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Cory House: Site and Building Summary - Cory Farm Complex

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of refusal on the property, picked up his option and then sold the house and land to the present owner whose full intent is to restore the property.

Architectural and Structural Report

The following report is based on careful and extensive analysis of the exterior and interior of the house before removing original and existing fabric. The site, dwelling house, and barn have been documented by wills, deeds, measured drawings, and photographs.

The initial survey of the house was a "bitter-sweet" but exciting experience as all the plaster and lath and some of the finish details had been removed. Why? In 2000 Dorothy Pierce, the previous owner, decided to renovate the interior of the dwelling house where she had lived since the 1938. Her nephew proceeded to strip out the plaster, lath, mantles, doors and moldings. Six months later Dorothy changed her mind and her nephew stopped further demolition. In 2003, when I first saw the house I was devastated to see what he had done. However, on second look I realized that the sweet side of his demolition was an opportunity to see the entire timber frame plus visible evidence of all the changes over the years, i.e., original interior door openings, windows sealed behind later plaster, and clear marks on the partition walls of the exact dimensions of the fireplace openings along with the first floor over-mantles and the second floor Federal mantles that otherwise we would not have known. Fortunately the nephew had left a great deal of the door molding, crown molding, chair-rail molding, and wainscoting intact. Because of this I was able to determine the original details for each room. In particular the nephew had left a cornice molding over one window that clearly indicated there had been interior sliding shutters. In another room he had removed the raised panel from over-mantle but had left the pieces of the bolection molding that held the panel in place. A further search led me to a dump in the front yard where I found the complete mantle from the second floor southeast chamber. lengths of crown molding, H hinges, chair rail, door frames, hand split lath, and so on. In addition eight of the original four panel raised panel doors plus many old photographs were found in the barn. One photograph was of the missing fireplace over-mantle in the first floor southeast chamber.

After digesting all this important information I felt very strongly that this was a great opportunity for people to learn how to understand the importance of "above ground archeology" Before rehabilitation began I gave twelve tours of the house and land to encourage people to realize how much can be learned about our architectural and cultural history by observation. These tours which took place in October 2004 were sponsored by the Westport Historical Society.

Site description

The house is positioned on a hill that slopes eastward to Cornell Road, a distance of approximately three hundred and twelve (312) feet. Two granite gate posts frame the entrance. A laneway boarded by stone walls leads to the house and barn. Open pasture land and stonewalls surround the east, west and south sides of the house.

A shingled thirty eight (38) feet by twenty six (26) feet two-story barn, ca 1850, is located approximately (70) feet from the southwest end of the house.

Exterior

The two story, center chimney, double pile dwelling house is Georgian in plan. In October 2004 work began on the exterior which needed to be made weather tight.

In the early 1900s the house was covered with imitation brick siding applied over 19th century shingles. Previously the original front doorway had been replaced by a simple unadorned doorway. Photograph #1.

After removing the shingles and imitation brick siding we discovered that the house was originally clapboarded (3 1/2 to weather) and, even more exciting, was finding the clear out line of the original doorway — an elliptical pediment with a transom and columns on either side. Photographs #2, #3, and #4.

Our measurements suggest that the doorway was not unlike two eighteenth century doorways in Newport, Rhode Island.

Photograph #5—an example of a 1750 Newport doorway of this type.

Next we discovered that the window headers (first floor front, and first and second floor gable ends) also had elliptical pediments. Photograph #6. Despite in depth research, both verbal and photographic, no examples of this type of window ornament on a wooden structure have been identified. The doorway and window treatment on the Cory House are unique for the Westport area.

Building Summary

The Cory house is a side gabled, double pile two-story structure with 3 bays. The timber frame is pegged. The partition boards, ceiling strapping and finish trim are held in place with wrought nails. The gable end is twenty-eight (28) feet north to south. The front or east façade measures thirty-six (36) east to west. The height from the sill bottom to the eaves is fifteen (15) feet and twenty-seven (27) feet from sill bottom to the peak. The house is vertically planked with five quarter thick oak.

Fenestration

The fenestration pattern is symmetrical through out.

East (front):

First floor —12 over 12 double hung sash with 6 by 8 lights.

Second floor—12 over 8 double hung sash with 6 by 8 lights.

North and South:

First floor — 12 over 12 double hung sash with 6 by 8 lights.

Attic—12 over 8 double hung sash with 6 by 8 lights.

West:

First floor — 12 over 12 double hung sash with 6 by 8 lights.

Second floor—12 over 8 double hung sash with 6 by 8 lights.

Foundation

A random sized stone foundation rises two feet above ground level.

Cellar:

The original cellar entrance was at the southwest corner . When the Greek Revival ell was added the entrance was moved to the center of the rear or

west side of the Cory House. Due to the relocation the original back entry door and vestibule was replaced with a window.

The full cellar foundation is stone. The floor is dirt. There are two (2) cellar windows in the above ground east foundation wall. There is one cellar window on the south gable end and one on the west side of the foundation walls. All the cellar window frames are wood that had two horizontal wooden "cow bars" incorporated into the frames.

Interior

The oak girts and posts are seven (7) by seven (7) inches. The oak joists are 2 1/2 by 7 inches deep. The summer beam in both second floor east chambers are ten (10) inches wide by seven (7) inches deep. The rafters are 3 1/2" by 6 1/2" tapered oak. All timbers in the house are joined with pegs. The house is a five room plan arranged around a center chimney. There is a center east entry, with two parlors on either side, each with a fireplace, a central back room (kitchen) with a fireplace that is bracketed by two (2) smaller rooms in the northwest and southwest corners. The southwest corner room incorporates the back or west entry.

Southeast front chamber

The room is fourteen (14) by fifteen (15) feet deep. There are three doorways. One leading to the front hall, one to the kitchen, and one to the ell. The ceiling and walls were originally plastered. A four (4) inch wide cornice molding surrounds the top of the walls. This molding protrudes outward over the windows to carry interior sliding shutters.

A chair rail protrudes to accommodate the shutters. The posts are cased and have a 1/2 half inch corner bead.

In the southeast corner of the ceiling there is a plastered niche in the ceiling, possibly to accommodate a grandfather clock.

The flooring is hard pine and averages ten (10) inches in width.

The fireplace over-mantle consists of three (3) vertical feathered panels, the middle panel being the widest.

Northeast front chamber

This room is identical in size (14' by 15') and plaster detail to the southeast front chamber. The posts are cased and beaded with a 1/2" bead. There is a four (4) inch wide cornice molding at the top of the room. There is no

indication of a chair rail which suggests that this room did not have interior sliding shutters.

Except for the missing central panel, the over mantle and adjoining 3 and 1/2 inch wide bolection molding is still in tact.

The original or older floor (condition not know at this writing) is covered with 4" wide tongue-and-grove boards.

West room or Kitchen

The kitchen is nineteen (19) feet long by thirteen (13) feet wide. The fireplace opening is seven feet eight (7' 8") wide by four (4) feet tall. The firebox opening is trimmed with three and one half (3 1/2") inch wide Federal molding. Behind the top piece of the Federal molding is a twelve (12) inch by nine (9) inch deep pine lintel that is chamfered with a lambs tongue stop. A 1720 deed mentions an earlier house on the property. Perhaps this is the original location of the lintel. There is no indication that there was a bake oven in the front of the fireplace opening. In Thomas Cory's will, dated 1796, he gives "privilege to the oven to bake." Because the chimney and its foundation have been removed there is no way to know if the oven was in the rear of the firebox.

The west wall has later studding over the original plaster. The older flooring has been replaced with 4" wide tongue-and-grove boards.

Second Floor southeast bed chamber

This originally plastered room is fourteen (14) by fifteen by (15) feet deep. The posts are cased and have a 1/4 inch bead. The top of the plastered wall has a 4' wide cornice molding. There is evidence of an original chair rail on all four walls.

The mantle is federal is style. The mantle shelf has molded edges over a frieze board that has applied moldings. The legs are flat columns outlined with applied molding.

Second Floor northeast bed chamber

This originally plastered room is identical in size to the southeast bed chamber. The posts are cased with a 1/4 inch bead. There is no evidence of

cornice molding or chair rail. The opening for the firebox is four (4) feet wide by three (3) feet high. A full length, small closet is located to the right of the fireplace.

The floors are pine boards that average thirteen (13) inches in width.

Second floor west chamber

This plastered room is nineteen (19) feet long by thirteen (13) feet wide and is located directly above the kitchen. There is no evidence that there was a fireplace. The floors are pine boards that average thirteen (13) inches in width.

There is a small room in the northwest corner. Its use is not determined.

There is a small room in the southwest corner. Marks of pegs on the partition wall suggest that at one time it was used as a closet.

Attic

The roof is common rafter construction. There are twelve (12) pairs of hewn and tapered oak rafters that are 3 and 1/2 inches by 6 and 1/2 inches. The rafters are toe-nailed to a plank false plate that extends out nine (9) inches beyond the plank frame on the projecting joist ends, creating a soffit. The rafters have pegged and bridled joints at the peak. All rafters are supported by oak collar ties that are mortised and pegged to the rafters.

Front Stair

The front stairs is a tightly winding, open staircase constructed in three turns. The stairway ascends in front of the east wall of the chimney well. The stringer is decorated with scrolls. The stick balusters are square, The banister is molded and the newel posts are plain. The walls are plastered and have a painted baseboard. Half way up the stairs is a 6'4" tall by 2' 9" wide doorway that originally opened into a chamber or smoke room built into the brick chimney.

Rear stair

The rear stair from the first to the second story is located in the northwest corner. It is a narrow closed staircase with unfinished boards covered with wallpaper.

Sink room stair

When the ell was built a stairway to reach its second floor was installed in the east corner of the small first floor southwest room named the Sink Room. Open stringer with a simple banister with no balusters.

Attic stairs

The attic stair is a narrow closed staircase with unfinished boards and is located in the northwest corner directly above the rear stairs from the first floor.

Basement stairs

The basement stairs descend from the northwest buttery. The access door is feather boarded and held in place with butterfly strap hinges. A 1720 deed mentions an earlier house on the property. Perhaps the door and hinges were also reused from the earlier house on the site.

Ell

Around 1840 a one and one half story Greek Revival ell was added to the south end of the house. The ell measures twenty-eight (28) long by eighteen (18) feet wide. The east and west exterior wall rises eleven (11) feet from the bottom of the sill to the bottom of the eighteen (18) inch wide frieze board that includes two fixed windows.

From sill bottom to the peak is twenty (20) feet. The building is stud framed with 3 and 5/8" by 3" studs and horizontally boarded with cut nails. The doorway entrance is on the east side.

Foundation

Cut granite blocks rise two feet above ground level. A cellar window is located at the gable end.

The crawl space under the ell includes a fourteen (14) foot wide circular cistern made of stone.

Ell Exterior

Originally clapboarded. Presently the east side has sawn shingles painted blue that have been covered with fake brick siding, The west and south wall have sawn shingles painted blue. An eighteen (18) by eighteen (18) inch chimney rises six (6) feet above the peak and is located eight (8) feet in from the south gable end. The east entrance door is flanked by sash that has four vertical lights. x

Fenestration

East: two windows.

6 over 6 double hung sash with 8 by 12 lights

Second floor fascia— There are two single fixed windows each with three horizontal 7 by 9 lights

South gable end:

First floor—Two 6 over 6 double hung sash with 8 by 12 lights.

Second floor—Two 6 over 6 double hung sash with 7 by 9 lights.

West:

First floor—Two 6 over 6 double hung sash with 8 by 12 lights.

Second floor fascia— There are two single fixed windows each with three horizontal 7 by 9 lights.

Interior

First floor

One enters the ell kitchen from the south end of the main house. The kitchen area is eighteen (18) feet by eighteen (18) feet. The six (6) inch

wide floor boards appear to be original. There is a trap door in the center of the floor that leads to the cistern below the kitchen.

At the south end of the kitchen is a partition wall which incorporates a chimney for a wood stove. On the east corner, behind the partition wall, is the ell's entrance door that opens into a 9' 6" by 12' 0" entry hall. In the southwest corner is a pantry with shelves installed above cupboard doors and drawer cabinets.

Second floor

There is a hall and three (3) small bedrooms that were plastered.

Roof

There are twelve (12) sawn rafters that measure five (5) inches by three (3) inches. The rafters are butted and nailed at the peak with cut nails.

Structural Condition

Dwelling House

Except for the sills in the dwelling house and ell the structural condition of is excellent. All of the sills have been replaced with 7' by 7" pressured treated beams. Five inches at the bottom of some of the vertically siding was rotted beyond attachment. Five inches of the planking has been repaired with oak boards scarfed, screwed and nailed to the original planking.

There is a leak in the north east corner of the roof. Still to be investigated. The cellar joists under the first floor west kitchen will need to be replaced or repaired.

Ell

The east, south and west sills were in poor condition and were replaced. The east rafter of the ell where attached to the dwelling house was rotted and has been replaced. During this repair a 12' wide tapered flashing board was discovered. If anybody is in the area they might be interested in looking at

this board. The carpenter definitely understood weather. He had chiseled various size troths to receive the clapboards while letting the water runoff. The post in the northwest corner was rotted 6 feet above the sill do to splash back from an old gutter. A new 6" by 6" post has been scarfed into the original.

The present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Bryant, are planning to live in the house, and are fully in accord with the Secretary of the Interiors Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

Attachments:

Westport Historical Commission Survey 1988 - Form Number 385

Site plan

East Elevation

West Elevation

First floor plan.

Second floor plan

Six photographs

Westport Historical Society Tour