

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Oyer, Christian, Jr., House

other names/site number Harmon House

2. Location

street & number Township Road 513, 258A not for publication N/A

city or town Huntingdon (Barree Township) vicinity

state Pennsylvania code PA county Huntingdon code 061 zip code 16652

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

DR. BRENT D. GLASS

Signature of certifying official/Title

6/13/95
Date

PA HISTORICAL & MUSEUM COMMISSION

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

| | |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

Oyer, Christian, r., House
Name of Property

Muntingdon PA
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1 | 1 | buildings |
| | | sites |
| | | structures |
| | | objects |
| 1 | 1 | Total |

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single Dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single Dwelling

Work in Progress

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Early Republican/Federal

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Stone/Stucco

roof Synthetic/Fiber Glass

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Name of Property

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

c. 1830

Significant Dates

c. 1830

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1 Oyer, Christian, Jr., House
Huntingdon County, PA

The Oyer House is located in north-central Huntingdon County about three-quarters of a mile from the village of Saulsburg. This dwelling, a ca. 1830 Federal style stone house of good integrity and rectangular in plan, sits on 1.8 acres facing south, surrounded on all sides by the gently rolling hills of the Gibboney Dairy Farm and fronted by a gravel road. Most of the original 163 acres of the farm belonging to the house was bought by this neighboring farm in 1968, leaving the house and its acreage isolated in a rural enclave. A non-contributing wooden, tin-roofed shed sits immediately to the northwest of the house.

The house is on the eastern end of the present property. It is a rectangular two-story Federal style four-over-four building (32'x42') with prominent double chimneys on each gable end. The structure of uncut fieldstone foundation and walls has a gabled roof of medium pitch, presumably originally covered with wooden shingles, the remains of which were found in the attic. The roof is now covered with fiberglass shingles. There are six dormers, three on the front and three on the back.

The south-facing two-story five-bay facade has a central doorway with an elliptical fanlight and sidelights on either side of an eight-paneled door which exhibited traces of polychromed paint now restored. The original locks, stamped "L. Gotta," remain on both the front and rear doors, the original polychrome on the latter remaining as document. Two free-standing reeded columns, oval in plan, support the paneled door reveal. The windows are 9/6, double hung, with some of the original highly distorted glazing. Shutters, some original, some replaced, exist on the front and sides of the building. There is a shallow molded cornice. Covered with stucco, the walls have been scored to resemble cut stone. In these interstices were faint remnants of color originally intended to resemble mortar.

Double-gable stone chimneys connected by a horizontal stone parapet wall are incorporated in the masonry end-walls. On the west wall are two downstairs and two upstairs windows of identical size to the facade windows. The east wall is the same as the west wall with the exception that there is a door which led to the demolished summer kitchen in place of a rear downstairs gable-end window. Two smaller attic windows and a louvered lunette on both end-walls give light and ventilation to the attic space. The rear elevation is identical to the front elevation in every way excepting the lack of shutters probably originally extant.

Entering the central hall, a large archway on free-standing reeded columns echoes the shape of the elliptical fanlight. The stairway, to the right, has a simple railing and square-cut balusters and leads all the way to the attic. The stair risers are "smoke" painted and the baseboards marbleized, as are nearly all the baseboards throughout the house. All rooms have chair-rails. The doors to each of the rooms off the central hall and throughout the house have five raised panels and wide surrounding intricate molding, complete with bulls-eye corner blocks. All doors and baseboards are decorated with original paint, in good condition, imitating exotic woods or marble. All doors except two have their original hardware intact. Two sets of door hardware have been replaced with similar period hardware.

The four rooms on either side of the central hall are approximately the same size, 14'x14'. All the downstairs rooms have fireplaces. The two front rooms have two-door

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chimney cabinets decorated or grained. Each of the fireplaces in the front rooms has double free-standing reeded columns on either side of the fireplace supporting mantels that have raised paneling, round molding and some reeding. Of the four original columns in the dining area, two have been removed and are in need of repair; two are missing and need to be replaced. The fireplace in the rear parlor to the west has single elongated columns supporting a similar mantel. A false stone back has been constructed in this fireplace to accommodate and hide the furnace flue. Upon removal of the wallpaper in this room extensive stenciling in fair to poor condition was revealed on all four walls, from floor to ceiling. Ca. 1970 a doorway was cut between this room and the front parlor by previous owners, the door moldings being carefully replicated. In the kitchen area, the large cooking fireplace supports a heavy, hewn oak lintel. Hardware to support a fireplace crane remains in place.

All of the windows on the first and second story are the same in dimension and detail. Each room in the house, with the exception of the kitchen, has three large windows, 3'x5'7", surrounded by the same intricate molding and corner blocks as the doors and completed with a very deep paneled reveal. The top sashes are fixed; the bottom, held open with brass window stops. The delicate muntins are only about 9/16" wide.

Ceilings throughout the house are 9'10" high. Floors are one inch random-width tongue-and-groove yellow pine. Molded baseboards and chair-rails remain largely intact throughout all the rooms of the house.

Three upstairs bedrooms also have fireplaces but without columns. Their panelings and mantels are each slightly different from the other. The two west bedrooms are 14'x14'. Another bedroom, in the northeast and to the rear of the main bedroom, is 11'x14', while the main bedroom is 14'x17'. A smaller room, 9'x9', at the head of the stairs between the southeast and southwest bedrooms, is now a bathroom.

All of the doors facing the halls, upstairs and downstairs, including the front and back entrance doors are painted in a very realistic manner to resemble figured maple. The base moldings in the hallways are realistically marbled and this decoration continues up the open staircase to the attic. The stair risers are "smoke" painted. The sides of the doors facing the two parlors are broadly painted to resemble crotch mahogany as is the two-door chimney cupboard in the front parlor. The woodwork in the kitchen and dining room was repainted in the late 19th century in oak graining. The baseboards in the two parlors and in four of the upstairs rooms are broadly marbled. In the larger southeast bedroom there is a large 9'x9"x5' four-door chimney cupboard realistically painted to resemble bird's-eye maple and both doors facing into this room are painted in like manner.

In the rear parlor, stencils in bright colors of red and green on a blue background are, unfortunately, in only fair to poor condition as many layers of wallpaper had been pasted on them over the years. These stencils appear, in various states of repair, from floor to ceiling on all four walls in designs that travel around the room, each of the six rows differing from the rest.

The attic has common rafters, ship-lapped and pinned at the apex with no ridge-beam. Tie-beams are mortised into the rafters. Mortises and the rotted remains

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of some tenons on some of the rafters indicated the size and placement of the six original dormers. This space and the basement space run open the full length and width of the building, with no evidence of any use other than storage.

In the cellar can be seen the large east-west summer-beam into which the north-south joists are mortised. The stone walls project under the fireplaces as support. An area with newer stone infill may indicate the previous existence of a fireplace in the east wall. Two small windows on the front and one on the rear open out to window-wells on the exterior of the building. Ca. 1970 a cement floor was poured and support columns installed in the basement.

The non-contributing wooden tin-roofed shed, 20'x24', placed near the northwest corner of the house was constructed in 1993 of old barn wood and serves as a garage and implement shed. There are no other outbuildings extent on the property.

Other than the inclusion of mechanicals, few architectural changes have been made to this building. Wiring, plumbing, heating, kitchen and bathroom fixtures were installed in 1990. At this time two chases were designed for either side of the front door to carry mechanicals to the second floor. Baseboards were exactly duplicated and the symmetrical chases finished to appear as part of the original structure. A very small lavatory was fitted into the wall recess which originally led from the kitchen to the summer kitchen; this exterior kitchen doorway remains intact.

Upstairs, the two closets and one bathroom, completed in 1993, were placed in the small rear bedroom, preserving the original appearance of the three main bedrooms. The other bathroom, completed in 1990, was placed in the small room at the head of the stairs.

Extensive replastering was necessary on walls and ceilings, most of the latter being saved with the use of plaster buttons; two could not be salvaged and were totally replastered as was the kitchen. A few pieces of chair-railing, basemolding and window muntins needed replacement and were milled to match existing samples. Most of this work was carried out during 1990-1991. At the same time several holes in the kitchen and rear parlor floors were repaired with the use of old yellow pine boards matching as nearly as possible the original flooring. With the exception of a doorway cut between the two parlors by a previous owner (ca. 1970) these are the only changes made on the interior and the plan remains otherwise intact.

On the exterior, repairs to the stone work and stucco were completed ca. 1970. The stucco was repaired again in 1991 which, with previous repairs, left an unsightly piebald appearance and so was painted as near as possible to the original stucco color. Fifty-three window panes needed replacement as did the roof and the aforementioned shutters. Some of the cornice was exactly duplicated and replaced. Six dormers were replaced in 1994, using dimensions indicated on the attic rafters, completing the rehabilitation of the exterior of the house between 1991 and 1994. The shutters were repaired or replaced at this time.

Every effort was made to change as little as possible consistent with modern living. These necessary changes were made with baseboard and chair-rails left intact so that closets, chases and kitchen and bathroom fixtures could be removed at a later date should it be found desirable to return the house to its original condition. The

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restoration that was possible and the replacement that was needed was carried out with sensitivity and care so that the significance of the building would be enhanced by careful restoration rather than impaired by remodeling.

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Huntingdon County, PA

The Christian Oyer, Jr., House is a good and representative example of Federal style architecture in Huntingdon County, embodying the distinctive characteristics of this early 19th century style. Unfortunately, the builder and the artisan who was responsible for the elaborate and extensive decorative painting are unknown as is the actual date of construction. The significance of this house lies in the excellent proportions and detailing, the remarkable state of integrity, and, most of all, in the amount and quality of its painted decoration. The fine front and back exterior polychromed doors and the doorways with their elliptical fanlights and sidelights, the prominent double chimneys on both sides of the house, the six dormers, and the scoring of the stucco to resemble dressed stone, all testify to the effort made to produce an imposing house of unusual architectural value for a remote farmhouse. On the interior as well, the paneled window reveals, intricate moldings on doors and windows, and the seven fireplaces all contribute to this quality and distinction. The integrity and quality of most of the interior simulated wood and marble painting and the stenciling are not only remarkable but unique to this area. This decorative painting is obviously the work of a talented craftsman.

Christian Oyer, Sr. and Christian Oyer, Jr. variously described as coming from Lancaster, Chester and Dauphin counties, were listed as "yoemen" in the Article of Agreement (1825) between father and son. There has been much speculation about the building of such a formal and impressive house more related to those of neighboring iron-masters than to those of other farmers in the area. There is no way of determining the actual motive, but the fact that Christian Oyer, Sr. felt it necessary to have a legal agreement between himself and his heir in the very year that he also made a will (and the year in which he died) suggests that he felt a strong need to direct with detailed instructions the use of his resources by a son about whose competence, stability or extravagance he may have had some doubt. And, indeed, soon after his father's death, the son embarked on the "substantial improvements now on the farm." (Africa, pg. 213) Possibly as a result of his improvidence, Oyer, Jr. was sued by David McMurtrie for \$3000 and Martin Nouresky for \$1000 in 1837. In 1844 Oyer lost the entire farm at the suit of Dr. Benjamin McMurtrie, who soon after sold the property to David McMurtrie, merchant. The farm was purchased by Philip Silknitter, farmer, and then Samuel Silknitter's administrators sold the property to pay off his debts. Jackson Harmon, farmer, purchased the farm in 1880 and it remained in the possession of his family until 1968. After purchase of the farm by the family of Silas Gibboney in 1968 and the subsequent sale of the house and 1.8 acres to Ellen Gibboney in 1970, the house, after some important structural repairs, (exterior stonework, basement cement flooring and support columns) was abandoned for about twenty years, purchased by William P. Hayes, 1990, and resold within the year to Jean L. Murphy. It was this abandonment and the fact that during the long eighty-eight year sojourn of the Harmons the house had received little attention, as witnessed by several photographs of the time, which was responsible, in a sense, for the preservation of its integrity. Although little was repaired, and that little allowed to languish, little was changed. Nothing was ever repainted with the exception of the dining room and kitchen graining. No running water, plumbing of any kind, central heating, kitchen or bath was introduced into the house. Electricity

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consisted of a single light bulb in the upstairs and downstairs halls. In short, no architectural modernization was made. Although both exterior and interior walls were severely cracked, glass and balusters missing, and roof leaking, all could be restored with minimal damage to the architectural integrity of the house. Necessary modernization by the current owner was made so that kitchen and bathroom fixtures, closets and chasers could easily be removed if it were found to be desirable to return the house to its early 19th century appearance.

Probably the only other stone house in Barree township is the Wilson House, ca. 1822. There are few similarities to the Oyer House, however. The Wilson House has a four-bay facade with single chimneys on either gable end. It has a four-over-four plan but there is no center hall. The single winding staircase leads from the kitchen to the upstairs. There are three fireplaces downstairs with chimney cabinets, six-paneled doors and plain door moldings and no panels in the window reveals. The entire rear wall of this house has collapsed and it is abandoned and apparently beyond repair.

The only other house in the area known to have any painted decoration is the Curtin Mansion, an iron-masters house in neighboring Centre County. Although also a stuccoed stone, five-bay Federal house, ca. 1830, the Curtin Mansion has a curiously inadequate front door with no side-lights. It also has three dormers across the front, the design of which was used for reference in replacing the Oyer House dormers. The four-over-four plan of the main part of the house is similar to that of the Oyer House but the rooms are somewhat larger, the staircase more grand and the two-story wing makes it more spacious. It is in the detailing that the Oyer House, although smaller in scale and lacking a kitchen extension, seems more elegant. In the Curtin Mansion only the doors have simulated wood graining which has been completely repainted and is, in any case, not nearly so fine as the original painting in the Oyer House. Nor does the Curtin Mansion have decorated baseboards, stair-risers, chimney cabinets or stenciling. Also the window reveals are plain; the upstairs fireplaces are smaller with insignificant mantels. The front and rear doors of the Oyer House with their sidelights, fanlights, free-standing columns, paneled reveals and polychromed doors are far more satisfactory than those of the Curtin Mansion.

Probably the most similar house in the area is the Hugh Seeds House in nearby Spruce Creek township. The Seeds House is another five-bay Federal stone house ca. 1830-40. The exterior stone is cut limestone, however, and it has single chimneys on either gable end and no dormers. The windows are 6/6 and not as large as the 9/6 windows in the Oyer House but the placement on the facade and the gable ends is generally the same. The front doorway has sidelights similar to the Oyer House but no fanlight. Instead the transom over the six-panel door shows some Greek Revival influence. The interior has the same four-over-four floor plan with the extra room at the head of the staircase in both houses, although the room sizes tend to be somewhat different, being approximately 13'x16' in the Seeds House and 14'x14' in the Oyer House whose ceilings are nevertheless higher. The Seeds House has a somewhat smaller central hall and no columned archway. An unusual 4' medallion adorns the ceiling in this hall which is not open all the way to the attic, however, which gives added drama to the Oyer

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House. There is an enclosed winder staircase leading from the kitchen to a smaller back bedroom. As well as being fewer in number, the room fireplaces tend to be smaller in the Seeds House. The mantels are less elaborate, and most lack chimney cabinets. The floors are similar yellow pine. The woodwork in this house is considerably plainer; the more elaborate moldings and the chair rails are reserved to the kitchen and dining room. And there is no decorative paint.

In general, it could be said that there are a number of Federal houses in the area, some of stone, most of wood or brick, many of which are fine examples of early 19th century architecture. What sets the Oyer House apart is refinement. Smaller in scale than some of the grander houses, it is in the details and the proportions that this house seems to excel. Although the Federal house form derives from English precedents, it may have been the German ancestry of Christian Oyer, Sr. (whose legal documents were all written in German) which accounts for the amount of painting in the house, there being a strong tradition of Pennsylvania decorative arts particularly in the eastern part of the state from which the Oyers originally came. Even the colors on the undecorated woodwork (which also have never been repainted) are strong blues, greens and violets as well as more reserved greys.

The Samuel Patterson House and the Adam Fisher House in Westmoreland County have doors painted in what appears to be similar crotch mahogany and maple graining to that which appears in the Oyer House, suggesting the existence of itinerant artists. Itinerant portrait painters, for instance, were often trained or self-taught in many other aspects of painting, "... some artists painted signs for local merchants, decorated coaches, painted murals and fireboards for local taverns and houses, ..." (Ebert, pg. 42) Not only were they able to turn their hands to all facets of painting and decoration, some also had various styles of painting, both the flat or "primitive" style associated with folk art and the more realistic style associated with academic painting. The type used, apparently, depended on the patron's taste or, more likely, ability to pay. This may help to explain what seemed at first an anomaly in the decoration of this house: some of the painting is virtually trompe l'oeil in its verisimilitude; other decoration is broadly painted in an approximation of reality. That the two styles were accomplished by the same artisan is suggested by the fact that both are original and both styles can often be found on opposite sides of the same door.

The building itself is a typically Federal house form. The rectangular four-over-four plan with the side gabled roof, the strict symmetry of the five-bay window placement, the centrality of the front door and the end chimneys are all typical of Federal design in this area. The restraint of the decorative elements on the exterior, as well as the delicacy of these details including the slimness of the window muntins, and the shallowness of the cornices are also usual in this building form. Elaboration is reserved for the doorway, but even here the fan-light with its crown scored in the surrounding stucco and the free-standing columns are light and delicate, the columns being typically elongated. The columns are often doubled on the interior, design elements designating this as an early 19th century example as are the fireplace mantels, the placement and design of the door paneling, the bulls-eye corner blocks and

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the configuration of the baseboards and chair-rails. And, indeed, although the exterior overall house form (many features of which can also be found in Georgian examples) tended to persist, it was on the interior where changes generally moved more rapidly making possible more accurate stylistic identification in many cases. In this case, however, both exterior and interior design forms are undeniably Federal in style. Although it is related in this regard to other houses in the area, it is its differences rather than its similarities that make it remarkable and set it apart from its neighbors.

The Oyer House is remarkable in its state of integrity. Architecturally the house has suffered minimal change; fireplace mantels, chair-rails, baseboards, door hardware, interior partitions and original paint remain, with the exception of some movable additions, (closets, chases, kitchen and bathroom fixtures) unchanged. G. Edwin Brumbaugh, renowned restoration architect and an authority on these matters, in a conversation, ca. 1975, with Nancy Shedd, Executive Director of the Huntingdon County Historical Society, has called this a "document house," a structure almost historically intact and therefore an unusual subject for study. According to the Huntingdon County Historic Site Survey of 1978-1980, this is a "...stone house of great architectural interest and integrity. The interior is outstanding for retaining its original grained and marbled paint which has been unchanged for 150 years."

The proportions of this house seem to be exceptionally fine; many of the other Federal houses in this area demonstrate a nice sensitivity in this regard. An element of the structure which appears to be significantly different from its neighbors, however, is the fact that the front and rear elevations are architecturally identical, a feature usually to be found only on high-style houses typically facing both road and waterway, the rationale for this double orientation. No other house in this area has this feature.

The scoring of the exterior stucco to resemble dressed stone, the excellent front and rear doorways with their fan and sidelights, free-standing columns and polychromed doors, and the six dormers suggest an attempt at the appearance of importance and display. On the interior, the impressive center hall with its columned archway, extensive paneling and molding, multiple fireplaces with their fine mantels, high ceilings and, most of all, the elaborate use of paint to simulate expensive materials, all attest to an unusual sensitivity in the use of elegant materials, workmanship and design. The house is set apart from its neighbors by its wonderful attempts at a kind of refined ostentation; a well preserved, virtually intact example, high in artistic value, of early 19th century domestic architecture, unique in many respects in this area.

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- Huntingdon County (Pennsylvania) Will Book. Vol. 3. Huntingdon County Courthouse.
- Shedd, Nancy. An Architectural Study of the Ancient Borough of Huntingdon. Huntingdon: John S. Rodgers Co., 1976.
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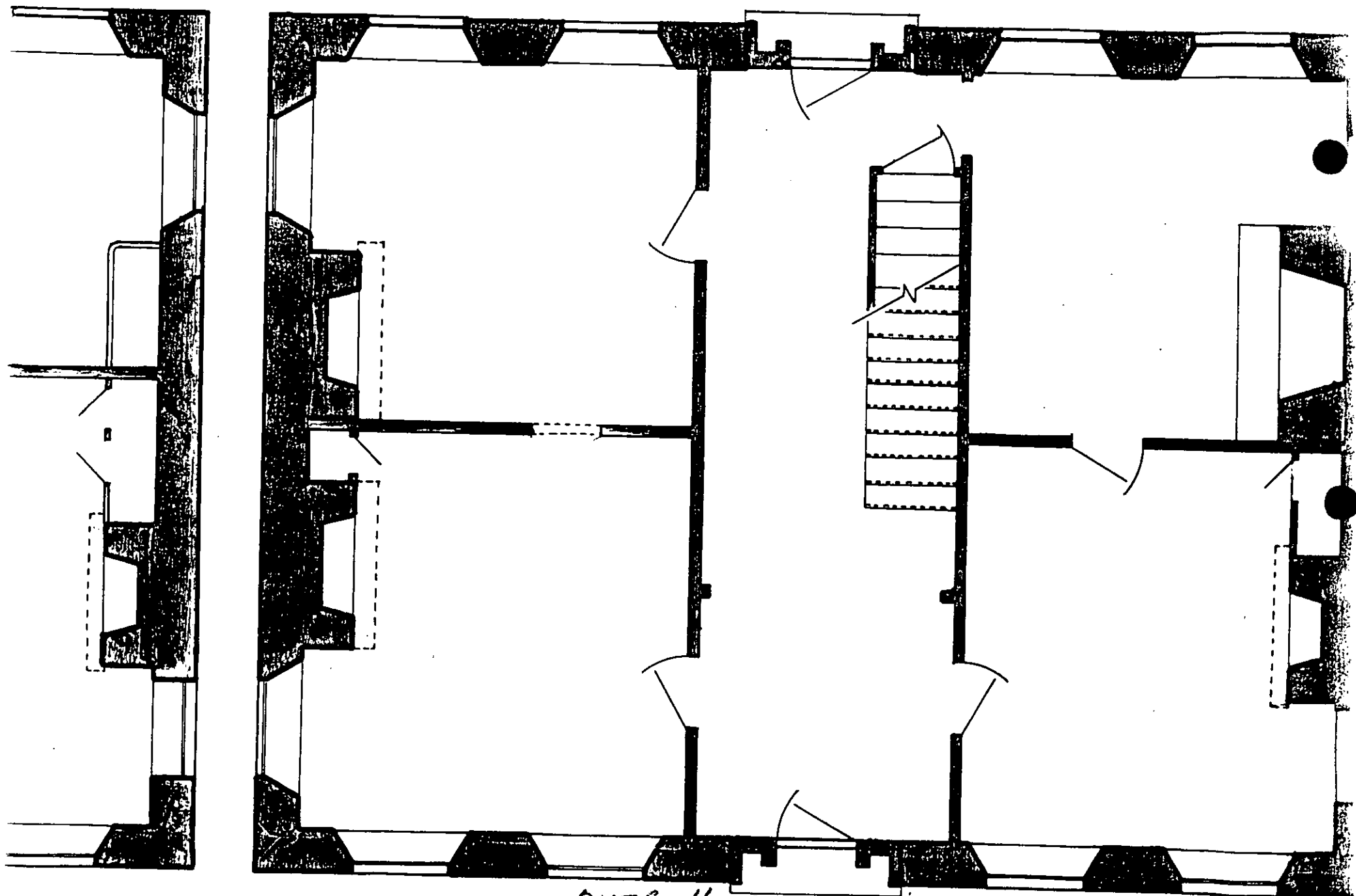
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Verbal Boundary Description

See description in Huntingdon County Deed Book (Book 261, Page 312).

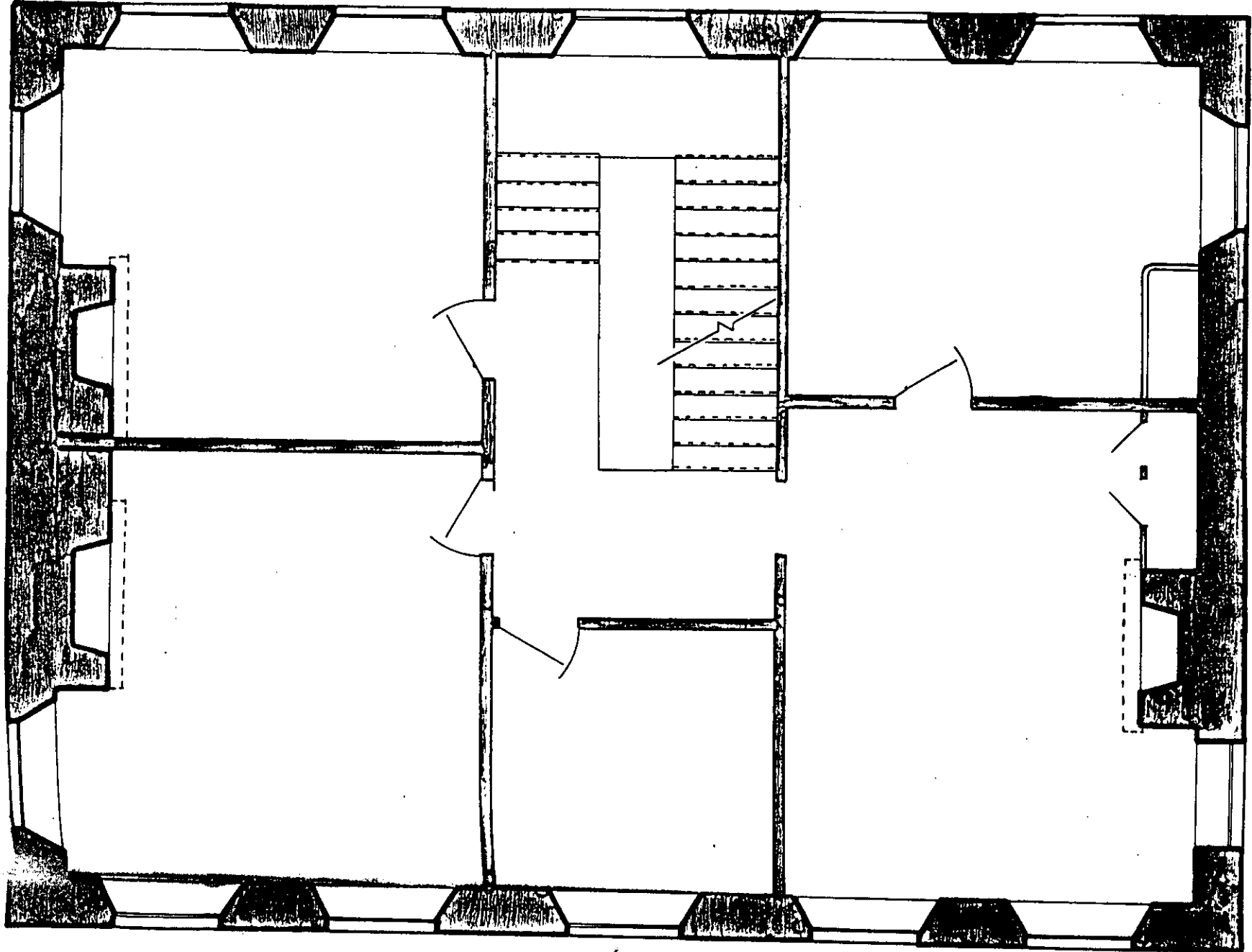
Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the house and the acreage immediately connected with the house. The historical 163 acres still surround the house, unimproved, but do not contribute to the architectural significance of the nominated property. Current property lines were drawn to exclude Gibboney Farm water sources and to include acreage surrounding the house. The house and the non-contributing garage are the only buildings extant on this tract.



OYER HOUSE

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

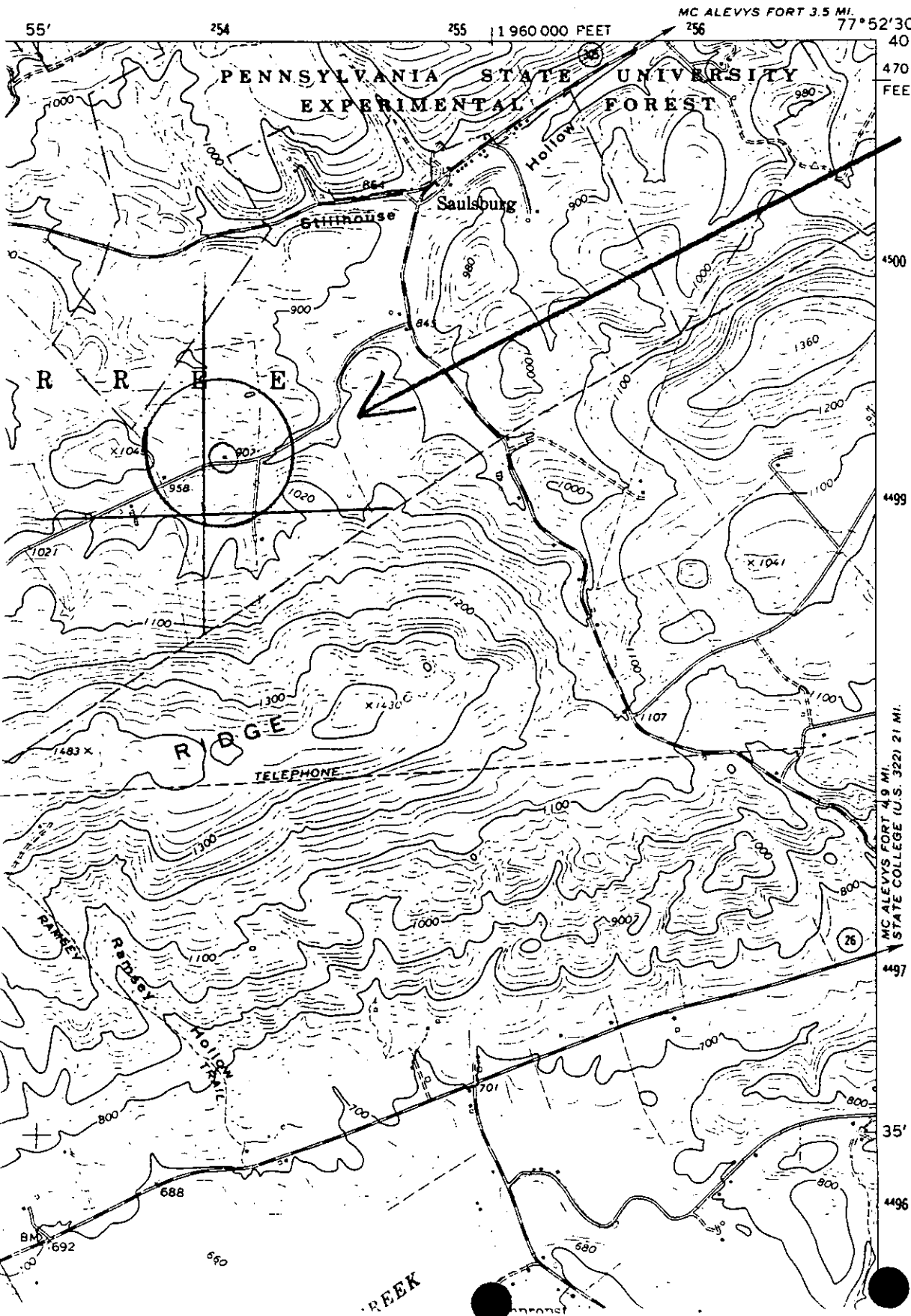


SECOND FLOOR PLAN

OYER HOUSE

DONATION QUADRANGLE
 PENNSYLVANIA-HUNTINGDON CO.
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

5465 III NE
 (MC ALEVYS FORT)



Donation
 Oyer, Christian, Hse.
 Huntingdon County PA
 Zone 18

E 254800
 N 4499250