

THE PHYSICAL THING ITSELF:  
ARCHITECTURAL / STYLISTIC / MATERIAL  
ASPECTS OF THE GEMBERLING-REX  
TAVERN / HOUSE, SCHAEFFERSTOWN

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*I*n the good old Colony Days, when wee lived under the King,”<sup>1</sup> and well into the era of the new Republic, many minority ethnic groups engaged in an active negotiation of their status with the politically dominant group. At the same time, under the same pressure from social forces outside their own communities, groups (such as the first-wave immigrant Germans in Pennsylvania) negotiated their own sense of *identity as* Germans living in a land defined in new ways: as “English” in the politically hegemonic sense, but also as “free” in the newly capitalist, economically individualist sense.<sup>2</sup> Taken together, these several senses of independence allow us to speak of “American” values. In addition, new attitudes of a middle class, with its rising “threshold of delicacy” and refinement, and its increasing acceptance of the Cartesian/scientific worldview, come into play. Pennsylvania Germans, especially those merchant and tavern-owning families such as the Rexes of Schaefferstown, Lebanon County, with extensive ties to the wider trading and intellectual

worlds, actively selected and adapted from the full range of material, social, and intellectual options—traditional ethnic habits to imported fashionable aesthetics—in forging their own “way” in this brave new country. Whereas earlier scholars, working under a model which saw the “melting pot” as beneficial, would have stressed accommodation and assimilation to the dominant society in this drama, current post-modern sensibilities (promoting “cultural salad” as the ideal) will stress a more active selection and even resistance on the minority part.<sup>3</sup> A note, however: much of the data remains the same.

In addition to the question of where a given artifact fits into the range of cultural options (situating a family vis-à-vis the dominant culture or their own minority heritage as immigrants to the new land of opportunity), the Gemberling-Rex house as a particular case presents two other kinds of historical puzzles: first, the physical evidence of just what was built, when, and second, just what use the final configuration of two parlors was put to. The historical documentary record has consistently indicated that the building was used in the early stages as a tavern, so the competing needs of a “private dwelling” versus a “public house” must also be considered.



**Figure 1:** A typical Connecticut center-chimney house, used as a tavern: the Welles-Chapman House, late 18th century, Glastonbury, CT. Photo by the author.

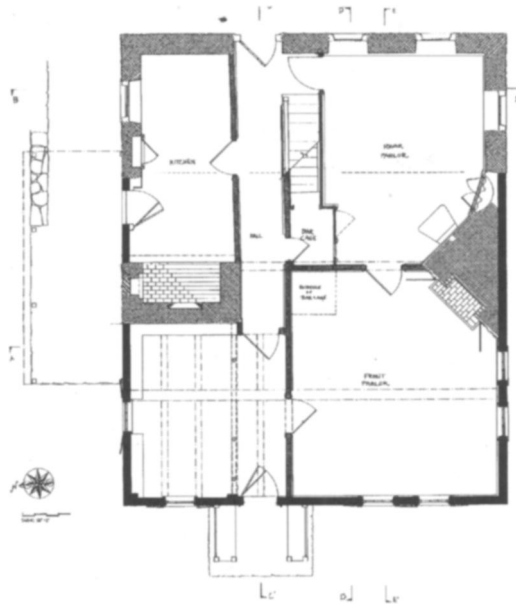
Historians of taverns and hotels as a social and architectural form have long noted an evolution from dwelling to hotel. Early in the process, when Gemberling built his building, there was no architectural difference between a private dwelling and a “public house” or tavern (see figure 1). During the earliest phases of settlement of the frontier, nearly any house one could come across was fair game for a traveler to stay at for a night: the code of frontier hospitality in a hostile environment had ancient and even Biblical origins, and it was absolute.<sup>4</sup> (Only after settlement was well established and visitors had become less of a novelty did specialized architectural features develop, such as secondary doors, bar cages, or ballrooms.) Thus early accounts abound of strangers being unquestioningly taken in to very humble circumstances. For instance, in 1797 Louis-Philippe, the future king of France, spent the night with his three companions on the floor of “Captain Chapman’s” one room cabin near Nashville, listening to the parents discuss the visitors in one bed and a swain make love to a daughter in another!<sup>5</sup> The Marquis de Barbe-Marbois, while in America as the French Legation in 1785, came to a farmhouse whose owner was out. But all the necessities were laid out, so the visitors cooked a meal, which the owner was glad to join, as if a guest, when he returned!<sup>6</sup> Even Mark Twain mentioned the obligation of desperately down-on-their-luck miners to leave their doors open to the even more desperate, in the “wild west” California of the 1860s.<sup>7</sup> Two of the buildings referred to are explicitly described as one-room cabins of decidedly rude design, in all of them the kitchen was easy for strangers to find (i.e., at the front, in vernacular fashion).

Ordinary houses were also commonly used as taverns or “*wirtschaften*” in Germany as well, sometimes in extremely small houses like the ones German immigrants built here. A “*wirtschaft*” is technically a “unit of consumption or economic distribution.” Sometimes this can simply be a “household,”<sup>8</sup> but more often a place where alcohol (at the minimum) and possibly food sold for consumption is meant. It can be the whole building or just a room or two in anyone’s house. A few tables and/or a “theke” (bar without stools) is all that suffices. Most of the year it was a men’s hangout in the evenings or after church while they waited for Sunday dinner to be prepared by their wives. Women were allowed for festivities only. In the village of Breitenheim Karl Martin remembered learning to dance in a *saal* (separate from the *wirtschaft* proper in the next room, possibly the family parlor most of the year?). It was so small that aside from the musicians there was only room for one couple to dance; after each tune partners would exit the front door, go around the back and get in line again.<sup>9</sup> But any village would have several such tavern-rooms-in-a-house, so all had fun.

While it is much more finely finished than a miner's hut, and possibly larger than some wirtschaft "establishments" in the homeland, the original configuration of the Gemberling-Rex house appears to fit this early pattern of a tavern being indistinguishable from the open vernacular houses of its neighbors, or even simply a designated room within one.<sup>10</sup>

### Part one: The FLOORPLAN(s)

#### The original structure and its meaning

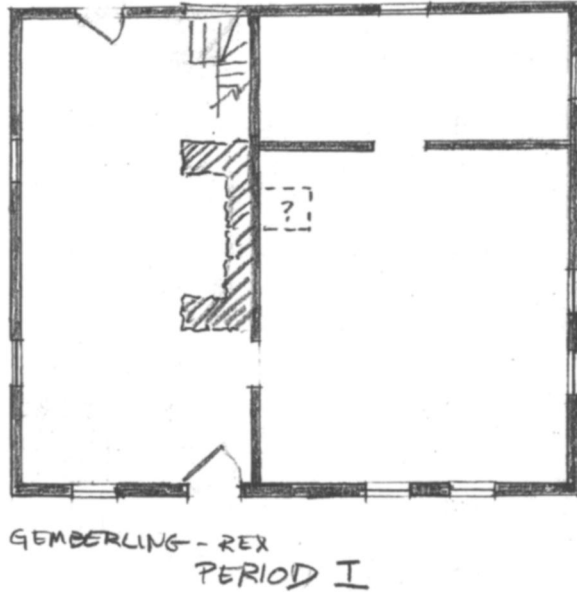


**Figure 2:** Measured plan of the Gemberling-Rex House, c. 1758, showing the confusing layering of many periods of historical evidence. Measured and drawn by the author.

Figuring out just what the original configuration of the Gemberling-Rex house was, however, is itself problematic; very little is known with certainty. The present structure, like any good historical record, contains traces from many periods (see figure 2). The earliest town platt, from 1759, assigns the location on the north side of the square to Paul Gemberling, who put his initials on the corner post when he built the innermost core of the present building. Just when is a matter of conjecture (for the last two digits of the date have been hacked away), but until the early 20th century oral traditions were apparently exact enough to induce an unknown hand to inscribe "Built

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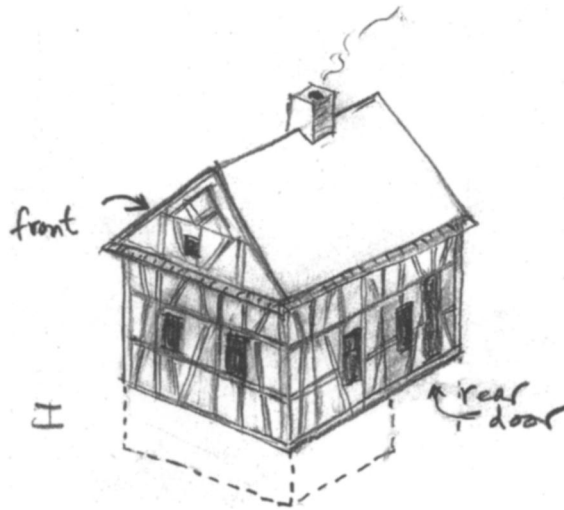
1729, remodeled 1929” on a basement wall. But that date is optimistically early for the still-nearly-frontier area, and in any event Gemberling did not own the property at that time. So “soon after 1758” (when the purchase was made) is the safest guess.



**Figure 3:** Conjectural schematic plan of the original Gemberling House, period I, as a basic *flürküchenhaus*. By the author.

The basic initial structure seems to have been a one and a half story *fachwerk* (half-timbered) dwelling house of the local vernacular *flürküchenhaus* plan (see figure 3). At this time the house apparently featured a front-to-back entry/kitchen, just inside the door, and a squarish *stube* or parlor in front of a narrow rear *kammer* (bed room) on the other side of the central chimney. This plan is the least-common-denominator of German houses in America, vastly simpler than most remaining farm houses in the old world. Nevertheless, like many of its neighbors, the building had a full basement under the parlor/*kammer* side, accessible from the kitchen and insulated in the Germanic manner with a thick layer of mud and leaves crammed between the floorboards and lower palings, in the spaces between the joists. One of the physical-evidence puzzles of the house is just where the rear wall of the basement *was*, but faint evidence has now been found to put it (as expected) under the rear wall of the

house, not extending under the shed which was soon attached (see figure 4, schematic drawing, phase one). The basement wall was soon moved/expanded, making the evidence hard to read.



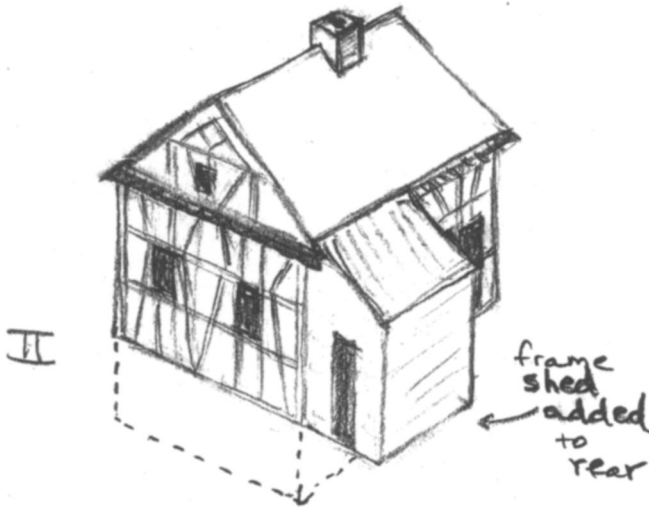
**Figure 4:** Rough sketch of the Gemberling House, period one, showing partial cellar and reconstructed fachwerk (half-timbered) pattern (with possible "Hessenman figur[s]"). By the author.



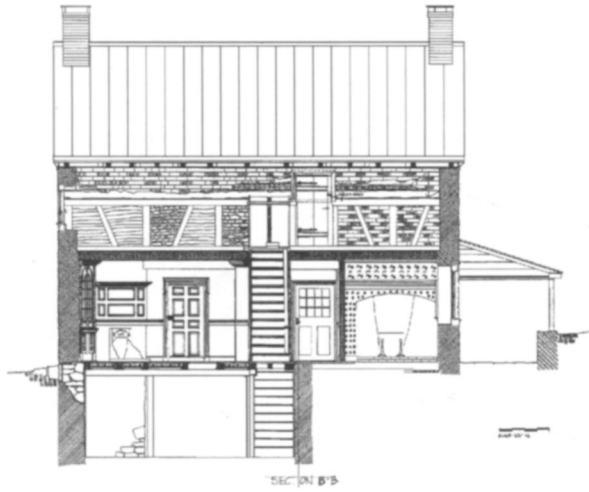
**Figure 5:** Gemberling-Rex House lean-to attic, showing the original exterior rear wall, with exposed, unfinished nogging, indicating a very early lean-to shed addition. Photo by the author.

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The original exterior of the “*flurkuchen*” unit must also be pieced together from scraps of evidence, usually found in odd, inaccessible locations. Recent prying under the siding on the north and south sides of the house has revealed that the brick nogging (or *fachwerk* infill) of the main body of the house appears to have been pointed and at least partly finished in a diagonal or herringbone pattern and thus possibly decorative, as befits a dwelling house of substance. However, as shown by evidence in the present rear lean-to attic, the rear exterior wall (at least the part of it behind the present parlors), was never fitted for exposure to the elements: there the nogging was highly irregular soft “brick,” which never was well “pointed” or rain proofed (see figure 5). Thus the house must have had a shed across part of its back from very early on, one that was conceptually an “addition” (without basement), but which was attached essentially from “day one” (see figure 6, schematic drawing phase 2). The function of such an “extra space” is of course conjectural, but it was *not* contiguous with the kitchen or the exterior doors, so it could not have served as a rear entry or “mudroom,” as so many “shanty additions” in Schaefferstown still do. Thus it is possible that the space served the additional storage needs of a dwelling that expected extra visitors, that is, an early tavern. The basic plan and type of the house was completely standard to the community’s dwellings, but accommodations were inconspicuously made for an additional tavern function, on the rear.



**Figure 6:** Rough sketch of the Gembering-Rex House, period II, showing lean-to addition across part of the rear wall, on the parlor side. By the author.



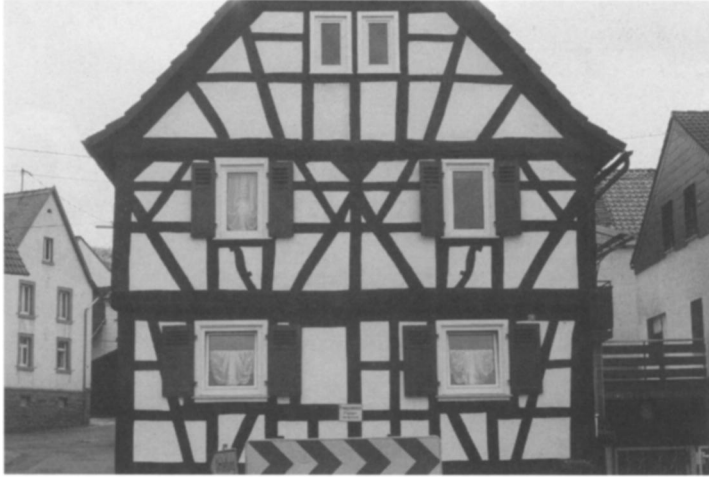
**Figure 7:** Measured drawing, Gemberling-Rex House, showing a lateral “section” cutting through the rear parlor and the rear lean-to attic above it. The partial pattern of the fachwerk braces is visible. By the author.

The rear wall of the Gemberling house (now in the lean-to attic) does show us that the structure was built with the traditional *fachwerk* pattern of Germany, rather than more sharply angling English “windbraces,” which jut from post to plate. Only the upper part of the Gemberling-Rex braces are now visible, but they slant away from the corner posts, not toward it (see figure 7). Pennsylvania German framing visible in barns usually features braces that slant from the plate (the top horizontal beam of a house frame) all the way to the sill (the bottom member), but the Gemberling-Rex house framing does not conform to that pattern either. The most probable solution of this puzzle is that the framing replicates a (modified?) American version of the “*Hessenmann figur*,” a decorative and imagistic/iconic pattern common in *fachwerk* house framing of the old country. In this configuration the short braces represent up raised arms and lower braces represent legs of a human figure, sometimes even called a “wildmann” (in the pagan heritage of foliate “green men” worked into otherwise decorative patterns and carvings) (see figure 8, and the schematic drawing, phase 1). The Gemberling-Rex house also featured carved and dated corner posts, as did several of its immediate neighbors. Such baroque-ish embellishments are surely points of pride and permanence for their owners (but alas the numerals are now gone). In sum, the known external features of his house betoken a domestic building of substance for the frontier, with ample, well finished framing and a



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full basement under the parlor side of the dwelling. And almost immediately extra storage was appended to the rear.



**Figure 8:** A house in the village of Hainchen, central Hessen, Germany, showing a “Hessenman Figur” in the fachwerk pattern. Photo by the author.

As noted, the Gemberling-Rex floor plan also appears to have been the one that Germans commonly adopted in the new world, a plan now known as a “*flurkuchen haus*” or roughly, an “entry-kitchen house.” But in contrast to the solidly “merchant-burgher” exterior of the Gemberling-Rex House, this German-American floor plan represents singularly conflictive “modest, but upwardly mobile” expression for the new immigrants: it is an autonomous, freestanding structure (divorced from barn or multi-use, multi-generational structures which still characterize prosperous farms in the old country), and thus it might have been seen as independent and “modern.” Additionally, such a house might have been seen as part of the trend toward embracing scientific progress, as expressed in the tendency toward rational articulation of functions into their separate compartmentalized spaces. It might even have been seen as incipiently “American,” had such a consciousness yet developed.

But the three room *flurkuchen* house is also small and low, the minimal kind of “least-common-denominator,” tiny, poor people’s hovel, sometimes called in Germany a “*hausgen*” (diminutive of *haus*). This building type occurred early in particular pockets of poverty (such as the southwestern duchy of Pfalz-Zweibrücken, from which many US immigrants came), but was not commonly built in Germany till the industrialism of the very late eighteenth century,

when they appear at the edges of town and for the margins of society.<sup>11</sup> (What the Germans call the *flurkuchen* house type itself in Germany, is another animal. It is specific to Moselle Valley winemakers, and is a much more elaborate affair, with virtually no resemblance in plan beyond the *flur* itself).<sup>12</sup> The American version is limited to a mere and very basic three rooms (or commonly fewer) and often only one story (as originally in Gemberling's house). The house type also featured—like primordial ancestors stretching back to the Neolithic—the most direct access of all visitors directly into the active social heart of the home, i.e., the working kitchen hearth. In fact, the meaning of the word "*flür*" is "lobby" or "entryway;" and "*küche*" is kitchen. There is by definition no way to screen people out of one's intimate or messy "backstage" areas; conservative values of morality and hospitality cannot be avoided. In any event Gemberling's house is presumed to have had the slightly off-center "center chimney" serving a large hearth facing into a long, front to back kitchen entered directly from the front street door (though direct evidence of this chimney stack is now inaccessible or effaced). A parlor or *stube* would have been located to the right front and a narrow *kammer* or bedroom would have been located behind it, as in any German "newcomer's" house of the era.

### The first remodeling

Sometime in the second half of the 18th century, probably before Gemberling sold the property to the late century wave of new arrivals, he fulfilled any growth expectations he had by raising the body of the house to a full two stories (see figure 9 and 10, schematic drawing/sketch, phase 3, and photo).

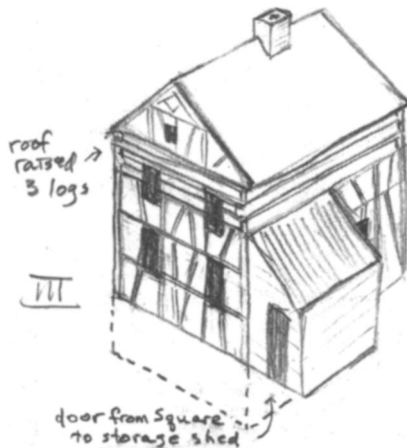
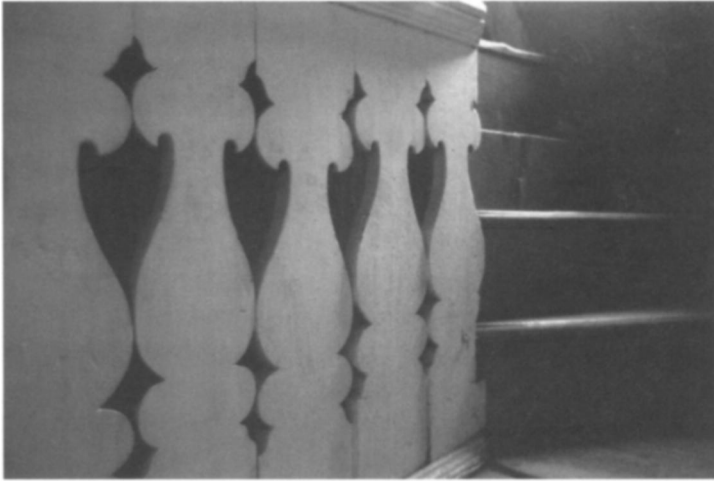


Figure 9: Schematic drawing / sketch, period III, showing the house raised to a full two stories, by means of three courses of log added above the fachwerk. By the author.



**Figure 10:** Gemberling-Rex House, lean-to attic, showing the three logs added above the original fachwerk. Photo by the author. At the extreme right is Robert C. Bucher, author of many seminal articles on Pennsylvania German architecture. This article is dedicated to him.

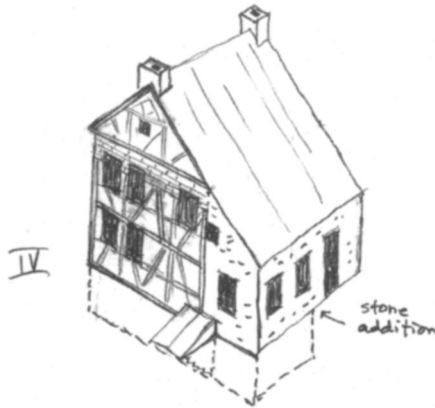
One can only speculate about the reasons, but an expanding tavern business regularly accommodating overnight stays would be ample motivation. This vertical enlargement was accomplished by the expedient of adding three courses of logs directly on top of the earlier half-timbered joined frame. To visually unify the addition, these logs were covered with a smooth plaster layer, inscribed and painted to resemble outsized brick. (These huge “bricks” were painted with a zany, random, black and red pattern (see Falk, figure 3). It is unclear whether they so imitated an earlier treatment of the fachwerk nogging, or if both were visually updated at the same time; but they certainly look similar and appear to have fooled the 1798 Tax assessors). The shed or “shanty addition” across the parlor/*kammer* side of the rear remained after the vertical expansion. There is only one remaining trace of the early interior finish—the wide baroque splats now extant only in the stair to the attic (see figure 11)—but they indicate a house, despite the modest floor plan, of some substance and consciously fashionable ornament. The house as we see it today, however, is largely the result of massive renovations by one of the various owners shortly before the 1798 Direct Federal Tax evaluations and the 1799 sale to Samuel Rex.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 11:** Baroque “splatts” (flat cut-out balusters of a stair) reused from somewhere in the period I house, now in stairs to the main attic. Photo by the author.

### Second major renovation

These late eighteenth-century renovations constituted a substantial reconstruction of the entire interior and rear exterior of the house. The shanty across part of the rear was removed and a stone extension of the house the entire width of the rear wall replaced it (see figure 12, schematic drawing, phase 4).



**Figure 12:** Schematic drawing / sketch, period IV, showing the fachwerk house with the enlarged stone addition across the entire rear of the house. By the author.

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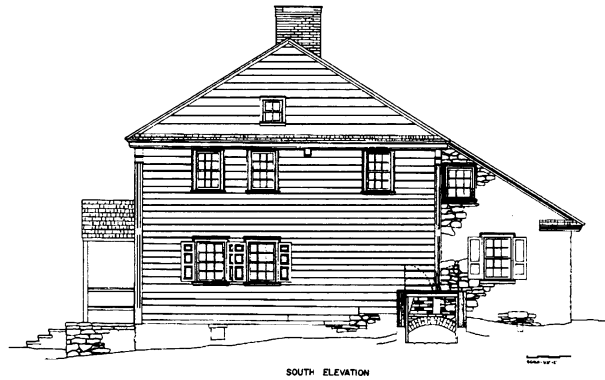


Figure 13: Measured drawing Market Square side elevation, Gemberling Rex House. By the author.

The rear roof was extended, not changing the pitch but making the form similar to a New England “saltbox” house (see figure 13). The evidence is frustratingly invisible, but it seems that the entire rear wall of the basement must have been redug and rebuilt at this time: the seam in the north basement wall is frustratingly faint, but the longer joists of the rear part of the basement were clearly replacements: they are made with applied flanges to carry the traditional Germanic insulation pales, rather than hewn as the earlier joists of the front basement are. In any event, a big increase in basement storage space, now with a wide set of exterior steps directly from the town square to the rear area, appears to have accompanied the larger rooms upstairs.



Figure 14: Schematic plan, period III, showing the narrow, non-classical center passage, rear-facing stairs, and two large parlors. By the author.

Most of the main floor of the house was also gutted and rearranged at this time, resulting in a "*durchgangigen*" floor plan (see figure 14, schematic plan). This name roughly translates as "through gangway." It is a traditional but *pre-renaissance*, *pre-classical*, vernacular version of a center-passage type of dwelling. Said center passage is still off-center, connecting to an asymmetric front facade. The passage is also rather narrow and the stair case, though sometimes ornate, faces modestly to the rear: It is *not yet* the ostentatiously visible and expensive, architecturally "polite" space of the later, fully-baroque (or on this continent "Georgian") house type, soon to be built by Anglo-authorities and the governing classes, and even the occasional rationalist-scientist, such as Joseph Priestley. In contrast, the *pre-Renaissance*, informal *durchgangigen* plan at the Gemberling-Rex house makes the ornateness of the stair rather hard to see, from the front door. It also relocates the kitchen and its fireplace and substantially closes it off from the front door.

As such, the informal *durchgangigen* house type is an intermediate choice, mediating<sup>14</sup> socially modest, local, ethnically German traditions while adopting some elements of the closure and status display the newly-fashionable, formal, presentational houses (i.e., the dominantly "English" "Georgian" house). There are two other excellent examples of informal *durchgangigen* houses in Schaefferstown: the Philip Erpff house and the more modest Christian Bucher house, a few doors away. Philip Erpff also ran a tavern and a store<sup>15</sup> at various times in his house and Bucher, a doctor, sold apothecary drugs from home as well.<sup>16</sup> Thus the *durchgangigen* house type apparently served well those who needed some buffer between public and private areas of the house. The huge and expensive changes in the Gemberling-Rex house thus represent a business expansion and upgrade, but maintain a traditionally irregular domestic exterior, one *not yet* adapting (should we say capitulating?) to elitist or authoritarian modes of renaissance classical symmetry or aesthetic harmony. (Just when the present porch was built is not certain, but even it only faintly suggests a classical pediment. It is probably twentieth-century Colonial Revival, but an exhaustive paint chip study is needed to help establish exact sequences throughout the house).

To accomplish this major change in the Gemberling-Rex house, the earlier center chimney of the *flurkuchenhaus* plan was completely removed, along with the entire rear wall of the ground floor. (Evidently they *really* wanted to have enlarged ground floor rooms, for the second floor was left nearly dangling; still now it is supported by only one small door post across the entire width, and as a result the house now sags by 6 inches!). A long, narrow *durch*,

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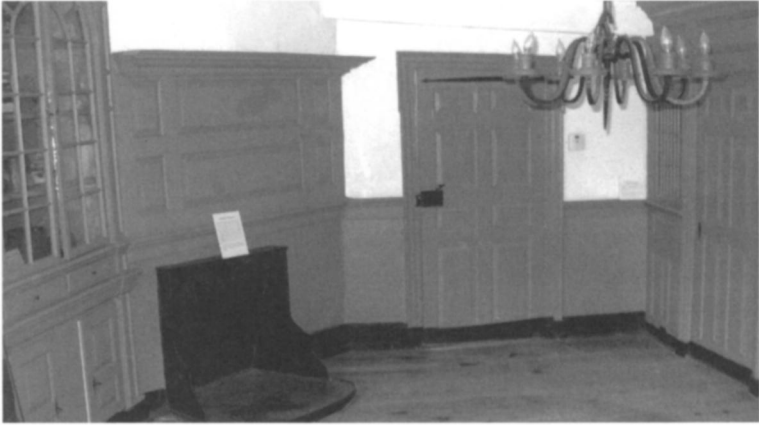


Figure 15: The rear parlor, showing a cupboard, corner fire place with Franklin stove to the left, and the bar cage to the right. Photo by Diane Wenger.



Figure 16: The refined, Rococo bar cage, in the rear parlor, Gemberling-Rex house. Photo by the author.

or through hallway, was inserted where the center chimney had once been, with the stair facing traditionally to the rear, straightened out and fancier, but much where it would have been in the original kitchen. A new kitchen hearth and chimney stack was constructed, this time with the firebox facing the rear of the newly extended room, and creating a very small room just off the front door hallway. Mortise pockets in the ceiling joists prove that this small room was partitioned from the through-passage and a glazed door could



further close off the kitchen from the front hall. The front exterior door of the house was a horizontally bisected “Dutch” door, so with the upper part of it open, the tavern keeper could still see people arriving at his door, looking through the glazed door from a spot only a few steps from his otherwise well closed off hearth. Perhaps this arrangement can be seen as an early version of “scientific household efficiency,” as the tavern keeper divided his attention between a stewing pot and stage coaches clattering to a halt. (The north side door and porch are artifacts of twentieth-century leisure.)

Removal of the rear wall of the original *kammer* meant that there was now a second parlor, of nearly equal size to the original front parlor (see schematic plan, period III and figure 15, photo). The matching front-to-back corner fireplaces, the rear one now with a Franklin stove, were also built at this time. And both parlors could now have a bar cage in them, the access to which was only from the new *durch-* or through-passage. The rear bar cage is still “in situ” and is quite refined (see figure 16), whereas ghosts of the missing front bar cage indicate it may well have been less architecturally elaborate, perhaps befitting a different clientele in that room. These bar cages also provided the only access to the basement stores, so (with the glazed door in the passageway,) the ample kegs of wines and spirits bought from merchant Rex by his renter-tavern keepers were doubly secure from all outsiders or guests. The extra space also allowed larger rooms for family or more likely, for increasing guests (perhaps now weekly boarders?), upstairs. Just why two full and separate parlors were so desired (as to endanger the stability of the whole house) remains conjecture: separation of male and female parlors makes the neatest answer, but the documents only partly support this idea. We shall return to this social puzzle, below.

### Heirarchy

Nevertheless, the new spaces of the Gemberling-Rex House also exhibit an intense internal sense of social hierarchy. This hierarchy is partly exhibited by the degree of finish of the woodwork (or lack thereof) from room to room, from the front of the house to the back, from ground floor to upstairs and thence to the attic, throughout the house. The fielded panels over the mantel of the front parlor (see figure 17) have particular associations with elites, who in Pennsylvania would essentially have been “English.” But these panels are irregular, fitting so awkwardly into their allotted space that nearly anyone would recognize “reused materials.” Thus, the public formal tone of the room was mediated by ad-hoc informal funkiness. The kitchen, for the working household only, was left plainly and somewhat roughly plastered, that is, with no formality at all.



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Figure 17: the front parlor, showing the ill-fitting fielded panels. Photo by the author.

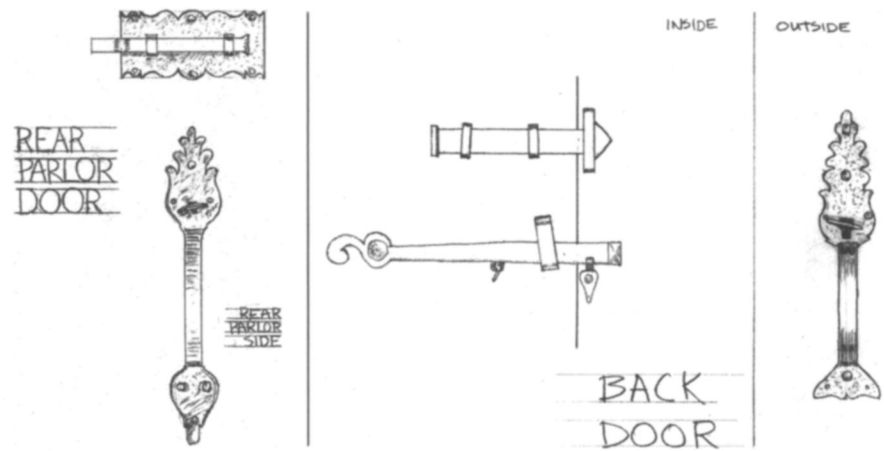


Figure 18: Decorative range and heirarchy of the ironwork  
A: dead bolt in the rear parlor going toward the durchgangigen passage;  
B: dead bolt, rear door to the back yard. (drawings by the author).

This hierarchy between rooms is even more exquisitely calibrated by the ironwork on each door (and differing on each side of each door), downstairs and up (see figure 18). This hardware varies from the positively clunky

(possibly left over from the original flurkuchen dwelling) to the stylish and refined, appealing to the knowledgeable and worldly tavern/hotel clientele. There are also possible gender distinctions to be perceived in the ironwork, although not only speculation enters the analysis, but (in Venturi's phrase) "complexity and contradiction" enters the evidence here.<sup>17</sup> The Gemberling-Rex House also contains a mixture of moldings, including some with pre-classical profiles, somewhat typical of Germanic medieval architraves and jetties in the homeland, mixed with moldings more classically mathematical in their harmonies and proportions. Further paint chip analysis might reveal what parts are left from which renovations.



Figure 19: Corner cupboard cornice moldings, rear parlor. Photo by the author.

Additionally, the Gemberling-Rex House constitutes the best example of Rococo style in America, north of Mexico (see figure 19). It is, of course, a vernacular Rococo, interpreted by a still-unknown local carpenter (both Diane Wenger and I *have* looked!). Basing my understanding of a deep-structured Rococo style on Hogarth's 1753 *Analysis of Beauty*,<sup>18</sup> I insist that this rural craftsperson intellectually surpasses the (often slavishly) exact replications of Abraham Swan's or William Salmon's or Thomas Chippendale's prescribed designs, as so often ordered by urban or political elites.<sup>19</sup> Rather, the Gemberling-Rex woodwork, in its creative freedom and especially in its demonstrably playful quality, captures the genuine, subtly oxymoronic and

even profound character of the Rococo spirit (not just decadent aristocratic luxury) that Hogarth took such pains to express.<sup>20</sup> On the corner cupboard cornice in the rear parlor, the keystone-shaped dentils actually dangle down in front of other moldings behind, and furthermore have little holes drilled through them. Standing on a ladder (while installing them?), the carpenter could play a peek-a-boo game with his assistant, or at least with his fingers. This excessive fall-der-all has *got* to be a joke, exactly the kind that Hogarth took his 175 pages to promote, but one seldom truly achieved by more official, elite renderings of the style.



**Figure 20:** Jig-cut end blocks of the rear-facing durchgangigen stair, a spectacular example of vernacular Rococo. Photo by the author.

The jig-saw fretwork of the rear-facing durchgangigen stair endblocks also constitute (folk) Rococo exuberance to an unsurpassed degree (see figure 20). The European version of the Rococo style itself constitutes (despite Hogarth's protestations to the contrary) the aristocracy's last binge of self indulgence and status display through excess, both in luxurious materials and labor intensive workmanship. Given the silence of the Rex family and other documents on this question, one can only imagine the conversation between client and woodworker, and just what the client, probably Paul Gemberling in advancing years, attempted to convey. Was it the urbanity or the elitism of Philadelphia's Powell house that he stressed in his instructions to the carpenter? The reputation of the parties? Did he think of the woodwork he was ordering as delicate and refined? Full of the kind of "beauty" that Quietist

religioners equated with “virtue”? Or did he see it as closer to the “lust for the eyes” described by the fervent shoemaker and later apothecary Ludwig Denig, who so decried the “tomfoolery” of tavern behavior (and illustrated it in his “Picture-Bible”/emblem book).<sup>21</sup> Did Gemberling, who was once arrested for assault and battery,<sup>22</sup> use words like “frilly” or the more vernacular “jig-jaggy?” “Fou-fou?!” The mind still reels.

### Minor renovation

Sometime after Samuel Rex purchased the property, he visually refined the exterior, covering the exuberant, almost zany, polychrome of the oversized black and red stucco “bricks” with wide, planed and beaded weatherboards (see figure 21, schematic drawing, phase 5). Such smoother, more uniform siding was always evaluated more highly by the tax assessors, and also appears (perhaps inevitably) more often on houses with ethnically English names.<sup>23</sup> Such a choice appears to be part of Rex’s domestication (or perhaps re-domestication) of the house, possibly when he moved into it as his own dwelling after 1802. But it might also have signaled his increasing desire to mark his membership in the wider Pennsylvania civil society (i.e. the governing English elite), as he began to act as Justice of the Peace (and as the next generation Rex descendants sent their daughter Tillie off to a young woman’s finishing school).

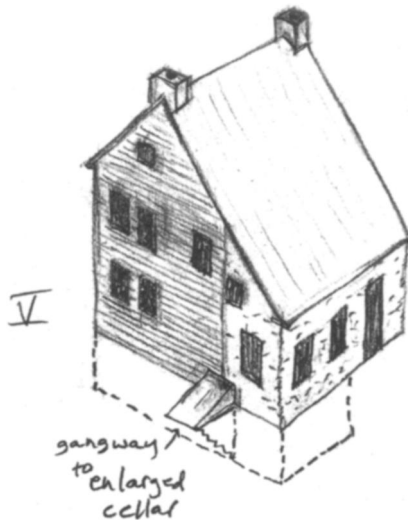


Figure 21: Schematic drawing / sketch, period V, showing Rex’s horizontal weatherboarding, finally covering the fachwerk. By the author.

## PART TWO: SOCIAL INTERPRETATIONS

The highly refined hierarchy in the finish of the rooms, together with the great expense taken in order to create two equally large parlors in the first place, also strongly suggests a *social* differentiation in their use. Three related ideas explaining the need for two parlors have been suggested: segregation of male and female patrons; segregation of public patrons from the owner's family; segregation of local patrons from travelers.

## Gender Codes of Eighteenth-Century Taverns

The sensibilities of women might well have wanted to be protected from the rowdy tavern scene of male camaraderie, usually expressed through drinking and physical boisterousness. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, men emphatically claimed the public and political space for themselves, even claiming that a female's brains, being somewhat smaller, could not handle the demands of political thought.<sup>24</sup> But there is ample historical evidence that women did sometimes travel on their own, at least in some parts of the new country. Widowed women might need to travel to the county seat or state capital on legal business, as Susanna Hastings of Charlestown, New Hampshire did, to settle the estate of her husband in 1759. Or there might be something else to attend to: in 1828 Anne Royall traveled from Maryland to northern New Hampshire on unstated business. Dutiful daughters could visit sick mothers (or other relatives) without their husband or brothers, as Sarah Connel of Bow, New Hampshire did in 1810. Or, despite current assumptions to the contrary, parties of unmarried girls sometimes gadded about, just for fun: the same Sarah Connel, when only 18 years old, took an afternoon ride with her friend Susan Ayer, in June 1809 to Hopkinton, a town a good 7 miles off, and stopped for refreshments at Bailey's tavern on the way. She reported to her diary "We were in high spirits and enjoyed our frolic highly."<sup>25</sup>

By the early nineteenth century many strictly private dwellings of the more ample sort contained a *pair* of parlors. Such an arrangement often suggested the expectation of significant entertaining, for the rooms were often separated by large sliding double doors, so that the rooms could be opened into one when the guest list required, or for a particularly dramatic presentation of dessert. Although such parlors are often matched nearly identically in architectural detail or finish, they often were gender identified. Early American custom often required the sexes to separate after dinner, for the women to literally withdraw to the "[with]drawing room." Each group would often form a large circle in their respective rooms and engage in a

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singularly efficient form of news gathering conversation, *ensemble*. (The practice still obtains in some quarters, as I have experienced myself in a large Mennonite family gathering during my fieldwork.) Women seem to have been assigned the more civilized front parlor, with the more public presentation of the best woodwork (if there was a difference in finish between the two spaces). Chairs, customarily set back along the wall, might also be pulled out for a sociable sewing circle, as Matilda Zimmerman did somewhere in the Gemberling-Rex house.

The men's convivial informality (i.e., drinking) would be relegated to the rear parlor, where a chamber pot might even be hidden in a bowfat (*beauffet/buffet*) or a cellarette, for immediate, desperate need. (Thomas Sheraton actually designed his elegant sideboard to be able to hold such a container, and the visitor Moreau de Saint-Mery described Philadelphia men (presumably gentlemen, in his circle) running to the "corners of the room, hunting for night tables." A satirical French print (of an English household), even depicts a pot in drunken use, the stream missing the wide, deep bowl altogether (see figure 22).<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 22:** Detail of *Apres-Midi des Anglais*, French engraving, circa 1814, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

### Family Codes

A second possible reason for two parlors might have been to segregate the public from the tavern keeper's family. As noted above, in the earliest taverns, though called "public houses" and licensed (albeit for private profit) to provide

public benefit, the architectural difference from an ordinary dwelling was scant. Indeed, one would be *expected* to dine as equals—dropping your spoon into a common bowl, more often than not—with the taverner's family. Such was the anti-aristocratic, egalitarian spirit in America that one might actually cause offense if one wanted privacy or special treatment: the visiting Mrs. Trollope reported that a Cincinnati tavern keeper loudly protested her request for a private tea, thus: "We have no family tea-drinkings here and you must either live with me and my wife, or not at all in my house!"<sup>27</sup>

But as settlement matured and "hotels" gradually differentiated from ordinary dwelling houses,<sup>28</sup> a host of distinct spaces also developed. One of them was possibly for the tavern keeper's family, in which to retreat from increasingly public functions of a hotel. The largest such specialized room would be a ball room, which could be rented for any number of "functions," from traveling theater players, to lecturing scientists to (later on) Oscar Wilde on tour. Other smaller rooms might also be set aside in better taverns, available to itinerant dentists or necromancers, or simply to have a quiet space, even for reading. Many incipient political movements fomented in tavern "inner rooms," including much of the American Revolution. And, as the tavern business got to be a daily ruckus (not a rare traveler to hospitably lodge), the owner might well be glad to have a place for his own family life.<sup>29</sup> Such a space would be the second parlor if at all. In Schaefferstown, the more public events would most likely have gone to Alexander Schaeffer's imposing Franklin House across the square, but some functions, such as the consultations of a stray "physiognotracer," could conceivably have found quarter in the Gemberling-Rex house. But that there would have been enough traffic for two parlors or public spaces is open to question.

### Travelers

A final reason for two parlors in a tavern is to segregate the local public from travelers, coming from farther afield. This separation appears to be the traditional pattern in much of the German homeland, and also effectively segregates the classes, too. The rooms are given names in larger German taverns: the "*schenkhaus*" is for the locals and the "*auslanders*" (literally, "foreigners") repair elsewhere.<sup>30</sup> A tavern frequently becomes a kind of extended "living room" for a neighborhood, with people who share certain proclivities, or of a certain ilk, self-segregating to their favorite pub where they could be found each evening. In the "pre-telephone" world, people *needed* to have a place where they could be conveniently and reliably found, and where a beer or two could precede any business transaction.<sup>31</sup> Thus, each establishment in



a town developed its own daily clientele and its specific social aura. But locals could walk home drunk and often did, whereas anyone needing to travel to town for business would also be likely to be of a higher economic bracket than those tied close to home. Thus a quieter space, away from the noisy and possibly brawling locals, and apart even from the passing drovers (or in Schaefferstown iron haulers, working for one or another of Henry Stiegel's furnaces), would often be required for the better sort. (The long shed with spaces for four teams (at least 8 horses) at the Gemberling-Rex house in 1798 possibly suggests more drovers than merchant travelers. The latter would presumably have preferred to take the frequent stage coaches that stopped right outside the Gemberling-Rex door, rather than their own animals in open weather.) Such a second parlor would also be a more refined space, as the tastes of richer, traveling sorts were also likely to be more worldly and erudite. Perhaps Gemberling was trying to upgrade his clientele, by building a "better sort" of room.

In the Gemberling-Rex house, any or all of these needs could have come into play, but I tend to think the last reasons predominated. Unlike in private double parlors for grand entertaining, the front room of the Gemberling-Rex is the relatively plain one, and the rear parlor is the decidedly more refined. Thus gender-segregation (and/or pot pissing) is unlikely; but the locals would have been amply satisfied with fielded panels, even irregular, ill-fitting ones, in the front parlor. Women are known to have visited, or at least to have been entertained at the Gemberling-Rex, and chairs to have been broken there, too, but it seems as likely as not that the "girls" visit was more a "frolic" than a sedate business meeting. (Thus it doesn't seem essential that there be different rooms to satisfy these particular historical records.) On the other hand, the existing bar cage in the rear parlor, so refined with its slender federal-Rococo muntins, attests that the room was designed for more than family events—or local drovers—alone. Thus the possibility remains that the elegant rear parlor room could have served as a family dining room for most occasions, (befitting the station of the Rex family, or even Gemberling's earlier tavern-keeper/renter), but also satisfy the tastes (and increasing desires for a modicum of privacy) of the occasional prosperous traveler, when one turned up.

### Conclusions?

The Rex family were always agents for modernization and change in Schaefferstown. They clearly embraced the new and the urban, and translated its effects to their rural neighbors. Already before coming to town, the



grandparent's generation had changed their name from Ruger (or possibly Reigle, according to one oral tradition) to the more Anglo-seeming Rex. As a merchant, Samuel brought outside worldly goods to town, and thus fomented fashionably progressive tastes. Besides weatherboarding the house, they were the first family in Schaefferstown to have their large table-type gravestone inscribed in English, and the Rex-Zimmerman generation were among the first to have their portraits (see Falk, figure 2) painted by the itinerant Jacob Maentel (along with Dr. Bucher in his nearby *durchgangigen* house/apothecary).<sup>32</sup> In the 1840s Samuel Rex's grand-nephew Edmund Zimmerman studied Geometry, "Mensuration," Surveying, Algebra, and Chemistry in Lititz, all subjects potentially useful to male professions (as opposed to working men's trades). He also studied the more erudite Latin, and took violin lessons from a Mr. Fetter, at the first rate of \$7.50. (His first tune was a patriotic Yankee Doodle, but nevertheless he reported that "the boys mocked me... said I'd never learn it.")<sup>33</sup> A. Stokes Jones wrote to Tillie Zimmerman (Edmund's sister) from the Civil War front, recalling the piano playing last heard at her house (the Gemberling-Rex house).<sup>34</sup> The family papers, so carefully preserved by Tillie and later descendants, contain brochures or advertising booklets for Stanley's Patented Rotary Cooking Stove (Philadelphia, 1843), Singer Sewing Machines (1869), the Regina Pneumatic Cleaner (an early vacuum cleaner, no date) and Simmon's Liver Regulator (1899, sent by Tillie's cousin Albert, from his hardware store in Parkersburg, West Virginia).<sup>35</sup> Along with counsels to her cousin (?) Amelia Zimmerman (Tillie and Edmund's sister) about love and marriage (itself a new idea in some quarters), Minerva (last name unknown) gleefully reports her family's worldliness: "Rex has gone to New York, what fun, to see the elephants, hope he [they?] won't eat him up."<sup>36</sup>

These historical nuggets all attest to the family's statements of status and adoption of increasingly bourgeois values of erudition, refinement and the by-then-risen threshold of delicacy. Simultaneously, they signal an embrace of science and advanced technology and the family's espousal of the vaunted rising level of prosperity and expectations of the good life in general. But these welcome messengers of progress are nearly always also vectors of unforeseen social changes. Indeed, some adverse effects of the very advances the Rexes and their descendents promoted were felt right away. The eight mile distance over the hill to Lititz and Tillie's exile at finishing school may not seem like much to us today, but it was a major rupture to her sense of community, at the time: every letter she sent or received begins with at least a paragraph of

wailing complaints about how long it had been since the last letter. The changes and progress of which the Rexes were key vectors—toward commerce, politics, formal education, and even cleanliness—were not always experienced positively.

But, and perhaps “thus” for that reason, we should note that even the most elegantly formal interiors of the Gemberling-Rex House, designed for family and for erudite travelers, were still painted with colors revealing ethnically Germanic—and thus perhaps psychologically comforting—tastes. The sheathed walls were a muted pewtery green, but the bevels and stair details were offset by a vivid vermilion, almost the kind of electric contrast which English neighbors found so incomprehensibly lurid in otherwise “plain” Amish quilts. And the kitchen was painted with a deep, saturated red, liberally sprinkled with sprightly sprigs of springtime flowers (see Falk, figure 5). Such exuberant and whimsical decor would not be impossible in a kitchen of the politically dominant “English” neighbors, but it does seem to fit more easily with the riot of tulips and other traditional floral motifs which characterize ethnically signature Pennsylvania German items such as *fraktur*, grave-stones, quilts, and painted furniture. So indeed, like the cultural creators of so many minority immigrant groups to the liberating American experience, the Rexes (and Gemberling before them) both learned to actively adopt progressive cultural signifiers of the dominant group (perhaps more so on the exterior) and yearned to preserve heritage and comforting community solidarity in their inner cores and emotional hearths.

## NOTES

This article is dedicated to Robert C. Bucher. Many thanks to David R. Sulik for digitizing and “cleaning up” the images.

1. “In the good old Colony days, when Wee lived under the King/Lived a Miller and a Weaver and a little Tailor/Three Jolly Rogues of Lynn [Massachusetts],”—traditional song, in Bill Bonyun, *Yankee Legend*, Heirloom Records HL-500.
2. Steven Nolt, *Foreigners in Their Own Land: Pennsylvania Germans in the Early Republic* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002). Even if people of German heritage held some offices in the new government, including Governor, the laws and their intellectual tradition were defined as British, tracing back to the Magna Carta.
3. Using “acculturation / assimilation” language: Edward Chappell, “Acculturation in the Shenandoah Valley: Rhenish Houses in the Massanutten Settlement,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 124:1 (February, 1980), reprinted in Dell Upton and John Vlach, *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture* (Athens, GA: University of

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- Georgia Press, 1986), 28–29; using “creolization” language, Gabrielle Lanier, *A Region of Regions: Local and Regional Culture in the Delaware Valley, 1780–1830* (Ph.D. Diss, University of Delaware, 1998), 105.
4. Scholars agree that the issue at Sodom was hospitality: even the very conservative Richard Hays of Yale concurs in “Awaiting the Redemption of Your Bodies,” *Sojourner Magazine* 20 (July 1991), 17–21, quoted in Reverend Nancy Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer Folk, God, Jesus, and the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), 78.
  5. Louis-Philippe, *Diary of My Travels in America*, 113–14, quote at length in Edward Chappell, “Housing a Nation: The Transformation of Living Standards in Early America,” in Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 205–6.
  6. Barbe-Marbois, Francois Marquis de, *Letters of Francois, Marquis de Barbe Marbois during his Residence in the United States as Secretary of the French Legation, 1779–1785* (New York: Duffield Co, 1929), cited in Karen Spitulnik, “The Inn Crowd: The American Inn, 1730–1830,” *Pennsylvania Folklife* 22:2 (Winter 1972–3), 35.
  7. Mark Twain, *Roughing It*, written 1871, (Signet Classic edition, New York, Penguin Books, (1871) c.1980), 330.
  8. *Cassell's German Dictionary* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1962).
  9. Karen Gross, a scholar of the German Arbeitskreis für Hausforschung, by emails from Breitenheim Germany, on April 6, May 29 and June 2, 07. I am piecing the story and the location together from several messages, so I may have gotten a detail wrong. Any mistake is mine.
  10. “establishment” is another possible meaning of *wirtschaft*.
  11. Personal communication by email from Karen Gross of Breitenheim, Germany, Friday April 6, 2007, 10:55:33. See also Gunter F. Anthes, *Breitenheim- einst und heute (Breitenheim, Then and Now)* published by the village for its 700th anniversary in 1993.
  12. Charles Bergengren, “Pennsylvania German House Forms,” *Architecture and Landscape of the Pennsylvania Germans, 1720–1920*, “guidebook,” Twenty-Fifth Annual Conference of the Vernacular Architecture Forum, May 12–16, 2004, Harrisburg, PA, 23–46, especially 28–30.
  13. The apparent conflict is in the documents: although the deed states Rex did not purchase the house till 1799, the 1798 tax attributes ownership to him. Apparently the actual evaluations were done at the later time and backdated. Diane Wenger has done the research to sort this out.
  14. The *durchgangigen* house type is not a hybrid, invented for the new American situation. It is one of the traditional house types available in the Old Country, albeit somewhat less common (as it was here).
  15. The two types, taverns and store, were not mutually exclusive, of course: tavern keepers also often sold stuff to their guests. See Wenger, *Creating Networks: the Country Storekeeper and the Mid-Atlantic Economy*, (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2001).
  16. Christian Bucher's portrait by Jacob Maentel, now in the American Folk Art Museum, New York, shows him standing in front of an apothecary display, probably in the small front room of his *durchgangigen* house. See Stacy Hollander, *American Radiance: The Ralph Esmerian Gift to the American Folk Art Museum* (New York: Harry N Abrams, Inc., 2001), 43.
  17. And twentieth-century colonial revival renovations, in which Rachel Lewis carefully used only period materials in her repairs, also confuse things!

18. William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty, Written with a view of fixing the fluctuating Ideas of TASTE*. London (Printed by J.Reeves, for the author and sold by him at his house in Leicester-Fields, 1753).
19. A particularly exact copy of a plate from Swan is found at William Byrd's Virginia mansion, Westover.
20. Charles Bergengren, "Baroque and Rococo in America: Carpenter's Canards in the Woodwork of 18th Century Schaefferstown, Pennsylvania," *Vernacular Architecture Forum* 1990, St Louis. See also pp 275ff in Bergengren, *The Cycle of Transformations in the Houses of Schaefferstown, Pennsylvania*, University of Pennsylvania, PhD diss.1988.
21. Don Yoder, "Part II: The Book and Its Sources," in Don Yoder, ed, *The Picture-Bible of Ludwig Denig: A Pennsylvania German Emblem Book* (New York: Hudson Hill Press for the Museum of American Folk Art and The Pennsylvania German Society, 1990). On Quietist attitude toward beauty see page 44-45; on Denig's attitude toward beauty as lust see page 48; for his images of taverns as bawdy see plates 7, 8, and 9.
22. Diane Wenger, by personal communication.
23. Bergengren, *Cycle of Transformations*, 517-18.
24. C. Kurt Dewhurst, Betty MacDowell and Marsha MacDowell, *Artists in Aprons: Folk Art by American Women* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979).
25. Donna-Belle Garvin and James Garvin, *On the Road North of Boston: New Hampshire Taverns and Turnpikes, 1700-1900* (Concord: New Hampshire Historical Society, 1988), 120-21.
26. Elizabeth Donaghy Garrett, *At Home: The American Family, 1750-1870* (New York: Abrams, 1990), 88-89.
27. Charles Hoffman, *A Winter in the West*, 140-145, quoted in Karen Spitulnik, "The Inn Crowd," *Pennsylvania Folklife* (Winter 1972) 32, 35; Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1927 (1832) 30)..
28. The use of the word "ordinary" to designate a tavern has a different derivation. It comes from the British laws regulating the regular price of an "ordinary" meal at licensed taverns or "public houses." A "pub" is a private establishment licensed to serve the public good, with laws limiting price gouging of travelers in need. *American Collegiate Dictionary*, 1950
29. Such appears to have been the case at the Jos. Barnard Tavern, added in 1795 to the 1763 Frary house in Deerfield, Massachusetts. Personal communication, Ritchie Garrison, summer 2004.
30. Carsten Vorwig of the Freilichtsmuseum Kommern, Germany, personal communication, 2004 Vernacular Architecture Forum Conference, Harrisburg, in the ballroom of that amazing Shriner's Temple.
31. As I have also experienced myself in Sandomierce, Poland, where my host bewailed the new but too, too convenient and anti-social telephones: She wished she could just tear them out for all they had really accomplished was that one could now "get your business done, without being friendly!"
32. See Hollander, *American Radiance*, 40-41, for the Peter and Elizabeth Zimmerman portraits.
33. Letter, Edmund R Zimmerman to his father Peter Zimmerman, Lititz, 1843. Rex papers, Leon E. Lewis Jr. Microfilm Collection, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Library, Winterthur, Del., Reel 12: L56.
34. Rex papers, Lewis Microfilm Collection, Reel 11: C16, letter 2.
35. Rex papers, Lewis Microfilm Collection, Reel 11: A8.
36. Rex papers, Lewis Microfilm Collection, Reel 11: C13.