COCKEY'S TAVERN

An Architectural and Historical Analysis

The Cockey's Tavern property is located on lot 44, and part of lot 43, of the original 45 lots of Westminster, or Winchester Town, that were laid out by William Winchester in 1764 and platted in 1768. While many of the lots were supposed to have sold quickly, lots 44 and 45 were not sold by Winchester until 1788. Each lot was approximately ½ acre, and they were both purchased by Andrew Reese, a joiner, for £20, with a yearly ground rent of 15 shillings due to Winchester. Local tradition suggests that lot 44 had a frame building constructed on it c.1790, and since Reese was a joiner this seems plausible, but there are no buildings listed in the 1798 tax assessment. The tax list notes that Reese held two lots, and that they were apparently being rented by Jacob Kesender and Jeremiah Tarlton, but whether these men were renting buildings or vacant land is not clear. Reese also owned a 102 acre farm, which had a new log house and a barn, and that is apparently where he was living. Andrew Reese sold both lots to Dr. George Colegate in 1810 for $1600, a sum sufficient enough to suggest that there were improvements on at least one of these lots.(1)

At this point the history of the property becomes confused. According to a deed of 1825, William H. McCannon was sued in the Circuit Court of Frederick County in 1821, and a writ was issued in December of that year ordering the sheriff to seize his property. The property was offered at public sale in June, 1822, ". . . at the house of William H. McCannon, in Westminster . . . ," and included furniture and a lot in town ". . . with a valuable two story brick house thereon erected . . . ." Though it is nowhere stated that this lot is lot 44, it is noted that the lot is one of the two that Dr. Colegate purchased from Andrew Reese. Lot 45, where Dr. Colegate lived, remained in the possession of his widow until 1846, so McCannon's lot must be lot 44. There were no bidders for the brick house, but another suit at this time, by the Bank of Westminster against McCannon and Dr. Colegate, resulted in two more writs to the sheriff. To further complicate matters, Dr. Colegate died in May, 1822, at the age of 39, while the court cases were being heard. In December, 1822 the sheriff was finally able to sell McCannon's property. It was purchased by Frederick Schley and Mary Colegate for $2,027.44.(2)

Frederick Schley was apparently a Frederick attorney who acted as a trustee for Colegate's estate, and Mary Colegate was the doctor's widow. Her maiden name was McCannon (they were married in 1810, the same year Dr. Colegate bought his two lots), and William H. McCannon was presumably her brother. Unfortunately, there is no record of a court case against McCannon (or Colegate) in the Frederick County Equity Docket to clarify what the

deeds and newspapers tell us, and there was never any deed from Colegate to McCannon. However, Katharine

Newel post and balusters, first floor staircase

Balusters, third floor staircase

Boyle sold the building at 218 E. Main Street to his daughter, Helen Irwin, in 1886, and he sold the Cockey's Tavern building to another daughter, Elizabeth Key Fink, in 1893. Elizabeth had married Charles E. Fink, a Westminster attorney, so the location of the building near the courthouse remained important to the owner. Boyle sold the property with one restriction, a life tenancy for his daughter, Mary B. Boyle, who was given " . . . full free and undisturbed use and occupancy of two rooms in the house . . . that is to say the room on the second floor fronting on main street next to the premises conveyed by me to Helen J. Irwin . . . and also the front Hall room adjoining the other room last above mentioned and that the said Mary B. Boyle shall have the privilege of opening a door-way between the said two rooms and also of closing up the door leading from said first mentioned room to the small hallway, in the rear thereof . . . ."

Mary Boyle was meant to have the east bedroom, but there is no doorway cut through from this room to the small, front center room (see second floor plan). Instead, a doorway is cut from the north bedroom to this room, and the trim here is consistent with an 1890's date. Thus, it would seem that, for unknown reasons, Elizabeth Fink and her sister arranged to switch the room in which Mary Boyle would live.(11)

Bay window added to front facade, 1905

Just as John Brooke Boyle had made fashionable alterations to his house, Charles Fink eventually did the same. In May, 1905, the American Sentinel reported: "Chas. E. Fink, Esq. is having his residence on East Main street remodeled in accordance with plans furnished by Mr. J. A. Dempwolf, architect, of York, Pa. A mansard roof or story will be added, bay windows put in the front and new and larger windows substituted for the other front and side ones. . . . Mr. Charles B. Hunter is contractor for the work."

Dempwolf was responsible for the design of a large number of York area buildings in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and designed several buildings in Carroll County, most notably St. Benjamin's Evangelical Lutheran Church near Westminster, of 1890-91, and St. Mary's Lutheran Church in Silver Run, built between 1894 and 1896. Westminster had its own capable architect in Paul Reese, who had lived just a few doors away from the Finks in the Shellman House, but he was probably not available to help them because he was completing work on "The Hills," Guy Steele's house at 45 Washington Road in Westminster, in early 1905. With its completion, Reese left for an extended trip to Rio de Janeiro. Charles Hunter was a major builder in Westminster, and was the contractor for "The Hills." The newspaper account clearly indicates some of the work done to the house, including the bay windows and the mansard roof (actually a gambrel). The general intent of the work was to make the building more "Colonial," as the Colonial Revival had been growing in popularity since the Centennial celebration in Philadelphia in 1876.(12)

The account also notes that the windows were made larger. It is clear from an examination of the sash that they are of this period, and are not earlier sash that were altered. The window openings do not appear to have been widened on the exterior, though a close examination is not possible because the shutters are now fixed in place. There do appear to be some broken bricks on several courses just above the sill, however, that suggest that the sills have been lowered. The addition of wood cornices over the windows, also from this period, disguise any changes made here to enlarge the openings. The window architrave is consistent with the earliest period of construction, but actually dates to the 1905 renovations. Dempwolf copied the original trim for most of the rooms on both the first and second stories, but did not get the proportions exact, and did not include the bead on the inner edge of the symmetrical architrave that all the original trim has. A comparative analysis of the chromo-chronology of the original door trim and the later window trim confirms this. The window openings are unusually wide for the construction period, c.1820, which suggests the possibility that the original window sash were set into large frames that were mortised and tenoned and pegged together, a treatment that is very common in buildings constructed before c.1830.

Other work in Cockey's Tavern was not explicitly described in the brief newspaper account. The front entrance columns and pediment date from this period. A vestibule was created by adding a short wall with a door (now missing) and leaded glass sidelights and transom across the front of the passage. A tile floor and wood half-paneling was added here, as well. The openings to the two front rooms may have always been wide (it is not possible to tell now) as they were in the northwest suite of rooms, but they were probably widened by Dempwolf, as became popular in the late nineteenth century, so that rooms flowed into one another. This is suggested because the doorway to the west-center room, which is original, is narrow, and one would expect consistency between this doorway and the doorway to the north room. In any case, the widened doorways were given a new architectural treatment, with Doric columns and a classical cornice. The passage and rooms themselves were also given a classical cornice, and the west-center room, which received a bay window, was given a cornice and half-paneling. Based on the chromo-chronology, all three first story mantels were replaced, and the fireboxes of the two front rooms were rebuilt. All of them have moldings that are characteristic of the early nineteenth century vernacular work of the region, not the Colonial Revival, and thus have a different "feel" from the more academically correct cornices and doorway columns, which were probably stock millwork. If the mantels were actually added by Dempwolf, they seem to have been designed for the house, and suggest that he, or one of his architects, had a good understanding of local vernacular carpentry. More detailed investigation is warranted before making any definitive conclusions about the age of the mantels. Columns were added in the passage, beneath an existing arch under the stairs, to create a screen between the front section and rear wing. This necessitated narrowing the arch, and the seams where these pieced-in sections were added to the arch are clearly visible.

The front entrance columns and pediment, widene

doorways and columns in the front hall, and first flo
mantels were among the alterations made in 1905.

On the second story, a doorway was cut through the stair landing and a passage created in the northeast end of the porch, along with two rooms to the south of it. The passage was continued along the southeast wall of the two ell rooms by cutting a doorway through what was originally the exterior brick wall and building a new frame wall on the southeast side of first the north end and later the south end ell rooms. This reduced the size of both of these rooms, but added overall privacy, as they were originally only accessible through the west-center chamber. A second passage was probably created at the time the south ell room was divided to create the passage along the southeast. This second passage was between the two ell rooms and along the northwest side of the southern ell room. This passage leads to a closet in the west corner of the ell, which seems like a great waste of space. Its purpose is not known at this time. The Sanborn maps do not indicate any changes to the porches, but the round-arched sash in the southeast wall of the passage is consistent with the other 1905 changes. This suggests that the northern-most room in the porch was enclosed at this time. There are wood columns partially exposed in the fire-damaged walls of the south porch room, suggesting that this part of the porch remained open, or became a sleeping porch for the Finks. The dormer windows were added, of course, with the roof. The third floor was laid out with a transverse passage, with a large room in the front center that reads as a sitting room, large rooms in the four corners that each had their own sink, and two small rooms flanking the original stairway. Earlier photographs show that the building was painted, and though it has been stripped, there is still evidence that it was once painted a brick red with white penciling, or mortar lines. This could date from as early as the construction of the building, as such a paint treatment was noted in Lancaster in 1801, (13) but could also have been used to conceal changes in the brick work made in the 1905 alterations. The brick work below the first story windows has been altered or repaired on several occasions, for as yet unknown reasons, and this could be one of a number of changes that it was sought to hide.

The Charles Fink home, c.1910

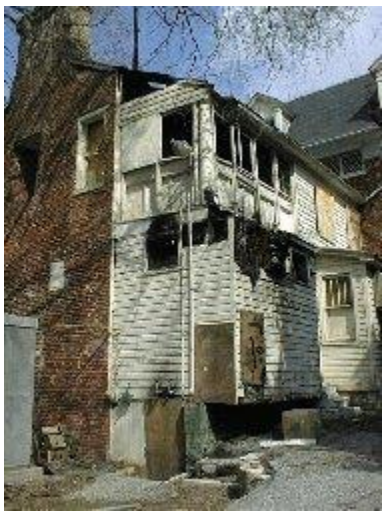
Local tradition states that the Finks held many elegant socials in their house, but just how long they lived at their Cockey's Tavern property is not known. The 1905 notice of work on the building describes it as Fink's residence, and one would expect that he would not make such substantial changes to a building in which he was neither living or working. However, Fink owned a house on Court Street, which is clearly indicated in the 1896 tax assessment and may be among the number of properties he held prior to that date (the earlier tax assessment is not clear on this). A 1914 notice in the newspaper states that "a fresh coat of paint is being applied to the residence of Mr. Charles E. Fink, Court street." While such notes are hardly definitive, this suggests that the Finks had moved to Court Street by that time, if not sooner. Why they would have moved, so soon after investing so much on improvements, is not known. Clearly, the whole story has yet to be gleaned from available sources.(14)

Other changes were made to the building since the Fink's renovations. In 1922 it was acquired by Frank and Mary Hoffman, and at some point became Hoffman's Inn, a boarding house and eatery that still has a reputation in the community for good home cooking, even though the establishment closed in 1969. Proprietress Thelma Hoffman well-known in Westminster and an article by a family member provided a vivid description of life at her establishment: "The sign our front says simply 'Hoffman's Inn.' If it is morning when the timid stranger rings the bell to inquire for food and lodging, he may be greeted by Jim, vacuum cleaner in hand. 'Miss Thelma ain't here. She's down buying out the A.& P.' If its in the afternoon, one of he maids may whisper through the aperture, 'Miss takin' her nap now and we don't ever wake her up.' If it is right before dinner, a sympathetic boarder may swing open the door. 'Take my advice, sir, and don't bother Thelma when she's rushing around getting food on the tables. She'll snap your head off.' …the shy visitor may hesitate on the threshold. Suddenly, however, he becomes conscious of the tantalizing whiffs of steaming, savory food curling in his nostrils. He is a changed man. Stepping eagerly into the hall and closing the door definitely behind him, he says firmly, 'I'll wait.' . . . The timid stranger waiting in the living room is pleasantly surprised to see Thelma appear, not the ogre he had pictured her, but a lady sweet and friendly, calm after her culinary storm, sufficiently mellowed to say, 'I guess I can take you if you don't mind sleeping in the wigwam. That's the little back room off the porch.' He doesn't know it yet but he is going to

have to buy a suit a size larger next year."

This photo of a local "Poker Club" was taken in the dining room at Hoffman's Inn in 1955. Standing: Ben Thomas, Paul Whitmore, Miller Richardson and Ralp BonsackSeated: Frank Leidy, Norman Boyle (grands of John Brooke Boyle), John Cunningham, Howard Brown, Theodore Brown

Hoffman's Inn was succeeded by "Cockey's Tavern," a restaurant that re-adopted the building's earlier name.(15) At some point during the ownership of these two businesses, the partition wall between the north and west-center chambers of the second story was removed and the door to the west-center chamber closed off on the chamber side. A new wall and doorway was added in the second story passage, closing off the stairway from the front center room. The southeast end of the cross-passage was closed off to create a bathroom. More serious changes were made to the ell. There was likely a wall dividing the ell into two rooms on the first story, though until some demolition work is done there is no way to confirm or refute this. The ell has been converted to a commercial kitchen, with part of the southeast wall, which was a brick wall, removed and the porch on the southeast extended and enclosed. This work is consistent with the period of the Hoffman's ownership, and not with the second Cockey's Tavern incarnation. At least the southern part of the porch was probably open after the Finks made their changes, as there is at least one wood column buried in part of the wall that now encloses this section. As much material has been removed or destroyed by the recent fire in the porch, we will likely never know its complete, and very complicated, history. The fireplace on the southwest end of this kitchen, which was presumably a cooking fireplace, is not accessible for examination at this time, but may have undergone considerable changes. The opening to the northeast was enclosed, probably at the same time that the bar was constructed in the west-center room. This work was done for the conversion back to Cockey's Tavern. Since the southwest end of the ell was probably the kitchen, and the northeast end of the ell had a wide opening into the west-center room, it stands to reason that the ell was divided by a wall into two rooms, as this would segregate the bustle of the kitchen from the public spaces. A bathroom was added to the south end of the passage in the second story of the ell, and a window was cut through the chimney flue on the southwest end of the ell.



Rear porch after fire

An arson fire in March 2000 severely damaged the building, destroying an enclosed frame rear porch and forcing the restaurant to close. HSCC acquired the property in November 2000.

ENDNOTES:

(1) Christopher Weeks, The Building of Westminster in Maryland (Westminster, MD: Mayor and Common Council of Westminster, MD, 1978), pp. 44, 150. Weeks gives the early history of lot 43, but not lot 44, on which most of the building is actually located. Lot 43 was purchased by James Wells in 1788. Emma Shelton, William Winchester, 1711-1790. (Westminster, MD: Historical Society of Carroll County, 1993). Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, WR 8-373; WR 38-453. Frederick County Commissioners of the Tax, 1798, Maryland State Archives. Theodore E. Woodward, Carroll County Physicians of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (Westminster, MD: Historical Society of Carroll County, 1990), pp. 11-12. Dr. Woodward repeats Week's assertion that the Colegate house was built c.1800. While it is not clear yet when the building was constructed, if it was that early, it was actually built by Reese. It is often suggested that Dr. Colegate had his office in this building, and Dr. Woodward places it in the east wing, however in 1842 Dr. G. W. Chalmers noted that his office was located where Dr. Colegate's had formerly been, and that it was next door to Moul's Hotel. As can be seen in footnote 8, below, this was located on the opposite side of the street.

(2) Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, JS 23-377. Frederick Town Herald, 8 June 1822, p. 3, c. 5. No advertisement was found for the December sale of the property. For lot 45, see Carroll County Circuit Court, Land Records, JS 5-478. Frederick Town Herald, 11 May 1822, p. 3, c. 1.

(3) Two Hundred Years Ago: Memories of Westminster, 1764-1964. Westminster Bicentennial Commission, 1964, p. 40.

(4) Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, JS 23-377. Frederick County Commissioners of the Tax, 1825, Maryland State Archives. Frederick Town Herald, 23 May, 1820, noted in Diehlman-Hayward file, Maryland Historical Society. Frederick Town Herald, 21 April 1810, and Frederick Hornet, 25 April 1810, noted in Diehlman-Hayward file, Maryland Historical Society. J. Thomas Scharf, History of Western Maryland, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Louis H. Everts, 1882), pp. 478-9, 936, 942, 947. John K. Longwell, "Historical Sketch of Carroll County," Westminster American Sentinel, 15 July 1876, p. 1, c. 2. "Old Westminster," Westminster Democratic Advocate, 17 September 1887, p. 3, c. 2. John C. Cockey, Last Will and Testament, copy in Frederick County Circuit Court, Equity 825, Maryland State Archives.

(5) Frederick County Circuit Court, Equity 1238, Maryland State Archives. Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, JS 49-380, JS 49- 374.

(6) "Old Westminster," Westminster Democratic Advocate, 17 September 1887, p. 3, c. 2. Jacob Sherman kept a tavern in the Main-Court Inn, across the street from his home, the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House, which is probably what the author was remembering. While it is possible that Sherman had more than one tavern, by 1820 he was 64 years old, and probably in retirement. Jay Graybeal, "Visitor Guide, The Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House," Historical Society of Carroll County, 1991, pp. 1-2. For more on the Main-Court Inn, see endnote 8.

(7) Sanborn Map Co., "Westminster, MD," 1887.

(8) Westminster Carrolltonian, 9 November 1833, noted in Marlene Bates and Martha Reamy, Abstracts of Carroll County Newspapers, 1831-1846, (Westminster, MD: Family Line Publications, 1988), p. 9; Westminster Carrolltonian, 23 April 1836, noted in Bates and Reamy, p. 31. Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, JS 49-377. Frederick County Commissioners of the Tax, 1835, Maryland State Archives. Carroll County Commissioners of the Tax, 1841, Maryland State Archives. Elias Hunt left Cockey's to take over Shriver's Hotel, just across the street, which is more commonly known today as the Main-Court Inn, though it is long since gone. Jacob Hartzell followed Hunt at Shriver's in 1837, and Conrad Moul followed Hartzell in 1839. See Westminster Carrolltonian, 10 June 1836, noted in Bates and Reamy p. 32. Westminster Carrolltonian, 14 April 1837, noted in Bates and Reamy p. 42. Westminster Carrolltonian, 23 August 1839, noted in Bates and Reamy p. 65.

(9) Weeks, The Building of Westminster, pp. 44, 150. John C. Cockey will in Frederick County Circuit Court, Equity 825. Westminster Carrolltonian, 24 December 1841, noted in Bates and Reamy p. 99.

(10) Carroll County Circuit Court, Land Records, GEW 29-114, JBB 41-502. John Brooke Boyle obituary, 1896, J. Leland Jordan Collection, Historical Society of Carroll County. For the Roberts house, see Weeks, The Building of Westminster, pp. 76-8, 196.

(11) Carroll County Circuit Court, Land Records, BFC 76-30.

(12) Westminster American Sentinel, 12 May 1905, p. 3, c. 2. Westminster Democratic Advocate, 7 February 1891, p. 3, c. 3. American Architect and Building News, 14 April 1894, no. 955. For "The Hills", see Kenneth M. Short, "Maryland State Historic Sites Inventory, CARR-1316," May, 1999. For Reese, see Weeks, pp. 85-7.

(13) John J. Snyder, Jr., "Painted Brick," Preservation Bulletin 2, Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County, April 1981.

(14) Carroll County Commissioners of the Tax, 1876-96, 1896-1910, Maryland State Archives. Westminster Democratic Advocate, 17 April 1914, p. 5, c. 4.

(15) Carroll County Circuit Court, Land Records, EMM 140-515; EAS 276-90; EAS 290-198; CCC 463-196; CCC 538-159; CCC 611-347; CCC 707-242; LWS 938-669; LWS 2070-137.

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