

George Catlin Hall
92 South River Street

Catlin Hall was purchased by Wilkes College in 1957 from Dorrance Reynolds, a descendant of the original owner.¹ Mrs. Dorrance Reynolds and her daughter Patricia record that the structure was erected in 1843 as the residence of Elijah W. Reynolds (1813-18), a merchant.² The leads on the facade record the year 1843. In 1859-1860 the property was purchased by William Champion Reynolds (1801-1869), a brother of Elijah.³ William C. Reynolds was a merchant and a lawyer who served in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives from 1836 to 1839 and as a judge of Luzerne County in 1841.

In the late nineteenth century ownership of the property passed from William C. Reynolds to his son Edward Sheldon Reynolds (1844-1895). An attorney, Edward Sheldon Reynolds was quite interested in the history of the Wyoming Valley and authored several articles on the subject. In his youth, Reynolds is reported to have scratched his name, 'school, and year - "Sheldon Reynolds Yale '67" - on a pane of an upstairs window.⁴ He is credited with organizing the Yale alumni society for Northeastern Pennsylvania in this house.⁵ The attorney and banker Dorrance Reynolds (1877-1959) acquired the property from the estate of his father in the early twentieth century.

Catlin Hall is a Georgian form house with decorative detailing that is characteristic of the Greek Revival style. The house consists mainly of a center hall flanked by two rooms along each side and a service wing attached to the southerly side of the back (east side). The present appearance of the building is the result of the renovations made for Dorrance Reynolds about 1906.⁶ Originally, the house appeared much as it does today except that the recessed porch was not enclosed. A circa 1868 photograph of the building shows how it appeared in the mid nineteenth century.

In the late nineteenth century, probably in the 1870s or 1880s, the house was "Victorianized." The roof overhang was extended and the cornice was either removed or covered. The recessed entrance porch was enclosed with large wooden double doors and the trim was painted a dark color. The present marble mantelpieces on the interior are vestiges of these alterations.⁷ The earlier wooden fence was replaced by a more fashionable iron type.

Early in the twentieth century the building was altered and several additions were made. The facade was returned to its original classical appearance and the roof overhang was shortened. The original front door was rehung.⁸ The projection with the French doors on the norhterly side of the first floor, the oriel on the southerly side, and the extension and the two story porch on the easterly side were

added at this time. Metal and glass doors replaced the wooden one at the street entrance. A brick fence about six feet in height was erected along the westerly and northerly boundaries of the property. This fence was lowered after the college acquired the property. On the interior the circa 1906 alterations included the removal of the partition between the two rooms north of the hall to create one large room. This room was used as the library by Dorrance Reynolds and was lined with bookcases. A new floor was laid in this room. The bookcases were removed by the Reynolds when the property was sold. The original floor is visible in some areas where the bookcases stood.

Catlin Hall is named in honor of George Catlin (1796-1872), the noted American artist who was born in Wilkes-Barre.

¹Luzerne County Deed Records, Book 1341, p. 313.

²Transcript of an informal talk given to the residents of Catlin Hall by Mrs. Dorrance Reynolds and Patricia Reynolds, May 14, 1958. The original ^{transcript} is now in the possession of Mrs. C. Welles Belin (Constance Reynolds), Waverly, Pennsylvania.

³Luzerne County Deed Records, Book 80, p. 29.

⁴Transcript of informal talk. In a letter ^{to the author} dated March 19, 1972 Patricia Reynolds wrote in reference to the window pane in question that it "is in the south west front bedroom, the right hand window (next to the bathroom), the top middle pane of the lower sash. It was still there in 1957, . . ." Apparently, the light in question is no longer in existence.

⁵Transcript of informal talk.

⁶Transcript of informal talk.

⁷Letter from Patricia Reynolds, March 19, 1972.

⁸Transcript of informal talk.

CATLIN HALL

The house was built by Elisha Reynolds in 1843, as you can see by the date on top of the rain leader, with the Reynolds 'R' under it. He built with care and thought, for stability and beauty. The bricks, brought from Phila. by canal were carefully selected for their color, a purplish tint so that in 1906, when Col. Reynolds made some additions, it was necessary to color the bricks that were used that they should blend with the old ones. The front door is the original and also the silver door knob now in use. The Reynolds home was purchased by the college in 1957 and renamed Catlin Hall after the noted and highly controversial painter of his time, George Catlin. Catlin was born in Wilkes Varre in 1796. In 1959, LIFE magazine published a series of color photos and articles of Catlin's paintings. Catlin Hall is considered to be one of the oldest buildings in this area.

Elisha Reynolds was a merchant of note and sold his home later to his brother, Wm. Champion Reynolds, a leader in business, political and civic affairs. Both his son, Sheldon and his grandson, Dorrance, were presidents of the Historical Society. William Champion needed a big house for he had eight children. Four generations of the Reynolds family lived there before the home was sold to Wilkes College.

Style: Traditional, simple, New England in brick rather than wood. Main front section with wing in rear. Separate stables at the back of the lot.

Construction: Native brick with imported Phila. brick facade, five windows on second floor, four on the first floor. Stone sills.

Later additions and remodeling: Marble in front hall, concrete pillars, fireplaces, hall, patio, and porch at left; (1906), Cellar: Probably excavated later for heating system; Partition between front and back parlors.

Details of interest: Original door with silver plated hardware; original mahogany handrail; door moldings showing Egyptian influence; lovely parquet floors in the library; first floor shutters and riser design are the same as at McClintock Hall; some of the original glass remains in the home.

Catlin was admitted to the Luzerne Bar Association in 1819 and following four years of practice, he left the area for Phila. where he established his career as a painter. He became world famous for his paintings and books of American Indian Tribes.

In the span of eight years, he visited 50 tribes and brought home a collection of more than 600 oil paintings, landscapes, Indian customs, their weapons, costumes and wigwams.

His paintings have been exhibited in London, the Louve in Paris, and the Smithsonian Institute.

"In his deaf, lonely age, after 30 years abroad," wrote his biographer, "he still signed himself- Georget Catlin of Wilkes-Barre."

Prior to 1970, Catlin Hall was placed on the Penna. Register of Historical Buildings.

After the 1972 flood, damages to Catlin Hall were estimated at about \$50,000.

Added: 1 March 1983

Georgetta Nelson: from information in the Wilkes College files



Ill. No. 18
Catlin Hall
92 South River Street
Spring, 1973
source: author
note: The height of the water
during the flood of 1972 is
clearly visible on the facade.



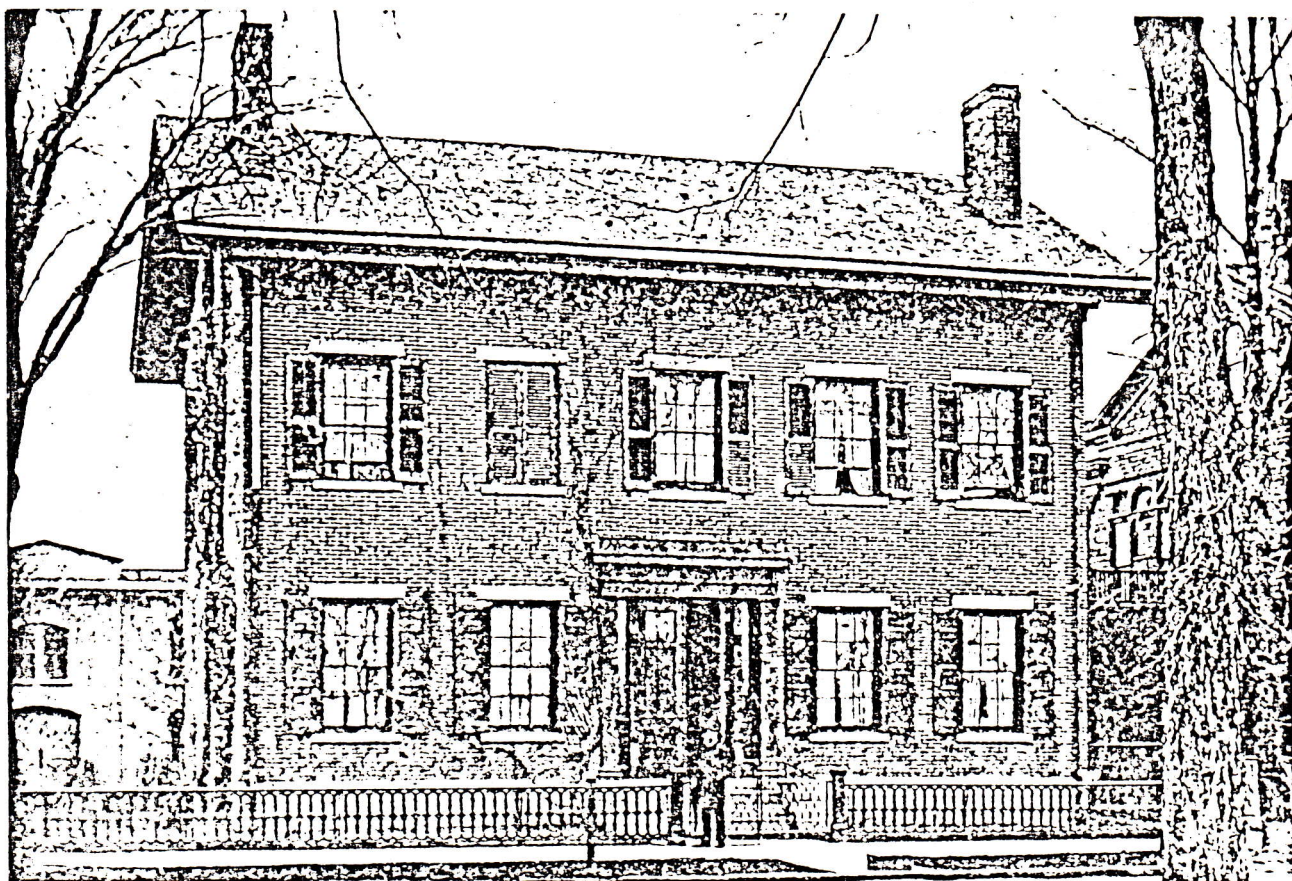
Ill. No. 19

Catlin Hall

circa 1868

source: Patricia Reynolds

note: The third person from the right is identified as Judge Edmund Taylor who resided in what is now Weiss Hall. The second person from the right is identified as being J. B. Woodward who resided in Susquehannock and Butler Halls.



Ill. No. 20
Catlin Hall
late nineteenth century
source: Patricia Reynolds