Region Five
421 Walnut Street
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

September 1, 1939

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park
From: Regional Director
Subject: Historic Structures Report, Part I - 423 Locust Street

After reviewing the subject report, we are pleased to recommend its approval.

(Sgd.) Daniel J. Tobin
Daniel J. Tobin
Regional Director

In duplicate
Copy to: Director
Chief, EODC

MNelligan/cp
General
Daily
Area
Operations Division
Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five

From: Chief Architect

Subject: Historic Structures Report, Part I, 423 Locust Street, Independence

The Historic Structures Report, Part I, for building at 423 Locust Street, Independence, has been reviewed by the interested Divisions in the Washington Office and is recommended for approval.

Dick Sutton  
Chief Architect

Copy to: Chief, EODC (2)  
Supt.; Independence
Historic Structures Report - Part I
Locust Street
Independence NHP

INTERPRETATION

Operations

This brief report packs more & better information in it than any other I have read from INHP. JRC.

Good report

Agree with schedule of actions.

J. H. Stock

Assistant Regional Director

8/19/64

Regional Director

I have reviewed.

8/21/64
See Chap. 11, sect. 2, Page 2 last line.

Surely this should read "... of national importance ..."

For isn't every man considered important to his loved ones?
8/12/59

Dr. Nelligan

Concur. Opening paragraph of "Evaluation" is good interpretive writing which might be used for a general interpretive sign on "Prune Street" - with special mention of Tench Coxe as perhaps the most prominent resident.

Frank Barnes
Region Five
421 Walnut Street
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

August 6, 1959

Memorandum

To: Director
From: Regional Director

Subject: Historic Structures Report, Part I - 423 Locust Street, Independence NHP

Forwarded herewith for your review are two copies of the subject report.

Comments on it should be made by August 21.

(Sgd.) Daniel J. Tobin
Daniel J. Tobin
Regional Director

In duplicate

Attachments

Copy to: Chief, EODC, w/copy of report
Capt., Independence
Operations Division

MHNelligan/cp

General
Daily
Area
February 12, 1959

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region V

From: Superintendent, Independence NHP

Subject: Historic Structure Reports on 408, 413, 415, and 423 Locust Street

Enclosed in quadruplicate for your review are the administrative and historical data sections of the Historic Structure Reports on 408, 413, 415, and 423 Locust Street.

Through inadvertence the reports have not been submitted.

By this memorandum we are requesting the Eastern Office of Design and Construction to prepare the architectural data sections of these reports.

M. O. Anderson
Superintendent

Copy to: Chief, EODC

H30
SIGNATURE SHEET

DIRECTOR

Date

REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Date

CHIEF, EASTERN OFFICE, DIV. OF DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

APPROVED

DATE

SUPERINTENDENT

DATE
Historic Building Report

on

423 Locust Street

Independence National Historical Park

* * * *

Prepared by

Staff

Independence National Historical Park

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

* * * *

February, 1959
# Table of Contents

## Chapter I. Administrative Data

1. The Building (Name, No., etc.)
2. Proposed Use of Structure and Justification
3. Provision for Operating House
4. Preliminary Estimate of Cost for Rehabilitating the Structure and Grounds

## Chapter II. Historical Data

1. Structural Evidence from Documentary Sources Evidence
2. Historical Associations
3. Evaluation of Historical Importance
CHAPTER I
ADMINISTRATIVE SECTION

Prepared by Superintendent H. O. Anderson
NAME AND NUMBER OF BUILDING

423 Locust Street, Building No. 18, is situated on the north side of Locust Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets, in Area "B" of the Park.
PROPOSED USE OF STRUCTURE
AND JUSTIFICATION

It is proposed that the exterior of this structure be
restored to serve as a needed feature in the landscape design of the
park, and that its interior be converted for employee housing. This
structure, along with the other five on Locust Street, has no signif-
icant association with important figures or events, but is typical of
Philadelphia dwellings of the historic period. The retention of all
six, for incorporation in the overall design of this section of the
park, will help recall the eighteenth-century atmosphere.

Justification for this proposed use is contained in the
approved Mission 66 Prospectus for the park. Only a limited number
of key protective, maintenance, interpretive, and administrative
personnel will be provided with housing in this and the other five
structures.
PROVISION FOR OPERATING HOUSE

As residence for Park personnel, the building would be leased and rent charged.
PRELIMINARY ESTIMATE OF COST FOR REHABILITATING THE STRUCTURE AND GROUNDS

$19,100.
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL SECTION

Prepared by Historian John D. K. Platt
The House at 423 Locust Street is one of the four aged buildings, grouped in pairs, still remaining on the north side of the block between Fourth and Fifth Streets after extensive demolition of recent years. All four are of a type; they are all brick Philadelphia row-houses, unprepossessing and unexceptional. No two are of the same dimensions and design. Three of the four, No. 423 included, were built in the decade following 1800.

The house at 423 Locust Street has a long and narrow appearance (see Illustration No. 1). It is three and a half stories high, with a frontage of but thirteen and a half feet. This measurement and the dimensions of the third floor (14 feet by 25 feet) provide us with two of the few facts which connect the existing building with the slim documentary evidence of its past. So far as is known, only a single insurance survey has ever been made of the premises. This one was recorded by the Mutual Assurance Company in October 1807 and depicts the building in the following very general terms:

SURVEY of Docr. William Shippon's three Story House situate on the North side of Frune [Locust] Street between fourth and fifth Streets. Dimensions, 15 [?] feet front and 25 feet deep, lower Story, plain Mantle, surbase, washboards and windows Cased, second and third Stories similar, Garrets plastered and Trap Door, winding Stairs. Kitchen 14 feet by 9 feet, one Story high and finished as Customary, lower floors yellow pine and others white pine, building nearly new, two Trees, no Battlement...
There is little doubt that the building described in the survey is the one which has survived, in considerably changed form, to the present. The property records, discussed in the next section, show conclusively that no building was on the lot before 1803. They show no replacement building since then. Structural evidence would help to establish the period of construction (see Illustration No. 2).

In the years since 1807 many changes have been made in the structure. They include extension and repartitioning of the first and second floors, relocation of the staircase between those floors, and addition of a two story "el" to the rear. The third floor and garret are practically the same today as they were in 1802 (see Illustration No. 3). The absence of more recent insurance surveys and the dearth of other documentary evidence relating to the building have made it impossible to show by comparison of earlier and later records more precisely what alterations were made during this interval.

An architectural investigation is believed necessary to substantiate the findings of this section and to determine what portion of the original building is standing today.
Ownership of Property to 1803

The land on which the house at 423 Locust Street is located for more than a century belonged to William Shippen, the elder or his heirs. It was originally part of the lot bounded by Walnut and Spruce, Fourth and Fifth Streets which in 1744 was granted to Edward, Joseph, and William Shippen by Thomas and Richard Penn and which the following year the brothers divided among themselves. William Shippen received the section north of what is now Locust Street. On April 20, 1784 he deeded a lot thirty-two feet in breadth and seventy feet in depth, consisting of the ground at present-day 421-423 Locust Street, to one Alexander Rodgers, a laborer, in return for payment of an annual ground rent of $42 2/3. On the eastern side of this lot Rodgers sometime before March 22, 1786 erected a dwelling. Within a year one Jeremiah Collins had built and occupied a house on the adjoining lot to the west. This left a narrow strip of unoccupied ground at what is now 423 Locust Street. This narrow strip was separated from the rest of the lot by a partition on July 31, 1802, within a year of William Shippen's death. The land had come into possession of the younger William Shippen and on it sometime before 1803 a three-and-a-half story house was completed. A Peter Groce occupied the premises that year, the first year that the Philadelphia tax records and directories list a house and occupant at the site.
Tenants of 423 Locust Street

Nothing is known about the house's tenants in this period beyond the fact that after Peter Groce had lived there in 1803, a William W. Wande occupied it in 1806 and 1807 and a William Thompson in 1811.

Ownership of Property Since 1803

The younger William Shippen died in 1808 and willed the property to his daughter, Ann Home Livingston. It then passed to his grandson, William Shippen. On May 3, 1858 this William Shippen deeded the property to his son Edward, who on May 11, 1869 sold it to a William Jack. Thus, after one hundred and fifteen years the land passed out of the Shippen family's possession. No one of importance owned the property before the federal government purchased it in 1951.
Chapter II
Section 3
Page 1

EVALUATION OF HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE

Considered apart from its setting, 423 Locust Street has no historical importance or interest. The house was built after the "historic period." No person of note has ever lived in it; no significant event has ever taken place there. The "story" of the premises, such as it is, can be told briefly. The house at 423 Locust Street was one of a number of "income" properties owned by members of the prominent Shippen family. It was located on a modest byway of unpretentious residences and boarding houses bearing the humble name, prune street (see Illustration No. 4). Most of the inhabitants were tenants and were among a transitory population, seldom occupying a house for longer than two or three years. Over the span of a generation nearly a score of occupations were represented on Prune Street. It was a neighborhood of sugar refiners, joiners, brushmakers, cooper, shoemakers, locksmiths, grocers, tailors, bakers, coachmen, brass founders, carters, wood sawyers, porters, and laborers. It was one of the centers of the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1797.

Considered as part of its setting, 423 Locust appears in a different light. It is on the one residential street of its type in the park. As the Walnut Street buildings in their proportions and design represent upper class life in Philadelphia at the turn of the century, so the Locust Street buildings represent life on a less ambitious scale.
Viewed from the main Park area the house and its neighbor at 421 Locust Street, set amidst ivied walls and trees, its gable outlined against the sky, present a readily interpretable vista (see Illustrations No. 5 and 6). Included in the general setting are the Tribute Garden across the street, the splendid Shippen-Wistar house at the corner, and the garden of the Philadelphia Contributionship to the east.

For these reasons, it is recommended that the house at 423 Locust Street be preserved as a landscape feature and be restored on the exterior.
House at 423 Locust Street is in center of 1950 photograph. Building to the right is Alexander Rodgers house. Building to the left has since been demolished. National Park Service Photo.
Another view taken in 1854 shows how west wall of earlier Rodgers House (1786) was used in construction of house at 429 Locust Street. National Park Service Photo
Alterations to first and second floors and addition of "el" can be seen in 1954 photograph taken from the rear of building. The "el" has since been torn down. National Park Service photo.
Houses at 404, 406, and 408 Locust Street as they appeared in 1878-89. They typify Locust Street in the historic period. Notes Penrose Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
Chapter II
Illustration 5

Photo of building at 423 Locust Street as seen from main Park area to the north. The Tribute Garden can be seen in the background. Buildings in foreground are old stables. National Park Service Photo.
A cross-section of the Locust Street setting. Wall at left belongs to the Blair House (1802-1803). Across the street are the facades of 18th Century buildings at 408 and 410 Locust Street. National Park Service Photo