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Captain Thomas Paine House: Correspondence with Claire Dempsey, April 30, 2003

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To: Claire Dempsey <dempseyc@bu.edu>
From: "Anne W. Baker" <awb02@sprynet.com>
Subject: Re: Question
Cc:
Bcc:

Thank you for your very interesting thoughts.

Now a bit about the house. Yes - it is still with us, and for some unbelievable reason, despite many wealthy owners and their subsequent additions the original section still exists. Today one has to look passed 5th Ave. interior decorations, but it's not that hard as the 17th frame is very evident.

About Cady. He was hired in 1949 to "restore" the house. Cady saw stuff that is unavailable to us today. He never did a framing plan, but fortunately he made notes, took photos, and wrote a short report. But, at that time (1950) he wasn't aware of the details that we die for today.

In 1979 the house was sold again and i was hired for "another restoration." Things like paint and sill repair, etc. Ugh! However, finding myself in a 17th century house I was able to interest the owners in the importance of the house and the architectural details that Cady had missed or had not recorded.

Now in 2003 I have been hired again my another new owner who is aware that he should be interested in it's architectural history but not sure why. Slowly though he is getting the message.

OK - so what does the house look like and what is left.

First the house:

It is referred to as a stone-ender and has been given 2 dates. 1680 and 1690. I have no idea where the dates came from or the idea that it was a stone-ender ,but it seems that when a couple of people come up with a date and type all subsequent researchers copied the thoughts instead of looking and researching deeds.

Anyway what remains of the original house today is a 2 story, single pile, one room above the other end chimney house with a front overhang.. Both rooms on the first and second floor (28' x 18') have crossed summers with story posts- east and west.. The dressed 3 x 4 joists are tusk-tenon at BOTH ENDS and pegged. Think about raising' that house ---. or trying to remove a joist after the house had been framed!

The fireplaces in both first and second floor are stone as is the mass, and there is no evidence of an oven.

The walls are studded and the side girts measure 4 x 10. Some of the interiors walls are paneled with shadow moulded vertical boards. However I have no idea if Cady found them in the house or they are reused from some other house.

At some point 9' of the house was removed from the south gable end, leaving the summers off center. This probably happened before 1882 as a drawing by Edwin Whitefield, 1882 shows the house with out the 9'.

(All summers are chamfered on both sides.)

In 1979 I found definite evidence, on the top of the east plate, of the pockets for a gable dormer. I was interested that you mentioned that "the garret was, you guessed, lit by a gable."

Now comes my doubt about a true stone-ender. I felt the whole time I worked there that there had always been a structure off the north end of the so called "stone-ender" such as a one story lean-too which in 17th century Southern RI wasn't unusual. Also there is a large stone fireplace in this North room that is part of the chimney stack that includes the other 2 fireplaces.. The structural timbers in this section are cased so I don't know what they look like - (Cady says rough but what does that mean)

Captain Thomas Paine was an active privateersman and close friend of Captain Kid. In 1693 at age 36, he married (first time) Mercy (Mary) Carr, daughter of Governor Caleb Carr. They had no children. Even so it is certainly possible that Paine added the lean-too, ell, or what ever to the north end. So far I have yet to find conclusive evidence that he even built the house.

I am sure it is not easy to put this info into perspective. It is hard to know how much to write so in lo of putting you to sleep I'll quit.

This 17th century stuff is so damn consuming.

Thanks again for taking the time to look at Paine's will.
Pete

Oh I am so sorry about this. I took a look, made some notes, then set aside to be buried. My apologies.

I probably should have asked some more questions, too. Is the house still standing? Is the Cady sketch a 'restoration' of what he thought it looked like at some time?

In any case, about the inventory: I can see how someone might think that the inventory seemed to represent a stone ender, perhaps something like Arnold. It appears that there are both heated and unheated rooms on both floors, based on the presence and absense of fireplace tools. The front of the building might be as Cady draws it, with a heated hall and an unheated bedroom on the first floor and the hall chamber and bedchamber above. He however doesn't show all the other rooms that are in the inventory, does he? It seems possible that, continuing to assume a stone ender, that the kitchen, which is heated, might be behind the hall, with an unheated kitchen chamber above. It's possible that the milk house could be next to the kitchen and behind the bedroom on the first floor, and is perhaps one of those 'split-level' spaces that you see at Winslow

and some other houses. Oven houses are sometimes seen, and may be small spaces that give access to an oven, sticking out or in a chimney bay. I'd guess the great house cellar is just under the front pile of the house, and that the rear section of the house is shaped like a leanto rather than a full two-rooms deep on each floor. And the garret above the front pile, and I guess lit by a gable. In this case, perhaps he has sketched what he thought was an early phase of the building's history, and the inventory records it after some additions. Interesting that it faces east.

If it's not a stone ender, then I guess we'd want to place the kitchen and the hall on either side of a center chimney, with the bedchamber, the milkhouse, and the oven house, across the back. Or it could be an expanded 'half house,' with the hall in front, kitchen in the rear, the bedroom in the corner, unheated, and milkhouse and oven house in various subsidiary positions. In either of these instances, the chambers would array above as specified.

That is of course a huge amount of speculation, assuming a fairly common configuration. And as we all know, actual buildings can be very very odd.

I hope that is the kind of thinking your were expectin, and I look forward to hearing more.

Again my apologies about setting this aside.

Claire

Anne W. Baker wrote:

Have you had a chance to look at Thomas Paine's will? If so do you have any thoughts yet on the configuration of the house in 1717?
Thanks, Pete