

# The Luke Miller House Newsletter

- Summer 2007 Edition -

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Restoration, Conservation, and Renovation Updates



20-Minute Documentary Video - Luke Miller: Forging History



Answers to Some Frequently Asked Questions



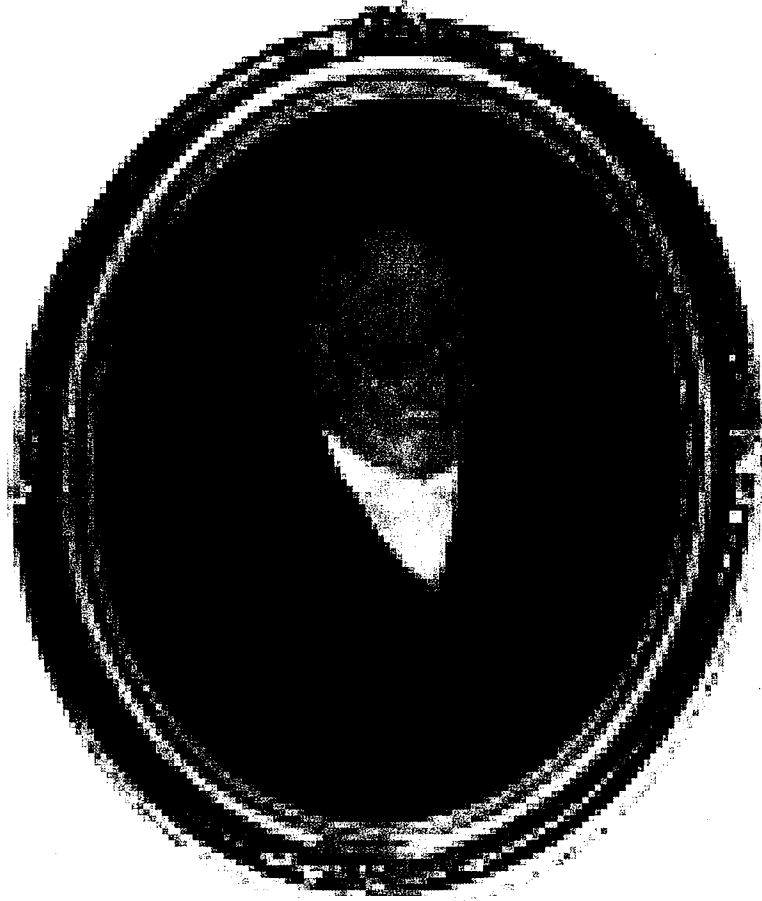
Architectural Drawings, Photo, and History of the Luke Miller House  
from the Civilian Conservation Corps'  
1936 Historic American Buildings Survey



Acknowledgements and Thanks



THE OLD MILLER HOUSE AS IT APPEARED IN 1891  
From the book "Bottle Hill And Madison" by William Parkhurst Tuttle, pg. 69



Artist Unknown

*Major Luke Miller, 1759-1851, of General Washington's Army, c. 1830s*  
Oil on canvas, 58 x 49 inches

This is an image of an original, oval-shaped portrait of Major Luke Miller in his later years. It is on display at The Museum of Early Trades & Crafts in Madison.

A rectangular-shaped copy of this portrait hangs in the dining room of the Luke Miller House. The copy, like the original, was done in oil on canvas. The copy was painted by Ken Olsen, who lives in a historic home in Madison's Bottle Hill Historic District. The copy is owned by the Madison Historical Society and is on permanent loan to the Luke Miller House along with several other artworks.

Cover Photo: Earliest known photo of the Luke Miller House (taken 1894)  
Reprinted from the book "Bottle Hill and Madison" by William Parkhurst Tuttle.

## **Extreme Makeover - 18<sup>th</sup> Century Meets 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The restoration, conservation, and renovation of historic Miller's Station began in January 2006, just after the pre-Revolutionary War homestead was purchased at auction from the Borough of Madison by a private individual. The new owner's ambitious 2-year restoration endeavor encompasses the entire 1.6 acre private/public site and may be completed as early as August 2007, nearly 4 months ahead of schedule.

**Open House:** An open house will be held this fall to celebrate the completion of work and will showcase the spectacular results for the public, free of charge. The homeowner will provide guided tours that highlight the painstaking efforts taken to restore and conserve the protected architectural features inside and outside the circa 1730 home while simultaneously "modernizing" around these elements using 18<sup>th</sup> century materials and Old World craftsmanship. The ingenious results are "historical" in appearance yet are a comfortable, elegant, modern blending of old and new. Recent visitors, who remember the house before the restoration work began, have described the "extreme makeover" results as "awesome," "beautiful," "gorgeous," "incredible," and "totally stunning."

### **Archeological Dig ♦ Forge Restoration ♦ Re-opening The Secret Tunnel**

These intriguing potential projects and others will take place in 2008 if the NJ Historical Commission awards additional grant money to preserve and interpret the Miller forge. The initial list of potential projects in 2008 includes: a high tech subterranean geological and artifacts scan around the forge, house, and 60-foot-long secret tunnel connecting the 2 buildings underground; an archeological dig for artifacts around Miller forge; the restoration of Miller forge into a working blacksmith shop for museum exhibits; and the reopening of the Miller forge entryway to the "secret tunnel"/Indian raid tunnel. Updates to be provided in the fall newsletter.

**Restoration Project Progress Reports:** Many people are curious about the work taking place inside, outside, and around the Luke Miller House. To keep the interested public informed (but without giving away all of the surprises before the open house this fall), progress reports are provided on the next 4 pages. These reports summarize all significant restoration, conservation, and renovation projects completed thus far. They also list the major projects that remain to be completed this summer in and around the Luke Miller House, the Miller forge, and the enchanting private and public grounds and gardens that comprise historic Miller's Station.

**Project Name****Percentage Complete****Landscaping****80%****Projects completed:**

- Removal of over 900 bags of leaves and five dump trucks full of sticks and branches from the 1.6 acre site during initial winter 2006 clean up
- Extensive weeding and mulching of sunken garden and embankments with generous help from Cheryl Munkel and many May Day volunteers
- Extensive pruning of trees and reshaping and trimming of hedges
- Removal of historically inappropriate shrubs and garden decorations
- Removal of historically inappropriate dog cage and critter hutch
- Removal of three dilapidated sections of fence from the north side yard
- Restoration and painting of shed, including replacement of rotted wood
- Addition of a loose stone and brick foundation around base of red shed
- Extensive re-seeding, fertilizing, and weed control in lawn areas
- Planting of historically appropriate trees, shrubs, flowers, and pumpkins
- Changing landscape lighting to 18<sup>th</sup> century iron farmhouse style fixtures
- Cleaning of pond; addition of aerator and 18<sup>th</sup> century spitter fountain
- Removal of clusters of very large stones from the driveway entrance
- Removal of over 250 rocks from the area between the sidewalk and fence
- Addition of over 250 rocks to the retaining wall behind the red shed
- Replacement of wood fence along Ridgedale with nearly identical copy
- Restoration of fence to right of driveway, as seen in 1894 photo of house
- Addition of new fencing to obscure central a/c unit and electric meter
- Mending of horse fencing around lower sunken garden area
- Addition of hand forged iron sign hangers and interpretive signage
- Addition of a handmade wooden box on a tree next to the sidewalk along Ridgedale to hold copies of The Luke Miller House Newsletter
- Addition of new wireless security devices around the 1.6 acre grounds

**Projects remaining:**

- Upgrades to lawn irrigation system, including addition of 2 new zones
- Whitewashing new fence in August once the wood is completely dry
- Planting 800 flowering periwinkles in front of the new fence that runs along Ridgedale, thanks to the generosity of the Madison Garden Club
- Power washing the slate patios, walkways, driveway, and parking areas
- Applying a protective coat of sealant to the driveway and parking areas
- Creating a tree-lined path between Summerhill Park and Ridgedale Ave

**Project Name**

**Percentage Complete**

**Blacksmith Forge**

**10%**

**Projects completed:**

- Cleaning cedar roof shingles; removal of leaves and debris from gutters
- Installation of gutter guards and new water drainage pipes
- Removal of historically inappropriate storm door from entryway
- Addition of 3, battery operated, flickering candles in windows
- Upgrade of security system's motion and fire/smoke detection sensors

**Potential projects in 2008, pending approval of grant money:**

- High tech, subterranean geological and artifacts scan around the forge and above the 60-foot-long "secret tunnel" connecting the 2 buildings
- Archeological dig for artifacts around Miller Forge and the privy area, in part, to help determine the true age of the forge building
- Restoration of Miller Forge into a working blacksmith shop for museum exhibits by the Museum of Early Trades and Crafts of Madison, NJ
- Reopening of the Miller forge entryway to the "secret tunnel"
- Search for artifacts and evidence to document past uses of the "secret tunnel," including: a cistern, an Indian raid escape tunnel, and/or as a secret passageway within a station on the Underground Railroad

**Garage**

**95%**

**Projects completed:**

- Cleaning cedar roof shingles; removal of leaves and debris from gutters
- Installation of gutter guards and removal of invasive ivy from exterior
- Restoration and repair of wooden window shutters and iron hardware
- Repainting of exterior and disposal of debris in outdoor storage areas
- Replacement of garage door springs and initial cleaning of interior
- Addition of 4 custom window treatments and a battery-operated candle
- Replacement of 20<sup>th</sup> c. lighting fixtures with 18<sup>th</sup> c. farmhouse fixtures

**Projects remaining:**

- Clean and repaint garage interior once house restoration is complete

**Project Name**

**Percentage Complete**

**House Exterior**

**95%**

**Projects completed:**

- Cleaning cedar roof shingles; removal of leaves and debris from gutters
- Installation of gutter guards and new water drainage pipes
- Restoration of all exterior doors and their hand forged iron hardware
- Restoration and repair of wooden window shutters and iron hardware
- Restoration of wooden bases of pillars supporting patio overhang
- Restoration of exterior wooden frames around windows in east wing
- Restoration of antique wooden storm window latches on ground level
- Re-leveling of slate slabs on the main patio and repair of grouting
- Removal of storage hutch from stone exterior and repair of trellises
- Removal of invasive ivy from the stone foundation walls
- Repair and repainting of exterior air vent cover for kitchen range
- Concealing dangling cables and electrical wires by adding wire clips
- Removal of historically inappropriate decorations and ornamental items
- Restoration of the iron and wood bench using pressure treated wood
- Replacement of 10' wide 1950s sliding door with double French sliders
- Addition of genuine fieldstone to cinderblock foundation of west wing
- Addition of loose antique bricks under the water pump stone slab
- Sanding, caulking, spackling, and priming of cedar siding shingles
- Repainting of entire exterior with historically appropriate colors
- Addition of handmade interpretive signage hung by old iron chains
- Restoration and painting of old iron water pump, bell, and gate latches
- Replacement of 20<sup>th</sup> c. lighting fixtures with 18<sup>th</sup> c. farmhouse fixtures
- Replacement of security lighting, upgrade of exterior security system sensors on house, and upgrade of fire/smoke detection sensors on house

**Projects remaining:**

- Additional sanding, caulking, and spackling of cedar siding shingles
- Additional cleaning of cedar roof shingles and application of oil coating
- Touch up paint on shutter, shingles, and iron hinges, as needed
- Washing and polishing of all exterior windows once all interior work has been completed

**Project Name**

**Percentage Complete**

**House Interior**

**85%**

**Projects completed:**

- Installation of distressed hardwood flooring in east and west wings
- Replacement of 1950s industrial tile with stone pebble tile in 4 rooms
- Removal of 1950s pine paneling and other inappropriate modern items
- Complete restoration of wainscoting and wood moldings on all 3 floors
- Addition of elaborate custom baseboard molding in east wing office
- Extensive restoration and conservation of exposed wood ceiling beams
- Cleaning, repair, and polishing of all wide plank wood and stone floors
- Cleaning/servicing of all 4 fireplace chimneys and 1905 cast iron stove
- Extensive plaster repairs and addition of new plaster, stone, and brick
- Two new kitchens featuring custom maple Shaker style cabinets, rough iron handles and drawer pulls, rough surface granite counters, stainless steel farmhouse and bar sinks, Jenn Air stainless steel appliances, red and white wine refrigerators, stainless frontload washer and dryer, new under-counter xenon lighting, and halogen lighting inside cabinets
- Four renovated full bathrooms with river stone floors in showers, tumbled travertine marble tile, hand forged iron sink stands with stone bowls, native wood vanities with vessel sinks, carved wood medicine cabinets, premium fixtures, and a wooden bathtub in the master bath
- Custom closet shelving and drawers on all floors, professionally installed
- Addition of over 30 reproduction 18<sup>th</sup> century style lighting fixtures, handmade by Amish craftspeople in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania
- Addition of 11 custom made wooden radiator covers throughout house
- Custom made interpretive artwork signage added throughout house
- Wine cellar renovated and restocked with hundreds of bottles
- Reinstallation of original "cat door" on 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, thanks to Nelson Dane
- Replacement of panes of cracked glass in windows with restoration glass
- Repainting every room, hallway, and closet, top to bottom, on all 3 levels
- Upgrade of security and fire/smoke/carbon monoxide detection system

**Projects remaining:**

- Additional repair of plaster using 18<sup>th</sup> century techniques and materials
- Additional painting of interior rooms on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> levels
- Installation of custom, seeded glass double French door in laundry room
- Reopening of the Luke Miller house entryway to the "secret tunnel"

## **Documentary Video - Luke Miller: Forging History**

Earlier this year, Madison's Museum of Early Trades and Crafts was awarded a \$10,000 grant by The History Channel's "Save Our History" program. The museum collaborated with Madison High School History Department chair, Mark DeBiasse (a "Save Our History" Teacher of the Year finalist), plus 26 of his students, the Madison Historical Society, and Cablevision to conduct research and produce a 20-minute documentary, video entitled "Luke Miller: Forging History." The documentary examines the history of the Miller family, the impact of their farm and forge on the local economy during the Revolution, and the socio-political climate of that time period. The documentary will be broadcast on Cablevision's throughout 2007 and will be used in history classes at Madison public schools. DVD copies may be available for viewing at the Museum of Early Trades and Crafts, 9 Main Street, and at the Madison Historical Society, located in the Chase Room at the Madison Public Library, 39 Keep Street.

### **Answers to Some Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q:** How old is the Luke Miller house and who built it?

**A:** Nobody knows for sure since deeds were not recorded at the time the house was built. However, the generally accepted belief is that it was built circa 1730, meaning the house is about 277 years old. The first Miller family member to live in the house was Josiah, who arrived from Long Island between 1750-59; Josiah's father, Andrew, had purchased the many acres of land that became known as "Miller's Station" from an Englishman, David Burnet, who bought it from the Indians. It is not known if the house existed at the time Andrew Miller bought the land or if his son or a previous property owner (i.e., David Burnet) built it. Andrew himself never lived in the house, and there's evidence of at least 2 owners of the property prior to the Miller family.

**Q:** Have you found any artifacts or other really old things in the house?

**A:** There are many original, approximately 277-year-old features in the house, which are artifacts in their own right. However, no loose items, such as coins or other objects, have been found. The Museum of Early Trades and Crafts, in conjunction with the Madison Historical Society and the Madison High School history department, may be conducting an archeological dig around the blacksmith forge and privy in 2008 that is expected to unearth artifacts related to blacksmithing and daily life.



## Answers to Some Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

**Q:** Why is the Luke Miller House historically important?

**A:** The Luke Miller House is the oldest (or one of the oldest) houses in Madison (formerly "Bottle Hill"), NJ. This pre-Revolutionary War homestead contains a remarkable number of original, early colonial architectural features that are typically lost over time. Some of these features include the wide plank wood floors, hand hewn ceiling beams, fireplaces and mantels, a Dutch oven, hand forged iron hinges and door latches, plaster and lath interior walls, and exposed stone and brick walls. Other historical features include the original dark red paint on a dining room door leading to the "Washington's Rock" room; this "paint" was made from a concoction of cranberries and sour cream and is one of the earliest known examples of paint-making in NJ. Also, the "cat door" at the top of the stairs leading from the 1<sup>st</sup> floor to the 2<sup>nd</sup> may be the earliest "pet friendly" door in the state. An area on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the house once served as the town jail and markings from the shackles can still be seen. The blacksmith forge on the north side of the property produced items for the Continental army, and Miller's Station may also be the only residence in the state with an Indian Raid Tunnel. In addition, the 2<sup>nd</sup> (known) owner of the house, Luke Miller, was a private in the Morris County militia, who rose to the rank of Major after fighting English, Hessians, and Indians throughout NJ and upstate NY, so past ownership by a Revolutionary War veteran adds importance.

**Q:** Is the Luke Miller House a "real" historic landmark?

**A:** Yes. Certain historic architectural elements within the interior and on the exterior of the Luke Miller House are protected by a historic preservation and conservation easement overseen by the New Jersey Historic Trust. Historical man-made and natural features on the remaining 1.6 acres surrounding the house, which were once part of Andrew Miller's vast land holdings known as "Miller's Station," are also protected under this easement. Miller's Station is a Morris County Heritage Commission landmark and bears a historic marker, placed on Ridgedale Ave in 1976. The Luke Miller House/Miller's Station is also part of the Bottle Hill Historic District, which is listed on the NJ State Register of Historic Places (district 4204, listed December 7, 2004) and the National Register of Historic Places (ID#05006614, listed June 16, 2005). The house was also featured in a series of watercolor paintings of historic places in NJ that was commissioned by the Carteret Savings Bank through Gray's Watercolors. A copy of the original painting, by Ernest Walden (aka Davis Gray) hangs in the dining room of the house.

## Answers to Some Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

**Q:** Is there really a secret tunnel between the house and the forge?

**A:** Yes. The tunnel and its entrances were documented in great detail during 1936 by architects and draftsmen conducting the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), which was one of President Roosevelt's New Deal programs run during the Great Depression by The US Department of the Interior's Civilian Conservation Corps. Thirteen drawings were made of the Miller house and its historical features, and most of these drawings show the location and exact size of the "secret tunnel" and its entrances in great detail (copies of all drawings are included in this newsletter). On the 13<sup>th</sup> drawing, which is an architectural survey of the blacksmith forge, the "secret tunnel" is specifically described as the "Indian Raid Tunnel." The "Indian Raid Tunnel" is also noted as "the interesting feature of the property" in the HABS bibliography of the house (copy included in this newsletter).

Note: Luke Miller fought local Iroquois Indians during the Battle at Minisink Ford on the Delaware River in July 1779, which began after the burning and destruction of colonial settlements there. Fifty militiamen lost their lives in the battle, which sent shockwaves of loss and grief throughout the frontier population. Having witnessed the destruction and brutality of local Indians first hand in combat against them, it is highly plausible that Luke Miller's relatively prosperous, landowning family had an Indian Raid Tunnel built here as a secret escape route in the event of an attack in what was then remote territory.

Some experts believe that the tunnel connecting the house and forge 60 feet underground may have also served as a cistern for fresh water, or as a secret hiding place within a station (i.e., Miller's Station) on the Underground Railroad during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Evidence of all these possibilities may be unearthed in 2008 should funding be awarded by the New Jersey Historical Commission for an archeological dig.

**Q:** Can I go into the tunnel or see the tunnel entrances?

**A:** No, it's impossible at this time, but perhaps in the near future you can. The entrances are sealed underground and the tunnel is rumored to be partially filled in by a previous homeowner whose children played in it and was afraid it might collapse on them. The entrance under the forge may be reopened during an archeological dig in 2008 and, after it is researched, may eventually be open on a limited basis for public view.

## Answers to Some Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

**Q:** Did George Washington really visit the Luke Miller house, and did he leave anything behind?

**A:** "Yes" to the first part of the question, and "sort of" to the second part. Washington is said to have visited the Miller house & forge many times between 1779-80, and on one occasion (May, 1780) was accompanied by the important colonial ally and supporter, the Marquis de Lafayette. General Washington's visits to the Miller house were likely due to the home's location; it was midway between Washington's headquarters in Morristown and the Chatham and Short Hills outposts, and it was also near General "Mad Anthony" Wayne's headquarters at the Sayre house just a short distance down Ridgedale Avenue. In addition, the Miller's had a blacksmith forge, farms, and a cider house, making their home a well supplied and hospitable rest stop in what was very rural territory.

Books, newspapers, and local lore document that Washington had his horse reshod at the Miller forge. He is said to have drawn his own water from the Miller's well (despite protests from those who were accompanying him), which "he drank without spilling a drop" on his coat. Washington is said to have socialized and discussed war strategy with other "distinguished men" at the Miller house. He is also said to have written 2 letters while visiting the home at a table situated on the northeast side of the house in what today is the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor living room.

It is said there was a "Washington's chair" in the house, which was the future president's seat of honor when he visited the Miller home. Strangely, none of the chairs listed among the contents of Luke Miller's estate are mentioned as such, and its present disposition is a mystery. To compensate for the "loss," 2 fine reproduction 18<sup>th</sup> century wooden Windsor armchairs were purchased in 2006. These chairs sit at opposite ends of the rustic 1<sup>st</sup> floor dining room and each bears a pewter name plaque; one reads "Washington's Chair" and the other "Lafayette's Chair" to memorialize the 2 famous guests. There is also a patriotic "V" for "victory" in the dining room's original fireplace mantle that is said to have been inlaid during the Revolutionary War. Last, but not least, there is a large boulder, commonly known as "Washington's Rock," exposed in one of the ground floor rooms. Washington is said to have sat upon this rock when he visited the house, and so perhaps this rock and the lost "Washington's Chair" are actually one and the same.

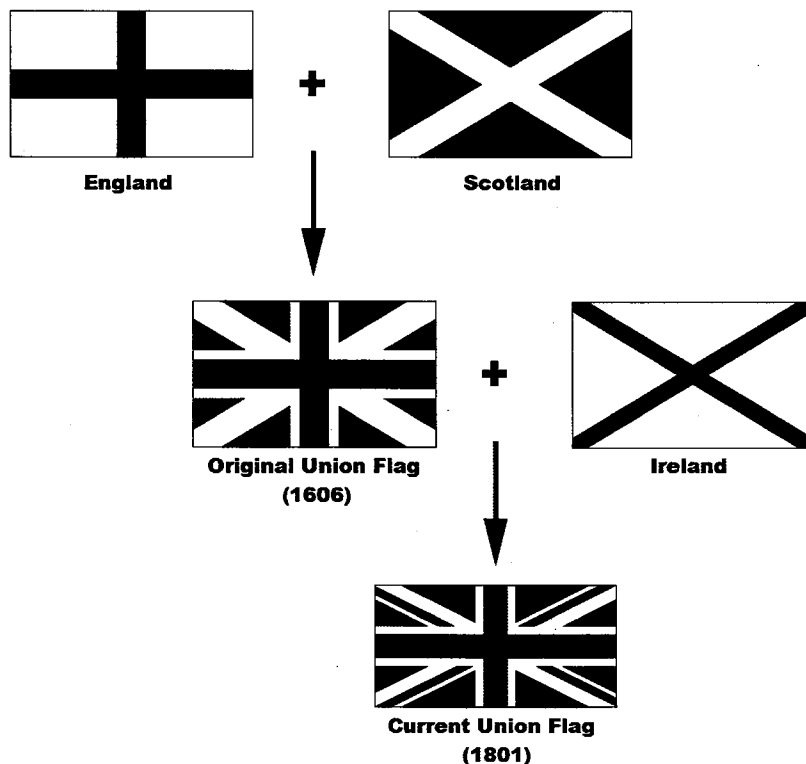
## Answers to Some Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

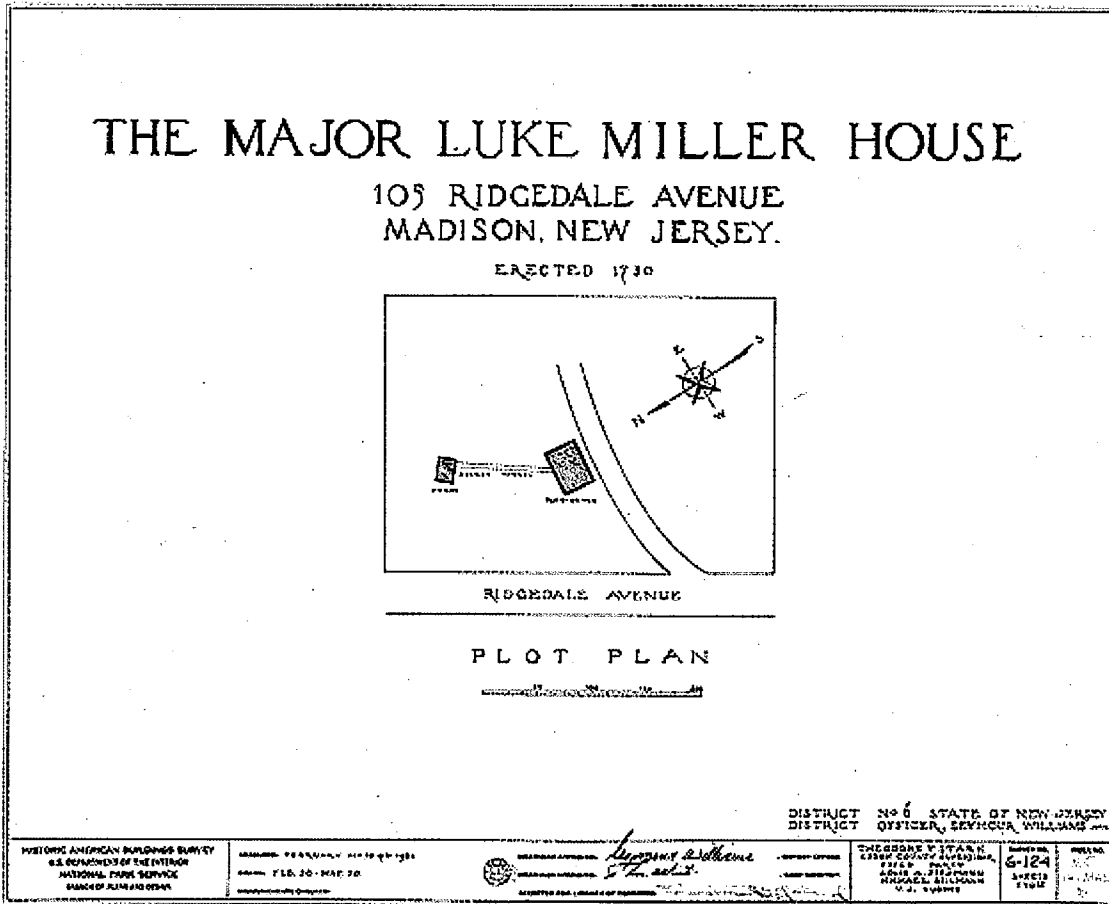
**Q:** Is the Luke Miller House haunted?

**A:** There is no record of paranormal activity at the Luke Miller house. However, a ghost may have recently been imported during renovation work. Come to the open house this fall for details on this spooky story.

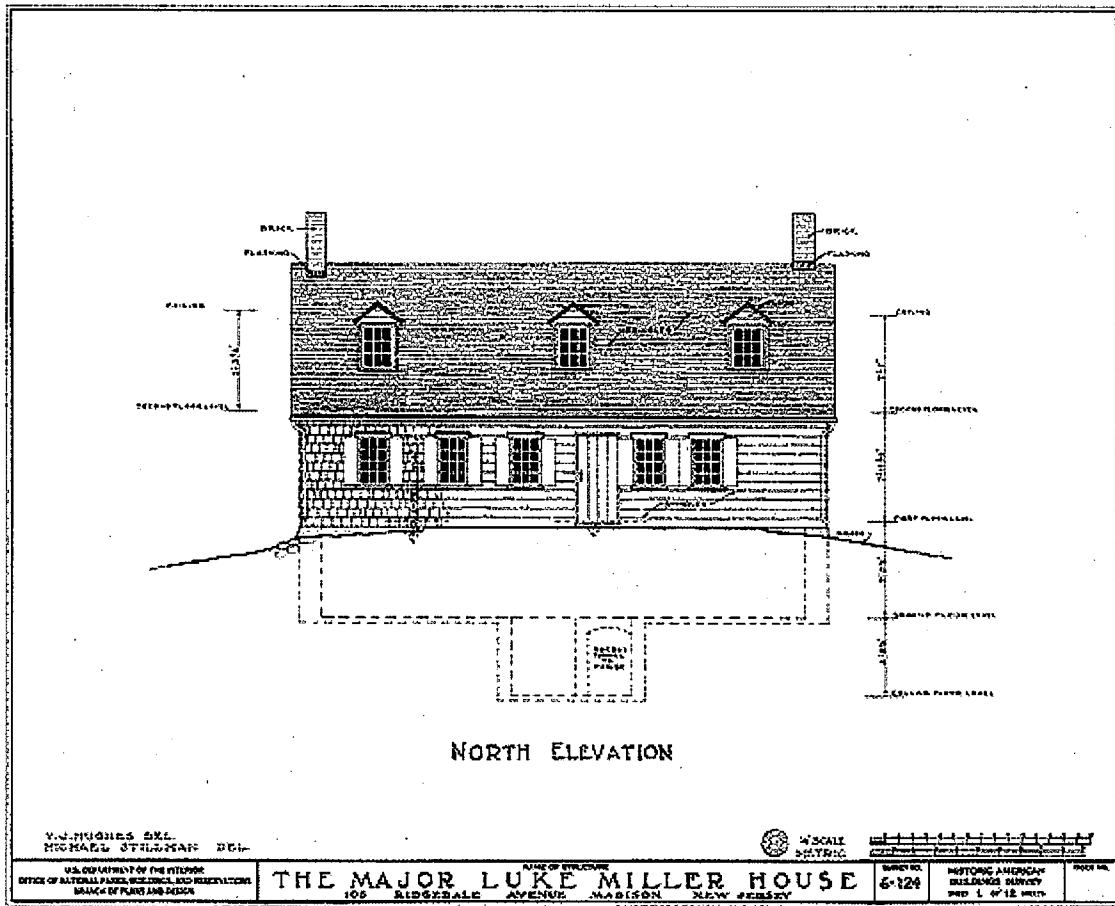
**Q:** Why is there a British flag displayed in front of the Luke Miller house?

**A:** The flag on the pole in front of the house is not the current flag of the United Kingdom, which represents the union of Northern Ireland and Great Britain, dating from January 1, 1801 (see image below). The flag displayed in front of the Miller house is actually the *original* Union flag, representing the regal union of the kingdoms of England (including Wales) and Scotland, dating from April 12, 1606. This original Union flag, also known as the Kings Colors, is actually the first (unofficial) flag of what was to become the United States; it flew over Jamestown, Virginia in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and throughout the 13 colonies up until the end of the Revolutionary War. If a flag had been flown at the Miller house at the time it was built circa 1730, it would, most likely, have been the Kings Colors, and so that's why it is displayed.

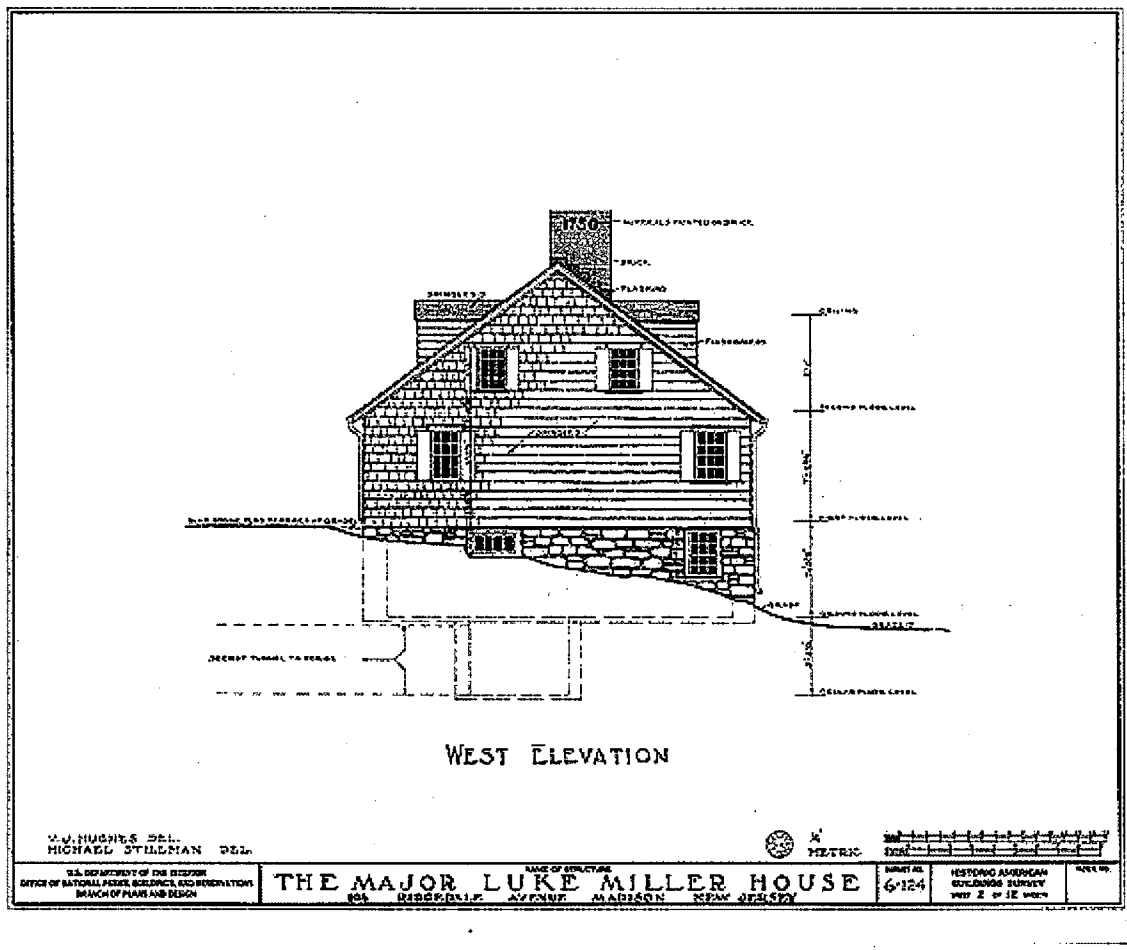




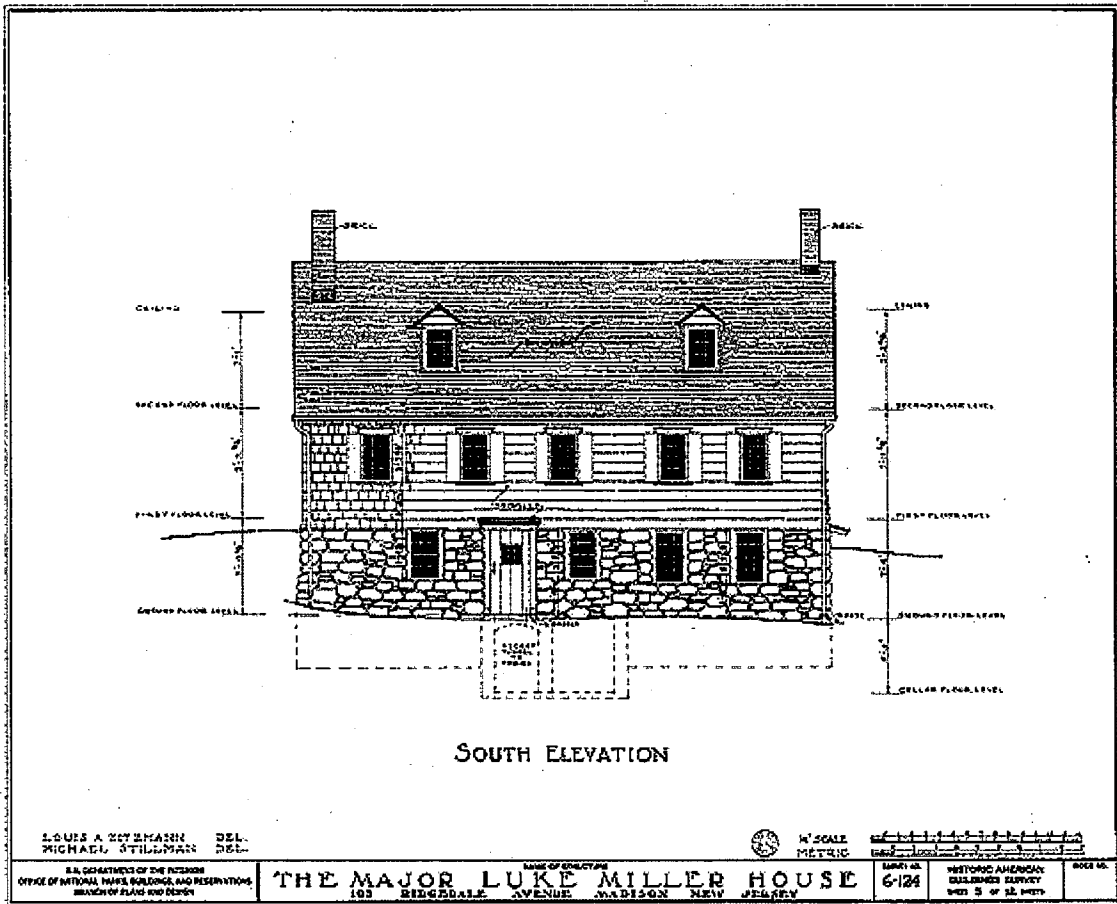
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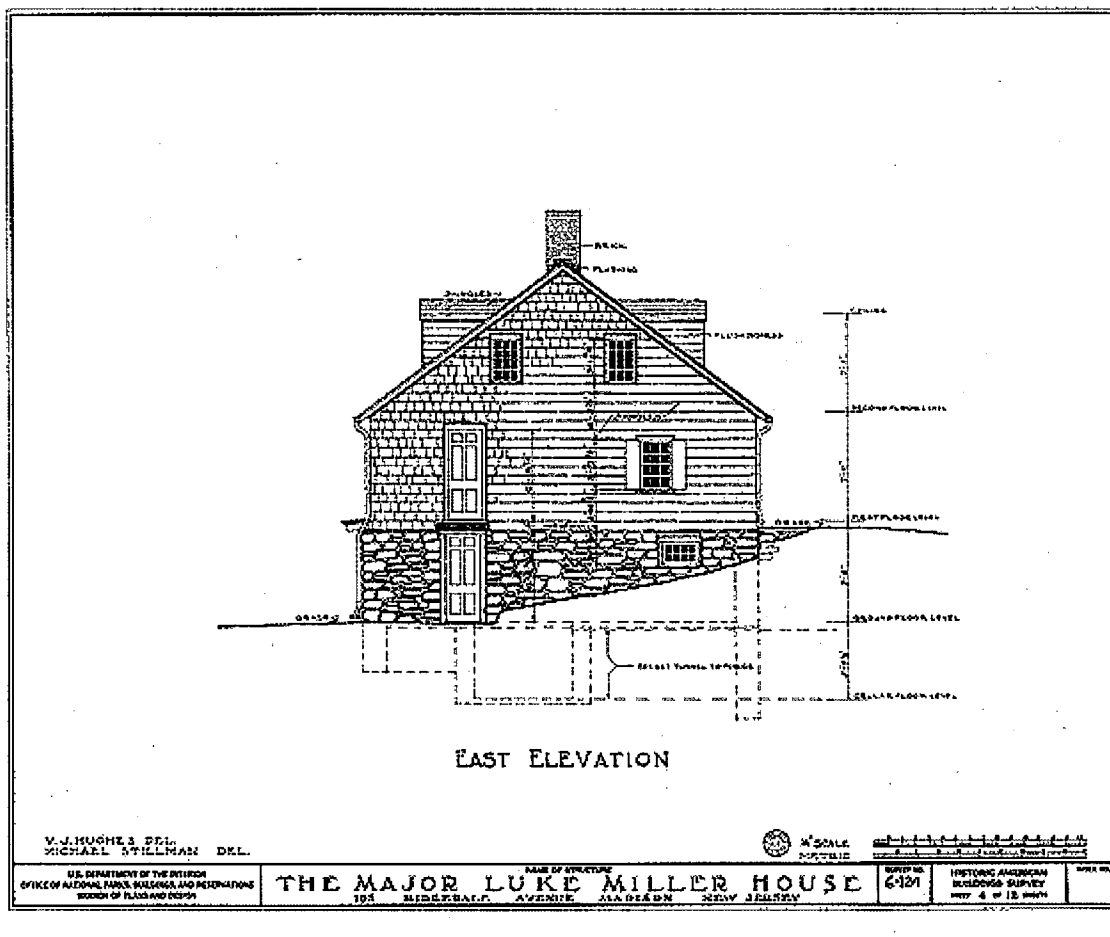


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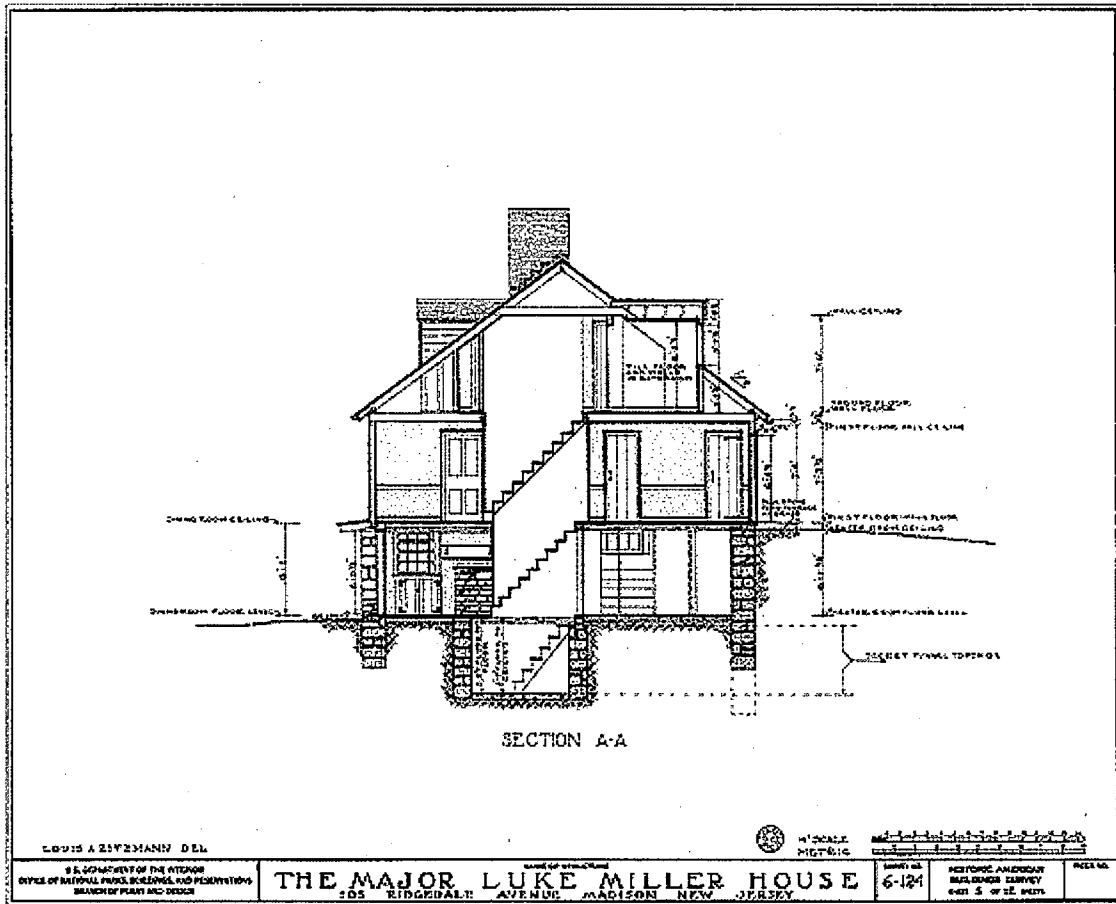


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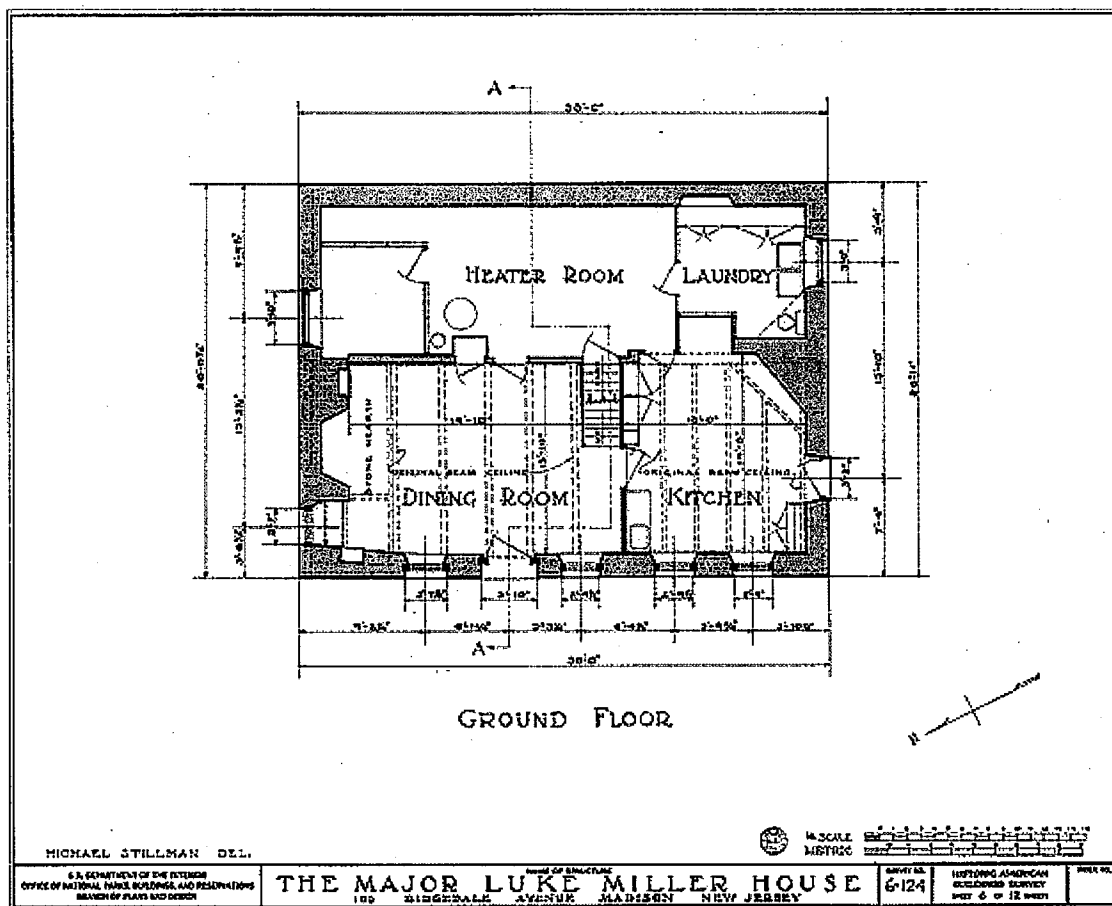




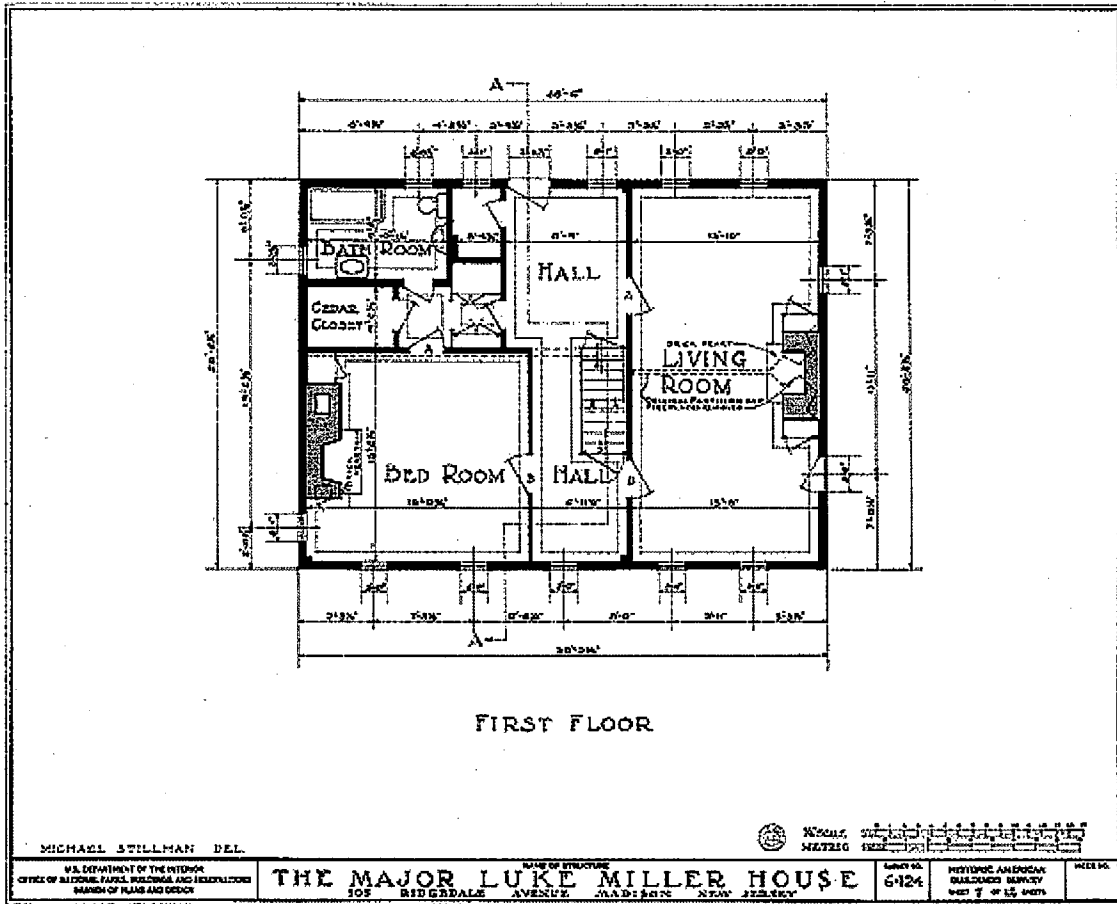
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