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## Vincent House: Newspaper Articles May - August 1977

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# Historic Preservation Society Will Restore Vincent House

By GEORGE W. ADAMS

A home has been found for what may well be the Island's oldest house.

Within a matter of months the old Vincent house which now stands on the MacKenty property on Edgartown Great Pond will be moved to the backyard of the Dr. Daniel Fisher House at the entrance to Edgartown proper.

By the summer of 1979, it will be open as a museum, C. Stuart Avery said this week.

Mr. Avery is executive vice president and treasurer of the Martha's Vineyard Historical Preservation Society, Inc., soon to be owners of the house.

"This is exactly what we are in business for — to save old and historic houses," Mr. Avery said Tuesday. The Vincent house is the third in the society's string: its first undertaking was the Dr. Daniel Fisher House; last fall, it took over the Ritter house in Vineyard Haven.

"This is the very thing we wanted from day one," Jeremiah G. MacKenty said the same day. He was speaking for his brother and sister, John E. MacKenty and Mrs. Katharine M. Bigelow.

The three of them are giving the house to the society.

The agreement is final, but papers are expected to be passed within a week or so. One little legal complication is that, since the society is getting a house but no land, a bill of sale has to be concocted instead of a routine deed.

The house, which is believed to have been built in 1656, was purchased from Mrs. Mabel Kenniston Baker by John G. MacKenty in 1940. She was the last of a line of eight generations of Vincents to own the house.

At Mr. MacKenty's death, the house passed into the hands of his three children. They have been faced with a quandry. They have recognized that the house is a treasure which should be saved, but were unable to preserve it themselves. For the last several years they have been looking for a savior.

They found several individuals who were interested in the house, but each of them planned to remove the house from the Island and use it as a private residence.

A month or so ago, Mr. Avery says, his society became interested and approached the MacKenty family. The family's terms were simple: the family would give the house to the society, provided the society would move it to a suitable location and properly preserve it. The family would also retain some say in the restoration and management of the house.

Last week, the board of directors of the society voted unanimously to accept the gift. It isn't entirely free: moving, restoration and landscaping costs are estimated at nearly \$100,000.

Incidentally, Mr. Avery, as a real estate agent, presided over the transfer of the house from Mrs. Baker to Mr. MacKenty in 1940. "I know the house well, and I love it," he said Tuesday.

The house will be moved to the crest of the hill behind the Dr. Daniel Fisher house, Mr. Avery says. The edge of the hill near the driveway will be graded to a flatter slope, up which a winding walk will lead. At the northwest side of the driveway a little parking lot will be built.

The house is a farmhouse, Mr. Avery points out, and by rights should have space around it. The yard is expansive. The society also plans to plant around the house shrubs and flowers characteristic of the house's style and period.

Shortly, the A.W. Baker Restoration Company will begin a careful documentation of the house as it now stands. Work will also begin on a fieldstone foundation for the house at the new site.

Some repair work will be done on the house before it is moved, including replacement of the sills and repair of the chimney. But most of the repair work will be done after the building is moved — that may be in a few months, but certainly will be done by next spring.

Mr. Avery says the society does not plan to polish the house during the restoration — it is a farmhouse and will be kept that way, he says. The society also intends to restore the house as it now stands, rather than taking it back to what may have been its original appearance.

One of the charms of the house is its air of growth. For example, one of the parlors was redecorated during the Victorian period. That will remain unchanged.

When the restoration is complete, the house will be open as a museum full-time during the summer and at regular intervals during the winter.

Mr. Avery says the society hopes to furnish the house with furniture and utensils of the period, hopefully things from Island homes.

The undertaking is unusual for the preservation society, in one respect. The Ritter house will be, and the Dr. Daniel Fisher house is rented for office space, to help pay their way. This is the society's first venture into museums.

The site -  
far cry from  
the plains but

Mention a member  
wants to take  
it back to  
original.

# One of the Vineyard's Oldest Houses

I Don't know page 1.

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to endow it, which we couldn't do," Mr. MacKenty says.

There have been some interested private buyers, for whom the price would be roughly \$20,000. Indeed, there is a private purchaser contemplating the house now. This one, like many of the others, brought by Anne W. Baker of the A.W. Baker Restoration Inc., specialists in restoration of early houses. She is no relation to Mrs. Mabel Baker.

"The trouble is," Mrs. Anne Baker said this week, "most of the buyers want to take the house off the Island. The house is fantastic. It should stay on the Vineyard."

Monday, Edward W. Vincent Jr. and John Carbon, both representing the Edgartown conservation commission, met Mr. MacKenty at the house for a tour and a chat about the possibility of the town acquiring it. Mr. Vincent is a fourth cousin of Mrs. Mabel Baker, four times removed, and a direct descendant of William Vinson.

The conversation was tentative.

Messrs. Carbon and Vincent said the conservation commission is interested, but has only just begun to consider it. The commission has about \$30,000 in its acquisition fund, which might be used for the project. The commission is also empowered to accept private contributions, and those might be forthcoming for this project.

At least as problematical is what to do with the house if the town does acquire it. It might be set up as a museum, in which case admission fees would help recoup the initial investment. It might be used as a meeting place for town boards. Mr. Vincent suggests the house might look well on the piece of town property at Jernegan's Pond; the men also mentioned the town land at Eel Pond and at the landing at Edgartown Great Pond. They wondered whether the backyard of the Dr. Daniel Fisher House would be appropriate, if the North Water Street Corporation were willing to donate space.

In any case, they agreed, "There is an opportunity here to preserve something valuable, while it is still worth preserving."

Mrs. Anne Baker, on her several trips here, has estimated some of the costs involved in moving and restoring the house. "Basically, the house is in really good shape," she says. "There are some sill problems, and the big fireplace has to be repointed. That work could easily be done while you are getting the house ready to move.

"If you assume that all the sills and joists are gone, that would be about \$5,000 to get the house ready to move. Moving it would be another \$10,000," she says. "Repairs and restoration — well, that depends on how much you do to it."

The total cost to a private purchaser of moving the building and restoring it for family use, she has told the

MacKenty family, would be something under \$100,000, including the \$20,000 purchase price of the building, but excluding purchase of land for it to sit on.

"I don't know why you would want to take the house back to an earlier point," she says. "One of the things that is fun about it is the way it has grown over the years. The stairway to the attic used to run up from the front hall, between the two front rooms. You



SHADOWS OF ANTIQUITY

can see where the floor boards in the attic were patched. The room to the left of the front door is now the way it was built, with raised panelling along the feature wall where the fireplace is.

"You step across the front hall into a Federal room. That isn't original, but you certainly wouldn't want to change it. The little kitchen ell was added late, maybe 75 or 100 years ago, but that should stay. The only thing that bothered me is that some of the walls had been studded out, so a good deal of the girls have been hidden."

As an expert, there are things about the house she admires that most people would miss: things like pit saw marks on some of the rafters, and the little V-checks just past the lamb's tongues which end the chamfers on the girts. Those last, she says, are "very definitely the mark of the craftsman," and she has only seen them in two other houses, both of them in Rhode Island.

But even the ignorant are captured by the 27-inch wide pine board which forms the chimney breast, and the eight-foot wide fireplace which stretches across the interior kitchen wall.

More than being told what they were doing you can actually see the changes.

Airport

HAS THE FOLLOWING

'72 Ford wind. van, 8 cyl  
'71 Jeep Commando, 6 cyl

# Dating Clues Are Sought

Call if you've got a V-check.

"We've got no date yet — no date carved nicely into a stone," reports Mrs. Anne W. Baker.

But as work continues on the old Vinson House, and as she explores other Vineyard houses, Mrs. Baker is assembling evidence that the house was not built in 1657, but nonetheless is probably the oldest house on the Island.

"I have a feeling of 1670, '80, or '90," she says. "The more I see, the more I think that nothing else here is older."

Mrs. Baker has charge of preparing the house for its coming move from the MacKenty property north of the Edgartown Great Pond to the backyard of the Dr. Daniel Fisher House in the center of town. It will be set up there as a museum by the Martha's Vineyard Historical Preservation Society, which was given the old house by the MacKentys this spring.

The preparation work is nearly complete, and in September when the summer traffic has waned the house should take to the road.

For the last month, Mrs. Baker's crew has been burrowing underneath the house to expose the sills and joists for inspection and repair. Ahead of the crew, an archeologist from Brown University has been sifting the topsoil for clues to the early history of the house.

Off the site, Mrs. Baker has been inspecting other old Island houses for clues to building dates. She has found a consistent quality to the early houses here which she thinks is probably characteristic Island style.

"All the houses are framed just like this one," she says.

In three other houses here she has found two distinctive architectural details which appear in the Vinson House — things she calls a "V-check" and a "lambstongue."

Both are part of the finish carving of ceiling beams; techniques for finishing off the chamfer along the exposed edges of the timber.

She would like to see more, if there are more. But some of these treasures are hidden from public knowledge. "From the outside, a house might look as though it were built in the Victorian period, and you ignore it. But the people who live there may know that the Victorian appearance is plastered on the top of an old house," she says.

The archeologist working on the site, Myron Stachiw, has been sifting through the earth removed for structural work, and has also dug other patches and trenches about the house at places which some clue indicates might be interesting. The floor of the house has been lifted up, and Mr. Stachiw has also sifted through that loose earth.

He has turned up all manner of artifacts: clay pipes, old coins, shards of china, and fragments of a diamond pane window. One of the pipes can readily be dated between 1780 and 1820; three or four of the coins are from the reign of George II.

Analysis of the evidence is not yet complete. When it is done, much may be learned. A number of animal bones were found, for example, which may say something about prevailing diets. The bits of pottery and china can probably be dated.

The sills in the house have proved to be badly damaged by termites. Harvey Weathers of West Tisbury provided Mrs. Baker with some well-seasoned Island oak logs, which he sawed into eight-by-eight's for new sills. Mr. Weathers also provided some smaller logs which, with their tops planed off, have been used as joists. They match the originals.

The termites at the scene are dreadful, Mrs. Baker says. She supposes that they have only been there for five or six years. "I'll bet the house wouldn't be there in a couple more years if the termites were left alone," she says.

In places, the termites have started their way up the posts in the walls. In those places the workers are scarfing in new timbers.

From its structure, Mrs. Baker believes the house was part of the second phase of building here. In most early settlements, crude structures were quickly thrown up around four posts planted in the ground. It was shelter at least. When the settlers had become better established, they advanced to something more luxurious — judging from the known history of other settlements, this building would be an example of that.

The kitchen ell proved a surprise when it was disassembled for transport. It appears to have been an original part of the structure; and it appears to have been made out of wood from another building.

The reconstruction work has already answered a perplexing question. Walled off from either end of the kitchen are small rooms. Were they both original to the building? The answer is no. The little room to the south of the kitchen appears to be an original pantry; the partition wall at the north end was almost certainly added much later.

ARC

one good reason for moving the house?

Island houses + V check

A :-

## Vinson House Move Planned for August; Work Begins

The William Vinson house should reach its new foundation in the center of Edgartown before the summer has flown.

The preparations began yesterday, when a three-man crew from A. W. Baker Restoration Inc. moved onto the site where the house now stands — the MacKenty property north of Edgartown Great Pond — and started to dismantle the shed attached to the rear of the house.

Mrs. Anne W. Baker has been hired by the Martha's Vineyard Historical Preservation Society to take charge of the moving, and perhaps the restoration.

Last week she finished making detailed measurements of the entire house. In the course of the inspection her enthusiasm for the project increased. So did some nagging doubts about the age of the house.

There are certain details in the original structure of the house which are characteristic of a period 40 or 50 years later than the house was originally believed to have been built, she says.

"When I'm away from the house, I think it was built in the late 17th or early 18th century," she said yesterday.

"When I am in the house, I think the earlier date is closer."

The Edgartown records say that

William Vinson purchased the land and a house from Edward Andrews in 1656. There is no indication that the house that now stands on the property was not the house referred to in that transaction, but there is no positive evidence that there is.

Yesterday Mrs. Baker presented to the preservation association a proposal for an archeological dig around the house. Among its other values, the dig might settle the age question.

C. Stuart Avery, president of the association, said yesterday that he would love to see the archeological work done, but the association at this point just doesn't have the money to pay for it. The proposal, prepared by an archeologist from Rhode Island, asks for about \$3,000 to do the job.

The plan at this point is to jack up the house, chimney and all, at its present site. The sills are badly deteriorated. Those will be replaced, along with any other essential members which are found to be failing.

While the building is jacked up, fieldstone from its foundation will be removed to the new location at the back of the Dr. Daniel Fisher House. The stone will be used in building a new foundation there.

Around the third week of August — if

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## Vinson House Move Planned

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local officials will agree to the timing — Edward Briggs of Mattapoisett will do the actual moving.

The route chosen is circuitous. Because of wires and branches close to the road on the direct route, Mrs. Baker has proposed moving the house west along the Edgartown-West Tisbury Road, north on Barnes Road, then east on the Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road into the center of Edgartown.

If it is done, the archeological work should begin immediately, Mrs. Baker says. Earth will have to be removed around the bottom of the house for a distance of 30 feet or so to give access to the underpinnings. Hidden there may be remains of an earlier house; certainly, there will be clues to the early goings on at the house.

"The more you get to know the house, the more it talks to you," Mrs. Baker says. **In it you can see periods of prosperity, for example — and particularly if they are combined with the archeological gleanings, these indications could teach something about the history of the Island.**

archaeology