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Akin House: Letter Concerning Rear 20th Century Dormer

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DRAFT LETTER

January 20, 2006

Mr. Paul Holtz
Historic Architect
Massachusetts Historical Commission
Massachusetts Archives Building
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125

Re: Elihu Akin House, 762 Dartmouth Street, Dartmouth, Massachusetts – Rear 20th century dormer

Dear Mr. Holtz,

I am writing at Janine daSilva's suggestion in regard to our Phase I Stabilization work at W H A L E's Elihu Akin House in Dartmouth. As she may have mentioned, W H A L E has decided not to replace the 20th Century dormer on the rear of the house.

In the early 1900's a 9' 6" wide shed dormer with two double hung windows was added to the center of the east roof. The dormer was constructed improperly and eventually pushed the rear portion of the house out of line causing serious structural damage. During Phase I Stabilization, the dormer was removed to allow critically needed work. In November, our contractors, the Architectural Preservation Group, recommended that the dormer not be replaced.

Anne W, Baker, our preservation consultant, agrees with this recommendation. She notes, "After 2 days of discussing structural alternatives for putting it back, I now know that it can't be done. The decision is based on the following:

The original dormer was built on the third and fifth rafter. (Akin House plan - Roof framing sk-09). The fourth or middle rafter was then cut out of the way for the dormer construction. This method would have been OK if the foot of the third and fifth rafter landed on the plate in conjunction with a second floor joist - needed to help support the extra weight of the dormer. But because the original third and fifth rafter did not land on the plate in line with a joist the weight of the dormer stressed the plate, causing the back of the house to be pushed down and out which in turn caused a sequence of deterioration.

Structural the only way the dormer can be put back is to insert secondary or new joists in the ceiling of the kitchen in line with the third and fifth rafter. Not only do I consider this

to be an invasive process to the history of the house, and ceiling of the kitchen, but it would showcase a 21st century repair for a 20th century dormer construction method that never worked.

I do propose a full scale exhibit mock-up of the original dormer explaining why it failed.”

At her site visit on December 16, 2005, Janine daSilva, our Massachusetts Historical Commission project contact was informed of our decision regarding the dormer. She asked that we explain to you the reasoning behind the decision.

We have also asked Christopher R. Gillespie, Principal, Dyer Brown Architects, for his opinion. He states, “I think the decision to eliminate the dormer is appropriate in view of the original construction and the poor imposition of a 20th century dormer that compromised the original roof structure. Although we are not working with a set restoration date, further compromise of the original structure to reconstruct a bad, relatively recent dormer pays a higher price to the history than retreating to a more accurate, if earlier, version of the structure. I think elimination of the dormer makes a stronger case for the accuracy of the restoration, both from an interior and exterior viewpoint.”

W H A L E has extensive photographic documentation of the dormer. This will be added to the Akin House along with the mock-up exhibit referenced above when the house becomes a cultural heritage center. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me here at W H A L E.

Sincerely,

Lisa Sughrue
Executive Director