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Mott House: History and Restoration by A.W. Baker Restorations, Inc.

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The Mott House

The Mott House is without doubt the finest and most complete example of 17th century Newport, Rhode Island, architecture, and in some of its structural and decorative details it is specially exemplary to all of New England of that period. In particular it reflects ^{architectural} the life style and cultural and political growth indigenous to this area. To be sure, there are a few other fine examples existing today, but for the most part they are incomplete. 7

Fortunately from a historical view the Mott House has been a low-income rental property for the past century, a situation which ^{of preservation by neglect} had protected its antiquity from destructive changes which certainly would have come about had the house continued in more affluent hands. By 1973 the structure had stood ^{been unoccupied} empty for two years and was slated for demolition ~~because~~ its site was to be developed for industrial purposes. Until that year the full impact of the historical significance of the structure was unknown.

To an architectural historian, the massive and decorated 17th century timbering visible in two rooms clearly showed at the outset that, indeed, the Mott House was a very special find. ^{I stimulated preservation efforts to preserve} indicators enough to stimulate an awareness that this unique slice of American heritage must be preserved. Consequently, an agreement was established with an ^{what was of this significance} "aware" independent backer who planned to dismantle and re-erect the house elsewhere.

The full importance of the treasure unfolded as dismantling progressed. The uniqueness became self evident

quickly, so many experts were called upon for their knowledge, skills, and, later, their influence not only to preserve this historically rare building but to keep it in situ where it began and grew for three centuries. (~~Letters attached~~)

Three hundred years of growth

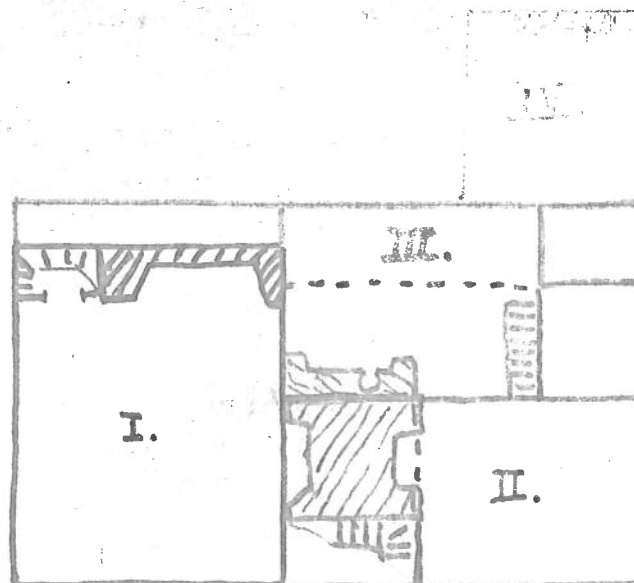
During dismantling it was determined that the Mott House of 1973 had developed in four distinct stages, thus becoming in actual fact a living architectural history book, for in each developmental stage nothing was removed from previous structural stages:

Stage I (1661-1690): a two-storey, end-chimney house (18' wide by 27' deep) with a small one-storey ell. It contained two bedrooms.

Stage II (1691-1710): the ell was enlarged and a second storey was added which included a third bedroom. The ell was now 24' wide and 16' deep.

Stage III (1711-1730): the ell was enlarged again towards the back making it 31' deep and essentially joining the two segments into one rectangular structure 42' x 31'. The house now had four bedrooms.

Stage IV (1840-present): a one-storey kitchen ell (18' x 16') was built off the back of the rectangle.



FIRST FLOOR
N →

caps
The first stages

~~Far and away~~ the greatest value of the Mott House, architecturally and historically speaking, shows up in its First Stage and Second Stage:

Originally the house had been a typical Rhode Island two-storey "stone-ender." Probably one-half to three-quarters of the stonework was exposed on the back gable end. There had been two fireplaces, ~~one~~ *a massive one* on the first floor measuring ~~a monstrous~~ *huge* nine feet wide, and another ~~on~~ *smaller one* on the second floor, but much smaller. (The hearth and one foot of the back wall of the first fireplace ~~was~~ *were* discovered in 1973 under a later floor.)

That first chimney was torn down and a new one relocated on the west gable end of the main house at the time of the first enlargement of the ell. The "new" one was of massive stonework and contained a first floor fireplace with a six-foot opening. The huge oak lintel ~~from fireplace number one was re-used for its successor, and it is canted and decorated with a fancy~~ *cyma reversa* molding, ~~matching that on the summer beam~~. On the second floor of the ell a brick fireplace was installed.

When the ell was enlarged the renovators (fortunately) did not remove the clapboards from the exterior surface, and these 17th century features became an interior artifact sealed in the newer chimney cavity but found again in 1973 when the house was dismantled. This section of very early clapboarding was removed as a unit and will be easily installed when the house is re-erected.

much
 Of the two chimneys, fireplaces, and ell development ~~much can be said architecturally and historically...and much~~ was found and all is preserved. *for future interpretation*

The frame. Three-quarters of the original roof framing was intact under a later roof. This ancient roof is constructed with a closely spaced (14") purlin system which suggests that the roof had been thatched or tiled, its pitch being a steep 45°.

The rafters have clear marks left from early pit sawing as do the attic boards. The oak frame including weather bracing is hewn, hand planed, and beautifully decorated with an ovolo molding carved into all exposed edges. The single summer beam on the first floor measures 11½" x 13" and is decorated with an ~~ovolo~~ ^{careful} molding matching that on the lintel, a treatment suggesting that the lintel and summer were thought of with great respect. The ceiling joists (3" x 4") are smoothly finished and dressed. ^{studs tenon butt & wing}

The ceiling of the first floor (the underside of second floor flooring) is wood and has been hand planed giving the room a completed sense of the 17th century.

Walls. The exterior walls are studded and mortised and tenonned into their girts. A 17th century studded frame is usual for mid-Massachusetts but is not often seen in Rhode Island.

Arch, however this studs help over hang.

These studs could well have been the creation of ~~its~~ ^{Jacob Mott, the son of} builder, Adam Mott, originally from Hingham, Mass., in 1635. (In 1638, ^{Adam Mott} ~~he~~ arrived on Aquidneck Island as a founding father and freeman and a strong influence in the establishment of the Quaker religion. ^{George} John Fox, the noted creator of Quakerism, is documented as having preached in Adam Mott's house on one of his trips from England. And, on the subject of personages associated with the house, Mary Mott (third generation) who was born in the house was the mother of General Nathanael Greene of American Revolution fame.)

Nailed to the interior side of the studs are very rare shadow-molded vertical boards averaging 18" in width. There are two two-panel early doors and one board-and-batten door. The upstairs chamber has two summer beams and contains the same types of wood ceiling and joists as the first floor, all aged to a rich golden brown. Upstairs also was found more shadow-molded vertical boards -- enough to finish one wall. Positive evidence was uncovered proving that the east gable end at one time had a jetty or second storey overhang, a very rare feature.

Windows. A great many diamond-pane fragments and one

full piece of diamond pane glass were discovered in the original section suggesting that at one time the windows had been leaded, diamond paned, and of the casement type. Location of such windows, however, could not be determined.

The ell. The hall leading into the enlarged ell features a stairway typical of the first quarter of the 18th century. ~~(It replaced the original stairway next to the end chimney.)~~

It had S-shaped sawn balusters, a Rhode Island specialty, of which one remains to serve as the necessary pattern. ^{for restoration} The two-storey ell features a stone fireplace with straight cheeks and beautifully curved walls -- very unusual and medieval in character.

The ell is not studded but, rather, sheathed. The sheathing boards are "^{secured}nailed" to the frame with wooden pegs, one of the few remaining examples of early fastening.

Interior treatment of the ell was mainly plaster with Federal Period trim. If there had been raised panelling in this section all evidence had disappeared. Corner posts were cased, but the summer beam and the girts were constructed originally so as to be concealed under lath and plaster.

To the west of the ell was the early kitchen with a huge brick fireplace with its oven in the back. Joists in the kitchen had been exposed and are deeply stained a rich, chocolate brown from many years of smokey fires.

Later stages

^{additions were again made to} In the early 1700's the house ~~was again added on to~~. The size of the kitchen was increased, and two smaller rooms joined the previous development.

In the 1800's a one-storey "newest" kitchen was built with a brick fireplace in the gable end. This ell is of sawn stud construction and is of significance only in its reflection of cultural growth.

1973 and beyond

As dismantling progressed on the Mott House (and dis-

Joist size?
Summer?

coveries made) artifacts were catalogged and preserved...to remain with the structure. ~~And~~ in addition to these finds samples of plaster, mortar, lath, and other integral elements were packaged and catalogged ~~almost~~ room by room.

Many of the historical and architectural details of the house have been ~~arrived at through~~ ^{determined by} thorough and extensive research. Every step of the dismantling ⁺ project ~~(and later)~~ ^{storage} was recorded in measured drawings, photographs, archaeological surveys, and documentation, ~~research~~. The summers of 1974 and 1975 saw a complement of archaeologists working -- excavating in and around the house to aid in dating and defining architectural features and to attain better understandings of the Mott Family lifeways.

Aside from the historical value of such research, the drawings, photographs, and artifacts -- all stored -- will serve to ~~ease~~ ^{implement} the rebuilding process.

The complete re-assembly of the Mott House would offer a unique opportunity for a university, museum, or syndicate to study and demonstrate the ways American domestic architecture has evolved.

As a private dwelling it might well include:

First floor	Living room	of Stage I
	Library	of Stage I or III
	Dining room	of Stage II
	Family room	of Stage III
	Two stairways	of Stage I and III
Second floor	Kitchen	of Stage IV
	Bedroom	of Stage I
	Bath, sitting room	of Stage I
	Two bedrooms	of Stage I and III
Attic	Bath	of Stage III
	Two bedrooms, bath	of Stage I, II, III

Regardless of future ownership
No matter who a future Mott House owner may be the structure should remain an honest, straightforward contribution to architectural history spanning three centuries. Thus, neither should 20th century attitudes and methods be introduced beyond usefulness and convenience nor should guesswork be employed in "replacing" details (jetty, casement windows with diamond panes, etc.) ~~about which no one knows.~~ *which may or may not be authentic & the structure.*

That the Mott House be re-assembled and used, though, is a self-evident truth.