



NEW HAMPSHIRE DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

State of New Hampshire, Department of Cultural Resources
19 Pillsbury Street, 2nd floor, Concord NH 03301-3570
Voice/ TDD ACCESS: RELAY NH 1-800-735-2964
<http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr>

603-271-3483
603-271-3558
FAX 603-271-3433
preservation@nhdhr.state.nh.us

NOTES ON FLOOR PAINT COLORS, ENTRY (STAIRHALL) AND KITCHEN, PIERCE HOMESTEAD, HILLSBOROUGH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

James L. Garvin
16 January 1998;
continued – March 1998;
completed April 29, 1998

Assumption: Since paint analysis was first carried out on the Pierce Homestead, the working assumption has been that the house should be restored to the period after the installation of the parlor wallpaper.

The paper was first manufactured in 1822-23, and may have been hung at the time that Pierce was first elected governor, in 1827. Pierce was governor in 1827-8 and 1829-30.

Together with a change in paint colors, described below and in Sara B. Chase's report, installation of this paper greatly changed the character of the parlor. With respect to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, installation of the paper (together with simultaneous repainting of the parlor woodwork) were "changes that have acquired historical significance in their own right," and should be retained and preserved. It may be assumed, too, that the fire frame in the parlor was added when the wallpaper was installed, further altering the character of the room.

Paint analysis has shown that the room was changed from a color scheme of predominantly robin's egg blue woodwork to one of predominantly light buff paint, covered with glazing. Since this change would harmonize with the sepia palette of the wallpaper, we may assume that the repainting was done when the paper was hung.

Inspections of the house on January 23 and March 4, 1998, provided evidence that other changes had occurred to the building after 1830. The most visible of these changes was the installation of rim locks of Carpenter's patent on a number of the doors of the house.

On the first floor, these locks appear on the front door, the door from the entry to the parlor, the door from the entry to the front sitting room or dining room, the door to the closet at the left of the front sitting room fireplace (believed to be the former bar), the door to the small side entry to the right of the front sitting room fireplace, and the door from the kitchen to the summer kitchen. Evidence shows that the exterior side door and the closet (former bar) to the right of the kitchen fireplace once had Carpenter locks as well.

On the second floor, Carpenter locks appear on the main entry door from the upper stairhall to the ballroom, and on the small closet door to the north of the main entry door. (The larger closet south of the main entry door never had a Carpenter lock, but had a closet lock mounted at the level of the latch rail.) The door from the rear stairhall to the rear bedchamber on the southeast also has a Carpenter lock, but this door is a reproduction installed by Philip Baker in 1964-5.

Elsewhere, doors have a variety of locks and latches, ranging from wishbone latches through simple closet locks to brass thumb latches that appear to date from the early twentieth century.

The Carpenter lock was patented in England in 1830. The presence of a number of Carpenter locks throughout the house—in some cases mounted on non-original doors with raised panels but with no stile and rail mouldings—provides a *terminus post quem* at or after 1830 for the remodeling of the house. We cannot know whether the locks and the parlor wallpaper were installed at the same time as parts of a single ambitious remodeling, or whether the wallpaper was installed first, followed over succeeding years by hardware changes.

It should be noted that the only windows in the house that are fitted with hinged shutters are the parlor windows. These shutters are not original, although the splayed embrasures of the windows would ordinarily be fitted with shutters. The flat panels of the shutters, combined with their ovolo-and-bead stile and rail mouldings, are seen nowhere else in the building. It may be assumed that these shutters were installed to protect the newly-hung wallpaper from the light.

The style of the shutters suggests a date in the 1820s, but not much later than 1830. By contrast, the front door, the two doors flanking the fireplace in the front sitting room, and the door leading to the summer kitchen, all have unmoulded stiles and rails that suggest a date after 1830, when the Greek Revival style had become dominant. These contrasts in joiner's work suggest that the installation of the wallpaper and parlor shutters, and the introduction of the Carpenter locks and the new doors that accompany some of them, could have been separated by at least a few years.

In any case, the presence of these locks, and of newer doors to which some of the locks are attached (including the front door of the house), requires that the house be represented at a period no earlier than the early 1830s.

Inasmuch as locks of Carpenter's patent continued to be available in the American marketplace at least into the 1860s, it is, of course, possible that the locks were installed much later, after Governor Pierce's death in 1839. As a practical working theory, however, we probably must assume that the house was brought to its present condition during the decade of the 1830s—the final decade of Benjamin Pierce's life.

Paint analysis has shown that various rooms in the house were repainted at the same general period as the parlor wallpaper was installed. It would therefore be logical to treat the entire building fabric as it appeared after the parlor was transformed and the Carpenter locks installed.

In some areas, we know the appearance of the building fabric in the early 1830s; in other areas, we do not.

By the early 1830s the house had ceased to operate as a tavern, though it may have accommodated a large family household and may also have provided entertainment for the governor's guests on occasion. Further research on the exact size of the household, and on the identity of each of the occupants, should be carried out to the extent possible. Sources for this research will include the Benjamin Pierce Papers, the John McNeil Papers, and the Franklin Pierce Papers, all at the New Hampshire Historical Society.

In attempting to determine the appearance of the house in the early 1830s, we encounter a number of specific questions that, thus far, have no answers. Among these are:

1. When were the Benjamin-type mantelpieces installed in the ballroom? The mantelpieces, and the doors adjacent to them, are characteristic of the fully-developed federal style. By contrast, most other joiner's work in the house is of the older Georgian style (except for the doors, mentioned above, that were installed at the same time that the Carpenter locks were introduced into the building). The two ballroom mantelpieces, in other words, appear to be later in style than the majority of woodwork on the first story of the house.

Why do these ballroom features not match other joiner's work in the house? Close study shows that the mantelpieces *may* match the period, if not the style, of other work. The bed mouldings under their shelves appear to be of the same profile as backband mouldings on the first floor, and also of the same profile as the bottom of the chair rail in the front entry on the first floor of the house.

Thus, the ballroom mantelpieces may simply have been designed in 1804 as the most up-to-date architectural features in an otherwise somewhat old-fashioned dwelling.

2. When was the ballroom subdivided into three bedchambers? Do the Benjamin-type mantelpieces in the ballroom, and the federal-style doors (which are like no others in the house), relate to this subdivision, or do they represent the original appearance of the ballroom? If the latter, was the ballroom left unfinished for some years after the first-floor rooms were finished?

3. When was the barroom on the first floor converted to a front sitting room or dining room? From the presence of the Carpenter locks and the four-panel doors on which the locks are mounted, it is apparent that the old bar was transformed into back-to-back closets sometime after 1830.
4. When was the old kitchen of the house subdivided, and why? Subdivision of the kitchen created a separate rear stairhall or entry, perhaps relating to a change (since obliterated by Philip Baker) known to have occurred in the rear staircase. Was the newly-created rear entry painted to match the colors of the front entry? Our records indicate that in 1991 I assumed that this partition dated from “about 1850.” If we can verify a date as late as this, and still adhere to the principle of presenting the house as it looked in the early 1830s, the addition of the partition will become irrelevant to our treatment of the old kitchen.
5. Is there sufficient evidence to indicate the color scheme and other decorative aspects of the front entry in the early 1830s? That is the period to which we are obliged to restore the front entry in order for the entry to correlate with the wallpapered parlor.
6. Which walls of the house, besides those of the parlor, were wallpapered by the early 1830s, if any? Could the walls of the entry have been wallpapered at the same time as those in the parlor? Sara Chase’s report concludes that the walls of the front sitting room or dining room were papered at some time. In his report of December 11, 1954, Roy Baker describes wallpaper on the kitchen wall, to the right of the fireplace closet, sealed beneath the partition that had been added to subdivide the kitchen from the rear entry. Photographs taken at the time of the Baker report offer some record of this wallpaper, but no preserved sample of the paper has come to light in the house. It thus appears possible that other rooms in the house may have been wallpapered at about the same time as the parlor, and several rooms of the house were certainly wallpapered eventually.

Sara Chase’s report on “Historic Interior Paints, Franklin Pierce Homestead, Hillsborough, New Hampshire—Primary Rooms” written in the springtime of 1997, offers evidence that bears on some but not all of these questions. Even where the report describes the sequence of paints in a given room, it does not necessarily link this sequence to sequences elsewhere or to any timeline. Thus, it is hard for the lay reader to construct, for example, an image of the condition and colors of the dwelling in the early 1830s.

Front Entry or Stairhall: Sara Chase’s report discusses paint evidence in the front entry and kitchen floor on pages 13-14. Ms. Chase wrote and submitted these pages after the other portions of her report under a separate, supplementary contract with the Hillsborough Historical Society.

Ms. Chase noted that “the [stair]Hall floor has been sanded down and refinished, probably more than once.” In 1954, Mr. Baker also mentioned new floor boards that had

been laid in the stairhall by that date. These new boards are five in number; they are in the middle of the floor at the front of the hallway and are noted on plans of the floor made on March 4, 1998. All the boards at the sides of the entry, and all the boards behind the beaking joint in the floor, are old and retain evidence of carpet tacks.

At present, the floor of the front entry is unpainted, but has been stained. Ms. Chase discovered deposits of the original floor paints on both sides of the wooden threshold of the closet under the entry stairs. Her report gives the sequence of floor paint colors as beginning with a deep rich ochre. This paint is probably similar to the “deep mustard yellow” that represents the first coloration of the parlor floor. The ochre was followed by deep reddish brown. Over the deep reddish brown is a brown varnish—perhaps a glaze? Above the varnished brown is a light neutral gray. Above the gray is a deep reddish terra cotta.

It should be noted that tack-hole evidence shows that the entry was once carpeted. The carpeting was tacked at the room’s edge, adjacent to the baseboards. The carpeting was carried around the perimeter of a small cupboard that once stood to the right of the door leading from the entry to the kitchen. We have no evidence of the date of this carpeting, or of the now-removed cupboard. Carpeting was once also laid in the parlor and the three bedchambers that once subdivided the ballroom on the second floor.

I examined the perimeter of the entry floor on March 4, 1998, to try to verify Ms. Chase’s conclusion that the entire floor had been painted, and to determine whether the floor was stripped before or after the carpet was laid. There is some paint accumulation under and around the remaining carpet tacks and tack stubs. Where paint is found, it bears out the sequence suggested by Sara Chase: ochre, followed by brown.

This evidence seems to indicate that the floor boards were painted at an early date. Later, carpeting was laid, with its tacks driven through the paint. When the carpeting was taken up and the floor paint stripped, a small residue of paint was left under some of the tacks. Stripping of the floor was quite thorough, with only a few ochre droplets left in a few places, together with the paint deposits found by Sara Chase at the ends of the threshold of the door to the closet under the stairs,

Stripping of the floor may have been done with lye or a similar caustic substance. All carpet tacks have rusted and bled iron oxide into the adjacent wood, following the grain of the wood.

On the other hand, some of this oxide bleeding is evident even where the tacks have been pulled and where their holes are filled with dirt. The bleeding could therefore have occurred because of the extreme dampness of the house, especially near the first floor membrane. From the cellar, the subflooring can be seen to be original throughout the entry area; it also shows rust stains where nails penetrated it.

Ms. Chase concludes that the deep reddish brown floor color of the entry is contemporary with the wallpaper in the parlor. She points out that the parlor floor was also painted a

deep red brown for its second color, presumably at the time when the sepia-toned wallpaper was hung in the room to cover the yellow ochre walls and original stenciling. Ms. Chase cites Munsell color 10R 2/2 for the parlor floor brown, and 2.5YR 2/2 for the entry floor brown. These two dark browns are highly similar to one another. Both are nearly black.

Based on this evidence and on the principle that the Pierce Homestead is to be portrayed as it was in the early 1830s, it would appear proper to paint the floors of the front entry a deep reddish brown (Munsell 2.5YR 2/2). It will be necessary to equate the Munsell color with some commercially available (or hand-mixed) color in floor enamel, or else to paint the front entry floors in an interior paint suitable for woodwork, followed by a coat of floor varnish.

Regarding the further decoration of the front entry, it has been assumed, on no particular evidence, that the walls remained painted and stenciled, rather than wallpapered, after the parlor was wallpapered. On this assumption, the entry walls were freshly painted in yellow ochre and stenciled by Peter Marciniak in the autumn of 1993. The 1993 wall color and stencil pattern were based on paint evidence that had been left exposed by Philip Baker near the door leading from the front entry into the kitchen. (See colored 35mm. slides and letter of 28 September 1993 from James L. Garvin to Peter Marciniak, in files.) It is possible, of course, that the walls of the entry and other rooms were papered at the same time as the walls of the parlor, but little or no wallpaper evidence has been recovered in other parts of the house.

As for the colors employed on the entry stairs, the brown and putty colors were identified in October 1992 by James J. Lee III of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities from paint samples cut by Peter Marciniak of Hillsborough. Painter Peter Marciniak recreated the brown stripe that covers the bottom of the stair stringer and the bottom rails of the doors in the autumn of 1993. This work was based on paint evidence that Marciniak had exposed during preparatory work (see colored 35mm. slides taken by James Garvin, in file). This brown zone carried uniformly around the lower elements of the entry at the height of the top of the brown-painted baseboard. The stair brackets and treads were also painted brown, while the balusters were painted a putty color.

Mr. Lee's report of October, 1992, noted that he examined four samples provided by Mr. Marciniak. These were 1. "the molding" (not further specified; perhaps the chair rail); 2. the baseboard; 3. the wainscot; and 4. a stair riser. Although the stair riser retained twelve layers of paint, the baseboard sample had only two layers, while the "molding" and wainscot samples had three. Oddly, all three—baseboard, "molding," and wainscot—are described as having originally been painted "tan" or putty color. Yet visual evidence revealed during scraping by Mr. Marciniak clearly showed that the baseboard had originally been painted with the same "rust brown" that constituted the first colors on the staircase risers. For this reason, the baseboard and the stripe around the lower zones of the stair stringer, newel post, and doors were all painted in rust brown to reflect evidence that was revealed and photographed during paint preparation (see slides).

Mr. Lee also stated that the molding, baseboard, and wainscot “all have a clear resinous layer below the first layer of paint. The surfaces may have been left unpainted for a period of time, or some of the earlier paint layers may have been stripped before repainting.” Since we have no record of the sites from which Mr. Marciniak took the samples he sent to Mr. Lee, it is hard to draw a conclusion. It is at least barely possible, however, that the joiner’s work in the lower entry was left unpainted during the earliest years of the house, perhaps during its tenure as a licensed tavern.

Kitchen Floor: Until 1992, all woodwork in the kitchen was bare of paint, having been stripped by Philip Baker in his restoration of 1964-5. In May, 1992, the Hillsborough Historical Society employed Gregory Clancey of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities to research the paint colors of the kitchen joiner’s work, not including the floors. Mr. Clancey never submitted a written report, but simply identified the color of the joiner’s work as a gray. Mr. Marciniak painted the woodwork in this color in the spring of 1992, leaving the floor unpainted.

In her report of 1997, Sara Chase indicated that the sequence of kitchen floor colors was 1. light neutral gray; 2. darker gray; 3. deep rich ochre; and 4. reddish terra cotta. She mentioned that “the plank edges of boards west of the North cornerpost near the East windows provided good evidence of historic paints.”

The entire finish floor in the area of the former rear entry is new work installed by Philip Baker in 1964. The new boards extend northward from the beaking joint that marks the former location of the partition between the kitchen and the rear entry, and cover the entire floor in the former entry. There is therefore no remaining paint evidence to indicate the history of colors on the floor in this area.

Chase identified the terra cotta paint in *both* the front entry and in the kitchen as Munsell 2.5YR 4/8.

If we are to portray the appearance of the house as it was in the early 1830s, it will be important to try to determine which of the four kitchen floor colors correlates with this period, or with the “deep reddish brown” in the front entry, which Ms. Chase identifies as contemporary with the wallpaper in the parlor. Unfortunately, we have no chronology for these colors, nor can we assume that floors throughout the house were repainted together. In fact, the contrary is probably more likely; floors in various rooms were probably repainted as necessary, without regard to other floors. In a high-traffic area like the kitchen, where floors would have suffered from more than common wear and dirt, is especially likely to have been repainted without regard to redecorating that might have occurred elsewhere in the house.

Thus, the only conclusion that we can make at this time would be to paint the entire kitchen floor, including the area once set off as a rear entry, in an early color. If further evidence later proves that we were wrong in assuming that this early color was still visible in the early 1830s, a later color can be applied over the earlier one.

One possible source of further paint evidence for the kitchen floors would be old floor paints that may adhere to the bottoms of the baseboards of the former kitchen/rear entry partition that is preserved in the barn.

If we take this approach, we will have to paint the kitchen floor to match Munsell color N7/ or N5.75 for the present time. Munsell N7/ is the same color specified by Gregory Clancey for the kitchen joiner's work. Thus, it would appear that the kitchen floor and upper woodwork were originally painted the same light gray.

At present, we have arrived at a period—the early 1830s—before which we cannot interpret the house. Because of the presence of the parlor wallpaper, several newer doors (including the front door of the house), and a number of Carpenter rim locks dating from 1830 or after, the house is now seen in a condition no earlier than the early 1830s.

We are faced with a problem in attempting to restore the paint colors of this period throughout the house. We know the sequences of colors in each room that has been studied by Sara Chase or other paint conservators, but we are not certain of the dates at which various layers of paint were applied. Our best chance at linking a color scheme with a date is in the parlor, where the transformation of the woodwork from predominantly blue to predominantly tan almost certainly coincided with installation of the sepia wallpaper that covered the formerly-yellow walls.

We also do not know how the color changes in one room correlated with colors in other rooms. Was the entire house largely repainted when the parlor was repainted? Or were various rooms repainted at various times, as family taste may have dictated?

In attempting to restore the interior of the house to the early 1830s, we will therefore have to make certain assumptions about the paint evidence that has been presented to us. In most cases, we will probably have to assume that the *second*, or possibly the *third* coats of paint on woodwork or floors relates to the period of the 1830s. Unless we find a better means of dating the paint layers in various rooms, we will have to use this assumption as a working hypothesis.

Since the Hillsborough Historical Society has generously offered (or provided) the funds for paint research and for repainting of various areas, and since the Society is eager to continue repainting, we must take the evidence we presently have and use that evidence to make decisions about room colors when possible. Where information seems still to be lacking, we may have to ask for further paint investigation, or for clarification of earlier reports or statements by paint conservators, in order to move ahead with the repainting project.