Visitors to Schaefferstown, a small Pennsylvania-German village about 75 miles northwest of Philadelphia, cannot help but notice the bright, mustard-colored Gemberling-Rex House, located prominently on the town square. Now a house museum, the building takes its names from tavern keeper Paul Gemberling, presumed builder, and Samuel Rex, who bought the building in 1799, and whose family occupied it for some 175 years.¹

Interrogated by scholars such as Robert Bucher, Bernard Herman, and Charles Bergengren, this remarkable structure reveals important information about Pennsylvania-German architecture, hierarchy of forms, uses and adaptations of interior spaces, and change over time.² A rare example of fachwerk (half-timbered) construction dating to the 1750s, the house, early on, was plastered and painted in a red and black checkerboard design, resembling bricks. At some point it was elevated from one to two stories, and, toward the end of the eighteenth century, it was extensively remodeled to give its interior a more stylish and less Germanic appearance. The latter changes included the removal of a rear wall and other main support
elements, resulting in a decided sag (up to six inches) at the second floor level, and suggesting, in Bergengren's words, that the "improvements were almost recklessly desired." In the early nineteenth century, the building was given an even more fashionable and subdued appearance with the application of wooden clapboards.4

Rivaling the building's architectural history, however, is an equally remarkable and similarly revealing document collection, covering two hundred years.5 These papers, preserved by the Rex family, offer further insight into the Gemberling-Rex House—its early renovations and tavern life, its conversion to a private dwelling, and one family's extraordinary attention to its heritage. Furthermore, the papers reveal changing attitudes toward the structure. While owners in the late eighteenth century were concerned with modernizing and expanding the tavern to enhance its commercial possibilities, a century and a half later, its owners found the building's very antiquity a source of intense pride and a marker of social status. Rather than seeking to modernize, they strove to retain and recreate the building's early appearance and ambiance.

Schaefferstown, originally known as Heidelberg, dates to 1758 when town founder Alexander Schaeffer purchased a tract of just over 100 acres of land and laid out the town. (See Figure 1).6 The town plan incorporated two roads as its main streets; the roads widened at their intersection to form the town square, and on this square the village's main businesses—including several taverns—were located. Schaeffer began at once selling lots in the town, but he kept one for himself, lot fifteen, on the northwest side of the square. There he built a large stone structure, the King George (later known as the Franklin House), in which he operated a store and a tavern.7

Paul Gemberling purchased lot fourteen, on the northeast outer corner of the square, from Schaeffer on August 2, 1758.8 Gemberling, like Schaeffer, was a German-speaking immigrant, but he was a relative newcomer to America, having arrived only a few years earlier, in 1754, on the ship Neptune.9 Evidence in the form of carved initials ("P.G.") on the building's corner post indicates that the structure was built by or for Gemberling, but, unfortunately the last two digits of the date on the post have been obscured by a later remodeling, leaving only 17—. Local folklore holds that Schaeffer sold some lots to people already living on them as squatters, so it is possible that the tavern house slightly pre-dates the town founding.

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Gemberling put the building to use immediately as a tavern. An advertisement in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* in November 1761 cites “Mr. Paul Gamberling (sic) in Heidelberg Town” as one of the regular stops for a “Post” that would ride with newspapers and letters from Lancaster to Lebanon each Monday. Besides serving post riders, travelers, and local customers, Schaefferstown taverns also benefited from traffic going to and from iron furnaces and forges, in particular, Cornwall Furnace, some five miles away. The importance of the iron trade to tavern keepers Gemberling and Schaeffer is evidenced by the fact that, in 1767, the two men partnered over (and then disputed the cost of) repairing the road from Cornwall Furnace to Schaefferstown. Gemberling continued to be plagued by financial and legal problems. He nearly lost the tavern after he was charged with assault and battery on local storekeeper Bernard Jacobs. The high sheriff of Lancaster County offered Gemberling’s properties at public sale, but there were no buyers interested in the tavern. He retained the property until 1784, when he turned it over to Jacob Gemberling, to satisfy the mortgage that Jacob Gemberling held against it. Jacob Gemberling immediately sold the building, and it continued to function as a tavern under the subsequent owners, tavern keepers Jacob Von Stetenfield and George Boyer.
Even though the building was a tavern for nearly half a century, there is no record of it ever having a trade name as did the rival Franklin House. When Samuel Rex first came to stay in Schaefferstown in 1789, his new employer, Lewis Kreider, suggested that Rex should “call at Mr. Boyer’s.”

The reference to “Boyer’s” suggests that the tavern was known colloquially by the name of each owner rather than by a business name; if the tavern ever had a formal name, all traces of it have disappeared.

Boyer kept the property until 1792, when he sold it to George Weidman for £325; this is the first reference to a selling price. Weidman is one of the few early owners who cannot be linked to a tavern license application, but, prior to 1798, some tavern keepers did not bother with a license. In 1798 tax collector Alexander Graydon explained that, “Under the former law and during the time I collected this branch of revenue a great many of the keepers paid what was due without requiring a license. At present as I am informed by the Treasurer, few or none will pay without receiving a license”.

The tavern changed hands again in 1795 when Weidman sold it to Abraham Forry for £350. Forry is also missing from the ranks of those who applied for a tavern license. However, John (sometimes listed as Jacob) Bricker, who bought the property in July 1796 for £500, attested that he had purchased “that old and well known stand for a tavern on Market Street, Schaefferstown, formerly held by Abraham Forry” and had “provided himself with provisions, liquors and forage for entertainment and accommodation of travelers.” Rather than keeping the building, however, Bricker sold it a mere four days later, on July 9, 1796, to Henry Stohler for £600, making a £100 profit. Stohler’s petition for a drink license verifies that he sought a liquor permit for the house “lately occupied by John Bricker in Schaefferstown...an old accustomed tavern for twenty years past.” Stohler retained the tavern building for almost three years, and then he sold it, in March 1799, to Samuel Rex. The purchase price for the building and two separate tracts of land (totaling three acres) was £555.

In 1798 the United States government mandated that a direct tax (also commonly known as the window tax) be levied on houses and other property to raise revenue for expanding the military in preparation for war with France. The tax documents purport to describe and assess the buildings’ size, ownership and condition as of October 1798, but Heidelberg Township assessors did not complete their survey until August 1, 1799, and they seem to have recorded the buildings’ status as of that date since they listed Rex, who purchased the property in March 1799, as owner of the tavern.
the direct tax records present a snapshot of the property as it looked in 1799.
The assessors recorded that the “front part is frame filled with brick and the
back part is of stone,” demonstrating that, by that time, the building had
been improved to its present two and one-half story configuration, and had
been enlarged with the addition of the stone lean-to in the rear. But which of
the early owners was responsible for these improvements?

Paul Gemberling was in possession for at least twenty-six years. As the
town began to develop, he may have decided he needed a better establish-
ment to compete with the Schaeffer tavern. At the very least it was likely
Gemberling who literally raised the roof of the inn to add a second story and
create more space for guests and for his family. (He and his wife Elizabeth
had two children.) Moreover, by the 1790s, the tavern was vying for trade
not only with the Franklin House, but with a tavern operated by the Kapp
family, also located on the square. Perhaps this increasing competition
made a later owner expand the building to the rear and, at the same time,
substantially remodel the interior.

The fluctuations in the building’s selling price over time offer further
insight. The dramatic increase in the price of the building in 1796 suggests
that it was Abraham Forry who added value to the property, since he pur-
chased it in 1795 for £350 and resold it a little over a year later to John
Bricker for £500. It is a bit more difficult to explain why Bricker resold it in
a matter of days for £600, but clearly someone made major changes to the
building between the spring of 1795 and the summer of 1796 and caused the
selling price to rise dramatically. It is also unclear why, three years later,
Stohler sold it to Rex for less than he had paid. The direct tax assessors
described the building as being in “indifferent order” at that time, suggest-
ing, perhaps, that the building was not maintained in good repair after the
remodeling was completed.

The direct tax records provide still more information about the property.
The tavern complex by 1799 included a frame and boarded shed for four
teams as well as a forty by twenty-four feet log barn (in “bad order”), and so
it offered ample, if not very well-kept, accommodation for guests’ horses.
There was also a tenant building, a small, eleven by fifteen feet, one-story,
“frame filled with brick,” structure, occupied in 1799 by Christian Gehret
(or Garrett) as a hatter shop, which would have brought additional income to
the property owner.

For the first few years that Rex owned the building he rented it out; in
1799 his tenant was tavern keeper Anthony Seyfert. Here, the paper trail
grows even richer since two tavern account books survive from Seyfert’s tenure. One, a thin notebook covered in red wallpaper, is a traditional ledger.\textsuperscript{28} The other, however, has a more interesting history. Before moving to Schaefferstown, Seyfert was the Dauphin County coroner. When he left Harrisburg for Schaefferstown, he still had space remaining in his coroner’s docket book, so he brought that book with him and reused the blank pages to record charge accounts for the tavern business.\textsuperscript{29}

Seyfert’s records show only charge accounts, so they do not present a full picture of his business. That is, strangers who were just passing through (and not familiar to the tavern keeper) would have been required to pay cash for their food, drinks, and overnight accommodations, and therefore do not appear in these records, while regular clients—regular travelers and local people from Schaefferstown—could run up lengthy tabs.

Even if Seyfert’s books show only a portion of tavern life in Schaefferstown, what they do show is tantalizing. Seyfert served breakfast, dinner, and supper for one shilling each. Sometimes working men took meals at the tavern on a regular basis; blacksmith Peter Lydig and his two journeymen boarded at ten shillings a week. As was typical of taverns in this era, Seyfert stocked a small array of store goods that he listed in his records as “sundries.” Most of the tavern trade, though, seems to have come from sales of beverages. Customers could choose from Lisbon and Madeira wine, brandy and egg slings, peach and cherry whiskey, cider, cherry bounce, rum, porter, gin, toddy and beer—all served by the gill, half-pint, pint or quart—or they might order a bowl of punch. Besides selling food, drink, and sundry goods, Seyfert extended other services to clients. Customers paid him to write deeds, bonds, or other legal documents, while others borrowed cash from him.

The tavern also offered overnight accommodations at four pence a night. There were four chambers on the second floor, allowing three rooms for guests to share and one for Seyfert and his wife Elizabeth. Servants may have slept in the attic or the loft, a low sloping space over the stone addition.

The tavern must have been an especially busy place when locals gathered in the town center for meetings, elections, and frolics, all of which offered Seyfert additional opportunities to sell food and drinks. Even though the parlors, with their fielded paneling, were quite formal, the tavern was sometimes the scene of less-than-genteel behavior. Seyfert charged customers for shattered drinking glasses and smashed windowpanes, and once, he made Jacob Gerret pay two shillings for “braking a rocking chair,” noting in the account book, “so we are even.”\textsuperscript{30}
Seyfert’s wife may have helped him in the tavern, but he also had a hired girl, Betsy Bryan. Seyfert paid Betsy fifteen shillings a month; she drew against her wages to buy two lottery tickets, a hat, and three pair of shoes; she also had her shoes mended and bought unspecified other goods from a local store and from a peddler. At the end of nine months, Betsy had spent all but £1 11s. 2 d. of her wages, and Seyfert paid her the balance in cash.31 Through Seyfert’s careful bookkeeping, we know this much about Betsy, but what about female customers? Do the tavern’s twin parlors indicate there were separate spaces for male and female clientele? Alice Morse Earle claimed that a separate sitting room for women was the mark of a good inn.32 Even if there were segregated parlors, women likely found little privacy when it came to sleeping arrangements. Susan Clair Imbarrato explains that female travelers in early America routinely had to share sleeping spaces with male strangers and “compromise modesty to adapt to the communal spaces of the tavern and inn.”33 Imbarrato further argues that taverns were part of the male sphere throughout America in the eighteenth century; she suggests that female travelers “may have challenged this predominance, but tavern culture demanded that the woman adapt rather than the institution.”34

But if taverns were part of a predominantly male world, did this mean that Schaefferstown women never patronized local establishments? Pennsylvania-German society was highly patriarchal; men were involved in business and politics while women took care of home, children, and religious matters, so it is reasonable to conclude that taverns were patronized nearly exclusively by men.35 Seyfert’s books shed some light on this matter. His accounts include only male names, but it was customary to keep business accounts in the name of the head of the household, usually a male. Some households were headed by widows, but if widows patronized the tavern, they did not charge their purchases. However, Peter Lydig’s account with Seyfert includes a charge of four shillings for “2 pints wine to treat the girls,” so we know that women were sometimes among the tavern company. And, in January 1800, Seyfert charged Alexander and John Stephanson 1s. 3d. and 3s. 9d., respectively, for wine drunk at their sister’s wedding, although it is not clear if the post-wedding celebration took place in the tavern, or if Seyfert merely supplied the beverages.36

Seyfert frequently crossed the town square to buy supplies at Samuel Rex’s store (located in the Franklin House building), and his purchases at the store provide additional insight into his business.37 On June 29, 1799, the day before the Cherry Fair (a celebration held annually on the village square) Seyfert bought ham, assorted dishes, wine glasses and tumblers in anticipation
of increased trade. Fairgoers seem to have reserved that day for entertainment, not other business, since Rex had no sales at his store on the day of the fair, while Seyfert was busy pouring wine and “sangeree” for customers.\textsuperscript{38}

When Seyfert’s one-year lease ran out in April 1800, local tailor-turned-tavern keeper Frederick Garrett (whose brother rented the hatter shop on the tavern grounds) became Rex’s next tenant.\textsuperscript{39} Garrett was closely acquainted with the tavern and its proprietor. He had occasionally charged drinks when Seyfert ran the tavern, and Anthony and Elizabeth Seyfert had served as sponsors at the baptism of Frederick and Anna Mary Garrett’s son, Samuel, born October 17, 1799.\textsuperscript{40} Garrett immediately began purchasing goods at the Rex store to stock his tavern; between April 1 and 3, 1800, he bought seventeen gallons of spirits, thirty-six wine glasses, four quart and pint mugs, a pitcher, and two flint decanters. He also purchased several brass locks, a necessity to secure liquor and other tavern valuables.\textsuperscript{41}

Garrett was the last tenant in the tavern. Sometime around 1802, Rex and his wife, Anna Maria (Mary), moved in and made it their home.\textsuperscript{42} Rex’s improvements to the property included the new bake oven that he had built in 1804, and a carriage house, erected in 1807. The only record of any renovations he made inside the house was a payment to Christian Densler in August 1811 for some plastering.\textsuperscript{43} Sometime after 1799, Rex also installed wooden clapboards over the polychrome exterior, and this gave the building a more subdued and more fashionable appearance.\textsuperscript{44}

After Rex retired from storekeeping in 1807, he continued to lend money, buy and sell grain, and to work as a justice of the peace. Because of his economic activities, Rex held a position of local prominence, and his household furnishings (as listed in his probate inventory) suggest that the Rexes aspired toward gentility. They owned fashionable tea equipage; their floors were carpeted; and pictures and maps hung on their walls. As befitting a man of his social standing, Rex had not one, but two, tall clocks. A corner cupboard in the front parlor displayed glass, china, and a silver ladle, six teaspoons and tablespoons, and a silver cream jug.\textsuperscript{45} Although the house may have been the scene of some sophisticated entertainment, including taking tea, it was crowded by today’s standards; Rex seems to have retained much of the furniture from the tavern days. The eight-room house contained six beds, five bureaus, a case of drawers, ten dining tables, six looking glasses, forty-three chairs (one an arm chair), two settees, and two desks.\textsuperscript{46} At least some of this extra furniture would have been used by frequent overnight guests. While there is no evidence the Rexes ever operated a tavern themselves, the couple,
who had no children, opened their home to a steady stream of nieces and nephews, who provided both companionship and help with household work. Occasionally they also rented rooms to out-of-town youngsters attending the nearby Lutheran church school.47

Like most Schaefferstown area residents, Samuel Rex’s ancestry was German, but more than most Pennsylvanians, he was a hybrid—a mixture of the old and new worlds. Samuel Rex’s grandfather, Hans Jürg Rüx/Rüger/Rueger/Rieger had immigrated to America from a German-speaking part of Europe sometime before 1720.48 The subsequent generation changed the family surname, but third-generation Samuel Rex still spoke and wrote German (as well as English) fluently. He wrote his store records and correspondence (including family letters) in English, but it was English interspersed with the occasional German term. This dual identity served him well; as a storekeeper and justice of the peace/scrivener, he assisted the local German-speaking people in business and legal matters and bridged the terrain between two regions and cultures. He was equally at home among German farmers in Schaefferstown and in the largely-Anglo Philadelphia business community where he bought and sold goods.

The former tavern was an appropriate place for Rex to make his home, because, like its owner, it was also a hybrid. The structure, especially the two parlors with their formal woodwork, reflected his status as a gentleman and man of finance. But, at the same time, these elements also speak of Rex’s country connections. The woodwork appears to be the work of a local builder who was not entirely familiar with the genre, but who did his best to interpret it with exuberance, perhaps from a verbal description or rough sketch.49 The result, as described by Bergengren, “concatenates every manner of wavy dentil, sawtooth, keystone, and more” in the cornices and chair rails.50 In addition, the elegant paneled corner fireplace in the front parlor, a positioning that indicates English influence, boasts a very Germanic feature—hinged doors closing the firebox (See Bergengren, “The Physical Thing Itself,” Figure 14). In the slightly-off-center passage, the elaborately carved, open stairway also speaks of the German roots of its carver. In short, both Rex and his home blended elements of folk ethnicity and urban sophistication.51

Samuel Rex died in 1835 and he bequeathed his house to his brother Abraham. In 1859 Abraham sold the house (as a token of his affection and for a formal payment of one dollar) to his daughter Polly (Mary), who was already living there with her husband, Peter Zimmerman and their five children.52 When Polly Zimmerman died in 1880, rather than leaving the house to her
husband, she left it to her daughter, Anna Matilda (Tillie), who had never married and still lived at home. Peter Zimmerman, who lived until May 1887, was thus in the perhaps uncomfortable position of living in a house owned first by his wife, and later by his daughter.

A few years after Abraham Rex sold the house to Polly Zimmerman, war broke out between the North and South. No one from the Zimmerman household joined in the fighting, but Tillie and her sister, Rebecca Amelia, wrote to and received letters from a close friend, A. Stokes Jones, who was an army surgeon in Virginia. His sensitive letters reveal the tedium of army life—slow time spent waiting for what would come next and the pleasure of finding an early-blooming arbutus or witnessing an exceptional sunset. But most of all they brought the horrors of war into the Zimmerman home as he wrote frankly to the women of amputating limbs, treating wounds, and seeing a deserter shot on his own coffin.53

Besides being an avid letter writer and saving much of her correspondence, Tillie also kept daybooks and diaries. She was thrifty, and rather than purchase new paper for her personal writing, she re-used old notebooks, including some of the eighteenth-and nineteenth century-documents stored in her attic. She recorded devotions, recipes, and household remedies in the remaining blank pages of Anthony Seyfert’s 1799 coroner docket/tavern book, and she kept a combination diary/account book for nearly twenty years in the unused portion of an 1857–1859 ledger from Rex, Kemmer & Company, Philadelphia.54

Tillie’s daybooks and diaries reveal the house in still another light—home to a middle-class Victorian family. Perhaps even more than her Uncle Samuel Rex, Tillie Zimmerman combined ethnic Pennsylvania-German culture with middle class gentility. Pressed between diary pages are clippings from The Philadelphia Times, a conservative newspaper that was the favorite of the wealthiest Philadelphians. According to urban historian John H. Hepp IV, The Philadelphia Times was an example of the “genteel metropolitan press,” a group of papers that targeted the city’s middle and upper classes. By reading The Times, Tillie and her family showed their class aspirations; by saving pertinent articles from this newspaper, Tillie signaled a typical Victorian interest in improving herself and her surroundings.55

As a teenager, Tillie attended Linden Hall, a Moravian boarding school for young women, in Lititz, Pennsylvania (about ten miles south of Schaefferstown) where she may have broadened her cultural horizons.56 Still she remained close to her family’s roots, and the diary is sprinkled with Pennsylvania-German terms. Once she wrote that she cleaned out the Shmutz
Shank; Shmutz means lard or grease, and Shank is a cupboard, so Tillie was probably cleaning the place she stored the fat and meat drippings she used in cooking. Food is one of the most persistent cultural markers, and Tillie routinely described such local favorites as sauerkraut with rick masel (pork backbone) and knepp (dumplings), smearcase (cottage cheese), apple custard, crullers, and potato soup for dinner (her noon meal).57

The Zimmermans heated the house with a coal stove, but the family had a wood fired cooking range.58 Even so, keeping the house warm in winter was not easy. Tillie welcomed ironing on a day that “was bitter cold...[it] was a treat ... to be in the kitchen”; another evening she had hoped to finish her mending, but she “had to go to my bed so early for the want of a warm room to sit in.”59 As these passages suggest, Tillie’s days were filled with hard work, cooking, baking, washing, ironing cleaning, tending to the family’s chickens and cows, and keeping house for an aging and increasingly cantankerous father, whom she called “Pop.” Household chores were punctuated by frequent visits from and to family and friends, attending funerals and church services, and occasionally quilting.

Just as previous occupants had extended their households to include non family members or live-in servants, so did the Zimmermans. In August 1884, Tillie wrote, “…got a little girl. Her name is Helena Lux.” Helena, who was 10 years old when she came to live with the Zimmermans, was apprenticed to Peter Zimmerman to learn sewing, knitting, and housewifery, and to stay in that position until she reached the age of 21.60 Apprenticeships were common in the eighteenth century, but the appearance of this arrangement in 1884 indicates an old-fashioned pattern of behavior that is at odds with the progressive spirit the family showed in other areas of their lives.

Tillie’s diary includes some hints about the appearance of the house during her occupancy and how her family may have altered it to suit changing tastes. Once she noted that she “washed up the sky parlor,” indicating perhaps that one parlor was painted blue, or that it was papered with a star pattern. Another day she recorded that two men had just finished painting the house roof with red lead. The earlier roof was most likely wooden shingles, and this entry shows that by the 1880s it had been covered in tin, as it still is today.61

By Tillie’s day, too, the old house and its contents were already becoming well-known. It is unclear if the Zimmermans ever attended the Centennial celebration in Philadelphia (though Tillie did write in her daybook a recipe for “Centennial Cake, February 3, 1894, received from Annie Fetter”). Still, Tillie felt a fascination with her family history that was consistent with the mood of the nation after 1876. According to Tillie’s grand-niece, Rachel

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Lewis, Tillie took “a lively interest in her great-great and great-grandfathers, Alexander and Henry Schaeffer, and many boxes of old letters, deeds, etc. have been preserved dating back to 1750.”62 Tillie wrote fondly in her diary of time spent among these papers in “my attic,” and her cousin, Albert Rex, once commented in a letter to Tillie, “That garret of yours must be quite a curiosity shop.”63 In September 1885, she packed up some family china for “the antiquarian display at Harrisburg.” Another time, though, she gave short shrift to someone who called on her, under the assumption that the family had old china to sell, “which we did not.”64 She obligingly raided the attic again in 1898 to find old deeds, maps—even a letter that the local Lutheran congregation sent to the Continental Congress in 1779—when local historian A. S. Brendle began compiling his Brief History of Schaefferstown. 65 It is indicative of Tillie’s high status in the village that Brendle included her biography in his Brief History. There are fifty-eight biographies of prominent Schaefferstown residents in the book, and Tillie is the only female.

In 1919, perhaps because her health was failing, Tillie transferred ownership of the property to a niece and nephew, Anna and John Illig, for one dollar and other monetary considerations.66 She stayed on in the house, however, and in 1921, hired Mrs. John Umberger as a live-in housekeeper and caregiver. Umberger signed the document with her mark, revealing the wide educational and social gap between her and her employer. Tillie allotted Umberger the use of three rooms and space in the shed for her wood and coal in exchange for keeping Tillie’s “rooms, hall and front clean and look[ing] after her generally” as well as doing the washing (with a wood-fired stove), ironing and tending the garden.67

Tillie needed even more assistance by 1922, when a broken hip rendered her “more or less an invalid.” Her niece, Anna Illig, to whom Tillie had already sold the house, moved in, and, according to Tillie’s obituary, looked after her aunt during the last seven years of her life. Tillie died of pneumonia, at home, in 1929, and Anna stayed on in the house.68

When Anna Illig died in 1937, an “extraordinary public auction” was held. The contents of the “large old house...built in 1740” were removed to the nearby P.O.S. of A. (Patriotic Order, Sons of America) hall for the sale, and the home was opened for public tours and touted as an outstanding example of “Early Penna. Dutch architecture.” The extensive sale bill, saved among the family papers, lists architectural elements (“two early pine doors, one with old lock and brass knob, both with long iron strap hinge”) along with antique furnishings including a Windsor settee with 29 spindle back, a

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cherry high chest, a pair of Chippendale mirrors, “Stiegel” glass, and an early wood stove, “still in use,” that was made at nearby Elizabeth Furnace.69

It may have been Illig or a subsequent owner who installed the first plumbing in the house. This involved the placement of a full bathroom on the second floor, as well as a powder room on the first floor. The latter, accessible from the center hall, is located in the former bar cage in the rear parlor, which survived from the building’s tavern days. (The bar cage is pictured in Bergengren, “The Physical Thing Itself,” Figure 13.)

Illig bequeathed the property to a sister and a niece. After her sister died in December 1947, the property went to the niece, Rachel Lewis, and Rachel’s brother, John I. Lewis. The siblings relocated to Schaefferstown to take up residence in their inheritance, which they seemed to have regarded as a status symbol.70 An informant who worked for the Lewises as a teenager recalls that they were loath to spoil the old house’s charm in any way. Rachel preferred to pile her clothing (including her furs) on a spare bed rather than to alter the house by installing closets. Despite their apparent commitment to preservation, however, the Lewises cut a door in the north wall of the house, leading from the kitchen to a secluded patio. This action suggests that they had more leisure than their Victorian Aunt Tillie ever had, since Tillie’s route out of the house would have been directly through the back hall and out the door to the garden, wash line, and chicken house. What’s more, Rachel Lewis was an antique collector, and, in the spirit of the Colonial Revival movement, she was so zealous about maintaining the house’s antique appearance that she insisted her carpenter use only period materials to make repairs, and that he replace missing or broken hardware with comparable pieces.71 This suggests that a note of caution is needed as one reads the Gemberling-Rex House, and demonstrates how documents and oral sources can complicate as well as illuminate architectural evidence.

Rachel Lewis died in December 1959, and John Lewis died in February the following year. In July 1960, “the contents of the Historic Old Homestead,” by now advertised as “built in the early 17th Century,” were sold at a local auction house. The sale bill suggests that some of the house’s earliest furnishing remained in place, even after the previous estate sale. Among the items listed were a pine corner hanging cupboard with “authentic floral decoration” believed to have “rested in this Early American home approx. 150 to 200 years” and a grandfather’s clock which featured “Mahantongo Valley style painting,” and which was also said to have been in the house for 150 years.
The latter may have belonged to Samuel Rex; at Rex’s estate auction, Peter Zimmerman purchased an “8 day clock with glass” for $8.00.72

Nor did this second sale empty the house of furnishings with family connections. Following John’s death, his brother, Leon E. Lewis, Jr., purchased the house from the estate. During Leon and Hildegarde Lewis’s occupancy they enjoyed possession of several family heirlooms, including three Jacob Maentel portraits—one of Maria Zimmerman and a pair of portraits of Maria and Peter Zimmerman. (See Cynthia Falk, “Personal History for the Visiting Public,” Figure 2). Hildegarde Lewis subsequently sold these folk art watercolors to an antique dealer for a sum (or so the local residents claim) that nearly equaled the value of the old house itself. The paired Zimmerman portraits are now in the collection of the American Folk Art Museum in New York.73

As the household furnishings were gradually dispersed, so too were family papers, which, according to another local informant, filled two piano crates.74 The Lewis family kept many documents but had them microfilmed and made available for researchers’ use. Other documents were sold at public auction and made their way to public institutions and private collections; occasionally some still turn up at flea markets and sales.

The Rex family connection ended in December 1974 when Hildegarde Lewis, the last of the Rex extended family, sold the house to Catherine and N. Frank Maldonado, the first non-Rex-relatives to possess the building since 1799.75 In March 1987, the Maldonados sold the building to Historic Schaefferstown, Inc., ending over two centuries of private ownership, but launching a new era in the building’s history as a museum.76

NOTES

2. Robert C. Bucher was a founding member of Historic Schaefferstown, Inc. He introduced a number of historians, including Herman and Bergengren, to Schaefferstown. On the Gemberling-Rex House, see Charles Lang Bergengren, "The Cycle of Transformations in the Houses of Schaefferstown, Pennsylvania" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1988), especially 249–50 and 283–84.
4. Early on, the boards were unpainted or perhaps whitewashed; professional paint chip analysis commissioned by the current owner, Historic Schaefferstown, Inc., shows that the first true coat of paint—a bright ochre color—was not applied until the Civil War era. The current paint replicates this early color.

5. These papers include records from the general stores that Samuel Rex and his brother Abraham operated in Schaefferstown from the late eighteenth into the mid nineteenth century, as well as deeds, correspondence, newspaper clippings, account books, and other documents. Many of the papers have been filmed and are available in the Leon E. Lewis Jr. Microfilm Collection (hereafter LEL), Lebanon County Historical Society and Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Library, Winterthur, Delaware. Other manuscript papers are in the archives of Historic Schaefferstown, Inc. (hereafter HSI) Schaefferstown, Pa., Lebanon County Historical Society, and the Downs Collection, Winterthur.

6. Deed, Martin Thomas to Alexander Schaeffer, June 20, 1758, Lancaster County Deed Book K, page 151.


8. The chain of ownership is recited in the deed transferring ownership from George and Anna Maria Boyer to George Weidman, March 30, 1792. LEL Reel 9:118 and Dauphin County Deed Book E, vol. 21, page 294.


10. The author was part of a team who investigated the Gemberling-Rex house in May 2004. Removal of the nineteenth-century trim revealed the carved corner post on the southeast corner with a cartouche containing the initial “P,” part of a “G,” and the first two digits of a date—17.... Unfortunately the portion of the cartouche that held the last part of the date had been cut away when a modern front porch was installed. The carved corner post in this building is remarkable, but not unique. There were at least two other structures on Market Street in Schaefferstown with carved corner posts; one survives intact on North Market Street (the Anthony Stiegel House, 1757); the other has long vanished, but its corner post survives, as a cellar support in a late nineteenth-century house on South Market Street.

11. The Pennsylvania Gazette. November 12, 1761. Accessible Archives Search and Information Server, item #237633. A manuscript report by researcher Clyde Groff states that Gemberling petitioned in Lancaster County for license to sell spirituous liquors. (Schaefferstown was in Lancaster County until 1785, when Dauphin County was created; in 1813 it became part of Lebanon County). Groff report, HSI.


13. Lancaster Deed Book S-45, cited in Groff report, HSI.

14. In November 1766, Gemberling and his wife Elizabeth mortgaged the property (along with 11 other lots he owned in Schaefferstown) to Michael Gross of Lancaster for £400; in January 1767, George Gardner, Jacob Gemberling, Nicholas Ensninger and Alexander Crow satisfied the mortgage on behalf of Gemberling, and they “acknowledged satisfaction” from him for the debt on November 3, 1768. Another deed shows that, the preceding day, November 2, 1768, however, Gemberling and Elizabeth had again mortgaged the properties to the same four men for £304 10s. On September 6, 1784, the debt seems to have been settled; Jacob Gemberling acknowledged satisfaction from Paul Gemberling, most likely because he had seized the tavern building and sold it to Jacob von

15. Jacob and Catherine Gemberling sold the property to Jacob von Stetenfield on September 1, 1784; Jacob and Christine von Stetenfield sold it to George Boyer on April 25, 1787. Deed chain recited in Boyer to Weidman, March 30, 1792, LEL Reel 9: TR118. Stetenfield’s application for a tavern license was recorded in 1786; Boyer was licensed in 1786, 1787, and 1789. Dauphin County Tavern License Petitions, micro. #6093, RG 47, Records of County Governments, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, Pa.


18. Quoted in Priscilla Stanley Fox, “Our Old Taverns,” (Paper read before the Lebanon County Historical Society, October 16, 1931), 133.

19. This transaction was recorded by endorsement—writing it on the deed that transferred the property from Boyer to Weidman.

20. Dauphin County Tavern License Petitions, micro. #6093, RG 47, Records of County Governments, Pennsylvania State Archives.


22. Dauphin County Tavern License Petitions, micro. #6093, RG 47, Records of County Governments, Pennsylvania State Archives.

23. Deed, Stohler to Rex, March 5, 1799, LEL Reel 5:AS48. Rex and the tavern owners who preceded him most likely needed the additional land for growing grass (for hay) and other crops to support the tavern as well as for cutting wood for fuel.


25. John Philip Gemberling was born November 17, 1766 and Anna Elizabeth Gemberling was born August 18, 1769. Baptismal records, Brendle, *Brief History*, 148-49.

26. Andrew Kapp’s tavern was licensed in 1795 and 1796, and John Kapp received licenses in 1797 and 1798. Dauphin County Tavern License Petitions, micro. #6093, RG 47, Records of County Governments, Pennsylvania State Archives; Fox, “Our Old Taverns,” 132-35. John Kapp’s tavern house was a forty by twenty-four feet “frame filled with bricks” building...adjacent to the Market Square.” U.S. Direct Tax, Heidelberg Township, Dauphin County, schedule I.

27. Seybert is listed as the occupant of the building and Rex as the owner in the 1798 U. S. Direct Tax.

28. This tavern book is in the Downs Collection, Winterthur, #417, box 1.


33. Imbarrato, “Ordinary Travel”: 43.
34. Imbarrato, "Ordinary Travel": 36.
37. Rex and his brother-in-law Michael Valentine rented the building from Henry Schaeffer, Alexander Schaeffer’s son; they are listed as the building’s occupants on the U.S. Direct Tax records.
38. Seyfert’s purchases appear in Rex daybook 11, Joseph Downs Collection, Winterthur. Seyfert noted the date of the cherry fair and logged his credit sales that day in his tavern book, LEL Reel 7: GM6.
39. Frederick Garrett’s tavern license is listed in Fox, “Our Old Taverns,” 137.
40. It is possible that baby Samuel was named for Samuel Rex, and if so that would further indicate the interconnected nature of the small town. The baptism record appears in Brendle, Brief History, 114.
41. Garrett’s purchases appear in Rex daybook 11, HSI.
42. It is not clear precisely when the Rexes moved into the tavern, though there is no indication that Rex rented it to anyone else after Garrett. Family history puts the date at 1802. Certainly they were living there by 1807 when Samuel retired from storekeeping and turned the store over to his brother Abraham.
43. Rex paid John Smith £1 10s. for making the bake oven; August 31, 1804, Rex daybook 28, HSI. The plastering is recorded in the entry for August 6, 1811, Rex daybook 41, HSI. Rex recorded his expenditures for the carriage house, which totaled £47 17s. 10d., in his ledger no. 8, LEL Reel 2: AB22.
44. Bergengren suggests the colorful exterior was “just a bit too zany” for Rex’s “aspiring tastes.” Bergengren, “Cycle of Transformations,” 250.
46. Samuel Rex probate inventory, LEL Reel 9:RE 5.
47. Rex mentions these visits and lodgers in his daybook 41, HSI.
49. Thanks to Charles Bergengren for his suggestion that the country builder worked from a verbal description.
51. On other Pennsylvania Germans whose homes combined urban and ethnic German styles, see Bernard L. Herman, Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780–1830 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2005), 77–97.
52. Samuel Rex will, Lebanon County Will Book B, page 33. Deed, Abraham and Elizabeth Rex to Polly Zimmerman, Sept. 30, 1859. Recorded January 12, 1928, Lebanon County, Deed book N, vol. 6, page 349. The Zimmerman children were: Edmund R (1827–1900), Mary Ann [m. Jacob Rhoads] (1830–1876); Cyrus (1832–1833); Susan A. [married Alfred V. Bucher] (1834–1924); Anna Matilda


56. Tillie received letters from a former Linden Hall classmate in 1851–1852, referring to her past attendance and indicating that by the time she was fifteen she was no longer in school. LEL Reel 12: L57, and Reel 13: L58.

57. Rex, Kemmer Book/Tillie Zimmerman diary, LEL Reel 4: AB28. I am indebted to the late Mabel Haag of Schaefferstown for explaining the dialect terms.

58. Peter Zimmerman inventory (1887), LEL Reel 10: ZE8.


60. Entry for August 14, 1884, Rex, Kemmer Book/Tillie diary, LEL Reel 4: AB28. “Apprentice paper, Helen Lux to Peter Zimmerman,” LEL Reel 11: A29. By 1891, however, Helen was hiring herself out to other employers, and later in that year went to live with her sister, suggesting that the apprentice arrangement was not binding.

61. Star-patterned wallpaper for ceilings was popular in Philadelphia in the late nineteenth century. I am indebted to John Hepp for this information. Tillie wrote about the roof being painted in her entry for June 23, 1891, Rex, Kemmer Book/Tillie diary, LEL Reel 4: AB28


63. LEL Reel 5: AS86, Albert Rex to A. Matilda Zimmerman, 1910.

64. Rex, Kemmer Book/Tillie diary, LEL Reel 4: AB28.


66. Tillie wrote in her diary of a number of health problems, including a bout of typhoid pneumonia in 1892. Deed dated January 7, 1919, and recorded in Lebanon County Deed Book N, vol. 6, page 351.


68. A. Matilda Zimmerman obituary (newspaper clipping), LEL Reel 8: TR38.


70. Anna Illig willed the house to Minnie and Rachel Lewis. When Minnie died, Rachel received Minnie’s share giving her three-quarter ownership in the house, while Rachel’s brother, John received a one-quarter share in the house. After John Lewis died, the house went to his brother, Leon E. Lewis, Jr., a nephew, Peter Illig Lewis, and a niece, Margaret Anna Lewis. Leon Lewis Jr. and Margaret Lewis subsequently sold the property to Leon E. and Hildegarde Lewis. Lebanon County Deed Book D, vol. 10, page 359.
READING THE GEMBERLING-REX HOUSE

71. Author's interview with the late Roger Wike, 2001, Schaefferstown, Pa. Wike worked for the Lewises in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

72. Sale bill from Kleinfelter's Auction Rooms, June 4, 1960, LEL Reel 14: V2. Samuel Rex vendue papers, HSI.

73. Rachael Lewis’s probate inventory lists “two early primitive water color paintings” valued at $50, and a “family primitive lady painting,” also valued at $50. LEL Reel 8: TR42. A photograph of the Maria Zimmerman profile portrait is in the archives of Historic Schaefferstown, Inc. The paired Zimmerman Maentels are pictured and described in Stacy C. Hollander, American Radiance: The Ralph Esmerian Gift to the American Folk Art Museum (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2001), 40–41; 382–83.

74. Author’s conversation with the late John Hickernell. The local residents’ vivid memories of the house, known prior to 1970s as the “Lewis House,” speaks to its and its owners’ prominence in the community.

75. The Maldonados nominated the structure for the National Register of Historic Places and restored the interior woodwork throughout the house to its earliest known colors. In the course of their renovations, they found evidence of early stenciling and freehand painting in several rooms, and they reproduced a striking white “potato stamp” design on a dark red background on the kitchen walls. On the Gemberling-Rex House stenciling see Ann Eckert Brown, American Wall Stenciling, 1790–1840 (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2003), 99.