

Muscatine Journal
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Correspondence

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Christmas Preparations
"Chew's House"
Lydia Darrah's House
The Old "Slate Roof House"
"Carpenter's Hall," &c.

Philadelphia, Dec. 24, 1853

The weather last night was intensely cold, and the wind blew almost a hurricane. During the week we have also had slight falls of snow.

On Thursday night last, there was an extensive fire in N. Third Street, during the progress of which the wall (only nine inches thick!) of a burning, four-story building came down with a terrible crash, burying several men who were engaged in extinguishing the fire. One of these unfortunates lay for some three hours, pressed down by the rubbish, and unable to extricate himself, in sight of his friends, who were alike unable to render him any assistance. He was at length, however, delivered from his perilous situation, and conveyed to his home, but at last accounts his injuries were such as to leave very little hope for his recovery. Another man, a policeman, was completely buried; and when found, he had long been dead. His feet were burned off, his face burnt to a crisp, and his head crushed in.

The markets, as well as shops of all kinds, are crowded today, with people making their Christmas purchases. Turkeys and fowls of all kinds are vanishing from the markets as if by magic. I asked a lady what the best turkeys were selling at. She replied that she had priced several fine ones, which were seven dollars apiece! This seems a high figure, but everything else is in proportion. Couldn't you forward us a few hundred of the birds?

During the week I have visited several places of note near Philadelphia. The first of these places was Germantown, where the Americans made the terrible charge upon the British, quartered in the celebrated "Chew's House." This building is still standing, and is at Present occupied as a dwelling-house. It does not appear near as old as others in its immediate vicinity. It is built in the real old English style, and still bears the cannon and musket ball marks received in the conflict which made it famous. Germantown is rich in old buildings, some bearing the dates of 1743, 1760, &c.

At the corner of Little Dock and Second streets, stands the queer looking old house occupied by the heroic Lydia Darrah. It was here, if I remember the story aright, that she left the British officer, and taking her flour bag, set off to inform Gen. Washington of the intended attack

of the British upon his camp; and her heroic conduct defeated the plans of the red-coats, and saved the Americans. Well does she deserve a monument; but no such monument is hers. As one might almost guess, her old mansion is now occupied by a Jew, as a clothing store.

The next place of note is the old "Slate-Roof House," which was the first house in the city covered with that material. It is situated in Second Street, at the corner of Norris's Alley. It was erected about one hundred and sixty years ago, in the old English style of architecture. It was occupied by Wm. Penn, in the year 1700, and John Penn, "the American," who was born under its roof. In this house Gen. Forbes, second in command, and afterwards successor to Gen. Forbes, second in command, and afterwards successor to Gen. Braddock, died, and from it was borne to the grave, with imposing military honors. In after years, it was the temporary abode of John Adams, John Hancock, and many other distinguished members of the First Congress, and also of Baron De Kalb, who fell, fighting for American independence, at the battle of Camden. The brave General Lee also breathed his last in this house, and was buried in Christ Churchyard. This noble old relic is also desecrated in the same manner as the Darrah House. Unless measures are shortly taken for its preservation, it will soon go to decay and be remembered as one of the things that were.

Carpenter's Hall, situated in Carpenter's Court, is a pile dear to every American, for within its walls, the first Congress of the United States assembled--a fact which should entitle it to a place in the heart of every true lover of his country. "The building is of brick, two stories high, and surmounted by a cupola. The facade is in the Roman style of architecture. The principal entrance leads to the Assembly Room, in which Congress first met. It is now occupied as an auction mart." By an auction mart--the old story. Alas! that these old buildings, so intimately connected with the principal scenes in the history of our country, should thus be profaned. Why do not those who make such magnificent donations to our colleges and other institutions, give a mite toward the preservation of these monuments of the past? Surely their liberality would be well bestowed. It is painful to look upon these time-honored edifices, and feel that they will soon fall into decay and be forgotten.

This communication is already too long to be interesting, and I will stop.

W.