

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Thatcher house

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 255 Ridge Road not for publication

city or town Kingwood Township vicinity

state New Jersey code NJ County Hunterdon zip code _____

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Deputy SHPO Assistant Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:) _____	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
_____	_____	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Traditional Patterned Brickwork Buildings in NJ MPS

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC / single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC / single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Georgian

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Brick

roof Slate

other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8 Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria considerations

(mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1765

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Thatcher House
Name of Property

Hunterdon County, NJ
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 3.8 acres

Latitude / Longitude Coordinates

(Note to Preparers: NJ HPO will complete this portion of the Registration Form for all Preparers, based on the coordinates derived from the Site Map or District Map that HPO produces.)

1. Lat. 40.538887 Long. -75.023999
2. Lat. 40.539011 Long. -75.022929
3. Lat. 40.537927 Long. -75.022765
4. Lat. 40.537561 Long. -75.023774

(NJ HPO will place additional coordinates, if needed, on a continuation sheet for Section 10.)

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet for Section 10.)

Boundary Justification Statement

(Explain, on the section sheet following the Verbal Boundary Description, how the chosen boundaries meet the requirements for boundary selection and are the most appropriate boundaries for the nominated property or district.)

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title Becky D. Shoemaker and Robert W. Craig
organization _____ date June 2020
street & number 255 Ridge Road telephone (973) 462-3094
city or town Kingwood Township state NJ zip code 08825

Additional Documentation

(Submit the additional items with the completed form that are outlined in the "Standard Order of Presentation" that NJ HPO provides. Each page must contain the name of the nominated property or district, and the State and the county in which the property or district is located. Consult with NJ HPO if you have questions.)

Property Owner

(Either provide the name and address of the property owner here or provide the information separately to NJ HPO. Check with NJ HPO for other requirements. All owners' names and addresses must be provided, including public and non-profit owners, but their presence on the form, itself, is not required).

name Becky D. Shoemaker
street & number 255 Ridge Road telephone _____
city or town Kingwood Township state NJ zip code 08825

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. The proper completion of this form and the related requirements is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this from to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Direct questions regarding the proper completion of this form or questions about related matters to the Registration Section, New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, Mail code 501-04B, PO Box 420, Trenton, NJ 08625-0420.

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Description Narrative

Summary Paragraph

The Thatcher house is a two-story, three-bay, brick house, plus a full cellar, built in 1765, at 255 Ridge Road on a hillside location in Kingwood Township, Hunterdon County, about two miles northeast of Frenchtown Borough (Photo 1). It exhibits notable patterned brickwork, for which it is significant (see below and Section 8). The house stands embanked on a sloping site, with the terrain falling away to the south. The house is set back about 25 to 45 feet from the north side of Ridge Road, with its rear elevation toward the road. The house stands on a fieldstone foundation and has a cellar accessible at grade. The house faces northerly. It possesses a large pent roof between the first and second stories that fully surrounds the house, and smaller pent roofs in the gable ends at the level of the eaves. A small, north-side vestibule and kitchen addition was added in the 20th century. The house was re-shingled in slate in the early 20th century. Other minor alterations were also made in the 20th century. The property includes two outbuildings that, while they include old construction materials, they do not possess integrity from the period of the house's construction and are therefore non-contributing buildings.

Exterior Description

The Thatcher house displays a cellar of locally-obtained fieldstone set in lime mortar (Photo 1). Due to its hillside location, the house is embanked, leaving the cellar on the south side fully exposed. This is a situation that is quite common in Hunterdon County. A water table of beveled brick follows (Photo 2). Two stories of brickwork stand atop the cellar, laid nearly entirely in Flemish bond of reddish brick: plain Flemish bond in the north façade and south elevation and a mix of plain Flemish bond and Flemish checker in the east and west elevations, outside the diamond work (Photos 2, 5, 6, and 8, and see below). The house still retains both a large pent roof, 2'9" deep, between the first and second stories and two much smaller ones in the gable ends above the second story. (Without evidence to the contrary, this nomination assumes that the pent roofs are original to the house.) A stringcourse of plain brickwork surrounds the house at the top of the lower pent roof (see, for example, Photos 4, 5 and 10). This stringcourse visually marks the transition to the second story.

The house, including the pent roofs, are re-roofed in gray slate, installed in the 20th century, probably before 1930. The main roof is finished in the same gray slate as the pent roofs. Icebreakers are spread across the lower part of the gable. The roof is pierced by an interior end chimney at the east and west ends. Each chimney is rectangular, balanced on the peak of the roof, and is topped with a white, stainless steel cap (Photo 5). These chimneys were rebuilt above the roofline in the 20th century, in an apparently deliberate attempt to match the original. The age of the brick suggests that the chimneys may have been replaced and the slate installed at the same time. The roof exhibits a cornice that does not appear to be original (Photo 8). In the first and second stories of the gable end, small 4-light casement windows appear, which in the Thatcher house light up stairwells. The bottom eaves of the roofs are fitted with gutters, and leaders direct the runoff water to the ground.

North (façade) Elevation

The house faces north, away from Ridge Road. The north elevation features the first-story entrance, centrally located within a nearly symmetrical façade. The elevation features a large, 1-bay-wide, vestibule addition, with a Colonial Revival doorway framed with a pediment and inside a tabernacle supported on pilasters (Photo 5).

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The west end of this feature was extended one bay. This addition stands on a stone foundation designed to closely imitate the cellar masonry of the body of the house. It, too, is roofed in slate.

Other features of the north elevation include a 9-over-6 window in the first story, and two 6-over-6 windows in the second story, each flanked by Colonial Revival replacement shutters, probably of 20th century make. A 4-light casement sash occupies the center bay of the 2nd story, just above the peak of the vestibule roof. Since the Flemish bond masonry on either side of this window has not been disturbed, it appears to be an original window filling an original opening.

South (rear) elevation

The south, or rear, elevation exposes the cellar below the first story (Photo 6). This elevation is without a porch, so the only entrance accesses the cellar, in the east bay. This opening is capped by a simple relieving arch of one row of plain headers. The cellar wall is otherwise broken by one cellar window, with a similar relieving arch of plain headers. These two openings break the symmetry otherwise imposed by the first and second stories, each of which has three double-hung sash windows, 12-over-eight in the first story and 6-over-six in the second. These, also, are flanked by replacement shutters, though hinged and held in place by reproduction shutter dogs. (Photo 6)

East and West elevations

The east end elevation exhibits only the solid mass of the original kitchen's beehive oven, now painted white (Photo 3). What would ordinarily have been an uninterrupted wall is divided by the lower pent roof into upper and lower halves, which are differently decorated with patterned brickwork (see below). The only fenestration in this wall are two, 4-light casement sash windows: one each in the first and second stories to light the stairwells, and two in the gable to light the attic. This elevation also contains the date in brick of the house's construction (more about, below). The west elevation, as one faces it, is nearly identical to the east elevation, with four, 4-light casement windows identically placed (Photo 7). The only notable distinctions lie in the presence of a cellar window like that in the south elevation, and the different brickwork. In the west elevation, the 1st- and 2nd-story casement windows illuminate a dining room and a bedroom.

Twentieth-century changes

The house was owned during the early 20th century by an owner with the means to re-roof it in slate, and that owner also appears to have been responsible for replacement of the cornices with the present ones, which suggest an elaborateness more due either to the Federal style or the Colonial Revival than to the original construction. The addition of the vestibule and the care with which they were integrated into the existing house, combined with some interior changes perhaps undertaken at the same time, suggest that the house underwent a rehabilitation and partial restoration during the first half of the 20th century. Attribution of these changes to specific owners will need to await further documentary research.

Description of Patterned Brickwork

Patterned brickwork is limited to the gable ends of the house, with the single exception noted above. The patterned brick decorations of this house were laid in what seems to have been a deliberate escalation as the walls rose. The first pattern, which appears in the first story of the east elevation, is Flemish checker. Flemish checker is a simple diaper pattern in which, in each course of brickwork, plain stretchers alternate with vitrified

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headers, and the courses themselves alternate, so that a vitrified header is centered above the plain stretcher beneath it. Although New Jersey houses that display Flemish checker nearly always feature it in the façade, in the Thatcher house, it is relegated to the first story of the east elevation, and nowhere else. The upper stringcourses in the gable ends, however, are decorated in Flemish checker fashion, every other header vitrified. The small windows in the gable ends, nine in all, including one cellar window, are topped with relieving arches that also exhibit alternating vitrified headers and plain stretchers.

Diamond decorations are the most remarkable features of the Thatcher house brickwork. The gable end walls display four different diamond designs. The first story of the west elevation displays a matrix of diamonds, two diamonds high by ten diamonds wide (Photos 8 and 9). Each diamond is eleven courses high. At first glance, these diamonds seem well-executed, but the matrix is only two diamonds high instead of the usual three, and it is unusually wide. The decoration is well-centered vertically and nearly properly centered horizontally, but the rows of completed diamonds are left open on the south end.

Larger and more complex diamonds, 17 courses high, occupy the second story of both the east and west elevations, in each elevation as a single horizontal row. Like the smaller diamonds described above, these are “hollow,” meaning they are filled with plain brick. These larger diamonds have at least one characteristic of diamond diapers⁴ in that the rows stretch from nearly one side of the wall to the other. In the east elevation (Photos 3 and 4), the bricklayer attempted to complete eight diamonds in the row, but he failed to center the work horizontally, leaving too much blank space on the right (as one faces the wall) and failing to close the end diamond on the left. He failed to properly account for the size of the window in the spacing of the headers, so that the right end of the wall does not look like it belongs with the middle and left side. Here, too, he also failed to center the decoration vertically, so it looks cramped⁵ at the top and disconnected at the bottom. He also failed to center the decoration vertically, so that in both dimensions a coarse effect is the result (Photo 4). The bricklayer also failed to lay the diamonds symmetrically, giving a leftward tilt to the diamonds that became progressively worse on the left side (as one faces the wall). He further attempted to finish the decoration by placing a small, 3-course diamond in the center of the larger diamonds. The bricklayer added a second course of two vitrified headers, and then a third course of a single vitrified header to complete the three-course diamond, but in doing so, the combination was thrown off-center. Off-center in diamonds already tilting to the left (Photo 4).

The most complex design appears in the second story of the west elevation. Here the bricklayer produced “nested” diamonds: a smaller diamond inside a larger one, both hollow. Here the tilting was avoided, and the result is more skillful. He nested this row of six diamonds concentrically, spacing them with plain stretchers (Photo 8). The use of plain stretchers to space the diamonds also helped to strengthen the appearance of the entire design against the surrounding brickwork. This only left space, however, for small inner diamonds of five courses high, which, in turn, left only the space for a single, plain header in the inner, hollow diamonds.

Once again, however, the decoration was not centered, either horizontally or vertically, with the predictable consequence that the decoration seems unbalanced and the diamond on the right end does not close. Below the row of diamonds a series of inverted ‘V’s were made (the upper halves of the smaller, nested diamonds), as if the decoration were supposed to be laid as a diaper rather than as a matrix. The left end is muddled with the presence of some vitrified headers laid to an incomplete and unclear decorative intention.

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Patterned work in the Thatcher house continues upward through the gable ends, where it displays a decoration in which a diagonal row of vitrified headers parallels the line of the roof slope, just below the end raking boards in the east and west elevations. Paul Love, in his dissertation, called these 'pediment outlines' (see Section 8). It is a relatively uncommon pattern, but it is present in the Thatcher house. These pediment outlines are effectively completed by the stringcourses above the upper pent roofs, which are laid in Flemish checker. The east gable contains the date, '1765,' laid with vitrified headers. There is a slight tilt to the downstroke of the '1' and also to the '7,' and the '6' is laid simply with headers in their ordinary orientation. The '5' is somewhat more artfully contrived, but it breaks through the line of the pediment outline. Above the date, additional vitrified headers seem to form some sort of pattern the form of which is unclear.

In the west gable end, where one might have expected initials that corresponded to the names of the original owners, the bricklayer instead left another nested diamond pair, the outer one 17 courses high and the inner one five courses high, as below (Photo 10). He finished the upper-left quadrant of the diamond mostly with plain headers for some unknown reason. This time, he flanked the entire figure with what seems to have been intended as a third, even larger diamond that he did not have the room to fully execute (Photo 11). The number and placement of additional vitrified headers in this gable end display an intent to exhibit further decoration, but the purpose is unclear.

Interior Description

General description

The house does not possess a significant interior. Although it does retain an original mantel and some other original millwork, much of the interior has been remodeled over the years, in a Colonial Revival manner. Radiated, hot-water heating was added in the early 20th century (1920s?), judging from the surviving radiators. Down lighting has been added throughout the house, hiding the wiring behind plaster or sheetrock ceilings. Attribution of these and other changes to specific owners will need to await further documentary research.

The double-pile form¹ of the Thatcher house is not as pronounced as many examples of this form, and the principal space in both the cellar and the first story display a three-room plan, with a large space extending the full depth of the house on one side and two smaller rooms on the other side, the third, in the rear corner, entered from the second (see Cellar and First Floor plans). The second story, on the other hand, is a more conspicuously double-pile space, with a more complex arrangement of bedchambers on both sides of a corridor. The house has evidently always relied on the winder stair in the northeast corner of the plan, and has never had a central stair, nor a stairhall such as was popular in the era during which this house was constructed.

Cellar description

The one entrance to the cellar from outside, through the south wall, opens into a large, finished space (01A) on the east half of the floor, the full depth of the house. (For the sizes of rooms, please refer to the floor plans.) This space was originally the kitchen and features the largest hearth in the house, complete with an oven for baking (Photo 12; see beehive oven, mentioned above). A closet and winder stair occupy the northeast corner

¹ The Thatcher house is described in some sources as an "I-house," which is a mis-attribution because an I-house is by definition a single-pile house.

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of the room. The closet is closed with a board-and-batten door, held with replacement H-L hinges (probably of Colonial Revival make) and a thumb-latch. A wood bench for seating and a peg rail above have been added to the southeast corner of the room. A built-in bookcase has been added along the north wall. The floor is paved with flagstones (Photo 12). The hearth has a high firebox evidently arched at the top to support the somewhat narrower chimney above.

The house has a transverse, structural, bearing wall that defines the middle of the floor and closes the kitchen room (1A). A doorway provides access to the room in the southwest corner of the floor (1B). This room is used for utilitarian purposes, including heating the house. Its fixtures include a heating oil storage tank (Photo 13). The northwest corner of this room is defined by a stone cheek wall and corbelled stonework to support the corner chimney above it. From this cheek wall a cinder-block wall extends, added in the 20th century, to define the third room (1C), in the northwest corner of the floor. The space shown as 1D on the plan is formed by the stone foundation for the addition to the front of the kitchen (see First story description).

First story

The main entrance into the first floor is from the vestibule addition on the north side. This consists of the vestibule, itself (2A), a half-bathroom (2B) on the left as one enters and a coat closet to the right. The vestibule leads through the original front entrance into the living room (2C). This room is highlighted by a long, paneled wall, apparently original, the entire depth of the house, that surrounds the 1st-story hearth and encloses the winder stair in the northeast corner (Photo 15). The west side of this room is defined by a partition wall that provides access to the dining room (2D) in the southwest quadrant of the floor.

The dining room (2D) is highlighted by a corner cupboard in the southwest corner of the room (Photo 17). This cupboard is of Colonial Revival design, which is further enhanced by the chair rail and baseboard that help fix its lower half in place, and the cornice that connects its upper half to the ceiling. The cupboard's face exhibits vertical fluting in its stiles that is not consistent with 1760s corner cabinetry, and the molding profiles and dentil course in the cornice betray an elaboration more in keeping with Colonial Revival work than with genuine colonial-era work. A small casement window in the west wall of the room helps to illuminate the dining room, and the room's northwest corner is occupied by a corner fireplace that is part of the corner chimney (Photo 18).

The dining room connects with the modern kitchen (2E), a narrow space dominated by its counters and cabinets (Photo 14). A small addition (2F) was made to the front of the house, attached to the kitchen and the west side of the vestibule. This addition provides a primary, additional access to the kitchen (without going through the living room and dining room) through the modification of what was originally a window opening (Photo 14). A casement window was added to the west of this opening to help better illuminate the kitchen. The addition has its own entrance from the outside, accessed by a small stone porch (Photo 5).

Second story

The second story contains three bedrooms, a full bathroom, and a corridor that links them from the winder stair in the northeast corner of the floor (Second floor plan). Wide, probably original boards comprise the flooring through the entire second floor. The vocabulary in each bedroom includes chair rails and baseboards; whether they are original to the house has not been determined. The principal (or master) bedroom (3A) occupies the southeast corner of the second floor. It features closets along the east wall (Photo 22). The doors enclosing

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those closets are of six-panel design, but a closer look will be needed to determine their age. They hang on modern butt hinges. They are held shut with 19th-century or reproduction rim locks.

The second bedroom (3C) occupies the southwest quadrant of the floor, over the dining room (Photo 20). To it has been attached a small dressing room (3D), the door to which appears to the right in Photo 20. This room is also lit by both a south-facing window and a small casement window in the west wall. This room also has a fireplace in the northwest corner (Photo 21), like the dining room below it. The third bedroom (3B), which occupies the northwest corner of the floor, is the smallest of the three, and is lit only by one north-facing window (Photo 19). Photo 19 shows the radiator and the type of radiator cover used in the house, both of which were popular during the first third of the 20th century.

Attic (or garret)

The attic space under the roof is a single, undifferentiated space (Photo 23). It reveals that the structure of the roof is mounted on pairs of common rafters, evidently of oak. High collar ties bind most of the rafter pairs together, and knee braces of a very shallow slope both guard against lateral forces on the front and back walls and help support the attic floor. The attic floor has been replaced. Steel cables were added under the floor for further structural strengthening.

Setting and outbuildings

The few acres currently associated with the Thatcher house do not compare with the large farm that Jeremiah Thatcher owned. None of the outbuildings that were present during his lifetime survive. According to historic aerial photos, a large barn formerly stood to the northwest of the house, about 200 feet to its rear. This and other domestic and agricultural outbuildings that once stood on the property have been demolished, or otherwise have disappeared, and little is remembered about them.

Instead, two small outbuildings, composed of old (likely reused) timber and displaying a variety of framing techniques (Photo 26), stand on the nominated parcel. As buildings they probably date from the second half of the 19th century. The property is accessed by a paved driveway from Ridge Road that swings around the east side of a wagon house that stands about 100 feet to the east of the house (Photo 24). The driveway then swings north toward a small, 1-story barn or shed (Photo 29). The property is largely set out in lawn, with well-spaced deciduous trees, and it is flanked by a private airstrip to the north.

The immediate environs of the house have been improved with hardscape. The front entrance (Photo 5) is accessed by a set of steps in stone meant to match that of the house's foundation, and a stone sidewalk extends to the driveway. The east side of the house (Photos 2 and 3) has been improved with a patio of stone flags enclosed with shallow retaining walls. This feature extends to a stone retaining wall and sidewalk (Photos 1 and 3) that control access to the cellar entrance on the south side of the house.

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Significance Statement

Summary Paragraph

The Thatcher house, built in 1765, is a uniquely elaborate patterned brickwork house built in the heyday of traditional patterned brickwork in the State best known for that vernacular architecture.¹ As architecture, it possesses statewide significance under National Register Criterion C for its decorative brickwork designs. The builders of the house are currently unknown. The original owners of the house—who hired the builders—are likewise unknown. Jeremiah Thatcher, a local farmer, acquired the farm on which the house stands sometime before 1790, becoming the earliest owner-occupant known today. Whoever the original owners were, they likely had some familiarity with the brick houses of southern New Jersey, enough to give their builders some general guidance, but the house is a peculiar mix of Salem County and Burlington County influences, not repeated in any other New Jersey house. The unidentified bricklayers probably had limited experience producing such designs, because their work lacked the consistency achieved by the Salem County bricklayers, whose work the Thatcher house designs most closely resemble.

Historical Background

This house stands within the territory historically known as the “Lotting Purchase,” about 150,000 acres of land bought in 1703 from the Native American owners, which included much of the future Hunterdon County.² It has not yet been definitively determined through historical research the identity of the original owner of this house. The available title evidence has not been fully analyzed. The leading theory of the house’s early years, however, holds that Jeremiah Thatcher, a local farmer in Kingwood Township, owned the farm on which it stands before his death in 1790. In 1802, his executors sold this farm, then of 297 acres and called by the Thatchers as the “Homestead Farm,” to Nathaniel Rittenhouse, Sr.³ One local recollector in the 1890s, however, went further. Writing as “Jay Bee,”⁴ he stated declaratively, “Jeremiah Thatcher erected the 3-story brick mansion now in possession of Samuel M. Rittenhouse [see below] about midway on the road from Frenchtown to the stone church. It has been in the Rittenhouse family for more than 100 years.”⁵

Rittenhouse and his wife reared their family in this house and continued to live there until his death in 1830. In November 1830 a sale advertisement was placed in the *Hunterdon Gazette*. The farm was described as having been reduced to 200 acres, a good proportion being “well-timbered.” “The improvements are a substantial, spacious Brick Dwelling-house, with a well of good water near the door; a good Barn and other necessary outhouses, and a large and thrifty orchard.”⁶ The notice was not successful, however, and the farm was not sold. Instead, Nathaniel’s son, Nathaniel Rittenhouse, Jr. inherited the farm and raised his family there.

¹ The comparative information regarding patterned brickwork in this narrative is drawn from the “Traditional Patterned Brickwork Buildings in New Jersey, Multiple Property Documentation Form” cited in the Section 9 bibliography, and from the New Jersey Patterned Brickwork database, a copy of which is held by the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, Trenton, NJ.

² For an explanation of the Lotting Purchase, see John Reading and the Creation of Hunterdon County,” Part 1, November 21, 2014. *Goodspeed Histories*, at <https://goodspeedhistories.com/john-reading-the-creation-of-hunterdon-county-part-1/>

³ Hunterdon County deeds, Book 8, p.370.

⁴ Doubtless an alias, probably for Capt. John Bellis.

⁵ “Recollections of Baptistown, by Jay Bee,” published in the *Hunterdon Independent* (Frenchtown, NJ weekly newspaper), 1893-97. collection of clippings at the Hunterdon County Historical Society, Flemington, NJ.

⁶ *Hunterdon Gazette*, November 17, 1830.

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The farm continued to descend generationally through the Rittenhouse family. Nathaniel, Jr.'s son Mahlon Rittenhouse acquired the house and 100 acres of the farm in 1869, and sold it to his brother, Samuel M. Rittenhouse in 1874.⁷ Samuel M. continued to own the house and 100 acres until 1922, when the property was finally sold out of the family, to a Joseph Nagy.⁸ The acreage attached to the house was reduced to 57 acres by 1964, and then again reduced to 16 acres. A further sub-division of the property about 1990 reduced the acreage associated with the house to its present extent.

Architectural Significance, Criterion C (statewide)

The Thatcher house abounds in peculiarities. Among patterned brickwork houses, it is one of the geographic outliers. About 95 percent of New Jersey's patterned brickwork occurs in six southwestern counties: Mercer, Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Salem, and Cumberland. The Thatcher house, which stands well to the north in the central portion of Hunterdon County, is one of only four examples of patterned brickwork in Hunterdon County, and the only one for miles in any direction. It thus appears to have been built by a team of carpenters and masons who were not very familiar with such construction. The scenario that seems most likely is that this house was built to be the country seat for a wealthy Philadelphia or South Jersey family. This conjecture, however, lies at odds with the above analysis that shows a local farmer as the earliest occupant of the house. One would not expect a mere local farmer to have been the client for this piece of vernacular architecture.

The house is a large, two-story dwelling of double-pile construction (ie. two rooms deep), three bays wide, of a size that would have made it expensive even as a timber-framed house. It stands embanked on a sloping site, enabling one entrance to be in the cellar, which one enters at grade. As a brick house it is peculiar for its siting, on a rising hill along Ridge Road, a few hundred feet in elevation above the Delaware River at the Hunterdon County town of Frenchtown, about two miles to the southwest. Frenchtown in the 1760s was a riverside hamlet that began with the delightful monicker "Sunbeam," quickly changed to "Alexandria," named for William Alexander, whose own brick mansion in Somerset County built just a few years before was famous within the colony. If brick had been produced at Alexandria, or even floated up or down the river to that location, it would nonetheless have needed to be carted uphill two miles to the jobsite, adding a large measure of additional cost to the house's construction.

The house is yet more unusual in that, with one minor exception (described in Section 7), neither its façade, nor its rear elevation, exhibit patterned brickwork. They are laid with plain brickwork only, generally in a plain Flemish bond. In fact, the care taken in the façade to avoid wasting vitrified headers in an elevation meant not to display them is somewhat striking. Further, the Thatcher house is nearly unique among New Jersey houses of its era because except for its decorative patterns, all four principal elevations are laid in Flemish bond.¹⁰ In most brick buildings of the 18th century, Flemish bond was a façade-only treatment. Patterned work in the Thatcher house is limited to the end walls of the house, which is true of very few houses of southern New

⁷ Hunterdon County deeds, Book 142, p.103, and Book 157, p.128.

⁸ Hunterdon County deeds, Book 346, p.136.

⁹ Still the name of the neighboring Alexandria Township.

¹⁰ The John Rogers house, built in 1751 in what is today West Windsor Township, Mercer County, was built with four walls of Flemish bond, including two of Flemish checker, but in the east wall the bricklayer(s) lapsed into common bond part way up the wall, unless that brickwork reflects a repair of an unknown date.

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Jersey. In Salem County, where the gable end walls were often the vehicle for displaying a house's most ambitious patterned work, and where patterned brickwork achieved its most extensive and finest expressions, the end wall was generally unobstructed, interrupted only by a stringcourse perhaps. In the Thatcher house, however, a broad pent roof occupies the space between the top of the first story windows and just below the second-story windows. This pent roof not only stretches across the south front of the house, it also wraps fully around the house. In that respect, it exceeds nearly every other 18th-century house in Burlington County that displays a pent roof. The size of the pent roof is very similar to that of Eglinton, in Upper Freehold Township, built in 1773 (demolished 1975). (The patterned brickwork houses of Mercer and Monmouth counties were generally very similar to those of Burlington County.) Surviving, original pent roofs are very uncommon in New Jersey; the Thatcher house still retains both the large one between the first and second stories and the much smaller ones in the gable ends above the second story.

The double-pile form of the Thatcher house is also more comparable to most Burlington County patterned brickwork houses, rather than those of Salem County, which are more commonly of single-pile. In one other feature, however, the Thatcher house more closely resembles Salem County houses. In the first and second stories of the gable end, small 4-light casement windows appear, which usually light up closets or stairwells. These are much more often found in Salem County than in Burlington County houses. The embanked site conditions of the Thatcher house, which are quite common in Hunterdon County, generally do not appear in either Salem or Burlington counties, so in that respect, also, the Thatcher house stands as an outlier.

Flemish checker,¹¹ the most common pattern in southern New Jersey, appears in more than half of all patterned brickwork houses, nearly always in the façade. In the Thatcher house, however, it is relegated to the first story of the east elevation, and nowhere else. This limitation is almost unduplicated in any other New Jersey house. Ordinarily, where Flemish checker is the prominent decorative device, it appears in only one elevation of the house. In somewhat more ambitious efforts, it is displayed in the façade and in one gable end. It seldom appears in one gable end only, and where it does it is usually laid through both the first and second stories.

In the brick houses of 18th-century New Jersey, a stringcourse is a common feature. It can take many forms, varying from a single course high, to four and even five courses. It is projected slightly in front of the wall plane, both to enhance its visual presence and to provide a cover for the upper end of the top-most shingles of pent roofs where, as here, they are present. They can be laid in plain, unglazed brick, or be part of a decorative scheme. In the Thatcher house, the stringcourse that surrounds the house at the top of the pent roof between the first and second stories is undecorated. The upper stringcourses in the gable ends, however, are decorated in Flemish bond fashion. Windows in the façade and rear elevation are surrounded by plain brickwork, but the small windows in the gable ends are topped with relieving arches that exhibit alternating vitrified headers and plain stretchers, their shapes modified enough to meet the requirements of the form of the arch.

Diamond decorations are the most remarkable features of the Thatcher house brickwork. In New Jersey houses that exhibit diamonds, only one type is usually displayed. The Thatcher house displays four different types. In

¹¹ For a description of Flemish checker, see Section 7. The patterned brickwork database indicates Flemish checker is present in more than half of the un-stuccoed and unpainted patterned brickwork houses.

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New Jersey, diamonds are an unusual and uncommon decoration, and where they are found, it is almost exclusively in Salem and Cumberland counties. The Thatcher house displays a matrix of diamonds, ten diamonds wide, in the first story of the west elevation. Each diamond is eleven courses high. At first glance, these diamonds seem well-executed, but the matrix is only two diamonds high instead of the usual three, and it is unusually wide. The decoration is well-centered vertically, but the rows of completed diamonds are left open on the alternate ends, leaving an awkward impression. The last time a similar diamond decoration appeared in a Salem County house was in the mid-1740s, nearly twenty years before, making the Thatcher house a chronological outlier as well as a geographic one.

A single horizontal row of larger diamonds, 17 courses high, occupy the second story of both the east and west elevations. The size of these diamonds is among the larger ones seen in New Jersey patterned brickwork.¹² Like the smaller diamonds described above, these are “hollow,” meaning they are filled with plain brick. These larger diamonds have at least one characteristic of diamond diapers¹³ in that they stretch from nearly one side of the wall to the other, but it’s there that the inexperience of the bricklayer is most conspicuously displayed. In the east elevation, he attempted to complete eight diamonds in the row, but he failed to center the work horizontally, leaving too much blank space on the right (as one faces the wall). Although he could have closed the end diamond on the left, he failed to do so, and he failed to properly account for the size of the window in the spacing of the headers, so that the right end of the wall does not look like it belongs with the middle and left side. Here, too, he also failed to center the decoration vertically, so it looks cramped¹⁴ at the top and disconnected at the bottom. He also failed to center the decoration vertically, so that in both dimensions a coarse effect is the result. Had this been a training exercise, he would have deserved an ‘A’ for conception, but a ‘C-minus’ for execution. He was not alone in making such mistakes, and his client’s reaction is unknown.

The bricklayer’s troubles didn’t stop there with this decoration. He failed to lay the diamonds symmetrically, giving a leftward tilt to the diamonds that became progressively worse on the left side. This issue is not seen in other New Jersey houses. He further attempted to finish the decoration by placing a small, 3-course diamond in the center of the larger diamonds. Had he limited himself to a single header in the center of the larger diamonds, which may have been the original idea, it would have been better. In some very early examples of patterned brickwork, including the remaining wall of John Mason’s 1695 house in Elsinboro Township, Salem County, and in a diamond in the wall of the Old Swede’s Church in Philadelphia, built 1698-1700, a single vitrified header was placed in the center of the diamond, to give it, one imagines, more of a three-dimensional illusion. This practice was generally given up early in the 18th century. It resurfaces, in a way, in the Thatcher house. When the bricklayer added a second course of two vitrified headers, and then a third course of a single vitrified header to complete the three-course diamond, the combination was, of course, thrown off-center. Off-center in diamonds already tilting to the left. The result is unique to this house, and further evidence that the bricklayers were responding to the wishes of a client rather than building what they knew.

¹² The largest ones are the 25-course-high diamonds of the John Maddox Denn house in Hancocks Bridge.

¹³ The difference between a “matrix” and a “diaper” is that the matrix was a defined geometric figure to be laid within a larger space, while a diaper was a small decorative scheme repeated enough times horizontally and vertically to fill up the space it occupied.

¹⁴ The top of this decoration may be obscured by the installation of the fascia of the roof cornice, which covers what looks like it might be the completion of the diamonds. This fascia may have been a later alteration.

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The grandest of the diamond decorations appears in the second story of the west elevation. Here, the bricklayer experimented with “nested” diamonds, a smaller diamond inside a larger one. Here, there was no problem with a tilt, and he handled this decoration with more care and skill than before. Yet here, too, he attempted more than he understood how to handle. He did nest this row of six diamonds concentrically, and they present a bold and generally geometric appearance. The use of plain stretchers to properly space the diamonds also helps to strengthen the appearance of the vitrified work, against the background. Once again, however, the decoration was not centered horizontally, with the predictable consequence that the decoration seems unbalanced and the diamond on the right end does not close.

Below the row of diamonds a series of inverted ‘V’s were made (the upper halves of the smaller, nested diamonds), as if the decoration were supposed to be laid as a diaper rather than as a matrix. The left end is muddled with the presence of some vitrified headers laid to an incomplete and unclear decorative intention. The best part of this overall decoration is the smaller, nested diamonds that rest concentrically within the larger ones. These smaller diamonds are five courses high, and their curious feature is a center filled with a single, plain header, as if reversing the design laid in the east elevation, which placed a vitrified header in the same location. This device, making the central element a plain header surrounded by vitrified headers, like a computer screen displaying inverse video, reverses the usual roles of “solid” and “void” in patterned brickwork.

Patterned work in the Thatcher house continues upward through the gable ends. As in a handful of patterned brickwork houses in Salem County, the Thatcher house displays a decoration in which a diagonal row of vitrified headers parallels the line of the roof slope, just below the end raking boards in the east and west elevations. Paul Love, in his dissertation, called these ‘pediment outlines.’¹⁵ It is a relatively uncommon pattern, one that Love reported in only six New Jersey houses (most of them in Salem County), but it is present in the Thatcher house (which was not included in Love’s dissertation). These are effectively completed by the stringcourses above the upper pent roofs, which are laid in Flemish checker. The east gable contains the date, ‘1765,’ laid with vitrified headers. There is a slight tilt to the downstroke of the ‘1’ and also to the ‘7,’ and the ‘6’ is also simply laid with headers in their ordinary orientation. The ‘5,’ however, which usually gave bricklayers more trouble than did any other digit, is somewhat more artfully contrived, but it breaks through the line of the pediment outline, as if the bricklayer miscalculated. The date is laid nearly identically to that of another house, the Taylor house, in Burlington County, also built in 1765, and also with a nearly identical ‘5’ that breaks the line of a pediment outline in an almost identical manner.¹⁶ Above the date, additional vitrified headers seem to form some sort of pattern the form of which is unclear.

In the west gable end, where one might have expected initials that corresponded to the names of the original owners, the bricklayer instead left another nested diamond pair, the outer one 17 courses high and the inner one five courses high. He finished the upper-left quadrant of the diamond mostly with plain headers for some unknown reason. This time, he flanked the entire figure with what seems to have been intended as a third, even

¹⁵ For his discussion of pediment outlines, go to Paul V. Love, “Patterned Brickwork in the American Colonies,” Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1950, p.6, and in Appendix A.

¹⁶ The coincidence is enough to prompt a conjecture that the two houses might have been built by the same group of unidentified bricklayers, even though many miles apart, especially since the pediment outline is a relatively uncommon decoration and because the form of the Thatcher house so resembles other houses of Burlington County.

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larger diamond that he did not have the room to fully execute. Although the number and placement of additional vitrified headers in this gable end display an intent to exhibit further decoration, it is unclear what he intended to convey.

Even with its lack of finesse, the Thatcher house comes closer than any other building in New Jersey to displaying the entire repertoire of traditional patterned brickwork. It displays a date but not initials; it lacks vertical zig-zags, but some of its incomplete efforts with diamonds evoke a horizontal zig-zag. The Thatcher house does not display filled diamonds (only hollow and nested ones), does not include coronet designs nor designs similar to the unique Dickinson and Bassett houses, or any of the more aggressive gable end designs seen in a few Maryland and Virginia patterned brickwork houses. The bricklayer decorated the relieving arches over nine, small gable-end windows, including two cellar windows,¹⁷ used decorated stringcourses. The gables include pediment outlines, and the bricklayer left behind evidence of an intent to provide some additional decoration of an unexplained character.

After the period of significance

The house does not possess a significant interior. Although it does retain an original mantel and some other original millwork, most of the interior has been remodeled over the years, in a tasteful but historically inaccurate manner. The house was owned during the early 20th century by an owner with the means to re-roof it in slate, and that owner also appears to have been responsible for replacement of the cornices with the present ones, which suggest an elaborateness more due to the Colonial Revival than to the original construction. The intent, however, was evidently restorative, when such interior features as the replacement H-L hinges and other restoration hardware are taken into consideration. Whether all of these changes can be attributed to the ownership of Samuel M. Rittenhouse, or perhaps a successor, will need to await further documentary research.

One further peculiarity associated with this house lies outside the realm of its architecture. The nominated property is designated as Block 1, Lot 1, of the Kingwood Township municipal tax map. In other words, when Kingwood's first tax map was constructed, the municipal engineer took this property as his starting point. Although a mere coincidence is possible, it seems more likely that he acted from either a special respect for this house or for its owner. New Jersey municipalities began to produce tax maps in the 1910s. As these maps began to be completed, they put in place, graphically, comparative information about tax ratables that had only been in list form before. In each of New Jersey's boroughs, cities, and townships there is, of arbitrary necessity, some property designated as its first lot in its first block. In Kingwood Township, that distinction belongs to its most architecturally unusual and finest early house.

¹⁷ Possibly a third cellar window was also so decorated.

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Geographic Data

Verbal Boundary Statement

The nominated property consists of the entirety of Block 1, Lot 1 of the Kingwood Township tax map, as is shown on the site map included with this nomination.

Boundary Justification Statement

The nominated property is the remaining land associated with the Thatcher house.

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Current Photographs

Photographer: Becky Shoemaker
Photographs taken: 2020

Number/Description

- 1 General perspective, south and east elevations
- 2 Close perspective of south and east elevations, emphasizing cellar masonry and brickwork
- 3 East elevation, including beehive oven and landscape features near the house
- 4 Detail of east elevation, emphasizing 2nd-story diamond string and the date in the gable
- 5 North elevation
- 6 South elevation
- 7 West elevation and lawn
- 8 Detail of west elevation, emphasizing 1st- and 2nd-story patterned brickwork
- 9 Close-up detail of west elevation, 1st-story diamond matrix
- 10 Close-up detail of west elevation, emphasizing the brickwork
- 11 Close-up detail of west elevation, emphasizing brickwork in the 2nd story and gable
- 12 Interior, view of west end of cellar, emphasizing kitchen hearth
- 13 Interior, east end of cellar, emphasizing the stone foundation for the corner chimney
- 14 Interior, 1st story, modern kitchen
- 15 1st story, east end paneled chimney wall
- 16 1st story, detail of east end chimney wall, showing corner stair and closet beside the chimney
- 17 1st story, corner cabinet, 20th century
- 18 1st story, corner chimney with Colonial-Revival millwork
- 19 1st story, northwest room
- 20 2nd story, interior corridor
- 21 2nd story, corner fireplace
- 22 2nd story, southeast bedroom
- 23 Attic framing
- 24 Outbuilding: 1.5-story wagon house, exterior
- 25 Wagon house shed
- 26 Wagon house, detail of interior framing
- 27 Wagon house, detail of interior framing
- 28 Wagon house, upper floor
- 29 1-story barn
- 30 1-story barn, interior



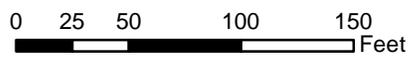
Thatcher House

New Jersey and National Registers Nomination
 Kingwood Township
 Essex County,
 New Jersey

Boundary and tax map

Legend

-  NJ & NR Nomination
-  Coordinates
-  Tax Parcels



Datum: NAD 1983 State Plane New Jersey

2.97 Acres

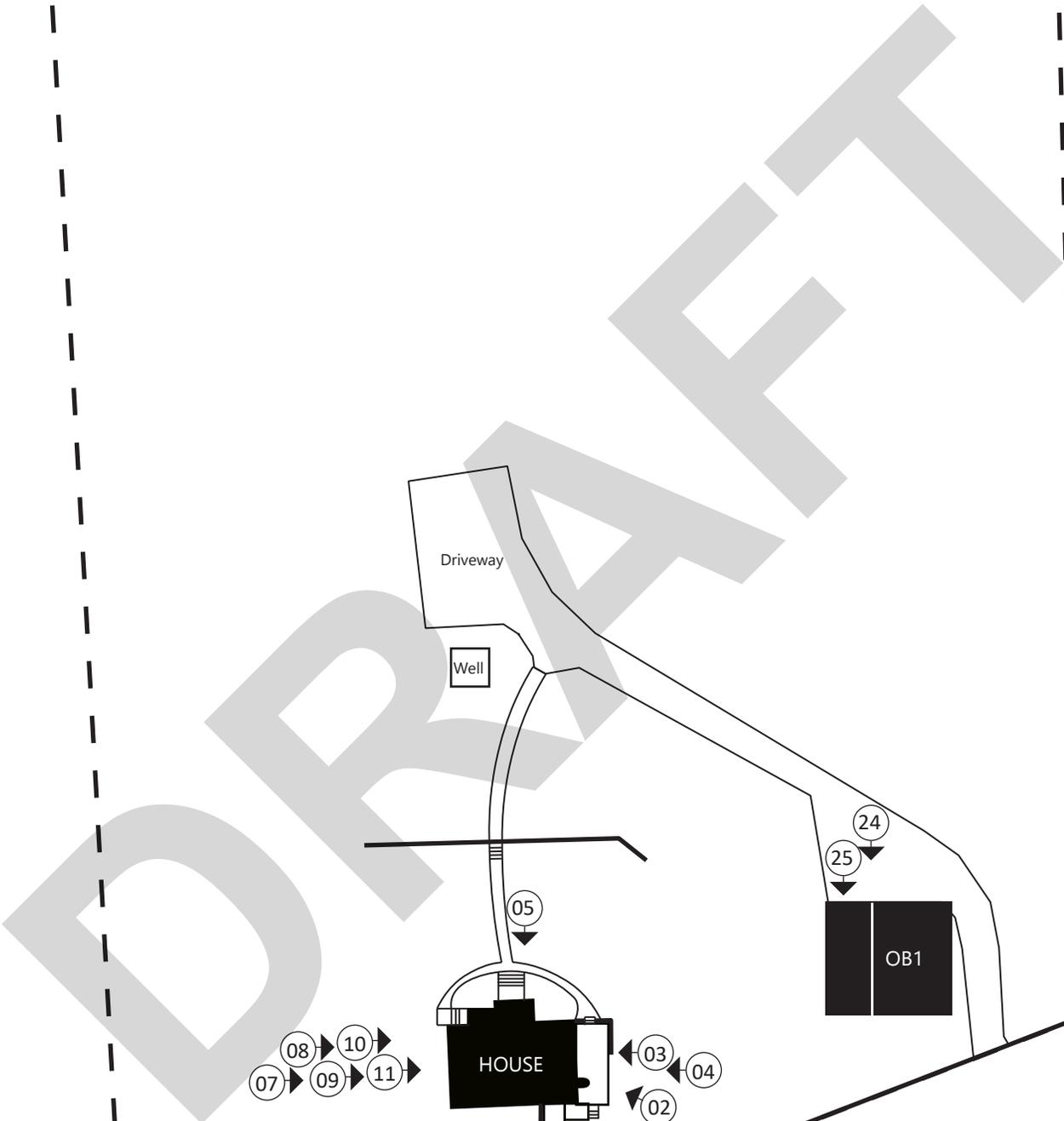


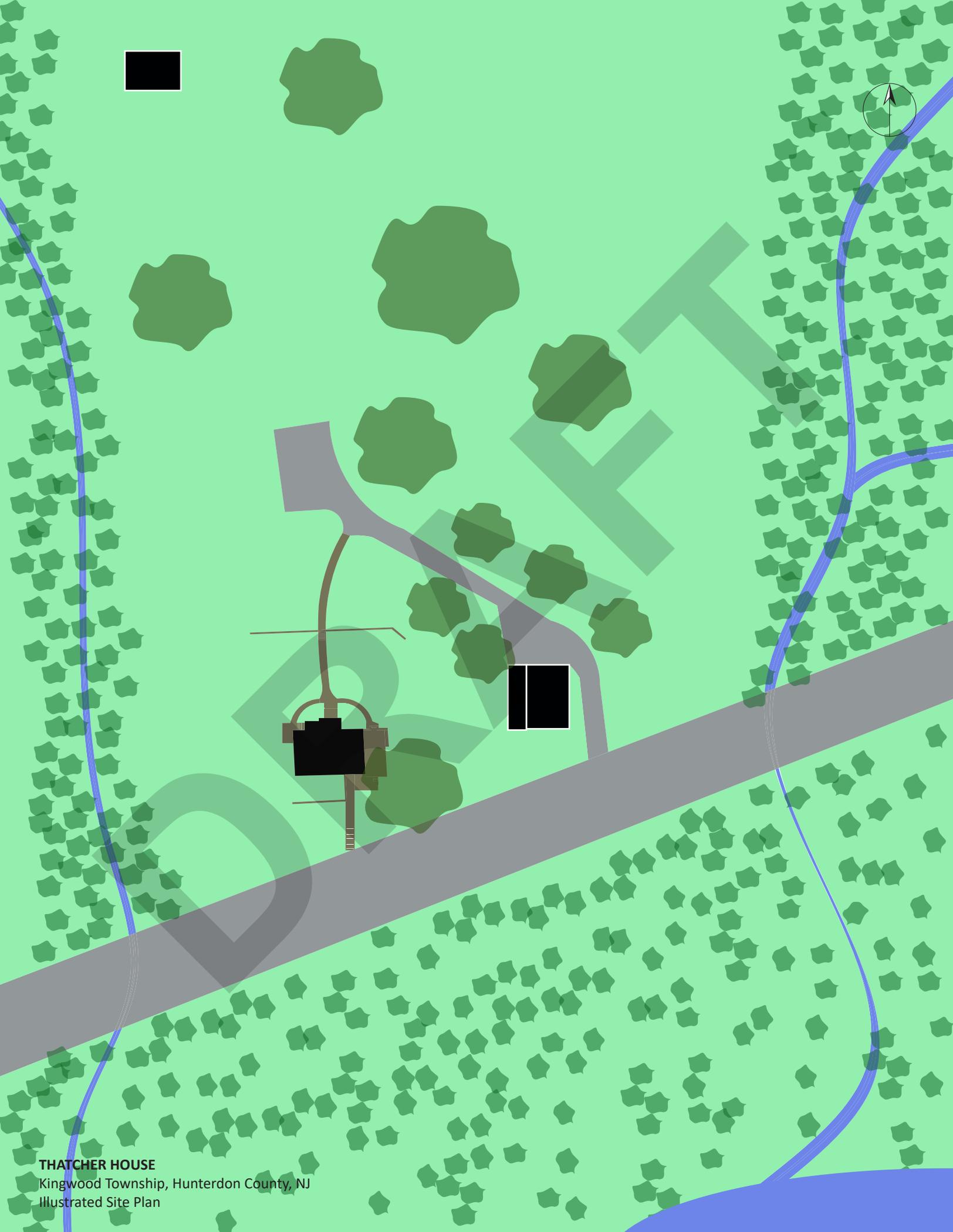
*NJDEP,
 Historic Preservation Office
 June 2020*

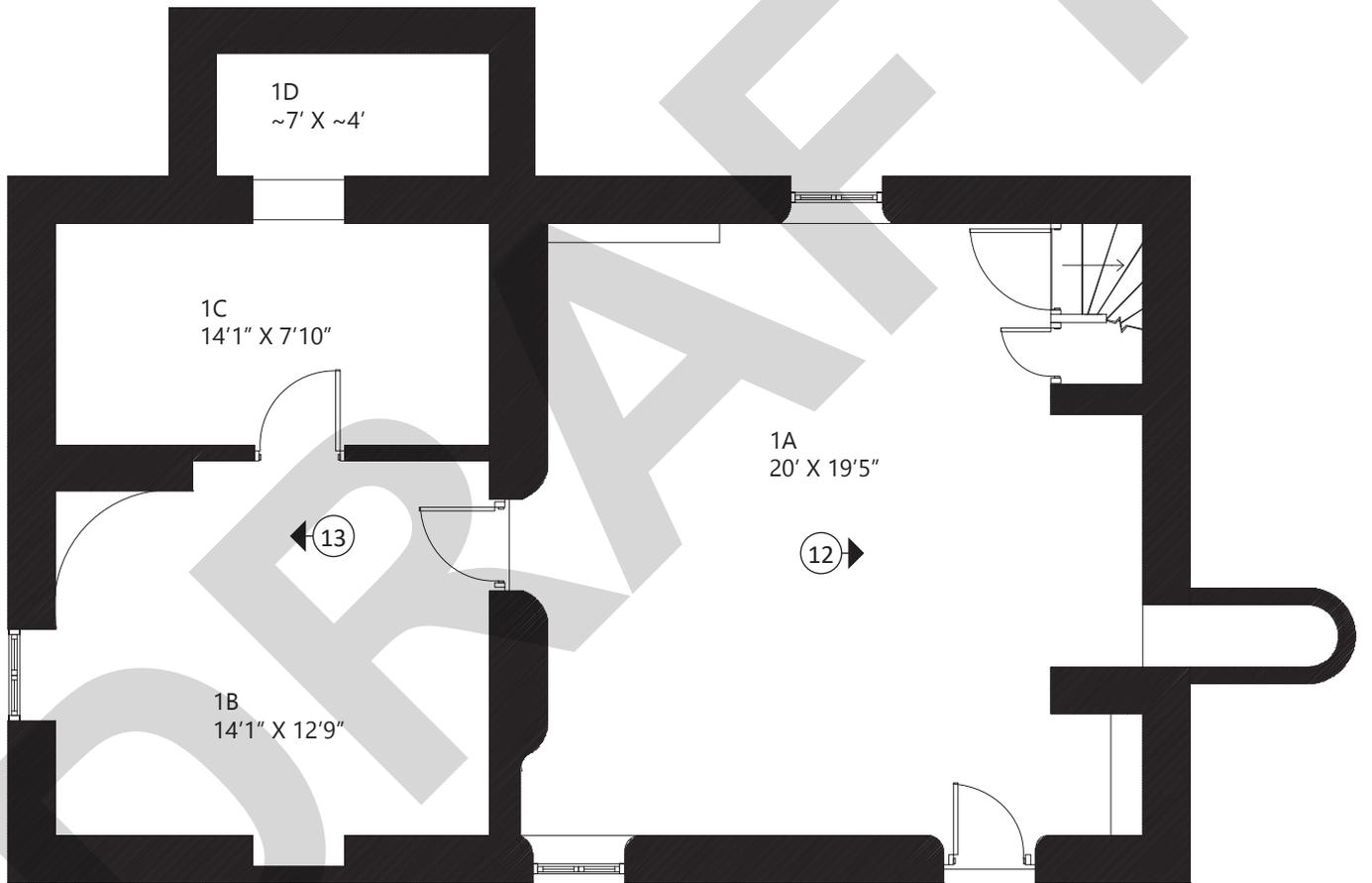
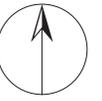


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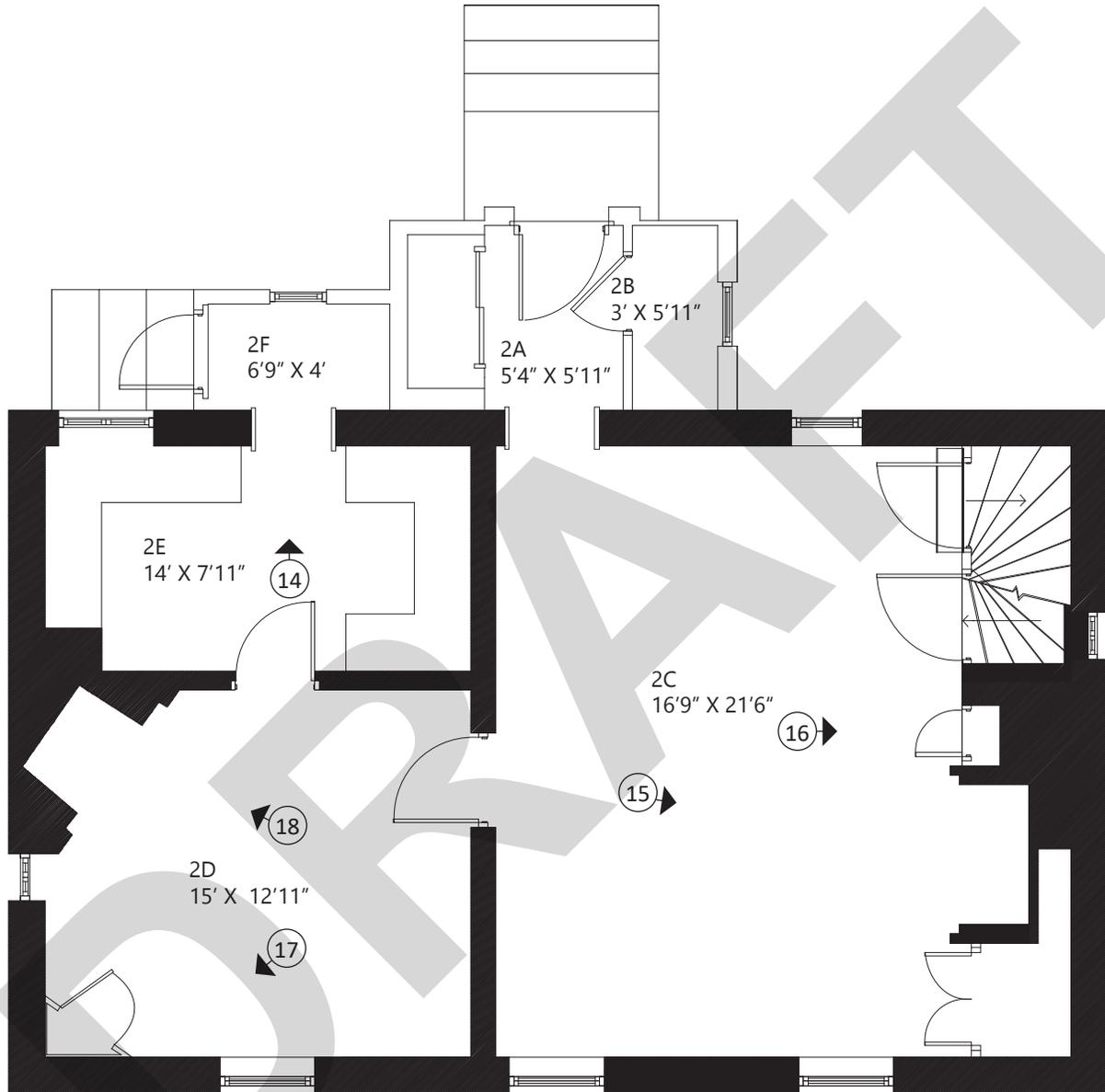




THATCHER HOUSE

Kingwood Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

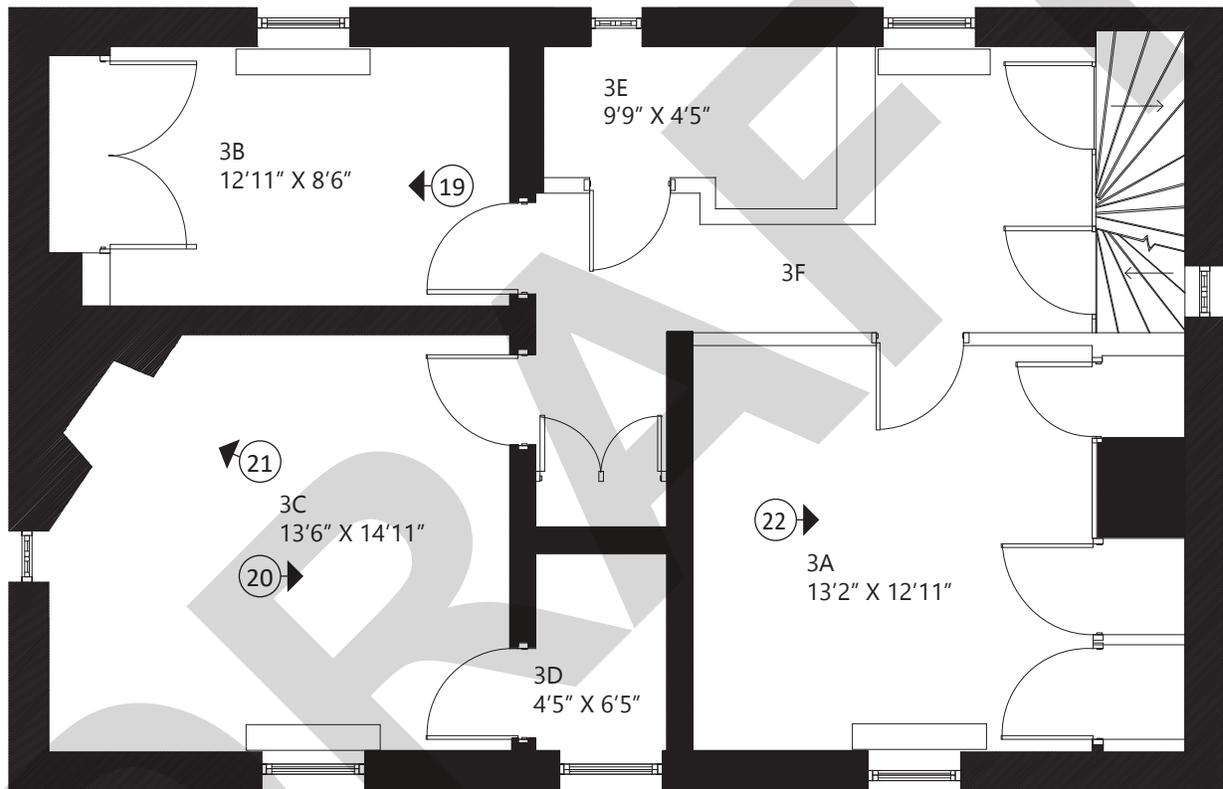
Floor Plan: Cellar



THATCHER HOUSE

Kingwood Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

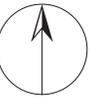
Floor Plan: First Floor



THATCHER HOUSE

Kingwood Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

Floor Plan: Second Floor



THATCHER HOUSE

Kingwood Township, Hunterdon County, NJ

Floor Plan: Attic

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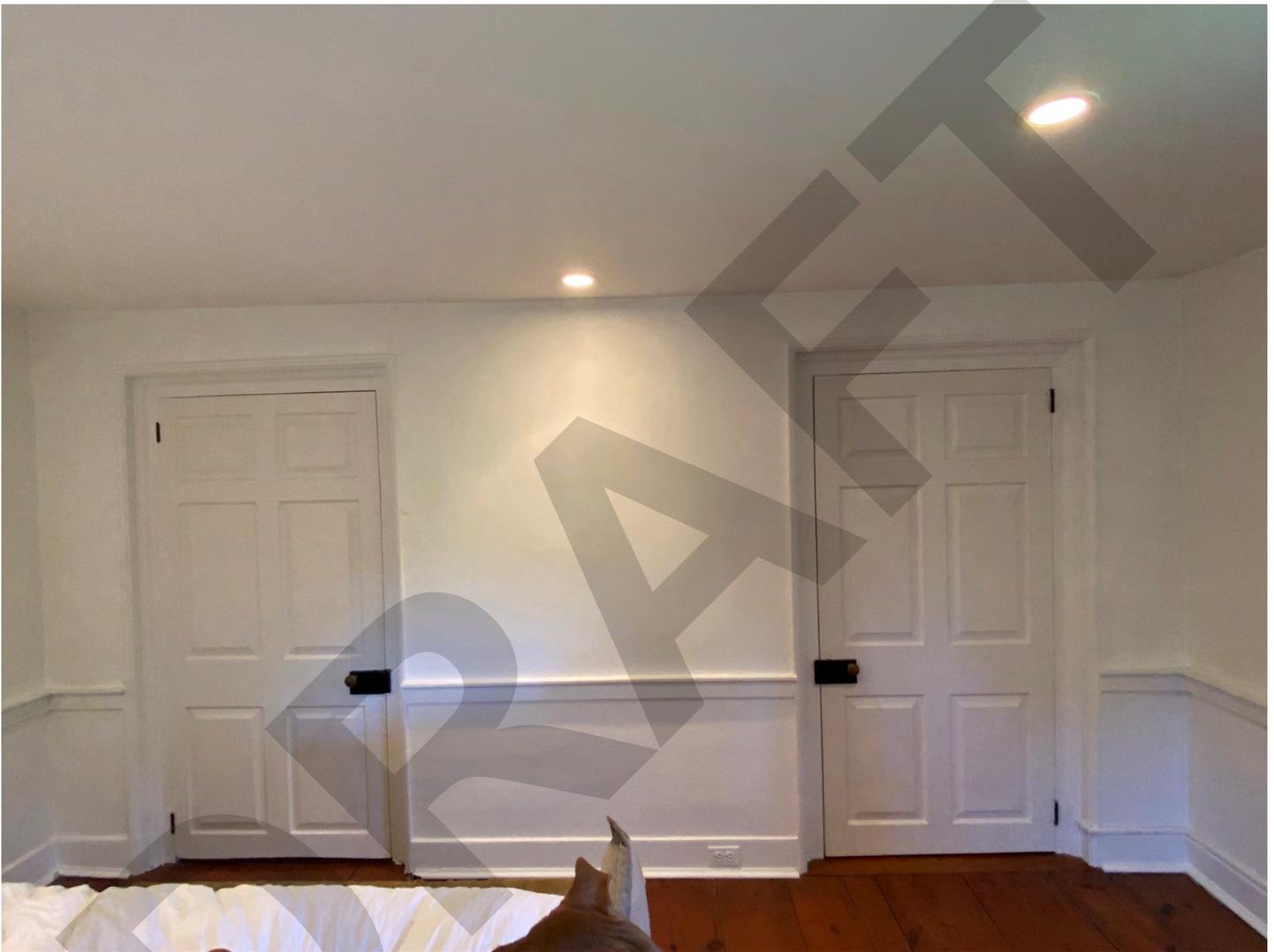


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