

Roger Williams University

DOCS@RWU

Documentation

July 2022

Coggeshall House: Westport News, June 8, 1976

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.rwu.edu/baker_documentation



Part of the [Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

"Coggeshall House: Westport News, June 8, 1976" (2022). *Documentation*. 148.
https://docs.rwu.edu/baker_documentation/148

This Documentation is brought to you for free and open access by DOCS@RWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Documentation by an authorized administrator of DOCS@RWU. For more information, please contact mwu@rwu.edu.

Coggeshall House Dismantled

The job of dismantling the "Coggeshall" House on Reed Road got underway over the weekend of May 21 and 22. The work was completed over the Memorial Day Weekend.

Volunteers like Anne W. Baker, Brian Ferguson, Jerry Vinci, and Fred Deutra, all of Westport, worked with Arthur Marshall of Middletown, R. I. and his friend and former colleague, Anthony Brandao.

At the end of the first two days what showed for their efforts were boards and building materials piled around the lawn and rubble kneedeep in the floor of the house.

The house, which stood on the property of William Gifford of 42 Reed Road, dates back until 1760, and indications are one of the earlier rooms may even predate that. Marshall and the others are looking for clues to tell them how old the house is and what it originally looked like.

Marshall, who works for the Newport Preservation Foundation, heard about the house from a friend and now owns it—lock, stock, and rubble . . . termites, dust and shingles.

At first Marshall hoped to salvage about a third of the structure, planning to reconstruct the house later on by himself as his private project. After working for two days on the house, Marshall conceded the percentage might be more like 25 or 20 per cent, but he still seemed pleased with his find.

Of primary interest to Marshall, Baker, Brandao and the others has been the very old wood paneling. One old panel probably was part of paneling that framed the fireplace and may predate other wood panels once thought to be the earliest parts.

As Baker explained, if they could locate a crosspiece of the chimney paneling, then they could be able to figure out the dimensions of the original fireplace.

The fireplace found in the house at the time of its dismantling is not believed to be the original one, although the bricks may be that old. Marshall and Brandao both pointed out early house builders used whatever they had and when remodeling a house, would use already existing boards and bricks, rather than buy new ones.

The job is painstaking because the workers must search beneath layers of plaster and under existing floors and boards to seek the clues to the house's earliest construction. The workers have to know what is important and what can be dismissed.

Before the razing started, Baker measured the house and drew up a set of plans for the structure. She emphasized the plans will be invaluable to historians of the future studying Westport and its earliest settlers.

She noted the original restorations made in Plymouth were based on objects archeologists found. Later, when more detail-

ed written records were discovered, it was found some of the designs guessed at were wrong. A complete set of plans will have any future scholar from making that mistake.

During the dismantling, interesting objects from days long passed occasionally turned up. Marshall found three pairs of gold-wire rimmed glasses. One was very rare — an early pair of sunglasses made with smoked glass. Another interesting item was a small whalebone whistle. Marshall said he intends to leave the objects with the house since they belong to it.

Marshall said he was very pleased with the response of Westporters to his efforts. While volunteers gave freely of their time and muscles, neighbors wandered about chatting with each other but remaining far enough away to stay out of trouble. Many of the boards were covered with nails (of a more recent time) or were crumbly to the touch having been eroded by termites or destroyed by rain. Truckloads of the Coggeshall House will stay in Westport — in the dump.

Marshall was especially pleased with the assistance given by Baker who offered her great knowledge of the subject.

Another interested person was Anthony Brandao. Brandao, of Portsmouth, R. I. knew the construction trade before he became involved with restoration work.

He showed a visitor hand tools he and Marshall have fashioned to emulate the work done by the early handtools. One is an old adze set in a new handle, and another was a plane to cut the beading used as decoration around window and door frames.

Brandao also showed how colonial man used what he had at hand for instance, a broken piece of glass might also serve as a plane.

Everything, of course, was handmade. Take a panel door for instance. There are no iron nails found in the early ones. Instead a tongue-mortice construction was used. At the end of the panel is a narrow, thin wooden

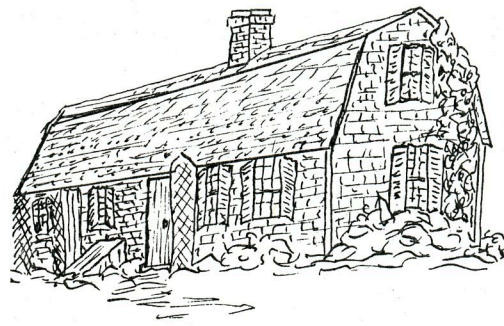
Four Arrested

Four men were arrested shortly after midnight May 29 in Westport.

Dana Brouillard, 19, 95 Banner Ave., William Davis, 18, 20 Orlando Drive, Thomas La-Pointe, 18, 26 Lassonde St., all of Westport, and Alfred S. Cruz, 20, 523 William St., Fall River, were charged with malicious injury to real and personal property at the home of John Dias, 25 Sunset Ave., Westport.

Brouillard is also charged with leaving the scene of an auto accident after causing property damage.

Westport police, investigating the case, said damage included broken windows at the Dias' house and damage to a car owned by Sharon Dias of the same address.



SKETCH OF COGGESHALL HOUSE, taken from a photograph of about 1908. The drawing, by Ann Cloutier, shows how the house looked when used as a home.

tab which slid into a slit in the frame. Wooden pegs were then fit together like a jigsaw puzzle pieces and the door has lasted over two hundred years.

The endurance of the work can be laid to the quality of the craftsmanship. The door, Brandao explained, was hung along its grain and no stress was placed across the grain. No nails were used to weaken the construction, too.

The paneling, with pieces made to slide into each other or over each other, provided protection from the elements and a smooth interior surface.

This fitting and careful build-

ing was the hallmark of such construction, and even though iron nails were used, early building did not entirely rely on them.

Shingling is another interesting aspect of the house. Brandao noted the early settler had to figure out which woods would provide the best kind of material for his house. It turns out that a soft wood like pine lasts very well, and soft wood like white cedar makes an excellent, long-lasting shingle.

Some remaining parts of the Coggeshall House clearly show how Westport's early residents adapted to their surroundings and from them produced quality work.



STANDING along side the Coggeshall House with Gambrel shaped roof for the last time before the dismantling began.



VIEWING possibly the oldest wall of the Coggeshall House with its feather bonding construction is Arthur Marshall and Ann W. Baker.

(Photo by Ann Cloutier)

WE THANK EVERYBODY FOR VISITING US AT . . .

Kate Cory
GALLEY
NOW OPEN

778 MAIN ROAD — CENTRAL VILLAGE COMMONS

HOME COOKED FOODS — PIES

Open 7 Days A Week - Mon. thru Thurs. & Sat. 7-7
Fridays: 7-8 — Breakfast on Sundays 7 - 9