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REPORT ON THE HEALD HOUSE HEALD ROAD WILTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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NOVEMBER 5, 1999
COMPLETED SEPTEMBER 1, 2002

This report is based on a brief inspection of the Heald House on the afternoon of November 4, 1999. The purposes of the inspection were to assess the date and significance of the house, to ascertain its condition, and to provide information for any person who may wish to rehabilitate the house in the future.

Summary: The Heald House is a brick “Cape Cod” style dwelling that was built about 1830. The house is part of a strong tradition of rural brick architecture in south central New Hampshire. The interior finish or joiner’s work of the house reflects both the federal style and the incoming Greek Revival style, with the rooms west of the central hallway being finished in the earlier fashion and representing very high standards of design and craftsmanship. The building has been neglected for many years. Chronic roof leaks, especially in the southeastern one-quarter of the house (which is covered by a temporary roof) have resulted in structural deterioration. The house is a significant and attractive example of a rural brick dwelling, and is an important document in the evolution of brick architecture and interior joinery in southern New Hampshire. The architectural attributes of the building warrant the investment of planning and funds that will be necessary to rescue it from progressive decay beyond a hope of repair.

Description:

Exterior: The Heald House is a story-and-a-half brick dwelling standing on underpinning of split and hammered granite slabs. For the purposes of this report, the façade of the house will be regarded as facing south. The house has a fully-excavated

basement under its eastern half, including its stairhall. Basement walls are composed of split granite boulders below the level of the underpinning stones. The western rooms stand over a crawl space with limited ventilation.

The granite underpinning stones of the house and the large, split stones that form the walls of the cellar were all split with flat wedges in chiseled slots. This method of splitting granite was superseded about 1830, so on this evidence alone it may be assumed that the house cannot date much after that year. Stylistic evidence, described below, corroborates a construction date of about 1830 for the house.

Where seen above grade, the underpinning stones of the house are hammered to a true face on the façade, but are left with a split face, revealing the marks of the splitting slots, on the end and rear elevations of the house. The two granite doorsteps of the front entry are very large and are hammered to a true face wherever their surfaces are visible. Beneath the doorway itself is a heavy granite threshold that extends through the front wall of the house and is visible in the cellar.

The house has a symmetrical five-bay façade and a symmetrical five-bay rear (north) elevation. The west end of the house has four windows on the first story (flanking fireplaces in a front and a rear room), and two windows in the gable above (lighting a bedchamber).

Attached to the eastern end of the house is a story-and-a-half wooden wing with a gable roof and a chimney. The roof ridge of this wing is placed slightly forward (south) of the axis of the ridge of the main house. The eastern gable of the brick house has only one window, offset toward the rear of the house, suggesting that the wooden wing was planned from the outset.

Because the wooden wing is narrower than the main house and has a slightly lower roof pitch, its ridge intersects the gable wall of the brick building at an elevation below the midpoint of the single window in the eastern brick gable. The wing is early—possibly as early as the brick house—and provides a summer kitchen. It has an added porch on the south side, running parallel to the front of the brick building, and an added woodshed that envelops its north (rear) side and its eastern end.

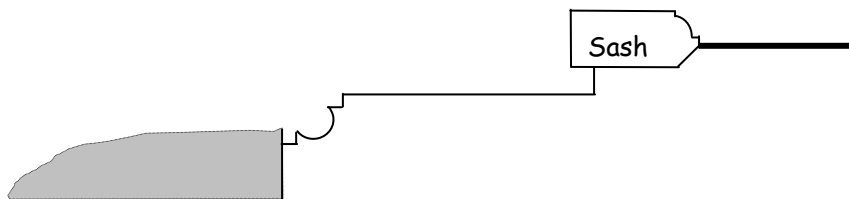
The brick house has two symmetrically-placed chimneys that rise within each gable end. The chimney stacks are built against the inner faces of the end walls which, in a fashion often seen in early brick buildings, probably form one of the four sides of each chimney. All chimneys apparently had fireplaces on the first story, although the hearth in the kitchen—the northeast room on the first story—has been closed to accommodate a kitchen range. This chimney is larger in its dimensions than the others, apparently reflecting the size of its original cooking fireplace, and probably the presence of an oven. On the second floor, one of the two chimneys that flank the walls of each of the two bedchambers has been fitted with a stovepipe thimble for added warmth in the upper story.

The two chimney stacks in the eastern half of the house are supported in the cellar by pairs of tall brick piers that rise to support platforms fashioned from flat fieldstones. The brick stacks rise from these stone tables. The bases of the two western chimneys are not visible.

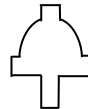
The brick walls of the house are laid for the most part in plumb or running bond. A very few courses have alternate headers and stretchers to bond the face bricks to the backing bricks, but such courses are seen on the façade, the rear elevation, and the western end only at courses 9, 18, 34, and 47, counting upward from the top of the underpinning.

The face bricks of the walls are well-burned, evenly-colored, and generally regular in size. They have relatively smooth surface texture, and their careful moulding adapts them well to a bond that favors uniformity in bricks.

The staff mouldings at each window follow this general pattern:



Sashes throughout the main house and the wing are six-over-six units. All display this muntin pattern, which is common during the first three decades of the nineteenth century but is often superseded by other profiles after about 1830:



Some of the windows of the house are protected by twelve-light storm sashes with a thin, late-nineteenth-century muntin profile. These storm sashes, along with a few other evidences of modernization, suggest that the owners of the house invested in certain improvements at about the turn of the twentieth century. The window frames have pintles for exterior blinds, and a number of blinds remain on the rear (north) wall. These, too, appear to date approximately from the turn of the twentieth century.

Interior: As noted above, the two rooms to the west of the central hallway bear late-federal-style woodwork of considerable distinction. While both the front (southwest) and rear (northwest) rooms express the federal style, their specific features differ. Several of these variations are shown below under “Architectural Details.”

The federal-style joinery seen on the western end of the house is delicate and sophisticated. It is perfectly characteristic of the mature federal style, with six-panel doors, thin and deeply-projecting mantelshelves, and chair rails and baseboards of imaginative and varied profiles, as illustrated below. This woodwork undoubtedly

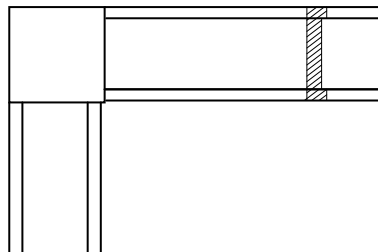
reflects the work of a joiner who had been accustomed to working in this style, and who had all the tools necessary to execute the subtle Grecian mouldings that were associated with the period before 1830. The woodwork is an important document of local joinery around 1830.

The Greek Revival style joinery seen in the eastern or right-hand rooms, by contrast, is deliberately simple. This woodwork displays a conscious contrast with that of the opposite side of the house. The doors are four-paneled. The interior window casings are composed of square stock with no backband mouldings. The wainscoting has a simple square shoe and a half-round chair rail.

The detailing on this side of the house appears later than that on the opposite side but probably is not. It is not uncommon for houses built around 1830 to display two entirely different stylistic vocabularies, one federal and one Greek Revival. Where two styles are found in one dwelling, the contrasting rooms are usually found on opposite sides of the building, as in this house.

This duality of detailing reflects a stylistic transition that occurred around 1830. It also documents the fact that joiners of this era were learning to supplant the older style, familiar for some thirty years, with an unfamiliar new style. The two styles required entirely separate sets of tools and entirely different attitudes about interior finish. It frequently happens, as in the Heald House, that the mature federal-style joinery seen in one part of the dwelling is quite sophisticated, representing a mature tradition of long standing. By contrast, the Greek Revival detailing is often less sophisticated than it would become when the style became more familiar during the later 1830s and 1840s.

The fact that the Heald House was built as a transitional dwelling, with a conscious duality of style, is reflected in the front entrance of the house. Here, the front door is a six-panel unit with flat panels facing the exterior in the classic federal-style pattern. The door essentially matches the flat-paneled interior doors seen in the western rooms of the house (see cross-section, page 5). This door is flanked by four-light sidelights above panels. The front doorway is surrounded, however, by a symmetrically-moulded casing with square blocks in the upper corners of the opening in the brick wall, in this manner:

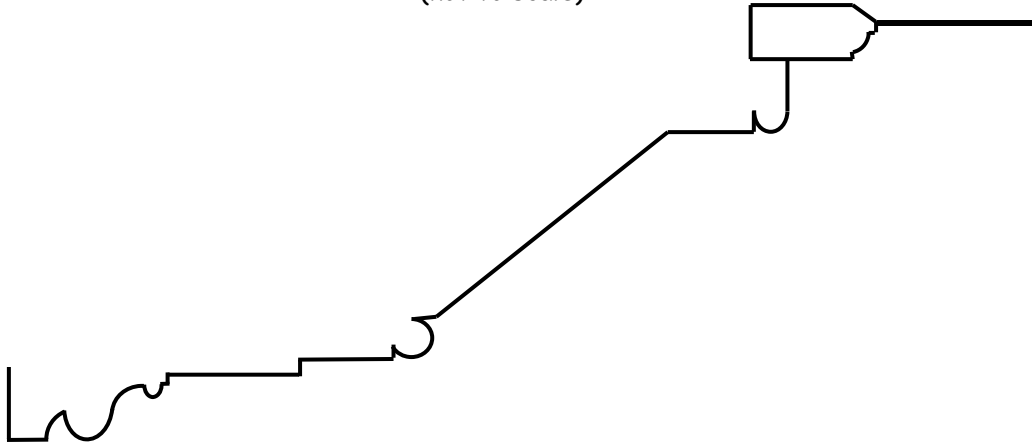


This type of casing is characteristic of the early Greek Revival style. Its use on the front entrance of the house proclaims the joiner's intention to display the new style in the most prominent feature of the building's exterior.

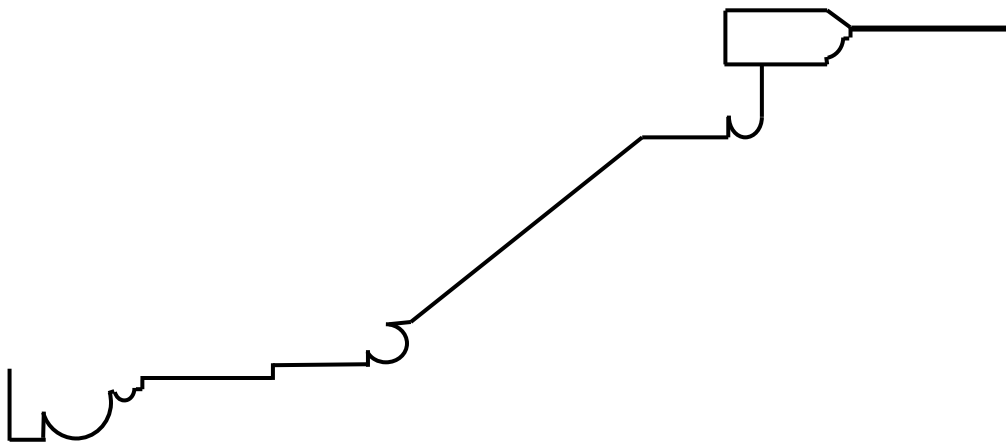
Together, the sophisticated federal-style joinery shown below, and the more tentative early Greek Revival detailing on the eastern side of the house, offer valuable insights into stylistic change in the Wilton area around 1830.

Architectural details:

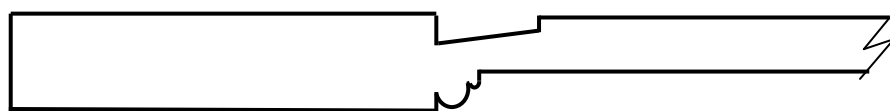
Door and window casings, southwest front room
(not to scale)



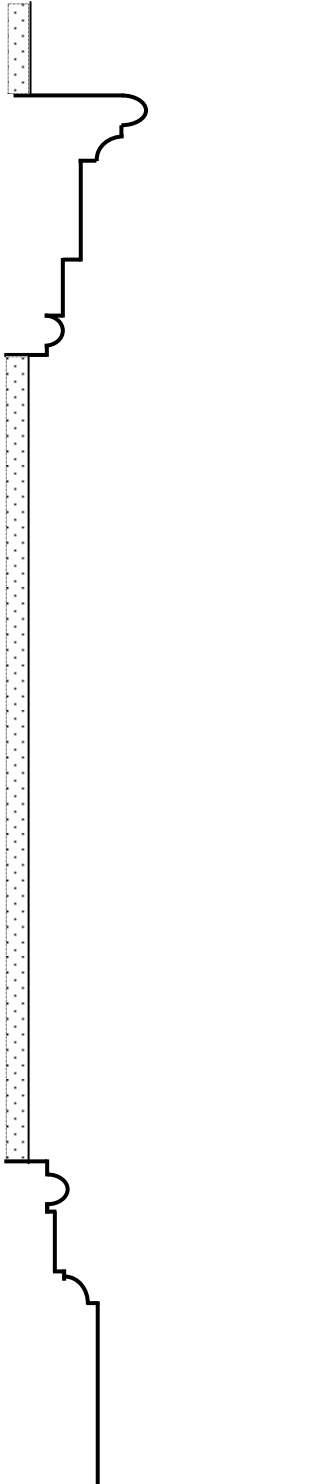
Door and window casings, northwest rear room
(not to scale)



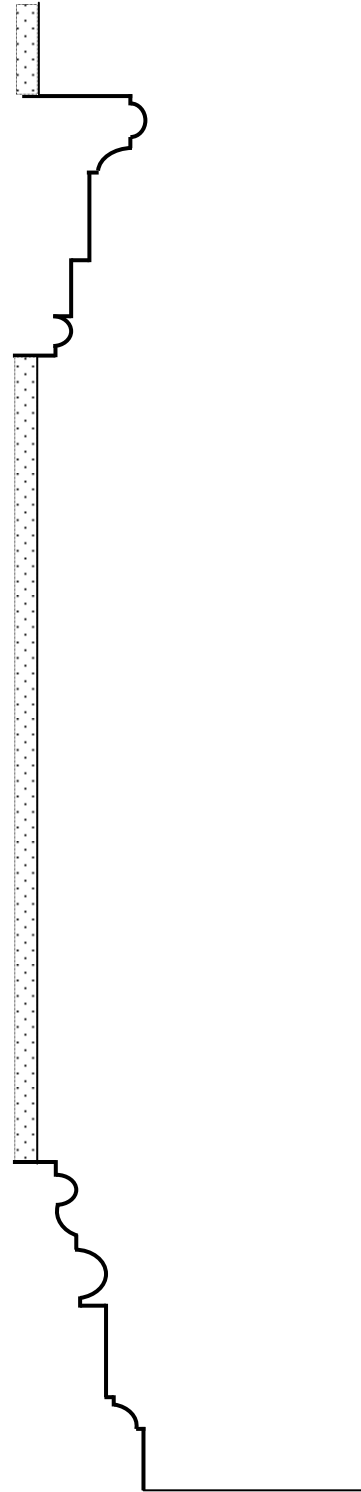
Profile of six-panel doors, western rooms



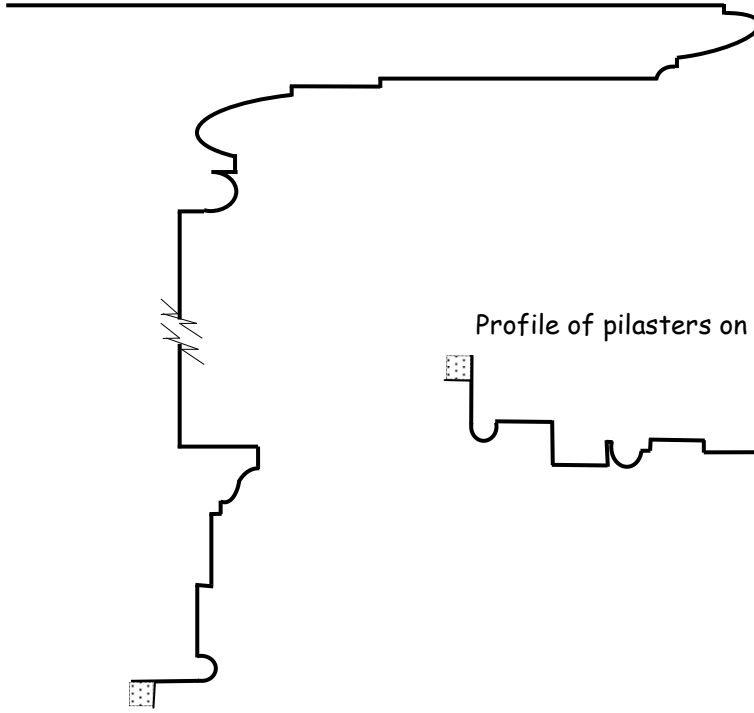
Profile of wainscoting,
southwest front room
(not to scale)



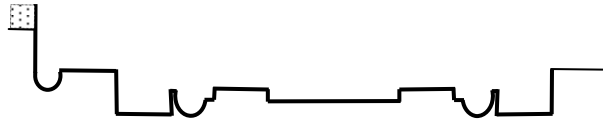
Profile of wainscoting,
northwest rear room
(not to scale)



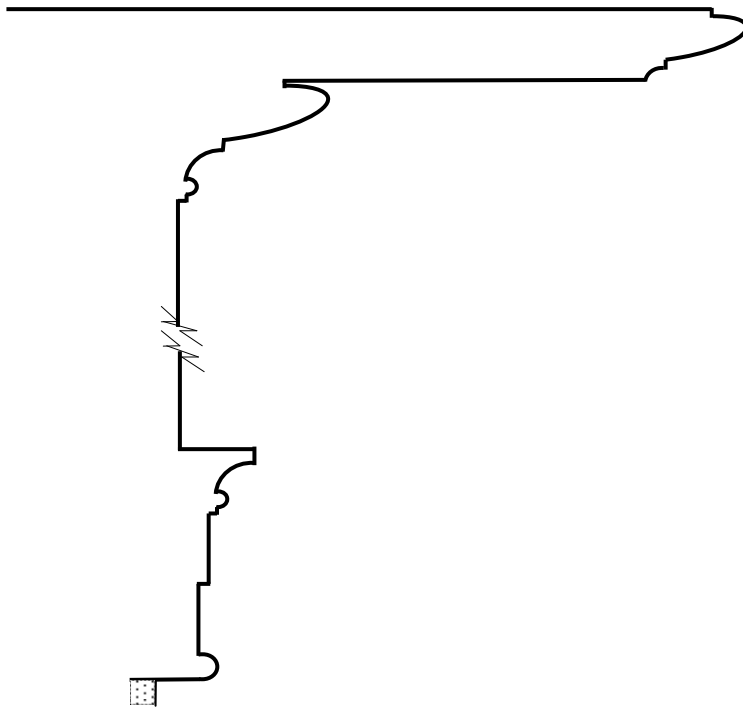
Profile of mantelpiece,
southwest front room
(not to scale)



Profile of pilasters on each side of fireplace



Profile of mantelpiece,
northwest rear room
(not to scale)



The details shown above make it clear that the front (southwest) and rear (northwest) rooms on the first story of the Heald House are finished somewhat differently, yet with an almost equal degree of elaboration. This suggests the possibility that both rooms were intended as parlors, perhaps for two generations of a family in which each generation was entitled to its own well-finished room.

This possibility is strengthened by the fact that the Heald House has an unusual stairway arrangement in its central hallway. The entry has two staircases along its eastern wall. One (now closed off) ascends from the front of the entry, inside the front door. The second (now active) ascends from the rear of the entry, where the bottom of the stairs was originally lighted by a window in the center of the rear elevation of the house. The bottom of each flight of stairs is close to the principal door leading from the front or the rear parlor. The two stairs converge at a central hallway that runs longitudinally through the center of the second floor, connecting to chambers at each end of the building.

House arrangements in which a dwelling is equipped with duplicate parlors or, sometimes, duplicate kitchens, are often seen where a widow shared the building with a child and the child's spouse and children. A widow was entitled by law to a dower from her deceased husband. This dower usually constituted one-third of the husband's estate, with the remaining two-thirds often bequeathed to children. Where a two-generation family with a widow chose to share the same dwelling, independent but comparably-finished rooms were often designated for the widow. Such a legal arrangement may explain the presence of what appear to be two parlors in the Heald House, as well as the independent front and rear staircases.

Condition:

The Heald House has suffered for years from neglect. When seen on November 4, 1999, the house had long suffered from severe leaks through a collapsed section of roof over the southeast quarter of the dwelling. Long-term water and snow infiltration had caused dropping of first-floor ceiling plaster and decay of the split-board lath that had held the plaster. The accumulation of wet plaster, general debris, and stored items on the floor of the southeast sitting room had probably caused some damage to the flooring system of that room. The entire ceiling of the southeast bedchamber, above the sitting room, had collapsed. A temporary roof frame, covered by a blue plastic tarpaulin, was temporarily excluding most rainwater from this portion of the house.

Similarly, there was clear evidence in the bedchamber on the western end of the house that the roof here was leaking, or had leaked. Plaster had fallen from the ceiling laths, the laths were discolored by fungus, and the floor was covered with debris. The two rooms below this chamber, the southwest front parlor and the northwest rear parlor, had not yet suffered extensively from water damage, although both showed signs that roof water had leached through their ceilings.

At the rear center of the house, within the central window bay, frost action had caused some shifting of the bricks in the wall. This area has a small, open cellar window. The damaged area of brickwork is located on the north side of the building, where roof water has splashed against the wall and saturated the bricks. A heavy growth of poison ivy on the rear wall held dampness in the masonry, and the rootlike holdfasts of the vines were penetrating the mortar joints. As a result of chronic dampness followed by frost expansion and possibly by swelling of the floor framing within, a panel of brickwork about seven bricks deep had begun to tip outward as a unit.

Despite this extreme degree of abandonment and neglect, the brick walls of the house remained in very sound condition. As noted above, the woodwork in the more elaborately finished rooms, at the western end of the house, was virtually intact and undamaged. Wall plaster remained essentially sound, although dampness had caused most wallpaper to peel from the walls. Vandalism had caused some damage to window sashes, but most sashes remained intact and repairable.

Because the brick walls remained largely sound and provided the support for all floor and roof framing, the Heald House could have been rescued and rehabilitated in 1999. No subsequent evaluation has since been possible, so it is impossible to say whether deterioration has continued or been held at the level observed in 1999.

Rehabilitation of the house would entail re-framing the damaged sections of roof and floor. The entire southeastern quarter of the roof will require rebuilding. Signs of leakage toward the western end of the house will require that this portion of the roof be evaluated closely as well. It is to be expected that finish flooring, subflooring, and floor joists in extensive areas of the second story will require rebuilding. Lack of opportunity for close study makes it impossible to state whether sections of the first floor have deteriorated to the point of requiring replacement.

Because water damage has largely been concentrated on horizontal surfaces lying directly beneath leaking or collapsed sections of the roof, it appears that much wall plaster and most interior woodwork of the house can be preserved. If leakage has been arrested during the past three years, it may be assumed that most necessary repairs will be structural rather than cosmetic in nature and will entail framing, sheathing, and roof cladding.

As noted above, the Heald House is a well-built dwelling that was finished with an unusual degree of sophistication. The building is an important landmark in the early development of brick architecture in southern New Hampshire, and a significant document of the evolution from the federal to the Greek Revival architectural styles around 1830. The family history of the house and farm has not yet been traced, but the dwelling was clearly built by skilled local craftsmen for a family of some financial means and taste. If funds can be found, the dwelling warrants every effort at preservation. The Heald House has the capacity to serve for many more decades and centuries as a comfortable and attractive dwelling in a location that is protected permanently for conservation and forestry.