

TE

THIRD STREET

#18 and #20, formerly the 60' Plot of Nathaniel Silsbee Sr. #18 the present William E. Myers house, and #20, the present Theodore Atkinson house.

(See Photos #76 and #75)

The south half of the 120' plot sold by Ambrose Backer in 1693 to Martin Martinson and kept by Martinson when he sold the north half to John Calvert (which was later incorporated in the Archibald Alexander property, #26-28) - came into the possession of Adam Hay (original spelling by the court clerks is Ikey or Iky) about 1709. Adam Ray sold this 60' to Thomas Morton, from whom about 1767 Nathaniel Silsbee, bricklayer, bought "house" and 60' lot, 172' deep, between Third and Fourth Streets. The plot was bounded south by the south line of present Silsbee's Alley. Nathaniel Silsbee re-fenced the south side of his 60' lot to leave open a six-foot alley between the two streets. In his will he provided that the alley be kept forever a public right of way.

The house and lot, thus restricted, was left in 1772 by Nathaniel Sr. to his son Dr. Nathaniel Silsbee Jr., who in 1779, sold the property to Robert Wiley, blacksmith, "for 100 pounds in money of the Delaware State."

Nathaniel Silsbee was the son of a Samuel Silsbee, house carpenter, who died in 1714, leaving a wife Elizabeth, his son Nathaniel and a daughter Mary (who married Philip Janvier). To these heirs he willed all his property. A study of the Silsbee family, from rille and property indentures, indicates a colateral

relationship (they were probably second or third cousins) between Samuel Silsbee, house carpenter, father of Nathaniel and the later Samuel Silsbee (grandson (?) of a Samuel Silsbee, blacksmith, who was dead in 1734), whose wife was Mary, and who left the Dutch house property to his widow and his two sons, Joseph and John, and who also had a daughter Mary who was later Mary Silsbee Thompson. The will of Nathaniel's father Samuel, the house carpenter, given by his son in a deed and cited by him in another deed as filed with the Register, was afterward lost, and at a later time, an attorney who wrote a deed for property of this first Samuel, assigned his heirs under the will of the third Samuel whose will, proved in 1751, was at the time, filed in the Register's office. Only after all the Silsbee deeds and wills of record were read and compared in this search could the several Silsbee properties on this block of Third Street, be clearly defined and their aid in establishing the bounds and owners of adjacent properties made use of.

#20 Third Street

Robert Wiley's property, 60' wide on Third Street and 172' deep, containing Silsbee's 6' alley on its south side, is referred to in indentures for the property to the north of it, as Robert Wiley's "frame dwelling and lot of ground." The frame dwelling was on the site in 1759, when Nathaniel Silsbee Sr. bought it from Thomas Morton, and it may have been built in Martin Martinson's time. This early frame house is believed to be incorporated as part of the present framedwelling now #20, the present front part having been added and modified at various later times. William E.

Myers, present owner of #18, the original house on this south part of this Silsbee plot, says the back part of #20 is the old frame dwelling, and Judge Hodney has said that the earliest dwellings at this end of the block were set back further than the later building line. Dates and details of the modifications of the early house have not yet been established in this search.

#18 Third Street

The present three-story brick dwelling, adjoining Nathaniel Silsbee's alley between Third Street and Fourth Street where Nathaniel had his own dwelling on the west side of the street, was still in the Wiley family in 1801, when Peter Crowding of Philadelphia (who had just built the George Bead Jr. house on the Strand) built this one for John Wiley. The house is characteristic of the work of Peter Crowding in New Castle, with some individual features, like the central chimney. The decorative work, so elaborate in the Read house is here restrained and simplified, to suit more modest means or a plainer taste.

The John Wiley house came into possession of a Jeremiah Bowman, carpenter and builder, who had the lumber yard next to Riddle and Bird on the Strand at the time of the great fire of 1824 and later to the Gemmill family. It is now owned by William E. Myers, son-in-law of Mrs. Zachariah Gemmill. Before the depression, this house, with all its original features, including window blinds, was maintained in outward perfect repair.

The history of both #18 and #20 proves the worth of these two buildings. #18 shows in its present condition its architectural value and would take very little work to place in good condition. #20 on the contrary has been so altered and added to, that its present outward appearance shows little if any architectural merit or qualities to give it a place on an important old street of the town. This report would advise a further search and study of this site to see if parts of this house could be preserved or restored.