

# The Luke Miller House Newsletter

- Spring 2008 Edition -

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Restoration, Conservation, and Renovation Updates



20-Minute Documentary Video - Luke Miller: Forging History



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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 1894  
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, shortly 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, \$500,000 restoration endeavor encompassed the entire 1.6 acre private/public site and was completed on schedule in January, 2008. All restoration, conservation, and renovation projects were privately funded by the new homeowner.

**Historic House Tour and Wreath Auction:** The Madison Historical Society's Open House and Wreath Auction at the Luke Miller House on December 9, 2007 was successful well beyond expectations. Over 500 guests visited the early 18<sup>th</sup> century home and enjoyed tours that were graciously provided by Mayor-elect Mary-Anna Holden. In addition, visitors were provided with tours of the Miller Forge, given by Madison HS History Department chair, Mark DeBiasse where they learned about recent research findings and the upcoming archaeological studies. The event netted \$3,500 after expenses, and proceeds will be used to help fund the \$14,720 cost of the upcoming archaeological study of the Miller Forge.

**Archaeological Study, Forge Restoration, Re-opening the Secret Tunnel:** The Madison Historical Society received a grant of \$10,197 from the NJ Historical Commission toward the \$14,720 cost of an archaeological study of the Luke Miller Forge. This grant money, along with the \$3,500 raised at the Open House and Wreath Auction, will provide most of the funding for the intriguing research projects slated to begin in the spring of 2008. Research projects include an archaeological dig inside and around the forge and privy, a study of the forge building to estimate its age, a ground-penetrating radar scan above the "secret tunnel" to determine its condition, re-opening and clearing the forge-side tunnel entrance, and studying the "secret tunnel's" interior to determine its past use(s). A big, special thanks goes out to all who helped prepare the grant application!

**Restoration, Conservation, Renovation, and Research:** Many people are interested in the work that's taking place inside, outside, and around the Luke Miller House and Miller Forge. To help keep the interested public informed, a series of progress reports are provided on the next 4 pages of this newsletter. These reports summarize all significant restoration, conservation, and renovation projects completed thus far. They also list the major projects that remain to be completed during 2008 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**

**98%**

**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 stone masonry 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
- Application of 1 coat of primer and 3 coats of white stain to new fencing
- Planting hundreds of flowering periwinkles in front of new fence along Ridgedale Avenue, thanks to the generosity of the Madison Garden Club
- Mending of horse fencing around the lower sunken garden area
- Power washing the slate patios, walkways, driveway, and parking areas
- Applying a protective coat of sealant to the driveway and parking areas
- 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:**

- Planting 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
- Pruning of tree branches and forsythia bushes growing over roof
- 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

**Projects remaining:**

- Removal of modern floor surfaces in forge interior to expose the ground
- Archaeological dig for artifacts inside and around forge and privy area, in part, to help determine the true age of the forge building
- Exposing and clearing forge entrance to the secret "Indian raid tunnel"
- Ground-penetrating radar scan above the 60-foot-long "secret tunnel" connecting the forge building to the Luke Miller House underground
- Restoration of Miller Forge into a working blacksmith shop for museum exhibits by the Museum of Early Trades and Crafts of Madison, NJ
- 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**

**100%**

**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

**Project Name**

**Percentage Complete**

**House Exterior**

**100%**

**Projects completed:**

- Cleaning cedar roof shingles; removal of leaves and debris from gutters
- New hand-split cedar shingles on roof above covered porch on east wing
- 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
- Replacement of clothes dryer and fan vents to blend with house
- 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
- Replacement of over 2 dozen cracked windows with hand blown glass
- Washing and polishing of all exterior windows and storm windows
- 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

**Project Name**

**Percentage Complete**

**House Interior**

**98%**

**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
- Installation of custom, seeded glass double French door in laundry room
- 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:**

- Reopening of the Luke Miller house entryway to the "secret tunnel"

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

In 2007, Madison's Museum of Early Trades and Crafts was awarded a \$10,000 grant by The History Channel's "Save Our History" educational program. The museum collaborated with Madison High School History Department chair, Mark DeBiase (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 had been broadcast on Cablevision 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, so the house is about 278 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 surrounding 54+ 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 Andrew Miller owning it.

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

**A:** There are many original, approximately 278-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 Madison Historical Society, in conjunction with Dr. Ian Burrow from Hunter Research and The Museum of Early Trades and Crafts, will be conducting an archaeological dig in and around the 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 cranberry juice and sour cream and is one of the earliest known examples of paint-making in NJ. 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. The northwest corner on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the house served as the Hanover town jail during the Revolution and markings from the chains that may have held British and Hessian prisoners can still be seen. The blacksmith forge on the north side of the property produced metal items for the Continental army, and Miller's Station may also be the only residence in the state with an authentic "Indian raid" escape tunnel. In addition, the 2<sup>nd</sup> (known) owner of the house, Luke Miller, enlisted as a Private in the Morris County militia. He 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 the Miller Family's 54+ acre 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).

## 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 To Forge*" and its entrances in great detail (copies of all drawings 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 firsthand in combat against them, it is highly plausible that Luke Miller (of a relatively prosperous, landowning family) had the tunnel built as a secret escape route in the event the house was surrounded and attacked by Indians or the British.

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 (ie, Miller's Station) on the Underground Railroad during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Evidence of all these possibilities may be unearthed in 2008 once Dr. Ian Burrow from Hunter Research conducts an archeological dig and study of the site.

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

**A:** No, it's not possible at this time, but perhaps in the near future you can. The entrances will be reopened in 2008 but 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. Once the forge entrance is reopened in Spring 2008 and the archaeological dig and research are complete, the tunnel may be opened 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 clothing. Washington is said to have socialized and discussed the war 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 acquired in 2006. These chairs sit at opposite ends of the rustic 1<sup>st</sup> floor keeping 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 a "V" for "Victory" in the keeping room's fireplace mantle that is said to have been inlaid during the Revolutionary War (it's actually a trammel inset). Finally, 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.

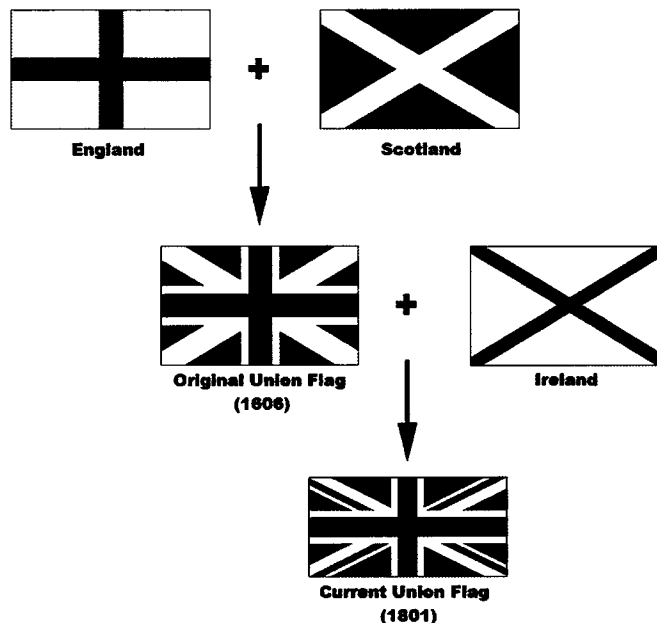
**Answers to Some Frequently Asked Questions (continued)**

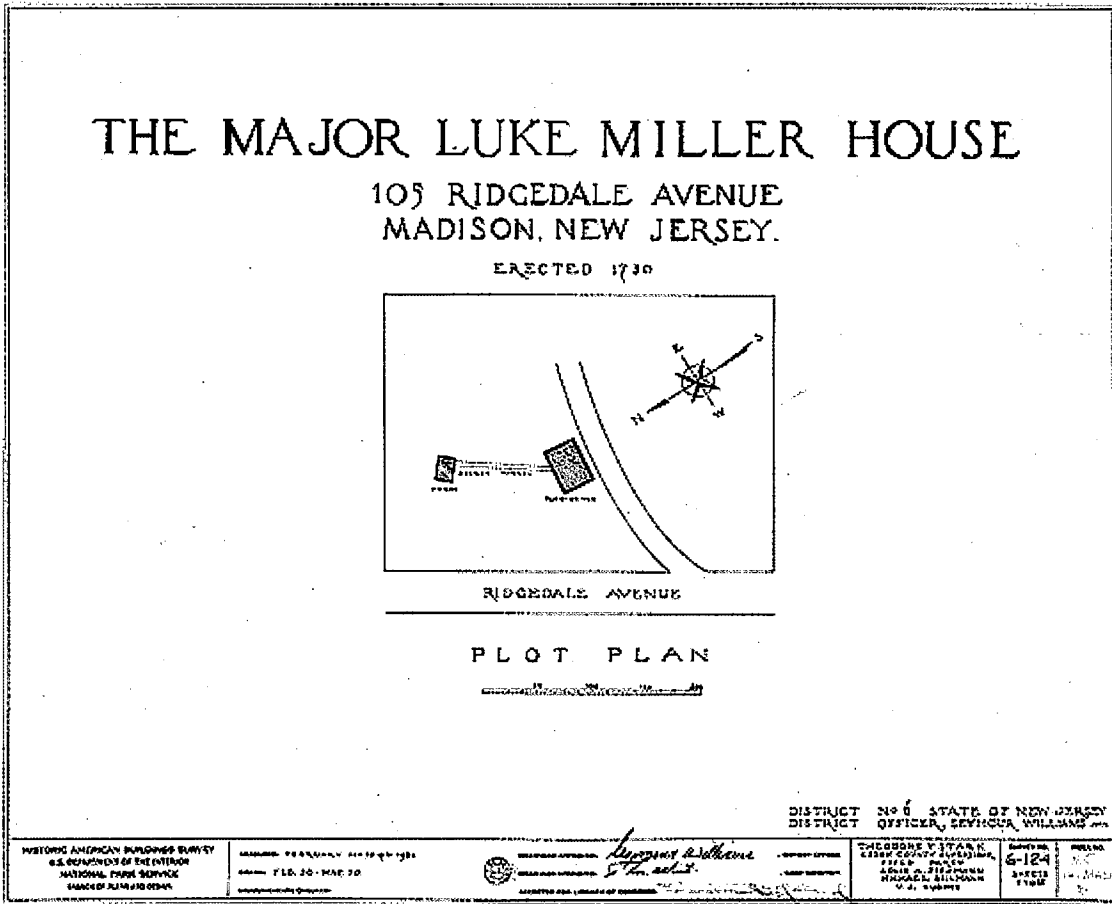
**Q:** Is the Luke Miller House haunted?

**A:** There have been sightings of a lady in a beautiful white dress in or outside the 1<sup>st</sup> floor keeping room. There have also been repeated encounters with an entity inside the forge, and most recently, the apparition of a happy Indian in his 70s wearing a red and brown jacket.

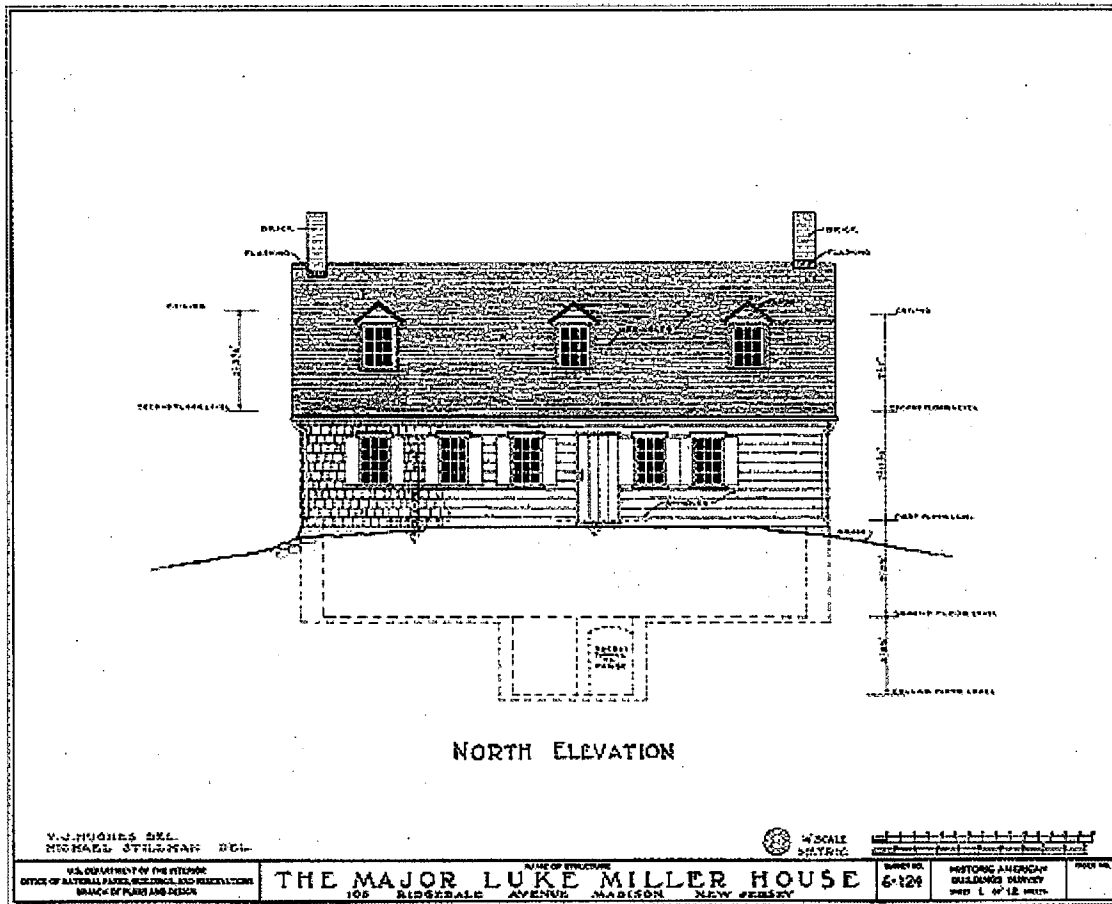
**Q:** Why is there a British flag displayed in front of the Luke Miller house?

**A:** The flag on the pole in front of the house is the first (unofficial) flag of the United States, directly preceding the first official flag in 1776 (that being the Betsy Ross flag, which hangs from the garage). The flag on the pole in front of the house is not the current "Union Jack" flag of the United Kingdom, which represents the union of Northern Ireland and Great Britain, dating from January 1, 1801 (see images below). The flag displayed in front of the Miller house is the Original Union Flag, dating from April 12, 1606, representing the regal union of the kingdoms of England (including Wales) and Scotland (Ireland's red Cross of Saint Patrick was added in the 1801 "Current Union Flag," or "Union Jack"). The Original Union Flag, also known as the Kings Colors, 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 have likely been the Kings Colors, so that's why it is displayed.



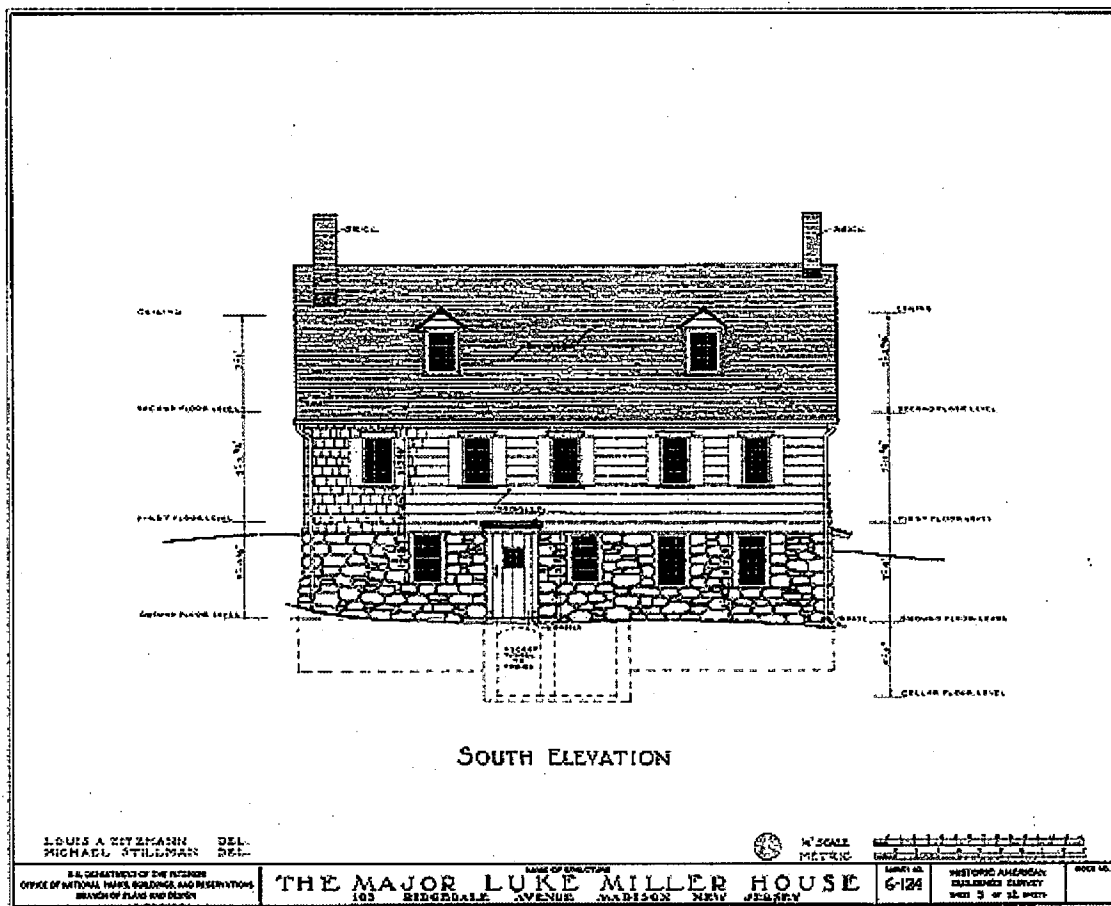


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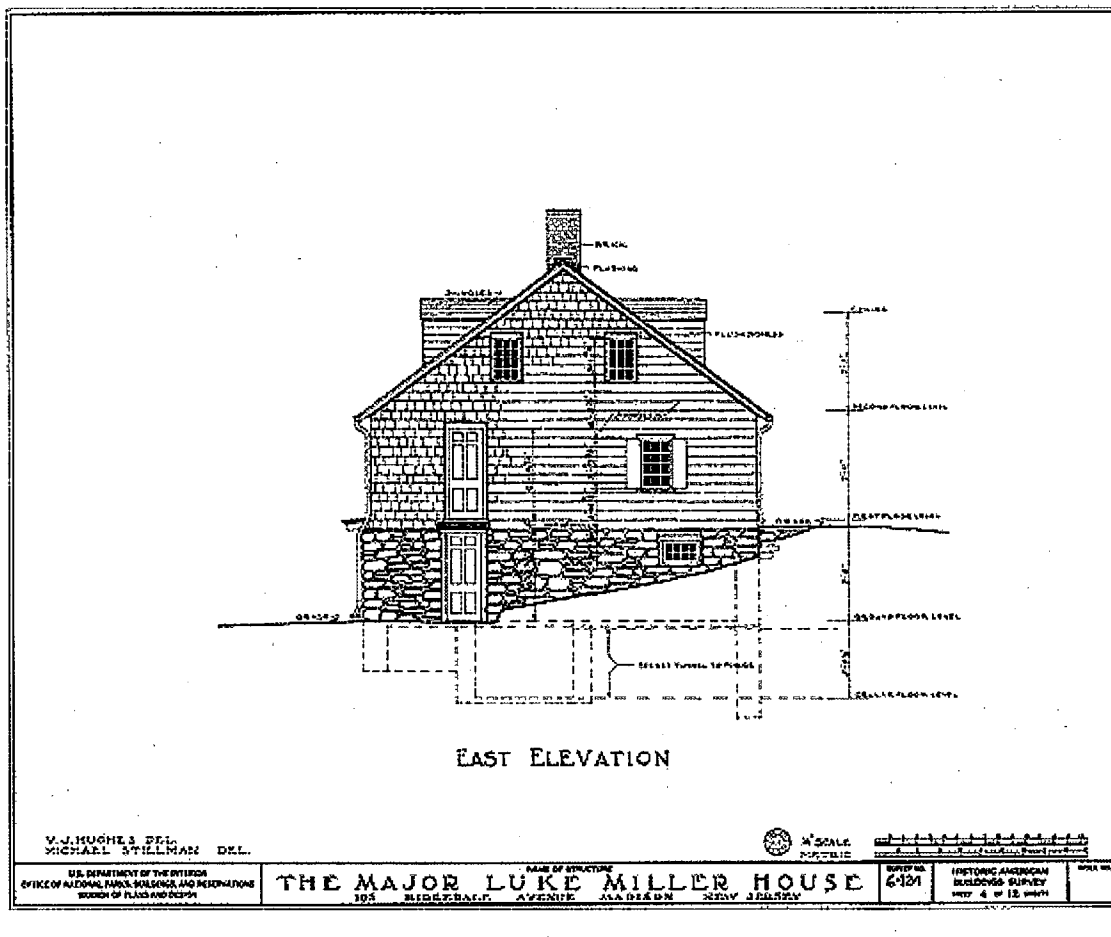
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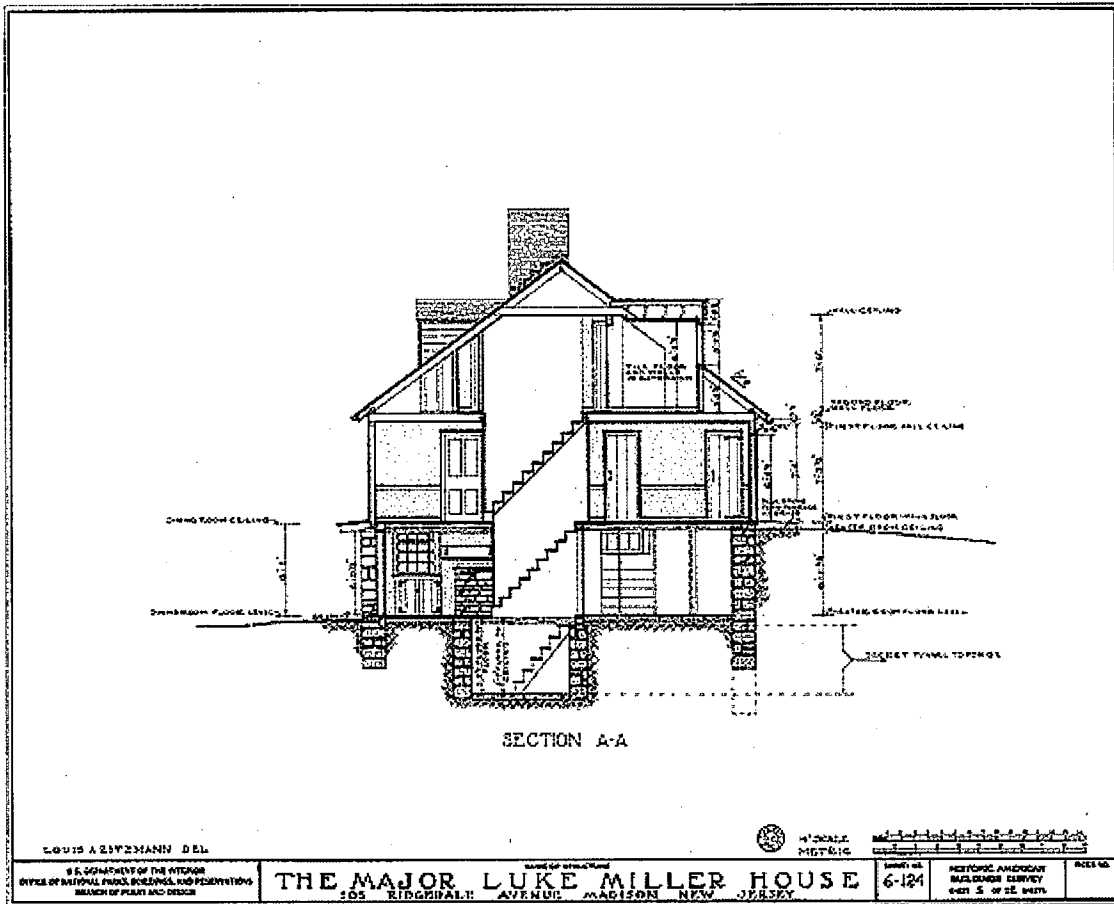


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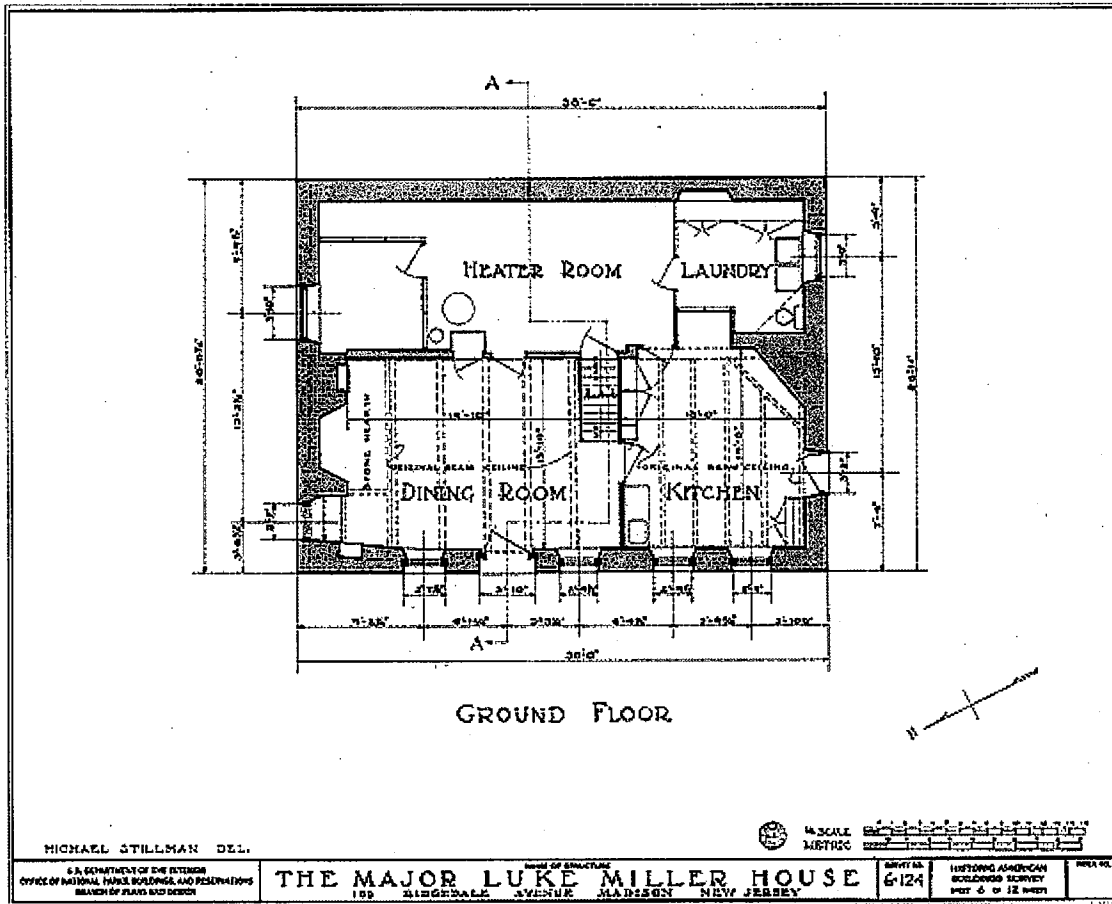




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