

Allendale home grows with American history

By CAROLE WHITE

ALLENDALE — Hidden on a hill behind the trees along Franklin Turnpike, the Pfister House is the culmination of five historical eras.

Since 1745, when the first section was built, the house has belonged to a Bergen County judge and Revolutionary War rebel, an Ackerman who entertained the namesake of Allendale, a sea captain, a foundry shipman who built the third section of the house, and a politically prominent couple who fraternized with notable Democrats, including Robert B. Meyner, governor of New Jersey 1954-1962.

The house, which reflects three architectural styles, belongs now to Jean Paul and Janet Pfister, who completely renovated it eight years ago.

It was originally built on the site of Judge John Fell's 220-acre estate, Petersfield, along what is now Franklin Turnpike. Most of the house was built in 1782.

Fell was a member of John Fell & Co., a New York merchant firm that had armed merchantmen in overseas commerce in the 1750's. He was appointed as a judge in the Court of Common Pleas in Bergen County in 1766.

During the Revolution, Fell was an "ardent supporter of the rebel cause." He was a member of the First Provincial Congress in Trenton in 1775 and chairman of the Provincial Council in 1776.

Twenty-five armed loyalists sought and captured Fell a year later. During his imprisonment, Fell experienced severe treatment. He was pardoned by the British, in 1778.

After his release, Fell was elected a New Jersey delegate to the Continental Congress, where he served until 1780.

Fell, husband of Susannah and father of

three children, Peter, Susannah and Elizabeth, died in 1798.

The house left the possession of the Fell family nearly 50 years later, when it was acquired by John G. Ackerman in 1846. Ackerman was host to railroad surveyor Joseph Warren Allen, for whom Allendale was named.

Stephen Cable, a former sea captain, bought the house in 1866. Cable also owned the celery farm across the street.

The house was acquired by a relative of the Cables, Joseph B. Taylor, in 1912. Taylor, who built the third section, was the owner of a ship-fitting foundry and father of seven children. He owned the house until 1951, when it was sold to Frederick and Rose

Pfister, Jean Paul's parents.

The Pfisters were deeply involved in the political whirlwind, entertaining many governmental figures. Robert B. Meyner's inaugural picture was taken by a fireplace in their home.

Jean Paul returned to rebuild the house in 1971. Among other things, ceilings had to be replaced and old brass pipes changed. "Some of the stuff they built in the old days isn't that terrific," he explained.

He estimated the barn to have been built before the Civil War, because there are wooden pegs in the beams. The Pfisters have held dances in the barn, he said.

Different styles of pine wood flooring in the rooms matches the use of the individual room, according to Pfister.

"This house has the ability to go from casual to formal," he said.

The Fell-Ackerman-Cable-Taylor-Pfister house has survived over the last 234 years. The different periods of time are evident, yet the house is as smooth a transition architecturally as the years that aged it. "It flows together well," Pfister said.



ALLENDALE'S PFISTER HOUSE