

**Batchelor's Hall (ca. 1728-1775)** was one of the most famous early buildings and gardens in the Philadelphia area. Seventeenth and eighteenth century deeds and surveys show that the Batchelor's Hall building stood east of Delaware Avenue and south of Shackamaxon Street, adjacent to the billboard (large shadow, which stands 115 feet south of Shackamaxon Street).



Our research has not yet revealed an image of the building, just deeds, surveys and fascinating descriptions of its famous visitors and religious orators. Ben Franklin was inspired to produce his most artistic work of printing, *Batchelor's Hall; A Poem*. After a brief history, the following items share the evidence for Batchelor's Hall on this site.

*Batchelor's Hall; A Poem*. George Webb & Ben Franklin, 1731.

*Writ of Partition of the Real Estate of William Masters, Esq. Deceased, 1775*.

*Plan of about three Acres of Land on which the Building call'd Batchelor Hall lately stood the lines through the same shew the manner in which it was divided amongst severall claimers by a Jury of the County of Philadelphia began in January 1775 and finished in June following in order of Confirmation. Survey by Jn. Lukens.*

*Indenture, Oct. 6, 1779, John Sobers to Paine Newman.*

*Stephen Girard vs Paine Newman, Deed to Manual Eyre. Feb. 2, 1791.*

*Batchelor's Hall Ground & John Dickinson's Ground. Reading Howell, 1804.*

*"...to open and continue Shackamaxon Street to the River Delaware" and Shackamaxon Street survey (1816).*

*Plan of Property late of John Dickinson Esq. Decd Philad. May 30, 1861.*

**Batchelor's Hall, a brief history.** Ken Milano, 2008.

According to Benjamin Franklin scholar, Prof. Leo Lemay, Batchelor's Hall was "formed for fellowship and pleasure before 1728." If this is true, then that would mean that Batchelor's Hall predates not only the learned societies of the American Philosophical Society and Library Company of Philadelphia, but also would be contemporary with Franklin's own "Junto Club," which is said to be founded in 1727.

Prof. Lemay states that members of Batchelor's Hall were Franklin's friend Robert Grace, as well as Griffin Owen, Lloyd Zachary, Isaac Norris, Jr., and Charles Norris. Philadelphia annalist John Fanning Watson adds Robert Charles, William Masters, John Sober, and P. Graeme to the list. As well, George Webb, who Franklin taught the art of printing, was a member. Some of these men were also in Franklin's "Junto Club," as well as early members of those two other learned societies in Philadelphia already previously mentioned.

It is to George Webb that we know a lot of what little there is know about Batchelor's Hall. Webb penned a poem that celebrated Batchelor's Hall and his mentor Benjamin Franklin printed it up in 1731. It was appropriately titled *Batchelor's-Hall: A Poem*.

Batchelor's Hall had its share of luminaries visit the place. The Hall would allow ministers from time to time to come and preach in Kensington and according to a contemporary journal kept by a follower of the Moravian Church, on February 4th, 1742, "Bro. Ludwig preached in Bachelor's Hall ...with marked effect." Brother Ludwig is Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) generally known as Count Zinzendorf, a German nobleman. He was the leader of the Moravian movement.

Later, in 1771, the Rev. John Murray, a Universalist minister, preached at Batchelor's Hall. Murray had been shut out from all the pulpits in Philadelphia, but was welcomed by members of Bachelor's Hall. Who would have thought that Kensington at such an early age was a place for liberal minded men?

Another noted person who visited Bachelor's Hall was John Bartram (1699-1777), once called "the greatest natural botanist in the world." One source states, "the first botanic garden, for the cultivation of plants having medicinal properties, was established at Bachelor's Hall." It is quite possible that these plants were gathered from the local Native Americans and that even Bartram may have cared for this garden.

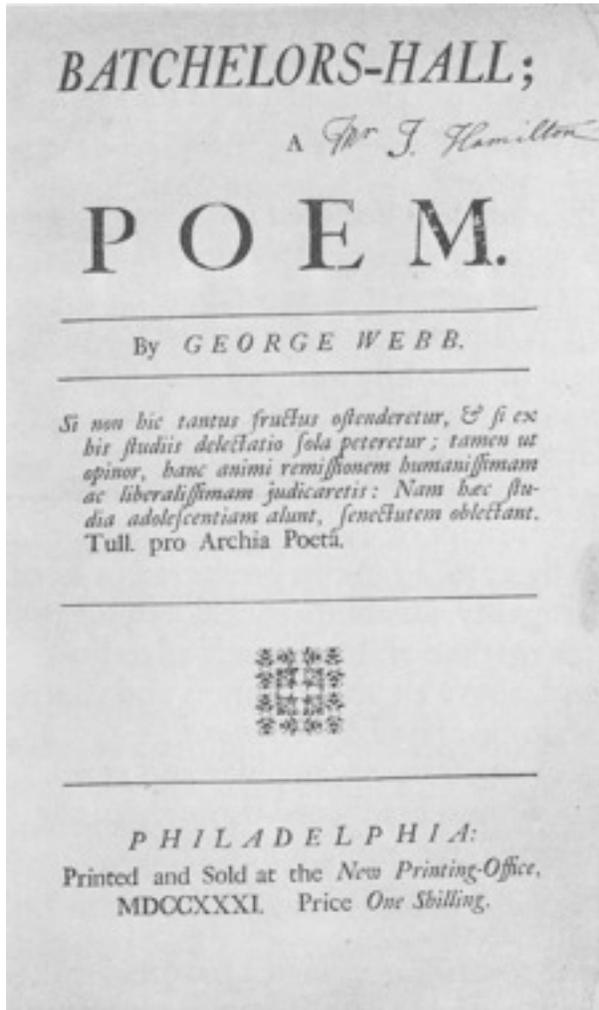
Batchelor's Hall is said to have been a square brick building. Since Paine Newman is known to have built his brick smith shop on top of the old foundation and his smith shop was 30 feet by 70 feet, then the Hall in all likelihood was a 30-foot square brick structure.

The Hall was said to be of considerable beauty and was used chiefly for balls and late suppers. Watson's Annals of Philadelphia, states that Batchelor's Hall, "had a fine open view to the scenery on the Delaware."

Christopher Marshall noted in his diary on April 4th, 1775, "This morning a fire begun at nine o'clock, at Bachelor's Hall, which soon consumed the building." Other sources state that all the wooden portions were destroyed, which would seem to indicate that it was a brick building as previously described, but perhaps had a wooden roof and interior.

Besides Webb's poem on the Hall in its early years, the burning of Bachelor's Hall inspired several poems, one by Hopkinson, another by Thomas Paine (author of Common Sense) titled, "Impromptu on Bachelor's Hall, at Philadelphia, being destroyed by Lightning, 1775."

**Batchelor's Hall; A Poem. George Webb & Ben Franklin, 1731.**



“In the Summer of 1731, the Philadelphia Friends Meeting was becoming concerned that a dangerous tendency seemed to be loose among some of their young people. A group of wayward young Friends already sported at horse races and fox hunts, wagering on both and drinking to excess, and now a potential den of vice to attract still more young men was abuilding on the shores of the Delaware River north of Gunner's Run [mistake, as deeds and surveys can demonstrate], just outside the city limits in the Northern Liberties (present-day Kensington). Worried that this would "prove to have a pernicious consequence," the Friends Meeting on July 31 appointed a committee to meet with the young Friends to dissuade them from continuing with the project. Of the ten or so involved, five were Quakers: Isaac and Charles Norris, Griffin Owen II, Thomas Masters, and Lloyd Zachary. But when confronted by the committee, the group replied that work was too far along on the square, one-room clubhouse to stop.

“The defense of the original Batchelors Hall did not begin or end with the conference of the young Quakers and the delegation from the Monthly Meeting in the summer of 1731. Earlier in the year George Webb had taken up his pen to defend in verse that "proud Dome on Delaware's stream" against public criticism. "E. M." (Elizabeth Magawley?) characterized Webb's general talent as "like Bantoft's fam'd

for the best Hack" (*American Weekly Mercury*, April 29, 1731). But "F. M." relented a little concerning *Batchelors-Hall*, admitting that "through the Piece Poetick Genius shines."...

“Batchelor's Hall is worthy of notice not for its poetical merit but as a prime example of early American fine or special printing. Few Colonial printers displayed concern for the design of the object they were producing... Franklin faced these problems too, yet he consistently turned out a better product than his fellow printers... The overall effect of *Batchelor's Hall* is more than just a good piece of printing. It shows the hand of an artist... in the case of Batchelor's Hall Franklin alone was responsible for the finished product. He had no previous edition to guide him, and it was his first piece of commissioned fine printing. He personally set the type, pulled the press, and folded the finished sheets. That his later work improved mainly in materials used and better type, proves how very good his first fine book really was. In fact, the Philadelphia tradition of fine printing was begun in 1731 with George Webb's *Batchelors-Hall*.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Essay by Gordon M. Marshall III in *Philadelphia, Three Centuries of American Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1976/1990), pp. 35-37.

**“Writ of Partition of the Real Estate of William Masters, Esq. Deceased, 1775.”**  
Collection: Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



William Masters' Estate was split amongst the sisters Mary Masters (who married William Penn's grandson Richard Penn in 1772) and Sarah Masters (who married Turner Camac in

The 22.6 acre SugarHouse site includes all the land on the river side of "Hall St." from the two "Wm. Masters" lot and "Wharf (south of "Maiden Street) through lots 23, 24, 25 & 26 to the "Bachelor's Hall Land." Shackamaxon Street was not run through the Bachelor's Hall Land until 1816.

The "Writ of Partition of the Real Estate of William Masters, Esq. Deceased, 1775" gives the following boundaries, confirmed by the map:

Lot No. 23 (Sarah Masters): situate on the north-easterly side of Maiden Street, and north-westerly side of Penn Street, containing in front on Penn Street aforesaid, two hundred feet; and on Maiden Street aforesaid, two hundred feet; bounded north-eastwardly by Richard and mary Penn, their allotment No. 24, north-westerly by Beach Street, south-westerly by Maiden Street, and south-easterly by Penn Street.

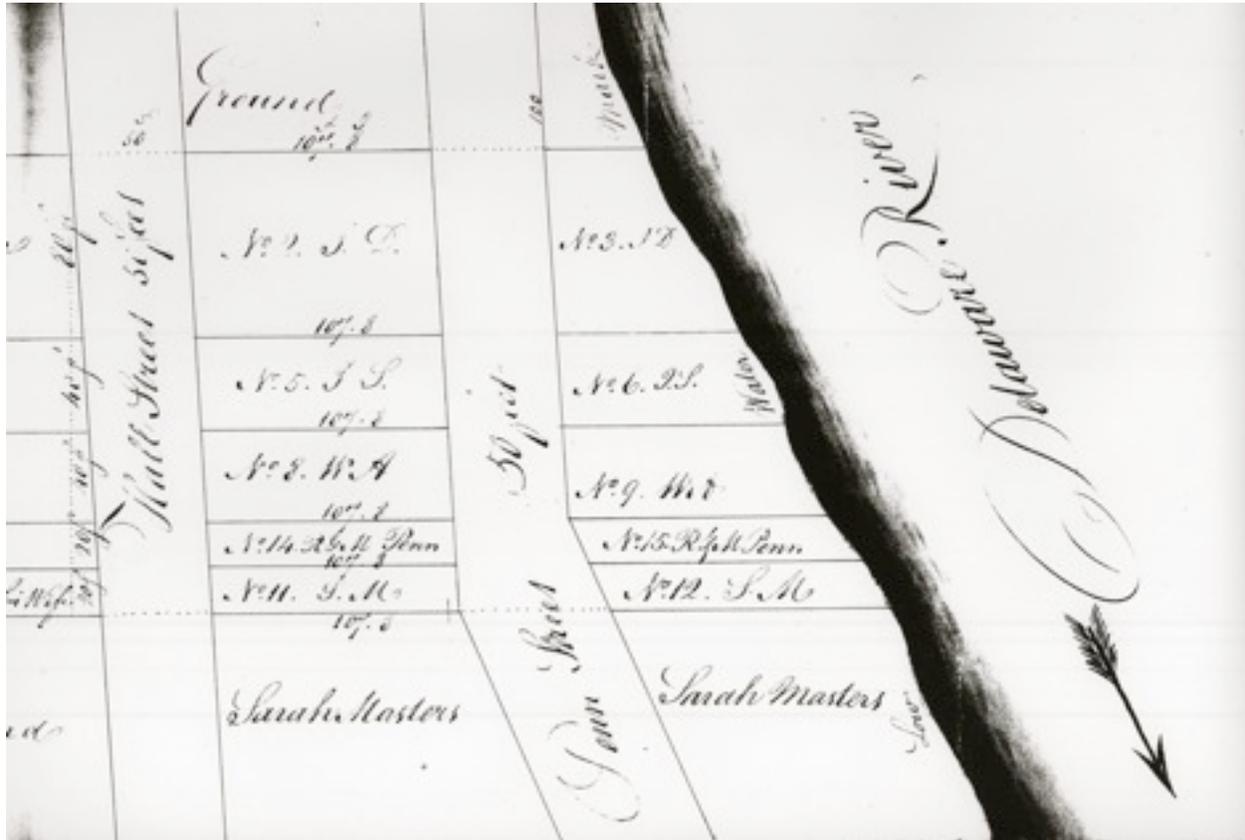
Lot No. 24 (R. M. Penn): situate on the west side of Penn Street; containing in front of said street, three hundred and twelve foot; on the Bachelor's Hall land one hundred and twelve foot; on Hall Street, two hundred and eighty-three foot; and on Beach Street, ninety-nine foot; and on Sarah Masters her allotment, No. 23, two hundred feet; bounded south-east by Penn Street, northeast by Bachelor's Hall land, northerly by Hall Street, northwest by Beach Street, and south-west by Sarah Masters her allotment. No. 23.

Lot No. 25 (Sarah Masters): situate on the north-east side of Maiden Street, and south-east of Penn Street; containing in breadth on Penn Street, two hundred foot, and extending the same breadth into the river Delaware; bounded north-east by Sarah Masters her allotment no. 26, north-west by Penn Street, south-west by Maiden Street, and south-east by the river Delaware.

Lot No. 26 (Sarah Masters): situate on the south-east side of Penn Street; containing in length on said street, two hundred and ninety-two foot, and in breadth into the river Delaware; bounded north-east by the Bachelor's Hall land, north-west by Penn Street, south-west by Sarah Masters her allotment, No. 25, and south-east by river Delaware.



**“Plan of about three Acres of Land on which the Building call'd Batchelor Hall lately stood the lines through the same shew the manner in which it was divided amongst severall claimers by a Jury of the County of Philadelphia began in January 1775 and finished in June following in order of Confirmation. Survey by Jn. Lukens.”** [detail].



Batchelor's Hall burned in 1775 and the Ground was subdivided as follows, from north to south, all lots ran from "Queen's Street" (now Richmond) to the Delaware River:

"No. 1, 2, 3: Four Equal Tenth parts allotted to John Dickinson," 80 foot width, adjacent to "John Dickinson's other Ground."

"No. 4, 5, 6: Two Equal Tenth parts allotted to John Sober," 40 foot width. The Batchelor's Hall building stood on John Sober's lot No. 5, 40 by 107.9 feet, between Hall and Penn Streets.

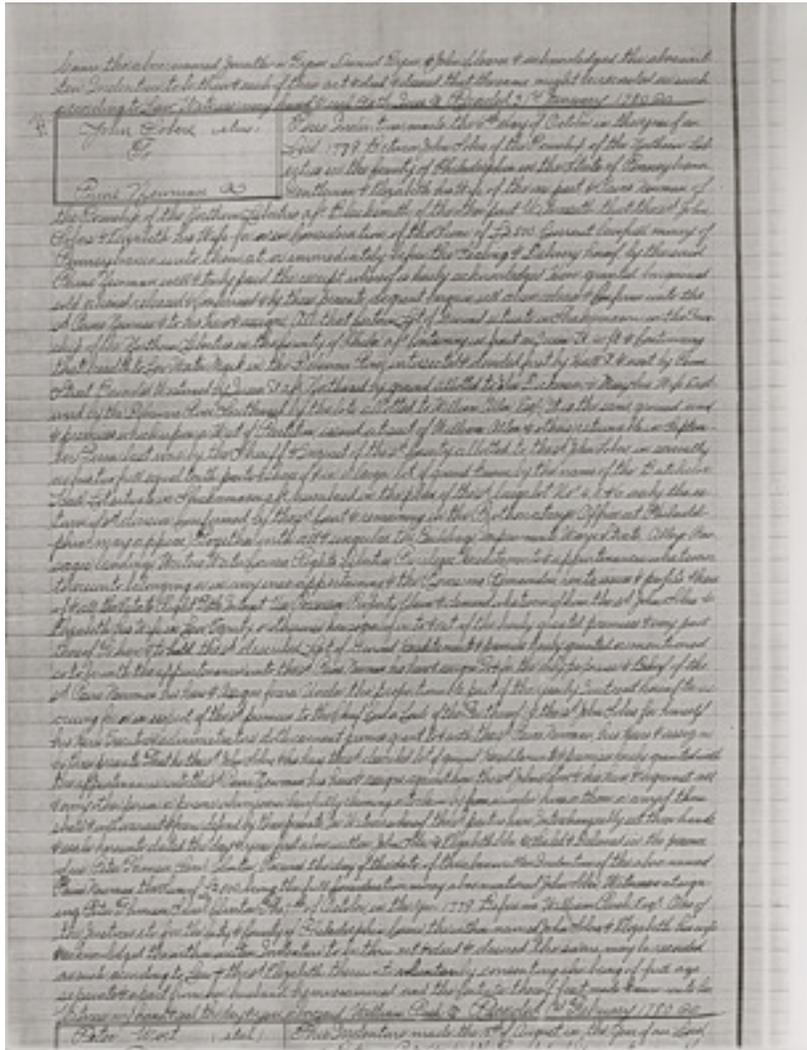
"No. 7, 8, 9: Two Equal Tenth parts allotted to William Allen," 40 foot width.

"No. 10, 11, 12: One Equal Tenth Part allotted to Sarah Masters," 20 foot width.

"No. 13, 14, 15: One Equal Tenth part allotted to Richard Penn and Mary his wife," 20 foot width, adjacent to "Richard and Mary Penn's other Ground" and "Sarah Masters"—the lands they inherited from William Masters in 1775.

When Penn Street was run through the Batchelor's Hall Ground, it turned to run parallel to Hall Street (maintaining a 107.9 feet width), unlike in the Masters lands to the south.

**“Indenture, Oct. 6, 1779, John Sobers to Paine Newman.”**



“This indenture made the 6th day of October in the year of our Lord 1779, Between John Sobers of the Township of the Northern Liberties in the County of Philadelphia in the State of Pennsylvania, Gentlemen & Elizabeth his Wife of the one part, to Paine Newman<sup>2</sup> of the Township of Northern Liberties a Blacksmith of the other part...

in Consideration of the Sum of £2,500...

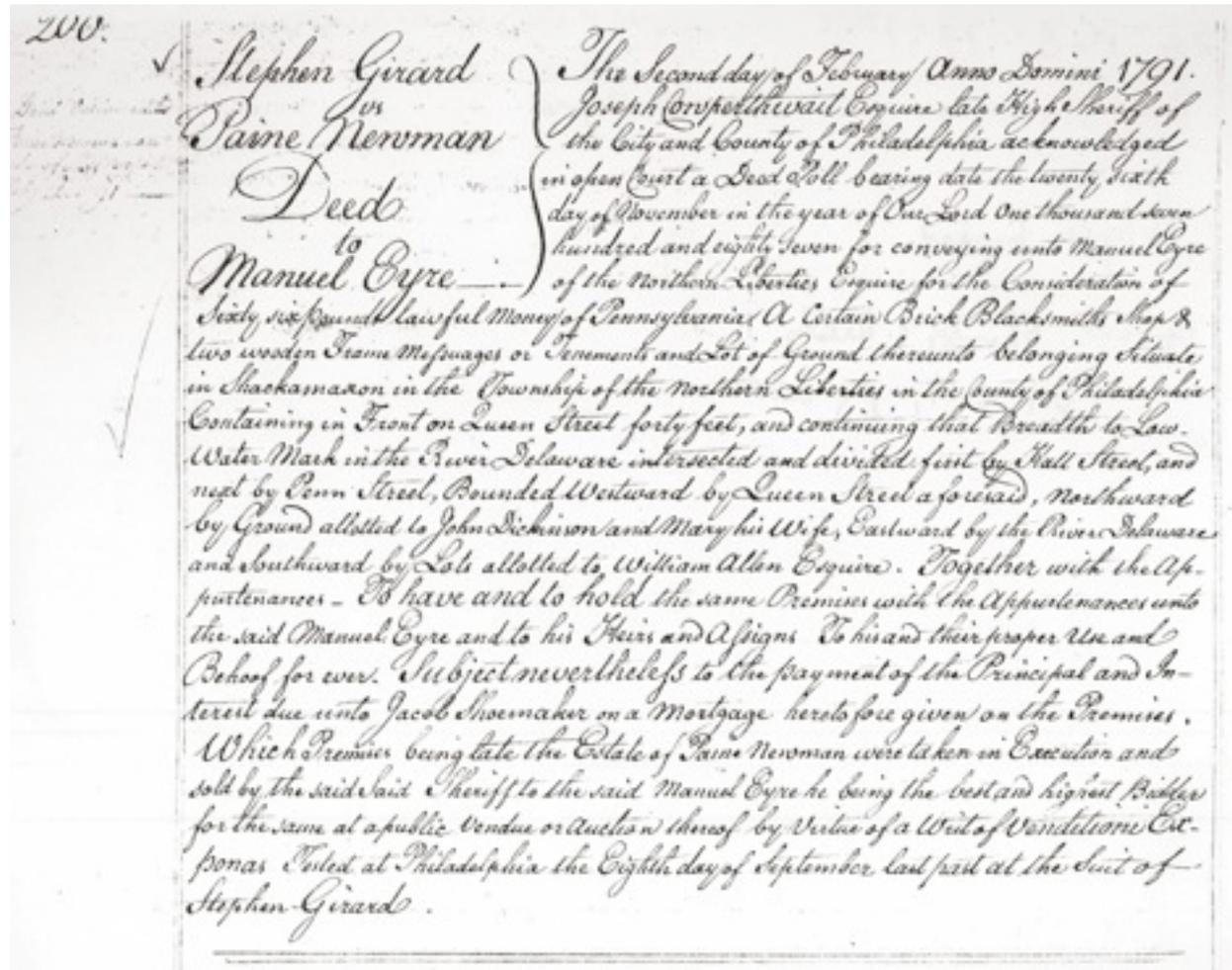
All that Certain Lot of Ground situate in Shakamaxon in the Township of the Northern Liberties in the County of Philadelphia as Containing in front on Queen St. 40 ft & Containing that breadth to Low Water Mark in the Delaware River intersected & divided first by Hall St. & next by Penn Street. Bounded Westward by Queen St & Northward by ground allotted to John Dickinson & Mary his Wife, Eastward by the Delaware River, Southward by the lots allotted to William Allen, Esq. (It is the same

ground & premises which upon a Writ of Partition issued at suit of William Allen & others retainable in September Term last was by the Sheriff & inquest of this County allotted to the said John Sober in severalty as his two full equal tenth parts share of an in a large lot & ground known by the name of the Batchelor's Hall Lot situate in Shackamaxon and numbered in the plan of the said large lot No. 4, 5 & 6...

Before William Rush, Esq. One of the Justices etc. for the City and County of Philadelphia Came the within named John Sobers & Elizabeth his wife acknowledged the within written Indenture to be there act & deed & desired the same may be recorded as such according to Law to the said Elizabeth therein to voluntarily consenting she being of full age separately a part from her husband by me examined and the Contents thereof first made known unto her. Witness hand & seal the day & year above said. William Rush. Recorded 1st February 1780.”

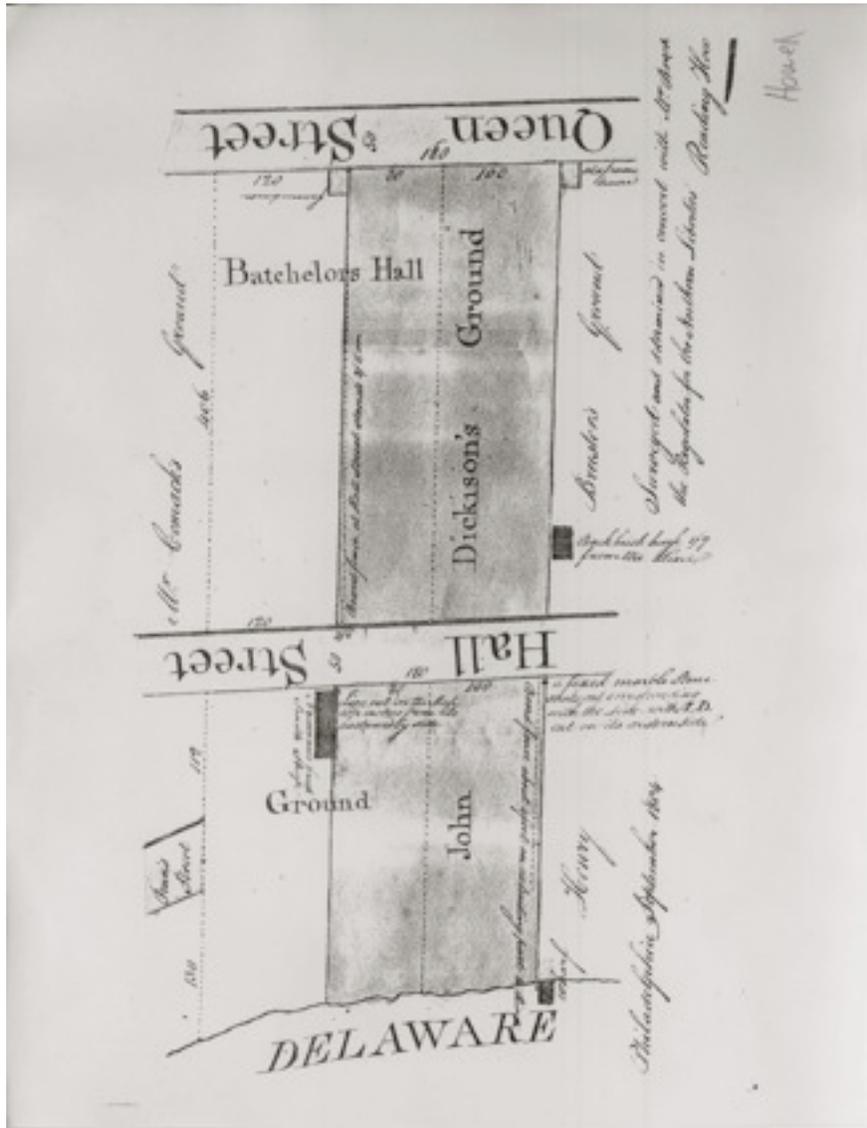
<sup>2</sup> “Paine” and “Payne” Newman are common spellings.

**“Stephen Girard vs Paine Newman, Deed to Manuel Eyre,” Feb. 2, 1791.**



The Second day of February Anno Domini 1791. Joseph Conperthwait Esquire late High Sherriff of the City and County of Philadelphia acknowledged in open Court a Deed Poll bearing date the twenty sixth day of November in the year of our Lord One Thousand seven hundred and eighty seven for conveying unto Mauel Eyre of the Northern Liberties Esquire for the Consideration of Sixty six pounds lawful Money of Pennsylvania A Certain Brick Blacksmiths Shop & two wooden frame messuages or Tenements and Lot of Ground thereunto belonging Situate in Shackamaxon in the Township of the Northern Liberties in the County of Philadelphia Containing in front on Queen Street forty feet, and continuing that Breadth to Low Water Mark in the River Delaware intersected and divided first by Hall Street, and next by Penn Street, Bounded westward by Queen Street aforesaid, Northward by Ground allotted to John Dickinson and Mary his Wife, Eastward by the River Delaware and Southward by the Lots allotted to William Allen Esquire. Together with the Appurtenances unto the said Manuel Eyre and to his Heirs and Assigns To his and their proper Use and Behoof for ever. Subject nevertheless to the payment of the Principal and Interest due unto Jacob Shoemaker o a Mortgage heretofore given on the Premise. Which Premises being late of the Estate of Paine Newman were taken in Execution and sold by the said Sherriff to the said Manuel Eyre he being the best and highest bider for the same at a public Vendue or Auction thereof by Virtue of a Writ of Venditioni Exponas Tested at Philadelphia the Eighth day of September last past at the Suit of Stephen Girard.”

**“Batchelor’s Hall Ground & John Dickinson’s Ground (Reading Howell, 1804).”**

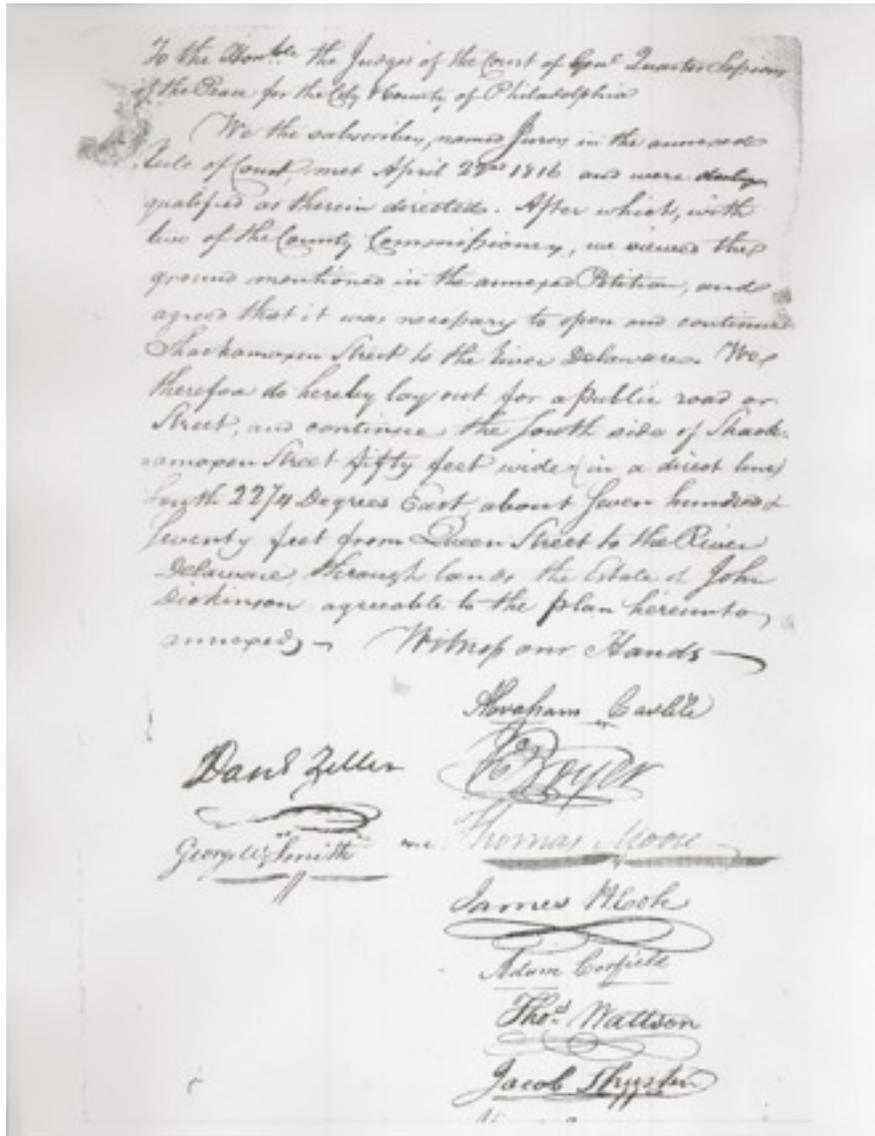


The Batchelor’s Hall Ground ran from Queen Street (now Richmond), across “Hall Street” (now Delaware Avenue) and to the low water mark on the “Delaware” River. In 1775, four-tenths (80 foot wide) of the Batchelor’s Hall Ground went to John Dickinson (the shaded area to the left of the dotted line), adjacent to his other lands (100 feet wide, to the right of the dotted line).

The dotted line to the left delineates “Mr. Comack’s Ground” or Turner Camac, the husband of Sarah Masters, who came to Philadelphia in 1803 to manage the estates of both Sarah and her sister Mary. Note 117 feet from the east side of Hall Street to the center of Penn Street with another 130 feet from the center of Penn Street to the Delaware River.

Batchelor’s Hall “square building of considerable beauty, with pilasters...,” (possibly 30 feet square) stood under the large dark rectangle, identified here as “Paine Newman’s Brick Smith Shop (approx. 30 by 70 feet). Neither Penn Street nor Shackamaxon Street ran through the Batchelor’s Hall Ground at this time.

**“...to open and continue Shackamaxon Street to the River Delaware.” (1816)**

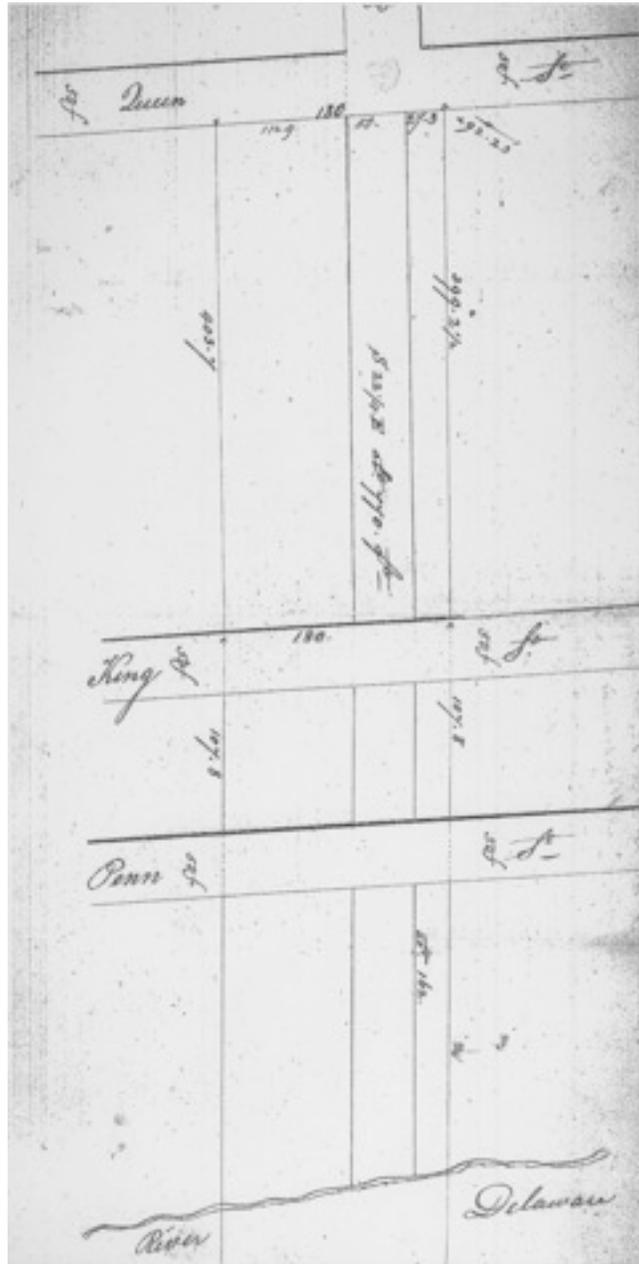


To the Honble the Judges of the Court of Genl Quarter Sessions of the Peace for the City & County of Philadelphia.

We the subscribers, named Jurors in the annexed Rule of Court, met April 22nd 1816 and were duly qualified as therein directed. After which, with two of the ounty Commissioners, we viewed the ground mentioned in the annexed Petition, and agreed that it was necessary to open and continue Shackamaxon Street to the River Delaware. We therefore do hereby lay out for a Public road or Street, and continue the Southe side of Shackamaxon Street fifty feet wide (in a direct line) South 22-1.4 Degrees East about seven hundred & seventy feet from Queen Street to the River Delaware through lands of the Estate of John Dickinson agreeable to the plan hereunto annexed.

Witness our Hands—Danl Ziller, George W. Smith, Abraham Carlile, Boyer [?], Thomas Moore, Jame H. Cole, Adam Corfield, Thos. Mattson, Jacob Shuster, .. [?]

**Shackamaxon Street survey (1816).**



This survey shows John Dickinson's original ground (100 feet) and four-tenths of the Batchelor's Hall Ground (80 feet) = 180 feet but there is an addition error:  $112.9 + 50 + 27.3 = 190.2$  The fifty foot width represents the land being taken for Shackamaxon Street. Shackamaxon Street was later widened to sixty feet by annexing land to the north (right).

Batchelor's Hall stood between "King St" (also Hall Street, now Delaware Avenue) and "Penn Street" below the southern (left) line of John Dickinson's ground, either 112.9 feet or 102.9 feet south of Shackamaxon Street.

Note the "Abt. 162" [feet] from Penn Street to the Delaware River.

