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REPORT ON THE MASTEY HOUSE 1 HANNAH DUSTIN DRIVE CANTERBURY, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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This report is based on a brief inspection of the Mastey House on the afternoon of April 13, 2007. Present during the inspection were Mr. and Mrs. Mastey, George E. Leduc, and James Garvin. The purpose of the inspection was to estimate the date of the house and to correlate its history, to the extent possible, with the known history of ferries and bridges at this crossing of the Merrimack River. The Mastey property will be the site of a brief archaeological field school during the summer of 2007, and this evaluation of the property was intended to develop some historical context for the archaeological investigation.

Description and estimate of date: The Mastey House is a rectangular gable-roofed dwelling of 1½ stories, standing on a foundation of granite underpinning stones over a small cellar that extends only beneath the central portion of the house. The building is a plank house, and has a sawn frame with corner posts. The house is connected by a long wing to an English barn of standard hewn framing. The barn was studied by Wayne Perry and dated by him at 1820-1840. Most elements of the house—framing, wall planks, and roof sheathing—were sawn on a reciprocating water-powered sawmill, undoubtedly one that was located in or near Penacook Village, which was a sawmilling center in the nineteenth century.

Based on the physical evidence cited below, the date of construction of the Mastey House may be estimated at about 1835. Further documentary research, coupled with archaeological testing, may determine the location of earlier houses on the site, the relationship between the existing house and various ferries and bridges that were licensed at this crossing, and other aspects of the use of the property that are not immediately evident from an inspection of the house.

The house was planned for stove heat. A single-flue stove chimney rises at the eastern gable end of the dwelling, providing heat on the first floor and also heating a formerly plastered attic chamber above through a floor register. Originally, the same arrangement pertained in the western end of the house, but this chimney was removed and the house is now heated primarily by a forced hot air furnace in the wing that extends from the eastern end wall of the house and connects to the barn. There is no break in the ridge board of the house to suggest the former presence of a central chimney; the two-end-chimney arrangement appears to be original. This suggests a date after 1830, since the availability and popularity of airtight stoves did not generally commence until about 1830.

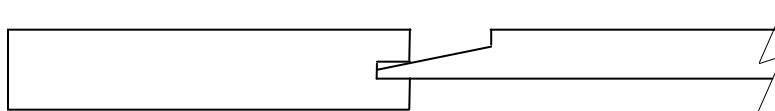
The first floor of the house is divided into two principal front (south) rooms flanking a central entry, with a range of smaller rooms across the rear of the house. Originally, the front and rear zones were separated from one another by a plastered plank partition that extended longitudinally through the house from gable end to gable end, with doors, as needed, to provide access to the rear rooms. This partition remains essentially intact on the east, but has been removed behind the western front room, merging the front and rear spaces into one area.

The front entrance is located at the center of the façade of the house, which is the southern elevation. The present door and sidelights are modern, but sidelights of a somewhat different pattern formerly flanked the earlier doorway.

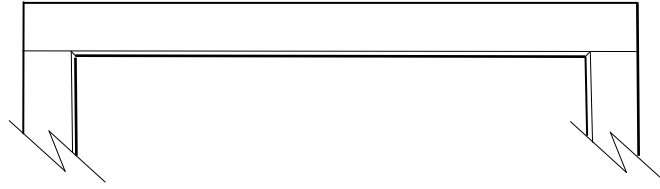
Inside the entry, facing the front door, is a paneled door that opens on a straight flight of stairs which ascend to the attic. The attic area within the center of the house is unfinished. The front (southern) slope of the roof formerly had a skylight that illuminated the enclosed stairway from above.

Each end of the attic had a plastered bedchamber; the ceiling plaster has been removed from both of these rooms. Each chamber has a six-panel door, which differs in panel layout from the four-panel doors seen elsewhere in the house. The upper two panels of these chamber doors are filled with glass, and this glazing allowed light to be shared between the gable-end windows of the bedchambers and the upper stairhall, as well as between the original stairhall skylight and the two flanking chambers.

The doors of the house, whether four-panel or six-panel, have raised panels on the “best” side and flat panels on the opposite side. There are no moldings around the panels, as would have been common before 1830. The typical cross-section through door stiles and rail and panels is shown below:

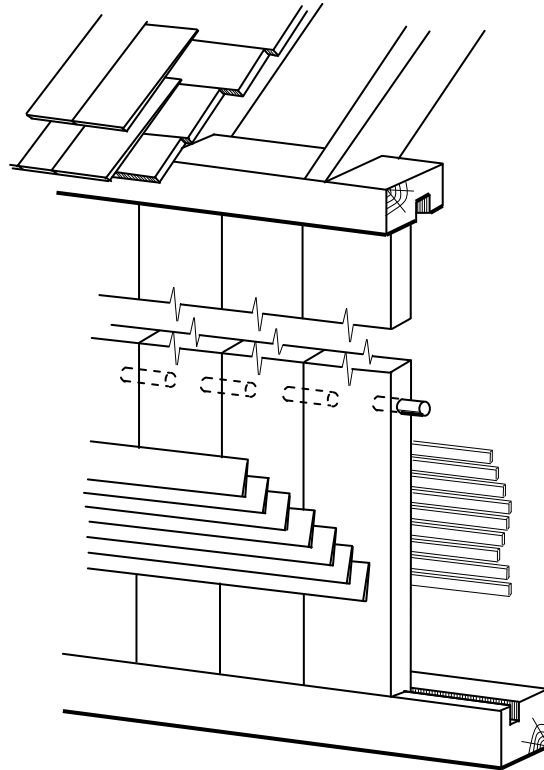


The door and window casings of the house are square-edged boards with no backband moldings, as shown below. This is a very basic type of detailing that suggests, along with the plain style of the doors, that the house was finished for functional comfort but without concern for stylistic expression.

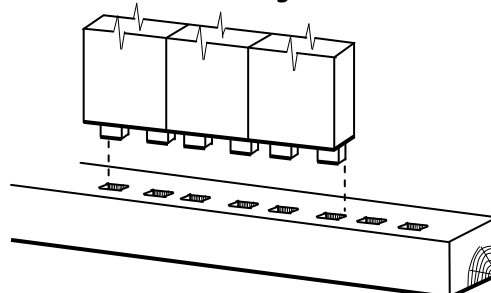


Only one original Norfolk-type thumb latch was noted—on the door to the eastern bedchamber. This is a characteristic latch pattern dating from the 1830s, and is identical to the pattern shown at the top of page 83 of *A Building History of Northern New England*. The doors are hung on three-knuckle cast iron butts.

As noted above, the Mastey House has walls of plank construction. The brief inspection determined very little about the precise details of the attachment of these planks to the house sills, wall plates or one another. Photographs and information provided by the owners revealed, however, that the planks are sawn on a reciprocating or upright sawmill, are about 2¼ inches thick, and are doweled together along their sides to prevent racking or slippage. The details shown below are partly conjectural.



Alternative method of attaching bottoms of wall planks:



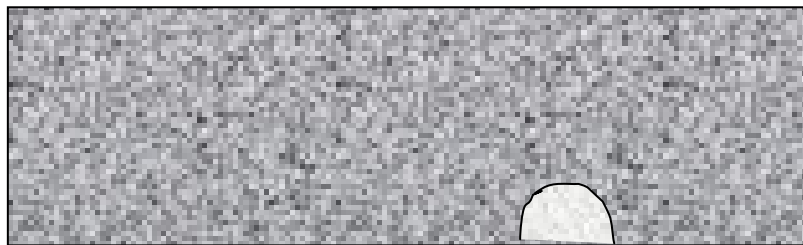
The above illustration shows some typical details of plank wall construction, but does not necessarily represent the exact methods employed in the Mastey House.

The attic floor joists are exposed to view in the rooms at the western end of the house. Here it is evident that the joists run from front wall to rear wall, and that most of them are light members that were sawn on the same kind of mill used to prepare the wall planks. In the center of the western rooms, however, is a larger, hewn timber. This member seems to have been inserted as a tie, serving to lock the front and rear walls together more firmly than can the light, sawn joists on either side. We may assume that a similar hewn member spans the house from front to back in the center of the eastern rooms, and probably that two other such members connect front and rear walls on each side of the central entry and stairhall area.

The roof of the house is structurally independent from the attic floor joist system described above. The rafters are common rafters measuring about 2 by 6 inches in section, and spaced some 42 inches on centers. The rafters meet at a one-inch-thick ridge board and are covered with horizontal roof sheathing boards that were sawn on an upright sawmill. The roof sheathing appears to be relatively undisturbed except in the small area above the staircase, where the filled former opening of the skylight is visible.

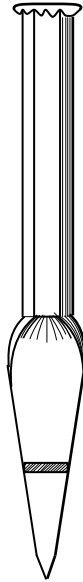
All of these attributes of carpentry, hardware, and heating point to a date of about 1835. The building underwent relatively little change in later years. Photographs taken by the Mastey's prior to and during restoration of the house show that two-over-two sashes had been installed in the windows, probably in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century; these have since been replaced by multi-light sashes appropriate to the original date of the house. Similarly, most of the Norfolk thumb latches were replaced, probably at the same general period, by mortise latches having brown "mineral" and white "porcelain" knobs.

The underpinning stones around the perimeter of the house have been covered with a coating of cement, and so the splitting technology of these stones is not visible on the exterior. As noted above, the house has a small, square central cellar (not accessible from the exterior), with walls laid carefully in split rubble and mortared or pointed with white lime-sand mortar. While the stones of the cellar walls do not reveal splitting technology, the inside faces of a few underpinning stones at the front of the house are exposed to view. One of these stones reveals splitting marks of the following appearance:



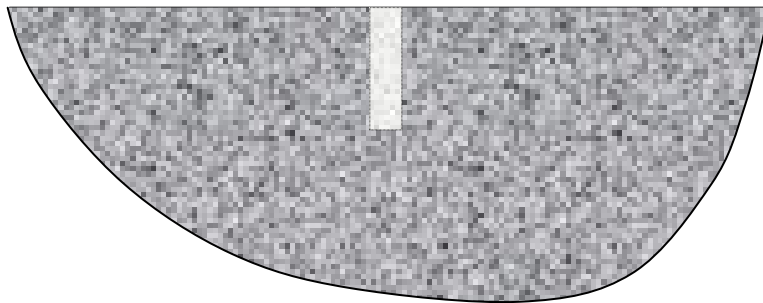
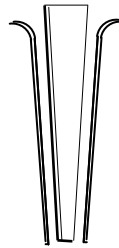
This flat marginal indentation represents a granite splitting method that generally dates from 1830 or earlier. This method utilized a narrow-bladed chisel to cut a series of slots

across the surface of the stone along a supposed line of natural cleavage. The cutting tool, called a “cape chisel” (shown below) was struck repeatedly with a hammer to create the line of slots.



Cape chisel for flat slot

Into these slots were inserted sheet metal shims and flat wedges, as shown below:



In general, this granite splitting technique was superseded about 1830 by a method that employed a drill (rather than a chisel) and created a series of round holes along the alignment to be split. Into these holes were inserted a different kind of wedge and shim,

generally called “plugs and feathers,” which exerted a greater pressure, at a greater depth, than the older flat-wedge method.

The presence of limited evidence of the splitting technology used on the underpinning stones of the Mastey House is perhaps not as helpful as the technological and stylistic evidence seen above the foundation. Yet the apparent use of the older splitting method suggests that the dwelling, while apparently dating after 1830, may not date much after that year.

The building in its historical context: The Mastey House is presumed to have been associated with the toll bridges and ferries that crossed the Merrimack River close to its confluence with the Contoocook River. Pending further research, it is assumed that the dwelling was built by the Proprietors of Boscawen Bridge as a residence for the toll gatherer whom the proprietors would have employed at the site. The current owners of the house recognized a painted toll sign, evidently for the Boscawen Bridge, that had been used as a sheathing board in the barn, and removed the sign for safekeeping.

Below is a chronology of transportation activities at this general site, based on research by George E. Leduc in his study “The Mastey Site: A Historic Merrimack River Crossing in Canterbury;” on published histories of Canterbury, Boscawen, and Penacook (as cited in notes); and on other sources (as cited).

It should be noted that the western boundary of the Town of Canterbury, as granted in 1727, was a straight line that did not extend to the Merrimack River, but lay some 606 rods east of the river at the southern end of the township. The ungranted land between the original western bound of Canterbury and the river therefore fell into the possession of the Masonian Proprietors when they acquired title to all ungranted lands within sixty miles of the sea in 1746. The several “gores” or slivers of land that were eventually merged with the territory of Canterbury to bring its western boundary to the river included the extreme southwestern corner of the township, where the Mastey House is located. The early history of land titles in this portion of Canterbury therefore follows a different sequence than that of other parts of town. The complex history of this “gore” is treated by James Otis Lyford in his 1912 *History of Canterbury* at some length.¹ Further documentation of land grants here is to be found in the records of the Masonian Proprietors as published in Volume 27 of the *New Hampshire Provincial and State Papers*.

1735 The Province of Massachusetts granted a tract of 300 acres “adjoining to the Town of Rumford, and lying on the east side of Merrimack River,” to Richard Kent, Esq. The tract was surveyed by Richard Hazzen, the surveyor who had

¹ James Otis Lyford, *History of the Town of Canterbury, New Hampshire, 1727-1912* (Concord, N. H.: Rumford Press, 1912), pp. 76-91. The same gore, which included a tract of some 300 acres called Kent’s Farm (granted to Richard Kent by the Province of Massachusetts in 1735 prior to the establishment of the final boundary between the two provinces), is also discussed in Nathaniel Bouton, *The History of Concord* (Concord, N. H.: Benning W. Sanborn, 1856) pp. 226-230.

laid out the Town of Rumford under Massachusetts authority. See *New Hampshire Provincial and State Papers*, Vol. 24, pp. 30-31.

- 1760** Thomas Pearson of North Yarmouth, Maine, sold to John Webster and Samuel Osgood 300 acres more or less in Canterbury bounded as follows: “Southerly by Rumford or Penacook line and by 2 acres I gave to Phineas Stevens, westerly by Merrimack River, northerly by land of Capt. Stephen Gerrish, and easterly by lands claimed by the proprietors of Canterbury, or, however otherwise bounded as by Richard Hazzen’s plan thereof may appear, this being the same land granted to Richard Kent by the Province of Massachusetts Bay and confirmed to me by the assigns of Tufton Mason [the Masonian Proprietors].”² The Masonian Proprietors made a practice of giving quitclaim deeds to lands within their territory that had previously been granted under other authority and improved by the owners.
- 1764** The Proprietors of Canterbury purchased most of the lands within the gore west of the original Canterbury western boundary line from the Masonian Proprietors. Documentation of this purchase, and a plan of the land acquired by the Canterbury Proprietors, are given in *New Hampshire Provincial and State Papers*, Vol. 27, pp. 142-147.
- 1765** Samuel Osgood of Maine deeded to Enoch Webster of Rumford “all my right in a farm, commonly called Kent’s Farm, on the easterly side of Merrimack River opposite the Contoocook River, which farm my honored father, John Webster, and I lately bought in equal shares of Thomas Pearson and do now hold as joint tenants and estimated to contain 375 acres.”³ Genealogical research may reveal how John Webster could be the “honored father” of Samuel Osgood.
- 1767** The Province of New Hampshire granted a ferry privilege at this location to John Webster of Canterbury. The grant of the ferry, dated September 19, 1767, is transcribed in *New Hampshire Provincial and State Papers*, Vol. 24, pp. 528-529. The ferry privilege included the right of ferriage across both the Merrimack and Contoocook Rivers. Webster was granted “the Sole Right of Keeping a FERRY & of Keeping, Using & Employing a Ferry boat & Boats for the transporting of Men, Horses, Goods, Cattle, Carriages &c: from the shore of Canterbury where the said Webster lives across Merrimack River to the shore of Concord & from the shore of said Concord to the shore of said Canterbury & from the shore of Canterbury to the shore of Boscawen & from the shore of Boscawen to the shore of Canterbury & from the shore of Boscawen to the shore of Concord & from the shore of Concord to the shore of Boscawen . . . And as a further Encouragement to the said John Webster in & about the Premises WE WILL that none of Our Loving Subjects Do presume to molest or interrupt the said JN^O WEBSTER in his said FERRY or set up any other Ferry

² New Hampshire Province Deeds 68:198, cited in Lyford, *History of Canterbury*, p. 90.

³ New Hampshire Province Deeds 79:99, cited in Lyford, *History of Canterbury*, p. 90.

upon or across the said River Merrimack within the space of Three Miles above or below the FERRY of the said JN^O WEBSTER—” The charter does not specify the rates of ferriage.

- 1767** On October 25, 1767, John Webster of Canterbury sold to Enoch Webster of Canterbury “the whole of a certain ferry which was granted to me by His Excellency John Wentworth, upon the Merrimack River.”⁴
- 1769** On November 24, 1769, the farm and ferry were bought by Benjamin Blanchard, 2nd, of Hollis, New Hampshire, from Enoch Webster of Canterbury and Andrew McMillan of Concord.⁵ Lyford states that Benjamin Blanchard 2nd later conveyed the farm and ferry “to his son, Benjamin Blanchard 3rd. The ferry continued in the possession of the Blanchard family until the building of the Boscawen toll bridge. It was known as ‘Blanchard’s Ferry’ and so described in the act incorporating the bridge company.”⁶
- 1802** The Proprietors of the Boscawen Bridge were incorporated by the New Hampshire legislature. The charter of incorporation, dated June 15, 1802, included the following provisions: “Whereas a bridge over said river, at the place above mentioned [“Blanchard’s-Ferry, near the mouth of Contoocook River”] will be of Public utility, and whereas Isaac Chandler, Timothy Dix, Jun. and Stephen Ambrose, and others, their associates, have petitioned the general court, for liberty to build the same, and to be incorporated for that purpose . . . the proprietors afforsaid be and hereby are permitted and allowed to erect a Bridge over the River Merrimack, at any place within the limits of Blanchards-Ferry so-called—And the said proprietors, are hereby empowered to purchase any lands adjoining said Bridge, not exceeding three Acres—and to hold the same in fee simple—and . . . a Toll be and hereby is granted and established for the benefit of said proprietors according to the rates following; namely, for each foot passenger one cent; for each horse and rider four cents; for each horse and Chaise, Chair, Sulkey or other riding carriage, drawn by one horse only, ten cents; for each riding sleigh drawn by one horse, four cents, for each riding sleigh drawn by more than one horse, six cents; for each Coach, Chariot, Phaeton, or other four wheeled carriage for passengers, drawn by more than one horse, twenty cents; for each Curricle twelve cents; for each cart, or other carriage of burthen, drawn by two beasts, ten cents; and three cents for each additional beast; for each horse or neat creature exclusive of those rode on or in carriages, two cents; for sheep and swine one half cent each; and to each team, one person and no more shall be allowed as a driver, to pass free of toll Provided further That whereas said Blanchards Ferry is supposed to extend, from Canterbury to Concord at the mouth of Contoocook River, and from Concord to Boscawen across the mouth of said Contoocook River, and by building a Bridge at the place proposed, these two branches of said ferry will be

⁴ New Hampshire Province Deeds 79:426, cited in Lyford, *History of Canterbury*, p. 90.

⁵ New Hampshire Province Deeds 96:162, cited in Lyford, *History of Canterbury*, p. 91.

⁶ Lyford, *History of Canterbury*, p. 91.

neglected, Therefore Nathaniel Rolfe Jun., living in Concord, on the westerly side of Merrimack River, at the mouth and on the southerly side of Contoocook River, his heirs and assigns, shall have liberty to keep a boat or boats, for the purpose of ferrying himself, or any other person, or thing, across the afforsaid places, —that is—from Concord at the mouth of Contoocook River, to Canterbury—and from Concord to Boscawen, across the mouth of Contoocook River affors'd, so long as the proprietors of sd Ferry & Bridge shall neglect the branches of said ferry.”⁷

- 1814** Most rates of toll for Boscawen Bridge were raised by statute. The new rates were: “for each foot passenger one cent; for each horse and rider six and a quarter cents; for each horse and Chaise, Chair, Sulkey or other riding carriage, drawn by one horse only, twelve and a half cents; for each riding sleigh drawn by one horse, six and a quarter cents, for each riding sleigh drawn by more than one horse, ten cents; for each Coach, Chariot, Phaeton, or other four wheeled carriage for passengers, drawn by more than one horse, twenty cents; for each Curricule twelve cents; for each wagon with two horses, or other carriage of burthen drawn by two beasts, twelve and a half cents; and three cents for each additional beast; for each small wagon drawn by one horse, nine cents; for each horse or neat creature exclusive of those rode on or in carriages, two cents; for sheep and swine one half cent each; and to each team, one person and no more shall be allowed as a driver, to pass free of toll.”⁸ A comparison of the tolls shown on the surviving toll sign with the toll schedules of 1802 and 1814 may indicate the date of the sign.
- 1827** The annual meeting of the Proprietors of Boscawen Bridge was held in 1827 at the toll house on the east side of the river in Canterbury.⁹
- 1839** The bridge was carried away in a freset. A chain ferry served the public until 1853, when a new bridge was built.¹⁰
- 1842** A deed to the Mastey House shows that Zebulon Smith purchased one acre north of the road, including a house, barn, and toll house.¹¹ The Proprietors of Boscawen Bridge were authorized by their 1802 charter to “purchase any lands adjoining said Bridge, not exceeding three acres.” The one acre and buildings purchased by Smith in 1842 appears to represent the parcel that the proprietors acquired to serve the bridge.

⁷ *Laws of New Hampshire*, Vol. 7, Second Constitutional Period, 1801-1811 (Concord, N. H.: Evans Printing Company, 1918), pp. 63-65.

⁸ *Laws of New Hampshire*, Vol. 8, Second Constitutional Period, 1811-1820 (Concord, N. H.: Evans Printing Company, 1920), p. 319.

⁹ George E. Leduc, “The Mastey Site: A Historic Merrimack River Crossing in Canterbury.”

¹⁰ Lyford, *History of Canterbury*, p. 232, citing Charles Carleton Coffin, comp., *History of Boscawen and Webster* (Concord, N. H.: Republican Press, 1878), p. 257, and David Arthur Brown, *History of Penacook* (Concord, N. H.: Rumford Press, 1902), p. 13.

¹¹ George E. Leduc, “The Mastey Site: A Historic Merrimack River Crossing in Canterbury.”

- 1853** A new, toll-free covered bridge was built at this crossing, presumably by the towns of Concord and Canterbury.¹²
- 1896** The free covered bridge was carried away and replaced by another chain ferry.
- 1898** A modern steel bridge was built at this crossing. Photographs reveal that this was a two-span Pratt truss bridge.
- 1937** Following the flood of 1936, a second, wider steel Pratt truss bridge was built here, with concrete abutments and a cantilevered bridge seat placed on the stone pier of a former bridge.¹³

Assuming that the Mastey House was built about 1835, there is no clear indication in the above chronology as to why a new house should have replaced earlier buildings at that time. It seems likely that a dwelling and/or toll house occupied the vicinity of this crossing at least from 1767, when the ferry was established here. Since the Proprietors of Boscawen Bridge were empowered to purchase only three acres of land, or less, to serve their needs, it also seems likely that the title of the Mastey House and its lot could be traced back to 1802, and that the property was associated with the bridge from that time until the Proprietors relinquished their charter and presumably liquidated their holdings.

Given the fact that the corporation presumably furnished a house for their toll gatherer and bridge tender from the start, we must look further for the reason why this earlier dwelling appears to have been replaced just a few years before the bridge was reportedly carried away by a freshet in 1839.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Interview on April 23, 2000 with the late Henry B. Pratt, Jr. (1910-2001), the engineer who designed this bridge.