



The Village Improvement Association of Doylestown

Historic Holiday Open House Tour: The James-Lorah Memorial Home

Take a step back in time and tour the celebrated James-Lorah Memorial Home on Main Street, Doylestown. Owned by the Village Improvement Association of Doylestown, the house has been decorated for the holidays by VIA members in anticipation of the Open House Tours scheduled for **Saturday, December 5th, Noon to 5PM**. Guides will provide interesting anecdotes of Doylestown's history and of the well-known community residents who called this home. "Miss Sarah James", portraying the last owner of the home and a member of the VIA, will be on hand to greet her guests!

Judge Henry Chapman, son of Abraham Chapman and grandfather of the celebrated Henry Chapman Mercer, built this architecturally transitional house. The building reflects the persistence of the earlier Federal style (connecting double chimneys) in Doylestown as well as the more fashionable Greek Revival (third floor eyebrow windows) and Italianate (window hood moldings) styles of the mid 19th century. In 1869 this property came into the James family, whose descendant, Miss James, bequeathed it to the Village Improvement Association in 1954.

The James-Lorah House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. This house ... "has been a center of public service with its history of law, medicine, religion, music, and literature," *Fred A. Martin, A.I.A., Doylestown architect and historian*. In 1806, Zerick Titus bought this land and erected on it – probably where the small office now stands – a harness and saddler's shop. Five years later he sold the property to Abraham Chapman, a descendant of one of Bucks County's earliest settlers, and the first white man to locate north of Newtown. He married the daughter of Doylestown's first doctor, and they moved from Wrightstown to Doylestown in 1813, when the County seat was moved there. In later years he was referred to

as the Father of the Bucks County Bar Association. In 1834 he gave the property to his son Henry who had the old saddler's shop reconstructed and enlarged in 1841.

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In 1844, prior to his second marriage to the daughter of Governor Francis Shunk of Pennsylvania, he had this large, handsome residence built onto the smaller building, "at that time the finest house in the borough (*Doylestown Old and New*, Davis). The builder was David Goucher who had worked with his brother Thomas as a "joyner" for several years in the area, then left him to take up carpentry.

Governor Shunk visited the young Chapmans during the first year they lived in the house; he was given a cannon salute when he arrived on the outskirts of Doylestown.

Henry Chapman served one term in the State Senate, and one term in the U.S. Congress. In 1861 he was elected President Judge of the Bucks-Montgomery District, where he served for ten years, then retired to "literary pursuits." He was the grandfather of Dr. Henry Chapman Mercer who built Doylestown's three "concrete extravaganzas": Fonthill, the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works, and the Mercer Museum which houses his world-famous collection, "Tools of the Nation Maker." Dr. Mercer was born in the front bedroom of this house.

Tours of the home, located at 132 North Main Street, Doylestown are free (donations appreciated and will be used for ongoing renovations of the historic house); the public is welcome. Light refreshments will be served. Gift items for sale; raffles offered. The Village Improvement Association, with nearly 325 female members, founded and governs Doylestown Hospital.

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