

NEW JERSEY OFFICE OF CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION SECTION
INDIVIDUAL STRUCTURE SURVEY FORM

AUG 29 1986

HISTORIC SITES INVENTORY NO. 6

HISTORIC NAME: Ackerman-Smith House
LOCATION: 171 East Allendale RoadCOMMON NAME:
BLOCK/LOT 1201/14MUNICIPALITY: Saddle River
USGS QUAD: Park Ridge
OWNER/ADDRESS: Robert GardinerCOUNTY: Bergen
UTM REFERENCES:
Zone/Northing/EastingDESCRIPTION c. 1760; A: oldest part,
Construction Date: A & B, pre-1861,
C: late 19th c.

Source of Date: Inskoop map; visual

Architect:

Builder:

Style: vernacular

Form/Plan Type:

Number of Stories: A & B: 1 1/2, C: 2 1/2

Foundation: A & B: coursed, roughly squared stone
C: boulder

Exterior Wall Fabric: clapboard

Fenestration: A & B: 4 bays, 2 bays each, C: 2 bay; 6/6 sash, probably mid 20th century;
old photograph shows C with 1/1 sash.Roof/Chimneys: gables, gable end of C faces street; 1 interior chimney between sections
B and C.

Additional Architectural Description:

Sections A & B: 4 bay, shed-roofed porch across south (front) which wraps around east side. Porch piers appear to date to time of construction of section C as are cobblestones or boulders. Old photograph shows porch with turned posts and solid railing. Now have simple square posts and board railing. Added gable dormers. Wood panel shutters. Exposed upper floor joists on first-story interior. Evidence in

foundation suggests building was originally one room. Finished interior on upper story

Section C: small square window in gable end.

Interior remodelled sympathetically in Colonial Revival style.

To rear are recent additions which are not visible from the front.

In summer of 1984 a addition was added to the westside of Section C.

PHOTO Negative File No. 1985-17-03440

Map (Indicate North) ↑



SITING, BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION, AND RELATED STRUCTURES:

Lot: 1.81 acres. House faces south. To north are woods. On sloping site on curve in road near junction of East Allendale Road and Chestnut Ridge Road. Sandstone well, 8' by 12', SW of house. Stone walls along roads and drives. Attractive landscaping with large trees and shrubs.

SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT: Urban Suburban Scattered Buildings
Open Space Woodland Residential Agricultural Village
Industrial Downtown Commercial Highway Commercial Other

SIGNIFICANCE:

The Ackerman-Smith House occupies a significant place in the history of journalism and in black history in Bergen County. From 1881 until his death in 1901, Alfred P. Smith, a black man, published a local monthly newspaper in this building which also functioned as his home. Smith's newspaper, briefly called A.P. Smith Paper before becoming The Landscape, was the only newspaper published in a rural area of Bergen County in the late 19th century and the only commercial paper ever published in Saddle River. It is among the earliest newspapers in New Jersey published by blacks, and with the Princeton Trumpet, published between 1888-1897 (?), one of the few 19th century newspapers published by blacks in New Jersey with considerable longevity.

Alfred P. Smith was born in the house at 171 East Allendale Road in 1832. The house, which is an interesting example of local vernacular architecture, according to tradition was built about 1760 and functioned as a tenant farmer's house of Abram Ackerman (c1716-1798). Ackerman's own house is located at 199 East Saddle River Road and is an early stone house believed to have been erected in 1781 (Bergen County Stone House Survey #60, 0258-16). While Ackerman's house replaced an earlier structure it seems unlikely he would build a substantial tenant house prior to erecting a substantial house for himself. Neither the section of East Allendale newspaper office (cont.)

ORIGINAL USE: Residential, Residential and PRESENT USE: Residential
PHYSICAL CONDITION: Excellent Good Fair Poor
REGISTER ELIGIBILITY: Yes Possible No Part of District
THREATS TO SITE: Roads Development Zoning Deterioration
No Threat Other

COMMENTS:

Part of house is located only about 10' from East Allendale Road.

REFERENCES:

NJHSI 0258-6
SRHC files: Issues of The Landscape, Cannon Notebook clippings, Smith genealogy.
1861: Hopkins map: on, no name.
1876: Walker Atlas: Peter Smith. -1887 Driving Map: A. Smith.
1902: Robinson: A. Smith. -New Jersey Black Historic Places
1913: Bromley: A. Smith. survey, 1980-on going.
1864: Inskeep: built c. 1760 by Abram Ackerman as a farm tenant house. 1863 P. Smith.
Landscape published by A. P. Smith, 1882-1901. (continued)

RECORDED BY: TRB
ORGANIZATION: BCOC&HA

DATE: 9-20-1983, 1984

SIGNIFICANCE: (continued)

Road along which the Ackerman-Smith House is situated nor the house itself is shown on Revolutionary War period maps of the area. However these omissions are not conclusive proof that they did not exist, as not all roads were mapped. While it is likely the Smith-Ackerman House was built after 1760, it is an early structure and probably evolved from a one-room building (section A on plan) with a second room and hall (section B) added by 1840 when the house appears on a U.S. Coast Survey map. The 2½ story west wing was probably added during Alfred Smith's residency, perhaps about 1877 when a fire destroyed part of the roof and the chimney, or later in the century when the operation of the newspaper from the house may have required additional space.

The house appears on the 1861 Hopkin's map without an owner's name. The 1876 Bergen County Atlas map shows it as a rectangular building owned by Peter Smith, Alfred Smith's father. The rectangular plan suggests that the west wing had not been added yet.

Alfred Smith's family is descended from an early Bergen County family, the DeGroats. Elizabeth DeGroat, Smith's grandmother, was the daughter of William DeGroat of the Ramapo Mountains. Smith was educated in public schools. He was crippled in his youth and spent his adult life an invalid. (Local newspapers of the 1880's (not Smith's own) report Smith bedridden with an abscess in his thigh). In 1862 Smith wrote a letter to President Lincoln favoring emancipation. During the Civil War he was a reporter covering Bergen County for the Paterson Guardian. He later contributed articles to the Republican. He participated in local debates and was a respected member of his community. Even in the 1920's, a time of considerable racial discrimination, a county history describes Smith's contribution to local journalism and states that he was "a colored man, a cripple, of fair intelligence" (Westervelt, I, pp 206-207). The latter statement can be construed as a compliment, given the date of publication.

The Landscape's long life is probably due to the fact it was a one-man paper, with Smith serving as publisher, reporter, printer, and salesman and due to the fact that it was a general interest local ^{paper} not one directed only a black audience. Smith in it promoted the betterment of blacks and general Republican issues. He also agitated for good roads and reported local news. The Landscape is an invaluable resource for research on late 19th century history in the Saddle River valley. Smith died on Thanksgiving eve, 1901, and The Landscape ceased publication at his death.

The Ackerman-Smith House was rehabilitated in the mid-20th century. Except for its current excellent maintenance, its exterior retains the general appearance it had during the Smith occupancy. The porch has been remodelled and today has an appearance more in character with the early parts of the house. Old photographs show it with vernacular Queen Anne style character.

This site is included in the New Jersey Historical Commission's Survey of Black Historic Places in New Jersey.

Additional information on Smith can be found in David Cohen's 1977 article about him.

REFERENCES: (continued)

Westervelt, I, pp. 206-207, 408.

William C. Wright and Paul A. Stellhorn, Directory of New Jersey Newspapers 1765-1970. Trenton. New Jersey Historical Commission, 1977, p. 219.

Bibliography Committee of New Jersey Library Association, New Jersey and the Negro, A Bibliography 1715-1966, 1967.

Osborn, Life in the Old Dutch Homestead, pp. 172-173.

1840: U.S. Coast Survey Map #132; on,

David Steven Cohen, "Alfred P. Smith: Bergen County's Latter-Day Ben Franklin", Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries, vol. 38 (June 1977), pp. 23-33.

Junior League Inventory: Ackerman "Old Slave House".

CKT List.



View Looking NW
showing sections
A,B,C and 1984 addi-
tion (behind hedge).
Neg. file #
19853-16