

930 E. 21 Avenue
Eugene, Oregon 97405
November 4, 1995

To the Mansfield Historical Society:

Re. Joseph Hall/ Ferguson/Liberman house
Mansfield Center, Connecticut.

My acquaintance with the Joseph Hall house began around 1925 when I was four or five years old and continued to around 1950. In 1951 we moved to New York.

During the 1920s, and perhaps again in the early 1930's, I and two brothers stayed at the Davolls (spelling) in Mansfield Center at least twice, for a week or so each time. The first time may have been when my sister was born in 1925.

The Davolls lived just to the east of the Hall house across the road in a wonderful house owned by the Chapins. (Several years ago I sent Roberta Smith a description of that house as I remembered it). It was during this period, before the Ferguson's bought the property, that I first remember seeing the Joseph Hall house.

After the Fergusons bought the Hall house, which I assume was before 1935, I visited it a number of times. The earliest would be in the 1930s and the last time I was in the house was about 1950.

Mrs. Ferguson knew of and encouraged my interest in architecture and older buildings and she talked to me about their house. I enjoyed the Fergusons and Mrs Ferguson's creative enthusiasms. I think that Mrs. Ferguson was the force and the designer behind all building projects on their property. Mr. Ferguson must have been in complete agreement; they were congenial. Both were involved in much of the construction.

Construction phases of the Joseph Hall House.

From my associations I would describe the house as having had four or five building phases all of which incorporate the building built by Joseph Hall.

Of these phases, three were of major construction. It should be noted that these three major phases occurred within "the historic period", fifty years ago and earlier, as historic period is defined by the National Register of Historic Places. In an historic sense, therefore, all of the phases up to 1940 are significant, and the building's evolution is significant.

Page 2 Hall, Ferguson, Liberman house

Recently (fall 1993) someone questioned me as to a fire in the history of the house. I believe that that person was hypothesizing that a fire would explain (for them) the evolution of the house. I have never heard of one. I doubt that a fire of any significant impact had occurred before 1950. The building had too much historic consistency to be compatible with a previous devastating event.

Phase I Construction, Joseph Hall house. Before 1700.

A one story, hewn framed, central entrance, central chimney house type.

According to Mrs. Ferguson the building that was her home had once been a fort built in the late 1600s. Whether she referred to Joseph Hall as its owner I do not remember. She owned an old, small, framed photograph of the early house. It hung in the first floor central room. I think that the photograph was a front view of the house, close up, from the south; the view did not extend to include surroundings or the barn.

I remember that the photograph showed a one story building (eaves down to first floor windows) with a central front door. No other details of the photograph are remembered.

However the zerox of an old photograph of the Hall house, in the Mansfield Historical Society collections, sent me by Roberta Smith would be the same building as in the photograph I remember.

At the time, calling a typical colonial house a "fort" may have made me wonder about it. Since then I have become aware of a number of ordinary houses which at times have been designated forts or served the function of a fort, remaining completely house-like throughout their military phase.

During my visits, evidence of early construction and structure, appropriate to the photograph, could be seen throughout the first floor rooms of the Ferguson home. The floor plan, also, was clearly a conventional colonial type.

It seemed to me that the old photograph was certainly the same house as the Ferguson house.

Page 3 Hall, Ferguson, Liberman house

Phase II Construction, the Hall house, An early Addition.?
One story rectangular building enlarged by lengthening. The completed form, like a typical central door, central chimney type house.

Whether the very early house was built III one or III two stages IS the discussion here.

This conjectural phase responds to observations Roberta Smith passed along to me. Three features prompted it. One is the different floor elevation in the western room as compared to the eastern rooms. The zerox view of the MHS photograph shows the second feature. It is a sense of a difference in roof surface between the eastern 2/3 thirds and the western 1/3 of the house. The third is a distinction in the basement construction. Whether each of these three building characteristics is in alignment with the others is a crucial question.

If the earlier one story house was built in two phases I think that the eastern piece (with the central room) would be the first phase because of its greater size, its frame and because of its floor plan.

It should be noted that the mark on the roof in the MHS photo of the Hall house may be just the stain usually found on shingle roofs in line with chimney caused by run off from the acids in the chimney mortar.

If the house was built in two phases, both were within the period using early hewn frame construction techniques.

Phase III Construction, c. 1900?, Hall House
A full second floor had been added to the house and covered with horizontal siding. The building painted white.

This is the first recollection I have of the house, probably some time in the later nineteen twenties. It was before the Ferguson's owned it. We had climbed up the steep hill from the Davolls probably with Mrs. Davoll or Ruthand a woman came out of one of the doors on the north to greet us.

Page 4 Hall, Ferguson, Liberman house

I saw, from the north, a big, ugly, two story, white wooden house. It was a simple, severe, large rectangular shape with a very flat roof. There may have been neither porches or projections. It probably seemed very clumsy or ugly to me because of: the extreme flatness of the roof, the lack of organization of the openings, the multiple groupings of windows on the second floor in contrast to the single placement of windows on the first and a thinness about the construction especially of the roof.

There was a sense, perhaps in discussion then, that this enterprise was something of a "folly".

Stylistically the house probably had craftsman features, but neither skillfully or extensively executed. The banks of second floor windows, casements, suggest that style. I think the building was more worn than fresh in finishes and in character.

By this period the original front door location had been abandoned. To this 1900 construction or to an earlier period must go the large rectangular bay window (which existed before the Ferguson's), approximately at the center of the south front of the house, essentially eliminating the colonial front door position.

Of the floor plan as I experienced it there is only a vague sense that the kitchen was in the northwest corner of the house. And that the woman who came out and greeted us came from the kitchen.

To construct this second floor would have required the removal of the roof from the original one story house; for the perimeter walls of the second floor were carried up from the first floor walls.

Phase IV. Construction c.1935-1940, the Ferguson period. Covered the building with stone, adding only the one story arcade across the north and the chimney on the west. Masonry work probably entirely completed before 1938.

C. 1935-1940. The house, Exterior changes and characteristics.

I believe that the stone material came from a quarry at Bolton Notch, Connecticut, along the old road, the main road at the time, to Hartford. This brown stone with garnets, a shale, was the same used about 1935 when Lisbeth Macdonald had a stone fireplace built in a reconstructed Bliss barn on Gurleyville road.

A distinct difference in workmanship can be seen in the masonry of the Ferguson house at least on the west elevation and probably at the chimney. As she pointed out to me, standing on the west lawn, Mrs Ferguson herself did the stone work as high as she could reach, perhaps four feet. Above that the professional masons took over completing the chimney and the walls. Mrs Ferguson was a very active and hard working woman, particularly for her extremely small size. I noted that her shoulders were at my belt line.

The most extensive alteration the Fergusons made to the old house was the exterior cladding of stone. With this was built the exterior chimney on the west with its two fireplaces of white quartz and pink quartz, the later upstairs. And across the north the arched porch or arcade of stone with flagstone flooring was added. In all other respects the new exterior stone wall surfaces closely followed the form of the existing, two story, wooden building's perimeter, laying stone against the old siding, fitting it like a glove.

The stone enclosure was so literal that in most cases, and perhaps in every case, the windows and exterior doors of the Ferguson house were the same, in the same position, as the openings in the existing wooden building which the stone now covered. The bay window on the south already existed, dating perhaps from before 1900, and the Fergusons covered its wooden frame with stone. And so on.

This means that the second floor bands of windows were those of the c.1900 construction; that the single, double hung sash openings on the first floor would include some of the same opening positions, if not the actual sash, of those originally built for Joseph Hall's house of c.1700.

The exterior appearance of the house was greatly improved with the Ferguson work. The existing two story building's proportions suited itself to a masonry covering and the low hipped roof was more suited to a building of masonry than one of wood.

C. 1935-1940. the House and the Ferguson's Interiors, Changes and characteristics.

The floor plans throughout the Ferguson's ownership remained very much the same as they had been when the Ferguson's bought the place.

Page 6 Hall, Ferguson, Liberman house

The Ferguson's made very few plan changes and these tended to be modest, small and inconsequential. Throughout the Ferguson's work the inclinations were to "make do".

The first floor. As I remember it, the main floor plan consisted of about six spaces. The characteristics c.1940 would have had many similarities to the original colonial layout as built for Joseph Hall. Across the back, the north, (which early on had been converted to the entrance side) were smaller rooms, a string of at least four. Three of the smaller rooms across the north were an entry area near the center of the house. Off it, to the east, a rather small dining room and at the northeast corner of the house a small kitchen.

Living Room. One of the very few interior alterations made eliminated one of these "smaller" rooms at the northwest corner of the house. The wall between it and the southwest corner room was removed; this created the large living room along the west side of the house with northern and southern exposures, too.

An interesting improvisation made by the Ferguson's was a feature along the living room wall facing the fireplace. This was a reuse of cabinets retained in place from the previous owner's kitchen. As I remember it elements had been added to create a built-in couch partly enclosed by these existing cabinets as bookshelves. In the living room were visible indications of the original hewn frame system.

The central room. Through the "center" of the house was an odd, long room, a hallway-like space running from the north wall to the south wall, with an exterior entrance on each end.

The central, hallway-like space was not in the true center of the house for the exterior, south wall flanking the hall on the east was considerably longer than the wall flanking the hall on the west. Historically and architecturally, this was as it should be. It indicated that the building was very early in date, that originally the kitchen was in the eastern front room, the larger room; that the parlor was in the western room, the smaller front room of the two (smaller, before the Fergusons removed an interior partition to make their long living room.).

Against the central room's south wall the rectangular bay window which had been added c. 1890 obscured what had been originally the formal entrance and front door to the house. Within the central room, parallel to the front wall of the house was the staircase which partially separated the entry area from the rest of this long, large, central hallway-like space, the central room.

Staircase. This little staircase was enclosed, narrow, very steep and curiously at odds with the large hall for being perpendicular to it rather than parallel with it. The stair was also inordinately small

for the large size and scale of the hall and of the large house. Mrs. Ferguson pointed out the stair was there when they bought the house. The stair's transverse position was characteristic, of course, of front stairs in central chimney houses. Here, it seemed odd to me for the original front seemed to have been on the south, at the other end of the long hall. As I remember, the workmanship of the stair disappointed me, too, and I wondered when it had been built.

Original Center Chimney. Mrs Ferguson said that this long hallway had once contained the central chimney and that explanation immediately made sense of this otherwise oversized, poorly illuminated, practically useless space. The chimney size and location could explain the stair. The entrances to the various rooms off the long central, hallway-like space also were located consistent with the existence of a central chimney. These entrances, still in use, were crowded at either end giving room for a huge chimney with the wide, deep fireplaces of the colonial period to serve at least the eastern and the western front rooms.

The southeast room. For me, the finest room in the house was the southeast front room, (probably the original kitchen perhaps then the term for it was "hall").The Fergusons called it the music room and it had in it some antique musical instruments. Its size seemed large. And I found the proportions and character wonderful, and in part, because elements of the hewn frame structure were visible emphasizing surfaces corners and modules. I do not remember the windows, perhaps two on the south and one on the east.

The Second floor. The second floor plan seemed to echo that of the first floor. Nothing in detail or structure in the second story was of particular interest to me.

Page 8 Hall, Ferguson, Liberman house

I do seem to remember that the flooring in the huge west bedroom as a tongue and groove of about three inch width, suggesting that the second floor spaces were built around nineteen hundred, perhaps ten years either side. The floor caught my attention because it had been painted a light color, either a pink or a lavender - the thought being to relate the room to the quartz fireplace, pink .

One curious recollection about the second floor was the observation of Mrs. Ferguson to me and which she found curious (and she may have shown me a place in the south east part of the second floor where this could be seen). She said that there was a space between the second floor flooring and the first floor ceiling (like a shallow

attic), perhaps about two feet high. If so, strange as it is not logically accounted for by construction and was not sufficient to be a remanent of the original attic of Joseph Hall's c.1700 house.

C.1935-1940. Ferguson site

The barn. Northwest of the house stood an old barn, a side opening English type, of vertical, unpainted boards. It faced south and was parallel with the house. Its position matched that shown in the Zerox MHS photo.

In front of it was a barn yard. In it sat a small, one story, white hipped roof building, perhaps about 15 by 15, perhaps a garage, perhaps built around 1915. The barn was torn down later; the little white building moved by the Fergusons to become part of the shop.

The Shop. Visible in the Zerox MHS view of this property is the "shop." sitting behind the house, somewhat to the northeast of it and parallel to it. Calling it a shop, a workshop, is an assumption. When I first saw the building, it was covered with horizontal siding, probably clapboard, painted white. It was an early, hewn frame outbuilding. It had a one story lean-to off its eastern end.

Again in the 1930's the Fergusons covered this small building with stone, adding a fireplace on the western end. The lean-to became, I think, a kitchen. The small hipped roofed building, moved from the barnyard, was attached on the back, its roof somewhat rebuilt, covered with stone and became, I think, the bathroom.

Page 9 Hall, Ferguson, Liberman house

In the main interior space of the shop, the fireplace room, the Fergusons had covered the walls with vertical white birch poles, trees with the bark on. As I dimly remember it these were rather roughly placed leaving some of the buildings hewn frame visible. The function of this simply, remodeled out building was to be a kind of studio and guest house.

Phase V. After 1953. The uses and developments to the property after the Ferguson period are unfamiliar to me.

Submitted by
[signed]
Philip Dole

Professor of Architecture Emeritus
School of Architecture and Allied Arts
the University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403

