

# Use of Stairs at Pennsdale Has Colorful History; Housed Quakers, Bandits, and Slaves

**me Which Served as Inn Con-  
tains Many Relics of Revo-  
lutionary Days**

**T**WENTY miles or so from Williamsport, in the little Quaker village once led Gossetown, later Elizabethtown, a now Pennsdale, there still stands a stone dwelling, hewn of limestone and sandstone. The House of Many Stairs, it is said to be the second oldest house in Adams County, it has sheltered all kinds of people in the last century and half—woodsman, Indian, innkeeper, highwayman, Quaker, British army officer, runaway slave, and even a signer of the Declaration of Independence. March 29, 1784, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania granted to Samuel Wallis, a certain tract of land situate in Muncy township, aforesaid containing 310 1/2 acres. John and Thomas Penn had conveyed this land to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by letters patent February, 1769.

## HOST TO FAMOUS MEN

Samuel Wallis, who came to this section about 1760, was at one time one of the largest land owners in the United States. He was in partnership with James Wilson, one of the original signers of the Declaration of Independence, who were situated with Wallis at this time in Pennsdale. Capt. Gilbert Imbrey of the British army, a fighter and writer, was also probably a guest of Samuel Wallis at one time.

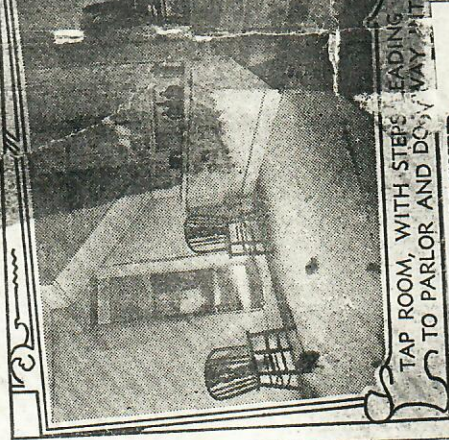
June 24, 1791, Wallis sold this particular plot of land to Enos Lundy, thus initiating a chain of buying and selling of the property which continued down to June 24, 1925, when it passed into the hands of Edward H. Morris.

Sometime between 1784 and 1790 the original little house, hewn of logs, began to "burrow its way into the hillside." Some of the outbuildings on the place were undoubtedly built before the main house, and the old pottery (log cabin), no longer standing, was apparently built when Enos Lundy got the land from Wallis.

place, with its crane and big kettle which are still there today. Down one step from the kitchen was the entrance to the cellar, so constructed that nothing froze there, although it was cold all the time.

## INDIAN DANGER PASSES

One of the seven stairways in the house led from this cellar to the second floor, exactly under the rake of stairs leading to the attic. The attic contained a huge dormer window which gave a commanding view of the countryside. A narrow hallway and a spacious bed-



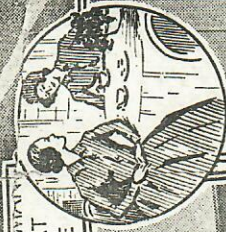
TAP ROOM, WITH STEPS LEADING TO PARLOR AND DOWN TO KITCHEN

## OLD INITIALS FOUND

John Stryker and his wife, who bought the land in 1808, may have been the builders of part of the house, it now stands, because the initials "J. S." and "E. S." and the date "1808" are carved on the keystone above the door of the old part of the house.

It then had two stories and an attic. The ground floor contained one room which served as living room and kitchen combined. Its most outstanding feature was the huge, almost square, fire-

"HOUSE OF MANY STAIRS," AT PENNSDALE



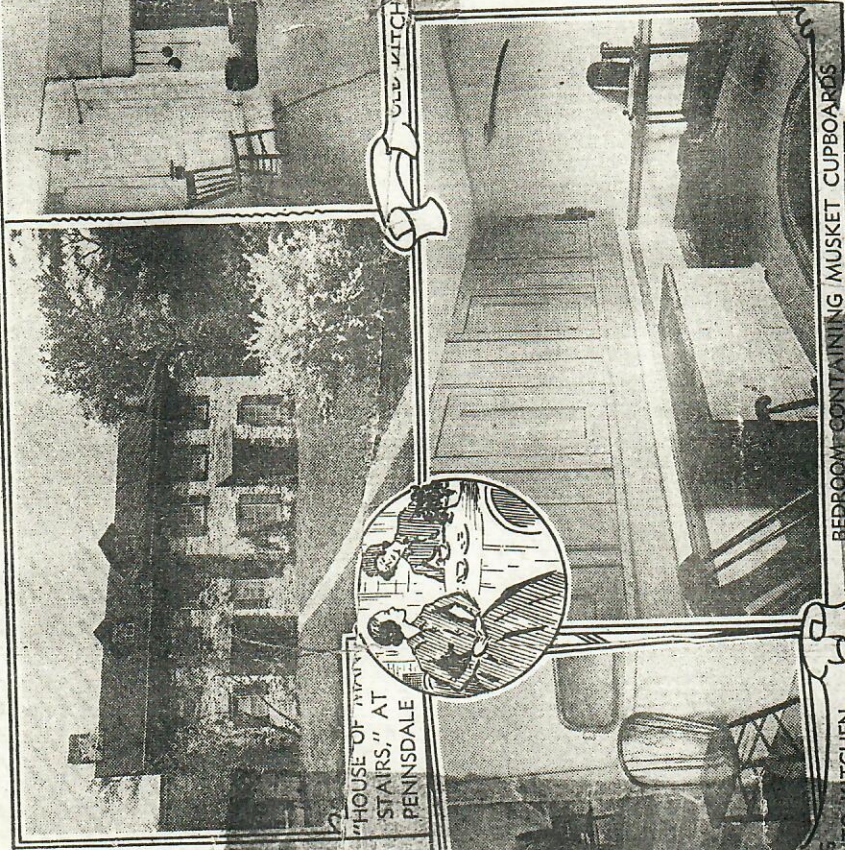
Small fireplace in kitchen

place served both as a home and for protection against the Indians. Finally, Indian raids grew less troublesome and eventually ceased. With the advent of good roads came the stage-coach, and inns sprang up. In 1790, the earliest known date in connection with the Pennsdale house, a bull's head "snorted fire" from the sign swinging on a tall pole by the wayside, to signify to all that the "Bull's Head Tavern" was open for public entertainment and to refresh the weary traveler.

More room was needed at the inn with the influx of trade, and a parlor was added first of all. Gradually, room after room was built.

Else steps up from the parlor ran a narrow way, on to which there opened an odd-shaped bedroom. Seven more steps and another tiny hallway led to one of the most singular rooms of the

# "House of Many Stairs" Retains Its Old Charm



OLD MITCH, WITH VIEW OF FIREPLACE

BEDROOM CONTAINING MUSKET CUPBOARDS

When wall stretched "high" of cupboard four in number, which tradition relates, were used as musket cupboards, where firearms were kept for emergencies. Two flights up was a dormer window in the main roof where the defenders in the musket room placed additional lookouts during frontier uprisings.

## TAP ROOM CONSTRUCTED

Last of all the tap room was added. This was a long, narrow extension built in front of the parlor. The common stone wall was removed to the height of a bar counter and capped with wood to serve as a rest for the liquid refreshment that passed over the top. Sturdy cupboards or closets were constructed to contain the bottles and glassware.

Soon the railroad came to supplant the stage-coach as the chief mode of travel, and the old, Pennsdale was relegated to old, obscurity as a little backwoods village. The inn, however, managed to retain a precarious existence and

March 10, 1935

# House of Stairs at Pennsdale Has Colorful History; Housed Quakers, Bandits, and Slaves

## Home Which Served as Inn Contains Many Relics of Revolutionary Days

**T**HIRTEEN miles or so from Williamsport, in the little Quaker village once called Goosetown, later Elizabethtown, and now Pennsdale, there still stands a little stone dwelling, hewn of limestone and sandstone.

"The House of Many Stairs," it is called.

Said to be the second oldest house in Lycoming County, it has sheltered all kinds of people in the last century and a half—woodsman, Indian, innkeeper, highwayman, Quaker, British army officer, runaway slave, and even a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

March 29, 1784, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania granted to Samuel Wallis, "a certain tract of land situate in Muncy Township, aforesaid containing 310 1/2 acres." John and Thomas Penn had conveyed this land to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by letters patent in February, 1769.

### HOST TO FAMOUS MEN

Samuel Wallis, who came to this section about 1760, was at one time one of the largest land owners in the United States. He was in partnership with James Wilson, one of the original signers of the Declaration of Independence, who once stopped with Wallis at his home in Pennsdale. Capt. Gilbert Imlay, of the British army, a fighter and writer, was also probably a guest of Samuel Wallis at one time.

June 24, 1791, Wallis sold this particular plot of land to Enos Lundy, thus initiating a chain of buying and selling of the property which continued down to June 24, 1925, when it passed into the hands of Edward H. Morris.

Sometime between 1784 and 1790 the original little house, hewn of logs, began to "burrow its way into the hillside." Some of the outbuildings on the place were undoubtedly built before the main house, and the old pottery (log cabin), no longer standing, was apparently built when Enos Lundy got the land from Wallis.

### OLD INITIALS FOUND

John Stryker and his wife, who bought the land in 1808, may have been the builders of part of the house as it now stands, because the initials "J. S." and "E. S." and the date "1808" are carved on the keystone above the door of the old part of the house.

It then had two stories and an attic. The ground floor contained one room which served as living room and kitchen combined. Its most outstanding feature was the huge, almost square, fire-

place, with its crane and big kettle which are still there today.

Down one step from the kitchen was the entrance to the cellar, so constructed that nothing froze there, although it was cold all the time.

### INDIAN DANGER PASSES

One of the seven stairways in the house led from this cellar to the second floor, exactly under the rake of stairs leading to the attic. The attic contained a huge dormer window which gave a commanding view of the countryside. A narrow hallway and a spacious bed-

## "House of Many Stairs" at Pennsdale



HOUSE OF MANY STAIRS AT PENNSDALE



TAP ROOM, WITH STEPS LEADING TO PARLOR AND DOORWAY INTO KITCHEN

room with a small fireplace composed the second story.

At first the little house served both as a home and for protection against the Indians. Finally, Indian raids grew less troublesome and eventually ceased. With the advent of good roads came the stage-coach, and inns sprang up. In 1790, the earliest known date in connection with the Pennsdale house, a bull's head "snorted fire" from the sign swinging on a tall pole by the wayside, to signify to all that the "Bull's Head Tavern" was open for public entertainment and to refresh the weary traveler.

More room was needed at the inn, with the influx of trade, and a parlor was added, first of all. Gradually, room after room was built.

Eleven steps up from the parlor ran a narrow hall on to which there opened an odd-shaped bedroom. Seven more steps and another tiny hallway led to one of the most singular rooms of the house. Along one entire wall stretched a row of cupboards, four in number, which, tradition relates, were used as musket cupboards, where firearms were kept for emergencies. Two flights up was a dormer window in the main roof where the defenders in the musket room placed additional lookouts during frontier uprisings.

# House of Many Stairs' Retains Its Old Charm



OF MANY  
S." AT  
DALE

OLD KITCHEN, WITH VIEW OF FIREPLACE



EN BEDROOM CONTAINING MUSKET CUPBOARDS

Lycoming County. It has sheltered all kinds of people in the last century and a half—woodsman, Indian, innkeeper, highwayman, Quaker, British army officer, runaway slave, and even a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

March 25, 1784, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania granted to Samuel Wallis, "a certain tract of land situate in Muncy Township, aforesaid containing 310 1/2 acres." John and Thomas Penn had conveyed this land to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by letters patent in February, 1769.

#### HOST TO FAMOUS MEN

Samuel Wallis, who came to this section about 1780, was at one time one of the largest land owners in the United States. He was in partnership with James Wilson, one of the original signers of the Declaration of Independence, who once stopped with Wallis at his home in Pennsdale. Capt. Gilbert Imray, of the British army, a fighter and writer, was also probably a guest of Samuel Wallis at one time.

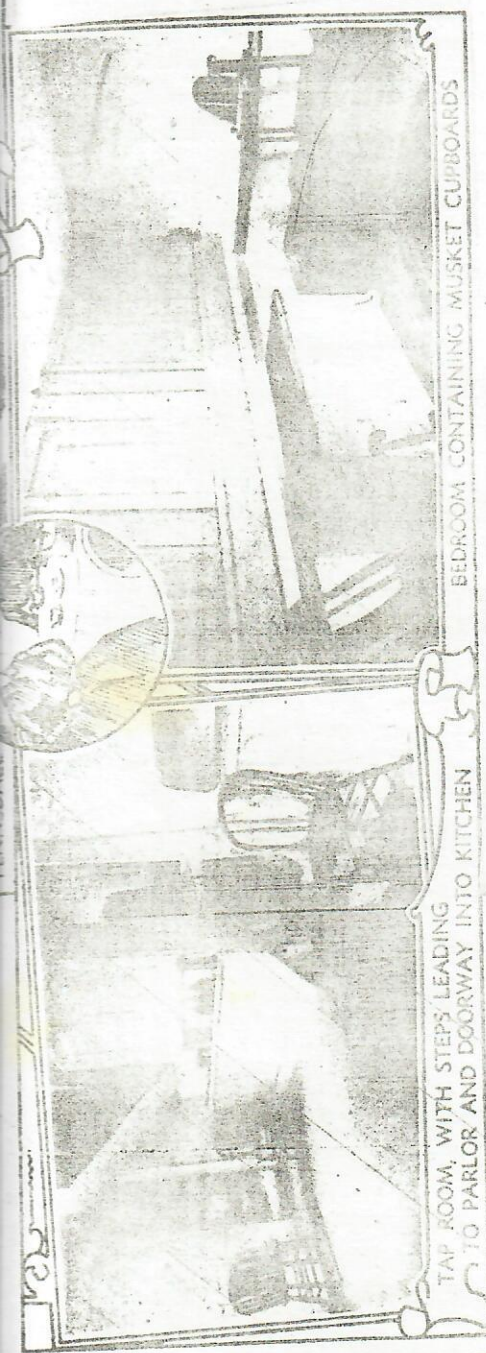
June 24, 1781, Wallis sold this particular plot of land to Enoch Lundy, thus initiating a chain of buying and selling of the property which continued down to June 24, 1925, when it passed into the hands of Edward H. Morris.

Sometime between 1784 and 1780 the original little house, hewn of logs, began to "burrow its way into the hillside." Some of the outbuildings on the place were undoubtedly built before the main house, and the old pottery (log cabin), no longer standing, was apparently built when Enoch Lundy got the land from Wallis.

#### OLD INITIALS FOUND

John Stryker and his wife, who bought the land in 1808, must have been the builders of part of the house as it now stands, because the initials "J. S." and "E. S." and the date "1808" are carved on the keystone above the door of the old part of the house.

It then had two stories and an attic. The ground floor contained one room which served as living room and kitchen combined. Its most outstanding feature was the huge, almost square, fire-



TAP ROOM, WITH STEPS LEADING TO PARLOR AND DOORWAY INTO KITCHEN

room with a small fireplace composed the second story.

At first the little house served both as a home and for protection against the Indians. Finally, Indian raids grew less troublesome and eventually ceased. With the advent of good roads came the stage-coach, and inns sprang up. In 1790, the earliest known date in connection with the Pennsdale house, a bull's head "snorted fire" from the sign swinging on a tall pole by the wayside, to signify to all that the "Bull's Head Tavern" was open for public entertainment and to refresh the weary traveler.

More room was needed at the inn, with the influx of trade, and a parlor was added, first of all. Gradually, room after room was built.

Eleven steps up from the parlor ran a narrow hall on to which there opened a odd-shaped bedroom. Seven more steps and another tiny hallway led to one of the most singular rooms of the house. Along one entire wall stretched a row of cupboards, four in number, which, tradition relates, were used as musket cupboards, where firearms were kept for emergencies. Two flights up was a dormer window in the main roof where the defenders in the musket room placed additional lookouts during frontier uprisings.

#### TAP ROOM CONSTRUCTED

Last of all the tap room was added. This was a long, narrow extension built in front of the parlor. The common stone wall was removed to the height of a bar counter and capped with wood to serve as a rest for the liquid refreshment that passed over the top. Sturdy cupboards or closets were constructed to contain the bottles and glassware.

Soon the railroad came to supplant the stage-coach as the chief mode of travel, and again Pennsdale was relegated to its old obscurity as a little backwoods

to contain the potencies and...  
Soon the railroad came to supplant the stage-coach as the chief mode of travel, and again Pennsdale was relegated to its old obscurity as a little backwoods village. The inn, however, managed to retain a precarious existence and served as a meeting place for the townsmen.

Finally evil days fell upon the old house. In Muncy a band of marauders—horse thieves and highwaymen—had their lair, and when pursued to their hideout, they always vanished, only to rally in full force at the "Bull's Head Tavern." For the inn, with its jumble of many stairways and exits offered little help to indignant pursuers. How many times the old house must have thrilled to a real game of "cops and robbers."

#### ON "UNDERGROUND RAILROAD"

In 1857, John Jones, the last tavern keeper, sold the Bull's Head house to Joseph Masters, a Quaker, for \$2,500, and with a single exception, when the property was owned by Narber Fry from 1922 to 1925, it has belonged to members of that society ever since.

The Friends were strong and steadfast Abolitionists and because Pennsdale was principally a settlement of this group, it soon became a station on the "underground railroad." The Bull's Head house, as well as other homes in the village, was a depot on the chain of places where runaway slaves were concealed until after nightfall, when they were fed and sent on their way to New York state and Canada.

#### NAME CHANGED

Years later, a macadam road was laid over the old corduroy road, and the old house again became an inn. This time it changed its name. It was no longer the "Bull's Head Tavern" but "The House of Many Stairs," so called by the owners because of the fact that no two rooms are upon exactly the same level, making it necessary to go either up or down a few steps for entrance.

Mellowed by time, the little house has survived, but no longer is it used as a frontier defense, tavern, or rendezvous for renegades. It is simply a house.

When the Morris family purchased it in 1925 it became a tea room for a short while, but again, as if certain that it was destined to be primarily a home, it returned to its original status. There is an old sampler hanging in the tap room today, with these words—which seem just suited to the little house—worked upon it:

"Old house you are really very small,  
Just big enough for love, that's all."