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Captain Thomas Paine House: Baker Report for Mr. and Mrs. Parker, August 10, 1978

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A. W. Baker Restorations, Inc.

670 Drift Road
Westport, Mass. 02790
617/636-8765

August 10, 1978

Mr. and Mrs Bertram B. Parker
279 Marlborough Street.
Boston, Mass. 02116

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Parker:

On August 1, at the request of David Stern, I visited your new property in Jamestown, R. I. to examine the structures in situ. Also attending was Nason's Heating and PcPherson's plumbing, from Newport, R.I.

Enclosed herewith is my report, which reflects that examination as well as its value as an historic site.

I look forward to meeting you in person which I hope will be in the near future.

Sincerely,

Anne W. Baker
Anne W. Baker

AWB/sb

pc: Mr. David Stern

THE CAPT. THOMAS PAINE PROPERTY

General:

This is an extremely important property, an documented homestead, dated to the 17th century historically and possibly earlier, pre-historically. In addition, and no less important, are the combination of buildings, trees, fields and water front which serve to complete a magnificent landscape.

In particular is the 17th century house known as "The Capt. Paine House". This is an extremely important house and must be considered as a unique, thus very rare find"a R.I. stone-ender" typical of the kind of domestic architecture that would have been seen throughout the state during the 1600's, most of which were destroyed during King Phillip's War of 1675. 300 years later, leaves us with only a scattered handfull. The Capt. Paine House is one such structure.

I am sure that you are well informed of the increasing value of our early New England structures, a value that is rapidly becoming general knowledge. Their unmatched quality in material and workmanship, to say nothing of design, along with the ever-increasing interest in and desire for antiques of all kinds are fostering an active market for antique houses.

Furthermore, both financial and emotional indications of future appreciation can be clearly seen in the federal government's recent vote to establish the Tax Reform Act of 1975, Section 2124 of Public Law 94-455: "An act to encourage the preservation of his-

toric structures." At the present time this act is applicable to only commercial and income-producing structures, but it shows the level of back-up on a national and governmental level. Standards for rehabilitation -- techniques, treatments, methods -- are aiming for excellence in preservational performance which, in turn, should have a profound influence on and for high quality restorations at personal and private levels.

Paralleling this is a re-evaluation and study of architectural facts, by professionals and scholars. The Capt. Paine house, with its quality and quantity of rare architectural details, will add, immeasurably, to the future success of this important project.

I would like to suggest that you consider entering the property for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Mrs. Collins thought that Mr. Cady might have done this. I have called the R.I. Historical Commission and found that the house never was entered.

The National Register serves mainly to protect important sites from federal and state intervention and has the additional advantage of making private property owners eligible for money through a grants-in-aid, matching fund, program.

The R.I. Commission have told me that they would be most interested in reading the material compiled by John Hutchins Cady (a copy of which David is forwarding to me). At an appointed time they then would visit the site which would be necessary for the completion of the nomination forms.

THE CAPT. THOMAS PAINE HOUSE

Description:

The Capt. Paine House is a two-storey, central chimney, structure with a large 19th century ell built off the back. The present house has three distinctive building periods, carefully combined, which now serve as a measurement of our cultural growth.

The earliest section, dated ^{ca -} 1680, is a one-over-one room plan, with a stone-end chimney which contains two huge fireplaces. This chimney was originally exposed on the north end. This feature, along with the jetty (over-hang), is easily compared to the Governor William Coddington House, 1641, since demolished (pictured inclosed), and characterizes 17th century R. I. domestic architecture. The interior of this early section with its exposed frame, is reflective of the 17th century life style --- a bold and frank solution between man and nature, a tree emblished, to serve the artistic, domestic and practical requirements needed for shelter.

The 18th century addition, to the north, surrounds the first chimney and focuses on the popular trend of that period which was the building of central chimney houses. The interior of this section also reflects the cultural transition away from the ancient medieval influence of the first section with its exposed frame, to the covering of the frame with a wood facade --- *beam casing* the beginning of our own American architectural traditions.

The 19th century ell is indicative of the increased wealth, political security and an established life style.

The historical significance of this house is immense in 1978 and will undoubtedly double in another 10 years.

THE PAINE HOUSE VERSUS THE MOTT HOUSE

The comparison between the earliest section of the Mott house, circa 1660 (which David tells me you know about) with the Paine house, circa 1680, is useful as they both are living architectural history books --- hence, re-discovered treasures. The two-storey end-chimney plan is the same for both, i.e., high ceiling, studded walls, (at this writing, rare for R.I.) and both interiors covered with shadow-molded, vertical panelling. In addition, it is interesting to note that they were built directly across the bay from each other and grew, in the 18th century, to simulate a center-chimney plan.

The Mott house was built with an 18" jetty as was the Paine house --- the difference being only that the jetty occurred on the gable end of the Mott house instead of the front. Although the jetty on the Mott house had been removed --- from what could be seen --- it is more than likely that the framing method was identical.

If the small remaining section of rafters in the Paine house are original (Cady), then here would be seen a marked difference in the rood construction. The Mott house has closely spaced purlins for securing thatch or tiles which type construction does not appear in Cady's drawings of the Paine house. (This needs further investigation).

Both houses have decorative treatments cut into the beams with the matching decoration carved into the lintel. However, the decoration in the Mott house is a large ovolo type bead ending in a lambs tongue, (Dutch) but a large chamfer, with a

nicely fashioned lambs tongue was used in the Paine house.

Both houses have summer beams which run lengthwise with the house (on the first floor) and are the load carriers. However, the Paine house has another summer beam which crosses the main summer --- this treatment, known as "crossed summers", is most unusual. (There is one other surviving example of this in a house in Wickford, R. I.).

In both houses, the joinery methods for the posts and girts are the same, i.e., "housed soffit shoulder with sinking butment checks" (marvelous English terminology!) and is typical for 17th century construction. The method used for framing the summer into the girts of the Paine house has not been recorded. The method used for the Mott house was an ancient joint called "tusk and tenon". 19

Of particular note is the differences in the method used for framing the joists. The Mott house joists were dropped into a 3"x4" pocket cut into the summer beam --- whereas the Paine house joists were shaped to fit a far more sophisticated pocket known as a "bare faced soffit with diminished haunch" (English again) and considered to be, by some scholars, out of fashion by 1660. Is the date 1680 correct for the Paine house!

As a final thought, and I have no idea at this writing whether it is applicable to anything particular, but for the records, it might be noted that the religion of these two men differed - Thomas Paine was a member of the Church of England while Adam Mott was a Quaker. To be sure, religion certainly was a strong influence on New England 17th century development and it is interesting to

to conjecture on what, if any, influence this might have had on these particular vernacular structures. In addition it is know that Adam Mott came to Newport from Cambridge, England after a short stay in Hingham, Mass. Further investigation on Thomas Paine and where he came from certainly is inorder.

Historical recommendations:

1. Before the Collins move, they should be interviewed as to their memory concerning specific details original to the house and property; hardware, doors, Indian artifacts, etc. and to identify materials brouht from another sites. This information appended to Cady's report.
2. Any additional information disclosed during 1978 concerning the structure architecturally, be appended to Cady's report.
3. An intensive documentary research on the family (Paine, Carr, Watson, etc.) and community to parrallel the excellent architectural study by Cady. (I am curious who arrived at the date 1680 and why.)
4. An expert consulted as to the possibility of the presents of megalithic material. In particular the rock formation located in the south garden. (I think David and I both agreed that this is a suspicious and unnatural rock formation.

Structural survey:

The entire frame of the Capt. Paine is sound structurally both by today's standards and for a building of its age. Throughout the house the character, beauty, condition, and workmanship is superb. This is a subject which requires elaboration. It is a rare experience to find a "restored house" which has been studiously approached and interpreted by the architect --- followed by professional carpentry performed by skilled and sensitive craftsmen. Furthermore, at this writing, it appears that the Collins have taken excellent care of the house during the ensuing 26 years. Naturally it is to be expected that there will be some minor problems and considerations.

In particular; Dampness evident in the east wall of the master bedroom. The insulation in the roof is less than efficient and should be properly increased. (However, at no time, should any insulation be installed so as to cause condensation which has proved to be a serious problem threatening historic buildings). The asphalt shingles should be replaced with wood shingles. The heating and plumbing system will need some minor repair. (Plumber's contract is enclosed). The exterior trimwork on the cottage needs paint. The shingles are in good condition, however if they were painted it would increase the visual looks of the building. I love the barn and its needs, structurally, could certainly be taken care of by a handyman. The little out building next to the house is beautiful. This building will need some work in the near future. The front plate is rotted out. I do not know what your specific plans are for these buildings but I certainly hope you are planning to keep them.

Cosmetics:

The 1680 section of the house is beautiful because of the exposed oak frame and pine vertical sheathing, richly embellished by the use of a chamfer on the beams and a shadow-molding planed into the sheathing and, of course, the 2 massive stone fireplaces.

It is my understanding that when the Collins acquired the house, the 17th century living room, had a plastered ceiling, cased summer and posts, horizontal wainscot with wall paper above, (Fig. 17, Cady) The fireplace was brick and built inside the stone one. This treatment was in proper accord with the 18th century -- and of course, would have had a charm of its own. However, when the Collins pulled down the plastered ceiling, removed the post and beam casings, exposed the 17th century vertical sheathing and the stone fireplace, the room stepped back 100 years to its medieval counterpart. At that time the wainscot should have been removed (Fig. 47 & 48, Cady) and re-used elsewhere. The wall treatment should be simply plaster, painted white for 3 walls and the vertical sheathing on the fireplace wall. The ceiling, between the joists would have been hand planed boards (the underside of the flooring above). I do not feel it is necessary to stay completely confined to a period as it is apt to give a sterile atmosphere but this room now appears aesthetically confusing because the 17th century details have been exposed and combined with a mood of a 100 years later. By the removal of the wallpaper, wainscot and plywood ceiling the architectural continuity of this room would improve.

The master bedroom has 18th century chair-rail and wall

paper but it does not conflict with the 17th century heart of this room. The plywood between the joists should be removed and an investigation made as to the feasibility of removing the cement from the face of the fireplace. If you look at Fig. 33, Cady, you will see how great this room looked until the wall paper was installed. I would suggest removing it except for the fact that it is a specially re-produced paper to copy what had been found in the house. This brings my final thought, that great care must be taken if any papers are to be removed. It should be determined first, the value of the paper and a proper method for removing it, if it should be preserved.

As yet I do not have all the necessary information, measurements, etc., to give you a proper estimate. Following is a general idea from what I have seen and before talking with you;

1500.00 - Plumbing, heating and electrical

6000.00 - New roof, main house. (I really need to know the sq. ft.)

1000.00 - Cottage

1000.00 - Main house, insulation

2000.00 - Interior cosmetics

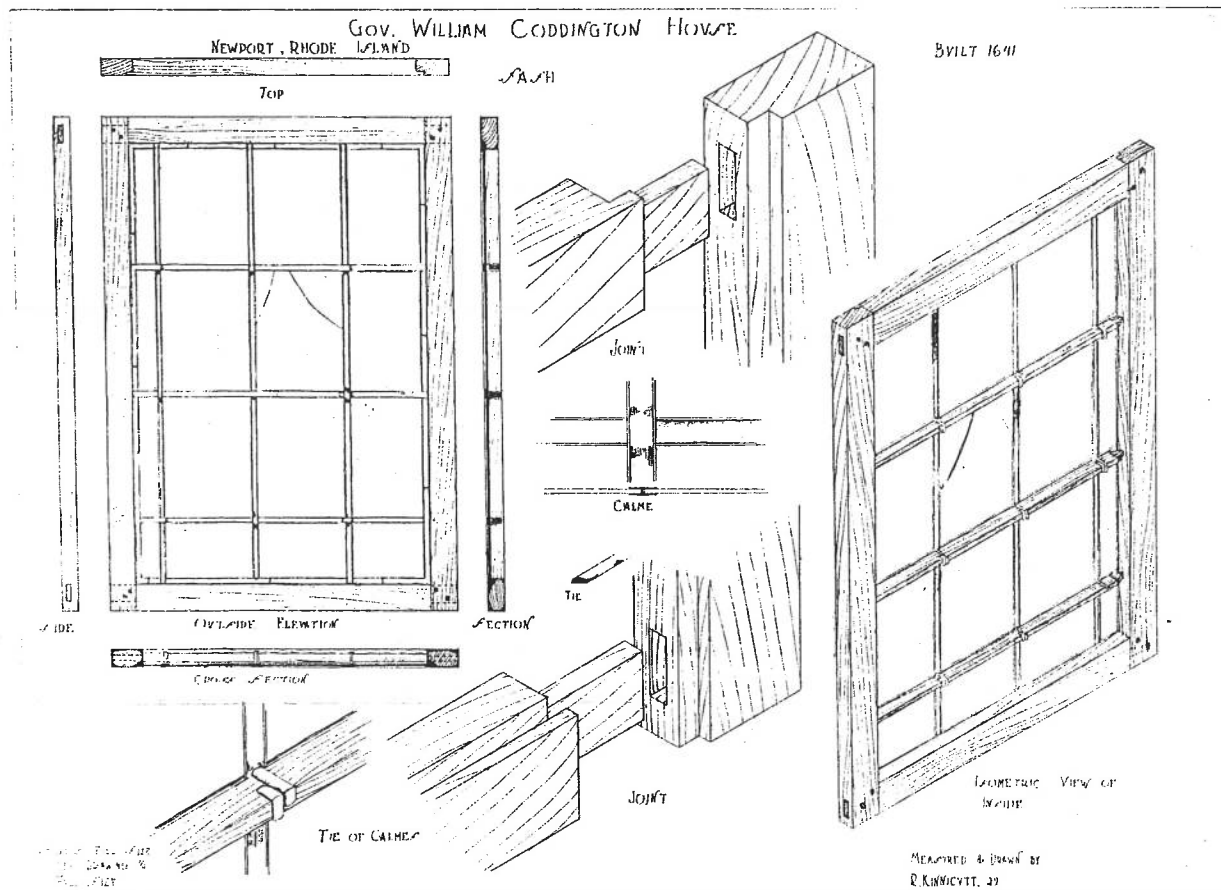
1000.00 - Small out building

2000.00 - Structural unknowns.

A. W. Baker Restorations, Inc. 15% of total cost and material.



Governor William Coddington House, 1641. Demolished in 1835. From *John Gorham Palfrey, History of New England*, 1860, Vol. II, p. 62.



Governor William Coddington House. Drawing of the casement window now in R.I.H.S.
Measured by R. Kinnicutt.