

# Covenhoven House

## of Monmouth County Historical Association

Constructed in the Year 1752

[www.monmouthhistory.org](http://www.monmouthhistory.org)



### By way of INTRODUCTION...

Welcome to Covenhoven House! This historic house is located in Freehold, NJ, on West Main Street.

Interestingly, the back of the house faces the main road because when the house was built, the front was facing Burlington Path, which ran parallel to the house. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Burlington Path was straightened out and later became Main Street, also known as Route 537.

South-facing Covenhoven House was built in 1752 by William and Elizabeth Covenhoven. They were a 5<sup>th</sup> generation Dutch family originally from the New Amsterdam area. After raising their ten children in a one-room house on the property, William and Elizabeth received large inheritances from their parents. They were in their 50s and used the money to build a large 2-1/2 story Georgian and Dutch style house.

The Georgian features of the home are the center hall floor plan, dentil molding at the roofline, pilasters flanking the split front door and the ¾ window and door layout on the front of the house. The Dutch features include the stoop or front porch, the stoop's overhang, the chimneys that are built into the side walls of the house, and the round butt shingles, also known as fish scale shingles.

The house was acquired by Monmouth County Historical Association in 1966 and restored from 1968-1970 to its present appearance. It is furnished to reflect a 1790 inventory from William Covenhoven's estate and includes many fine furnishings that a wealthy, successful farming family would have at that time.

### THE CENTER HALL

As you walk through the front door, you enter the CENTER HALL where many business meetings took place between William and business partners. From an inventory that was taken when William passed away, we know that the family owned a tall clock and secretary desk, which were located in the CENTER HALL. Another piece of furniture located in the CENTER HALL was a

three-piece "kast", a Dutch cabinet for the family linens. Merchants and others with whom William had business dealings entered the house through the back door under the stairs.

The stairs are seen as you walk in the front door and turn at a landing before leading to the second floor and the upstairs bedrooms.

### THE FRONT PARLOR

To the left off the CENTER HALL, the FRONT PARLOR is decorated with elaborate moldings on the built-in cabinets surrounding the fireplace. Pilasters sit on each side of the hearth, and shell-backed cabinets at either end of the wall display fine china and other valuable items. Paint analysis discovered that these blue and black pilasters, mantel, and cupboard doors were originally painted as faux marble. A tilt-top tea table and several chairs were used for the many guests that the Covenhoven family entertained during their time at the house.

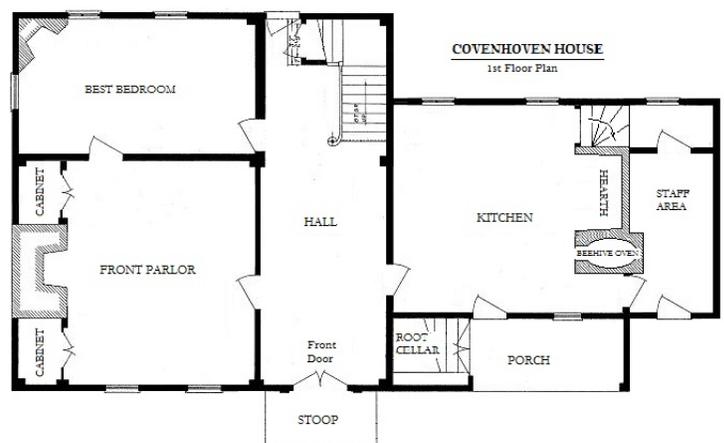
### THE BEST BEDROOM

Beyond the FRONT PARLOR is the BEST BEDROOM. It has a corner fireplace opposite the built-in corner cabinet. The bed hangings here are reproduced in a style that was popular in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century. Elizabeth Covenhoven seems to have been fond of blue, given the surviving paint evidence. A full set of hangings was often the single most expensive possession in a home.

### THE HEARTH KITCHEN

Also off the CENTER HALL is the original HEARTH KITCHEN. It boasts a very large hearth with an iron crane from which to hang pots, several windows, and a Dutch door. The split style door kept the young children in the kitchen and the animals out. For most meals, the family would have eaten in the KITCHEN for warmth and convenience.

Above the KITCHEN is a loft and was most likely used by the



servants and slaves as living quarters or as a storage area. This area also leads to a crawlspace under the eaves that was used for storage.



Taken in 1936, Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

### **THE DORMITORY – BACK BEDROOM**

When family came to visit and stay, cots or beds would be set up in the DORMITORY, which is off the second floor landing to the right. It's a large airy room with several windows.

### **THE MASTER BEDROOM**

Upon entering the large MASTER BEDROOM from the DORMITORY, you will notice the exquisitely painted wall surrounding the fireplace. The painting over the fireplace depicts a naval battle scene between Dutch and British ships situated with several faux painted tiles. Wrapping the façade at the top of the walls are more of the same faux painting. The Covenhovens spared no expense in their MASTER BEDROOM, which includes the closet and doored shelving flanking the fireplace.

### **THE FAMILY – WHO WERE THE COVENHOVENS?**

William Covenhoven's ancestors settled on Long Island, and his father Albert Covenhoven moved to what is now Marlboro Township in 1700 from Flatlands, Long Island. In 1702, William Covenhoven, fifth generation Dutch, was born in Monmouth County. William married Elizabeth in 1723, bought a farm, and raised ten children in a one-room house on the property where the current house stands. The couple lived quite comfortably for the next twenty years and then they both inherited large sums of money from their parents. In 1752, they built the current Covenhoven House, reflecting their new wealthy status.

Because of this change in status, the Covenhovens began to assimilate into the English society of Monmouth County. Earlier generations, who arrived in America sometime in the 1630s, kept a strong hold on their Dutch traditions, marrying into other Dutch families, speaking the Dutch language, and attending the Dutch reformed church. William and Elizabeth started to attend the Old Tennant Meeting House to which he donated £5 to the construction of it. Also in 1750, William acquired the title to the adjacent tract of land, which was sold to Benjamin Cook in 1706. This totaled his land holdings to almost 300 acres.

The house has had many owners. It was sold twice in sheriff sales and, in 1793, it was sold under a "wit of sequestration", when the court commissioners sold the property to Kenneth Hankinson, Jr. In 1829, Captain William Forman bought the farm and house. Six years later, it was sold to Joseph Murphy. In 1874, the house was sold at a sheriff's sale to Charles Webster. His son, William Webster sold it to Margaret Moreau in 1883. Upon her death in 1903, the house eventually went to her son, William. William and his wife subsequently left the house to their children, and their son William Rhea Moreau became the owner. He was survived by his wife Maude and after her death in 1966, the executor of her estate conveyed the house and a small portion of land to Monmouth County Historical Association, which restored the house from 1968-1970. It was then opened to the public as a historic house museum.

### **REVOLUTIONARY TIES...**

In May 1778, the British army was occupying the city of Philadelphia, which they had captured in September of 1777. General Henry Clinton of the British army received orders to send his troops back to New York City, some of which were to be sent back to England since the French had joined the war effort as an ally to the colonies. They packed up their valuables— and the valuables of the homes that they occupied – and created a wagon train 12 miles long, which included approximately 11,000 soldiers and about 1,000 Loyalists.

As the British soldiers returned across New Jersey to Sandy Hook Bay, they encountered many obstacles put in place by the Continental Army, which hindered their progress. Finally, General Clinton decided to stop at Monmouth Courthouse (present day Freehold) and stayed at Covenhoven House for three days prior to the Battle of Monmouth.

74 year-old Mrs. Elizabeth Covenhoven, having heard that the British army was approaching, took precautions to save her household goods by burying her china and plates by her rosebushes and hiding her fine furnishings in the woods, but decided to remain in the house. When General Clinton arrived at the house, he noticed the lack of furniture in such a wealthy household. He eventually cajoled Mrs. Covenhoven into bringing back the goods. When it arrived back at the house, General Clinton refused to allow the items to be brought back into the house. By the next morning, most of it had been stolen. The only thing that was given back to her was the family Bible.

Mrs. Covenhoven suffered while General Clinton stayed at her house. Besides losing most of her belongings, she was also made to sleep on the dirt floor of the milk room with her servants and slaves. Her bravery in confronting the soldiers, however, saved her house.

### **VISIT OUR OTHER HOUSES...**

<b>Marlpit Hall</b>	137 Kings Highway, Middletown
<b>Taylor-Butler House</b>	127 Kings Highway, Middletown
<b>Allen House</b>	400 Shrewsbury Ave, Shrewsbury
<b>Holmes-Hendrickson House</b>	62 Longstreet Road, Holmdel
<b>Museum &amp; Library</b>	70 Court Street, Freehold

Like us on Facebook to learn about special happenings and events!



MONMOUTH  
COUNTY  
HISTORICAL  
ASSOCIATION