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**Foundation Ruin**

A subterranean stone foundation occupies a 20 x 15 foot rectangular area 14.5 feet northeast of the c. 1754 section of the house. It is believed that this may have been the location of the original residence constructed by Robert Williams in 1704. The ruins include a chimney element centered on the east wall.

**Changes and Threats to Integrity**

The Ellis Williams House retains integrity, both interior and exterior. Although various owners have made changes, the alterations do not seriously detract from the house's historic appearance. In fact, the present owner has preserved most of the significant interior details. The biggest changes to the house are the removal of the pent roof, the removal of the winding stairs on the first floor, the construction of the 1997 pantry / powder room addition, the installation of kitchen on the first floor and a bath on the second floor. Visitors to the house easily grasp its historic appearance augmented by the museum-like quality interior. Almost every room conveys a sense of its original appearance despite the aforementioned alterations. Changes to the workshop include its end additions (clad with compatible board and batten siding), and the construction of the fireplace and chimney.

A small one-story frame powder room addition was attached onto the eastern end of the house in 1997. Its small size, natural material, shape, and location at the end of the house make it a highly compatible addition to the main block. An open frame pergola attached onto the west end of the house replaced an earlier and incompatible addition.

The setting of the Ellis Williams House is generally intact. While the rural nature of the land in the specific vicinity of the house remains, the workshop is the only extant outbuilding historically associated with the house other than the foundation ruin. The barn and springhouse historically associated with the property were located on the south side of East Boot Road and were subdivided from the farmhouse in 1922. The barn was demolished for a housing development in the late twentieth century, and the land where it stood has been regraded. The springhouse is a ruin; its historic landscape has changed from open to wooded, and it is not visible from the house. Changes to the landscape around the barn site and springhouse and to their historic fabric have weakened their association with the Ellis Williams House. As such, they no longer contribute to the historic farmscape and are not included in the resource count.

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### Statement of Significance

The Ellis Williams House is significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Highly intact, it is significant as a key example of rural domestic architecture demonstrating the Penn Plan core (c. 1754) and the enlarged Penn Plan locally known as the “four-room house” (c. 1790). The period of significance begins with the original section c. 1754 and ends with the construction of the workshop c. 1820. (Note: the period of significance does not include the date of the foundation ruin north of the house, thought to have been constructed c. 1704). When expanded, the resulting “four-room house” plan would exemplify a common floorplan of mid-eighteenth century additive farmhouses throughout southeastern Pennsylvania.

### Historic Context

Local tradition states that the house was constructed by Robert Williams (1647—1734), who moved to Chester County from Wales in the 1680s. He is said to have crossed the Atlantic on the ship *Lyon* in the fall of 1682 with the Welsh Quaker leader William ap Edward.<sup>1</sup> A widower, Williams married Gwen Cadwalader in 1691. They settled in Goshen Township about 1700, and are said to have been the first Europeans to settle there (Robert Williams became known as the *King of Goshen*).<sup>2</sup> According to a tradition recorded in J. Smith Futhey and Gilbert Cope’s 1881 *History of Chester County Pennsylvania*, Robert and Gwen first lived in a cave. Williams apparently built a log house in the township around 1699 or 1700.<sup>3</sup>

Robert Williams was an early leader in the Quaker settlement in Chester County. In 1688, he was one of a number of Quakers at Chester who signed a petition against selling alcoholic beverages to Indians.<sup>4</sup> Goshen Friends Meeting first met in 1702 in a house owned by Griffith Owen, a nonresident landowner who lived in Philadelphia. Records of Haverford Friends seem to indicate that this building was the first residence of Robert Williams. Williams purchased his first land in the area the next year.<sup>5</sup>

In 1702, Haverford Friends contributed £19.9.8 for the construction of a new house for Robert Williams, since he was “kindly and openhearted” and was willing to host the Friends meeting at Goshen in his house. This fact and the fact that Williams first purchased land in the township in 1703 seem to suggest that Williams constructed his second house c. 1704 (possibly the foundation ruin north of the current

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<sup>1</sup> Charles H. Browning, *The Welsh Settlement of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: W.J. Campbell, 1912), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> J. Smith Futhey & Gilbert Cope, *History of Chester County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881), pp. 177, 764.

<sup>3</sup> Futhey & Cope, p. 764.

<sup>4</sup> John Pitts Launey and F. Edward Wright, *Early Church Records of Delaware County, Pennsylvania* (Westminster MD: Family Line Publications, 1997), vol. 1, p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> Futhey & Cope, p. 234—235, 764.

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house). The Friends meeting at Goshen was moved out of Williams' house on 6/30/1703 and returned on 3/1/1704.<sup>6</sup> The meeting may have been relocated during the construction of Williams's house. Three years later (1707), Chester Monthly Meeting agreed that Goshen Friends could build a new meeting house near the burial ground already in use in nearby Goshenville. The Goshen Friends Meeting House was completed in 1709; however, a six-weeks, or half-quarterly, meeting continued to meet at the Williams house until 1716.<sup>7</sup>

Williams purchased 75 acres of land in Chester County in 1703 and another 300 acres in 1707.<sup>8</sup> He began to fall behind in his payments on this property and possibly other debts, which annoyed the local Quakers. They appointed a committee to work with him to satisfy his creditors, leading to his decision to sell his property and begin again elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> Robert Williams broke up his large land holdings, conveying the portion containing the house to his son Ellis in 1715 and another portion to John Fincher. In 1715, Robert Williams moved to Uwchlan Township, Chester County, with his wife and minor children.<sup>10</sup>

The Robert Williams property was owned by members of the Williams family for seven decades following its sale in 1715. Ellis Williams, son of Robert Williams, owned the property from 1715 until he sold it to his son Ellis Williams Jr. in 1754. Based on architectural evidence (including a site visit with John Milner), it appears that the younger Ellis Williams may have constructed the core of the current house c. 1754. Ellis Williams Jr. died around 1765; in his will he left twelve acres of land to his widow Lydia, who sold the parcel to Josiah Garrett in 1785 for £230.<sup>11</sup> The Garrett family was a prominent family in the Goshenville area at this time.<sup>12</sup>

Josiah Garrett (Sr.) purchased the property in 1785 and lived there about a decade. Architectural details of the addition suggest that it was constructed during his ownership. His widow Mary Garrett sold the property to their son Josiah Jr. in 1797 for £900. Josiah Jr. owned the property until his death in 1856, leaving it in his will to his grand-nephew William Williams. It seems that Garrett family constructed several of the buildings on the farm. In 1802, Josiah Garrett paid tax on one stone house and a stone barn. This barn was probably the one located south of Boot Road as indicated on the historic maps. Tax records

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<sup>6</sup> Futhey & Cope, p. 764.

<sup>7</sup> Futhey & Cope, pp. 234—235.

<sup>8</sup> Charles H. Browning, pp. 71, 208.

<sup>9</sup> Chester Monthly Meeting, 3/29/1710, in *Early Church Records*, vol. 1, p. 88.

<sup>10</sup> Futhey & Cope, p. 764.

<sup>11</sup> Chester County Deed Book Z-189, Will Book 4:492.

<sup>12</sup> See Robert Wise, *Goshenville National Register Historic District*, 1999.

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seem to indicate that the barn, now demolished, was enlarged between 1811 and 1826, as the tax value doubled (the records between 1811 and 1826 do not identify individual buildings). Other buildings which appear on the tax records during the Garrett ownership are a stone wagon house, a stone workshop, and a spring house. Tax records indicate that Garrett made chairs in the stone workshop, which is thought to be the extant outbuilding associated with the house.<sup>13</sup>

The Williams family owned the property from 1856 until 1923. William Williams inherited the farm in 1856 but sold it to Jesse Williams in 1857 (Deed Book F-6-128-381). Jesse Williams died in 1870, and his son Jesse Jr. assumed ownership until his death in 1922. In 1879, Jesse Williams Jr. constructed an addition (now demolished) which the local newspaper described as "a marked improvement."<sup>14</sup> The current owner believes that this addition was located on the east side, where the pantry / powder room section is now located. The 1880 U.S. Agricultural Census states that the Williams farm produced 36 tons of hay on 18 acres, 450 bushels of Indian corn on 9 acres, 200 bushels of oats on 4 acres, 188 bushels of wheat on 8 acres, and 50 bushels of potatoes on a half acre. Furthermore, Williams sold eight pounds of honey, six cords of wood, 40 bushels of apples, 312 dozen eggs, and 2490 pounds of butter.

Major agricultural production on the farm ceased in the early twentieth century. Jesse Williams Jr. died in 1922, and his executors sold an 18.557-acre parcel of land to Elizabeth R. Saportas which included the Ellis Williams House. The sale subdivided the house from the barn and springhouse on the south side of East Boot Road and from the associated farmland. Saportas held the property for one day, then conveyed it to Samuel Horner Jr. The current owner believes Horner constructed an addition along the north side and ends of the main block; this section appears to have replaced the earlier addition of 1879. Later owners included Charles P. O'Connor (1944—1964) and Lankenau Hospital (1964—1971). The property assumed its current size of 0.734 acres in 1964. The current owner, Shirley Fox, purchased the property from Lankenau Hospital in 1971. Fox demolished the incompatible c. 1930 section, which was becoming dilapidated, and constructed the pantry / powder room addition in 1997 on a portion of its foundations. She also installed the flagstone terrace and pergola on a portion of the foundations of the c. 1930 section.

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<sup>13</sup> Deed Books Z-189 and Q2-184; Will Book 20:475; East Goshen Tax Records 1802-1829. No genealogical connection is known between William Williams and Robert Williams.

<sup>14</sup> *Daily Local News*, 4/30/1879. It is possible that the pent was removed at this time, as the pent on the west end was covered by the addition.

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### Architectural Significance

The Ellis Williams house is a representative example of an enlarged Penn Plan house, a type locally called the "four-room house." It was constructed c. 1754 and doubled c. 1790. The original section reflects one of the most common building types of the area: the Penn Plan. It was originally a two-story, two-bay building with an end-gabled roof and an end chimney at the ridge of the roof. The walls were constructed with rubble fieldstone and originally featured a pent roof (now removed). The interior of the house consisted of a front and rear parlor on the first floor and two chambers on the second floor. Like many other houses in Chester County, the original building was enlarged later in the eighteenth century as families grew in size and wealth.

The Penn Plan was a mode of architecture in the Pennsylvania colony possibly dating to William Penn's idea for a green country town. Introduced around 1700, the Penn Plan became one of the most common modes of vernacular Colonial architecture in southeastern Pennsylvania. Having a desire to avoid the consequences of the Great Fire of London in 1666, Penn hoped that Philadelphia would become a city characterized by brick houses and an abundance of open space. Other examples of the Penn Plan House are the dwelling at 76 Slitting Mill Road in Thornbury Township, Delaware Co. and the Emmor Jefferis Tenant House, c. 1730, in the Worth-Jefferis Historic District (NR 1996) in East Bradford Township, Chester Co. The Ellis Williams house exhibits all the characteristics of the Penn Plan, although it is slightly wider than the standard Penn Plan.

The interior of the Penn Plan reflects a significant development in the evolution of English domestic space. Jack Michel wrote that Medieval English houses were composed of one room, or two at the most. Houses with two rooms separated the parlor from the hall, which was a combination kitchen, storage area, and bedroom. During the seventeenth century, most new English houses incorporated more rooms, creating a greater division of family space. One way of adding additional rooms was through enlarging the loft into a full second floor. The Ellis Williams house is an illustration of what Michel called the two-story, four-room house (that is, two rooms on each floor for a total of four rooms). The four rooms divided the house and family by functional considerations, with some functions of the hall being relegated to other rooms with the introduction of the chamber (or bedroom). There were two primary varieties of interior arrangements in these early houses. Some Penn Plan houses did not have a partition wall subdividing the interiors; an example is the Derrick Casselberry House in the Evansburg Historic District (NR 1972) in Lower Providence Township, Montgomery Co. Other houses had partition walls on each floor creating a hall and parlor on the first floor and two separate chambers on the second floor. Examples of this interior arrangement include the Ellis Williams House and the Isaac Garrett Farmhouse in Willistown Township

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(NR 2003). The significance of the Ellis Williams House is underscored by the fact that Michel used it to illustrate the four-room house with this interior arrangement.<sup>15</sup>

As the eighteenth century progressed, many homeowners in southeastern Pennsylvania enlarged their Penn Plan houses, often by constructing an adjacent two-story, two-bay addition mirroring the original building. The resulting two-story, four-bay house with a continuous roof had two doors on the main elevation (second and third bays) and a symmetrical main façade. The building type is locally known as the "four-room house," meaning that it had four rooms on each floor for a total of eight rooms. Most instances of this doubling involved similar materials, although the Penn Plan house at 76 Slitting Mill Road (Thornbury Township) had a frame addition on a stone Penn Plan house. When the c. 1735 Derrick Casselberry House was doubled c. 1765 to a two-story, four-bay house, the addition's stonework was keyed into that of the original section and stuccoed to obscure the fact that the building was constructed in two sections. In c. 1790, the Ellis Williams House was expanded in this common manner, with two additional rooms on the first floor and two bedrooms on the second floor. The exterior reflected that of many such houses which maintained the symmetry, materials and massing of the original section.

The Ellis Williams House, a Penn Plan house constructed c. 1754, is exemplary of rural houses in colonial Pennsylvania. The original house reflected the late medieval Penn Plan, a two-story, two-bay house with two rooms on each floor. The enlargement of the house c. 1790 followed a common building pattern, resulting in a two-story, four-bay house with an interior plan reflecting the "four-room house." While the main elevation reflects Georgian symmetry, the interior typifies the planning of a rural farmhouse. As such, the Ellis Williams House is an important and highly preserved example of colonial architecture.

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<sup>15</sup> Jack Michel, "In a Manner and Fashion Suitable to Their Degree;" A Preliminary Investigation of the Material Culture of Early Rural Pennsylvania," n.d., unpublished manuscript, pp. 33-48 passim.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

Per Chester County Tax Parcel 53-4-92

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary is per tax parcel 53-4-92 and contains the house, workshop, and summer kitchen ruin. The boundary does not include land south of East Boot Road which originally contained a barn and springhouse. This land has been altered and subdivided from the aforesaid tax parcel. The barn was demolished, and the springhouse is in ruins. The barn foundation was disturbed at the time of the subdivision on the property. The landscape surrounding the springhouse is becoming reforested, and the building itself is dilapidated. The barn and springhouse are not visible from the house and have lost most of their historic association with it. The land north of the parcel was not associated with the farm following its subdivision in 1715 and is now a golf course.



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**Photographs**

All photographs enclosed with this nomination were taken in 2002 by Robert J. Wise, Jr. Original negatives are located at Wise Preservation Planning, Paoli, Pa.

- 1 Overview of farmstead, facing NE
- 2 House – main façade, facing NW
- 3 House – west end, facing E
- 4 House – rear elevation, facing SE
- 5 House – rear elevation, showing powder room addition, facing SW
- 6 Parlor in c. 1750 section, facing NE
- 7 Parlor in c. 1750 section, showing the partition wall, facing NW
- 8 Former kitchen / dining room, facing NW
- 9 Living Room in c. 1790 addition, facing NW
- 10 Second floor bedroom (NE room), facing NW
- 11 Second floor hallway, facing E
- 12 Attic in c. 1750 section, facing E (not shown on site plan)
- 13 Hearth supports in basement, c. 1790 addition, facing NW (not shown on site plan)
- 14 Workshop – main façade, facing N
- 15 Workshop – rear façade, facing SW
- 16 Workshop – rear façade, facing SE
- 17 Workshop – finished room, facing NW (not shown on site plan)

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**Maps**

- 1 USGS Quad Map
- 2 Tax Map (2003)
- 3 Witmer Atlas (1873)
- 4 Breous Atlas (1883)
- 5 Mueller Atlas (1912)
- 6 Sketch Map

**Floorplans**

- 1 First Floor
- 2 Second Floor