

Allen House

of Monmouth County Historical Association

Constructed in the Year 1710

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By way of INTRODUCTION...

Welcome to Allen House! This historic house is set in Shrewsbury, New Jersey, on the northwest corner of Shrewsbury's "Four Corners." Built in 1710 by prominent Manhattan businessman Richard Stillwell and his wife Mercy Sands as their country retreat, the original house was structured after the Britton Cottage in Staten Island, NY. In 1754, Josiah and Zilpha Halstead from Rumson Neck bought the property and operated a tavern for almost two decades. As was tradition, Josiah chose a distinctive title for his establishment and named it "The Blue Ball." Over that time, Josiah made several improvements to the house, including a KITCHEN WING and a full second floor to accommodate overnight patrons.

The house includes a TAP ROOM for patrons and a MEETING ROOM where visitors discussed local politics and legal rulings were dispensed.

THE TAP ROOM

When visitors first step into Allen House, they arrive in the TAP ROOM, where patrons relaxed at well-worn mismatched tables and chairs, drinking rum and ales brought in from New York or locally made apple jack. This was a room for socializing and the huge hearth and fireplace welcomed the patrons and visitors over the years when the tavern was the local hangout. The MEETING ROOM next to the TAP ROOM was the place for the circuit court judge to conduct county court business. The BAR is also located in the TAP ROOM. On its shelves, there is plenty of room for bottles of rum and other beverages, plus a grate around the upper portion that can be locked when not in use. Today, you can almost hear the noise from the patrons visiting with each other over an ale or two out of ceramic mugs, eating off redware and pewter plates, and catching up on the town news or conducting business while warming themselves by the hearth.

THE MEETING ROOM

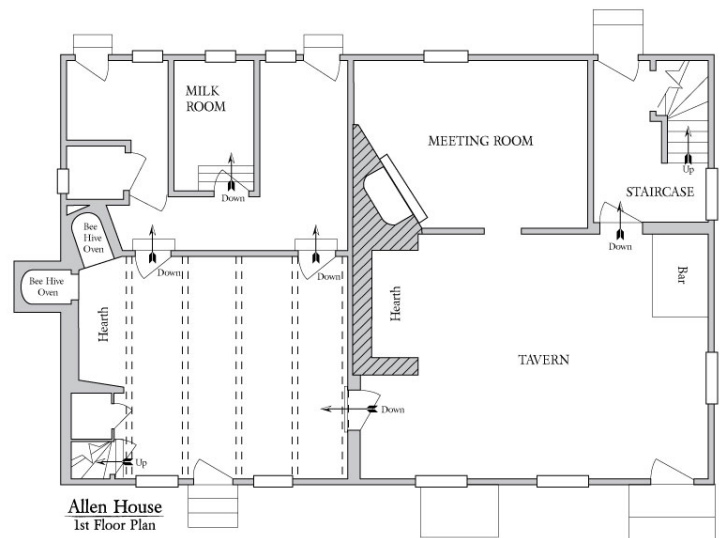
The MEETING ROOM is where local groups would assemble for business or judicial reasons. The local circuit court would be held here when the judge passed through town. It was also where Christ Church vestry meetings and other various local government meetings were held. It is more refined than the TAP ROOM and furnished with finer furniture, such as regionally styled Windsor chairs. These chairs were perfect for use in a meeting room: they were lightweight, easy to move around, and inexpensive to make.

THE STAIRCASE

At the back right of the TAP ROOM is the STAIRCASE to the upper floors. While operating as a tavern in the second half of the 18th century, Josiah improved the house with upper floors to offer temporary lodging to travelers, workers building Christ Church, and others needing a place to stay overnight. The STAIRCASE is also the location of a fatal skirmish during the Revolutionary War. See "Revolutionary Ties..." for the story!

THE KITCHEN

After buying the property and house in 1754, Josiah Halstead built the KITCHEN wing. To keep up with the tavern business, Josiah installed two BEEHIVE OVENS in the large hearth fireplace and located the KITCHEN right off the TAP ROOM for convenience. During the time that he operated the tavern, Josiah



had slaves and servants to help run the business. On two separate occasions, Josiah placed advertisements offering rewards for the capture of servants. The first servant, when running away, allegedly stole a good deal of money from Josiah and the second servant stole

a horse. These advertisements make one wonder what type of master he may have been.

Above the KITCHEN is a loft that was most likely used by the servants and slaves as living quarters or for storage purposes. This area also leads to a crawlspace under the eaves that was used for additional storage.

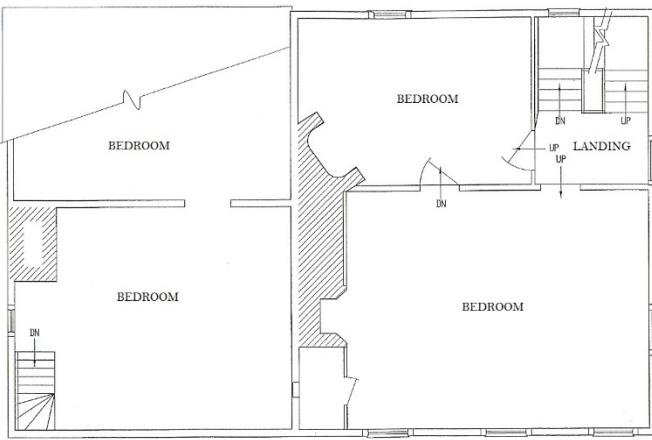
THE MILK ROOM

Beyond the KITCHEN is the MILK ROOM. This is a room where dairy items, such as cream, milk, and cheeses, were stored. It is a simple room that is a few steps lower than the rest of the first floor with a brick floor, but it was essential for the busy tavern while serving patrons.

UPSTAIRS ROOMS

The UPSTAIRS ROOMS are quite large and spacious. The second and third floor rooms may have served as living space for Josiah Halstead and his family. Surrounding the second floor fireplace is 18th century paneling that may be original to the house, but thought to have been in another part of the house at one time.

In the small closet off from the larger room, the split lathing straw and mud brick construction is exposed, along with a small window that now opens to nothing. The original mud brick and split lathing materials are still in place between the KITCHEN loft area and the closet, so the reason for the window is unknown.



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

THE FAMILY – WHO WERE THE ALLENS?

Little is known about the original Allen House structure, but it was probably a substantial dwelling. The builder, Massachusetts-born Quaker Judah Allen, was an influential local citizen. The original structure was built between 1679 and 1688.

Sometime after 1700, prominent New York City merchant Richard Stillwell purchased the property from the Allen family and had a new house built around 1710. Richard patterned his new home after Britton Cottage, which was built by Obadiah Holmes around 1670. Richard died in 1743, leaving the property to his four older children. After his wife Mercy's death, the heirs sold the property to Josiah Halstead. Halstead opened his tavern in 1754, the same year his first wife Zilpha died. The tavern was highly successful in the beginning.

During this time, Halstead made several improvements to the property and married twice more: first to Anna Throckmorton in 1755 and then to Lydia Worthley in 1766. For unknown reasons – perhaps due to business decisions – Halstead he experienced financial hardships and offered the tavern for sale in 1765 and again in 1768. Finally in 1772, Halstead ended up in debtors' prison for unpaid taxes.

In 1773, Shrewsbury resident Stephen Tallman assumed ownership of the tavern; Josiah rented the tavern for a year from Tallman, but never regained his previous financial success. Tallman then rented the property to William Lippincott, who continued the tavern business.

The tavern continued to change hands until 1814 when Dr. Edmund Williams Allen, a descendent of the original owner, Judah Allen, bought the property. His son, Joseph, ran a general store after Dr. Allen's death in 1867 until the early 1880s. After Joseph retired, Abram Holmes Borden ran a grocery and dry goods store from the rented space for about 20 years.

A fire on April 17, 1914 destroyed the store wing and severely damaged the third floor. Dr. William Nicholas and his wife Sarah Allen Nicholas were residents at the time. According to newspaper accounts, Abram Holmes Borden rebuilt his store, and in September 1916, entertained President and Mrs. Woodrow Wilson who stocked up on fruits and vegetables.

The house remained in the Allen family for 113 years through daughters and nieces, the last of whom was Maggie. In 1927, she sold the house to George Silver because of declining health and old age. She was the last surviving Allen to live in the home.

In 1943, Mrs. Henry Holmes purchased Allen House and bequeathed it to Monmouth County Historical Association upon her death in 1948. A close family friend, Miss Lillie Huelson, was given life rights to the house and she lived there until 1968. On May 1, 1968, Monmouth County Historical Association assumed ownership.

REVOLUTIONARY TIES...

In the summer of 1779 on the Monmouth County coast, one of the locals, Joseph Price, was "on command" for the loyalist New Jersey Volunteers. He had permission to carry out raids and forage behind Continental lines. A small group of Continental soldiers was stationed at the Blue Ball Tavern to observe the local Tories. The tavern owner at the time, William Lippincott was a Whig, and the tavern was the site of several public meetings to discuss the boycott of British products.

When word of this Continental group reached Joseph Price, he headed to the tavern with four soldiers. They rushed the house and seized the weapons of the Continental soldiers. In the ensuing melee, three of the twelve Continental soldiers were bayoneted to death and the other nine were captured.

An interesting note: Joseph Price was Josiah Halstead's son-in-law and was married to Josiah's second daughter, Abigail. Hence, he knew the tavern's layout very well.

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Taylor-Butler House	127 Kings Highway, Middletown
Covenhoven House	150 West Main Street, Freehold
Holmes-Hendrickson House	62 Longstreet Road, Holmdel
Museum & Library	70 Court Street, Freehold

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