THE BENJAMIN ROWE HOUSE

COMMITTEE REPORT

AUGUST 1991

Arthur Tilton, chairman

Kathy Francke

Gilford School Board

Pat LaBonte, selectman

Adair Mulligan

On 2 June 1989, the Selectmen established a committee to study the future of the then named Alvah Wilson House. The following findings and recommendations are the result of the committee's works to fulfill the goals and objectives adopted at that time.

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How does one go about finding structures ... worth saving? Recognizing the ways they are hidden is a good start. ... Some are covered up by the addition of inappropriate materials. Most frequently, though, they are hidden by our own blindness: our familiarity with their presence, and our unfamiliarity with their worth. (Wrenn and Mulloy, 1976, p.36)

By Gilmanton artist Donna Manning

Date	Owner	Deed Book	Deed Page
	Simeon Hoyt		
	($500, no buildings)		
1808	Joseph Sibley	SC 5	211
	($825, 17.34 acres and other land)		
1810	Jesse & Sophia Thing	SC 5	485
	($1200: 86 acre homestead farm)		
1815	Benjamin F. Rowe	SC 7	178
1882	Estate to grandson Simon		
	Belknap County Probate # 3860		
1908	Executor John B. Morrill, husband of Mary Susan Rowe		
	Belknap County Probate # 8251		
	($2500: 70 acre homestead farm)		
	Ernest P. Sawyer	BC 124	106
1947	Alvah & Ruth Wilson	BC 295	399
1969	Town of Gilford	BC 527	392

HISTORY

> Knowing a place better depends on knowing something about its collective architecture, on being able to look with some knowledge at the quality of its design and construction ... [such knowledge] can give the viewer an understanding of a place that a history book seldom does, because history is written intimately, three dimensionally, upon the environment. (Wrenn and Mulloy, p. 197)

The farm was first settled in 1810 by Jesse Thing, who built a homestead, possibly on the site of the present 2 storey ell. Benjamin Rowe, a brick maker, bought the property five years later, and it remained in the Rowe family for almost a century. Rowe, who lived to be 100 years old, made the brick for the nearby Benjamin Jewett, Jr. House and his own unusual cape (c1838) at the stream below the house. A village landmark for years, it is referred to in many old deeds. (Illus. 1)

The 150 acre farm, second largest in the village, included grain and hay fields, pastures, as well as a sugar bush on the slopes of Mt. Rowe, named for the family. In 1840, Rowe attempted to found a silk industry; mulberry trees along the fence survive to attest this failed effort.

Pine Grove Cemetery was established in the 1850's with the death of Benjamin's great-grandson, Albanus. Simon Rowe

planted the pines to hide the grave from the daily view of his wife, and four generations of Rowes are buried there. Upon Simon's death in 1908, the farm was bought by Ernest Sawyer. He and his family operated a dairy farm on the property, still remembered by many in Gilford, until most of it was sold to the Town in 1969. (Mulligan, 1990)

Weeks to Wadley

12
520

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS, That I George W. Weeks of Gilford County of Belknap and State of New Hampshire Gentleman for and in consideration of the sum of Three Hundred Dollars to me in hand before the delivery hereof, ~~xxxxxxx~~ paid by Benjamin Wadly Gentleman have remised, released, and forever quitclaimed; and by these presents do remise, release and forever quitclaim unto the said Benjamin Wadly his heirs and assigns forever, a certain piece of land situated in Gilford village and bounded as follows to wit Beginning on the road leading from Gilford village to Benj. Rowe on land of said Benj. Wadly thence northerly on land of said Wadly eight and one half rods thence easterly on said Wadly's land formerly owned and occupied by Joseph R. Gale nineteen rods to the easterly side of the range way thence on the easterly side of the range twenty three rods to a stake and stones thence westerly one and a half rods to a Spruce tree spotted thence north only fourteen with the range twenty four rods to a stake & stones thence westerly about forty eight rods to a stake & stones thence northerly about four & half rods to a stake & stones thence westerly about nine rods to the road aforesaid then southeasterly on said road about fifteen and four tenth rods to the bounds began at containing about seven acres being the same more or less as bounded

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, Belknap SS. June 7. A. D. 1848

Personally appearing, the above named George W. Weeks acknowledged the foregoing instrument to be his voluntary act and deed, Before me, John G. Weeks Justice of the Peace.

Received September 9. 1848 Examined by Math. Cogsley Recorder.

Illus. 1

PRESERVATION EFFECTS

> One building is architecture, but two buildings are a townscape. Gordon Cullen (cited in Wrenn & Mulloy, 1976)

As the only house in the village which does not face Belknap Mountain Road, the Rowe House is an historical, architectural boundary between the "village" and "rural" dwellings of Gilford's past. In 1988, it was evaluated by David Ruell of the Lakes Region Planning Commission in conjunction with the Gilford School District Building Committee; and again in March 1989 by State Architectural Historian James Garvin, when the building was petitioned for demolition at Town Meeting. Their reports are included in entirety at the end of the report; significant quotes follow.

> The architectural quality of the Wilson House may not be apparent to the casual observer ... but it is a fine early cape, significant not for any elaborate ornament, but notable for its pleasing composition and details, good proportions and workmanship. What makes the Wilson House unusual among the early houses of Gilford, Belknap County, and the Lakes Region is its brick construction. Virtually all of the early buildings in the region were built of wood, and only a small fraction were constructed of brick. ...a windshield survey of the early buildings of central New Hampshire made some years ago... found only six brick capes, but 426 wooden capes in the eleven towns of Belknap County. In the thirty-two towns of the Lakes Region

there were 21 brick and 1336 wooden capes. ... The numbers clearly indicate the extreme rarity of brick capes. They are, in fact, rarer in the county and the region, than churches of the same era. Any remaining early brick cape should receive especial consideration. Certainly, a restored Wilson House would be a major asset to the historic Gilford village. And its loss would be a great one for the Gilford Village Historic District. The Wilson House, if the exterior is restored, would be an attractive building, a fine example of the area's early architecture, a good representative of an uncommon building type, and a unique reminder of Gilford's own past. (Ruell, 1988)

In March 1989, James L. Garvin reported:

> The house is unique in New Hampshire in its floor plan. The placement of four chimneys along the walls of a central hallway, in such a manner as to provide fireplaces for four first - floor rooms, is without parallel. Most brick houses of the period have their chimneys placed against the outer walls on opposite ends. ...the house retains most of its original interior features. These include the staircase, door and window trim, mantlepieces, a multitude of unusual doors, hardware, and some window sashes. ...Tradition states that the bricks for the Wilson House were burned on the site by the builder, who was a brickmaker. This tradition is strengthened by the presence in the walls, chimneys, and cellar floors and partitions of bricks from all parts of a brick kiln, as if the builder of the house were trying to use up an entire "burning" of brick. This makes the Wilson House an important document of local technology and craftsmanship. ... The house is very important building, both as part of Gilford Village and as part of the broader architectural heritage of New Hampshire.

In March 1991, Paul Mirski, a New Hampshire architect specializing in adaptive re-use, toured the building and grounds at the request of the Rowe Committee. Mr. Mirski

reported that

> The families which occupied the Rowe House played an important part in framing Gilford's present image and character. Gilford's history is rooted in agriculture. Industrial growth formed and consolidated elsewhere in the county. Gilford, until very recently, was a town of rolling hills and dairy farms - in the very best tradition of a rural community. The Rowe House ... [is] an important reminder of that lost heritage ... [and] links Gilford's past culture with its present development. ...The Rowe House is an exceptional brick structure and is in very good condition. ...the community needs to take a minute and learn more about the potential of the property to link present community life with its recent and distant past.

STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY

> In preservation, the beginning is to look ... look up, look down ... looking at the elements closely, inquisitively, suspiciously, thoroughly. (Wrenn and Mulloy, p. 37)

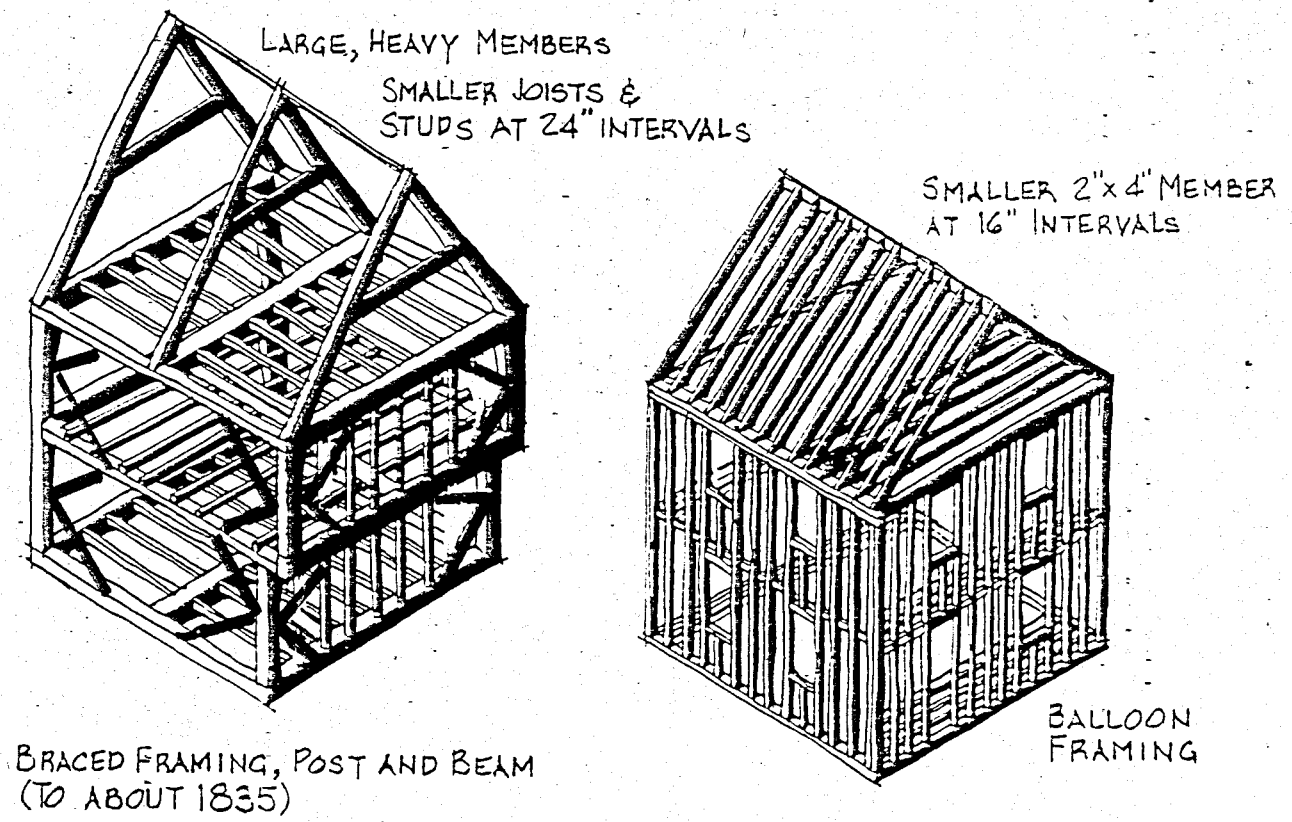
THE WOODEN ELL

Beginning in March 1991, members of the Rowe Committee began a series of "architectural archaeology digs" in an effort to establish the age of the wooden ell and the dormers. A c. 1900 postcard, reproduced for Gilford Public Library, shows the Rowe House with a 1 1/2 storey dormered ell, a "typical" open porch, and the original out-buildings. (Illus. 2)

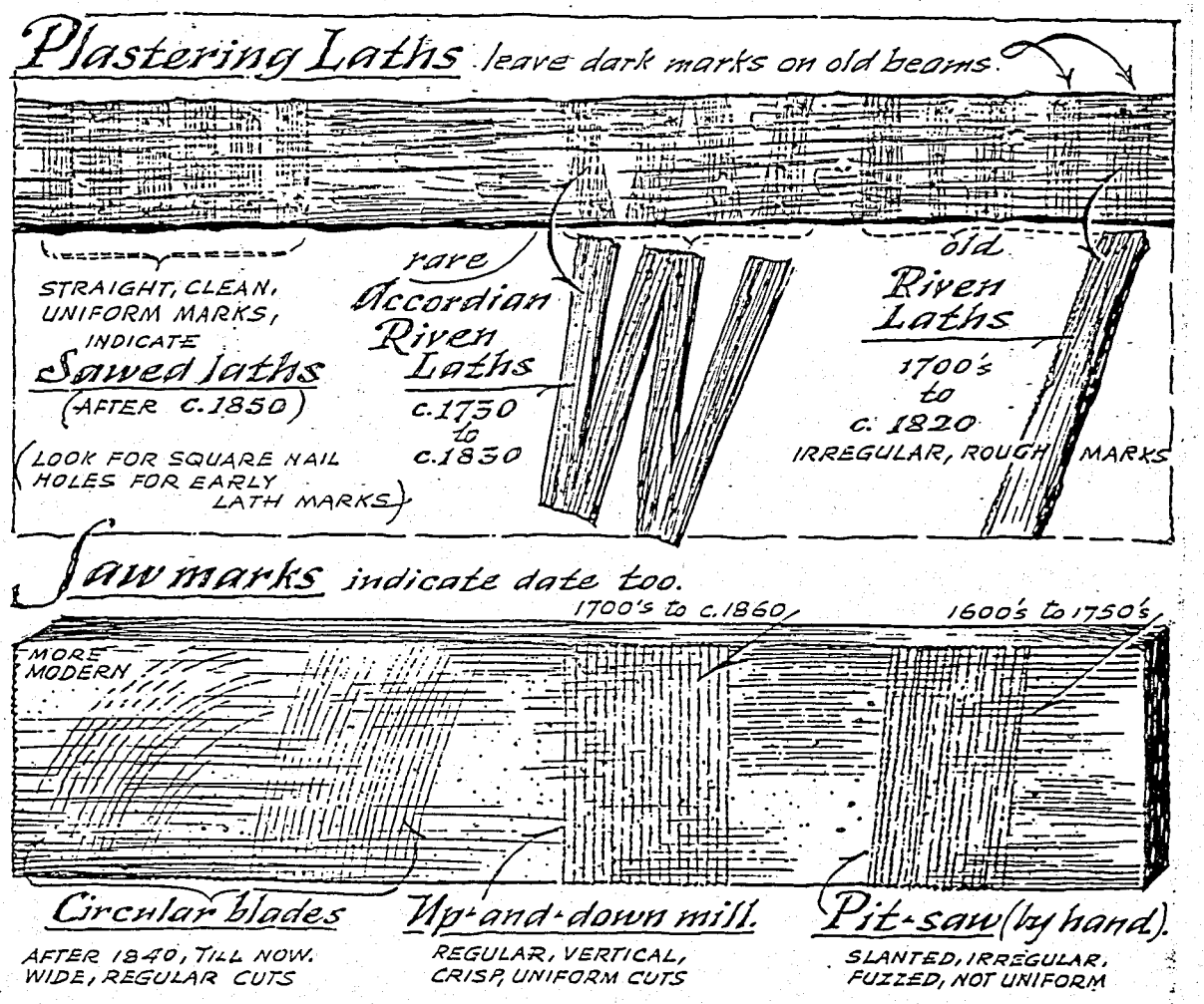
Illus. 2 (from the collection of Robert Holman)

Various evaluations of the building since 1988 revealed that the basement of the ell appeared earlier than that of the brick building; thus it seemed possible that it was the original foundation of the Jesse Thing house, and perhaps elements of that earlier structure were incorporated in the present ell.

Two areas were targeted for exploration: The wall adjoining the brick structure, and the northwest corner of the ell. If the ell did contain elements of Jesse Thing's house, there would be post and beam construction with gunstock posts, windbraces, and riven lath. (Illus. 3,4)



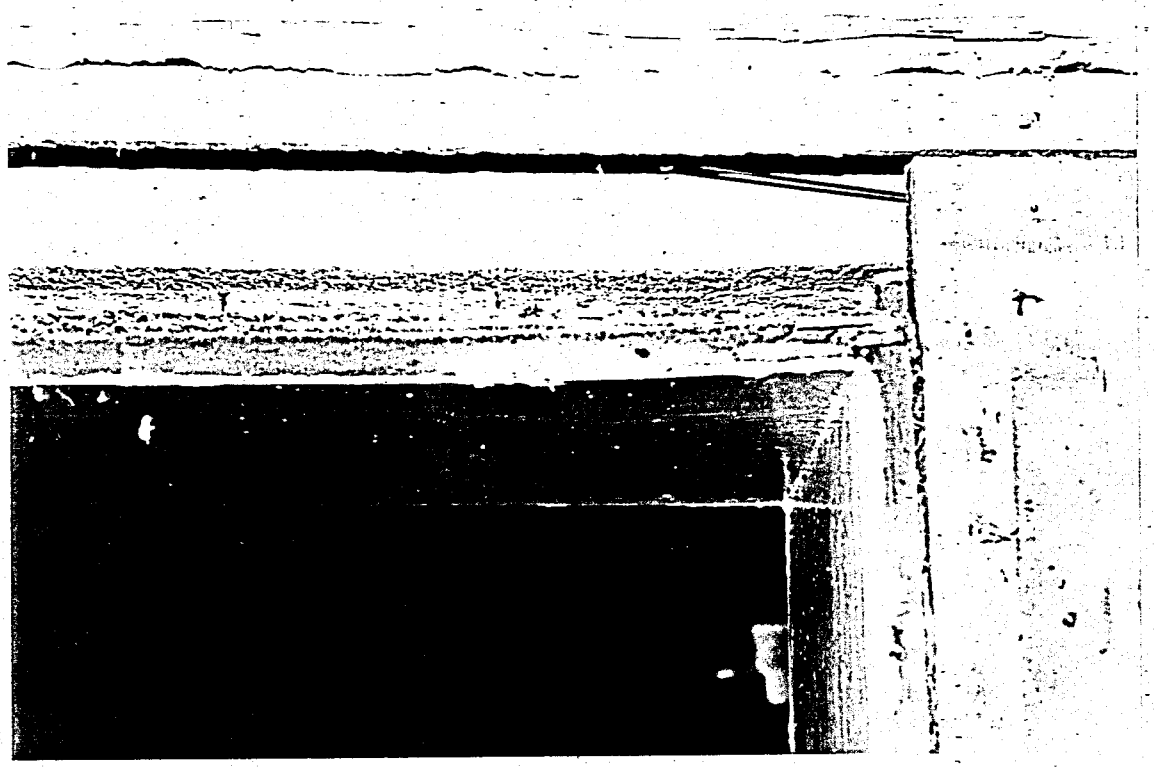
Illus. 3 (Hart and Hance, 1978, p.66)



Illus. 4 (Sloane, 1965, p.26)

"Unbuilding" revealed that the ell was newer than the brick building: the end wall of the Rowe House was behind the sawn lath of the ell, the door opening had been chiseled through a previous window which retained its granite header, and the framing was balloon: all indicating later 19th century addition. (Illus. 5-8)

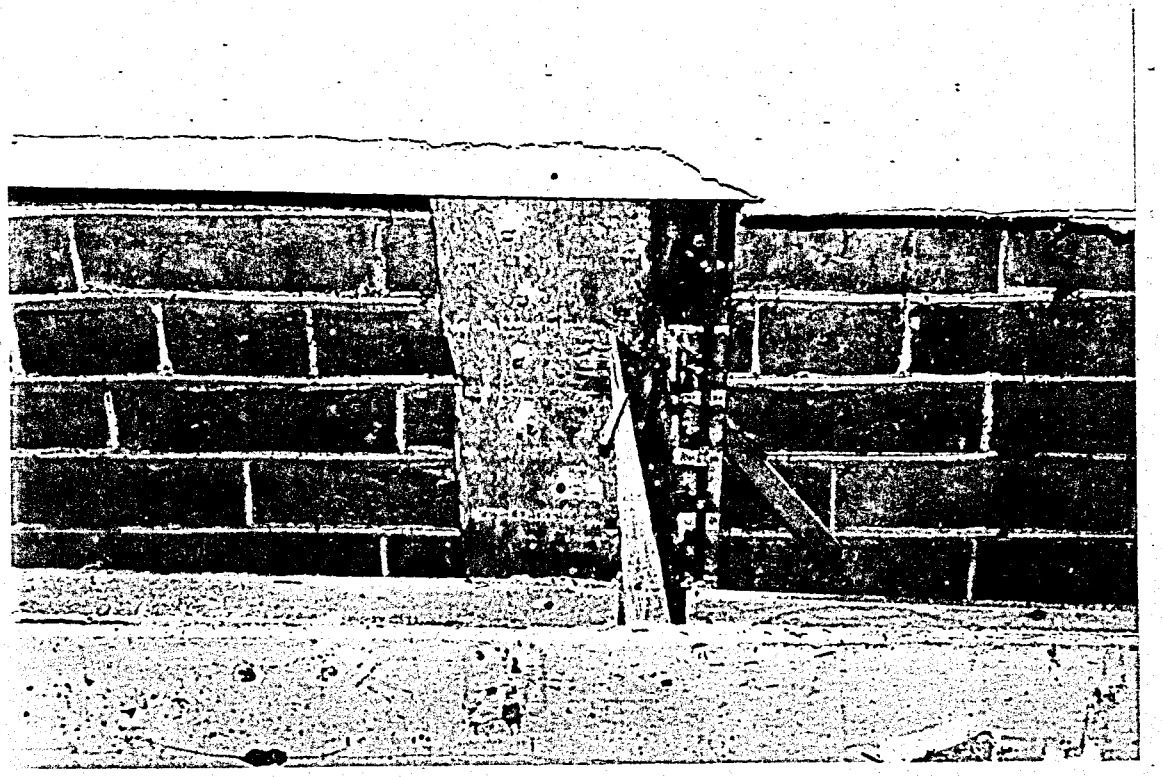
Granite header of original window



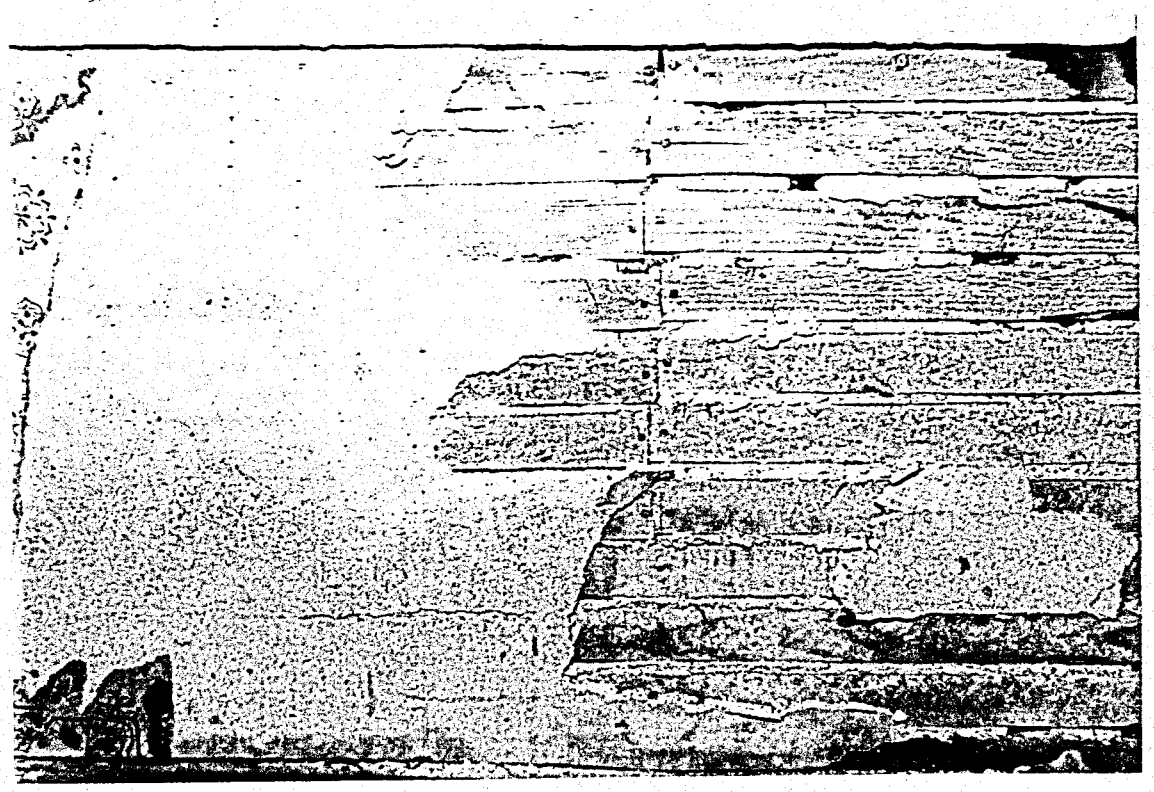
Illus. 5.

Chiseled brick of original window

Illus. 6.



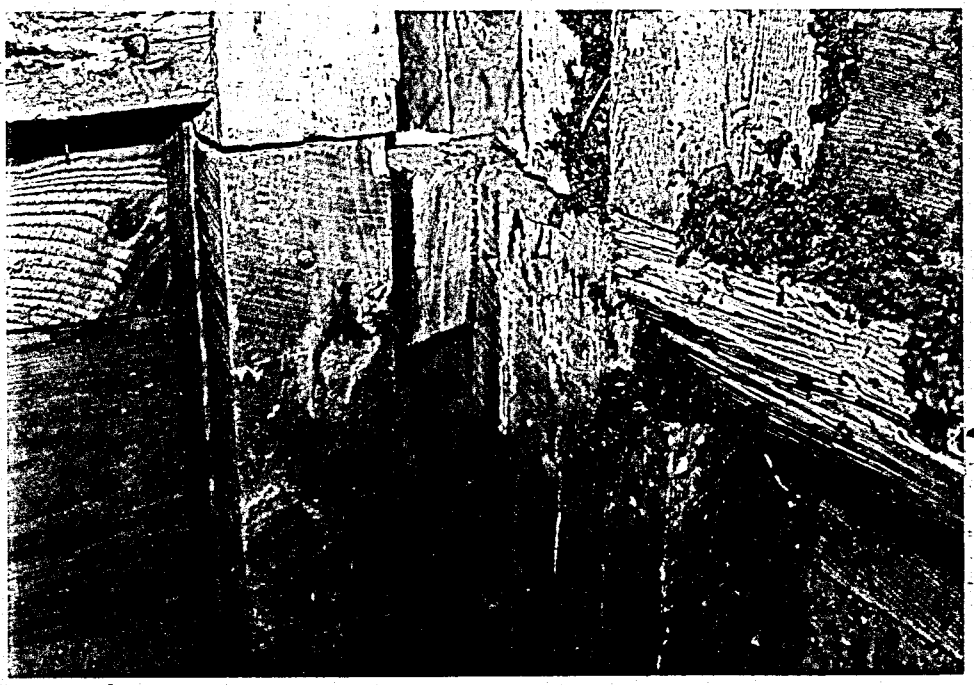
Illus. 7. Brick end wall



Illus. 8. Sawn lath

This evidence, coupled with the postcard, indicated that the first floor of the ell was probably built by Benjamin F. or Simon Rowe, perhaps on the foundation of the Thing house.

Exploration of the second storey of the present ell revealed the original attic floor, framing for the roof of the earlier 1 1/2 ell, and "beaver board"; a wall material not in use until the early 20th century. (Illus. 9,10) The presence of beaver board throughout areas of the dormer additions indicated that the ell had been raised and the dormers constructed in the same time period. The most likely builder was Ernest Sawyer, after 1908.

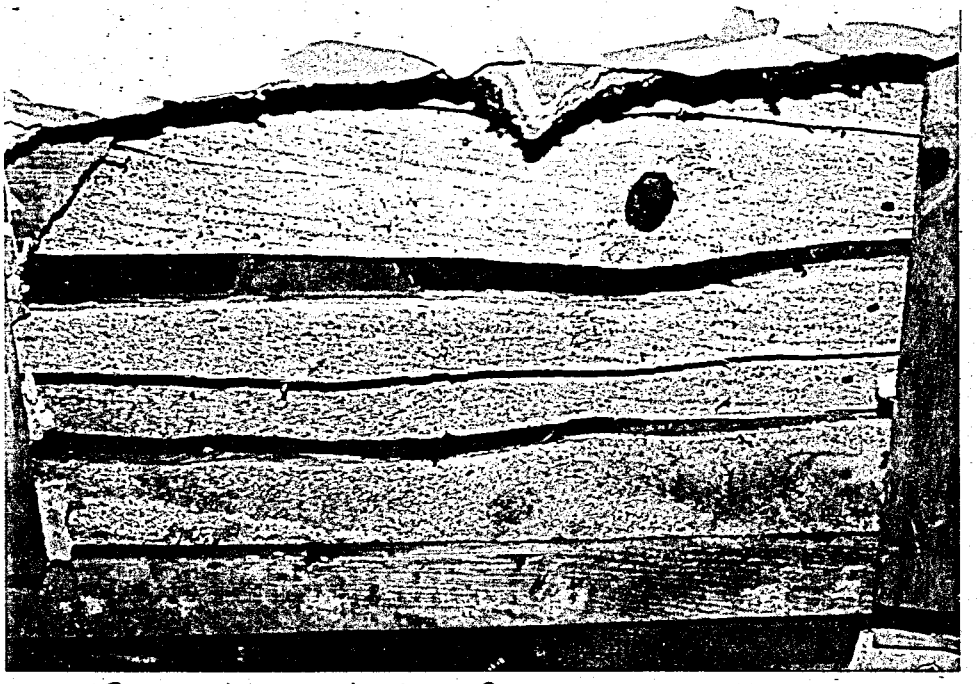


Illus. 9

Original end wall stud, ell

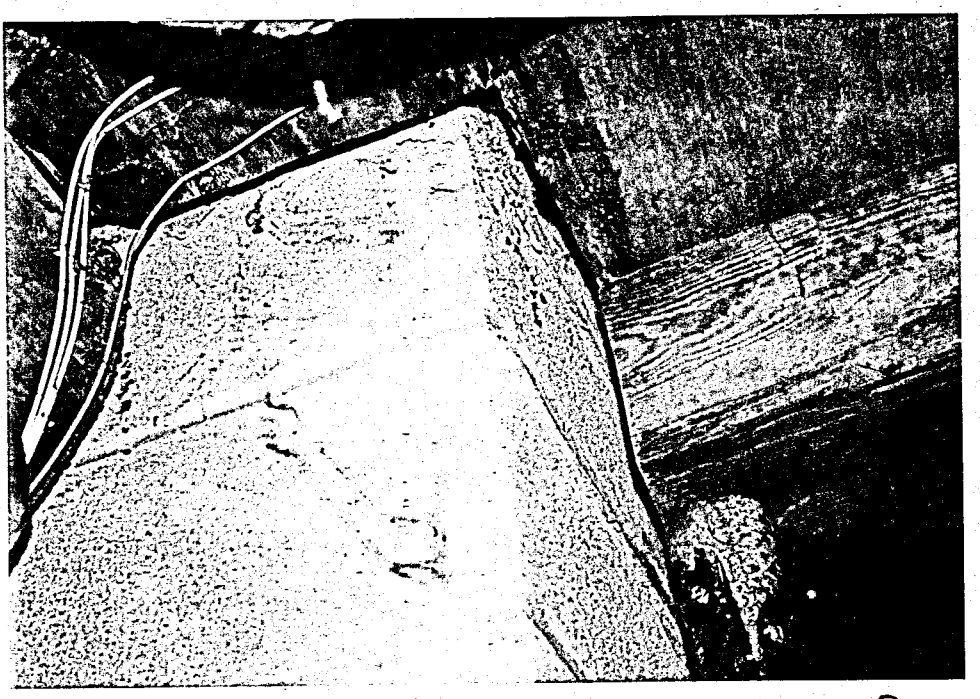
Illus. 10

A further question remains about the chimney of the ell: there is every indication that it was a later addition. It is of cinderblock construction, none of the chimney area is appropriately framed; neither in the basement, nor as it passes through to the second floor. The original, mysterious, riven lath of the first floor ceiling had been sawn through, and no support was provided the lath, causing major plaster and lath failure in the area of the chimney. (Illus. 11-13)



Riven lath of 1st floor ceiling

Illus. 11



Illus.12 Chimney from basement to first floor

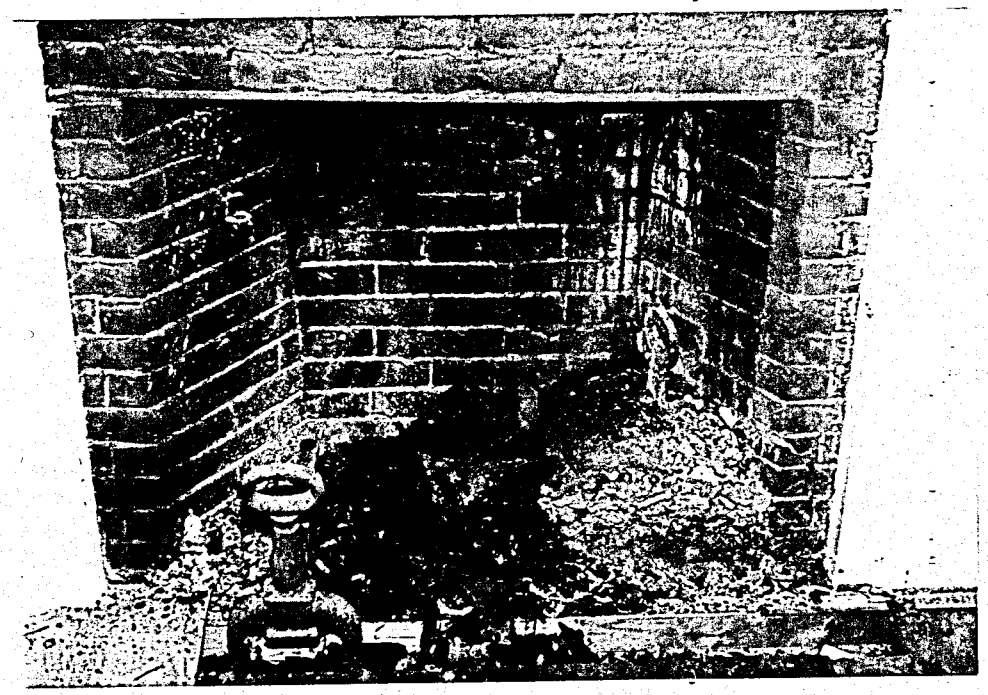
Chimney opening sawn through riven lath of first floor ceiling.

Illus. 13

THE BRICK HOUSE

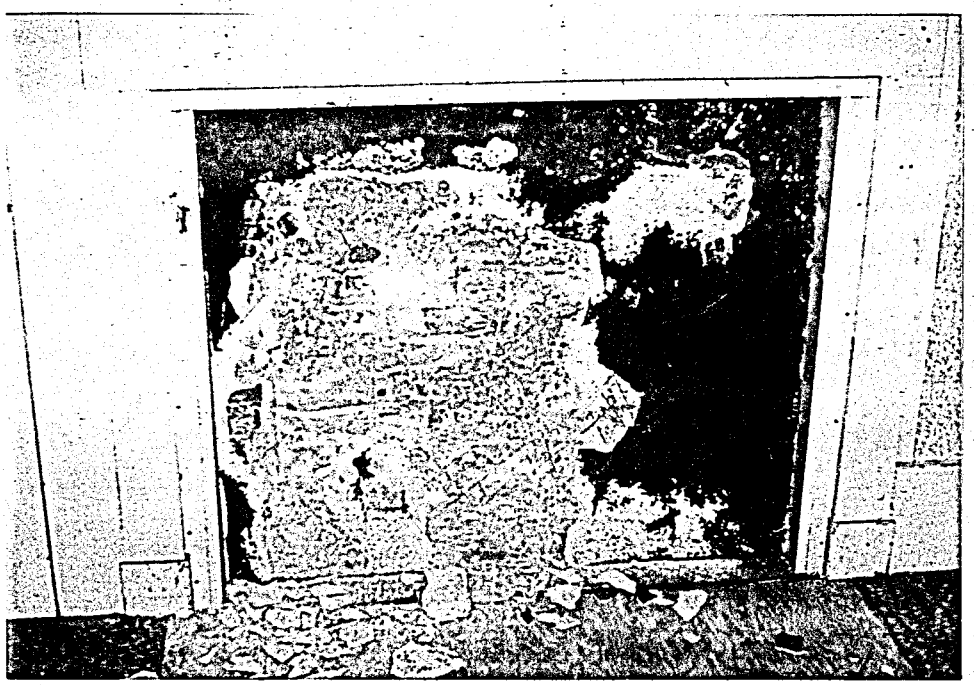
Ground Floor

Except for the replaced windows, entry doors, kitchen area, and added bathroom, the first floor of the brick house is substantially intact. Although every chimney was modified to accomodate wood or coal stoves, the placement and surrounds of three remain unaltered. One fireplace, in the northwest room, was sealed in 1954, as evidenced by a New York Times page from December 8, 1954 found stuffed in the flue opening. Andirons were also in the fireplace. (Illus. 14)



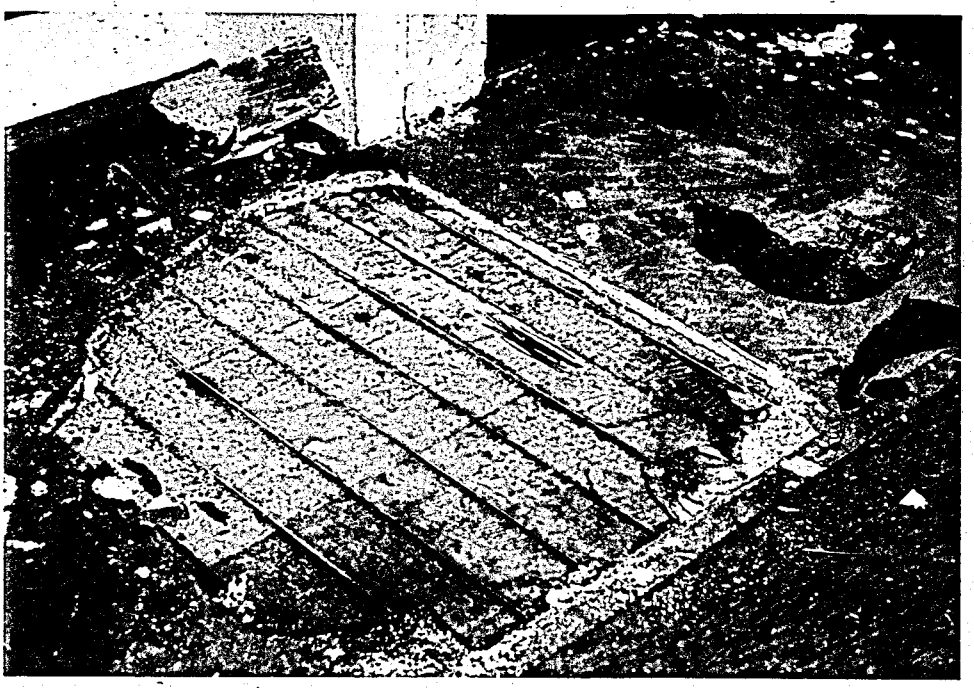
Illus.14 Northwest fireplace

The fireplace opening in the southwest room was bricked, plastered, painted, and later plywooded over; its hearth had been removed. (Illus. 15)



Illus. 15 Southwest fireplace

The fireplace in the southeast room remains open, complete with exposed hearth; but it, too, shows evidence of a later stovepipe access. The northwest fireplace, in the former kitchen, has been totally removed, and replaced with a chimney to accomodate a stove. Removal of the carpeting in this area revealed a narrow board maple floor which replaced the original flooring as well as the former hearth. The material is consistent with early 20th century kitchen "remodelings" of the area. (Illus. 16)

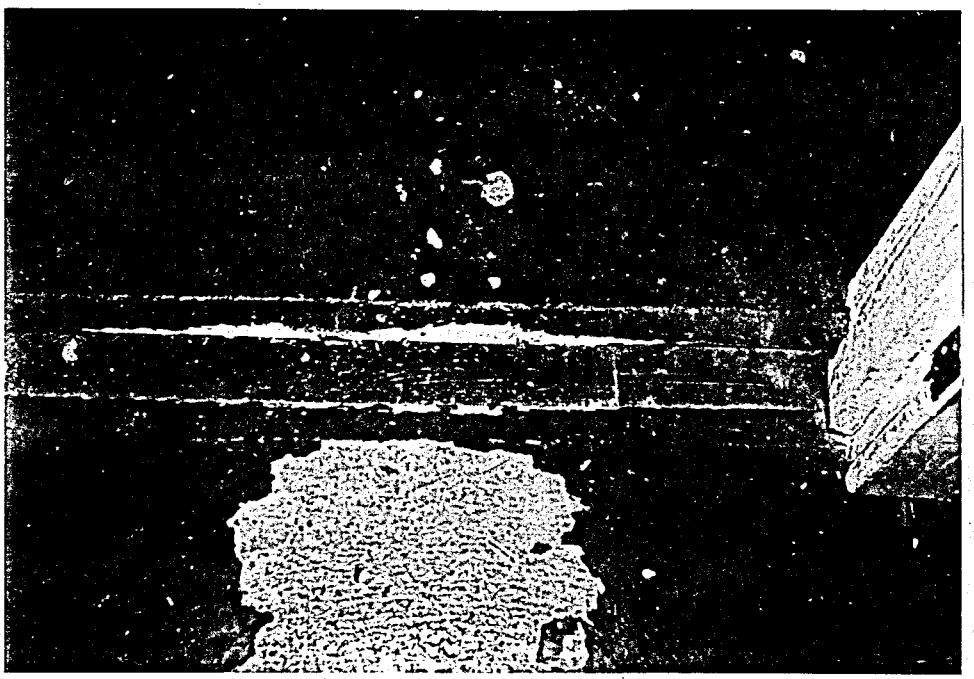


(Illus. 16) Northeast ("kitchen") fireplace area

All rooms but the center hall and pantry have dropped ceilings; the walls of the bathroom are beaver board, which dates its construction.

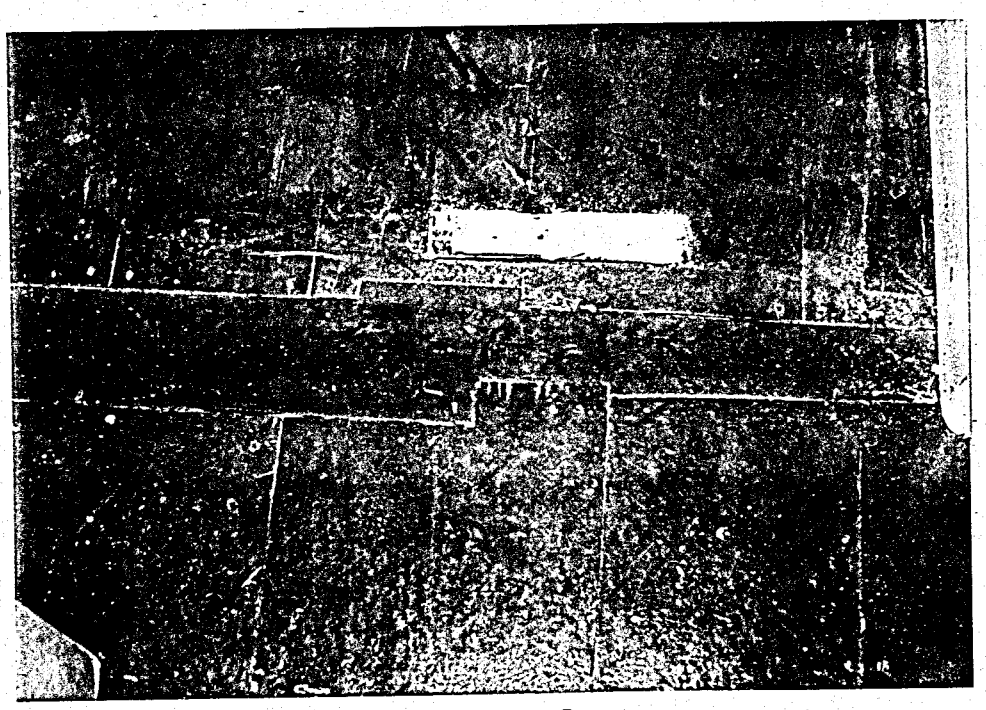
THE SECOND FLOOR

The dormers built by the Sawyer family changed a good portion of the second floor plan. The east and west rooms of the building are relatively easy to discern due to the presence of original doors, traces of different partitions in the floors, and beaver board. (Illus. 17,18)



Doorway cut through earlier partition

Illus. 17



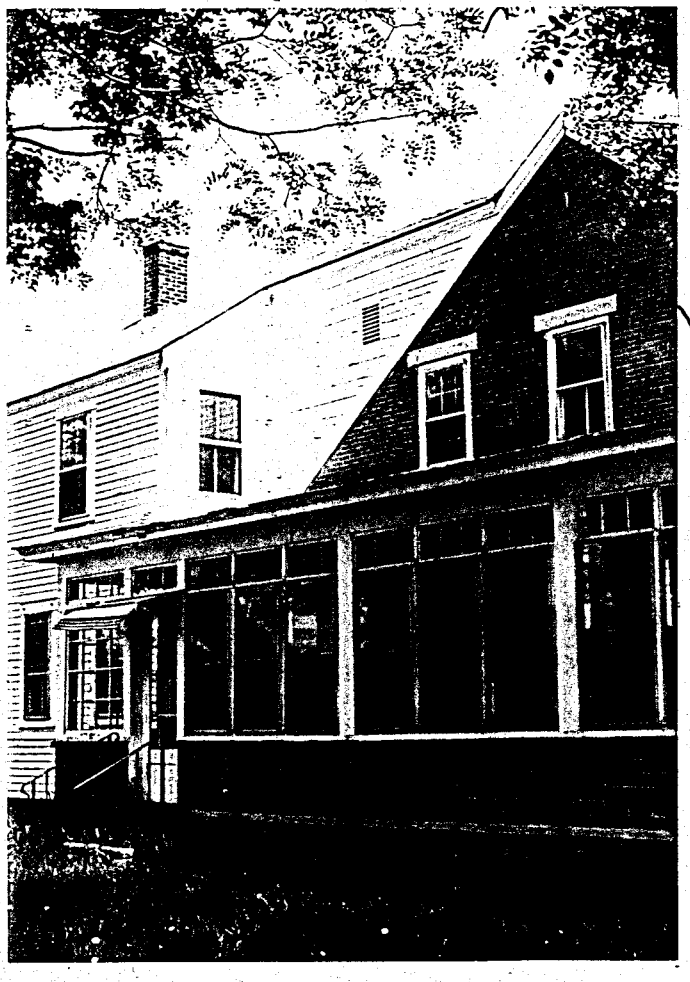
Illus. 18 Patched areas of former partitions

The front hall staircase, in all likelihood originally open, was later enclosed. (Illus. 19,20)

Illus. 19 Crudely sawn railing of upstairs hall

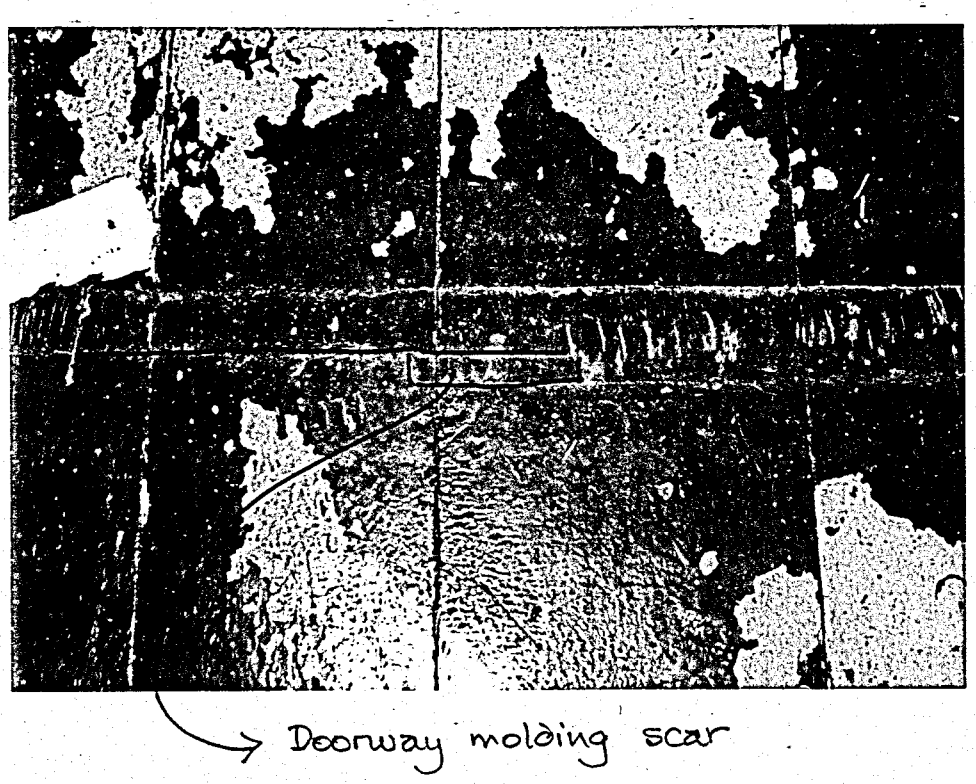
Illus. 20 Sawn spindles of upstairs hall railing

The junction of the brick house and the wooden ell revealed possibly an "unfinished" attic room due to the plasterwork, evidence of a doorway, and containing the only original 6 over 6 window of the entire second floor. (Illus. 21,22)



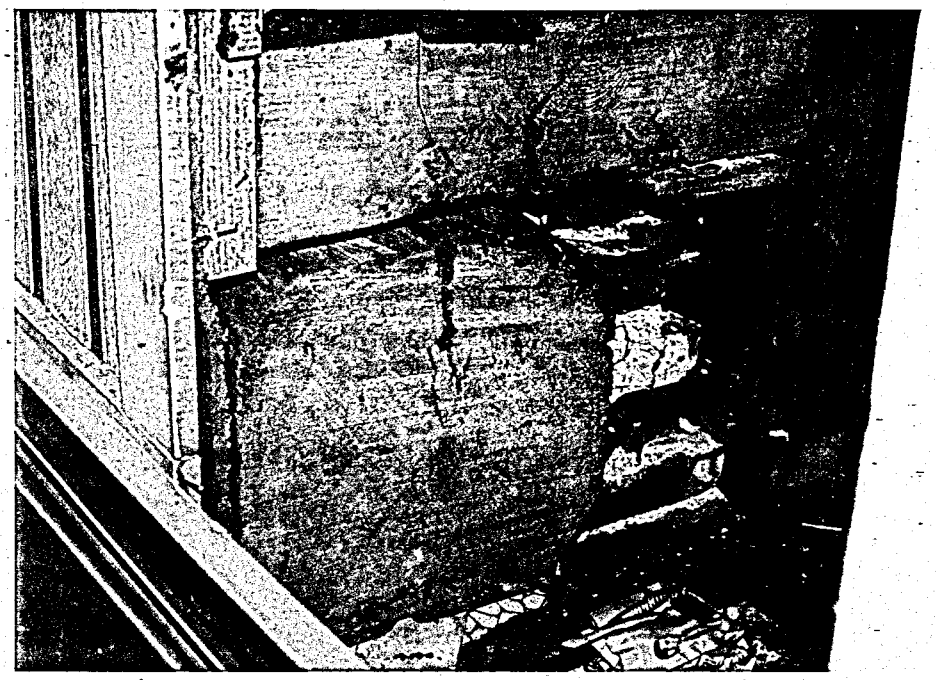
Only 6/6 window on second floor.

Illus. 21

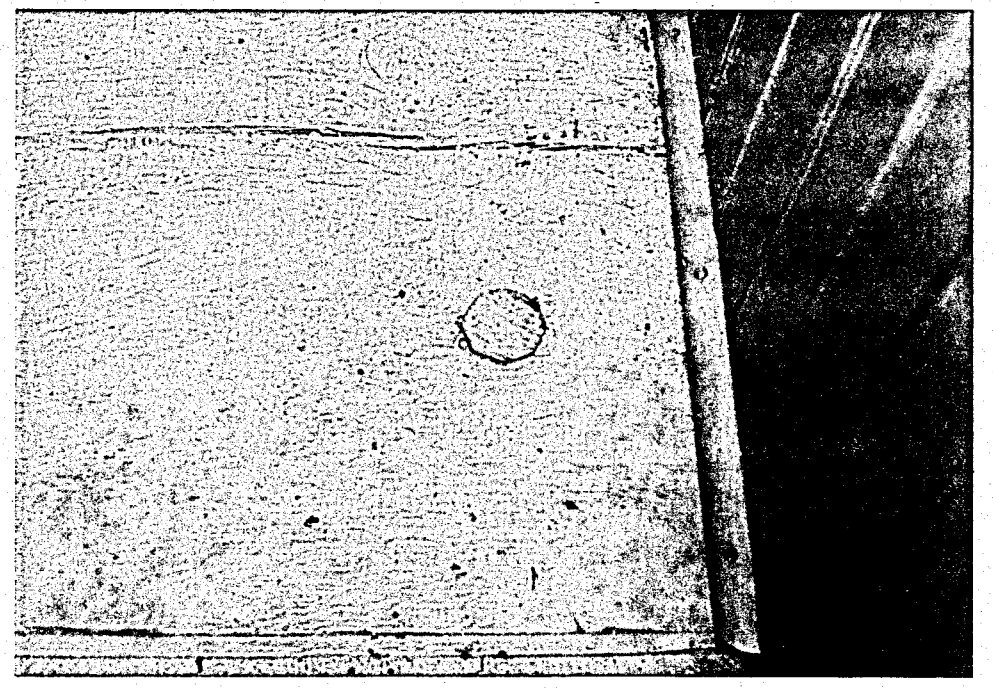


Illus. 22

Removal of the beaver board and "modern" 2x4s framing the passage from the raised ell to the dormer areas also revealed an architectural wonder: a substantial 13"x14" plate beam, overlaid by an equally staggering 21 1/2"x6" roof plate, joined by large wooden pegs at regular intervals. Such construction is on both the south and north 40' length of the building. Further examination revealed the 31" - 33" spacing of the original roof rafters. (Illus. 23,24)



Illus. 23 Roof structure elements



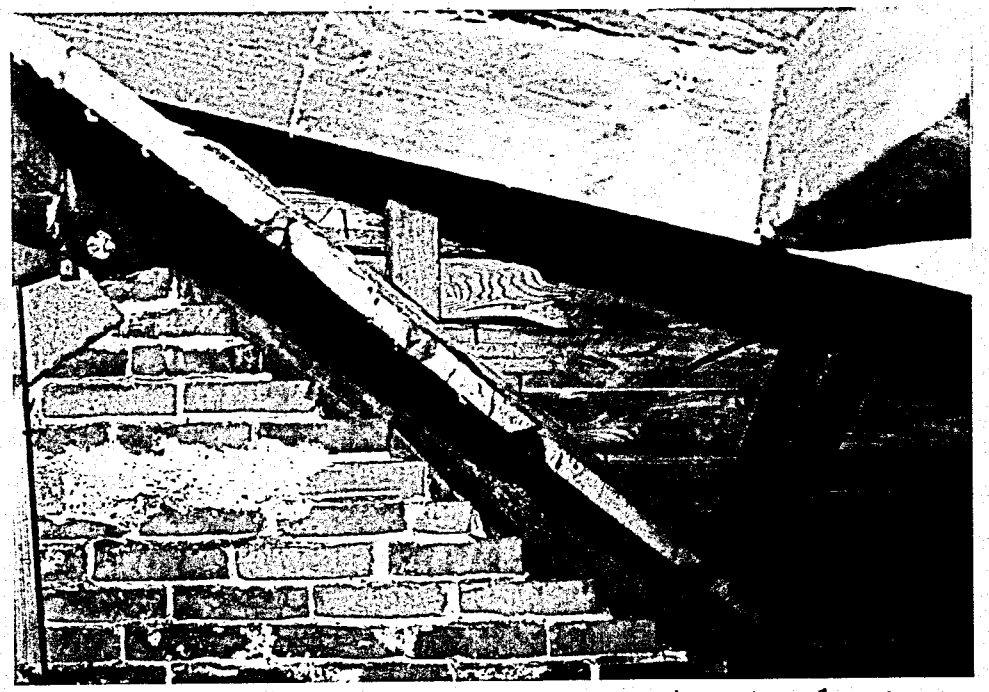
Illus. 24 Peg joining beam and plate

Dormer Roof

The original slope of the roof can be discerned by the flashing lines of the chimneys and the end walls.(Illus. 25-27)

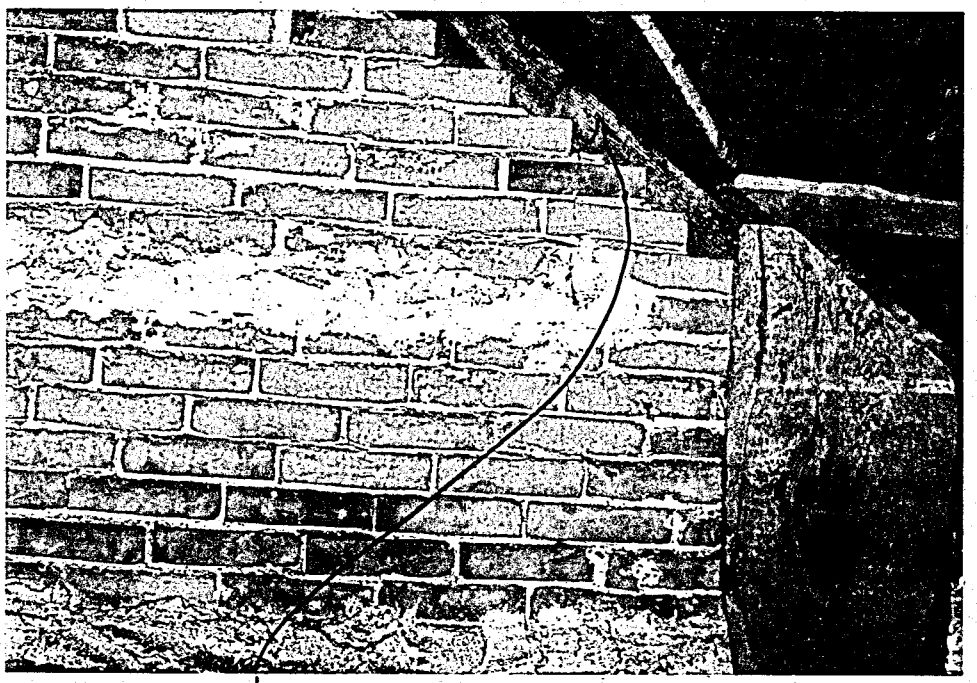
Chimney flashing

Illus. 25



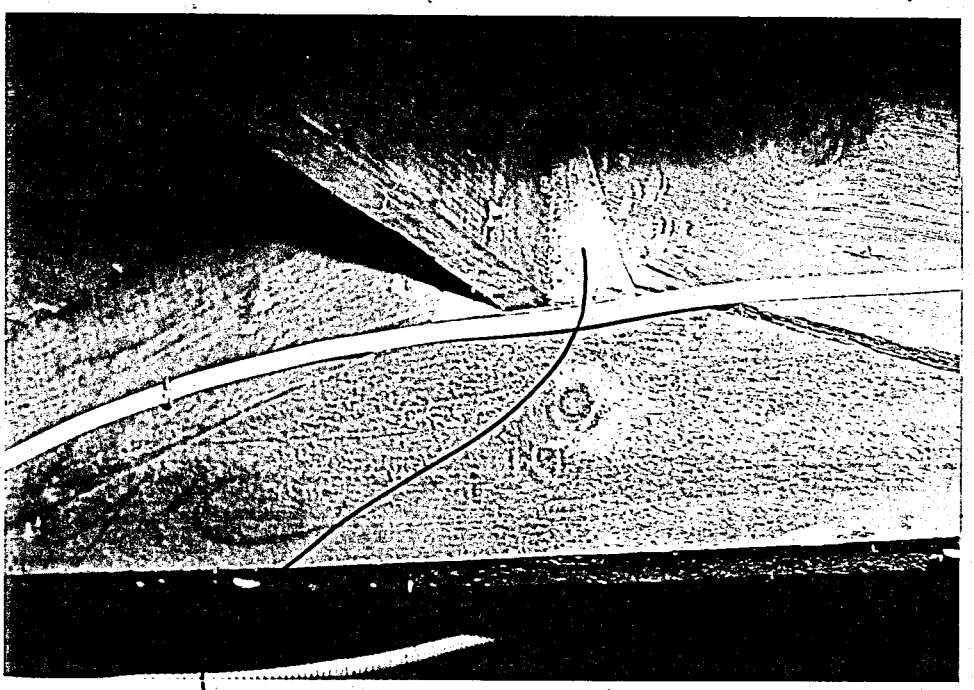
Illus. 26

Original planking ↗ end wall



Illus. 27

Consistently placed wedges along the ridge of the present roof, the evidence found in the materials, and measurements of the rafter spans led the "architectural archaeologists" to conclude that the dormer roof was achieved by raising the original cape roof. Furthermore, the saw patterns on the planking of the roof are unmistakable evidence that it is original to Benjamin Rowe's cape as well. (Illus. 28-30)



Wedges to "raise" the roof

Illus. 28

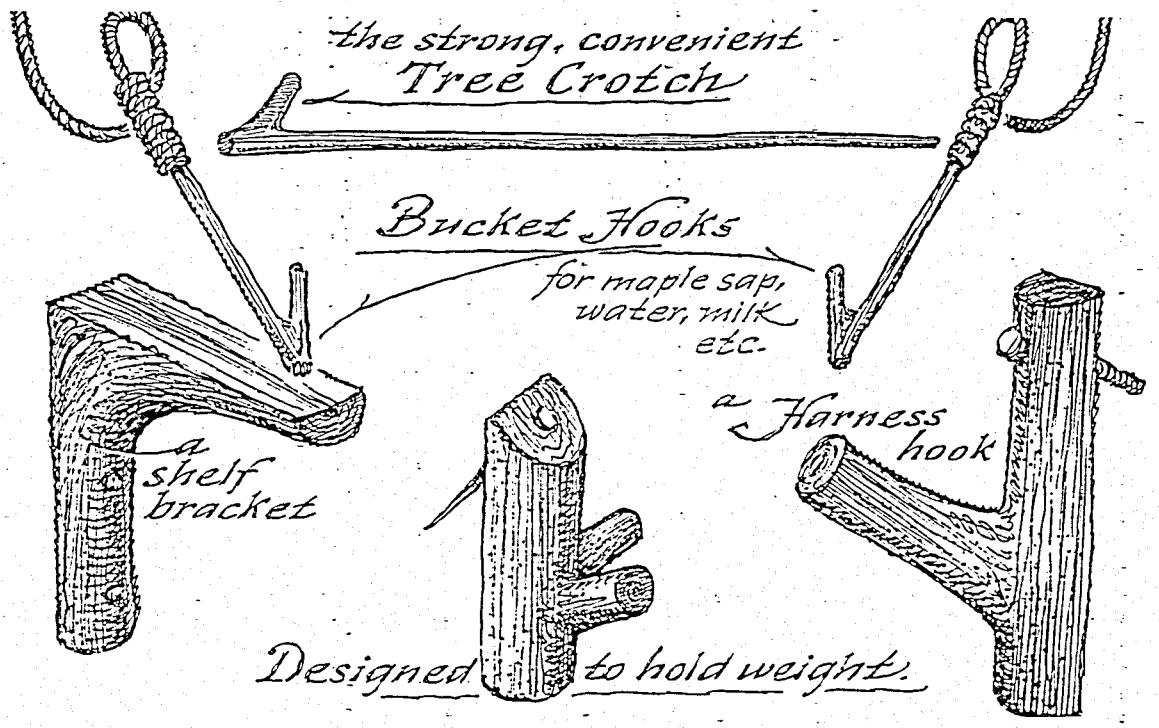
Not standard 20th century timbers

Illus. 29

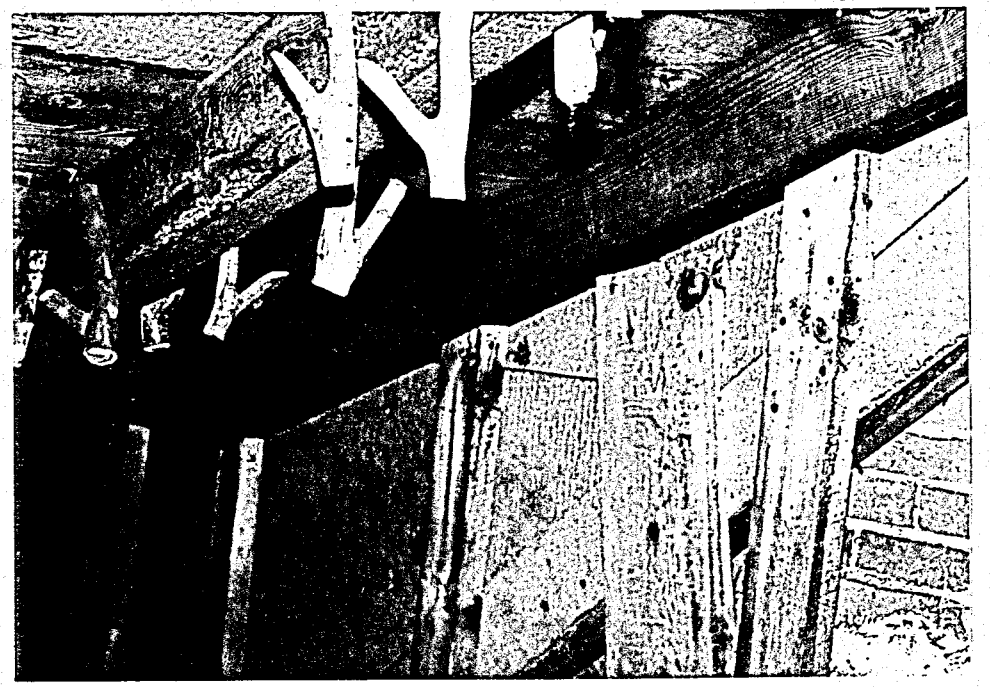
early saw marks

Illus. 30

A final charismatic note of dormer intrigues was the presence of what is assumed to be "drying pegs": wooden hooks hung along the rafters, made from branch crotches in the tradition described by Eric Sloane. (Illus. 31,32)



Illus. 31 (Eric Sloane, 1965, p.39)



Illus. 32

Miscellaneous Findings

Measurement of the north door (into the current milkroom) revealed that, in all likelihood, the large granite block discovered this spring next to the milkroom was the back step to this door. Examination of the granite block currently at the base of the "front porch" yielded evidence of a boot scraper, indicating its position and importance to the front entrance of the brick house. (Illus. 33)

Illus. 33

Finally, the presence of wrought iron brackets on the south and north face of the house attest to the previous presence of drains and down-spouts for the original structure. (Illus. 34)

Illus. 34

RECOMMENDATIONS

I

DISPOSITION

Given the continued controversy which surrounds the Rowe House, it is the recommendation of the committee that the Selectmen define a rationale and process for returning the building to compatible and sympathetic use, and develop a new charge for its Rowe House Committee. Specifically, the Selectmen need to address the following: why the building should not be sold, the renovation/restoration of the building, how tenants would be sought, and the terms of a potential lease.

In order to protect the interior and exterior of the Rowe House, the committee further recommends that the renovation, restoration be undertaken by the town through the direction of a re-defined Rowe Committee, with any costs being borne by community efforts (volunteer labor), fund-raising, and the terms of the lease, rather than passing the responsibility of work to a tenant. With such premises, the committee has developed the following guidelines for use, renovation, restoration, and process.

II

Use

How dull it is to rest unburnished, not to shine in use!

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Because infrequently used buildings deterioriate rapidly, and are vulnerable to vandalism, it is the recommendation of the committee that the building should be occupied by a group or groups with relatively little flow of "clients" and a stable office staff, which would keep the building open and in use all year round. It is also recommended that only the first floor of the brick building be available for general use, in order to retain and protect the integrity of the interior. The upstairs should be limited in use and access. Restoration of the building, both interior and exterior, should be documented, and done in conjunction with the N.H. Division of Historical Resources and the Gilford Historic District Commission, according to the guidelines adopted by the commission on March 26, 1991.

Grounds

The locust and maple trees along Belknap Mountain Road and

the present driveway should be afforded attention: both need pruning, and interplanting should be done since the maple trees are suffering from age and, presumably, salt damage.

III

Restoration

At present, the Rowe House stands as its worst enemy: it is overgrown with inappropriate additions, and has a recent history of unsympathetic and uncomfortable use.

In order that this important building be again readily visible to all, it is recommended that the dormers, second floor of ell, porch, and entry porch be removed. While some have voiced the opinion that the Rowe House be shorn of all additions, it is the conclusion of the Rowe Committee that the wooden ell be returned to its earlier 1 1/2 storey configuration, together with the open, turn-of-the-century porch visible in Illustration 2. Because the junction of the brick building to the ell was chiseled through a window opening, repair would be difficult and obvious. The documentation of the postcard, the presence of several early 20th century porches in the village, and the problem of cleaning the brick which the west faced porch roofs have lined for almost a century lead the committee to conclude that the

Rowe House would be better served by reflecting these significant episodes of its past than returning it to the configuration which existed for relatively few years. Furthermore, while the Rowe Committee has recommended serious restrictions on the treatment of the brick house interior, it is less stringent with the considerations of the ell, whose contribution is only to exterior architecture. The ell interior has no features of significance, but the brick wall should be left exposed in order to illustrate the historical development of the buildings. Its use could be any that would have minimal impact on the traffic in the brick building.

The first floor of the Rowe House needs relatively little work. In 1988, specific requirements for meeting buillding codes were listed by John Bobula, Director of the Department of Planning and Land Use, and are included at the end of the committee report. In addition to the technical improvements necessary, the committee recommends that ceilings which have been tiled should be repaired; replaced windows should be returned to their original wood muntined 9/6, 6/6 configurations. Woodwork should be refinished, and walls repaired and wallpapered. The prominance of the Rowe family, the period of the house, and no evidence of paint on the original plaster would indicate that all walls were most likely wallpapered. Heating and all other necessary pipes should be

moved into appropriate spaces available in chimney-side closets. Radiators should be replaced with more efficient and unobstrusive baseboard elements, painted to match the woodwork. Floors should be refinished and painted, or carpeted if they need to be protected. All present fireplace openings and hearths should be repaired and/or retained. The downstairs bathroom should have its beaver board replaced and be refurbished. The kitchen area should be provided special consideration: the previous sink/dishwasher unit was cut into the original panelling and window frame, concealing 1/3 of the window opening. Whether a convenience area should be continued in this space will depend on the use eventually assigned this room.

IV

PROCESS

It is the recommendation of the Rowe Committee that much preliminary work can and should be done to better reveal the inherent charm of the building while "tenants" are sought: the removal of the entry porch, the stripping of necessary areas of the interior, and the refurbishing of the first floor. Most of the work could be accomplished with volunteer labor, at little or no cost to the town; fund-raising activities could galvanize enthusiasm for, and support of, the building. Local businesses such as Boulia-Gorrell Lumber and Decorative Interiors have already expressed considerable interest and assured maximum co-operation in these efforts. A proposed time-table and "cost" follows:

Phase I

Removal of front porch, ell interior, acoustic tiles, carpeting, and beaver board from brick building. Cost: access to dumpster. Labor: volunteers.

Phase II

Refurbishing first floor of brick building. This work is deemed necessary as preparation for occupancy by suitable "tenants". Materials needed: replacement windows, bathroom and "convenience area" fixtures, insulation and sheetrock (ell), lighting fixtures, paint and wallpaper, ceiling repair, baseboard heating units, and other work necessary to meet current building codes. Costs could be allayed by terms of lease, volunteer labor, and fund-raising efforts.

Phase III

It is recommended that the removal of dormers, ell second floor, and west porch be left for last. Because these structures are interdependent, it is impossible to estimate the cost of this phase until architectural drawings are prepared. The preliminary investigations of the committee lead us to conclude that this project requires further in-depth analysis for appropriate development. However, cleaning out and stripping the area in preparation for study and reconstruction should mostly be done in phase I. Fund raising in conjunction with the town and proposed tenant(s) could provide most, if not all, the monies necessary for this most costly aspect of the Rowe House renovation, and matching funds from the National

Trust for Historic Preservation could, by then, be more readily available.

CONCLUSION

It is the opinion of the committee that a community-based effort to restore the Rowe House would be very desirable and successful. Many towns in the state have undertaken such work, and the benefits derived have not only been the savings of tax dollars, but, additionally, an increased sense of pride in, and understanding of, local heritage and history.

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3 March 1989

Report to: Gilford, N.H., Historic District Commission
Gilford, N.H., Board of Selectmen
Gilford, N.H., School Board

From : James L. Garvin, Architectural Historian, New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources

Re : The Alvah Wilson House

On March 3, 1989, I inspected the Alvah Wilson House at the invitation of Ailleen Jensen, Chair, Gilford Historic District Commission. During my inspection, I met with members of the Board of Selectmen, members of the Historic District Commission, members of the School Board, members of the administrative staff of the school system, and interested citizens. The following report will attempt to assess the historic and architectural importance of the Alvah Wilson House and to discuss various options by which the dwelling might be preserved and made useful to the town.

SUMMARY: The Alvah Wilson House is a story-and-a-half brick dwelling dating from the early nineteenth century. The house has undergone several alterations over the years. Most changes have been additive rather than subtractive, so that the house retains most of its original features. The two areas of loss suffered by the house are 1) the front and rear roof membranes, removed when shed dormers were added to the building in the late nineteenth century, and 2) the northeast chimney, altered by removing an original fireplace during a kitchen renovation, also in the late nineteenth century.

Other alterations to the house have minimal effect on its architectural integrity. The house can thus be studied and evaluated as a little-altered example of local construction. As such, the Wilson House has several areas of significance.

First, as far as my knowledge extends, the house is unique in New Hampshire in its floor plan. The placement of four chimneys along the walls of a central hallway, in such a manner as to provide fireplaces for four first-floor rooms, is without parallel. Most brick houses of the period have their chimneys placed against the outer walls on opposite ends.

Second, the house retains most of its original interior features. These include the staircase, door and window trim, mantelpieces, a multitude of unusual doors, hardware, and some window sashes.

Third, the house is an example of rural brick architecture. Brick farmhouses dating from the early nineteenth century are not common. Information supplied by David Ruell of the Lakes Region Planning Commission suggests that in the eleven towns of Belknap County, there are only six brick story-and-a-half houses, while no less than 426 such houses are built of wood. In the thirty-two towns of the Lakes Region, there are only twenty-one brick capes, but 1,336 wooden ones. These statistics alone point to the rarity of such houses and to the architectural value of each one that survives.

Fourth, tradition states that the bricks for the Wilson House were burned on the site by the builder, who was a brickmaker. This tradition is strengthened by the presence in the walls, chimneys, and cellar floors and partitions of bricks from all parts of a brick kiln, as if the builder of the house were trying to use up an entire "burning" of brick. This makes the Wilson House an important document of local technology and craftsmanship.

Fifth, the house has remained in excellent structural condition. This means that its use for modern purposes would be cost effective, since all funds spent on the house could be devoted to needed utilities and decoration rather than to correcting structural deficiencies. The cost per square foot of renovation of the Wilson House would be greatly less than the cost of any practical form of new construction. This is especially true because the recent use of the building for town offices has supplied it with a good electrical service and heating system.

To sum up the above, the Alvah Wilson House is richly deserving of preservation and maintenance for several reasons, not least of which is its location in the Gilford Village Historic District. The house is an important part of the heritage of the local community. Its loss would leave the village poorer, and would sadly weaken a past record of successful preservation of one of New Hampshire's most attractive villages. The loss of the Wilson House would also be a loss to the state of New Hampshire as a whole, since the house is unique.

STRUCTURAL EVALUATION: Suggestions have been made in the past that the Wilson House, as an old structure, cannot be made safe for modern uses or be brought easily into conformity with life safety codes. I have tried to evaluate the condition of the house with these concerns in mind. I believe that the house is safe, or can easily be made so.

The Wilson House is in an excellent state of preservation. While architectural changes made to the structure over the years convey the impression of a building that has been treated insensitively, none of these changes has affected the structural integrity of the house.

Most brick houses of the early 1800s show at least some sign of settlement and cracking in the foundation and the brick walls above. No such damage is visible in the walls of the Wilson House. The cellar is remarkably deep, and its walls are built of large stones, carefully split and well laid in mortar. Moreover, the house has a series of interior basement walls of brick, and these help to provide an unusual

degree of support for the inner partitions of the building. The chimney bases are very well built brick vaults (arches) resting on deep footings. Altogether, the care used during original construction has ensured that the walls of the Wilson house are as sound today as when they were new.

It is easily possible to examine the first floor framing from the cellar. This frame is composed of a few very large girders of hewn timber. Framing into these are a series of sawn joists. The entire first-floor frame (except for a small area beneath the kitchen sink) is as sound as when new.

The joists used for the first floor, while large, are nearly square in section and are placed 32" on centers. This means that the floor departs in several respects from a standard modern wood-framed floor, in which joists are normally made of two-inch-thick stock and are placed 16" on centers. I have no doubt that the floor membrane of the Wilson House can sustain the live or dead loads of office use or other foreseeable types of occupancy. I would suggest, however, that a structural engineer be asked to analyze the load-bearing capacity of the floor in order to provide a clear statement of safe loading, and, if necessary, to suggest methods of reinforcement.

The framing of the second floor (originally the attic) also appears to consist of joists placed 32" on center. These run from the front of the house to the back, and are supported at about midpoint by load-bearing partitions between front and rear rooms on the first floor. Thus, the clear span of these joists is short. Again, however, it would be advisable for an engineer to assess the capacity of this floor, especially if long-range plans call for the intensive use of the second floor.

The house shows some signs of water leakage. Some of this (such as an area at the southeast corner) can be attributed to a former eaves gutter which apparently discharged water directly against the brick wall at this point. Other leakage has occurred around some of the chimneys. Some of this was apparantly caused by rainwater running down the flues, and some by leaks around the chimney flashing. It should be possible to remedy any chimney problems by a few hundred dollars spent on repairs to the flashing.

It has been suggested that the Wilson House might be made much more attractive for future uses by removing some or all of the additions that presently obscure the original design of the structure. These additions include the front porch, the side porch on the west, the wooden rear ell, and the concrete block milk room addition. I will discuss some of these options below, under RENOVATIONS.

Structurally, there should be little problem in removing either of the two porches or the milk room addition. The porches are merely built against the brick walls of the house, probably with one or two ledger boards bolted into the brickwork within their roof structure. The removal of the two porches, if thought appropriate, could probably be done at an expense of $2,000± unless it proves difficult to break up the concrete floor of the western porch.

Similarly, the concrete block walls of the milk room addition are merely butted against the brick walls of the house. There should be relatively little difficulty in removing this addition, again assuming that its floor slab can be broken up without difficulty.

The question of removing the shed dormers and the two-story wooden rear ell of the house is more complex. First, the roof of the ell is tied into the rear dormer. While it might be possible to restore the main roof to its original slope and still keep the ell, this would require some reframing at the intersection of the main and ell roofs. It would also be feasible to retain the rear shed dormer and remove the front one, at least as a first step toward restoring the original lines of the house. It might even be possible to reduce the ell to one story if that were thought preferable to wholesale removal.

A further consideration in the removal of one or both of the shed dormers is the fact that the second floor now has several partitions that were installed when the dormers were added, perhaps a century ago. Removal of the sheds and restoration of the original roof slope would interfere with parts of these partitions and with some of the doors leading from room to room. Thus, removal of one or both dormers, if thought desirable, would have to be coupled with some change in the floor plan of the second floor and would probably preclude any further use of that floor for public purposes. Future public use of the second floor will be severely limited in any case by lack of handicapped access to this level. Apart from changes in plan, the major difficulty in restoring the roof to its original slope would be the temporary support of the original second-floor ceilings during the process of cutting away the rafters of the shed dormers. The original ceilings of the second floor appear to be partly suspended from the newer rafters of the shed dormers.

RENOVATIONS: The Alvah Wilson House can provide usable space--at the very minimum, the 1,200 square feet of the first floor of the main brick house--at practically no cost. The main requirements for returning the four main rooms of the house to use would be the completion of a small amount of deferred maintenance, mainly to stop any further roof leaks. Acceptable heating, plumbing, and electrical systems are already in place. The major missing element is handicapped access, which could be provided through one of several doors; the brick portion of the house has two rear (north) doors, one side (east) door, and the front door on the south. If the west side porch were retained, a wheelchair ramp could be installed under its roof.

There is a general perception that the qualities of design and workmanship of the house are obscured by some of the additions--particularly the shed dormers. Many think that the house would assume its rightful place as one of the most admired buildings in the village and as a pleasant headquarters for various activities if it were at least partly restored to its original appearance.

My suggestion would be that major renovations to the building be postponed until an agreed-upon long-range plan has been developed

for the building. While it would undoubtedly be easier to rally support for the permanent preservation of the building if it were returned to original condition, many would also complain that public funds were being committed to renovations that had no certain benefit to the town and no part in a master plan. I would suggest that once the question of preserving the house is settled, all interested parties begin to meet to agree upon the role the structure will play in Gilford's future. I would suggest that major structural changes to the building be postponed until a long-range plan is developed.

Meanwhile, however, the expenditure of a few hundred dollars per room, and/or some volunteer labor, could make a great difference in the attractiveness of the house. The Wilson House is generally in attractive condition. It suffers from the usual minor flaws and imperfections of any old house, emphasized by soiled wallpaper and old carpeting.

It would be a simple matter to remove the wallpaper and paint or repaper the walls in the main rooms. The wall-to-wall carpeting and its underlayment, having served their purpose, could be removed and the original floors repainted. A bit of simple scraping would reveal the approximate original paint color of the woodwork, and the rooms could be returned to these colors.

It is hard to predict what might be found above the present ceilings of Celotex, but it is likely that the original plaster, if it survives at all, is in poor condition. If it is desired to return the ceilings to their original appearance and if the plaster is found to be missing or partly missing, it should be possible to replaster the rooms at a cost of a few hundred dollars per ceiling. The preferred method is to retain the original split-board lath and nail expanded metal lath to its underside. Fibered gypsum plaster can be applied directly to the metal lath. A single coat of plaster, smoothed as carefully as possible with a hand trowel, will closely duplicate the slight undulations of original work. The major difficulty in this work is finding an experienced plasterer.

For guidance in more extensive alterations, I would suggest that the town plan to commit funds to employ an architect experienced in the renovation or adaptation of old buildings. Regrettably, the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources lacks the staff to provide continuing advice to any municipality during the course of renovations to a public building. I attach a list of architects and preservation specialists who could provide more detailed and extensive guidance if Gilford decides to adapt the Wilson House for future needs. The advice of an experienced architect would be especially valuable if the house were to become, for example, administrative offices for the school system, a small meeting place, or headquarters for special education.

An architect could also provide aesthetic advice concerning the effects of changing the appearance of the house, and structural advice in areas affecting life safety codes or in changes to the floorplan. He or she could also provide better cost estimates than can this report.

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY: This report has concentrated more on practical considerations of adapting the Wilson House than on its history. It must be repeated, however, that the house is a very important building, both as part of Gilford Village and as part of the broader architectural heritage of New Hampshire.

While local tradition dates the Alvah Wilson House at 1811, structural and stylistic evidence within the dwelling point to a date of around 1830 or a bit later. This in no way detracts from the importance of the house. Very few rural New Hampshire houses were built of brick in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, so the Alvah Wilson House remains a rarity in its region. There was undoubtedly a house on the land in 1811, but the present brick dwelling appears to have supplanted the original structure.

Among the technological clues to a date of about 1830 are the use of American bond for the brickwork of the walls and the use of plug drills in splitting the stone of the foundation. Both the brick bond and the stone splitting technique are characteristic of 1830 or later.

Stylistically, the prevalence of Greek Revival mouldings and detailing throughout the house points strongly to a date of 1830 or after. Such details are seen in the mouldings around the window openings, the newel and angle posts of the staircase, and the five-panel doors of the house.

The hardware, too, is typical of this period. Especially characteristic are the pewter-handled Norfolk thumb latches on most doors. These are often seen on Greek Revival houses both in cities and in the country.

As mentioned above, the Wilson House was built with unusual skill. The building probably remained essentially in original condition until sometime in the 1880s or 1890s. At that time, it appears, the kitchen was remodelled. Perhaps at the same time, the roof of the house was raised by the construction of the shed dormers, and the partitions of the second floor were altered.

It is hard to date the construction of the two-story wing at the back of the house. Its foundation and first floor framing are cruder than those of the main house, and actually appear earlier. On the other hand, the subflooring of the wing is circular sawn and appears rather late. All of the doors and interior trim of the ell also appear late--probably after the Civil War and possibly as late as the remodellings to the main house. The ell needs further study to determine whether it incorporates part of an earlier structure or whether it is merely a late and rather crude appendage to the main house.

The Alvah Wilson House answers many questions concerning early nineteenth-century brick architecture in the Winnipesaukee region. Undoubtedly, many more clues and discoveries remain in the house, awaiting a fuller investigation. The house has statewide importance, and the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources urges all interested parties to continue to plan for the long-term usefulness of the structure.

Respectfully submitted,
James L. Garvin
Architectural Historian

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Telephone:
Public Works — 524-6284
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Recreation Center of New Hampshire

TO: Sheldon Morgan, Director
FROM: John Bobula, Building Official
SUBJECT: Wilson House assessment for proposed partial use.

Based upon inspection of Wilson House on September 13, 1988, the following items were determined as a requirement for the use of the first floor in an assembly use group:

1. All levels of building must have active fire detection/alarm system.
2. At least one entrance must be handicap accessible.
3. At least one bathroom must be handicap accessible.
4. Electrical panel in basement has some improperly terminated wiring, correct to NEC 1987.
5. Lally columns may have to be added to provide floor structural capacity.
6. Furnance installation shall pass GFD inspection.
7. Install backflow preventer on FHW supply pipe.
8. Diagnose cause of frequent pressure/overtemp. relief valve operation at FHW unit.
9. Potable water supply to pass applicable tests for public comsumption.
10. At kitchen: remove and reroute exposed 1/2" diameter copper pipe from ceiling.
11. Install exit lights on first floor only.
12. Post second floor as being off limits to public.
13. Designate one parking slot for wheelchair.

The above evaluation is based upon the following provisions of the applicable codes:

LIFE SAFETY CODE:

9-1.1.1 Existing assembly occupancy may continue upon determination of authority having jurisdiction. (Code Official)

BOCA Building Code 1987

513.1 In a "Historical Distric" code official has determinant authority and building code is "not mandatory".

9/14/88