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## Houghton-Sprague House: Harvard Historical Society Records

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JAMES HOUGHTON

by Elwira Scorgie  
her source: Della Sprague  
and house

## 224 WEST BAKE HILL

It is very interesting to read about the South part of the Town of Harvard, Mass. This area known as Still River, where the first settlers began building their homes. This section had three if not four Garrison houses within a half mile of each other. Two of which are still standing and in remarkable preservation. Perhaps the Thomas Houghton garrison, the one I am speaking about specifically is known by the Houghton families as the Ralph Houghton Garrison.

Ralph Houghton conveyed this <sup>part</sup> of his land grant on to his first son James and helped build the garrison for two sons, James and John, before he left Lancaster for Milton, Mass. about 1690. Son Joseph inherited the home Ralph lived in, in Lancaster, Mass. For two generations it was brother and brother living in the garrison, then the home was passed down to Father and son for four generations. Mr. Warren Houghton was the last male Houghton to inherit the 8 room home.

Mr. Warren Houghton had one child, Anna Gertrude the seventh generation by name of Houghton. She passed away at the age of 49 years, unmarried, a year before Edward Warren died. Anna Gertrude was the seventh generation born in this fine old home, a span of about 295 years.

## Now about the house itself-

It is a well planned house having 2 stories front and salt shape in the back, which was made two stories about 1830. The south-west ~~part~~ room was The Garrison part which was all wood finish. The front side of the room was all filled in a foot deep with rocks all around the windows and up above ones head was the port-hole on each side of the windows. This wall was all torn out and carried back a foot showing up the corner beams. A hand hewn beam was put through the center of the room 14 inches wide and 6 inches deep, in fact nearly all of the rooms has this beam through them. The rooms were all finished very beautifully with up and down wainscoating in the lower rooms. The chambers and upper hall has block wainscoating and on side of Southeast chamber it has very lovely work absolutely free of knots and as smooth as glass. In the northeast chamber the walls were all woodwork, with a secret till and little cubby closet near the fireplace.

It is a 10 room house with 8 fireplaces. Three of the eight are three cornered fire places with two brick ovens. The fireplace in the present dining room is very large. I thought it would be fine to open it up, put a damper in and sit by watching great logs burning such as we read about in fireside tales. It burned beautifully but pretty soon on a windy day we came pretty near being drawn up the chimney, so my dream came to an end by bricking up the fireplace again as it was. The front hall is very spacious and a lovely set of stairs-2 steps up then a broad one about 40 x 34 then up 4 steps, another broad landing, then 2 more up into a good sized hall. In the early days there was a leaded window in the upper hall. It is now in the possession of the Antiquarian Society in Concord. In the back wall on the left as one goes up the stairway is a smoke closet and a drying closet large enough to hold

several pigs at one time. The kettle still hangs on crane, corn cobs still can be found in the smoke closet. The chimney has 9 flues in it and is supported by 2 great arches and with great flat stones all around it, bricked inside with splendid workmanship. One of the arches is almost large enough to drive a small car in. A very fine cellar under all rooms except one and the front hall.

The East end of the house has an old fashioned summer kitchen quite large with 2 set boilers in brick-one of brass to boil cloths in and the other is of iron. One holds about 25 gallons for slaughtering purpose. Out side near the open stoop was the wellsweep and an open bucket taken out about 1890 and covered up. This well is still being used and supplies all the water for the home today, using an electric pump.

It is understood by the present owners that the West half of the house was built first and when a son old enough to marry then the part nearest the East was added, rebuilding the stone chimney for the present brick one. There was a burning room near the present kitchen, which would have been near the fireplace and kitchen where the house undoubtedly was the warmest. Two old fashioned brass door-bell hung in different rooms, one of which I have let remain hanging by a brass spring, in the present dining-room. There are three ways to get up to the upper floor, 2 ways down into the cellar.

The present owners have saved some of the original wall paper taken from the front hall. It being block paper and no doubt made close by.

Mr. Ralph Houghton was one of 4 to sign the Lancaster covenant in 1652. He came from Lancastershire, England to Watertown in about 1650. He was the youngest son of Sir Richard Houghton, said to be 29 years old; went back to England for his wife and sons Ralph and John who were born in England. James and John came to Still River and built the garrison house about 1690.