German housing. These observations focus on Pennsylvania parallels in terms of house plan, construction, and improvement. The following comments also provide a brief statement of context based on the returns of the 1798 Federal Direct Tax Census about how the Hoyle House would have stood in the Pennsylvania-German architectural landscape. The Hoyle House is architecturally an extremely important building for south central North Carolina and deserves considerably more investigation and analysis before any significant restoration work begins.

Plan. The historic core of the Hoyle House appears to be a two-story, framed log structure approximately 30 feet in length and 25 feet deep. The earliest readily apparent plan visible in the house is a four-room arrangement with two heated rooms served by back-to-back fireplaces in one gable end, and two unheated chambers in the opposite end. This arrangement in terms of its present configuration and detailing seems to date at the earliest from the late 18th century. Later alterations changed the plan into a center-passage, double-pile arrangement before returning it to its earlier appearance. The Hoyle House, however, had an even earlier plan history, possibly dating into the third quarter of the 18th century, which we have only just begun to assess. First, the evidence of smoke stains and decorative finishes such as chamfered joists suggest that the house was heated originally by a fireplace most likely set square to the gable and facing directly into the room. The heavy summer beam running the length of the house was probably partially supported in the chimney jamb masonry. The single gable end fireplace offset in the gable end heated a large open room that ran the full depth of the

house. We know this from the simple chamfers on the edges of the joists at their juncture with the summer beam. If the original plan had called for a partition parallel to the ridge, the builders would have made some provision to seat a vertical board wall. No indication for such a wall is currently visible. Also, the even staining from fireplace smoke and grease on the original under surface of the exposed second story floor boards strongly indicates a single large room at one end of the house. The original length of this room is uncertain at present. It is possible (but unlikely) that the house as first built contained a single open common room on the first floor. More likely, though, is the probability that the first floor was partitioned into one or two unheated rooms across the end away from the fireplace. The second floor plan seems to have followed a similar formal history although the fireplace set square to the wall remains intact. The subdivision of this space has changed at least three times in the history of the house with no clear evidence of the first arrangement.

In terms of parallels with Pennsylvania-German housing of the late 18th century, we can offer a few tentative observations. First, whatever the exact arrangement of the original plan, the Hoyle House did not conform to any of the most common forms of Pennsylvania-German housing. The intended plan appears instead to draw on a family of cross-passage plans more closely associated with Pennsylvania-English communities in the lower Delaware Valley. The idea of a large three-room house with a major fireplace and stair in one end and two equal size chambers (usually heated in the mid-Atlantic region) was the choice of wealthier landowners-- many of whom held controlling interests in rural industries such as grist and flour mills.

Construction. The corner post log construction of the Hoyle House possesses more precise associations with Pennsylvania-German architecture of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The construction system itself falls into a framing tradition that uses logs as a form of infill or nogging. While there are some colonial examples of this technique, the vast majority appear to be of post-Revolutionary and even of post- lath-century date. One of the best 18th-

century examples is the Hess House located near Lititz north of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Built circa 1740, the Hess House stands as a 25 by 42 foot German-Georgian plan dwelling. Of particular note, though, is the construction system of heavy timber posts joined by log infill. The posts average ten by nine inches and are placed to define the principal openings and internal divisions of the building. At least three of the four corner posts are “L” shaped one foot two inch by one foot timbers. The primary differences between the Hess and Hoyle houses resides in the way in which the posts are employed in relationship to the plan. In the Hoyle House the posts define structural units and formal units; in the Hess House they define structural and formal characteristics as well as all the door and window openings.

A second house located east of Lancaster illustrates some of the basic characteristics of post-and-log houses erected in the early national period. The Webber-Glick House is a 30 by 34 foot three-room “Flurkuchenhaus” erected around 1800. Although later siding obscures the much of the originally exposed log construction, the stairwell to the attic reveals the use of corner posts with diagonal arch braces. The builders tenoned log infill into the posts and pinned the logs in place. This strategy for building framed log houses appears throughout the Delaware Valley and on into central Pennsylvania, and, based on recorded extant houses, dates from the 1790s through the mid 1800s.

Improvement The changes made in the plan and finishes of the Hoyle House from the period of its initial construction through the early 1800s reflect a larger pattern in the architectural landscapes of the eastern United States. Whatever its original appearance and plan, the owners of the Hoyle House modified their dwelling in the early 1800s through the installation of paneled overmantels, molded vertical board walls, beaded exterior siding, and enlarged sash windows. They also appear to have improved on the plan by remodeling the large gable end chimney pile with back-to-back fireplaces on the ground floor while leaving the second floor first period fireplace unaltered.

The fact of change or improvement expressed in the fabric of the Hoyle House relates to much larger traditions in improved housing standards in the quarter century after 1800. The houses most likely to be improved were larger dwellings of the 18th century--such as the Hoyle House. The types of improvements made to houses most commonly incorporated added or rebuilt fireplaces, enlarged windows, new interior finishes (usually in the form of applied moldings and paneling), and plan changes made by subdividing existing space or adding service wings for cooking and other household activities. All of these changes are present in the Hoyle House.

The 1798 Federal Direct Tax Census. The 1798 Federal Direct Tax for Conestoga Township in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, enables us to place the Hoyle House in the larger context of Pennsylvania-German architecture. Conestoga Township is one the county's German communities and is located southeast of Lancaster on the east bank of the Susquehanna River. The average size of Conestoga Township houses valued at greater than \$100 in 1798 was 748 square feet (compared with the 750 square foot Hoyle House). Like two-thirds of the houses in Conestoga Township, the Hoyle House was built using a variation on log construction. The big distinction came in terms of building height. The two-story elevation of the Hoyle House was impressive even by Conestoga Township standards where three quarters of the assessed dwellings stood only a single story in elevation. Thus, while the dimensions of the Hoyle House fell right in the middle range of Conestoga Township houses, its two-story elevation would have made it a commanding presence in the landscape.

Farther west in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, the 1798 Direct Tax recorded all the principal dwellings in East Pennsborough Township on the Conodoguinet Creek. The durable settlement of this area took place in the mid 18th century and consisted primarily of Scotch-Irish, English, and Germans. Four fifths of all the houses were of log construction, but only 47 (33 percent) of the 204 recorded log dwellings rose a full two stories in elevation. Log houses

ranged in size from 18 by 16 feet (288 square feet) to 54 by 21 feet (1 134 square feet). The average log dwelling contained 806 square feet, but the typical dimensions of 22 by 26 feet describe a smaller range of housing. In this context, the Hoyle House would have stood as a major dwelling by local standards.

Similarly in Washington Township, Franklin County, Pennsylvania, located just north of Hagerstown, Maryland, the Hoyle House would have occupied an even more significant position along the architectural continuum of houses described by stories, dimensions, area, and material. In Washington Township log houses represented nearly 90 percent of all recorded housing, and over two-thirds of the log houses stood only a single story in height. The smallest recorded log dwelling, a scant twelve by thirteen feet, was valued at \$110; the largest (45 by 21 feet) covered an area of 945 square feet and assessed at \$280. The average area of a log house in Washington Township enclosed 669 square feet--137 square feet less than in East Pennsborough and 79 square feet less than in Conestoga Township.

Although each of these townships is located in Pennsylvania, they all stand at various points along the head of the migration trails that fed into the Valley of Virginia and ultimately the Piedmont region of the Carolinas. The fact that the Hoyle House would have presented an exceptionally high level of housing in the Pennsylvania landscapes suggests how extraordinary the Hoyle House would have been in the Gaston County countryside.

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