

# **SPREAD EAGLE INN**

## **THE WHITE BEAR**



**Second Street Pike and  
Almshouse Road  
Richboro Village  
Northampton Township  
Bucks County, Pennsylvania**

**Notes on Site Visit of December 6, 1997**

**KATHRYN ANN AUERBACH Preservation Consultant**

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The following report was prepared for the Northampton Township Historical Society by Kathryn Ann Auerback. Ms Auerback, an instructor of Historic Preservation at the Bucks County Community College visited the Inn in December 1997 with students from the college and other interested preservationists to document it's historic attributes and record in pictures and drawings the current state of the Inn. It was determined that although the Inn externally has a look of disrepair, the basic structure is in remarkably stable condition.



Roe Blumenthal and Ranulph Bye with his painting of the Spread Eagle Inn, Richboro, Bucks County, Pennsylvania

The Historical Society also published a book detailing the history of the Spread Eagle Inn written by Rose Marie Blumental. This history book, as well as prints of the Spread Eagle by Ranulph Bye, are being sold by the Society.

Report edited by Doug Crompton, Richboro, PA

This report and other information on the Spread Eagle Inn is available at the Northampton Township Historical Society's web page – [www.crompton.com/bucks](http://www.crompton.com/bucks)

## **SPREAD EAGLE INN, THE WHITE BEAR**

**Second Street Pike & Almshouse Road, Richboro, Northampton Twp.**

### **NOTES ON PHYSICAL STRUCTURE:**

The following information includes notes and observations based on a site 'visit on December 6, 1997. The purpose of the visit was to assess the general construction and stylistic characteristics of the hotel and to inspect the basement for clues on building chronology and relationship to the upper stories. The present owners, Amoco, propose to move the hotel, or the original portion of it, 100 feet or more to a new location facing Almshouse Road, thus permanently separating it from its original foundations.

The overall appearance of the hotel today is dominated by two story porches on its east and south facades and the Mansard roof over the main block giving the building a Victorian, Second French Empire look (*Photo 1*). Beneath these features stands the original hotel built c1810 (*Blumenthal, Roe. Endangered White Bear. 1997 p. 3*). The two story plastered stonewalls exhibit modified Georgian fenestration still popular in this area in the Federal period namely, five bay front facade with center entrance door (*Photo 2*). On the first floor the bays to the right of the entrance were compressed to accommodate an additional doorway between the two windows, which entered directly into the front corner room. The orientation is to the east facing Second Street Pike and this first section was two piles deep with overall dimensions of 42 feet wide and 30 feet deep. These measurements vary slightly with an advertisement January 20, 1836 in the Bucks County Intelligencer of 50 by 30 (*Blumenthal, p. 8*) and may be the result of the advertiser estimating rather than taking actual dimensions. An ad from the October 28, 1879 Doylestown Democrat is more accurate, 42 by 30 feet (*Blumenthal, p. 10*).

A "piazza" is mentioned in 1836 for the "front and on one end" and as porches in 1879 (*Photo 3*). The porch posts are heavy, with chamfered edges and show evidence of an earlier railing, suggesting that the structural elements of the present porches date from at least the late 19th century, if not original (*Photo 4*). Most of the window and door openings appear original although the trim and shutters are of a Victorian design. At this time the upper story windows were also enlarged to floor level to function also as doors. In the late-20th century these windows were boarded up and tables built into the recess as part of semi-outdoor dining area on the upper porch (*Photo 5*). The present railing and scroll brackets were also added (*see Blumenthal., p. 16 1971 photo*). On the first floor front the extra door between the northern two window bays was also covered over.

The present roofline is also from the last quarter of the 19th century, of Mansard design with four dormers on the front, east slope and two on the south and north and three on the west. The original roof design is conjectured to be gable in the prevailing style, although no firm architectural evidence has yet been uncovered to verify this.

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The original attic was finished as described in the 1836 advertisement with “four rooms and an entry” on the “3rd floor”. The staircase to the attic is of the original Federal design (*Photos 11 & 12*) with portions of the railing and decorative fretwork below the treads intact. The original stonewalls of the hotel continued approximately one foot above the attic floor (*Photo 6*). These are hidden behind false walls built to give the Victorian attic rooms vertically plumb exterior walls. In the staircase area behind this false wall (against the rear west wall) is the original chair rail (*Photos 7, 8, 9*). This chair rail was removed along the interior wall of the staircase as evidenced by a change from hand-split lath to circular sawn (seen in an area where the plaster was broken through) (*Photo 10*). The balance of the attic is finished in the style of the late-19th century, albeit damage from a fire and modifications to install modern HVAC systems (*Photos 15, 16*). The ad from 1879 lists 15 rooms total (as opposed to 12 in 1836), helping to verify this Victorian remodeling.

The location of the original stairs to the attic and their formal Federal design helps to confirm the location and appearance of the staircase from the first to the second floors. As the 1836 ad details, the floor plan may have been of standard Georgian format “4 rooms and an entry” on each floor. The center entrance hall would lead back to the open Federal staircase with three flights, the second flight and both landings against the back wall. To the left of the hall were two even sized parlors, each with a fireplace centered along the gable end wall. The outline of the plaster around the fireplace openings suggests that these rooms once had the decorated Federal mantelpieces (*Photo 18*). Residents of the area recall elaborate punch and gauge decoration (*Doug Crompton, 12/6/97*). To the right of the hallway the plan is not as common, while there may have been two rooms, they did not have traditional fireplaces, possibly being heated with stoves (*Photo 20*). The front room may have been larger, as it was once served by its own outside door. Today the first floor is basically one large room dominated by a three sided bar in the center area (*Photo 17*), bathroom to the far right (*Photo 19*), NW, corner, side entrance in the SW corner leading to a straight run enclosed stair and a small pantry behind the bar against the stairs. Modern kitchen facilities are in an addition to the rear.

The second floor entry contains original door openings and trim leading to the large rooms to the north and south (*Photo 21*). It is possible that the short run of stairs leading up to this entry from the landing (which accesses also the large banquet room in the addition) is also original, although doors are new. The original plan is disguised by newer wall treatments and bathroom partitions, although the southern half possibly mimics its first floor counterpart. There are the chimneystacks and openings for fireplaces like those below (*Photo 24*).

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### NOTES: continued... 3

There is also a niche in the south end wall between the fireplaces, which could date from the Federal period, as niches were a popular feature. The large room along the north end of the inn has a fireplace in the front half (although there is none beneath it). This fireplace shows marks in the plaster, which indicate that the most recent mantle was not its original, although the size, proportions and exposed stone vs. plaster recommend a Federal mantelpiece originally (*Photos 23, 25*).

The remaining woodwork from the original Federal construction, namely the chair rail and door trim, staircase railing, banisters and fretwork demonstrate a degree of elegance found in finer homes of the period (*Fig. 6, 7, 8, 12*). The fretwork under the stair treads and landing is thin pieces of wood in connected back-to-back swag patterns with medallions applied in a bas-relief fashion which adds delicacy to the staircase (*Photo 13*). This lightness is enhanced by the vertical molding of the square balusters and undercarving of the handrailing (*Fig. 9, 10, 11, 13, Photo 12*). The door trim in the second floor hall is more elaborate than its counterpart inside the rooms and may be what was used on the first floor also (*Fig. 1, 2, Photo 22*). The backband of the architrave has the typical concave molding while on the flat surface is the more elaborate reeding. The molding inside the rooms is much plainer, without reeding, with typical convex profile and narrow ovolo and end beads. Of note, the trim around the windows on the first and second floors also contains a reeding pattern, but exhibits cyma reversa molding profiles of the mid-to-late 19th century and the reeding is broader, suggesting spacing between the reeds (now filled with paint) rather than the narrow incisions more typical of the Federal period (*Fig. 4, 5*). Paint analysis may help to confirm that this trim was added when the windows were changed to 2/2 Victorian sashes, and the 2nd floor windows made into doors during the late 19th century remodeling.

The basement was inspected for its basic features and relationship with the upper stories of the hotel. Present, and apparently original exterior entrance was gained from exterior steps (formerly a bulkhead, now an enclosed full size doorway) leading down on the south side in the SE corner of the cellar (*Photo 3, 27*). The interior wall finishes throughout the basement were recently resurfaced with a cement stucco in some cases disguising earlier features and clues, including cellar windows along the front. The main basement seems to uniformly sit underneath the 42 by 30 foot original hotel and is divided into two sections laterally by a stonewall which serves as the support for the two spans of floor joists running from front to back. The floor joists are milled, most with up-and-down saw marks, although some, in the northeast corner in particular, appear to have pit saw marks (although finer than the usual rough cut appearance) (*Photo 26*).

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This is a curious feature for such a late date, namely by 1810 saw mills had been operating in the area for over 50 years, eliminating the need for the labor intensive hand sawing.

Fireplace supports evident correspond to the fireplaces existing today on the first floor, namely the two parlor sized ones on the south end wall. These supports are two stone piers, which extend out to support the sidewalls of the chimneystack with heavy timbers set across the top to support the hearth area (*Photos 27, 28*). On the north end of the building evidence is less straightforward, if even non-existent. In the northeast parlor area there is no indication that there ever was a fireplace or support, corresponding to the lack of one on the first floor and suggesting a separate corbeled support for the fireplace on the second floor. In the northwest corner of the basement is the modern heating furnace, which uses a chimneystack that runs up along the rear west wall. In the small area between the flue and the actual NW corner is a small area of floor higher than the present cement floor, which has the original stone surface intact (*Photo 29*). In the wall area directly above in this corner is a boarded space, which appears to have been a window or opening. To the left of the furnace flue is a door opening into a small cellar area (approximately 9' x 141). Along the north wall in this corner area but next to the middle partition wall is another set of exterior cellar bulkhead steps. Finish work around the opening suggests that it may have been broken through at a later date. The interior stair access to the basement is a straight run staircase against the rear west wall directly beneath the present staircase from the first to second floors. Again, due to surface refinishing of the walls and extensive piping and wiring and other shelving built in for the restaurant, any scarring from an earlier staircase has been obscured. Beneath the present kitchen (against the rear west wall) and extending towards the tiny alcove cellar is a crawl space with an intermediate stonewall to support the circular sawn floor joists.

The advertisement from 1836 describes the basement with “a cellar kitchen and 2 good cellars”. The two cellars can easily be defined by the stonewall that runs laterally supporting the floor joists. The cellar kitchen, however, is not as obvious. Most likely it was located in the northwest corner where the furnace is now. In the early 19th century in this part of Bucks County large cooking fireplaces were quite popular, in fact some houses were being remodeled or added to with these features, complete with bake ovens and iron cranes. The use of stoves might be found further north in German settled areas, but even then, large fireplaces were built in out-kitchens to provide the necessary versatility for self-sufficient living. To meet the needs of a hotel, a large fireplace is more likely to fit the bill than a large wood-burning stove. Presently, however, the only flue in this corner is one sized for a stove (or furnace).

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### **NOTES: continued... 5**

If this corner contained a large fireplace since removed, the chimneystack appears also to have been removed. Curiously, this is the corner with the bathroom on the first floor, which may conceal evidence of scarring from the removal. The blocked “window” in the basement wall (*Photo 30*) could be an opening, which was part of a bake oven opening; the doorway could have been cut through later or may have been direct access to the outside, in an exposed basement area. If possible, this area should be further inspected before the hotel is moved.

There is mention in the 1836 and later advertisements of two wells of water, icehouse and milk vault, barns and stables. The only feature of these structures to remain apparent today is one well, with an above ground “wishing well” appearance, that is located outside the south end of the building, not far from the cellar entrance. The stables can be seen in early photos in the parking area to the south of the hotel. The icehouse and vault may be located in the course of excavation and ground disturbance with the construction of the future gas station. There should be opportunity offered to the historical society for documentation at that time.

In addition to the ambiguous reference to the cellar kitchen, with its disappointing lack of concrete evidence, there is also a reference in 1879 of a “stone dining room 38 by 25 ft”. It is assumed that this would have been located to the rear, along the west wall, in the area of the modern kitchen. The crawl space foundation dimensions do not correlate to the dimensions in the ad, but due to difficulty in access, these were not fully examined for changes. An advertisement November 29, 1893 in the Doylestown Democrat (*Blumenthal, p.10*) describes the hotel with 18 rooms (compared with 15 in 1879) and an Arnold Bros. postcard photo of May 16, 1907 (*Blumenthal, p. 2*) shows a rear addition, stuccoed masonry on the first floor, frame with siding on the second with a flat roof. This would be the kitchen and rear second floor banquet room today. This addition extends beyond the south wall of the original hotel seven feet and the depth by exterior measurement is 16 feet (corresponding better with the crawl space walls). If the first floor of this addition was the “stone dining room” the depth given in the ad was inaccurate.

There is a more recent block one-story rear addition to the west, which was not inspected on this visit. Most likely this portion will be demolished when the building is moved, and it appears to have no historic value. While the building dates to 1810, the roof, rear two-story addition and other modifications date from the late-19th century and have been a part of the hotel’s operations for over one hundred years. Consideration should be given to restoration primarily to this period with preservation and inclusion of the original Federal features wherever possible, including the mantles and, if possible, the staircase.

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 1



East, Front Facade and intersection (KAA:96-4) 3/96

PHOTO 2



East, Front Facade (KAA:96-4) 3/96

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 3



South, side facade with new basement entrance, well and side entrance (KAA:96-4) 3/96

PHOTO 4



Southeast corner, 2nd floor porch (brackets and railing added late 20th century) (KAA:97-15/15) 12/6/97

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 5



Northeast corner of porch, 2nd floor, original porch railing  
mortise hole in post. Recessed window openings  
(KAA:97-15/16) 12/6/97

PHOTO 6



West attic wall, top of original stone wall behind plaster  
(KAA:97-15/10) 12/6/97

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 7



West, stairwell wall to attic. Chairrail behind false wall  
(KAA:97-15/12) 12/6/97

PHOTO 8



West wall, stairwell to attic. Detail of chairrail  
(Doug Crompton) 12/6/97

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 9



West wall, stairwell to attic. Chairrail detail  
(Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 10



Interior partition wall, stairwell to attic. Lath detail showing both hand split and circular sawn.

(KAA:97-15/14) 12/6/97

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 11



Stairwell to attic, portions of original balusters and railing.  
(Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

PHOTO 12



Stairwell to attic, landing detail balusters, newels and railing  
(Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 13



Stairwell to attic. Fretwork detail at landing  
(Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

PHOTO 14



Stairwell to attic, stair tread and baseboard detail  
(Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 15



Northeast corner room attic, dormer windows  
(KAA:97-15/9) 12/6/97

PHOTO 16



Northeast corner room attic, view of roof construction  
(KAA:97-15/8) 12/6/97

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 17



First floor, general view looking south  
(Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

PHOTO 18



First floor, Southwest corner fireplace  
(Constance Gerhart 12/6/97)

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

**PHOTO 19**



First floor to northwest corner (bathroom partition)  
(Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 20



First floor view to northeast, window detail  
(Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 21



Second floor view from north room through entry hall  
(original door trim) (KAA:97-15/18) 12/6/97

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**



PHOTO 22

Second floor original door trim in entry hall  
(KAA:97-15/19) 12/6/97

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 23



Second floor general view to northeast corner (note fireplace and window openings) (KAA:97-15/17) 12/6/97

PHOTO 24



Second floor southeast corner fireplace  
(Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 25



North wall second floor fireplace  
(Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 26



Basement floor joist detail  
(Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 27



Basement fireplace support, south wall near southeast corner  
(note entrance to left) (Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

PHOTO 28



Basement fireplace support south wall near southwest corner  
(Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**



PHOTO 29

Northwest corner of basement, furnace chimney, original stone floor, boarded window? (Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

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**PHOTOGRAPHS:**

PHOTO 30

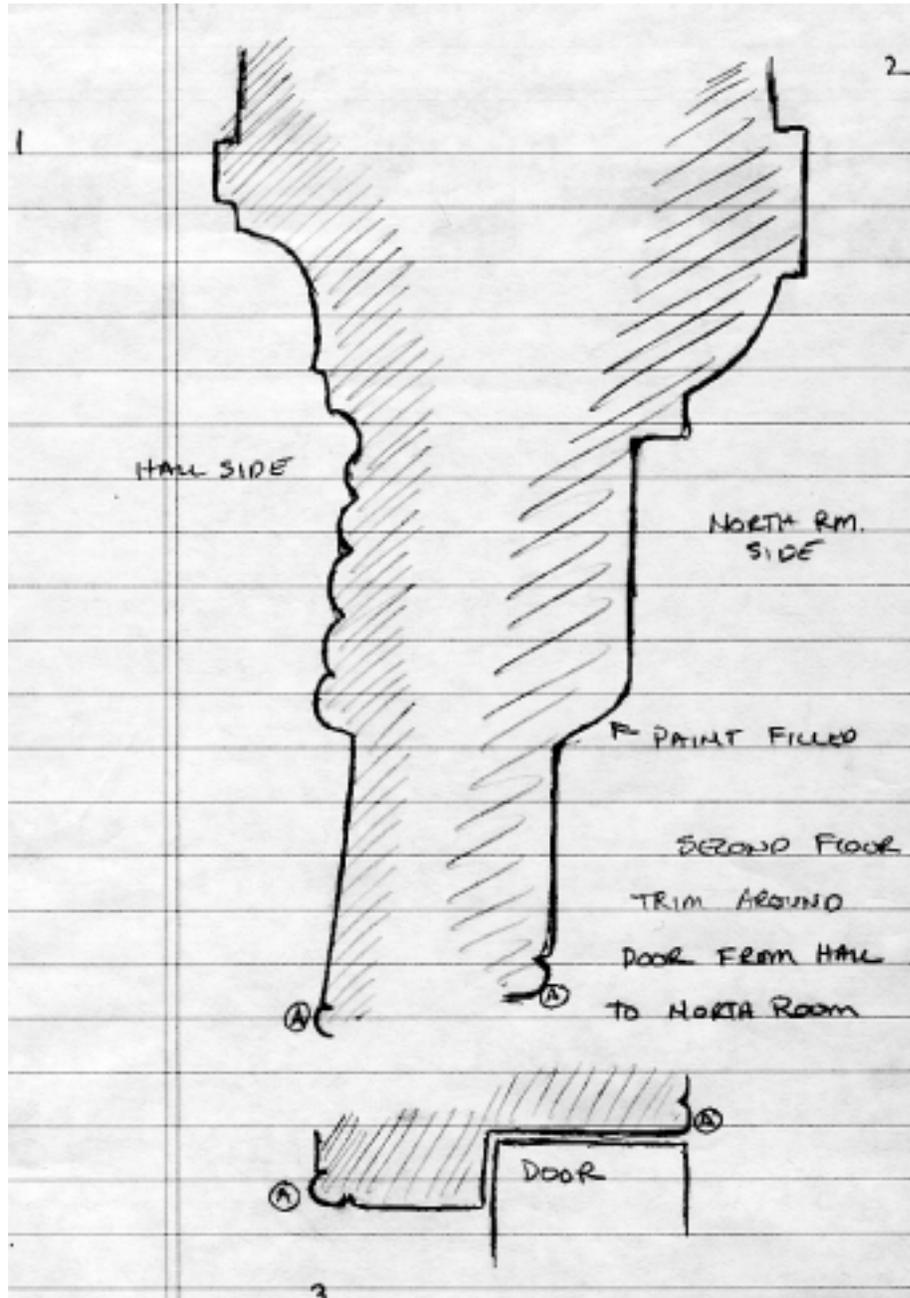


Basement alcove, view back to northwest corner of regular basement, closed window? (Doug Crompton 12/6/97)

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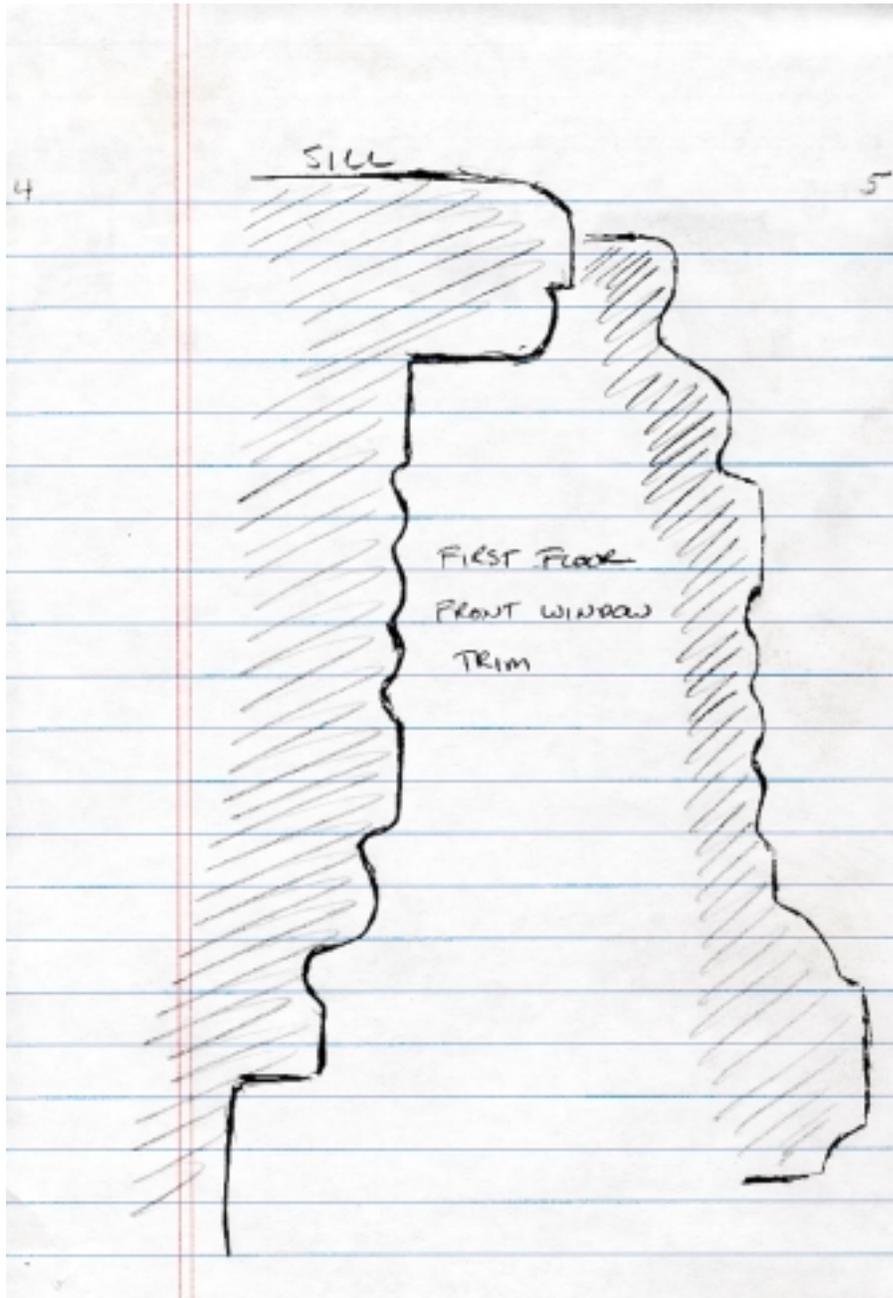
FIGURES: Drawings by Richard Green, 12/6/97



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**Second Street Pike & Almshouse Road, Richboro, Northampton Twp.**

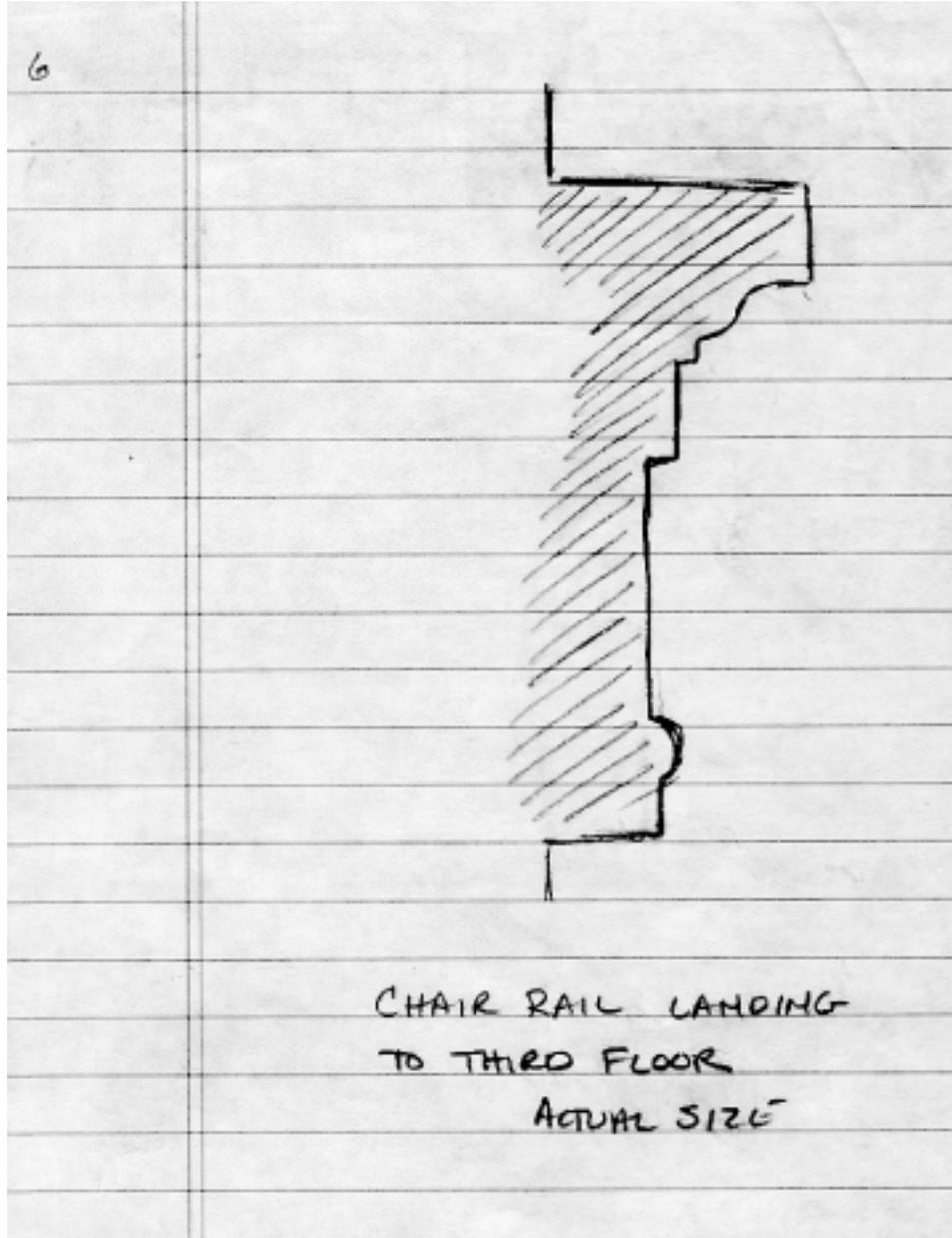
FIGURES: Drawings by Richard Green, 12/6/97



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**Second Street Pike & Almshouse Road, Richboro, Northampton Twp.**

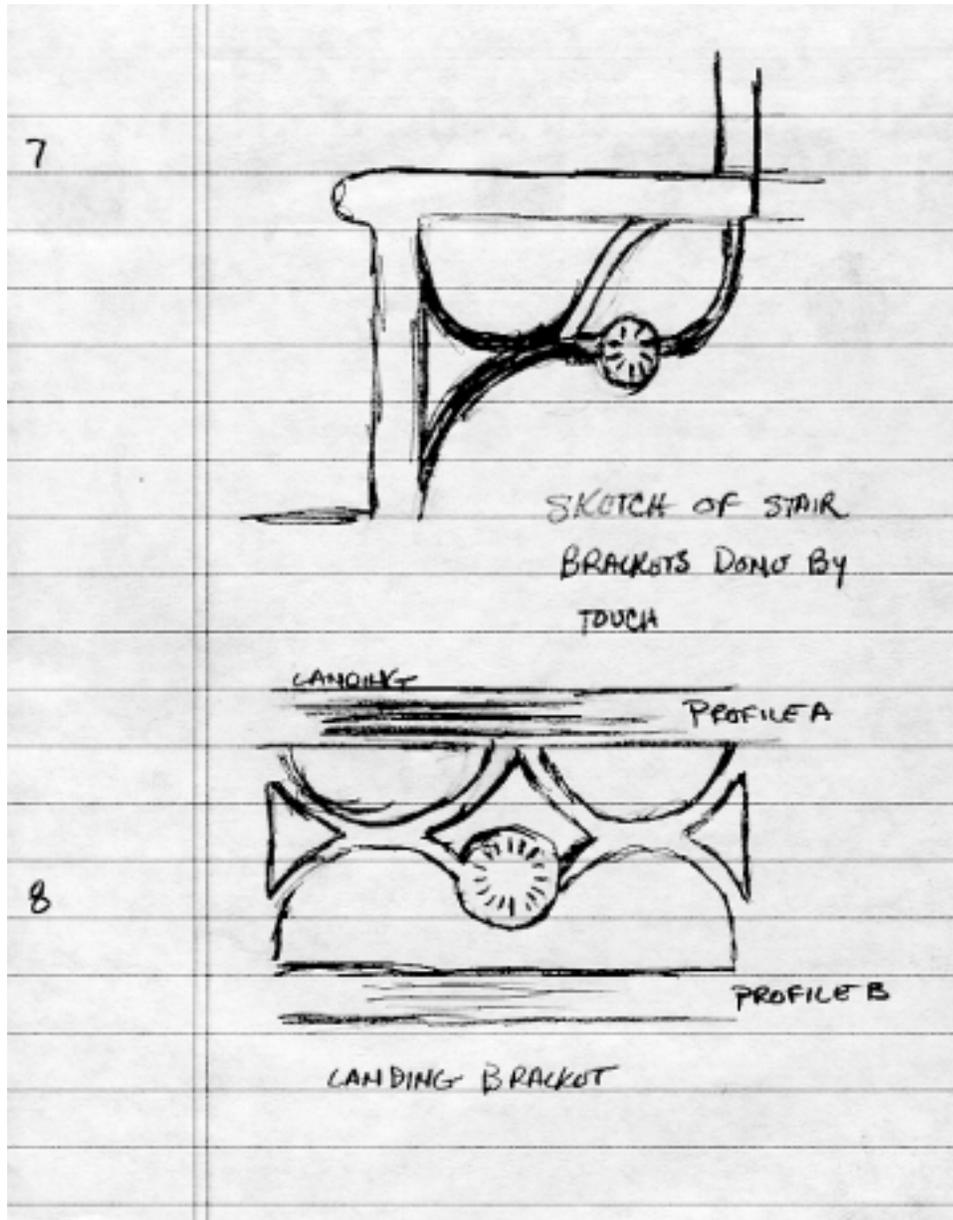
FIGURES: Drawings by Richard Green, 12/6/97



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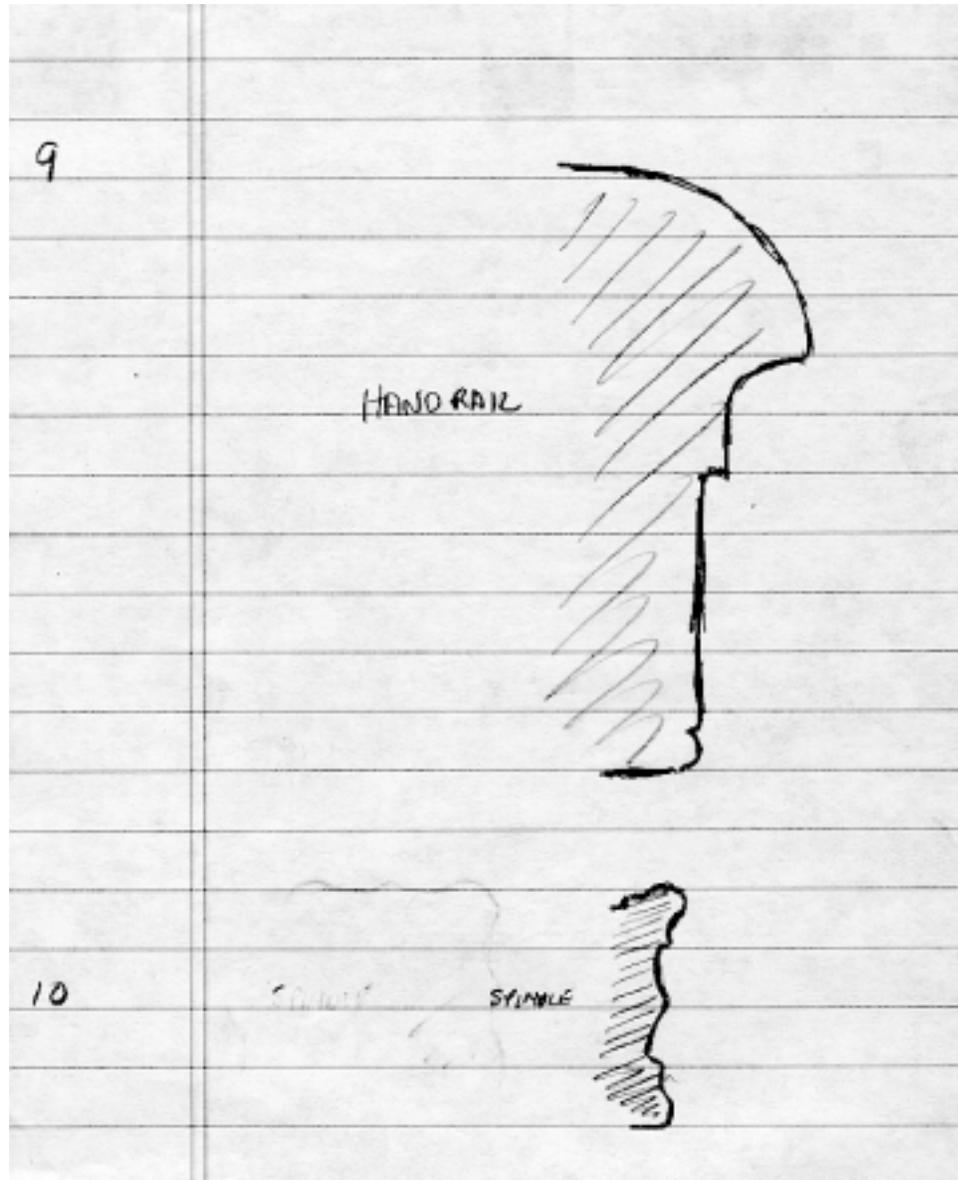
FIGURES: Drawings by Richard Green, 12/6/97



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FIGURES: Drawings by Richard Green, 12/6/97



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FIGURES: Drawings by Richard Green, 12/6/97

