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REPORT ON THE GREEN HOUSE 131 RING ROAD LOUDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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The following report is based on a brief inspection of the Green House, now occupied by Joseph L. Merrill, on the morning of May 17, 2003. Also present during the inspection were Colin Cabot, owner of the property; Linda Ray Wilson, deputy state historic preservation officer; and Linda Pate, preservationist and timber framer.

Summary: The Green House is an example of a three-room or square-frame house. Such houses are a now-uncommon type of dwelling that was first identified as a vernacular house form by staff members at Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts in the 1980s. A number of examples of three-room houses have since been recognized throughout southern New Hampshire, including another example in Loudon and one in nearby Pittsfield. The Green house appears to date from around 1800, and retains two well-defined rooms that exhibit contrasting styles of interior joinery. The third and largest room was substantially altered during conversion of the building into a shop, privy, and storage building. The building has been moved once or twice, and now stands on a shallow stone foundation with no basement. Despite the changes it has undergone, the Green House retains significant evidence of its original framing and interior finish, and is an important example of a local building type that would richly repay further study.

Description:

The Green House is a nearly square, gable-roofed dwelling that stands immediately behind a larger house that supplanted it about 1840. It exhibits framing characteristics that are seen in all square-frame houses: three posts in each exterior wall, with heavy,

hewn interior girders that extend across the building from the tops of the inner post in each wall, crossing over one another adjacent to the chimney. Although the chimney in the Green House appears to have been moved at one time from its original location, and was finally removed altogether, it is possible to trace the points of exit of the original chimney, and its replacement, through the ridgepole of the house.

Unlike some square-frame houses, the Green House does not have its inner wall posts in the approximate center of each of its exterior walls. The posts are offset toward one corner of the house, as shown in the plan below, constraining the chimney placement to a greater degree than would be the case if the inner posts were more centrally located.

This feature of the Green House should be compared with the framing of other nearby examples. It may represent a local variation of the house form as presently defined by non-New Hampshire examples. The standard form, as defined by researchers at Old Sturbridge Village, is shown below the plan of the Green House.

The roof frame of the house is composed of four sets of hewn rafters, including the pairs in the gable ends of the building. The intermediate rafters are connected at a height of about six feet by collar ties. Each slope of the roof has three purlins below the ridgepole, and roof boards are applied vertically, from ridge to eaves. The roof framing bay on the end of the house opposite the original chimney has heavy diagonal wind braces, extending from end rafter to intermediate rafter, on each slope of the roof.

The floor frame of the house can be readily observed only on the eastern side of the house, where an opening in the stone foundation wall provides access to a shallow crawl space. Here, it can be seen that the original floor frame under the present southeast portion of the house is composed of a series of hewn joists that run north and south. The northern ends of these joists are diminished in depth to rest in a now-missing girder that extended east and west across the building beside the former chimney.

It can also be seen that the house has a double or inner sill on its eastern and southern perimeters. House frames with double sills are occasionally seen throughout this region of New Hampshire. In such dwellings, the outer walls rest on perimeter footings that extend well below grade, but are not cellar walls. The cellar walls are built of fieldstone, some two or more feet inside the perimeter of the house, rising to support the inner sills of the frame. In their original state, such houses sometimes have openings for ventilation in both the outer and inner walls.

The house is consistently lathed on the interior with split-board lath. Where observed, the nails that hold this lath are all early cut or machine-made nails. When seen in a building in an inland agricultural community, such nails denote a date of 1800 or later.