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HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT - PART II (PORTION)

THE DEN CEILING, EDISON HOME, BUILDING NO. 10

Prepared by

Melvin J. Weig
Superintendent

and

Norman M. Souder
Architect

January - March 1966



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Edison National Historic Site
P. O. Box 126
Orange, New Jersey 07051

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H30

March 17, 1966

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Northeast Region

From: Superintendent, Edison

Subject: Historic Structures Report - Part II (Portion)
The Den Ceiling, Edison Home, Building No. 110,
Administrative and Historical Data

MAR 21 1966	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reg. Director
<input type="checkbox"/>	Asst. Dir.:
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Records
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Asst. Dir.:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fed'l Agency Assis.
<input type="checkbox"/>	NPS: Hist. & Arch.
<input type="checkbox"/>	State Assistance

Enclosed are the original and two copies of the Administrative and Historical Data sections for the above report. Routing, title, and contents sheets have been provided for the report as a whole, to include in final assembly the Architectural Data section transmitted with Mr. Palmer's memorandum of February 14.

Special attention is called to Item 3 in the list of recommended actions in the Administrative Data, that is, the immediate need for assignment of professional personnel to inspect and prepare a report on the necessary work and cost of cleaning and restoring the Tojetti painting and related decorative motifs of the clerestory section of the Den ceiling. This work should certainly be done as concurrently as possible with other phases of the ceiling restoration, so that reopening of the room to visitors may not be unduly delayed.

Further in this respect, we would particularly like to have the Den once more ready for public use when the Proprietors of Llewellyn Park hold their next annual meeting at Glenmont, which will be in January 1967. That date may at present seem a long way off, but restoration of the painting and art work will unquestionably require considerable time. There is therefore some urgency in getting it started soon.

Melvin J. Weig
Melvin J. Weig

In duplicate

Enclosure

cc: Chief, Philadelphia PSC

Name of Area: Edison National Historic Site

Prepared by: Melvin J. Weig, Superintendent
Norman M. Souder, Architect, EODC

Date: March 16, 1966

REVIEWED

PLANNING AND SERVICE CENTER

Architect _____ Date _____

Engineer _____ Date _____

Landscape Architect _____ Date _____

REGIONAL OFFICE

Interpretation _____ Date _____

Operations _____ Date _____

RECOMMENDED

(Sgd.) Melvin J. Weig
Superintendent

Date March 16, 1966

Chief, PSC

Date _____

Regional Director

Date _____

Assistant Director, Design and Construction

Date _____

APPROVED

Date _____

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HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT - PART II (PORTION)

THE DEN CEILING, EDISON HOME, BUILDING NO. 10

"ADMINISTRATIVE DATA"

Prepared by

Melvin J. Weig
Superintendent

March 16, 1966

Administrative Data

Information, comments, and recommendations under this heading in our Part I submission of December 22, 1963, still hold good with regard to the Edison Home generally, including its need for thoroughgoing rehabilitation to assure preservation for future generations, and to reduce annual maintenance costs.

Both the "Historical Data" and "Architectural Data" submitted with the present Part II report throw new light on the structural history of one part of the Edison Home in particular, the Den, Room No. 114. Based on information therein available, as well as on related discussions with EODC and the Northeast Regional Office, the following steps appear to be desirable:

1. The roof over the Den ceiling should be made water-tight, there being at present some small leaks which, undetected until the false ceiling was removed, have caused partial rotting of the framing members beneath. In the "Architectural Data" reference is made by Mr. Souder to the advisability of opening up this roof and uncovering the exterior windows, which are outside the stained glass windows. We believe, however, that it would not be wise to do this at the present time, and indeed perhaps never at all. From all indications the exterior windows are badly rotted and would need to be entirely replaced, undoubtedly at considerable expense. Such restoration, even if carried through, would also make it more difficult to keep the roof tight and introduce added maintenance problems with respect to the stained glass windows underneath. As pointed out by Mr. Souder, the lead comes of the latter have relaxed, very seriously in the case of two or three of these windows, causing them to bow downward with the possibility of eventual collapse unless all such stained glass construction is carefully checked and repaired. We have considerable reservation, therefore, about the advisability of restoring the windowed exterior roof, especially since this would in addition probably recreate something of the draft conditions which motivated Mrs. Edison in closing the roof over in 1935. In any event, we believe the matter should have further study before any final decision is made, one way or the other.

2. The border ceiling framing should be carefully checked and replaced where necessary, and all lath should be renailed.

3. Immediate steps should be taken to arrange for professional inspection and preparation of a report on necessary work and estimated cost of cleaning and restoring the Tojetti painting of muses and cherubs, as well as the decorative panels both between and below the clerestory windows. It is suggested that Mr. Walter Nitkiewicz, Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services,

Washington Office, would be an excellent choice to undertake this survey in first instance, and later to perform the work itself.

4. The central clerestory section of the ceiling should be fully restored, complete with decorative panels and painting, as it was in the lifetime of Thomas Edison, and in line with the special study recommended in Item 3 above. Restoration of the Tojetti painting at the top will probably require removal of the canvas from its plaster base (the work is on canvas, and not directly on plaster as mentioned in the "Architectural Data"), which appears to be loose and broken in various places, and has caused dropping of the surrounding wood trim very noticeably in two corners. The leaded stained glass windows should also be carefully checked and fully repaired to eliminate the possibility of their future collapse, with consequent hazard to historical furnishings, and even more to the safety of persons who may use the Den from time to time.

5. All electrical conduits, wiring, and boxes for the ceiling lighting fixtures, being presently not up to code, should be replaced now, while the work can be done at least expense. Further in this connection, the now missing chandelier (presently stored in Laboratory Building No. 5) should be reinstalled in the southwest bay window section of the ceiling, where it was originally. As for auxiliary lighting of the Tojetti painting, suggested by Mr. Souder in the "Architectural Data," this may not actually be needed, but if so might be accomplished more easily by installation of pinpoint lights within the existing chandeliers at the four corners of the clerestory opening. Study might also be given to lighting the stained glass windows from behind if the exterior roof is to remain closed, though such lighting would pose special problems of fire safety and maintenance in replacement of burned out lamps.

6. Batt insulation should be installed in the voids around the clerestory and over the ceiling lath, and insulation panels should be fitted into the vertical sections below the clerestory windows as a base for the painted decoration to be restored.

7. The border ceiling (actual width about 4'-4") should be finished as follows: (1) application of rock lath over the existing or replaced wood lath, (2) application of metal lath over the rock lath, and (3) application of vermiculite plaster over the metal lath.

8. Wood trim should be replaced and adequate grounds provided for replastering, missing component parts to be restored and finished as necessary.

9. The new border ceiling should be painted in color to match the existing ceiling. However, until the present condition of the clerestory has been examined by a professional restorer of paintings, as set forth in Item 3 above, it is suggested that the vertical panels below the windows not be painted, since the new canvas to be applied on these panels might adhere better to an unpainted surface.

Most of the above recommendations are in line with those already made by Architect Souder, although there is some variation and difference of opinion, quite probably because the entire condition of the Den ceiling had not been fully ascertained at the time of his inspection.

Some of the work outlined above has already been done under Work Order 403-211729, approved by the Superintendent on February 2, 1966, and under which allotment of \$2,305 was made by the Northeast Regional Office (Allotment Advice 3-979) on February 7 following. The principal items thus already accomplished are as follows:

1. Closing the room, evacuating its historic furnishings, putting protective polyethylene film and plywood covering over the finished flooring, and removing the entire existing ceiling finish and opening up the clerestory section.

2. Repairing all damaged framing, including replacement as necessary.

3. Renailing the sound old lath of the border ceiling, and installing some new lath needed, mostly around the edges.

4. Removing the old wiring and running new electrical conduit per code (about 90% complete), and pulling a small portion of the new wiring through the conduit.

5. Installing grounds around the edges of the clerestory opening for finish plastering, requiring welding of threaded metal clips to the steel beams for this purpose.

6. Installing batt insulation.

7. Installing "Marinite" panels on the vertical sides of the clerestory opening beneath the windows for later application of restored painted decorative motifs.

8. Obtaining estimate from competent local firm for replastering the border ceiling (including application of rock lath, metal

lath, and vermiculite plaster as recommended), amount of approximately 700.

The above items accomplished to date, all by day labor, have cost approximately \$2,200, and additional funds will be required to carry the project further forward. Exactly how much money will be needed for completing all the work recommended cannot be determined at this time. By rough estimate, however, we believe that a total of \$3,500 will probably suffice for all items exclusive of the cost of repairing the leaded stained glass windows and restoring the Tojetti painting and related decorative motifs, both of which will have to await further survey and study for preparation of cost estimates.

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT - PART II (PORTION)

THE DEN CEILING, EDISON HOME, BUILDING NO. 10

"HISTORICAL DATA"

Prepared by

Melvin J. Weig
Superintendent

March 16, 1966

Historical Data

Information submitted here supplements the "Historical Data" previously furnished in the Historic Structures Report, Part I, "Glenmont," Home of Thomas Alva Edison (Building No. 10), prepared by the writer under date of December 22, 1963. The present Part II report deals specifically with the ceiling in the Den, Room No. 114.

When the National Park Service assumed custody of Glenmont in 1959, it was known that the central section of the Den ceiling had originally been a domed rectangular vault surrounded on its four sides by clerestory windows and painted decorative panels, surmounted at the top by a flat, classical type painting of muses and cherubs in varying degrees of rather wispy undress. The room had always been somewhat drafty, however, and for that reason Mrs. Thomas Edison finally had the opening framed and ceilinged over, so that thenceforth the entire Den ceiling presented a flat expanse with separating panel trim, completely concealing the original construction above it. At or about the same time the exterior roof over the domed portion was also completely covered with sheet metal, with the result that the clerestory windows could no longer be seen from the outside. Although these facts were known, no information was available concerning just when the subject changes took place.

About five or six years ago, it was noticed that some of the wood trim of the ceiling, especially in the northeast corner, appeared to be breaking away, and that the old chandelier in that corner had also dropped somewhat. The condition was inspected periodically, and as time passed it seemed to grow worse, extending gradually to other parts of the entire ceiling. Finally, on January 17, 1966, one week after the annual meeting of the Proprietors of Llewellyn Park held in the Den and adjacent Dining Room, Room No. 115, it was decided that the time had come, both for the good of the building and in the interest of safety for persons and historic furnishings, to initiate a careful study of what was causing these failures.

On January 17 such investigation was accordingly begun under immediate supervision of Exhibits Specialist (Restoration) Gordie Whittington, EODC. One panel of the central section was first removed to facilitate inspection of structural conditions above the ceiling. This revealed the domed section with its decoration, stained glass windows, and handsome painting of muses and cherubs,

the latter still in surprisingly good condition, as shown in Photograph No. O-1565 attached to this report. The condition of the flat portion of the main ceiling, however, surrounding the domed opening, was discovered to be much worse than expected. Typical findings are illustrated in the attached Photographs Nos. O-1569, O-1567, and O-1566. Breaking away of wood trim in the domed or clerestory section is pictured in Photograph No. O-1568.

The situation being thus quite serious, a telephone call was made to EODC, and two days later, on January 19, Architect Norman Souder visited Edison National Historic Site and made further careful inspection in consultation with Mr. Whittington and the Superintendent. As the result of such inspection it was unanimously agreed that the Den ceiling was so far deteriorated and structurally unsafe as to require its complete replacement. Further in this connection, Messrs. Souder, Whittington, and the Superintendent also agreed that in view of its particularly interesting architectural and decorative character, restoration of the domed section was likewise in order, provided of course that evidence could be found to indicate that it had not been closed up before Thomas Edison's death in 1931. The present living members of the Edison Family (Governor Charles Edison, Mrs. John Eyre Sloane, and Mr. Theodore M. Edison), being consulted in the matter, were also heartily in favor of such restoration.⁽¹⁾ Mr. Souder returned to his EODC office in Philadelphia and subsequently prepared the "Architectural Data" section of the present report.

The first step in historical inquiry about the central, domed section of the Den ceiling was to ask Governor Edison, Mrs. Sloane, and Mr. Theodore Edison if they could remember when it was closed up. Unfortunately, none of them could recall just when the change was made. Mrs. Sloane thought it might have been not long after her marriage on June 17, 1914, but she was by no means sure.⁽²⁾ Governor Edison's rough guess was somewhere between 1909 and 1915, when he attended the Hotchkiss School.⁽³⁾ Mr. Theodore Edison could recall nothing as to date, only that the room had been drafty, which was the reason for his mother's making the change, a point with which both Governor Edison and Mrs. Sloane also agreed.⁽⁴⁾ All acknowledged the vagueness of their memories as to date, observing that many changes had taken place in the old house at different times, and that it was all too easy to confuse such changes, one with another.

Meantime, on January 20, Mr. Whittington observed that the wood 2" x 4" framing used to close in the central section of the

ceiling was of the same stock size as that used today, that is, not actually 2" x 4" as in the old days, but the present roughly 1-5/8" x 3-5/8". On inquiry at the local mill of John Deliduka, Inc., in nearby Montclair, which firm has been in business for a long time, Mr. Joseph Deliduka informed him that the latter, or so-called nominal 2" x 4" lumber was in use, along with the old-time size, when he began work with his father about 1930. He believed that the smaller, nominal size was first introduced about that time. This pointed to a date for covering over the central section just before or shortly after Mr. Edison's death. (5)

Mr. Whittington next consulted Landscape Gardener C. Thore Hallstrom, who came to Glenmont in April 1934, and whose memory for physical details about the property has proved remarkably accurate in the past. Mr. Hallstrom recalled very clearly that: (1) he went home to his native Sweden in July-August 1934, and that Mrs. Thomas Edison had the Dining Room "remodeled" during his absence; (2) he decorated the scroll work, formerly existing between the main room of the Den and the bay window section at its southwest end, for the 1934 Christmas season; and (3) the said scroll work was removed and the central, domed section of the Den ceiling was closed in during the year following, before Christmas 1935. (6)

Park Guide Thelda A. Coakley was also asked if she could remember anything about the Den ceiling closure, since she and her husband, Mr. John C. F. Coakley, were for many years associated with the Edison Company and Family, and had often been guests at Glenmont. Mrs. Coakley's recollection, too, was that the work in question was done about 1935, and in any event after the death of Thomas Edison in 1931. She said further that she was sure there were some pictures, in old photograph albums at Glenmont still the property of Governor Edison and Mrs. Sloane, of how the Den ceiling looked before its central section was closed up. (7)

Meanwhile, Architect Souder began preparation of the "Architectural Data" section of this report, and following further discussions of the Site office with both EODC and the Northeast Regional Office funds in amount of \$2,305 were provided under Work Order 403-211729 (dated February 2) to remove the deteriorated ceiling and make further investigation of related structural conditions. Carrying this work forward led to further interesting discoveries. Among these was the fact that construction of the Den addition to Glenmont was initiated by Mr. Henry C. Pedder, for whom the house was built in 1880, his name being found painted on several of the steel beams running from brick wall to brick wall as basic support for the ceiling and roof structure (see Photograph No. O-1570 attached). On February 2 Mr. Whittington also found this pencilled note on a

piece of the ceiling framing: "This addition was built in July 1884." Mrs. Sloane remembered having been told, however, that the Den was not fully complete when her father bought the house in 1886, and that Mr. and Mrs. Edison finished it off to their own taste. Such recollection was confirmed by the painting of muses and cherubs in the flat vault of the central section, above the clerestory windows, which was signed by the artist: "V. Tojetti 90," the "90" obviously referring to the date 1890. With a magnifying glass, his signature can just be made out in the lower right-hand corner of Photograph No. O-1565, and of course it is plainly evident on the painting itself.

Most important of all, however, was a piece of old newspaper which Mr. Whittington found on February 3, stuffed into a void left when one of the original five wooden chandeliers in the Den, formerly located in the southwest bay of the ceiling, was removed in connection with the changes made when the central section was covered up. This fragment was part of the New York Daily News and carried the date, "Wednesday, August 14, 1935" (see Special Illustration No. 1 attached for a machine copy). The recollections of Mr. Hallstrom and Mrs. Coakley as to when this work was done were thus confirmed.

Summarizing the above findings, evidence located to date points preponderantly to the following conclusions about the history of the Den, Room No. 114:

1. Construction of the Den addition was begun by Mr. Henry C. Pedder, the pre-Edison owner, probably in 1884.
2. The Den addition was not yet completed and decorated when Mr. Edison purchased Glenmont in 1886, and it was thereafter finished off, the dome painting of muses and cherubs being definitely done in 1890, presumably by an artist whom he and Mrs. Edison themselves commissioned for that purpose.
3. The central, domed section, with its clerestory windows, was covered up in 1935, almost four years after the death of Thomas Edison, and the exterior metal roof changes (including outside covering of the windows) probably also dates from this same period.

Attached to this section of the report are Photographs Nos. 6938, 6939, and 6940, printed from new negatives made from original prints in the old albums at Glenmont, already mentioned above, with the permission of Mrs. Sloane and Governor Edison. None of these pictures is dated, but taken together they show a considerable amount of detail about the appearance of the Den in earlier

days, before the central section was closed up. They should thus have much restoration value. No. 6939 is best of the three on the decorative panels below the clerestory windows, which panels were unfortunately removed when the opening was closed, and which in the projected restoration will have to be reproduced 100%.

Reference Notes:

1. Consultation with Mr. Theodore M. Edison at Glenmont on January 17 and 19, 1966; with Governor Charles Edison by telephone on January 17; and with Mrs. John Eyre Sloane at Glenmont on January 20.
2. Telephone discussion with the Superintendent on January 17, 1966.
3. Telephone discussion with the Superintendent on January 17, 1966.
4. Discussion with the Superintendent at Glenmont on January 17, 1966.
5. Mr. Whittington's discussion with Mr. Deliduka on January 20, 1966.
6. Conversation on January 20, 1966.
7. Conversation with Mr. Whittington on January 20, 1966.



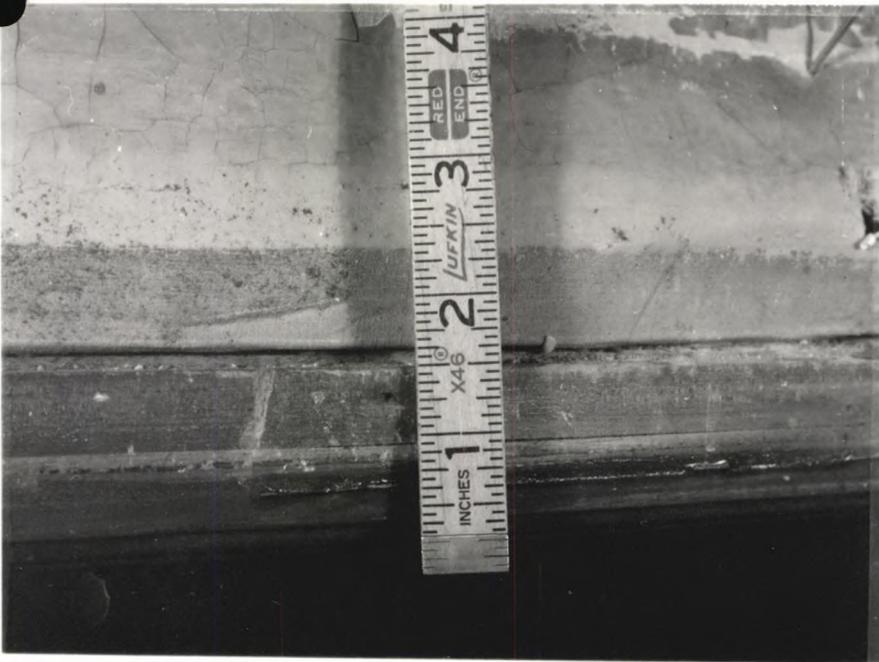
PHOTOGRAPH NO. O-1569

General view of the clerestory section of the ceiling in the Den at Glenmont, looking toward the north or fireplace end of the room. Note dropping of trim at right corner of painting and at right-hand chandelier below. The open section, with lath showing, was formerly covered by decorative, painted panels like those between the windows. Whittington photo, 1/27/66.



PHOTOGRAPH NO. O-1567

Northeast lower corner of clerestory opening, Den ceiling, Glenmont, showing plaster away from the lath to extent that a rule can be placed between. Note that the screws did not hold anything. Whittington photo, 1/27/66.



PHOTOGRAPH NO. O-1566

Canvas strip left at the lower edge of the clerestory opening of the Den ceiling at Glenmont, with paint markings showing width of trim removed when this opening was closed up. The piece of canvas shown in this picture was part of an original decorative panel below the clerestory windows, and this sample has been saved. Whittington photo, 1/27/66.



PHOTOGRAPH NO. O-1568

Detail of trim falling away from painting of muses and cherubs in northeast corner of the clerestory opening of the Den ceiling at Glenmont. Whittington photo, 1/27/66.



PHOTOGRAPH NO. O-1570

Lettering detail steel beam framing, Den ceiling at Glenmont, proving that construction of the Den addition was begun by Mr. Henry C. Pedder, the pre-Edison owner. This photograph is right side up. Note how plaster has dropped away from the lath. Whittington photo, 1/27/66.



PHOTOGRAPH NO. O-1565

Painting of muses and cherubs in flat vault of the clerestory section of the Den ceiling at Glenmont, as it appeared when the lower or false ceiling installed about 1935 was removed. The Edison children always liked this painting and are delighted at the prospect of its being once more revealed. Note signature in lower right corner: "V. Tojetti 90". Whittington photo, 1/27/66.

SPECIAL ILLUSTRATION NO. 1

DAILY NEWS, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 14, 1935

MR. CARL BUYS CARL 8 YEAR OLD BONDED WHISKEY



TO MAKE THIS
Never Since Reper
A Whiskey Value

HARVEST
8 Years Old

'E'

Copy of part of August 14, 1935 newspaper found by Gordie Whittington on February 3, 1966, stuffed into the void which was left when the wooden chandelier, formerly in the south bay of the Den (and now stored on the third floor, Building No. 5), was removed. This ties in with the recollection of Landscape Gardener C. Thore Hallstrom that the domed section of the Den ceiling was closed in between Christmas 1934 and Christmas 1935.

PHOTOGRAPH NO. 6940

General view of southwest end of the Den, Room No. 114, Glenmont, as it appeared in a copy of a half-tone photograph now in one of the Glenmont photo albums owned by Governor Charles Edison and Mrs. John Eyre Sloane. There was no date for this picture in the album. Note scroll work between the main room and the bay window section, as mentioned in this report. This photograph is a new negative copy of the album photograph made with permission of Governor Edison and Mrs. Sloane



#69140

PHOTOGRAPH NO. 6938

General view of the Den, Room No. 114, Glenmont, looking toward the northeast corner, as it appeared in a photograph now in one of the Glenmont photo albums owned by Governor Charles Edison and Mrs. John Eyre Sloane. There was no date for this picture in the album. This photograph is a new negative copy of the album photograph made with permission of Governor Edison and Mrs. Sloane.



#6938

PHOTOGRAPH NO. 6939

General view of the Den, Room No. 114, Glenmont, looking toward the southwest corner, as it appeared in a photograph now in one of the Glenmont photo albums owned by Governor Charles Edison and Mrs. John Eyre Sloane. Note detail of painted decoration in panels below the clerestory windows, all of which is now gone and will need to be replaced in restoration. There was no date for this picture in the album. This photograph is a new negative copy of the album photograph made with permission of Governor Edison and Mrs. Sloane.



6839