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Cory House: Nomination for MHC Award, Steve Tyson's Letter of Support

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February 15, 20

To the Massachusetts Historical Commission:

I write this letter of support as a nominator as well as a contractor with over thirty years of experience in the restoration and preservation of historic buildings. Architectural Preservation Group works exclusively on historic structures and has restored hundreds of them in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island; however there are few that stand out more than the Cory House Restoration Project. The owners, Timothy and Maryann Bryant have been a pleasure to work with.

The Cory House Project took nearly three years to complete and had some unique challenges to overcome. Tim had a Dendro-Chronology analysis performed on the house's frame that had produced a date of 1777. This was an expensive process, and it has been my experience that most people consider Dendro-Chronology as an unnecessary expense in the restoration of historic buildings. This just further affirmed the Bryant's dedication to the restoration of the Cory Homestead.

As I think back to the start of this project, I was disheartened by the lack of original material in the house. All the doors were missing all the plaster had been removed and the mantles were ripped out. The central chimney was long gone, there was no original flooring on the first floor, the original windows were missing and all the exterior trim and siding were gone. The site also had the remains of a few outbuildings that had been burnt down.

The task of restoring the house started with examining the few samples of original fabric that had remained. Tim found the remains of a burning pile from which we had uncovered quite a few pieces of mantles, interior crown, chair rail, some doors, etc. Although the chimney had been removed years earlier (probably in the 1920's), the original wood lintel remained. We stripped the exterior siding (an imitation brick asphalt shingle), and found the original window and door scars. It was only the ghost of what was there, but an accurate account of the size and shape none the less. The windows were plank framed with an arched window header. Much of the research was done on this finding, by Anne W. Baker who was a consultant on the project. The result of the research was that this style was rare if not unique. We did a pencil rubbing of the burn marks then fabricated the plank frame windows with arched headers that matched exactly the shape of the ghost on the original sheathing.

A similar method was used with the front door. The size and the diameter of the arch were taken from the ghosting. However, the detail was taken from research results that Tim Bryant had done. We found evidence of a transom over the door and tried to use similar doors as examples from the same period and region. We continued such methods in every aspect of the restoration. In some instances we re-made components with only old photographs as references. In other cases we used nail patterns to help tell what was the original fabric. The central chimney with its five fire boxes were reconstructed using the clues the sheathing and the framing had given us. The visible portion of the fire boxes were built using brick that were discovered on site and most likely the original chimney bricks.

The painstaking efforts that were taken in order to complete and honest and accurate restoration, were costly but highly rewarding. To find a half burned piece of chair rail in a cow pasture, then make a knife that matches the profile, fabricate the molding, then install the chair rail on the ghost line before the wall is plastered the way it was originally done, links us to the men that built the house and puts us on the list of care takers of the Cory house.

In addition to restoring the house and the wing, Tim and Maryann had obtained two derelict out buildings that were in line for demolition: an 1850's shed and an 1860's five bay carriage house that we had dismantled, restored and assembled on the property.

It has been a wonderful experience working with Tim and Maryann on this restoration. This project serves as the standard for restoration work with in our company.

Sincerely,

Stephen J. Tyson Jr., Vice President