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Vincent House: Baker Letters to Jerry Mackenty, June 15 and June 23, 1977

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June 15, 1977

Mr. Jeremiah G. Mackenty
Meeting House Lane
Edgartown, Massachusetts
02539

Dear Jerry:

Thanks for un-locking the door.....I plan to be back Monday June 20, and ask if you could leave it un-locked ~~some~~ more. We moved some furniture but kept things in order as we found them.

It was a most successful day.....108 pictures (interior, exterior, future and present site) and enough measurements to start laying it out on paper. This is always exciting as it will enable me to begin to 'read' structural growth, hence change, that has taken place since 1656.

I am glad this has all come about when it has. I find, on close investigation yesterday, (behind plaster) that a good deal of the clay insulation is very wet; a bad situation for a house. I am going to expose these areas immediately and before any further damage accrues. Once exposed, the June weather should help the wood dry out. I also found evidence of termites in one, maybe two, interior girts. It appears to be inactive and not extensive. Once these things become apparent it's not unlike the feeling when you know your child has wet and buggy clothes on....you just want to get them off as quickly as possible. (As you probably guessed I have difficulty making the distinction between a structure and a human!)

In order to have the job progress efficiently we will need electricity. I have talked with Mike (Betcore ?) at the N.B. G.&E. (M. V.) about connecting a temporary service. He is sending me a list of Electricians to choose from and asked that you write a letter to the N.B.G.&E. giving permission for this service as yours is a private line. There will be no cost to you what-so-ever as the service will have it's own meter.

I am going to start lining-up a place for my men to stay. (3) Do you know of a convenient boarding house or the like? They are also willing to bunk out. How would you and your family feel about the use of the bunk house next to the project? It might be a stretch 3-4 weeks long....minus weekends.

I'm really glad the newspaper printed the article about your house. Most people I have talked with so far know of the project, are excited and most helpful. This is important when working long distance.

Thanks again Jerry,

Sincerely,

June 23, 1977

Mr. Jeremiah G. Mackenty
Meeting House Way
Edgartown, Massachusetts
02539

Dear Jerry,

From our end of things the Vincent House Project is starting to assume major proportions, logistically speaking. There are several points which you should know about, for they are very much a part of our thinking, planning, subcontracting, and so forth.

We have reservations on the ferry for crew and vehicles on Sunday, July 10. We will start the necessary structural repairs on Monday morning.

Contents of the house, if not moved to safety elsewhere, may pose a problem both to you and your family as well as to our people. If they are not relocated by July 10, can you suggest which outbuilding you would prefer for safekeeping of these items? It should be weather tight because of the books and other damageable pieces.

The electricity to the house was hooked up on June 20, and we thank you for that kindness. Please send me all bills that come from this meter. It turned out that the meter reader came from the Vincent family -- his name is Bill Enos -- and was able to fill us in on some sidelights of the Vincent family. We pulled the main switch in the shed upon our departure so that there are no hot wires into the house in our absence.

This week we found it necessary to lift some floorboards and break into the insulated walls on the second floor. Please, you and your family, use caution (and forbearance on the mess of insulation) when walking in the southeast front room and on the second floor. I will put the boards back when I come out next Monday.

I plan to order delivery of a large trash bin, a Dumpster or some such, at an early date so as to keep the site and house as clean as possible during our repair process.

We find we are starting to create a fair amount of traffic to the site -- vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian. I suggest our people might use the gate entrance hereafter....if this is agreeable? We can put an "A. W. Baker" at the gate for identification to the various people coming to the job site.

We were able to contact our first-choice archaeologist who is excited to join the project. He is Myron Stachiw, Brown Educated, and highly qualified technician who has headed the South Main Street (Scrabbletown (North Kingstown, R. I.)), and other digs. Myron and myself are making an exploratory visit next weekend. After that visit he will help estimate the costs involved.

In all probability Ed Briggs of Mattawisett will be the house mover. He has made two trips to the site already and has fallen a victim of the inherent and growing enthusiasm for the project. I talked with him last evening, and he is exploring the possibility of a six-mile, no tree-damaging route as opposed to a two-mile, branch removal route. I will have more information later on this point.

The first phase of the photographic series has been taken, and we are analyzing these for the second phase. I am so pleased with the pictures and most anxious to show them to you and Mr. Avery. Nearly all measurements have been taken, and I am in the process of committing them to drawings. It is becoming very clear that the house was built as one unit originally and not, as I thought might be the case, one section built earlier than another. The writer has begun his notes and photographing, which, although a totally independent venture on his part, is helping us in our documentation.....He took some aerial pictures of the site as well of your house and asks me to relay the information that if they turn out he'll give you a print of your immediate house site.

I am planning to be out again on Monday. I have a date with the building inspector at 10:00. If we could find a convenient hiding place for keys to the house and electric box we would not bother you with this increasing disturbance to you.

Jerry, I have been deep in Charles Bank's history of the Vineyard. What a fantastic book! The site of your house is not only the site of the original proprietors (1640-1670), their Commons but also a dense Indian settlement. I am more than ever stuck on the subject of leaving the Vincent House just where it is. The photographs bear out this premise, as do the comments of those who have visited the site and my inner feelings. I realize that for many reasons that this is impossible but for my own sense of responsibility I am preparing a simple graphic and narrative "final appeal," for I feel as an historian, preservationist and restorationist by duty to you and the Society to point out the advantages of preserving the integrity of a community. Of course I will abide by what ever decisions.

Look forward to seeing you on Monday.