

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

National Historic Landmark nomination form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Meason, Isaac, House

other names/site number "Mt. Braddock"

2. Location

street & number U.S. Route 119

not for publication

city, town Dunbar Township

vicinity

state Pennsylvania code PA

county Fayette

code 051

zip code 15431

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private (checked)
public-local
public-State
public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s) (checked)
district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing:

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 5

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official: [Signature] Date: 1/19/90

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official: _____ Date: _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
determined not eligible for the National Register.
removed from the National Register.
other, (explain):

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

domestic: single dwelling
secondary structure: dependencies

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

domestic
secondary structures: dependencies

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Georgian
other: Palladian

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation sandstone
walls sandstone, limestone
roof asphalt
other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Isaac Meason House stands on a site on Mt. Braddock, a prominent hill in central Fayette County just to the west of the Allegheny Mountains. Other buildings on the four-acre site include two stone dependencies approximately thirty feet to the north and south of the wings, a large frame, bank barn located further to the north of the house and the remains of an abandoned, one-story shed to the northwest of the house. In addition to the buildings, the property includes a low, cut-stone wall with steps and entrance pylons, a stone wellhead and a carriage drive which enters the property on axis with the gate and divides following the line of the stone wall to the extreme corners of the end pavilions. The house (including the wings) and dependencies are contributing features of the property as are the stone wall and well head. The twentieth-century frame barn and the remains of the small abandoned shed (perhaps a former chicken coop) are non-contributing features.

The house faces northwest across a raised circular lawn defined by the ashlar masonry wall. Original wrought iron gates having ramped top rails, pickets and oval and crisscrossed panels remain on the large stone pylons which are on axis with the center entrance and drive as well. A stepped mounting block near the gate suggests that carriages did not enter the once-fenced lawn. A cut-stone well head is located in the terraced lawn near the north wing. The coping is a remarkable single cut stone. On the inside, the well also has a shaped drip stone which was to direct any spilled water back into the well.

The house is composed of seven parts according to a Palladian scheme. The two-and-one-half story main block is flanked in turn by lower hyphens, end pavilions, and dependencies and is on axis with the entrance gate. The dependencies are separated about thirty feet from the house by the split carriage drive. The main block is fifty feet wide by twenty feet deep. The composition of the northwest (entrance) and southeast (rear) facades are similar: each is five bays and has a slightly-projecting pedimented central pavilion, half the width of the facade and containing the center entrances.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D National Historic Landmark
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G Criteria: 4

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Landscape Architecture

NHL Theme: Architecture XVI

NHL Subtheme: Georgian B

NHL Theme: Landscape Architecture XVII

Period of Significance

1802

Significant Dates

1802

Cultural Affiliation

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

Adam Wilson

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Isaac Meason House was built in 1802 in Fayette County, Pennsylvania, just to the west of the Allegheny Mountains. It was the residence of Isaac Meason (d. 1818), an early entrepreneur and iron master in western Pennsylvania and remained in the Meason family until sold in 1887 (Van Trump: 6). The substantial 2½-story ashlar sandstone house is a heavy, yet vigorous, example of an English Palladian villa-type house and is an appropriate statement of the means and presence that Meason had achieved by the early nineteenth century. Although stone houses dating from this period are not uncommon in southwestern Pennsylvania, Historic Preservation Fund assisted surveys of Fayette County (1979) and adjacent counties (Allegheny, Somerset, Washington, Westmoreland) and guidebooks (see Swetnam & Smith's A Guidebook to Historic Western Pennsylvania, 1980) have confirmed that the house is the singular most sophisticated building in the region from this early period.

In eighteenth century America, houses with extended plans and composed of distinct blocks reflecting the architectural principals of Andrea Palladio (the sixteenth century Italian architect) have always been accorded architectural significance because of their design sophistication and size. Most of the important American examples were built in the 1750-1775 period in the South and were especially well-suited for the plantation culture (Pierson: 115). Significant examples in Maryland include: the Brice House (1772); Whitehall (1766); Tulip Hill (1746); the Hammond-Harewood House (1773); and Hampton (1785). Important surviving houses in Virginia, generally of the same period, include: Mt. Airy (1758); Blandfield (1770); Brandon (1770); Battersea (1770). The Meason House shares design characteristics common to all these Palladian plan complexes - center-block, hyphens/connectors, end-pavilions, or dependencies. Only the Meason House, Whitehall, and Brandon, however, have a seven-part plan; only the Meason House and Mt. Airy are constructed entirely of ashlar masonry. Even when compared to contemporary examples: Mt. Vernon (ca. 1787 VA), Woodlawn (1800, VA); Gore Place

See continuation sheet

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The entire northwest (entrance) facade of the main block, the hyphens and the end pavilions are faced with coursed ashlar gray-brown sandstone with limestone dressing. On the main block the stonework is further developed so as to integrate the secondary stone features of the facade. For example, the jack arches over the basement windows correspond to the depth of the second stone course; the jack arches with projecting keystones over the first and second story windows also conform to the coursing. In addition to flush quoins of contrasting-color limestone defining the outer corners and the central pavilion, each corner is further defined by a raised vertical edge which joins the belt course denoting the second story.

The five-bay fenestration is arranged in vertical registers with milled three-face window architraves and projecting wooden sills. The windows have double-hung sash in a six-over-six configuration, with slender muntins and rails which contrast with the heaviness of the facade. In the center of each facade and above each door, is a large round-headed window. On the entrance facade, this window is crowned by a leaded fanlight and framed by rusticated voussoirs, with a prominent keystone. A small, carved, stone plaque below the central window announces the builder, "Isaac Meason - AED. A.DOM 1802."

The wood frontispiece of the entrance is composed of Ionic columns with stopped-fluting supporting an entablature and dentillated and modillioned pediment. This frames the double-leaf doors and a fanlight which is divided by wood muntins and further detailed on the perimeter with lead, floral swags.

The chief glory of the main facade is the subtle stone carving of the central pediment. At the return of the pediment cornice, carved stone consoles terminate the projecting stone frame and in turn support a molded sandstone beltcourse which sets off the pediment. A semicircular lunette with a molded stone archivolt capped by a keystone console is the central focus. The lunette is flanked by extraordinary, delicately carved stone garlands and rinceau. The entire facade and pediment are crowned by a dentillated and modillioned carved wood cornice, treated to look like stone.

The rear (southeast) facade is slightly less formal, lacking the sophisticated stonework of the entrance facade. The central round-headed window is lower than the flanking windows because of its position at the landing of the main stair. As a consequence, the center entrance on the southeast elevation is smaller than the main entrance, with a small, stone jack arch above an architraved door frame surrounding a paneled single-leaf door.

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On either side of the main block are gable-roofed, end pavilions connected with lower, recessed hyphens. Each hyphen has a paneled door adjacent to the main block. Both end pavilions have a door lit by a four-light transom sash and a window on the main elevation and are terminated by a massive stone interior end-chimney. The similarly sized, gable-roofed dependencies are across the drives and are built with crudely dressed stone. Each, originally had an end-chimney, though that of the northern building has been removed since the 1930's, when the building was recorded by the survey of western Pennsylvania architecture. Variations in the fenestration of each suggest different original functions.

The main block contains the living and entertaining quarters while the wings contain service and work spaces. Both the front and rear entrances open into a large, center hall off of which all the first floor rooms can be entered and two rooms are located to either side of the center hall in classic double-pile, center-hall fashion. The larger rooms across the front (northwest) side connect to each wing and to the smaller companion room located on the rear (southeast) side of the house, respectively. The south wing contains a room thought to have been used by Isaac Meason as an office; the north wing contains the kitchen.

As befits the stately character of the house, the center hall is generously proportioned and handsomely detailed. Wide, regular floorboards, deeply molded base boards, a molded dado (that continues up the stairs) and a carved, dentiled cornice articulate the entrance hall. Additionally, paneled pilasters supporting a segmental arch with a large keystone separate the entrance hall from the broad, open-newel staircase just beyond. On either side of the front hall, large paneled doors with paneled reveals open into the principal first floor rooms. The proportions of these rooms continue the monumental character of the entrance hall and are similiary detailed with deep baseboards, and a dado at window sill height and a molded wood cornice. Window reveals are paneled as are the window aprons and detailed with strong moldings. In the center of the end-wall of each of the four first floor rooms is a fireplace with a pilastered wood mantel with three raised panels in the frieze. In each of the front rooms, the mantels have applied Adamesque detailing including bas-relief scenes from classical mythology in the center panel. Fireplaces have been infilled to accomodate changes to the heating system but are otherwise intact.

The kitchen and office wings are connected to the main block with passages, the north of which, has a staircase to the basement. These wings are simply finished with plaster walls. In the kitchen the most important feature is the large cooking fireplace which is spanned by an immense stone jack arch surmounted by a mantel shelf. Some of the original iron cooking apparatus remains.

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The upper floors are reached by the center-hall stair, which is open to the third floor. The stair case has simple, square-section balusters that carry a handsomely shaped handrail which begins in a twist of one revolution. Internal bolts, at the point where the handrail changes from straight to curve, lock the handrail into a continuous piece. A dado molding which echoes the handrail is continuous to the third floor. The staircase is plastered on its underside and intersects the architrave of both the rear hall door and the back-landing window.

The second floor is divided and articulated more or less in the manner of the first floor except for a small room at the front of the hall which is lit by the great semi-circular headed window of the entrance facade. Although the plan of the second floor corresponds to that of the first, it appears that the two north rooms may have been created from a single large room. The dividing partition does not have the molded dado and the wood cornice lacks the molding found on the perimeter wall as well as the awkward handling of the cornice intersection. Again, window reveals are paneled as are the aprons and the fireplace mantels with paneled pilasters carrying a frieze and cornice somewhat simpler than those of the first floor.

The third floor contains three rooms. The most finished is a small room at the head of the stairs lit by the central pediment lunette. On either side of the landing, narrow rooms run transversely across the width of the house and are lighted by small rectangular windows between the chimneys in the gable ends. In these rooms, water damage to the ceiling plaster necessitated its removal. Below the collar beams are plastered partitions parallel to the front and rear walls, providing storage through small doors.

The house and dependencies exhibit exceptional integrity. The seven-part Palladian plan remains unaltered. Minor alterations over the last 187 years have occurred. The original gutters and down spouts have been replaced by a modern aluminum system and the roof is modern asphalt shingles. One-story shed-roofed additions used for storage and a bathroom are located along the southeast elevations of the wings. Slight variation in the color of the masonry to the sides of each window and the rear center entrance indicate the previous existence of shutters and a rear entrance porch, respectively. In addition there is physical evidence that sheds were located on the chimney-end elevations of each dependency.

Changes to the interior have been equally minor. No walls or partitions have been removed. All the interior materials (wood and plaster) and architectural features are original. Modern utilities (plumbing, heating, electricity) have been added in the twentieth century with little effect on the original character. Radiators have been placed in each room; fireplace openings have been closed; the plumbing has been confined to the north wing. In the early twentieth century some of the woodwork on the first floor was grained to simulate oak and remains intact.

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(1799, MASS); Homewood (1800, MD); Monticello (ca., 1800, VA); Dunbarton Oaks (1805, DC), Tudor Place (1816, DC) and Bremo (1818, VA), the Meason House is the only Palladian plan house to be built in seven parts entirely of dressed stone. It is a unique expression of the English Palladian villa in America and was correctly evaluated in the 1932 survey of western Pennsylvania architecture as a building "...which deserves a place in the first rank of early American architecture." (Stotz: 19). It therefore qualifies under Criterion 4 for National Historic Landmark designation.

The architectural achievement of the Meason House is the product of two individuals - Isaac Meason, the owner, and Adam Wilson, the architect-builder. Meason provided the interest and the means; Wilson the design and construction skills. Unfortunately, only scanty information is available for both men. Most references indicate that Meason was from Virginia and migrated to southwestern Pennsylvania sometime in the 1770's (Ellis: 502). He was a pioneer industrialist and an early exploiter of the region's rich natural resources - iron, timber, and coal. Meason's entrepreneurial skills link him directly to the rise of the iron industry in western Pennsylvania and to the exploitation of the markets throughout the vast American interior accessible via the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys to which Fayette County has direct access via the Youghiogheny and Monongahela Rivers.

Historical accounts generally treat Meason as a significant, early iron master, although he was not the first man to establish an iron furnace west of the Allegheny Mountains. Nonetheless, Union Furnace and Forge which he established in 1791, is regarded as the first commercially successful iron furnace in that region (Abraham: 42). The 1799 tax records for Dunbar Township, Fayette County, indicate that Meason was a man of vast and diverse investments. He was taxed on 6,400 acres of land, one iron furnace, one iron forge, one grist mill, and two saw mills (Ellis: 508). He had also laid out the town of New Haven, on the south bank of the Youghiogheny River opposite Connellsville (Fayette County) and was subsequently granted joint authority by Pennsylvania to erect and operate a toll bridge between the two towns in partnership with Zachariah Connell (McClenathan: 393). By the time of his death in 1818, Meason had increased his land holdings to nearly 20,000 acres of coal and iron-rich lands, a salt works, a second iron furnace at Mt. Vernon, the first iron rolling mill in America at Plumsock (Fayette County) and his substantial stone English Palladian house at Mt. Braddock (Abraham: 46-47).

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The design and construction of the Meason House is attributed to Adam Wilson, a Scots-Irish architect-builder who is reputed to have been brought to the United States by Meason (Van Trump: 6). The house incorporates design principles that dominated British architecture throughout the eighteenth century. Its massing and robustness reflect the English Palladianism of the early part of the century as exemplified in the designs of James Gibbs (1682-1754), while the delicately carved detailing reflects the later neo-classicism of Robert Adam (1728-1792). Using stone in contrasting colors to differentiate the body of the house from the detailing as well as the quality of the carving for the swag and rinceau motif in the central pediment and rusticated voussoirs of the arched window show Wilson's ability to create out of the native materials one of the premier examples of an English Palladian villa in America.

The architectural significance of the Meason House is further evidenced by the landscape design. The house and dependencies are located on Mt. Braddock, a prominent hill in the rolling landscape just to the west of the Allegheny Mountains. The house is carefully positioned on the eastern tangent of a circular (145' diameter), grassed terrace defined by an ashlar stone wall which also served as the base for a wrought iron fence. Large stone pylons with the original wrought iron gates are located on axis with the center entrance and the approach drive from the west. This separation between the designed landscape inside the fence and the natural landscape beyond is consistent with the English landscape design principles of the period which saw the country house as part of the landscape and yet separate from it.

The interior of the Meason House is the classic eighteenth century double-pile, center-hall plan and is finished throughout with plaster walls and molded wood detailing of excellent quality. Interior architectural features include a broad segmental arch supported by paneled pilasters which serves to separate the center-hall staircase from the entrance; molded wood cornices in the principal rooms in the center block, paneled window reveals, deeply molded door and window architraves, and molded dado rails. Fireplace mantels in the two principal rooms on the first floor have Adamesque motifs with center-panel bas-reliefs featuring scenes from classical mythology. Mantels in the other rooms in the main block follow the same general form but have no bas-relief detailing.

The architectural significance of the Meason House is reinforced by its remarkable integrity. It has stood for 187 years with no changes or alterations that have compromised its original design or appearance. The seven-part Palladian plan remains unaltered. No walls or portions of the three buildings have been demolished. No interior partitions have been removed. All the interior materials (wood and plaster) and architectural features are original.

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The house has been brought into the twentieth century with plumbing, electricity, and heating. The plumbing, however, has been confined to the north pavilion. Early twentieth century oak graining on some of the woodwork remains intact.

Changes to the exterior have been equally minor - roofing material is modern; exterior shutters are gone; and the wrought iron fence around the grassed terrace disappeared before 1930 (see Slotz). Two one-story shed additions (twentieth century) have been added along the southeast elevations of each wing: one is a recent frame section used for storage; the other is an earlier porch subsequently enclosed and used as a bathroom and for storage.

The only other buildings on the property are a large, frame bank barn (probably 20th century) and the remains of a small frame shed. These are located to the north and northwest of the north dependency and, although classified as non-contributing buildings, do not detract from the house in any way.

The architectural sophistication of the seven-part Palladian plan, the use of ashlar masonry in contrasting colors, the quality of the carved, stone detailing, the siting and landscape treatment and the axial approach all combine to make the Meason House one of the premier examples of a Georgian period Palladian villa-type house in America.

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"Fayette County Historic Sites Survey" unpublished copy on file,
Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission Harrisburg,
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The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, Vol. 25, No. 1 and
2 (March-June 1942): 84-90.

Klein, Philip S. & Ari Hoogenboom A History of Pennsylvania
University Park & London: The Pennsylvania State University
Press, 1980.

McClenathan, J.C. Centennial History of the Borough of Connellsville,
Pennsylvania 1806-1906 Columbus: Champlin Press, 1906

"National Road: Historic Resource Survey" unpublished report on
file, Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, Harrisburg,
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Country Uniontown, Pennsylvania: Fort Necessity Chapter,
Pennsylvania Society of the Sons of the American Revolution,
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Stotz, Charles Morse The Architectural Heritage of Early Western
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2/11/88

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Isaac Meason House

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The following information is being submitted as Added Information to the National Register nomination for the Isaac Meason House, Fayette County, listed on the National Register January 25, 1971.

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at a point 301 feet northwest of the southwest corner of the main, two and one half story block of the house; then proceeding 346 feet northeast; then proceeding southeast 643 feet; then proceeding 643 feet southwest; then proceeding 643 feet northwest; then proceeding northeast 297 to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

The boundary forms a rectangle of 9½ acres centered on the house. This acreage was approved by the National Register upon listing in 1971. The boundary includes the contributing main house and contributing blacksmith shop and spring house. It also includes a non-contributing 1930s barn. The boundary excludes vacant land and a nearby shopping mall which do not contribute to the significance of the listed property.

The boundary is centered on the house because there are no man-made or natural features present to otherwise define the boundary. The house is situated on top of a hill with no permanent natural landmarks such as creeks in the immediate vicinity. Man-made features such as a highway are too far beyond the 9½ acre parcel to be of use in defining the boundary.

This Added Information was prepared by William Sisson, PHMC, State Museum, Harrisburg, PA, 19108.

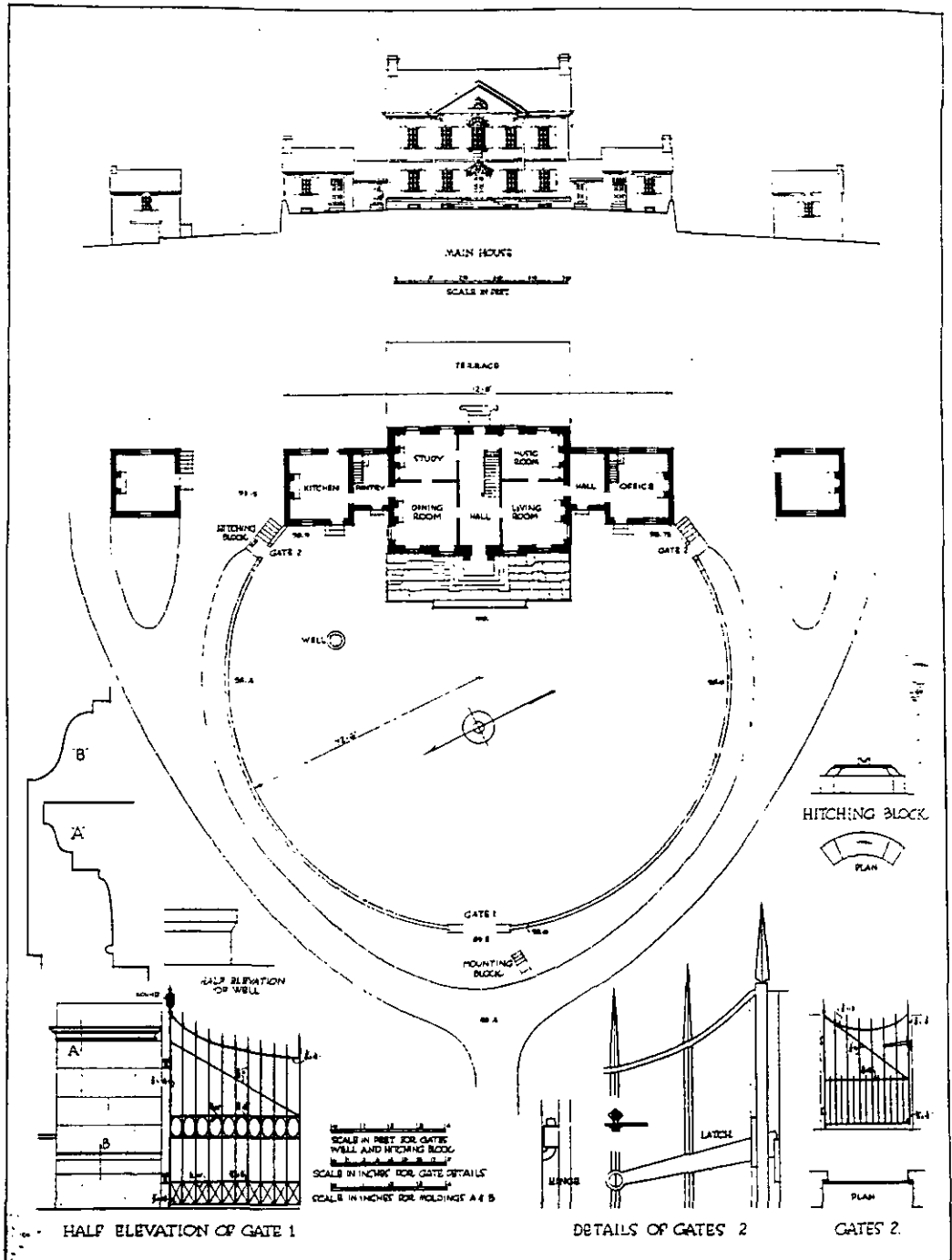
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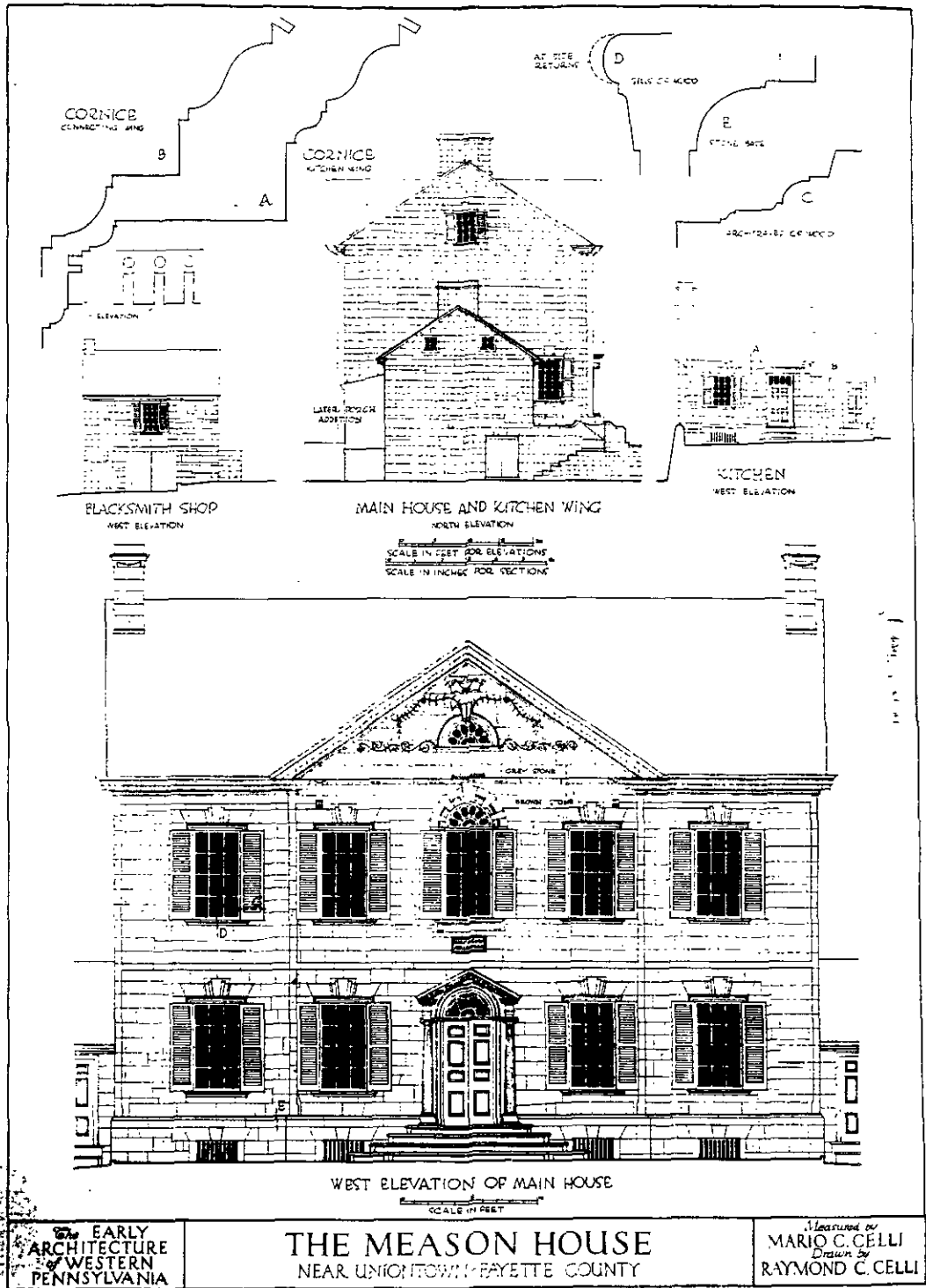
Beginning at an iron pin on the Southwest corner of the herein described property, said point of beginning South 70° 30' 40" East 756.55 feet to a point; thence North 17° 17' East 595.68 feet from a point on the East side of Traffic Route 119 at the corner of the property of the Estate of Maria Cellurale and the land of the U.S. Steel Corporation; thence from said point of beginning North 41° 36' 50" East 417.42 feet to a point; thence South 48° 23' 10" East, 417.42 feet to a point; thence South 41° 36' 50" West 417.42 feet to a point; thence North 48° 23' 10" West 417.42 feet to the place of beginning, Containing 4 Acres.



EARLY ARCHITECTURE OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

THE MEASON HOUSE
NEAR UNIONTOWN-FAYETTE COUNTY

Measured by MARIO C. CELLI
Drawn by RAYMOND C. CELLI



THE EARLY ARCHITECTURE OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

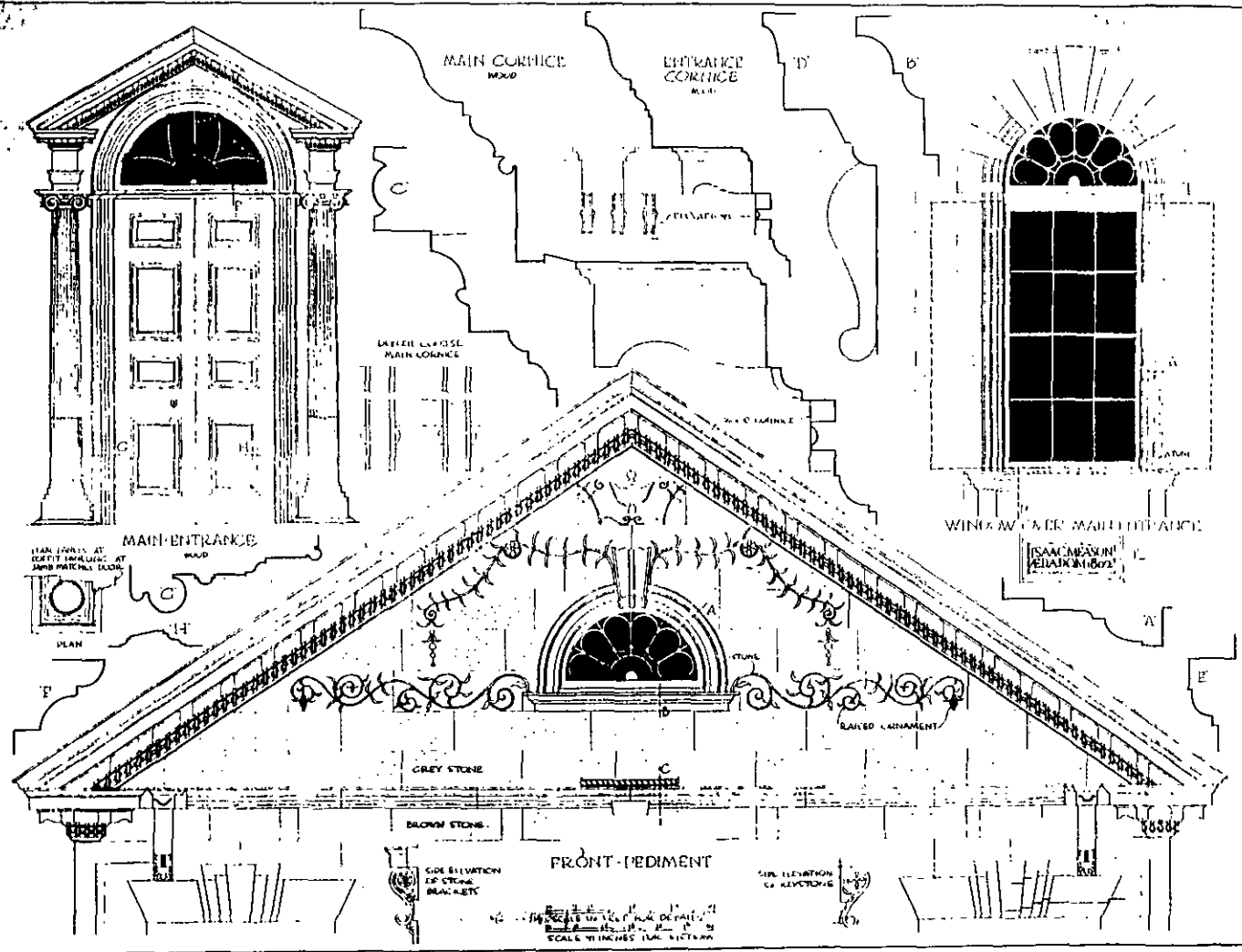
THE MEASON HOUSE
NEAR UNIONTOWN, FAYETTE COUNTY

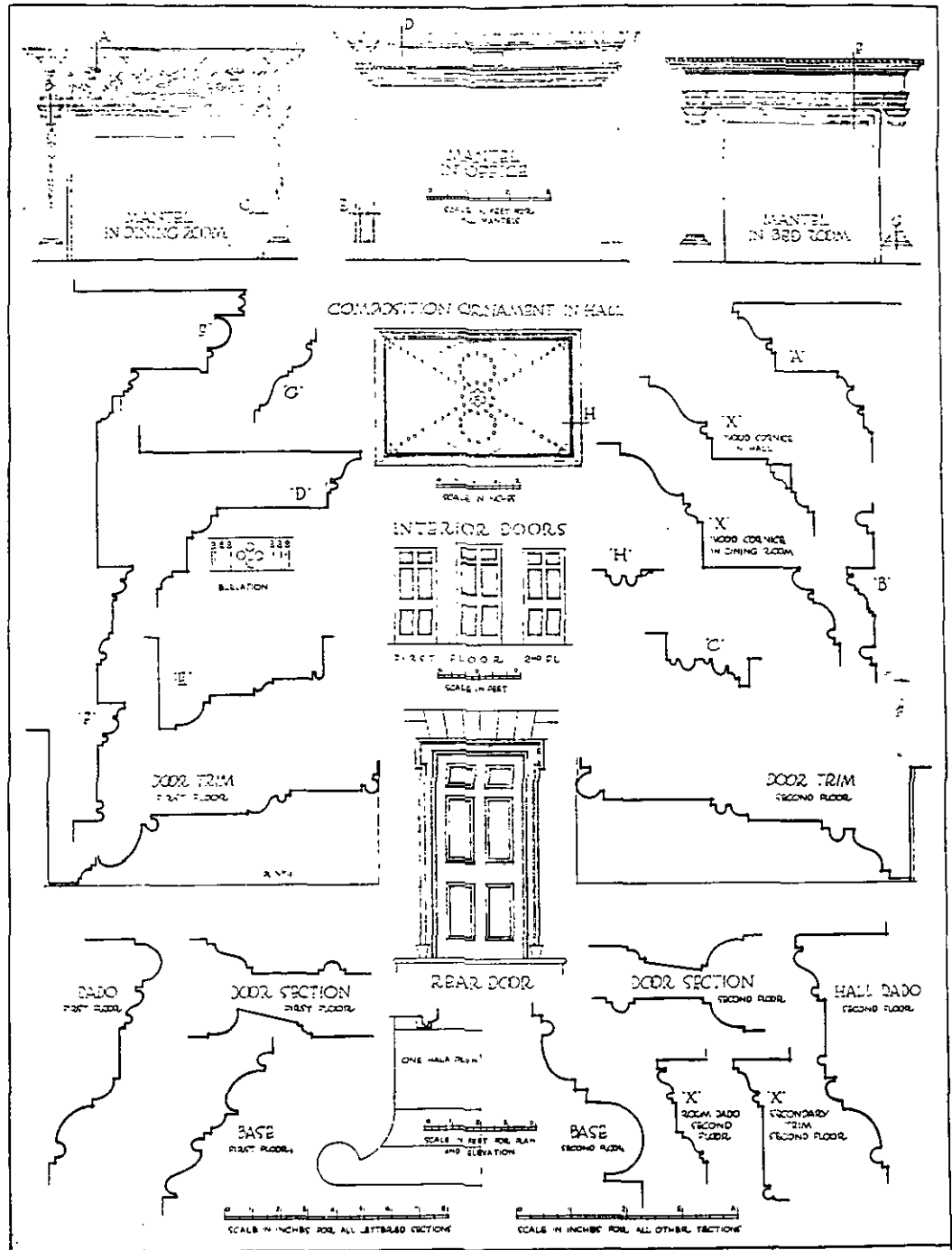
Measured by MARIO C. CELLI
Drawn by RAYMOND C. CELLI

EARLY ARCHITECTURE OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

THE MEASON HOUSE
NEAR BRIDGETOWN, BRISTOL COUNTY

Measured by
MARIO C. CELLI
RAYMOND C. CELLI

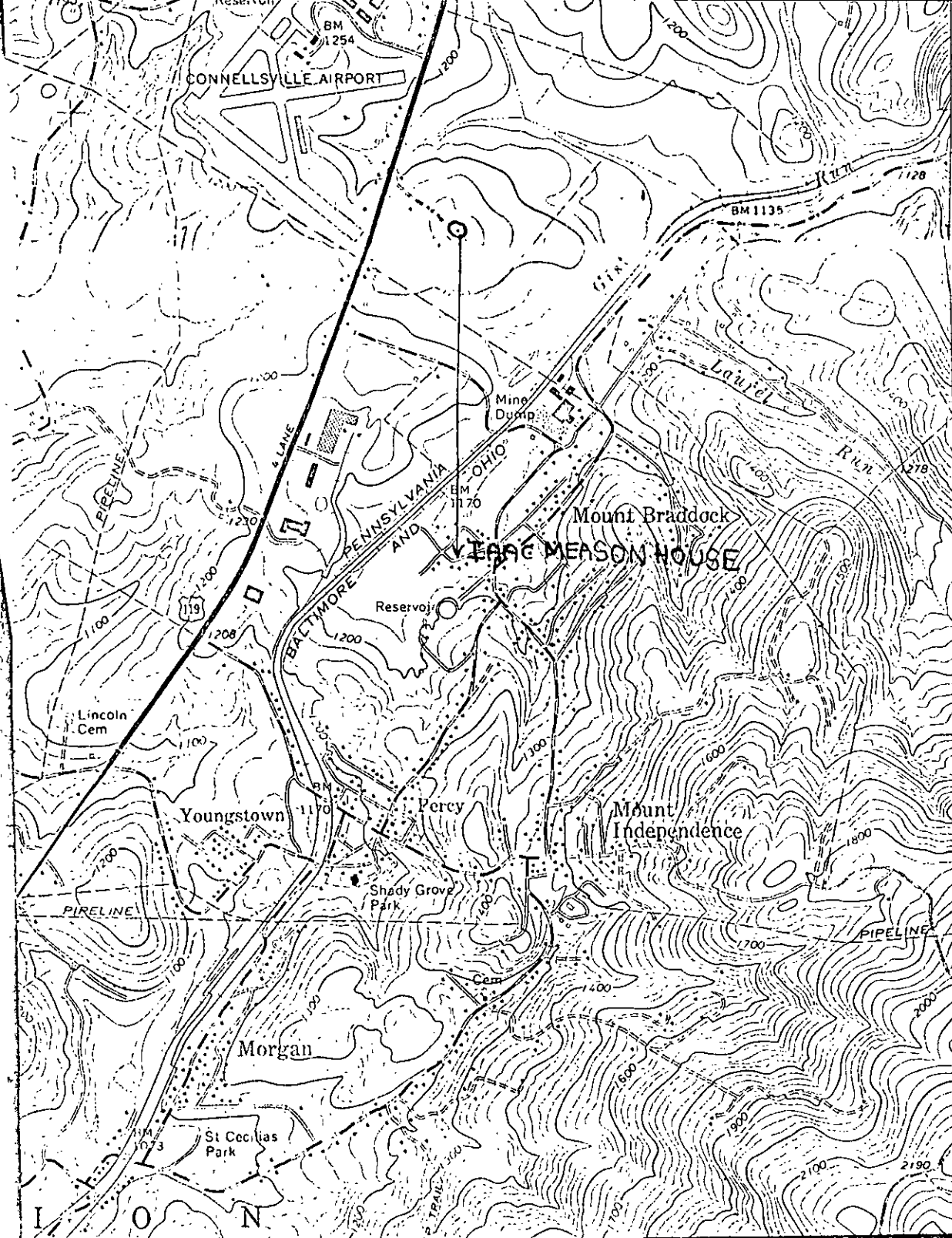




THE EARLY ARCHITECTURE OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

THE MEASON HOUSE
NEAR LINNONTOWN - PAYETTE COUNTY

Measured by MARIO C. CELLI
Drawn by RAYMOND C. CELLI



42°24'
57'30"
1.5 MI.
42°23'
42°22'
42°21'
(SOUTH CONNELLVILLE)
5063 1 NE

