REPORT ON THE MICHAEL FARMHOUSE
FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE JAMES ROGERS HOUSE
645 HOLDERNESS ROAD
SANDWICH, NEW HAMPSHIRE
MAY 22, 2021

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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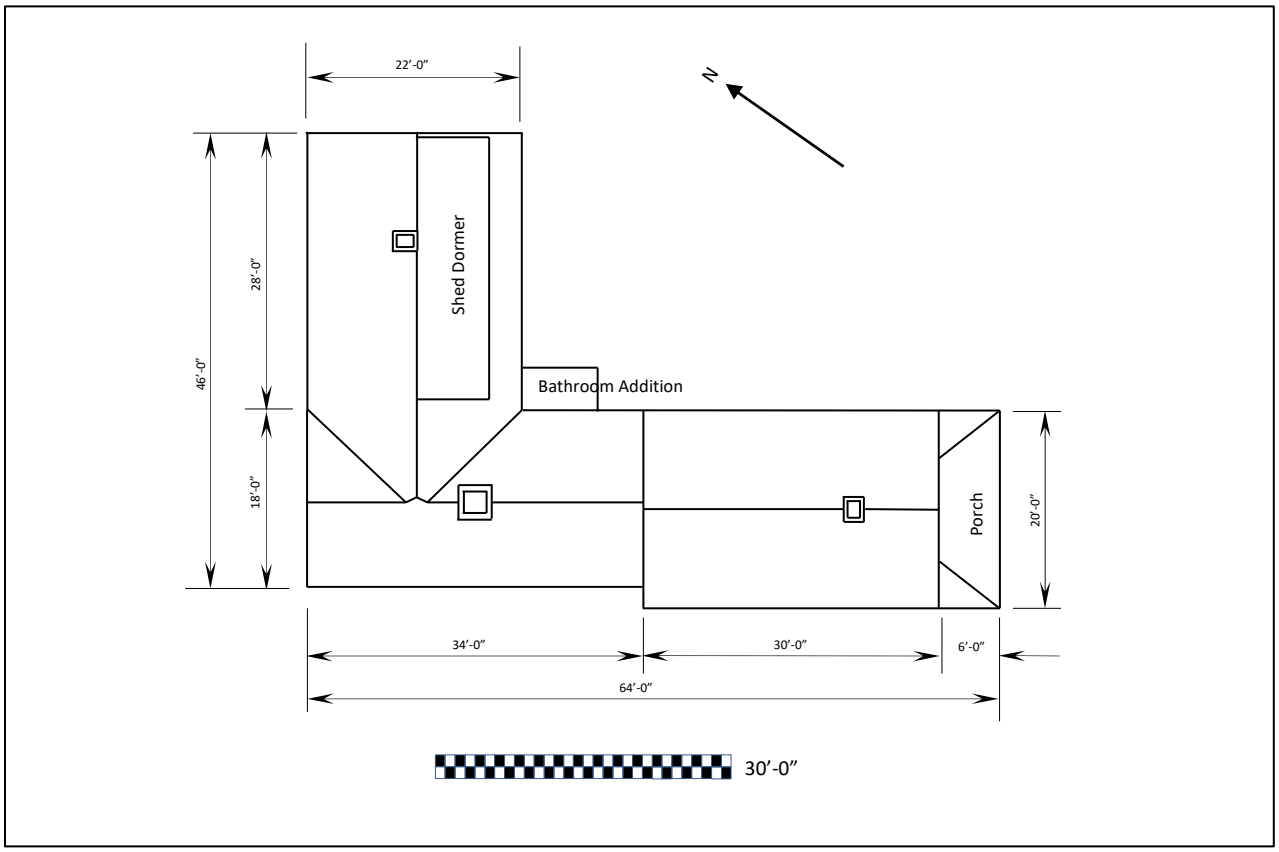
Michael Farmhouse Complex, Sandwich, New Hampshire. Camera facing Northeast

Summary:

This report is based on an inspection of the Michael Farmhouse, known during the first half of the twentieth century as the home of forester and prominent local citizen James Rogers, on the afternoon of May 18, 2021. The purpose of the inspection was to observe and identify the character-defining features of the buildings and to begin to understand their origins and evolution. Present at the inspection were Roger Larochelle, executive director of the Squam Lakes Conservation Society, the owners of the property, and Geoffrey A. Burrows, president of the Sandwich N. H. Historical Society.

This set of buildings includes a center-chimney timber-framed Cape Cod dwelling that faces southwest toward Coolidge Farm Road, a private gravel road; a framed wing that extends northeasterly from the rear side of the center chimney dwelling and has its own chimney; a large, kneewall-framed shop, also with a chimney, attached directly to the eastern end elevation of the center-chimney house; and a detached two-car garage that has a framed addition on its southeastern end. The complex formerly included a framed barn that stood on the opposite corner of the intersection of Holderness Road and Coolidge Farm Road. This barn was recently removed without a formal record of its appearance or structural characteristics.

A sketch map or roof plan of the principal complex, with approximate dimensions, is given below.



The origin of the Michael Farmhouse complex is obscure. From what is known, its origin is unusual in a rural setting, although it would be less rare in a village or urban context.

Geoffrey Burrows kindly pointed to the Sandwich Historical Society's *Seventeenth Annual Excursion* of August 20, 1936, as the source of a brief account of what are now called the Michael buildings. The Sandwich Historical Society was and is among local New Hampshire historical societies that conduct annual or periodical field trips or excursions. The Sandwich society seems to be unique, however, in having published narratives of each of its excursions from 1920 to the present day.

The *Seventeenth Annual Excursion* covered the area of Sandwich "West of Chick's Corner." Of the Michael Farmhouse, the narrative says:

James Rogers' [House]

Samuel Kimball lived here, and his son James (1815-1889), then George Gurdy who married the widow of Kimball. Norman Hodge also occupied it. It was owned by the Coolidges for a considerable period, and is now the property of Mr. and Mrs. James Rogers, who live here. The two houses and a shed were placed together to make the present dwelling, but so long ago that no one now remembers where the buildings originally stood.

As described below, the "two houses," which are treated to appear as a Cape Cod dwelling and a large wing or ell, do indeed appear to have different dates and origins. Stylistic evidence suggests that both houses date from 1850 and earlier.

The moving of rural buildings appears to have been relatively rare in nineteenth-century New Hampshire with two exceptions. Structures near the larger lakes were not infrequently moved over the ice from place to place, often from the mainland to an island. Public or semi-public buildings such as meeting houses or churches, when erected at one site but later desired to stand in a new location, were not infrequently moved either intact or by being disassembled and rebuilt elsewhere. The same was often done with district school buildings which, being small one-room structures, were moved with relative ease over gravel roads, especially when snow-covered.

Moving intact houses was presumably less usual. Its feasibility presumably depended, as it still does with the moving of buildings over land, on the relative nearness of a structure to its intended new site and the width, straightness, acclivity, and obstructions of the roadways.

Each of the three principal units of the Michael Farmhouse assemblage is described below in some detail. From the standpoint of the current condition of each building, the principal period of interest appears to be the early-to-mid twentieth century, when the property was occupied (and owned during part of this period) by James Smith Rogers (1885-1946) and his wife, Ida Louise Rand Rogers (1883-1939). Trained as a forester, James Rogers was employed as a supervisor of the Coolidge Farms, which included forest and farmlands adjacent to the farmstead and embracing four to five thousand acres and some twelve miles of private roads. Rogers eventually served as a trustee of the J. Randolph Coolidge Memorial Fund and was active in

town affairs and organizations. During World War II, Rogers used his woodworking shop to manufacture wooden shovels that were intended to move explosives that might be dropped on Sandwich by the enemy.[1]

During the years of Rogers occupancy, this set of buildings served as the gate lodge, superintendent's home, and maintenance shop of the Coolidge Farm. It therefore possesses a strong and significant relationship to one of the largest landholdings in the Squam watershed, the entirety of which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places under a Multiple Property Documentation. Among other areas of significance, the house is therefore strongly reflective of the themes of "farms for summer homes," "country houses and estates," "protecting Squam," and "farmhouses and farmsteads," as discussed in this National Register Cover Form.

The 1995 town history includes a wintertime photograph of James Rogers standing in the deep snow on Holderness Road beside his Model T Ford automobile, converted to a "Snowmobile" for winter driving as was often done at the time. Dated 1922, the photograph shows the northern sides of Rogers' farm buildings in the background. The photograph reveals that the shed dormer on the northernmost building had been added by that date. The workshop differed from its present appearance only in not yet having its present brick stove chimney.[2]

Southwestern Cape Cod House

Cape Cod structure, Michael Farmhouse. Camera facing East.

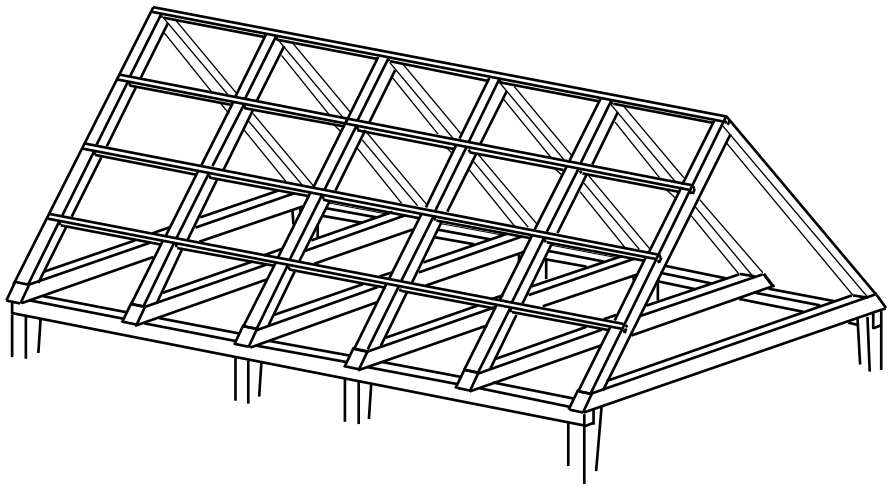
[1] Sandwich Historical Society, *Sandwich, New Hampshire, 1763-1990, "A Little World By Itself"* (Portsmouth, N. H.: Peter E. Randall, 1995), pp. 184, 189,197.
[2] Ibid., p. 167.

As seen in the photograph on the preceding page, the Cape Cod house was treated as the foremost building in the assemblage of structures that, according to the 1936 *Excursion*, were assembled on the site at an unknown date. The single feature that indicates that this was not a house that originally stood on this site is the fact that it has no cellar, but only a shallow crawl space beneath the first floor. The outer walls of the building are supported by a low perimeter footing of stone. The interior floor girders are supported on wooden posts set in the ground.

Virtually all freestanding houses in the days of maturing settlement of New Hampshire had excavated cellars, at least under a portion of the superstructure. Cellars were necessary for the wintertime storage of brined meat, root crops, apples, and cider, the foods that sustained families during the long dormant season. Cellar holes remain throughout the town of Sandwich where the original houses have long disappeared. These evocative features have long been chronicled by the Sandwich Historical Society, most recently by its current president. Geoffrey Burrows.[3]

The Cape Cod house structural unit was clearly chosen as the façade of the assembled pair of houses because it replicates the appearance of a traditional one-and-a-half-story dwelling. With its symmetrical fenestration, large central chimney, and low eaves, this unit cannot be recognized from the exterior as anything other than a characteristic dwelling of the early 1800s. Due to its present irregular fenestration, the second house, which functions as a large wing in the assemblage, has lost its resemblance to a typical dwelling of the early 1800s.

As described below, the exterior and interior detailing of the front structure of the assemblage clearly expresses the Greek Revival architectural style wherever its early features are intact. Because the house was thoroughly modernized in this style, apparently around 1850, we may theorize that this was the period when the two houses and the shop building were moved to the site and assembled as the farmhouse complex that we see today. Further investigation may show, however, that the frame of this front house dates from well before the mid-1800s.



Roof Frame: Principal Rafters and Purlins (rear purlins omitted for clarity)

[3] As an example, the *Seventeenth Annual Excursion* of the Sandwich Historical Society (1936), which includes the description of the Rogers [Michael] Farmhouse quoted on page 2 of this report, includes a map that indicates the many surviving cellar holes in the neighborhood described in the publication.

The roof frame of the front house, and indeed the roof frames of every structure on the property, is composed of principal rafters and longitudinal purlins, as shown above. Such a roof frame ordinarily denotes a structure that dates from the 1830s or earlier. However, the same framing principle is used on all of the Michael Farmhouse buildings, including the freestanding two-bay automobile garage, so it may be that in the Sandwich area the older roof framing type, seen here, was retained much longer than elsewhere in New Hampshire.

The attic of the Cape Cod house is seen at the left; the camera is facing northwest, toward Holderness Road. The hewn rafters and heavy original purlins are visible, as are some sawn auxiliary purlins that were added to support the roof sheathing boards under the weight of snow. The attic floor boards are sawn on an upright or reciprocating water-powered sawmill of the type that was common prior to the mid-1800s, and persisted after that date in small sawmills.

At the left is seen the intersection of a pair of rafters and the ridgepole. All roof framing members were hewn with a broadaxe and were not smoothed with an adze. Portions of both rafters and the ridgepole retain the bark of the tree in some areas. This is rough but very serviceable carpentry.

The fact that Sandwich carpenters could create a more highly finished frame, if wanted, is shown by the Merriman House on the northeast side of Squam Lake at 700 Squam Lake Road. In this house, the frame is unusually massive and well-finished and has some unusual structural characteristics. The differences between these two house frames, separated by little over two miles, illustrates the variations that could result from the work of different carpenters or the requirements of different customers.

As noted previously, the joinery of the Cape Cod house is characteristic of the 1850 period. As seen in the photograph on page 3, the exterior window casings are composed of flat boards without backband moldings or other embellishment. This stylistic severity is characteristic of the late Greek Revival style. The style began to find favor around 1830, supplanting the more delicate Federal style. The Grecian style began to be supplanted by more elaborate Victorian

detailing after 1850. In the years toward the mid-1800s, the style was often expressed through details of extreme simplicity.

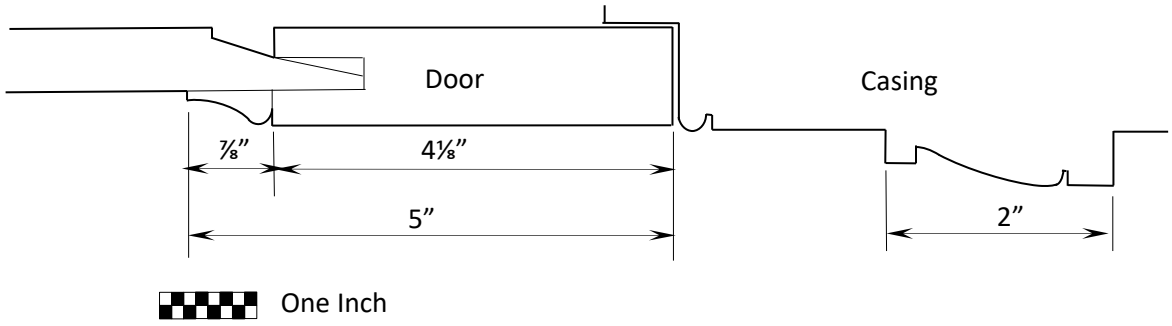
The same simplicity is seen in the front doorway of the house. Although the doorway has some molded features, its general expression is one of deliberate simplicity and plainness. This would have been recognized as stylistically modern in the mid-1800s.

The interior of the house retains its mid-nineteenth-century style in the large room or parlor that faces toward Holderness Road on the western end of the building. The rooms on the eastern end of the house have been reconfigured and remodeled at various times during the twentieth century and have lost earlier datable features.

Parlor of the Cape Cod house, camera facing east

As seen in the photograph above, the joinery in the parlor is simple in detail, matching the style of the exterior woodwork. Diagnostic details of the Greek Revival style of this room are shown on the following page. This room retains a working fireplace, but the central chimney of the house has been rebuilt, and the opposite side, which normally would have had the large kitchen fireplace, now has only a brick platform for a woodburning stove. As seen in the photograph on page 5, the chimney was rebuilt with concrete blocks through the attic. It is built of brick above the roof.

Detail of Door Casing, Corner Block, and Door Panel in Parlor. The chip carving on the corner block is highly unusual.



Section through Parlor Door and Door Casing, Half Scale

A detail of the parlor mantelpiece, shown at the left, shows that it adheres to the very plain Greek Revival style, contrasting with the rather sophisticated door casings and doors of this room.

As noted above, the chimney of this house has been at least partially rebuilt in modern times, having a shaft of concrete blocks, seen on page 5 of this report, above the first story and below the roof. The western room of the house has a fireplace, but the eastern room, shown below, now has a brick platform for a woodburning stove. The face of the chimney adjacent to this platform has a cast iron door for a brick oven, undoubtedly retained from the chimney as it formerly stood.

Left: Original kitchen fireplace wall with new stove platform.

Right: Oven door cast in Lake Village (Laconia), New Hampshire.

The oven door shown above is of a well-known pattern. Doors with identical frames were cast in a number of New Hampshire foundries, including those in South Newmarket (Newfields) and Concord. The doors bear different names depending on the manufacturer. Most of those made in South Newmarket bear the date "1849." On the basis of that evidence, doors of this pattern are regarded as diagnostic of a date of circa 1850. As discussed earlier, this approximate date correlates with the appearance of the woodwork in the western room of this house. Because a chimney would normally be dismantled from a house that was to be moved, and reconstructed in the new location, the oven door of circa 1850 strengthens the likelihood that this house, and presumably its companion structures, were moved to this site and joined together around 1850.

Northeastern Wing or Ell

The second building unit in the assemblage, treated as a wing extending from the rear of the Cape Cod dwelling in the front, has one large room and two small rooms (one treated as a modern kitchen) on its first story. Above, in what was undoubtedly an unfinished attic for many years, are two finished bedchambers reached by a staircase that ascends from the front house adjacent to the stove room shown on the previous page. Because these upper rooms are finished with plaster or gypsum board, the roof frame of this unit is hidden from view.

As seen in the photograph below, the eastern slope of the roof of this structure was provided with a shed dormer to light the bedrooms. As noted previously, a wintertime photograph of 1922 of James Rogers and his automobile shows that the dormer had been added to the roof by that date.

Second Building Frame, attached to the rear of the Cape Cod House. Camera facing west. The flat-roofed extension to the left with a plumbing vent is an added bathroom.

When brought together, the two dwelling frames were aligned at the eaves level. Because of the slightly higher post height of the rear building, there is a small difference in the height of the first floors of the two houses. As seen in the photograph on page 3, the ridge of the roof of the rear building is a few inches higher than that of the Cape Cod house and is visible from the front of the buildings

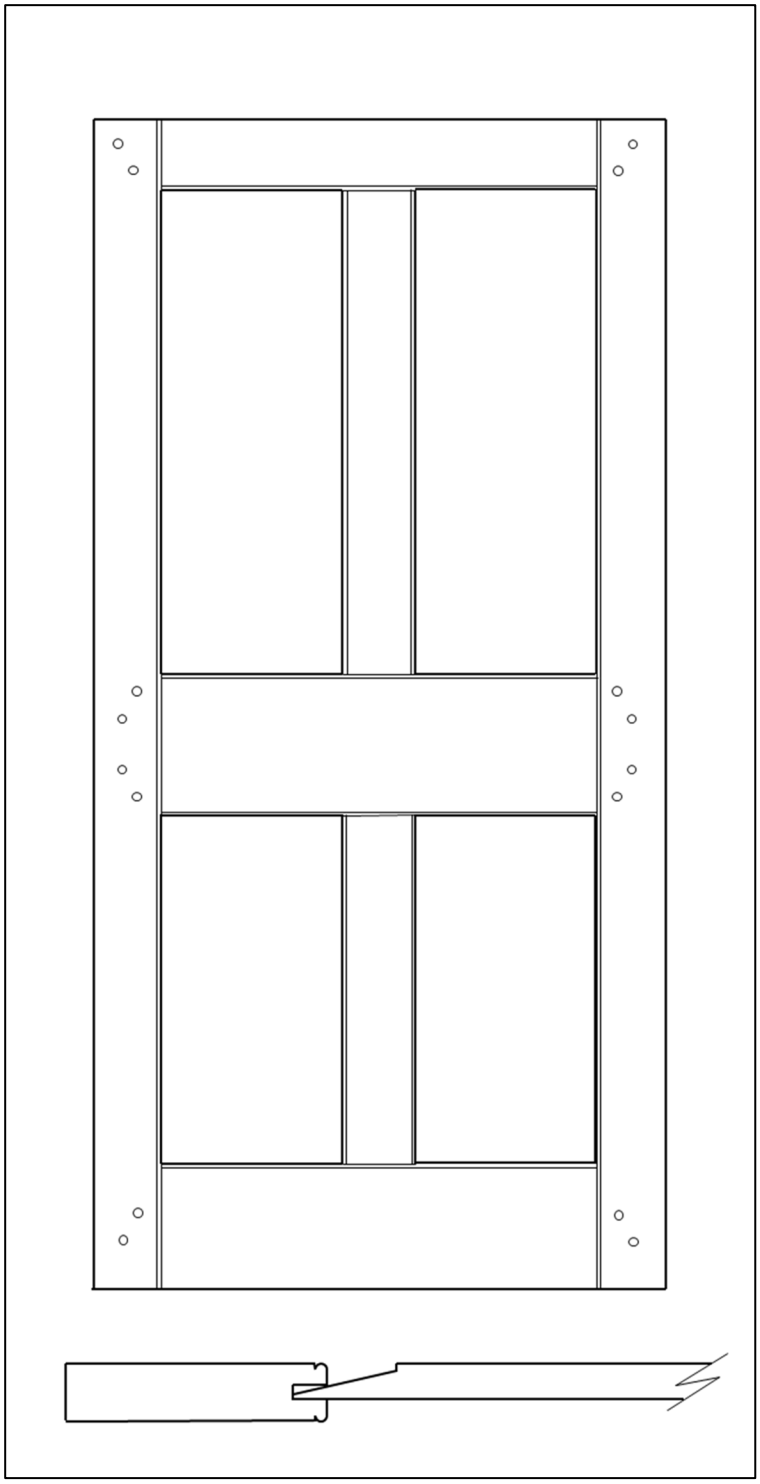
The lower frame of this struture is marked by projecting corner posts, while the corner posts for the Cape Cod house in front are invisible. It was a common practice in the first few decades of the nineteenth century to hew back the projecting corners of such posts in order to allow plaster to be carried to the corners of the rooms, and this may have been done in the front house.

The plaster in the rear building is applied over split-board lath, which was the common lathing system from the late 1700s until 1850 or later, depending on the date when circular saws became locally available to saw individual wooden laths.

While there is no cellar under the Cape Cod house, the rear wing was provided with a deep cellar that extends under the full frame. As seen below, the stones of the cellar walls are mortared, not laid dry, and are whitewashed. They may have been bedded in mortar from the date of construction, although dry-laid foundations were not rare in the mid-1800s. The cellar wall on the east, facing the back yard of the L-shaped assemblage, has been reinforced with a concrete wall that extends about two-thirds up the height of the stone wall. The concrete wall was bolstered by two concrete buttresses, now mostly removed. This added concrete indicates that the eastern cellar wall was failing, probably from the pressure of earth made more plastic by water falling from the roofs of both gable-roofed units, which meet in a valley as seen on the previous page.

Cellar of the rear house, camera facing southwest. The cleanout door at the base of the chimney matches the oven door shown on page 8 and was probably the door of the ash pit that would have been placed under the oven. The protrusion under the cellar stairs is a large boulder or ledge that was too massive to split and remove when the cellar was excavated.

Because of its interior remodeling at various times, this building unit has fewer datable features than those seen in the front house. Two doors of this section, and a number of window casings, appear to be original features and indicate a date that is earlier than 1850. These details may have been retained without much change when this building was moved to the present site.



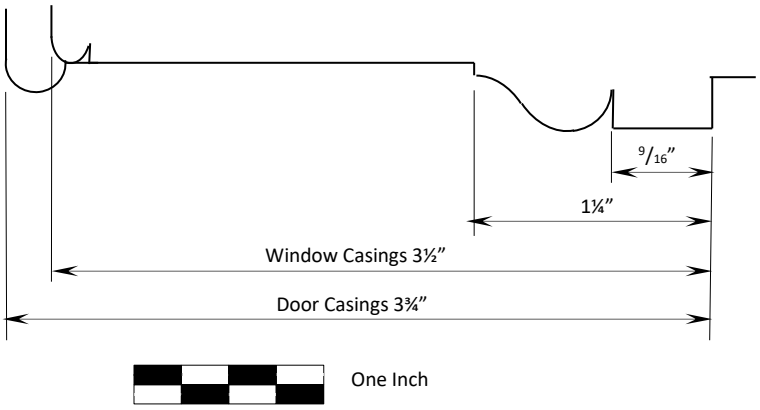
The type of door seen in the rear house is shown at the left. It is a four-panel door with flat panels on one side, which is usually treated as the face or best side of the door. The flat side is shown in the drawing. The sectional view at the bottom shows the raised field of the panel on the opposite side of the door.

This type of door dates from the end of the Federal period of joinery and carries into the early Greek Revival period, which began around 1830. It is simple in its detailing and was probably most commonly fashioned for less expensive or less elaborate houses.

Where such doors have been found in datable houses in New Hampshire, they generally date from about 1835. This may be the period of the surviving early joinery in the rear house. We may theorize that this rear unit was constructed elsewhere around 1835 and moved to the present site around 1850. While the front house was given fashionable woodwork of the 1850 period at the time of the move, the rear house was apparently left with much of the interior finish that it had at the time of the move.

Left: Drawing of one of two identical doors found at the northernmost end of the first story of the rear house.

Where undisturbed by remodeling, the window and door casings on the first story of the rear house also display profiles that reflect simple joinery of the late Federal or early Greek Revival period, as shown below, correlatingwith the style of the four-panel doors.



Window and Door Casings of the Rear House

From these features of the joinery, it appears that the interior of the rear house was finished about 1835.

Shop Building

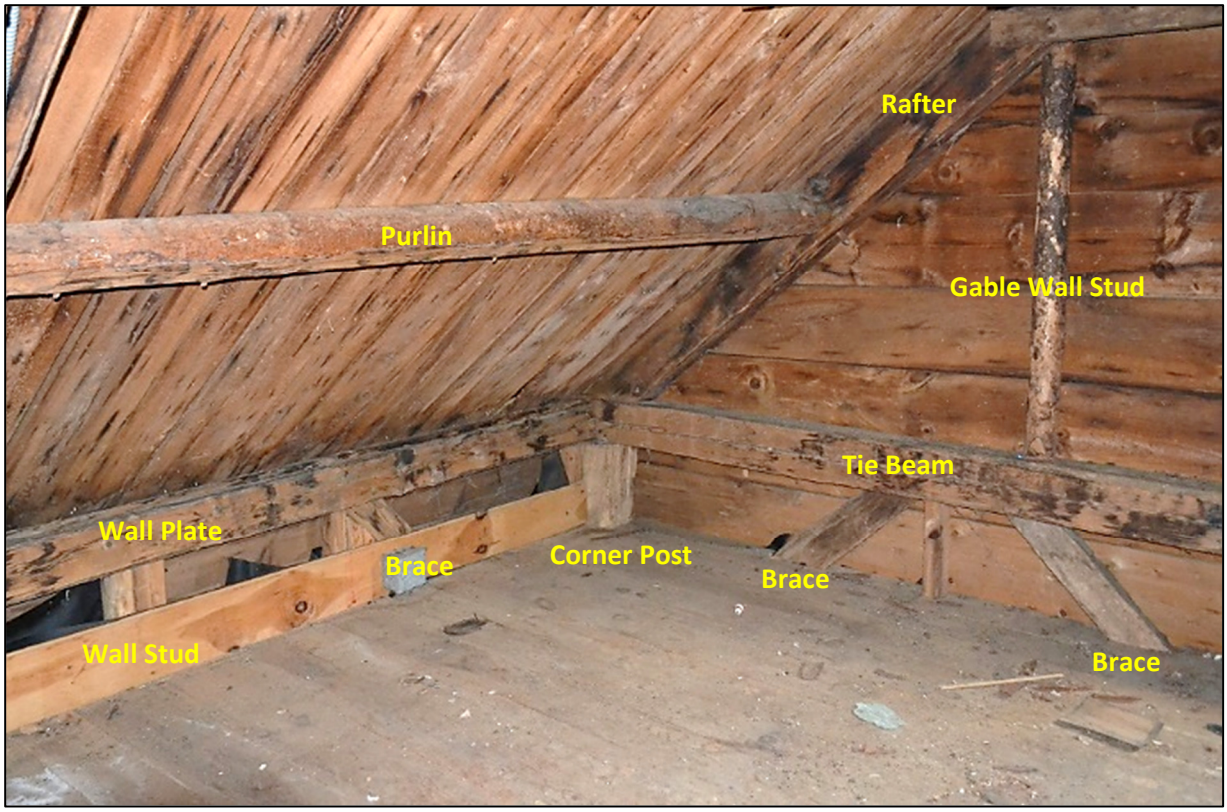
Shop Building. Camera facing Northeast.

The shop building was an important place of work for James Rogers, who was a skilled woodworker as well as a trained forester. The building is attached directly to the eastern gable end of the Cape Cod house. The clapboards of the house, retaining an early dark paint and showing few signs of weathering, remain on the house and are visible from the shop at a door that connects the attics of the two buildings.

The shop has the appearance of a small English barn, but is too small to have been built as a barn and is framed differently from most English barns. It was apparently built as a high-posted shop or an agricultural storage building.

Shop building. first story, camera facing southeast.

The building is framed with hewn timbers. As in the roof system of the Cape Cod house, the timbers were hewn with a broadaxe and not further smoothed. The roof of the shop, like that of the Cape and presumably of the rear house, is a rafter-and-purlin frame of the type shown on page 4 of this report. The principal difference between the shop's roof frame and those of the two houses is the fact that the shop has a kneewall frame. In such a frame, the second story is supported by posts (and sometimes girts) that lie well below the wall plates that receive the feet of the rafters. The wall posts of the frame extend without break to the bottoms of the wall plates. Sawn diagonal braces connect posts and wall plates (and the gable-end end tie beams of the structure), stiffening the frame against racking from wind pressure or eccentric snow loading.



Northeast corner of shop attic, camera facing east. The framing of the kneewall is exposed.

Kneewall buildings, both houses and barns, began to be popular in New Hampshire in the 1830s. It is possible that this shop dates from that general period, although it could of course be later. The shop may have been brought to the site along with the two houses, or could have been added to the complex at some time after the houses were brought together and remodeled as a single dwelling.

The photograph above shows the corner framing of the building. It can be seen that the tie beam, which supports the end rafter, laps over the wall plate. The tie beam and the plate are flush at their botttoms and seem to rest directly on the top of the corner post without a complex framing joint. This type of simplified framing is characteristic of the 1840s or 1850s, although it can occur earlier.

Tie beams act in tension to resist the outward thrust of the rafter feet, which naturally tend to spread under the weight of the roof materials and especially under the weight of snow. At the opposite end of the shop, where the building abuts the gable end of the Cape Cod house, the tie beam was cut long ago to permit passage between the attics of the two buildings without obstruction. Severing the tie beam at that end weakened the frame, but there is no obvious sign of structural movement. This is probably because the gable of the shop, being attached to the gable of the house, receives some support from the latter. The spreading tendency of rafters is diminished by the presence of gable wall studs like the one seen in the photograph above.

Two-Bay Garage

Standing alone to the east of the connected buildings is a two-bay garage for motor vehicles. The garage has a two-part shed connected to its southeastern end, one portion of which could formerly have been a privy.

The detailing of the garage, with its heavily framed sliding doors and diagonal sheathing, suggests a date of the 1910s or 1920s. Inside, the garage has wood-sheathed side walls and a concrete floor, adding to the substantial, early-twentieth-century appearance of the building. The rear (northeastern) wall of the garage was extended by a shed-roofed addition to accommodate longer vehicles, a common alteration of garages that were originally proportioned for Ford automobiles or trucks.

This garage displays one anomaly: it is framed with as rafter-and-purlin roof like those of the connected buildings, although more crudely hewn and more lightly framed. As noted previously, such roof frames generally gave way to roofs of closely-spaced common rafters during the 1830s. It is hard to believe that any carpenter would frame a buildng weithg suchg a roof in the age of the automobile. This suyggersts the possibility that the garage, like the shop, may be a remodeled agricultural outbuildings of a relatively early period, thoroughly disguised with well fashioned doors and trim in the early twentieth century.

Window sashes

All window sashes that were noted in the buildings display a muntin profile that shows their origin during the twentieh century. They have two-over-two pane configuration, and their

muntins, though all of the same pattern, vary in thickness according to the sizes of the window openings. The heaviest muntins noted were those of the Cape Cod house; these meassure a full inch in width. It seems likely that the older sashes of the buildings, which may well have had dissimilar pane configurations and muntin profiles, were replaced either under Coolidge ownership or, later, by James Rogers.