

INTRODUCTION



Photo 1: View of the Pulda House from the northwest.

The Pulda Farm is located at 300 Old Georges Road, North Brunswick Township, Middlesex County, New Jersey. It is situated on the south side of Old Georges Road at an intersection with Route 130. The 70 acre property extends from the road to the south all the way back to Farrington Lake. The house is situated on a slight rise set well back from the road, and the property consists of agricultural fields, some fallow fields, woodlands and the farm yard. A long gravel and dirt driveway provides access to the house and continues past the west side of the house to out buildings and back to fields and wooded areas beyond. To the east side of the house down a slope is a fallow orchard, which is clear in historic aerial photographs.

The house is oriented roughly north/south with its front façade facing north. It is at the north end of a collection of farm buildings consisting of a small barn, a corn crib and several other smaller barns and sheds. The house consists of two sections. To the east is a one and one-half story wood frame, gable-roof section with small porches on both the front and rear. This smaller section has a partially finished attic and an irregular plan that was altered over time. Attached to the west side of this is a more formal two-story, three-bay, side hall structure that represents an intact typical side-hall two room deep floor plan.

The house is generally in good condition. In spite of some obvious issues such as the failing chimneys, isolated deteriorated framing members and a failing section of foundation wall, there do not appear to be widespread water infiltration or structural problems.

The main, two-story section of the house is of timber frame construction with brick nogging infill sitting on a raised rubble stone foundation with a full basement. The exterior walls are finished with square edge clapboard that is not original to the house. The windows are a combination of twelve-over-twelve, twelve-over-eight, six-over-six, and four-over-four hung sash. At the first floor front façade there are two four-light, paired casements. The windows have simple square casings and non-historic board-and-batten shutters. The front and rear stile-and-rail paneled doors into the main section of the house appear to be original, or early.

A shed roof porch extends across the front of the two-story section of the house with a beaded board ceiling and round columns that appear to date to the early twentieth century. Later in the twentieth-century it was enclosed with T-111 plywood siding and aluminum storm windows. At the rear entrance of the main section the house there is a small shed roof porch, which is also an earlier porch that was enclosed with the same materials as the front porch.

The roof is a fairly steeped pitch gable roof over a large attic space. The roof is finished with asphalt shingles, and there are two symmetrically placed brick chimneys near the ridge at the west gable end. Modern aluminum K-gutters and corrugated downspouts have been installed throughout. At the ground floor two painted brick fire-backs are exposed at the exterior. Millwork throughout the exterior is simple square millwork with an



Photo 2: View of the farm from the northwest. The property, fairly level here, drops off sharply to the east from the house and driveway.



Photo 3: View of the rear of the Pulda House.



Photo 3: View of the front of the early one and one-half story section.

over-hanging rake board and enclosed, square soffit and fascia with no crown moulding or other ornament.

The presumed early section of the house is a three-bay, one and one-half story section to the east of the two-story section. It has an irregular gable roof due to the extension of the building to the rear. It is constructed on a shorter, but also raised rubble-stone foundation over a shallow crawl space. This section was also clearly constructed in more than one phase as will be discussed later. The windows of the east section are predominantly two-over-two windows with one six-over-six window at the rear adjacent to the rear door. The two-over-two windows are likely later replacement sash in openings that precede the installation of the six-over-six sash. There are non-historic board-and-batten shutters matching those of the main section. The front door on this section is an altered stile-and-rail door with lights installed in the upper panels. The rear door is a board-and-batten door with narrow beaded vertical boards. The siding is square-edge clapboard siding matching the siding of the main section. The roof is finished with recent asphalt shingles and a tall narrow brick chimney extends through the roof at a location approximately one-third of the way into the building from the east end, marking the original end wall of this section.



Photo 4: View to the rear of the parlor in the one and one-half story section looking into an area that was original a porch. The wall shown here is the original exterior rear wall.



Photo 5: View north in the kitchen showing a fireplace. There is evidence of a large cooking range in front of the fireplace. The left side of the fireplace seems to roughly mark the original end of the building.

As mentioned above the plan of the one-story section is irregular and has been altered over time. One enters the front of the building into a parlor. To the rear of this is an enclosed porch off of which is access to the basement of the two-story section and the attic of the one-story section. At the south east corner of this section is a large kitchen and in front of this, adjacent to the parlor is a bathroom that was inserted into an earlier chamber. In the attic are two narrow rooms finished

with plaster. The rest of the attic is unfinished space, with the area behind the two rooms consisting of open floor joists with no flooring.

The plan of the two story section of the house is a typical three-bay, two room deep, side-hall plan. One enters this section of the house from the porch on the north side into a wide stair hall. On the left is a door with two steps down into the parlor of the one and one-half story section. To the right (west) of the hall are two large parlors each with fireplaces on the west wall. On the left, rising to the rear, is the stair to the second floor. Beneath the stair landing is a small closet that also provides access to the rear room of the one and one-half story section and appears to originally have provided access to the basement.



Photo 7: View south in stair hall of the two-story section.



Photo 8: View north stair hall of the two-story section. The door to the right enters down in to the parlor of the one and one-half story section.



Photo 6: View of the west wall in the front parlor of the two-story section of the house.

At the second floor there are two chambers to the west of the hall mirroring the parlors at the first floor, each also with a fireplace on the west wall. At the front of the hall is a small room. The attic stair is located above the stair from the first floor, access to which is provided from the hall as well as from a door on the south wall of the small room at the front of the hall.



Photo 7: View north in the second floor hall showing the small room at the front of the hall.



Photo 8: View west in the front chamber. Note the four-over-four sash at the west wall and twelve-over-eight sash at the north.



Photo 9: View of the west wall in the rear chamber, second floor. Note the larger twelve-over-twelve sash at the rear (south) wall.

Limited historic research of the farm was previously completed in 2013 by Douglas Aumack and Mark Nonestied of Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission. In 1978 the property was included in the Middlesex County Historic Sites Inventory and it was identified as the A. Alston Farm. The results of the preliminary research included in the 2013 report indicate that the property was owned by the Buckelew family in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was then transferred to the Webb family. It is shown on the 1876 map of North Brunswick as part of the estate of James Webb. The 2013 report indicates that it was then sold to the Alston family before being purchased by the Pulda family in 1906, who owned it for 50 years before it was purchased by the township.

This is a historical map of the New Brunswick area, showing the location of E. Ustog circled in red. The map includes various towns, roads, and geographical features like the Red Lion Tays and the New Brunswick Canal.

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Page 6

It has been assumed, probably correctly, by those who have looked at the house that the east section was built first and then the two-story section was an addition. This seems like the logical progression as the wealth of the family increased over time and is a typical configuration for New Jersey farmhouses. Exposed clapboard siding within the stair to the attic of the one and one-half story section is clear evidence that this space was enclosed after the two-story section was constructed. This, however, is not definitive evidence that the earliest portion of the one and one-half story section was built prior to the two-story section, only that the rear portion where the roof is extended was constructed later. Seeming to contradict the idea that the one and one-half story section was constructed first is the configuration of the siding around the bulk head door accessed from the rear room of the one and one-half story section. The photo at right shows exterior siding of the two sections of the building with the one and one-half story section on the right. The character of the siding on both sections is the same; wide clapboards with a bead at the bottom edge. This would indicate that the siding was installed at the same time or chronologically in close proximity. What is interesting is that the siding on the one and one-half story section is notched around the siding at the two-story section, indicating that it was installed second. Or, they were installed during the same campaign, but the two-story section was sided first and then the perpendicular wall of the one and one-half story section was finished. It is also interesting that the perpendicular courses of siding do not align, but given the difference in foundation and floor levels it is not surprising that the effort was not made to align the siding. At the attic level there was no apparent evidence that the one and one-half story section pre-dated the two-story section. Additional research and investigation is necessary to definitively determine the chronology of the two sections.



Photo 10: Clapboard siding within the stair to the attic of the one and one-half story section, showing that this rear section was enclosed after the two-story section was constructed.



Photo 14: Clapboard around the interior bulkhead door entrance to the basement.

CONDITIONS

As mentioned above the house is generally in good condition with a few significant exceptions.

Masonry

The rubble stone foundation of the two story section is, for the most part, solid with the exception of a section of the rear wall to the east of the bulkhead entry. The wall here is completely failing, possibly due to the laundry sink ejector pump, which might have been expelling water on the ground directly outside this wall, overtime deteriorating the mortar holding it together. The interior brick piers at the full basement are in good condition.

The foundation at the small east section is also in fairly good condition, with the exception of the north side where a portion of the wall is failing because of prolonged water infiltration due to previously failing gutters. Some of the interior pier conditions are also suspect and should be reinforced or replaced.

There are two brick chimneys at the west end of the main section. The chimneys are in poor condition with the south chimney having lost a significant amount of brick. At the one and one-half story section, the chimney has been reconstructed and is in good condition.



Photo 15: Failing portion of the foundation at the rear wall of the main section.



Photo 16: View into the crawl space showing one of the suspect piers at right.



Photo 17: Failing south chimney at the main section of the house.

Walls

The timber frame structure of the house is also generally in good condition. However, there are several isolated areas that require attention.

A section of the sill plate at the front of the one and one-half story section is deteriorated where the vulnerability of the sill plate is exacerbated because the masonry foundation projects in front of the frame wall. This creates the potential for water to collect at this point and to be directed back towards the wood finishes and framing. This foundation condition can be found throughout the building. Upon inspection of the crawl-space, it was also noted that the east sill plate appears to be in poor condition with the floor joists in the kitchen not fully engaged with the sill plate. At the upper level, a section of the rafter plate at the front of the house exhibits advanced deterioration. This could be the result of the same failure which caused the damage to the sill plate below and has been corrected, at least on a temporary basis.



Photo 18: Front of the one and one-half story section at the foundation showing area of deteriorated siding and sill plate. This was likely exacerbated by failed gutters which were recently replaced.

There is also significant damage of the siding, interior finishes and presumably structural members at the rear east wall of the main section above the roof of the one and one-half story section. The damage apparent at the exterior has resulted in failing finishes and bulging plaster at the interior above the main stair, which indicates a potentially serious structural problem. At the top portion of this, the tie beam running just below the attic window is severely damaged and requires repair. It appears that this damage occurred prior to the installation of the current siding.



Photo 19: Area of damaged rafter plate at the front of the one and one-half story section.

Roof

The roofs of the house are asphalt shingle with the exception of the small porch roof at the front of the main section which is translucent corrugated panels. The asphalt shingles are at the end of their useful life. At the two-story section the shingles are installed over plywood that spans between rafters that are 30-plus inches on-center. This span is too great for the plywood and at some locations it is sagging badly. Flashing throughout is also in poor condition.



Photo 20: This area of damaged siding the east end of the main section where it meets the roof of the one and one-half story section has resulted in structural problems with this wall.



Photo 21: The interior of the area shown in Photo 19 above. Note daylight is visible at the far end of the plaster wall which is bulging inward.

IDENTIFICATION OF HISTORIC FEATURES

Exterior

- Building form
- Main front porch, excluding enclosures and later inappropriate millwork.
- Rear porches, excluding enclosures and later inappropriate millwork.
- Masonry Foundations and chimneys
- Wood siding, millwork, windows and doors (existing board-and-batten shutters are not historic)

Interior

- Concealed and exposed timber framing and brick nogging.
- Wood flooring throughout
- Plaster walls and ceilings
- All interior doors
- All interior millwork with the exception of the chair rail in the rear parlor of the two-story section.
- Most door hardware.
- Select interior lighting fixtures. A full preservation plan would attempt to define a period of interpretation for the house, which might include select existing light fixtures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the goal of preserving and repairing as much historic fabric as possible, while replacing severely damaged material to match the historic and allowing for a new use of the property for meetings, events and limited interpretation. To that end, the following recommendations are based on the maximum retention of the historic features identified above.

Masonry

Immediate

- Provide new concrete slab at basement.
- Reconstruct failing foundation wall at rear of basement on new footing. Approximately 10'-6".
- Provide spread footing and steel column beneath west end of east-west summer beam in basement where it bears on the basement window header.
- Reconstruct foundation at front of one and one-half story section on new footing. Approximately 8'.
- Reconstruct two chimneys at two-story section to match historic from approximately 4-ft. above the attic floor level up. Do not re-plaster at exterior. Provide new flashing and cap.

Walls

Immediate

- General: Given the intact character of much of the historic timber-frame, repairs should be undertaken using traditional joinery and wood species.
- Repair sill plate at front of one and one-half story section. Assume 6-ft. repair. Replace damaged siding.
- Repair sill plate at east gable end of one and one-half story section. Assume 12-ft. repair. Re-establish connection with joists. Remove and reinstall flooring at kitchen to complete repairs. Replace flooring at stove base to match historic flooring.
- Repair rafter plate at front of one and one-half story section. Approximately 6-ft. repair.
- Remove siding and plaster at the rear east end of two-story section. (Photo XX) Evaluate framing and make repairs. Remove and reinstall brick nogging as necessary. Provide vapor barrier. Replace siding and flashing at exterior and plaster and finishes at interior.
- Remove corner boards and siding at south east corner of main section. Inspect corner post and repair in conjunction with above.
- Repair tie-beam at east end attic just below attic window. Approximately 6-ft. repair.

Windows

- Immediate
- Windows around the house have been protected by the installation of aluminum storm windows and are in fairly good condition. Re-glaze 50% of the window muntins. Prep and paint windows. Restore lower sash to working order.

Long-term

- Remove exterior aluminum storms and provide interior storms.
- Install period appropriate shutters.

Doors

- The exterior doors at the house have similarly been protected by the porches and are in good condition with the exception of the front door to the one and one-half story section, which was altered at some point and re-assembled using bolts.
- Undertake minor repairs to doors to ensure that they are functioning properly. Upgrade hardware to secure doors without the use of pad locks and hasps.
- Re-construct front door at one and one-half story section. Remove glazing and replace with panels and trim matching the lower panels.

Exterior Woodwork and Finishes

Immediate

- Prep and paint exterior walls of two story section of the house.
- Remove and discard existing board-and-batten shutters.

Short-term

- Prep and paint remaining exterior
- Repair exterior woodwork not identified elsewhere.

Roofs

- Remove and replace existing asphalt shingle roof. At two-story section, replace plywood sheathing with 5/4 tongue-and-groove board sheathing.
- Replace flashing throughout.

Porches

Immediate

- Front Porch: Remove enclosure repair porch deck, trim and ceiling.
- Rear Porches: Remove enclosure from west porch. Maintain roofs.
- Coordinate work at rear porches with accessibility provisions.

Short-term

- Front Porch: Restore porch decks, skirt, ceiling and other trim. Provide new steps centered on door. Remove porch at one and one-half story section and provide new stone steps.
- Rear Porches: Restore porch decks, skirt, ceiling and other trim.
- Coordinate work at rear porches with accessibility provisions.

Accessibility

Short-term

- Providing barrier free accessibility to the house is complicated by the fact that the first floor levels of the two sections of the house differ by approximately 16 inches. The best approach to accessibility to the house will be to provide a compound ramp with landings at both entrances at the rear of the building. This will allow for access to both sections of the first floor of the house for event and interpretive purposes.
- Barrier free access to the second floor of the building is not recommended given the impact such an undertaking would have on the historic character of the building. Interpretation of the second floor of the building should be provided through alternative means such as video or exhibit panels.

Interior

Before undertaking a significant amount of work at the interior of the house, we recommend thorough finishes analysis be completed to prevent the loss of important evidence of the early finishes before they can be documented. The goal of restoring interior finishes will be to provide historically accurate finishes in those spaces to be interpreted and an appropriate back-drop to meeting and event spaces.

- Floors: due to the fact that the existing finishes on the floors in the house are likely historic and contain a record of the early treatments, we recommend gentle cleaning of the floors and installation of period appropriate floor coverings.
 - Most floors are in good condition. The kitchen floor and the floor at the rear entry of the one and one-half story section will require repairs. Assume removal and reinstallation of these floors with replacement of approximately 100 s.f. to match existing.
- Plaster Walls and Ceilings: Currently all of the walls in the house are finished with wall paper with the exception of only a few spaces. Some spaces show evidence of what could be a thin distemper paint layer under the wall paper. Analysis of wall finishes will be valuable to understanding how these rooms were treated from an early period.
 - Replace plaster at the two-story section stair hall east wall from the bottom stair up to the ceiling and the ceiling itself in the second floor hall.
 - Assume replacement of an additional 200 sq. ft. of plaster and stabilization of 200 sq. ft. of plaster using plaster washers. Assume repair of 100 ln. ft. of plaster crack repairs.
- Trim, Doors and Windows: Following finishes analysis, repaint millwork in period appropriate colors.
 - Repair beaded board at kitchen ceiling assume 72 sq. ft. replacement of ceiling boards to match existing.

Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing

Immediate

- Provide temporary heat
- Provide new electrical service, fire alarm and limited temporary lighting. Reuse existing lighting where possible while meeting current code requirements.
- Provide seasonal portable toilet facilities on site.

Short-term

- Provide new heating and air conditioning. Reuse existing hot-water radiator system.
- Provide new lighting.
- Upgrade existing first floor bathroom for limited use.

Long-term

- Provide new barrier-free restrooms in a new or rehabilitated outbuilding.
- Change in use from Residential to Business as a historic building under the rehab sub-code will require installation of emergency egress lighting and signage.

Outbuildings

Short-term

- Undertake historic overview and stabilization assessment of the existing outbuildings.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The Pulda Farmhouse is a remarkably intact historic building that still very much conveys its historic associations with the development of this farm and the region. Given the limited scope and budget of this report, there are a number of additional research and evaluation efforts that would benefit the understanding and preservation of the Pulda Farm.

HSR/Preservation Plan

In order to fully understand the history and evolution of the site, a full Historic Structure Report, or Preservation Plan would be beneficial as it would compile all the historical research, building conditions and recommendations into a single cohesive document. This type of document is also often required as a first step in applying for grant funding for construction projects.

Finishes Analysis

As part of an HSR or Preservation Plan, or as a stand-alone report, historic finishes analysis would be very beneficial in providing information on historic finishes and helping to understand the chronology of the house. Even if the intention is not to interpret the building as a museum, historic colors and finishes always provide an interesting back drop to any type of meeting or event space and add interpretive value to whatever the new use of the space is.

National Register Nomination

Complete New Jersey and National Register Nomination in conjunction with the preparation of an HSR or Preservation Plan. This will provide recognition of the significance of the property and will allow for the application of certain grants for capital funding.

Historic American Building Survey (HABS) Documentation

Given the intact nature of the building, the property has much to information to offer and Historic American Building Survey (HABS) documentation of the house should be considered. This effort will again be beneficial in helping to fully understand the history and evolution of the building.