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REPORT ON THE FOGG-ROLLINS HOUSE EXETER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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This report derives from a brief inspection of the Fogg-Rollins House on the afternoon of October 11, 2007. Also present during the inspection were Kenneth C. Turino, a trustee of the Rollins estate, and Richard M. Candee, retired director of the Preservation Studies program at Boston University. We did not inspect the basement of the house or the kitchen wing, so these notes will record only a cursory evaluation and should be augmented by a much more thorough physical examination of all parts of the house and barn.

These notes are intended to supplement the more extensive report, “Fogg-Rollins House, Exeter, New Hampshire: A Baseline Documentary Report,” written by preservation consultant Elizabeth Durfee Hengen and submitted to the Fogg-Rollins Trust in January 2000. Mr. Turino has kindly made a copy of the Hengen report available to the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources.

Summary: Based on the brief physical inspection of the house on October 11, 2007, the construction of the main dwelling may be dated to the late eighteenth century. The building saw some remodeling—possibly fairly pervasive—during the early 1800s. The house was extensively remodeled again in the mid-1800s; Elizabeth Hengen has dated this extensive transformation to 1854. The interior of the house was so thoroughly changed at that time that many features of the early nineteenth-century modernization were probably obliterated; evidence of the earlier renovation can now be seen only in a relatively few federal-style features that were left untouched in 1854. Despite these sequential changes, the Fogg-Rollins House retains important elements of carpentry in its framing, of masonry in its chimney, and of joinery dating from the three principal stylistic periods that are evident on the interior. Its surviving barn is significant as an English barn that was enlarged and reoriented during the mid-1800s to become a then-prevalent “Yankee” barn with the axis of its new roof at right angles to the original orientation.

Elizabeth Hengen has provided the following general chronology for the Fogg-Rollins House. The present dwelling may have been built by John Fogg, perhaps in concert with his son Seth Fogg III (1752-1832), in the late 1700s (date uncertain). In 1807, Seth Fogg III sold his house and fifty acres lying in both Exeter and Stratham to his daughter, Susy Fogg Rollins (c. 1784-1853). Susy and her husband, Lowell Rollins, resided on the farm until their deaths, and Hengen speculates that Seth Fogg III may have lived under the same roof with them until his death in 1832. Susy Rollins apparently owned the farm in her own name and not in concert with her husband, or in his name. At her death in 1853, Susy Rollins left the farm to her son Obed (1802-1870). Within a year of his mother's death, Obed Rollins divided the house and sold his younger brother Gilbert (1820-1896) the western half of the dwelling. Hengen gives the language of the 1854 deed that partitioned the building:

Beginning at the north line of the highway opposite of the center of the front door of my dwelling house, running to and through the front entry of my dwelling house to the North side of the chimney, thence off setting to the west to conform to the westerly end of my Kitchen, thence through said house and parallel with it 52' to a stake and stones, thence Westerly 106' running near the northerly end of said Gilberts Barn to a stake and stones.¹

As will be seen below, the two Rollins brothers substantially remodeled the interiors of both sides of the dwelling, substituting Greek Revival joinery for much of the woodwork that had preceded it. Being deprived of the old kitchen at the rear center of the house, Gilbert Rollins added a kitchen wing at the northwest rear corner of the building.

At Obed Rollins' death in 1870, the eastern side of the house and associated lands passed to his as-yet-unmarried daughter, Sarah Elizabeth Rollins (1828-1915). Sarah married Samuel Jenness Drake in 1883, while her uncle Gilbert, who was only eight years older than she, continued to occupy the western half of the dwelling. Gilbert Rollins was a wheelwright, and around 1857 he built the surviving shop building that stands a short distance to the east of the dwelling.

Gilbert Rollins married Abigail M. Hayes (1832-1901). They had four children, all of whom were living in Amesbury or Salisbury, Massachusetts, before the deaths of their parents near the turn of the twentieth century. In 1917, Herman S. Rollins (1862-1938), one of Gilbert's and Abigail's children, purchased all shares in the property, bringing it under single ownership for the first time since 1854. The house was never again occupied as a year-round home, but served thereafter as a summer residence for Herman; for his widow, Carrie; and finally for his niece, Beatrice A. Rollins (1902-1995).² Following Beatrice Rollins' death, the property passed to a trust charged with using and maintaining it in specified ways.

House frame: The Fogg-Rollins House embodies the distinctive characteristics of a vernacular dwelling type that became a dominant urban and rural house form in southeastern New Hampshire during the 1720s, and remained dominant for a full century. The house type is the two-story, two-room-deep, center-chimney dwelling. Typically, the frame of such a house was

¹ Rockingham County Deeds, 366:233, quoted in Elizabeth Durfee Hengen, "Fogg-Rollins House, Exeter, New Hampshire, A Baseline Documentary Report prepared for the Fogg-Rollins Trust" (2000), pp. 12-13.

² Elizabeth Durfee Hengen, "Fogg-Rollins House, Exeter, New Hampshire" (2000), pp. 13-15.

laid out with four bents, each containing three wall posts: one at the front wall, one at the rear wall, and a prick post, placed about two-thirds of the way from the front to the rear wall. These posts define a dividing line between the front and rear ranges of rooms. The prick posts in the two bents at the center of the house are placed close to the chimney. Without removing floor or ceiling material, it is impossible to know whether the floor framing of the Fogg-Rollins House in the rear range of rooms is lighter in dimensions than that in the larger front range of rooms, as is often the case in such frames.

The earliest house that has thus far been identified with the framing characteristics of this vernacular house form is the Benjamin James House in Hampton, some five miles from the Fogg-Rollins House. In 2001, the James House was dated to 1723 by dendrochronology.

Dating from more than a half century later, the Fogg-Rollins House continues the two-story, two-room-deep, center-chimney tradition, a tradition that would persist at least until the 1820s and the advent of airtight stoves. By the 1830s, heating and cooking by open fireplaces began to be replaced by heating and cooking by airtight iron stoves. At that point, construction of large and complex central chimneys generally ceased, and the carpentry traditions that had accompanied the use of such chimneys began to evolve into newer and less complex framing methods.

The statement of significance for the James House in Hampton might answer for a description of the Fogg-Rollins House of more than a half century later:

The [frame of the] James House is composed of four bents, which are assemblages of posts, girts at the second story level, and tie beams at the roof level. Each bent is a structural frame that runs through the depth of the house from front to back. Two of the bents define the end walls of the house. The two inner bents define the chimney bay at the center of the structure.

Each bent has three posts: one in the plane of the front wall (façade) of the house; one in the plane of the rear wall; and a third, called a prick post, defining a plane that runs just behind the rear face of the original central chimney. The prick posts mark the transition from the front rooms of the house to the rear rooms, and help to support partitions that separate front rooms from rear rooms. . . .

The tops of the posts in each of the four bents of the frame are linked together in two directions. Each bent is connected to adjacent bents by three wall plates. One [plate] lies at the top of the front wall of the house, and one at the top of the rear wall. A third wall plate, which might be called a chimney or medial plate, connects the tops of the prick posts and runs through the length of the house just behind the chimney stack. The tops of the posts are connected through the depth of the house by tie beams, which rest upon the wall plates and are secured to the plates by lapped dovetail joints cut into the upper surfaces of the plates and the lower surfaces of the ties. The tie beams link the front and rear wall planes [*sic*: plates] of the building and provide support for the feet of the rafters, resisting the tendency of the rafters to spread outward under wind and snow loading. . . .

The house has six sets of rafters, four of which are supported by the four bents of the house. Intermediate tie beams, not supported by the four bents, span the depth of the house halfway between the end walls and the chimney bents, supporting the feet of an additional two sets of rafters. . . .³

The consistency between the frames of the James and Fogg-Rollins houses, separated by five miles but by more than a half century in time, establishes the center-chimney dwelling, framed with three-post bents, as an enduring vernacular building form in southeastern New Hampshire.

While the Fogg-Rollins House retains the standard features of the carcass of the two-story, two-room-deep, center-chimney dwelling, its roof frame differs from many examples of the type. As noted above, the roof system of the main house is composed of six sets of hewn rafters. The roof frame has hewn purlins. The rafters are supported near their lower ends by diagonal struts that extend upward from the tie beams below them, and are tenoned unto the undersides of the rafters.

What makes this roof frame especially interesting is the treatment of the two central pairs of rafters. These have heavy collar ties that connect the front and rear rafters near their midpoints. These collar ties, in turn, are supported near their front and rear ends by vertical posts that rise from the tie beams below the attic floor and are tenoned unto the bottoms of the collar ties. These posts transform the lower portions of the two inner sets of rafters into queenpost trusses lying at each side of the chimney. These trusses are connected to one another by horizontal ties that extend across the front and back of the chimney stack. The result is a heavy timber box frame that encloses the chimney above the attic floor.

Roof frames of this type have been noted in center-chimney houses in the towns of Northwood and Deerfield, New Hampshire, some fifteen to twenty miles west of Exeter. While these houses have not been dated closely, most known examples appear to be somewhat later than the Fogg-Rollins House. In the absence of fuller survey data, it may now be surmised that the origin of these queenpost chimney enclosures may be traced to the Exeter area. Exeter was the ancestral home of some of the settlers of the town of Nottingham. The towns of Northwood and Deerfield, where similar roof frames have been recorded, were eventually separated from the parent town of Nottingham.

Chimney: The chimney of the Fogg-Rollins house is characteristic of that of a two-story, central-chimney dwelling, yet displays features that are unusual and deserve closer study. The chimney stands on a vaulted brick foundation. In keeping with the usual practice in coastal New Hampshire during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the brick vault that underlies the chimney stack springs from a foundation of split stone, which protects the bricks from rising damp. The brief visit of October 11, 2007, afforded no opportunity to inspect the basement of the main house, so it is impossible to be more specific about the characteristics of the chimney base except to surmise that it is laid in lime-sand mortar and to note (from photographs in Elizabeth Hengen's report) that it has wood-plank food storage shelves built into a recess on one

³ Lisa Mausolf with James L. Garvin, National Register nomination, Benjamin James House, Hampton, New Hampshire. On file at the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources.

side of the vault. Such shelving, in one configuration or another, is commonly found as a feature in such chimney bases.

It might be noted that large vaulted brick chimney cases of this type, while typical of the New Hampshire coastal region, are much more common after the late 1700s (1780s and 1790s) than before. This fact may assist in estimating the date of construction of the house.

The upper areas of the Fogg-Rollins chimney stack, best seen in the attic and below the attic floor, are built of relatively soft-burned bricks laid in clay-sand mortar below the roof. This, too, is typical of chimney construction in the coastal region.

One unusual attribute of the Fogg-Rollins chimney is the fact that its vertical, plumb face is at the rear of the house, above the kitchen fireplace. Bricklayers who were constructing a fireplace chimney within a building frame typically worked from a plumb line on one face of the stack. Because the kitchen fireplace is large and deep, and because the staircase of a central chimney house is usually built snugly against the chimney, the vertical face of the chimney of a center-chimney house is usually at the front of the house, while the swelling face of the chimney is at the rear, above the kitchen fireplace. This norm is reversed in the case of the Fogg-Rollins House. Here, the front of the chimney projects forward dramatically, as may be seen below the attic floor. The rear of the chimney is plumb, and its vertical face allows the current staircase to the attic to rise against its flat northern surface.

It is possible that the Fogg-Rollins chimney has a hidden smoke chamber at its front. It is not uncommon for center-chimney houses to have an enclosure in the void between the opposing fireplaces on the first story, or somewhat above them, for smoking meat. Such chambers are often reached through small doors in the wall of the front staircase. As an alternative, some central chimney houses actually have a small chamber within the chimney between the fireplaces on the first story, and such chambers are commonly reached through a passage that extends under the front stairs. It is possible that the Fogg-Rollins House had one of these arrangements, and that evidence of such details have been hidden by a remodeling of the front staircase.

Another unusual attribute of the Fogg-Rollins chimney is the diagonal fireplace that heats the northwest room on the first story. As Elizabeth Hengen pointed out in her report of 2000, the dwelling was divided into two properties in 1854, with Obed Rollins retaining the eastern side of the house and his brother Gilbert taking the western side and adding a kitchen wing at the rear to compensate for Obed's possession of the original kitchen at the rear of the dwelling.⁴ Despite the fact that airtight stoves were commonplace by 1854 both as parlor stoves and kitchen ranges, Gilbert Rollins chose to add a diagonal fireplace at the northwest corner of the original stack to warm the room he reportedly used as his dining room, rather than simply installing a stove in this room and connecting its funnel to an existing chimney flue. The Hengen report indicates that Gilbert also built a fireplace and brick oven for cooking in his new kitchen wing. This continued reliance on fireplaces and open fires as late as 1854 indicates a preference that was the subject of some discussion in the mid-nineteenth century.

⁴ Elizabeth Durfee Hengen, "Fogg-Rollins House, Exeter, New Hampshire" (2000), pp. 4, 6-7.

It is difficult, except through such physical evidence as is seen in the Fogg-Rollins House, to gauge the degree of acceptance or resistance to airtight stoves in New England houses of the mid-1800s. While such stoves had been available, and widely advertised, since the 1830s, it is clear that many New Englanders preferred to heat their houses with open fires in fireplaces. Likewise, many seem to have retained a preference for cooking over open fires, and for baking in brick ovens rather than in kitchen ranges. The old brick oven of the Fogg-Rollins House was updated with a new cast iron door and damper manufactured by the “Iron Foundry, South Newmarket, NH” in or after 1849, but clearly continued in use until it was eventually supplanted by a cast iron kitchen range.

While we cannot yet quantify the vernacular reaction to the advent of cast iron stoves, we do have literary evidence that proves that some New Englanders stubbornly preferred to rely on their open fires despite the fuel economy offered by air-tight stoves. In 1856, shortly after the partition of the Fogg-Rollins house, Nathaniel Hawthorne included an essay on “Fire Worship” in his *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Despite his admission that he had substituted iron stoves for open fireplaces in his own old house, Hawthorne lamented the loss of his friend and muse, the open fire:

How kindly he was! . . . How humanely did he cherish the school-boy’s icy fingers, and thaw the old man’s joints with a genial warmth which almost equaled the glow of youth! And how carefully did he dry the cowhide boots that had trudged through mud and snow, and the shaggy outside garment stiff with frozen sleet! taking heed, likewise, to the comfort of the faithful dog who had followed his master through the storm. When did he refuse a coal to light a pipe, or even a part of his own substance to kindle a neighbor’s fire? And then, at twilight, when laborer, or scholar, or mortal of whatever age, sex, or degree drew a chair beside him and looked into his glowing face, how acute, how profound, how comprehensive was his sympathy to the mood of each and all!

Also in 1856, Hawthorne’s friend Herman Melville penned his defense of his own massive central chimney, twelve feet square at its base, which Melville’s wife and daughters wanted to demolish for any number of practical reasons. In “I and My Chimney,” Melville noted the role of the central stack and its fireplaces in unifying the domestic household:

It need hardly be said, that the [exterior] walls of my house are entirely free from fireplaces. These all congregate in the middle—in the one grand central chimney, upon all four sides of which are hearths—two tiers of hearths—so that when, in the various chambers, my family and guests are warming themselves of a cold winter’s night, just before retiring, then, though at the time they may not be thinking so, all their faces mutually look towards each other, yea, all their feet point to one centre; and, when they do go to sleep in their beds, they all sleep round one warm chimney, like so many Iroquois Indians, in the woods, round their one heap of embers.

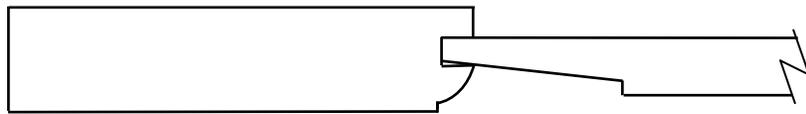
Thoreau echoed the reverence of the New Englander for the open fire in his poem “Smoke,” which appears in the “House Warming” chapter of *Walden* (1854):

. . . Go thou, my incense, upward from this hearth
And ask the gods to pardon this clear flame.

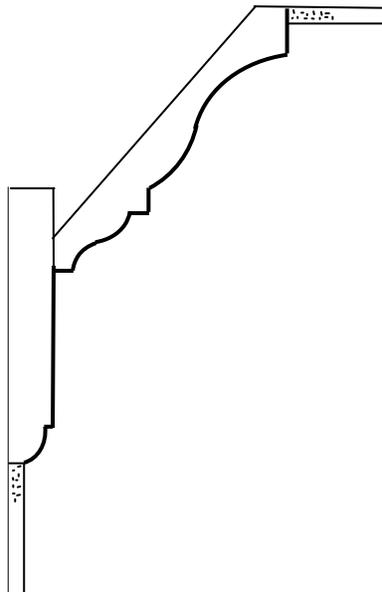
While the expressions of New England's literary elite may not represent the pervasive attitude of the region's farmers in the 1850s, it is nevertheless clear that there was no wholesale abandonment of open fireplaces in favor of stoves, at least in older houses that were already equipped with capacious chimneys. Apart from habit and sentiment, economics may have played a role in those families that continued to heat with open fires. Despite their offer of economy in fuel consumption, early parlor stoves and kitchen ranges were probably expensive. Where wood was freely available in exchange for the labor of cutting it, as on the Rollins Farm, it may have seemed sensible to continue to heat with fireplaces, or even to build a new fireplace to heat a room that was to have a new use, as did Gilbert Rollins in 1854.

Interior woodwork: As noted above, the rooms of the Fogg-Rollins House retain three periods of joinery: elements that date from the construction of the house in the late eighteenth century, and reflect the Georgian style; elements that reflect the federal style, and may date from about 1807, when Seth Fogg III sold his house and fifty acres lying in both Exeter and Stratham to his daughter, Susy Fogg Rollins (c. 1784-1853); and elements that reflect the Greek Revival style, and reflect the subdivision of the house into two dwelling units owned by the two brothers, Obed Rollins (1802-1870) and his younger brother Gilbert (1820-1896) in 1854.

The earliest features noted in the house are a few four-panel doors in the southeast parlor. These doors are hung on H hinges with wrought iron nails, and display the classic Georgian cross section:

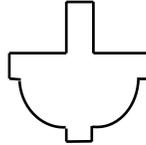


The southeastern parlor likewise retains a crown molding at the ceiling, the only true cornice in the house:

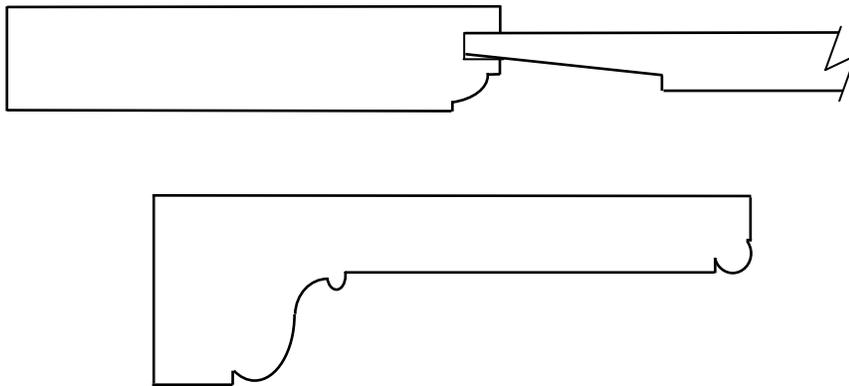


This cornice is of a profile that could date from the presumed date of construction of the house in the latter eighteenth century, or could have been installed in the early 1800s. Its date of installation could potentially be estimated by a determination of whether it is attached to the wall framing by wrought or cut nails.

The only window sashes in the house that appear to date from the period of its original construction are a pair of six-over-six sashes in the western attic window. These display a heavier muntin pattern than any seen elsewhere in the house:

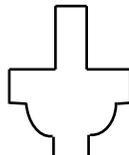


As noted above, the house provides visual evidence of having been remodeled rather extensively in the early 1800s, very likely at about the time that title to the property passed to Susy Fogg Rollins. Evidence of these early nineteenth-century changes was largely obliterated by the extensive remodeling of both sides of the house circa 1854. Yet the house retains a few federal-style doors, having a cross-section that differs slightly from that of the original doors, and a few door casings of a distinctly federal style:



These modest federal-style interior features are accompanied by two surviving federal-style mantelpieces on the west side of the house, one in the southwest front room on the first floor and the second in the chamber above. The former is pictured in the Hengen report.

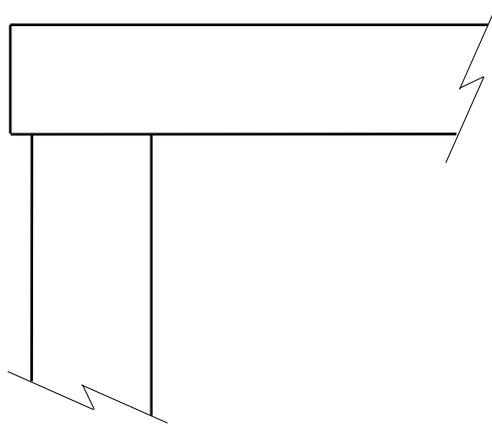
Most of the window sashes in the house were also replaced during the federal period. The newer muntin profile is seen in a number of nine-over-six and nine-over-nine sashes on the east side elevation and the north (rear) of the house. These sashes display muntin profiles that are characteristic of the early nineteenth century:



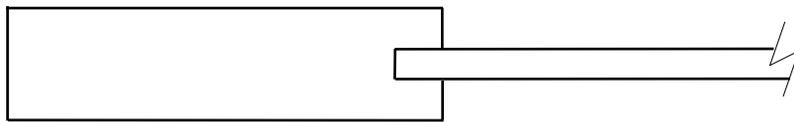
The cursory nature of the examination on October 11, 2007, prevented a close examination and analysis of the original and the early nineteenth-century features of the house. Other diagnostic features of both periods, both stylistic and technological, would certainly be disclosed by careful examination of the building. Both front lower rooms, for example, retain wainscoting made of horizontal boarding. Closer study of the wainscoting, and of the molding profiles of its chair rails and baseboards, could determine whether the wainscoting is original or (as seems more likely) dates from the early 1800s.

As noted above, the house was largely remodeled on the interior, and to some extent on the exterior, when it was subdivided into two properties in 1854. Exterior changes included installation of the front doorway or frontispiece, which is strongly Grecian in character except for the door itself, which is a mid-twentieth century replacement of a four-panel Greek Revival door. Other exterior changes include the low-peaked window caps that surmount all window openings except those on the rear of the house.

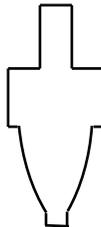
On the interior, many door openings were fitted with square-edged casings of the simplest possible Greek Revival type:



Within these enframements are equally simple four-panel doors with no applied moldings:



The window sashes that accompanied the 1854 remodeling are seen on the front (south) and west elevations of the house. Their muntins are of a pattern that derives from the earlier profiles shown above, but displays elongated ovolo moldings:



These sashes are six-over-six units, with relatively large lights of glass.

Time did not permit a close study of the Greek Revival mantelpieces in the house. Two of these are found in the parlor and parlor chamber of the eastern side of the dwelling, owned after the division of 1854 by Obed Rollins. A third surrounds the diagonal fireplace added to the northwest first-floor room of the original dwelling by Gilbert Rollins after 1854. The mantelshelf of the original kitchen fireplace at the rear (north) of the central chimney, being a simple, heavy plank, also appears to date from the 1850s.

In general, it may be said that the Grecian mantelpieces in the house have heavy, plank shelves with horizontal back boards lying against the wall above the shelves. The shelves rest upon deep wooden entablatures that are composed of unadorned, flat boards. The entablatures are supported by broad, flat wooden pilasters on each side of the fireplace openings. Such mantelpieces are characteristic of the later Greek Revival period, and are sometimes seen, without fireplaces, as enframements for stove locations in front of single-flue chimneys in mid-nineteenth-century houses.

Barn: The existing barn, which stands west of the house, is one of two that stood on the property until after 1925. The second barn stood behind (to the north of) the dwelling, attached to a milk house that remains in ruinous condition. This second barn reportedly housed milk cows and their provender. It disappeared many years ago.

The surviving barn stands to the west of the dwelling. It is a gable-front or "Yankee" barn, with its gable end and main door facing east, toward the house. This barn was described in the 1854 deed of partition, quoted above, as "Gilbert [Rollins]s Barn." Elizabeth Hengen states that "the existing barn belonged to him as early as 1850," citing the 1850 United States Census.⁵

This barn represents the conversion of an English barn into the present elongated Yankee barn. The carcass of the earlier barn is intact within the front (eastern) section of the enlarged building, and its four rear posts can be discerned about two-thirds of the way toward the current rear wall of the structure, where framing changes from hewn to sawn. The original wall posts are heavy, and flared at the top; they reveal evidence of the former attachment of tie beams at their tops, removed when the orientation of the roof was changed from north-and-south to east-and-west. The original roof would have been composed of principal rafters and purlins, with the roof sheathing applied vertically, from eaves to ridge. The current roof frame is composed of sawn common rafters supported by a single sawn purlin on each slope; roof sheathing is laid horizontally. The general aspect of the barn as seen from the exterior suggests a date of enlargement at about 1850, the period when it was owned by Gilbert Rollins and devoted to his own uses. The fact that Gilbert Rollins had acquired and enlarged the original English barn of the Fogg homestead suggests that the second barn, behind the house, was probably built around 1850 by elder brother Obed Rollins to serve the needs of Obed's separate household.

⁵ Hengen, pp. 13-14.

As Elizabeth Hengen notes in her report, the surviving barn deserves careful study. As an example of an English barn, probably dating from the late eighteenth century and later enlarged, the Fogg-Rollins barn may reveal important facts about barn framing practices in the Exeter area.

Wheelwright Shop: This small building, standing east of the dwelling, was probably built by wheelwright Gilbert Rollins (1820-1896), who learned his trade from Gilman Robinson and was in business for himself by 1859, and probably earlier. The building is thought to date from circa 1857.⁶

This building is an example of a lightly-framed balloon-frame structure. The use of balloon framing was becoming commonplace throughout southern New Hampshire by the late 1850s and early 1860s. This shop deserves careful study as an example of this framing technique. Its long rafter tails create an exaggerated roof overhang that is characteristic of the mid-century and is often seen in dwellings and schoolhouses of the period and, to a still more extreme degree, in railroad depots of the 1850 era.

The shop is divided into two stories, with the second floor formerly lighted by two front windows and a now-boarded-over skylight in the eastern slope of the roof. The second story was heated by a stove, and clearly served as a comfortable shop for delicate work. This room retains a number of wooden patterns, perhaps for coach body work, that deserve study and cataloguing.

The first story of this shop could have served for heavier work, yet the building currently contains no wagon doors to admit entire vehicles. The lack of such doors brings into question the exact use of the building. Wheelwright's work required skill and facilities for both woodworking and blacksmithing, and the building shows no clear evidence of having had either a forge for welding iron tires, heavy woodworking equipment such as a lathe for turning hubs and spokes, or any arrangement for sweating iron tires onto wheel rims. A wheelwright's shop would typically resemble a blacksmith's shop, with large wagon doors and a chimney that served for more than just a stove for warmth. This somewhat enigmatic building deserves closer study both of its construction and of its former uses.

⁶ Hengen, pp. 13-14.