

THE STRAND

Read House Property now owned by
Philip Laird, #42 The Strand
Comprises Original Plots - 8 and 9 and parts
of Original Plots - 7 and 10

(See Photo #22)

The major part of the present Philip Laird property extending 178 feet along the Strand is on the site of two original plots of 60' each which lay between the plot of Jan Andrussen (Original 7) on the south, and the plot of William Maurits (Original 10) on the north. The present plot comprises in addition to the central 120' a 19' strip of the original plot to the north and a 39' strip of the plot to the south. Of the two central plots, Original 8 and Original 9, 0-8 belonged to the Englishman Simon Lane and 0-9 to the Dutch tavern-keeper Foppe Jansen Outhout.

Isaac Tayne (Tyne, Tine, als ~~Lapier~~), of French origin, but a Dutch citizen at Fort Casimir with Peter Stuyvesant in 1655, secured from Stuyvesant the grant of a lot within this 120 feet at that time. By 1662, he had acquired by purchase the whole of the 120' by 300' plot between the Strand and the Market Place. In the colonial records for 1672, mention is made of a controversy that has been "going on for too long" between Isaac Tayne and Foppe Jansen. It is ordered by the governor to be reviewed before Captain John Carr, and settled. No details are given, but the controversy may well have been over settlement of Tayne's purchase of Foppe Jansen's part of the Strand plot.

After the death of Isaac Tayne, his son, Isaac Tayne Jr., in an agreement of 1677 with the other Tayne heirs concerning Isaac

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Tayne Sr.'s property, gave to Dr. John DesJardains, the house on the north 30 feet of this Strand property together with the lot. Tayne Jr. kept the southern 90 foot plot, "where he lived." In 1679, Dr. DesJardains' house and lot (the site of the south 30' of the present Laird house) was sold by the sheriff to Johannes DeHaes for 540 gilders, DeHaes made the property over to Ephraim Hernan "who made good the purchase."

Ephraim Herman, at that time owned the 60' lot down the Strand that he had bought from George More - the present site of the Presbyterian Manse and the Morrison garden. In 1680, Tayne and Herman made an exchange by which Isaac Tayne Jr, acquired the lower lot plus a sum of money, and Ephraim Herman acquired the balance of the 120' plot that is now included in the Laird property, with Tayne's house on the lower 90' and the house on the northern 30' that Tayne had given DesJardains.

Ephraim Herman (oldest son of Augustine Herman), was one of the attorneys for the Duke of York, to convey the soil of Delaware to William Penn.

Herman may have been living in his house or this site at the time. He had been married at New York, a few years before, and there had met the Gutch Labadists, Dankers and Sluyter, who converted him to their faith and their plan for a religious community. He entertained the Labadists (Dutch Quakers) in New Castle when they came in 1679 and also on his farms. About 1686 Ephraim Herman left his wife to join the Labadist colony near Bohemia Manor,

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but later returned to her, and died in 1689.

Following Ephraim Herman's death, his wife Elizabeth acquired from her brother-in-law Casparus Herman, his interest in the Strand plot. She owned the whole when she married John Donaldson, a prominent merchant, who was later a judge in the court, 1695-96. John Donaldson and his wife Elizabeth, in 1701, sold the Strand property with all "housing, outhousing, gardens, orchards, fencing and all other improvements" etc. to Robert French, merchant, also the one-quarter share in a mill property on Naaman's Creek, both for 1,400 pounds, so that it is not possible to tell what value was set upon the Strand plot with its dwelling and other buildings out of this very large sum for that period in any real estate transaction.

Soon after his purchase of the property on the west side of the Strand, Robert French acquired by grant of William Penn, the water lot opposite, 60' on the Strand and 600' deep. He acquired much other property in and near New Castle and was one of the leading men of his day. About his death, James Logan wrote to William Penn, Philadelphia, 8 September, 1713, "Robert French in this day carried from hence (to New Castle) to be buried. He has long been ill and died here last night. His death will be a loss to us..." Two years later, Mary, widow of Robert French, married Robert Gordon, another prominent merchant. She was the executor of Robert French's will by which she inherited the Strand property

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for her lifetino, described by Robert French in his will, as "my now dwelling house.. ...the lot adjoining the said house, together with the front or bank lot and the improvements thereon." His son David was to inherit from his mother; the boy was then in school at Chester and his father desired that he be sent to the University of Glasgow in Scotland.

Whether David French st- died abroad has not beer! discovered, but he became an attorney and was prominent in New Castle affairs, He inherited the Strand property, but as he left no children, this property went to the children of his sister Katherine, the eldest daughter of Robert French, who in his will had made her the heir to it next to David.

Katherine French married John Shannon and had two daughters, Ann who married John Maxwell and Mary who married James Sykes of Kent County. The Sykes and the Maxwells and their heirs, finally John Patten and Mary his wife, continued the ownership of the property by descendants of Robert French, from his death in 1713 to 1798 when John and Mary Patten, on May 9, conveyed to George Read (the signer), "all that messuage and lots of land now and long since in the tenure of the said George Read." The sale to George Read included the bank lot opposite. George Read died in September of that year, having owned the dwelling he had made famous, only a fen months.

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None of the family history of the Robert French's heirs so far as it could be discovered through available records, indicates when the house shown on the 1804 survey was built, or rebuilt from the early house of Robert French. John Donaldson may have rebuilt the Isaac Tayne-Ephraim Herman house. Brick houses were being built in New Castle during the 1690's, the decade of Donaldson's ownership. Judging from the records, Donaldson could have afforded a substantial dwelling, and Robert French could have rebuilt, enlarged, or built entirely new between 1701 and 1713 the dwelling shown on the 1304 survey. Robert French's widow, wealthy in her own right and married to a prosperous merchant, might have remodeled, but as she had the house only for her lifetime would not, perhaps, have built a new house or greatly enlarged the old.

David French, a young boy in school at the time his father died in 1713, but in the 1720's an "attorney" and "gentleman" in New Castle, may have pulled down the old house and built a new house, for the house on the 1504 survey is architecturally a unit, although the back building shown on the 1804 survey map may well have been part of an older house.

The date of David French's death has not yet been established by this search; he died intestate before the middle of the century and as most of his sister Katherine's heirs seem to have lived in Kent County, the house may have been leased from the time of his death or earlier. James Sykes, statesman of the Revolutionary period, John Patten and William Maxwell, both sons of Ann Maxwell, daughter

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of Katherine, were officers in the Delaware Regiment in the war, and all seen to have lived in Kent County.

George Read II, who inherited the 120' plot and dwelling (which his father may have bought it at the end of his life in order to leave it to his son!), had bought a 17 foot wide extension to the property along the north side in 1737, together with the use of a 9 foot alley along the north side of the strip, from William Armstrong, who had his dwelling and tavern on the site of the present garden of #54. This additional ground enabled George Read Jr. to widen the alley and build the present Laird house north of his father's dwelling, but with a very narrow space between them, out of proportion to the two large houses.

The building of the George Read house between 1797 and 1802, the finest house of its period, by Peter Crowding of Philadelphia, was a culminating cultural feature in the rich history of the lives and times of the owners and dwellers on the whole Read site from Peter Stuyvesant's first grants of the land.

After the fire of 1824, which destroyed his father's former dwelling, George Read bought the site, south of this property, of the old store and post office, which also was destroyed in the fire of 1824. He bought this site, 39' wide and extending to Second Street, in 1834 from Eliza P. Penton for \$400.

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Following the death of George Read in 1836, the Read house was leased. Jchn M. Clayton lived here for a time, 1842-1845, and in the latter year the property was bought by the Cooper family. By this family the gardens were laid out and they owned it until it was bought by the present owner, Mr. Philip Laird. Under the care of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Laird, the house has been restored to and maintsined in the perfection achieved by George Read and his builder, Peter Crowding in 1801.