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REPORT ON THE BLAISDELL-WINSLOW HOUSE, NORTHWOOD, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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This report is based in a brief inspection of the Blaisdell-Winslow House on the afternoon of September 6, 2002. The purpose of the report was to evaluate the house for features or elements of architectural or historical value before the New Hampshire Division of Parks and Recreation, the owners of the house, proceed with plans to demolish the building.

Summary: The Blaisdell-Winslow House appears to have begun its existence as a store, shop or warehouse that was converted to a dwelling in the early 1800s. The house bears clear evidence of having been remodeled around 1850, although most of its interior features have been lost during subsequent remodelings that have obliterated most of the earlier room configurations and finishes. The frame of the house is difficult to assess except in the attic, where the hewn roof frame is staunch, well-built, and in good condition.

History: The following summary is taken from New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources inventory form #171 for Northwood. The form was prepared on May 20, 1991, by Elizabeth Hostutler and Kari Federer of the Preservation Company [Lynne Emerson Monroe]. According to local tradition, the Blaisdell-Winslow House was built circa 1788 by blacksmith Peter Blaisdell. Blaisdell purchased thirty acres of land on both sides of the road from his father-in-law, Thomas Piper, in 1787. Most of the land was south of the road, but the house is said to have been built on a fourteen [square] rod parcel on the north side of the highway. Blaisdell had come to Northwood from Kingston and married Elizabeth Piper in 1785. Blaisdell did not remain in the house long. By 1802 he was living in Pittsfield.¹ This house may be the unidentified structure shown on

¹ Joann Weeks Bailey, *A Guide to the History and Old Dwelling Places of Northwood, New Hampshire* (Concord: Capital Offset Company, Inc., 1973), p.122.

the north side of the First New Hampshire Turnpike on the 1802 plan of the road by Phinehas Merrill.²

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the property was owned by John Wiggin, who lived nearby. In 1852, John Wiggin, Jr., of Dover sold the house and land to Charles Winslow. The Winslows are thought to have moved the old house across to the south side of the turnpike and built a new small house (survey number 170) on the northern fourteen-rod piece where the old house had originally stood.³ A map of 1857 shows B. Winslow in this house south of the road, and C. E. Winslow to the north in #170.⁴

Between 1865 and 1950, the Blaisdell-Winslow House had ten owners. At the turn of the twentieth century, it was the residence of Mrs. Buzzell and her son, Henry.⁵

Description: The Blaisdell-Winslow House is a two-story framed dwelling that stands on the south side of the First New Hampshire Turnpike (U.S. Route 4) and faces south, with its northern gable end facing the highway. The house has a five-bay façade, with a central doorway flanked by sidelights. The house has a dirt-floored cellar, with dry-laid stone walls, under its northern room. Underpinning stones have little obvious evidence of splitting, but a few reveal the holes of plug drills, generally used after 1830. The first-floor joists of the northern room are heavy, 4" by 8" timbers, sawn in a reciprocating sawmill. The first-floor joists of the southern end of the house, as far as they can be seen, are rounded sleepers hewn flat on their tops.

Attached to the northern gable end of the house is a modern one-story vestibule extension that provides access both to the northern room (parlor) on the first floor and to an enclosed staircase that leads to a separate apartment on the second story.

The original volume of the house has been extended on the west side by a one-story gable-roofed addition, which stands over a shallow basement with stone walls below grade and concrete walls above grade. The floor joists of this extension are circular-sawn.

Attached to the southern gable end of the house is a one-story, gable-roofed woodshed and carriage house (not entered), which has a roof of rafters and purlins. Attached to the southern end of this shed is a small, high-posted, one-story barn (not entered).

The frame of the house is best observed in the attic; in the rooms below, some posts have apparently been hewn back to the thickness of the walls, while others may be interrupted by window openings. The rafters are heavy, and are hewn with a broadaxe. Some of the purlins are hewn to square or rectangular cross-section, while others are rounded spruce

² "Plan of the New Hampshire Turnpike Road, Surveyed in June A.D. 1802" collection of the New Hampshire Division of Records Management and Archives, 1802.

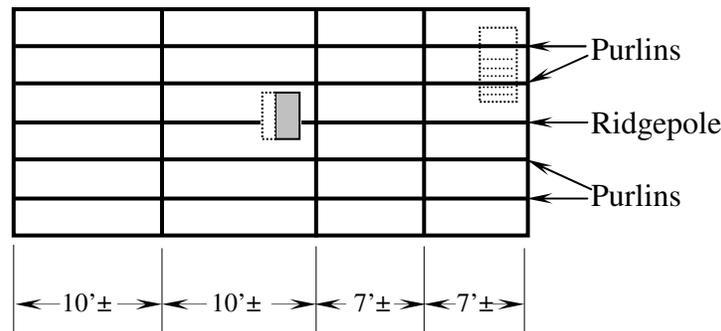
³ Bailey, op. cit., p. 122.

⁴ Northwood vignette from Rockingham County wall map (Philadelphia: Smith and Coffin, 1857).

⁵ Bailey, op. cit., p. 122.

poles. The ridgepole is a rounded tree bole, interrupted by a chimney that pierces the ridge close to the centerline of the house.

The roof frame has only five rafter sets rather than the usual six. This leaves no well-defined chimney bay at the center, so the chimney rises through the north side of one bay, as shown below. The structural bays of the house vary in width between the north and south side of the chimney, suggesting that this frame was originally not intended for a dwelling, but rather for a store, shop or warehouse with special structural requirements. The unusual dimensions of the structural bays causes the post location ten feet from the southern gable wall of the house to be interrupted by window openings. It is not known how the roof loads are transmitted down to the sills at this location.



Trenches in the tops of the southern gable rafters may have been intended either for purlins extending over a now-missing bay of the frame, or for lookouts to support an overhang of now-missing raking eaves. The former seems more likely. This suggests that the frame was originally longer than its present length of approximately thirty-four feet, but that it was shortened by one or more bays when being converted to a dwelling or when being moved across the road from its original location.

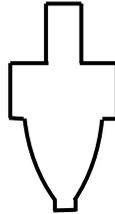
The current chimney is intended for stoves. At least one cut in the floorboards on the second floor suggests the former presence of fireplaces in the house. Evidence in the roof sheathing indicates that the house formerly had a chimney of somewhat greater width than the current stack.

Although the present chimney appears to have a substantial stoned base beyond the southern wall of the cellar, this base may have been intended for the current chimney rather than for the larger chimney. If the house was indeed moved around 1850, the larger fireplace chimney was probably removed at that time to give way to the more modern stove chimney seen today.

The interior finish of the house, where not of twentieth-century origin, reflects two stylistic periods and gives some hint of the interior joinery both when the house was first finished on the interior and when it was remodeled around 1850. Most of the interior doors have been moved from their original locations; only those inside the former front

entry remain associated with door casings of the appropriate period. Some of the window casings of the house remain to suggest two different periods of window trim.

The only early window sashes in the house are the sidelights that flank the front door and a single set of six-over-six sashes in the southern attic window. These surviving remnants of earlier fenestration have the muntin profile shown below:

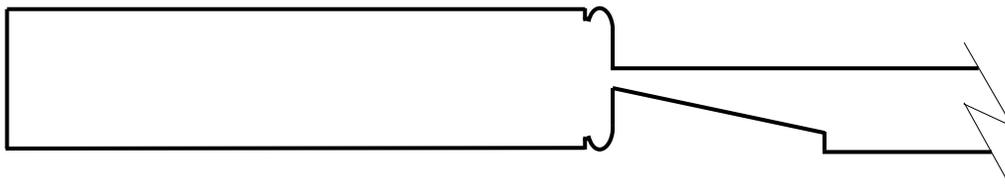


This muntin profile was common during the period from 1830 through 1850. It appears that the frame of the Blaisdell-Winslow House may first have been finished for domestic use during the period before 1830 (see below). We may therefore surmise that these remnants of earlier fenestration remain from the period around 1850, when the house was remodeled, rather than from the earlier period of domestic use.

Except for these surviving elements of earlier fenestration, all sashes in the house have been replaced by two-over-two units dating from the twentieth century.

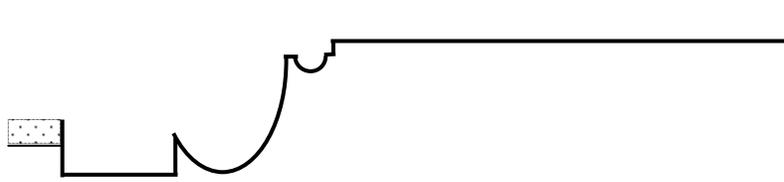
The earliest recognizable stylistic elements in the house are a four-panel door in the lower entry and some interior window casings in the southeast room on the second floor. These features appear to date from the early 1800s, but are too few to allow accurate dating. The presence of these features, however, suggests that the house formerly had joiner's work of a simple federal style. These are the only obvious hints of the interior appearance of the house before about 1850.

The four-panel door is of a rather uncommon type that substitutes delicate beads for the mouldings that are usually seen around door panels in the federal era.



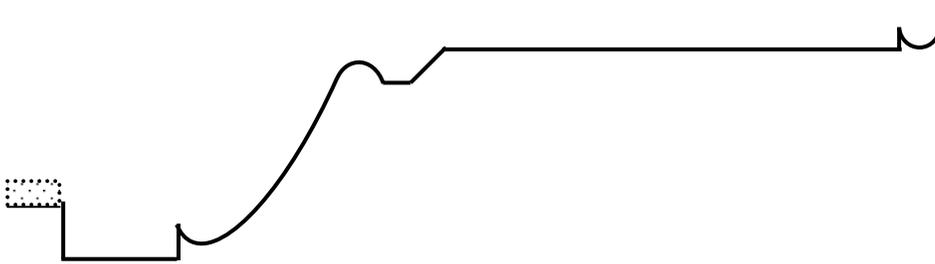
It must be remembered that the door could have been introduced into the house from an entirely different building.

The window casings in the southeast room of the second floor likewise appear to date from the early 1800s:

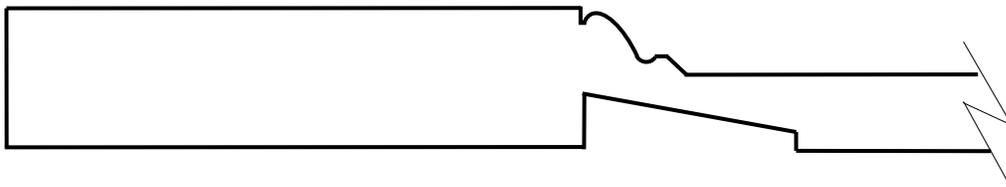


By contrast with these few elements from the early 1800s, the house retains a number of door and window casings that date from a later period. These features bear the flat Grecian ovolo mouldings that are associated with the later Greek Revival style. These casings appear to date from around 1850, and to correlate with the sale of the house to Charles Winslow in 1852. Other features of the dwelling, including the exterior door trim and the exterior window caps, also suggest a date of about 1850. As noted above, the local belief is that the building was not only sold in 1852, but was moved from the north side of the turnpike to the south side. Such a move would logically entail a very thorough remodeling of the house and the substitution of the current stove chimney for the earlier fireplace chimney.

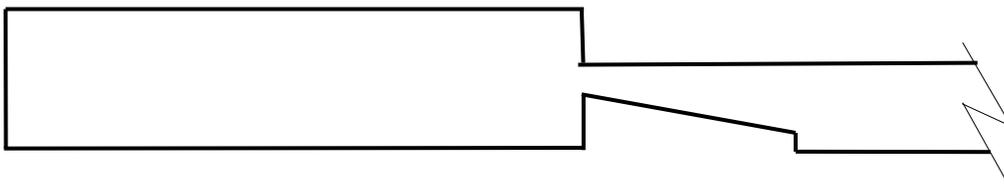
The door and window casings that are seen throughout the front rooms of the first story have this profile:



The house also retains a number of six-panel interior doors that appear to date from the 1850 period. Some, in fact, relate strongly to the casings shown above, bearing Grecian ogee mouldings around their panels that are miniature copies of the backband moulding used on the casings. These doors have this profile:



Other six-panel doors, mostly on the second floor, are simpler versions of those on the first story. They lack the applied mouldings around their panels:



Although these six-panel doors appear to reflect the remodeling of around 1850, it must be remembered that they could have been introduced from another building. Only careful paint analysis, comparing color sequences on the doors with sequences on the door casings that remain in their original positions, could confirm that these doors belonged to the house during its evolution.

The Blaisdell-Winslow House was determined in 1992 to be not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The consultant who evaluated the house stated that it “lacks integrity for its first period, because it was moved c. 1855. Numerous twentieth-century alterations have affected the building’s integrity for its later period.”

It is true that the house lacks integrity for its first period, whether that period is defined as the time during which the building appears to have been a store, shop or warehouse, or as the period during the early 1800s when the structure first functioned as a center-chimney dwelling.

On the exterior, the building retains some integrity for the period around 1850, when it was remodeled into the form it presently retains. Its coherence for this period has been lessened by the additions that have been placed on its north and west elevations, but the building nevertheless expresses its identity as an older house that was remodeled around 1850, much as does the Willey House diagonally across the road. The house has long been a visible presence along this area of the highway, and relates visually to the similarly remodeled Willey dwelling on the opposite side of the turnpike.

Although it is presently impossible to assess changes that may have occurred to the building’s frame below the level of the attic floor, the Blaisdell-Winslow House retains at least a portion of a well-preserved non-domestic frame. It is rare to encounter examples of late eighteenth-century commercial carpentry. Each surviving example, even when converted to a dwelling (as is common among surviving examples), has the potential to reveal something about early framing practices.