



NEW HAMPSHIRE DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

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Memorandum for the file

From: James Garvin

Re : Jesse Garvin House, Chichester, N.H.

This is a memorandum of a brief visit made by R. Stuart Wallace and James Garvin to Sen. and Mrs. Gordon Humphrey, present owners of the Garvin House. The purpose of the visit was to assess the integrity of the dwelling and to determine its potential eligibility for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Time did not permit a thorough inspection of the entire house, or of all diagnostic features which might contribute to an architectural description. Nevertheless, enough was noted to contribute toward an understanding of the architectural context of the building. The following notes are intended to set down as many observations as may be helpful to any consultant who may be engaged to prepare a National Register nomination.

Contrary to some accounts which date it at about 1820,

the house appears to have been built during the period 1830-35. It shares an overall design with the Upham-Walker House of 1831 on Park Street in Concord, and many details of interior joinery with the Graham House in East Concord (now called the Bridges House), dating from about 1836.

The house is built on a foundation of carefully-laid blocks of split granite. While the stones of the foundation are largely obscured by applied insulating foam, there is a granite post in the cellar which reveals the marks of flat wedges, a splitting technique which was gradually superseded by the introduction of the plug drill and by plugs and feathers (which leave a rounded rather than a flat impression) during the 1830s. Further study of the window lintels and of other granite exposed on the exterior of the house would probably reveal further evidence of splitting technology. Time did not permit a close inspection of the exterior of the house. It is possible to study the grain and color of the foundation stone at one point where a new passageway has been cut through the foundation wall; the stone appears to be Concord granite.

The walls of the house are laid in a variation of the American bond, using common, hard-burned bricks. A

quick inspection suggested that the courses which bond the inner and outer withes of brick are not all-header courses, as is common in this bond, but rather have alternating headers and stretchers. This bond is very similar to that employed in the walls of the Graham (Bridges) House of about 1836 in East Concord. Unlike the Upham-Walker House in Concord or the nearby Bailey Parker House (circa 1830) in North Pembroke, the walls of the house are not laid in pressed bricks, which evidently were available in limited quantities in the region after about 1830 but were by no means used universally; in the Bailey Parker House, pressed bricks were employed only on the two elevations most visible from the road, with common bricks, laid in American bond, on the other walls. The walls of the Garvin House appear carefully laid, but the time available to inspect them was limited. The granite window lintels should also be examined for comparison to local examples, particularly to those of the Upham-Walker House in Concord, which were cited in one document as establishing a standard of workmanship (see the National Register nomination for that house).

The brickwork in the cellar of the house is highly comparable to that in the Bailey Parker House (1830) and the Upham-Walker House (1831). Each chimney is supported on a brick vault springing from high brick

piers and built solidly against the granite walls of the basement. The kitchen chimney of the house (in the southeast corner) is supported by a larger vault. At the left side is a hollow pier which lies beneath the kitchen oven and served as an ash box fed through a chute below the oven. The oven has been bricked up so that its flue can be used to vent an oil-fired forced-hot-water furnace.

The house has a massive frame of hewn and sawn members. The first floor frame, visible in the basement, has extremely heavy hewn girders running through the house from front to back, supported by granite posts or by brick partitions. The roof frame is particularly heavy, and is comparable to the frame of a meeting house both in design and dimensions. It is composed of king-post trusses of extraordinarily heavy dimensions, whose bottom chords support the joists of the attic floor. The king posts are linked together, and to the brick gables of the house, by horizontal tie beams. Each pair of principal rafters is supported by diagonal struts which rise from opposite sides of the kingposts. The principal rafters, like the kingposts, are hewn, and support very heavy hewn purlins let into their top surfaces. The purlins, in turn, support ranges of sawn common rafters of square cross-section.

This roof frame is more massive than any other of its period in the region, though it may have been duplicated in the roof of the Upham-Walker House, now rebuilt to accommodate rooms. Other brick houses of the region display much lighter roof framing. The Bailey Parker House of North Pembroke, for example, has a hewn roof frame of principal rafters and purlins. The Graham (Bridges) House in East Concord, being a few years later, has a roof frame of sawn common rafters. Both of these are houses of one-room depth, and so require only a standard roof frame.

The interior joiner's work of the house is very coherent throughout and is strongly Grecian in character. The predominant moulding is the Grecian ovolo, which appears, in varying sizes, around door panels, as a backband around door casings, as a baseboard cap, and as a crown moulding on mantelshelves. This is a form of the moulding with a very flat profile, Greek Revival rather than Federal in nature, and may reflect the influence of the 1827 edition of Asher Benjamin's The Country Builder's Assistant or the first (1830) edition of his The Practical House Carpenter.

The mantelshelves throughout the house, of which six survive in addition to the kitchen fireplace trim, are

similar to one another and yet vary somewhat from room to room. While all have similar crown mouldings and engaged columns at the sides, other mouldings show considerable variation. The two first-floor front parlors show how similar designs can be varied for good architectural effect. Above each column is an architrave block which in the northeastern room is decorated with a recessed flat panel having semicircular cut-outs at top and bottom. In the northwestern room, similar panels have a vertical, semicircular billet at their center, conveying a linenfold effect comparable to mantelpieces in the Graham (Bridges) House in East Concord. In general, the design and feeling of the mantelpieces of the Garvin House are very similar to those of the Graham (Bridges) House of circa 1836.

In terms of advanced or elaborated character, the joiner's work of the Garvin House is far more sophisticated than that in the nearby Bailey Parker House (1830), where half the rooms retain Federal-style trim and the other half have mouldings that suggest the Greek Revival only through the use of flat fillets, not through actual Grecian mouldings. On the other hand, the Garvin woodwork is less sophisticated than that in the Upham-Walker House (1831) in Concord, which closely reflects some of the most advanced

profiles of Asher Benjamin's The Practical House Carpenter. This suggests that different joiners worked on the interiors of the Upham-Walker and Garvin Houses, despite their similar design and apparently similar dates. Of local brick dwellings, the Garvin House is perhaps most directly comparable in its detailing to the much smaller Graham (Bridges) House of circa 1836, in East Concord. Perhaps the Garvin House reflects the work of Charles Graham of East Concord, who was himself a joiner and who may be supposed to have finished his own brick house.

In summary, the Garvin House is one of a small number of brick dwellings in the Concord area. All these houses reflect the new fashion for building in brick, which did not arrive in the region until after 1800.

(In his History of Concord [1856], p. 5, Nathaniel Bouton dates the first brick house in Concord between 1804 and 1815.) All of these surviving brick dwellings also reflect the skills of local brickmasons, some of whom (the Hazeltines of Pembroke) had brought their skills and experience from Portsmouth. All reflect a brick industry, mostly focused on the riverside clay deposits of Pembroke and Hooksett, which was rising to significant production during the 1830s and would eventually become a manufacture of great local importance. All are documents of changing taste and

style, dating as they do within that critical decade of the 1830s when the Federal style was giving way to the Greek Revival. All are resources for further study, since their builders are unknown and usually not even guessed at, and since the entire architectural community of the Concord area is still ill-defined.

These remarks on the technology of the Garvin House reflect a very brief visit of less than two hours. Some of the key aspects of the house deserve much deeper study, particularly the character of the exterior brick walls, the hammered granite, and the roof frame. In order to reconstruct the social milieu in which the house was built, it will be necessary to learn whether the first owner, Jesse Garvin, was able to achieve his evident prosperity through farming alone, or whether he had other interests and investments such as stores, mills, turnpike and toll bridge shares, and the like. Garvin's probate inventory should provide some hint of this. Jane (Mrs. Steven) Coons of Concord, N.H., a former owner of the property, has also devoted years to collecting facts about the house and family, and may be able to provide information for the social and economic context of the farm during the 1830s.

Bibliography

Olney, Susan Faxon, and Peter B. Olney, "Upham-Walker House . . . Concord, New Hampshire, Historic Structures Report," May 1980, New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, Concord, N.H. Provides a detailed analysis of a comparable brick dwelling, with some direct comparisons to the Garvin House.

Garvin, James L., National Register nomination for the Upham-Walker House, Concord, N.H., July 25, 1979, New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources.

-----, "Architectural Analysis of the Bridges House, East Concord, N.H.," May 15, 1979, New Hampshire Historical Society; copy available at New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources.