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Houghton-Sprague House: Baker Letter to Abbott, September 4, 2008

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9/4/08

Anne W. Baker
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Hi Abbott,

I wanted to make a formal (that means real time) invite to see the Houghton House in Harvard, MA. The house I called you about that is owned by Karla Pearlstein from Oregon.

Karla is more than happy to pay you for your time and travel.

I think you will find the Houghton house extremely interesting. Presently the house is two stories with center chimney. At the west side there is a 20' x 20' section that is original or moved. Also there are shed-type structures (summer kitchen, etc.) attached to both the east and west ends of the house.

What is referred to as the original structure (east end) was, at one time, a salt-box—supposedly circa 1695. Structurally I don't see that. Cased frame, rough timbers under—and much raised paneling but I am out of my normal territory. It is possible that the 20' x 20' section at the west end is actually the original circa 1695 house.

It is a totally different structure: exposed framing on the first floor, large summer beam (no chamfer) with exposed joists that are embellished with quirk beads.

With in-depth investigation we discovered the roof had been turned 90 degrees. Had the building been moved to the site or was this done previously, or is it the house, which historically has been referred to as a garrison???? There are vague references to the fact it had a stone end in the location that is now brick. Whatever, there are definitely two separate buildings put together.

Following the connection of the two buildings the roof was raised on the east and west structures and within a short period the whole back of both structures were widened, changing a steep roof pitch to a lower wide one. You'll notice that something looks suspicious as soon as you drive up.

Also it is well recorded that two of quarrel glass sash were given to museums but it was never noted where exactly in the building they came from. One is said to have been in the 2nd floor window but we could find no evidence of this in the studding. I did see the sash and have photos.

The owner does plan to do dendro and has contacted Dan Miles, but your eagle eye is desperately needed.

The owner lives in Oregon and saw the house while on a visit to the area.

She is a rare individual. She doesn't plan to move here and live in the house. She knows only that it must be saved (demolition was the town's plan) and conserved for future historians.

Any chance you could take a look before cold weather sets in? Perhaps October or earlier.

See enclosures to learn a little more.

Best,

Pete Baker

PS...

When ever I think about the Mott House I think of you and your friend from Washington (forgotten his name. That seems to happen too easily now-a-days.) I have to smile when I remember you both disagreeing if the original Mott House lintel was oak or chestnut while arguing intensely looking at the lintel from every possible angle. Not sure that either of you ever agreed or even decided.

That was in 1973. A. Downing was there. She got as far as the front hall.