

Rediscovering the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House



The Cambridge Historical Society



2010

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A New Understanding of Our Old House

The rediscovery of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, a process that is documented in this publication, started simply enough: we needed to replace the house’s aging electrical wiring. That work, however, had an all-too-obvious impact on the interior walls of the building, requiring us to repaint them. But that necessity itself was an opportunity.

First, we conducted an extensive paint analysis, which brought to light new facts about the house and also raised a number of questions about its early history. To answer some of these questions, we brought together a panel of architectural historians with particular expertise in Colonial architecture. They immediately began to question some of the traditional understanding of the house’s history. They suggested ways to explore the building and discussed alternative theories of the house’s past.

There was real excitement in these discussions, and we used that excitement to undertake an extensive study of the three-century-old structure of the house by opening its walls and the casings that sheathed its beams.

Working on this year-long project were paint analysts, dendrochronologists, and traditional carpenters. Their findings were reviewed by the original panel of architectural historians and studied through the eyes of local historians. This publication includes essays by many of those involved in that process.

We are confident now that we know more about our old house than we did before we started, but we understand that the house still holds more mysteries than we once realized — and that we may never know the answer to some of them.

Historical investigation, like history itself, is a living process. In many ways we have confirmed the old theories, but in other ways we have complicated or contradicted our previous beliefs. We hope now that future scholars and explorers will bring new techniques and understandings to review our work and continue the process of determining the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House’s place in history.

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A Repository of Memory

By Carl N. Nold

To a world that looks for instant answers on the Internet or momentary trends that are “tweeted” to personal communication devices, the historic house may seem an anachronism. Can there really be value in preserving and studying antique woodwork and yellowed documents? It’s a question faced by every historic house but rarely answered as well as at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House.

Historic houses are places of memory and stories, both stories told through oral histories or in formal presentations by tour guides, and stories that are developed from looking at the physical structure of a house and its surrounding landscape.

Those knowledgeable about buildings — or those who are simply inquisitive — can learn much about a community’s life by studying an old house. The stories, while based in the past, can lead us to conclusions about life today.

We tend to think of the past as a simpler time, lacking today’s complexity and pace. Examining a house like Hooper-Lee-Nichols leads us to a different conclusion. This house, which holds more than 300 years of history, has been subject to a wide array of forces that brought steady change.

The 17th-century structure was encased in later expansions and additions. The preferred tastes on Brattle Street changed over time, and the appearance of the house was updated regularly in response. The early 20th century preservation movement brought architectural historians to study the structure, and more recent times have used the modern techniques

of paint analysis, archaeology, and even tree ring dating — dendrochronology — to understand how the house became what we see today.

Beyond the physical evidence, an investigation of community and social history reveals how family changes, economic factors, evolving conditions in the neighborhood, and even world events influenced the

house and its occupants. When all of the evidence is assembled, we begin to understand the web of stories of a historic house and how that place, its community of Cambridge, and even our region and beyond can be better understood.

A historic house is a repository of memory, a place of joy and sadness, a continuing part of its community, and a contribution to the preservation of its heritage for future generations. The Hooper-Lee-Nichols House story will continue to fascinate, inform, and change.



The Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, ca. 1995

CHS Photo Records

A Year of Discovery

By Jinny Nathans

In the past year we have used some of the most technologically advanced techniques available to learn the history of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House. We have read messages hidden in the paint layers; matched tree rings to 17th-century weather patterns, and peered inside the walls of our house. This process has brought together historians from different disciplines and has led to engaging exploration and discovery. We have also benefited from the talents of designers, editors, and museum professionals, who have allowed us to describe these discoveries in this publication and in our new interpretation of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House.

We owe a great debt to all the scholarship that preceded our recent project. We would never have been able to formulate the questions to investigate had we not had the background information to draw from. We were very lucky to have Anne Grady and Sally Zimmerman, authors of the original Historic Structure Report, work with us today.

Brian Powell’s study of the paint has expanded our knowledge of the building, and we would never have been able to stir the interest of historians without his passion for uncovering the building’s past. The support of such leaders in local history as Carl Nold and Charles Sullivan has given us the courage to explore our building further. Karen Davis proposed the paint analysis and has since acted as a technical editor for this publication. The contributors have all added their special knowledge.

continued on page 4

Discovery (continued)

Tim Orwig's understanding of Joseph Chandler is unrivaled, Jim Shea has a unique perspective from the only other Tory Row mansion museum, and Heli Meltsner's work on New England social history uncovered new information about the owners. We are also greatly indebted to all of the historians who have helped us, including Claire Dempsey, Susan Maycock, Brian Pfeiffer, and Sarah Burks.

The museum display owes a great deal to Cynthia Brennan and Mark Vassar. They both used their technical skills and creative powers to make the displays inspiring. They both also worked many extra hours under tight time pressure and remained positive and innovative through the whole process.

This publication would never have come together without the editorial work of Michael Kenney and Gavin Kleespies. They put in countless hours writing and editing and working with the contributors. It would not read as smoothly without the careful eye of our copy editor, Luise Erdmann. And our designer, Kevin McNavich, provided us with crisp cover and page layouts.

None of this would have been possible without the generous support of the Cambridge Savings Bank and the Community Preservation Act Grant. I hope you enjoy reading about our discoveries and the mysteries that remain. It is a wonderful building that has solved many of its puzzles, but we know there is much more to discover.

New Knowledge, New Questions

By Charles Sullivan

The Hooper-Lee-Nichols House is one of the icons of Cambridge history, and, like all such structures, it risks being taken for granted. For a long time it was considered to be the oldest structure in Cambridge, but that honor, thanks to a dendrochronology study, now rests with the Cooper-Frost-Austin House (1681), at 21 Linnaean Street.

Both have been altered over time, but while that on Linnaean Street still looks like a rare First Period house, the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House in its Georgian form became a prototype for imitators in the 20th century, most notably a few blocks

away, at 146 Brattle St. (1939). Imitation is certainly a form of flattery, but it breeds familiarity and eventually indifference. In this case, the uninformed observer may find it difficult to distinguish one from the other.

The very familiarity of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House makes it important to understand its origins. Unlike another Georgian icon, the Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House (1759), the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House was not conceived as a unified artistic vision

but evolved over a long period of time. The intent of the guiding hand here is not apparent, beyond a striving for symmetry. The admixture of disparate forms and materials — clapboards, quoins (in imitation of masonry), roughcast (another imitative material) — is confusing even to the architectural historian standing in the street. Peel away the skin,

and the picture is entirely muddled.

Successive generations of historians have attempted to make sense of this puzzle by examining the paper records as well as the fabric of the building itself.

What is now

becoming clear is that the successive generations of builders who preceded us had no compunctions about using the material at hand, wherever it could be found and whatever its original purpose, dressing up the result with characteristic Georgian features in the 18th century and Georgian Revival features in the 20th century. Acknowledging and reinterpreting this tangle with our new knowledge can make the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House fresh again. However, we are still leaving many questions to challenge the investigative skills of future historians.



146 Brattle St.

Gavin W. Kleespies

Tory Row's Debt to George Washington

An interview with James M. Shea by Michael Kenney

Tory Row is Brattle Street. Its Georgian mansions — now interspersed by houses built after the Revolution — include the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House and the Longfellow House.

From his vantage point at the Longfellow House, where he is the National Park Service's site manager, James M. Shea notes that the fame of "Tory Row," the mansions built by the families who remained loyal to Britain during the Revolution, can be attributed to none other than George Washington.

After thousands of protesters marched down Tory Row, the families fled to Boston, where the British troops were stationed. General Washington later made his headquarters at the Vassall family's mansion, now familiar as the Longfellow House, and took command of the Continental Army.

In his *Old Landmarks and Historic Fields of Middlesex*, Samuel Adams Drake wrote that the records of the Provincial Congress indicated that the Vassall farm "furnished considerable forage for [the] army. It was at a time when the haymakers were busy in the royalist's meadows that Washington, entering Cambridge with his retinue, first had his attention fixed by the mansion which for more than eight months became his residence."

When Washington left Cambridge after the British evacuation of Boston in 1776, his headquarters "took on a shrinelike quality," Shea said.

"That helped to set the stage for the preservation of the Longfellow House as well as Cambridge's outstanding collection of Georgian mansions on Brattle Street." It also fed into the Colonial Revival movement and, in turn, to the replication of Georgian

homes along Brattle Street from the early 19th century until well into the 20th century. There is a 20th-century replica of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House at 146 Brattle St. and a late 19th-century copy of 33 Elmwood at 22 Fayerweather St.

The Colonial Revival houses on Brattle Street "make it look more 'colonial' than it did in the 18th century. It's a powerful story," Shea said. "Not just the buildings, but the social history.

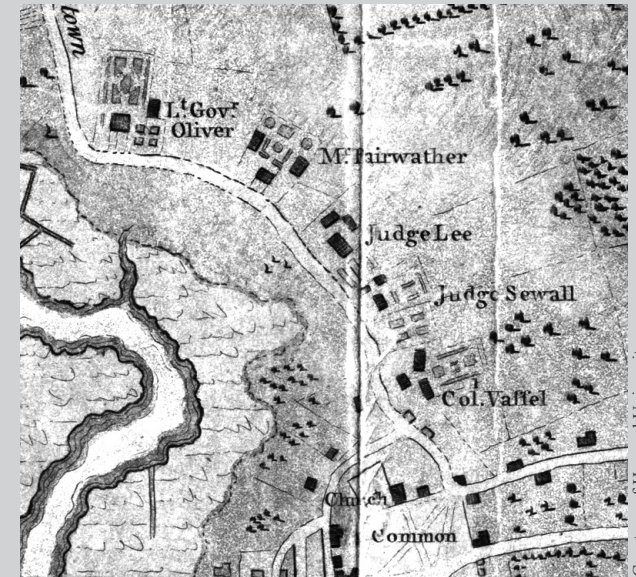
These Loyalist families were next-door neighbors. "They were related to each other through marriage and business. They were a Cambridge community — although many had houses in Boston, as well as interests in the West Indies."

Baroness Fredericka von Riedesel, the wife of a Hessian officer paroled in Cambridge after the battle of Saratoga, left a charming secondhand description of life before the Revolution. The families, she wrote, "were in the habit of daily meeting each other in the afternoons... and making themselves merry with music and the dance." The Riedesel name is remembered by a street off Brattle.

In addition to the houses, the families had formal gardens, farms, and fruit trees. And for many, their lands extended down to the Charles River (although only the Longfellow House still has that view).

House museums, like the Longfellow House and the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, are important teaching tools. At the Longfellow House, for instance, "you are in a room where George Washington met with his staff," Shea said, and "people visit house museums because they tell stories, of both the lives of the people who lived there, and of the evolution of the houses they lived in."

The Houses of Tory Row



Courtesy of Harvard University

Section of 1777 map by Henry Pelham

- "Elmwood," 33 Elmwood Ave.; built 1767 by Lieutenant Governor Thomas Oliver; current residence of Harvard president.
- Ruggles-Fayerweather House, 175 Brattle St.; built ca. 1764 by George Ruggles, sold to Thomas Fayerweather in 1774.
- Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, 159 Brattle St.; built 1685 (the home of the Cambridge Historical Society).
- Lechmere-Sewall-Riedesel House, 149 Brattle St.; built 1761; owned by Jonathan Sewall, the Massachusetts Bay Colony's last attorney general.
- Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House, 105 Brattle St.; built 1759 by John Vassall; Washington's headquarters (owned by the National Park Service since 1972).
- Henry Vassall House, 94 Brattle St.; built 1746 by Henry Vassall; medical corps headquarters in the Revolutionary War.
- William Brattle House, 42 Brattle St.; built 1727; the home of General William Brattle (now the Cambridge Center for Adult Education).

The Traditional History of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House

By Karen L. Davis

Until recently, the Society's understanding of how the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House evolved from a 17th-century farmhouse to its present size was based primarily on a Historic Structure Report prepared by Anne Grady and Sally Zimmerman in 1980. Graduate students in the Preservation Studies Program at Boston University, they were supervised by Morgan Phillips, an authority on building conservation, and Abbott Lowell Cummings, the leading expert on New England's 17th-century houses.

Amateur and professional historians had previously studied deeds, wills, diaries, etc., but the BU team was uniquely qualified to evaluate the physical evidence of the house itself — its posts, beams, paneling, windows, doors, and trim — and to correlate their findings with documentary research and historic photographs. The result was the first authoritative opinion on the original 17th-century construction date of the house and on its 18th-century alterations.

The history of the house begins with Richard Hooper, who bought the land in 1685 and built a 2½-story house in the First Period style (see page 7). What survives of his house is the massive timber frame “within the walls of the present southwest room and chamber [Bosphorus and Naples rooms], stairhall, and central chimney space” (Grady, 13). Dr. Hooper died in 1690, leaving his wife, Elizabeth, with two

young children, Hannah and Henry, and the house. To generate income, Elizabeth ran the house as an inn but died destitute in 1701. The children were placed with a guardian, and the house was deemed unfit to rent because of its deplorable condition.

It stood vacant until 1716, when Henry Hooper began repairs, paid debts, and reclaimed the title. It is not known whether the original house had rooms on

the east side of the chimney, but if so, Henry replaced them. While the physical evidence shows that both halves of the house date to the late 17th century, it also shows that they fit together awkwardly and that the east side has features that are unusual for an addition. This led to the theory that Henry moved and attached

an existing 17th-century two-room house to the east side of the chimney, creating a 2½-story house with a central chimney and entry.

Hooper sold the house to Cornelius Waldo in 1733. By 1742, Waldo had removed the original roof to add the third story. Remodeling the house in the fashionable Georgian style, he has been credited with casing some of the exposed frame of the beams and posts, paneling the fireplace walls, installing larger, double-hung sash windows, and adding decorative wooden quoins at the outside corners. Waldo may have lived in the house for a time, but he also offered it for rent as a “gentleman's country seat.”

Joseph Lee purchased the house from Waldo's widow in 1758. He has been credited with adding the projecting section of the entry hall, which was cramped due to the central chimney behind it. He also applied the roughcast finish, scored to resemble stone, to the western exterior wall. (The roughcast wall is highly significant as the only surviving example in the Boston area.) After Lee died in 1802, the house appears to have been rented.

Less is known about 19th-century alterations. The new owner, Deborah Carpenter, may have installed the 1823 scenic wallpaper from which the West Chamber (Naples Room) takes its name. She hung this over an 18th-century paper that dates to Lee's period. In 1860, George and Susan Nichols purchased the house after renting it for 10 years. They added the scenic paper in the West Parlor (Bosphorus Room), the balustrade along the roofline, and the rear ell ca. 1860.

The next and last major change to the house occurred in 1916, when Nichols's grandson Austin T. White hired the preservation architect Joseph Everett Chandler to create the First Period Revival library and raise the house to a full three stories across the rear elevation. Chandler uncovered and restored the cooking fireplace in the library (Chandler Room) and decorated the beams to match those in the East Chamber. He also designed the front gate, the wide front door, and the garage.

Principal reference: Anne A. Grady, “The Hooper-Lee-Nichols House: An Architectural History,” *Essays on Cambridge History*, Cambridge Historical Society, 1998.



Tittle & Sperring measured drawing, 1932

CHS Maps and Plans Collection

First Period Architecture

By Karen L. Davis

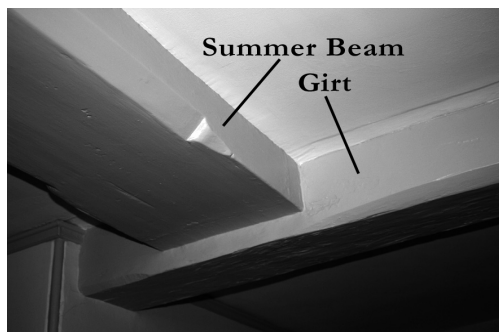
First Period buildings are rare, so they are among the most significant historic structures in New England. Most of them, including the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. While they were built from roughly 1630 to 1730, the oldest survivor identified to date is the ca. 1641 Fairbanks House in Dedham.

The First Period style of architecture is based on post-Medieval vernacular building practices that the colonists brought with them from England and transferred to subsequent generations during the first century of Anglo-American settlement. The houses had simple floor plans, steeply pitched roofs, small windows, a center or end chimney, and a heavy timber frame that was exposed and decorated on the interior. The outside of the houses were covered with unpainted clapboards.

Due to age as well as modernization, no First Period house remains as built. In many cases, physical evidence of First Period construction is hidden in the timber frame of the house. While heavy timber framing continued well into the 19th century, exposure and decoration of the frame

did not. Generally, it is the decorated posts and/or beams—the evidence that the frame was originally exposed—that places a house in the First Period.

The framing members selected for decoration changed over time, as did the nature of the decoration. The summer beam — located near the center of a principal room — was the timber of choice for the longest period. The most common decoration from 1660 to 1690 was the chamfer, or beveled edge, with a variety of tongue-like stops. Chamfers with lambs tongue stops can be seen on the summer beam in the East Chamber of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House.



First Period details in the East Chamber. The summer beam and girt have chamfered edges; the summer beam also has a lambs tongue stop.

Gavin W. Kleespies

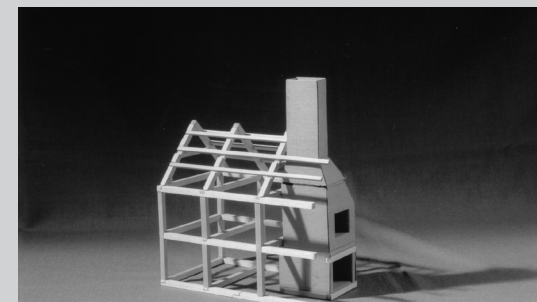
By 1725, as the classical influence of the Renaissance made its way to the colonies, the exposed frame was becoming old fashioned. In houses built or remodeled after the first quarter of the 18th century—particularly those owned by affluent people—the frame was concealed under interior walls, and projecting timbers were enclosed (cased or boxed). These

changes, along with many others, ushered in the Georgian style of architecture, which is the dominant style of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House today.

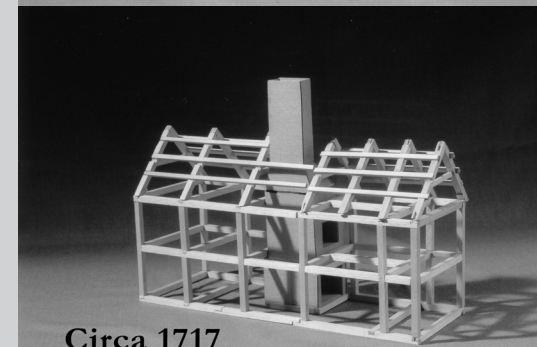
Principal reference: Richard Candee, et al., "First Period Buildings of Eastern Massachusetts," Thematic National Register Nomination, 1990.

SCALE MODELS showing the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House as it was enlarged, constructed by Gerald B. Warden, the Society's resident curator, 1976-1981. From top: Original one-over-one structure built by Richard Hooper ca. 1685. Second one-over-one structure moved to site and attached to original between May 1716 and March 1717. Roof raised and third floor added in 1733. Entry porch added in 1758.

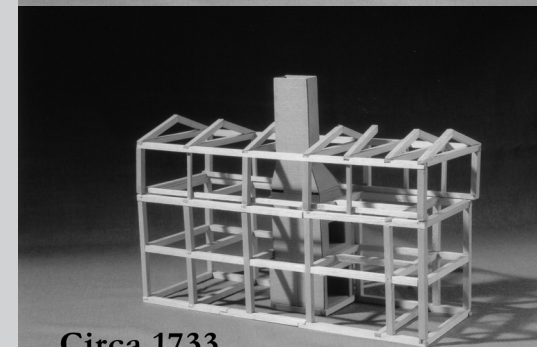
The Evolution of the House



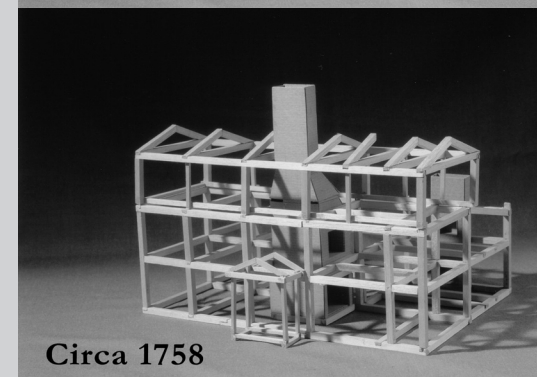
Circa 1685



Circa 1717



Circa 1733



Circa 1758

Lewis Bushnell

Documenting the Process of Rediscovery

By Gavin W. Kleespies

The traditional understanding of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House is that the west side of the building (the Bosphorus Room and the Naples Room) is the original portion of the house built by Richard Hooper ca. 1685.

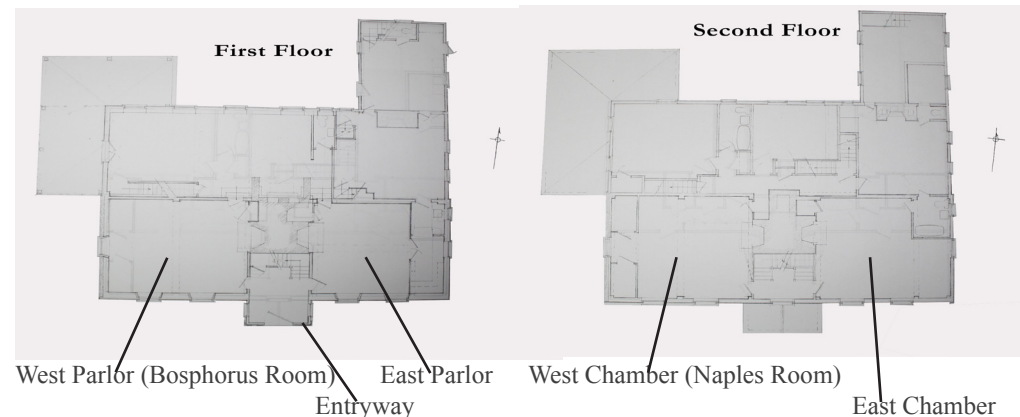
If this is true, you would expect to find, underneath the Georgian, Victorian, and Colonial Revival additions, evidence of First Period construction and details. However, an external investigation shows some unusual features. The west side includes two large rooms with high ceilings, both of which feature summer beams that are parallel to the chimney girt. The rooms are made up of what appear to be three equal bays (the chimney bay, from the chimney girt to the summer beam, and from the summer beam to the end girt), and in a recent investigation we found that many of the beams are pine, not oak. All of these items are unusual, although not unheard of, in a First Period house.

It was these features, coupled with the fact that no one living today had looked inside these walls and casings, that made the exploration of the house exciting. Questions were raised. What portion of Richard Hooper's house has survived? Is it possible that the east side is older? Is it possible that the west side was a Hooper building but not his house? Could one side have been built as an addition? Do both sides show

First Period details? Were both built as two-story structures? Was one side enlarged?

Our recent paint analysis, followed by the repair and repainting of the interior, gave us a rare opportunity to answer these questions. We could open up the walls, remove some of the casings, and poke our heads into the nooks and crannies that had been closed for centuries (and have confidence that the rooms would be seamlessly put back together before the house reopened to the public). We jumped at this opportunity and used innovative techniques to uncover the inside of our house.

along the northern side of the building, "the rear girt extending from the western room stops about three feet west of the joint ... of the east room rear girt" (Grady & Zimmerman, 7). Both this report and Karen Falb's Landscape History Report state that, based on how the structure is joined, it seems that two separate buildings were attached. The east side of the structure is smaller than the west, the floor heights are uneven, and the summer beams are perpendicular from one side to the other. The east side also has a small bay at the far end of the house that was most likely a chimney bay of the east half before it was joined to the west half.



Most buildings of this age have few written records of their early years, and, not surprisingly, other than the traditional understanding and guesses based on structural components, no sources state that the west side of the building is the original side.

If we wanted to answer the questions we had posed, we needed to look at how the building was put together. If the west side of the house was a First Period house, you would

We began by reviewing the previous studies of the house. In their Historic Structure Report, Grady and Zimmerman state that the chimney bay was built as part of the west side of the building. They point out that the frame, along the front or southern wall, is a continuous beam from the southwest corner of the building to the door of the East Parlor. However,

expect there to be a heavy timber frame, which was exposed on the interior of the house and decorated with chamfered edges and decorative stops cut into the summer beam, structural girts, and posts. If the structure was built for another use or at a later period, you would not expect to see these features.

Process (continued)

To uncover this history, we worked in several stages. In the first phase, a team made up of Charles Sullivan, Brian Powell, Charlie Allen, and myself met and decided what openings to make. In the Bosphorus Room (West Parlor), it was decided to remove the front panel covering the center post supporting the summer beam on the north side of the room, cut a view port into the panel behind the interior shutter on the south side, remove a section of plaster in between the south window and the west corner post to see the corner post, and cut a small hole into the casing around the chimney girt. These openings would tell us what wood the center post, the chimney girt, and the corner post were made of and if they were decorated, as well as exposing an earlier wall that had been covered in the 1750s by a furred-out wall built to create window seats.

In the East Parlor, the same group agreed to remove a piece of trim from the fireplace and bore a hole into the casing behind the trim to reveal the chimney girt and bore a small hole into the casing around the summer beam to see if it was decorated. Finally, in the Naples Room it was agreed to remove a round piece of wood that filled a previously cut hole in the casing around the chimney girt. On the day of the work, in consultation with Brian Powell, Susan Maycock, Charlie Allen, and Jonathan Detwiler, we also decided to cut a second view port behind the shutter of the other window on the southern wall of the Bosphorus Room for a better view of the girt, cut a small hole into the casing around the chimney girt in the East Parlor, and remove a piece of paneling around the northeastern corner post of the East Chamber that had already been partially removed by the electricians.

The results of this exploration answered some questions but raised many more. The openings on the east side of the house support the previous understanding of the structure as a First Period house. In the East Parlor the summer beam is chamfered, as is the chimney girt, and the casing removed from around the northeastern corner post in the East Chamber shows a tapered post.

However, the west side is more complicated. The exposed center post is pine and has been roughly hacked back about an inch. There is evidence of whitewash on the sides, implying that it was once exposed, but there is no evidence of any decoration. There is also a small block of wood toward the top of the post that was hard to explain. It could be a piece of filler or a remnant of joint, suggesting that the post had been used at some other site or was a tenon from a removed summer beam. The hole in the casing around the chimney girt shows a whitewashed beam with no evidence of its being chamfered or having any other type of decoration. The circular cut in the Naples Room (West Chamber) also shows an undecorated but whitewashed chimney girt. All of this is contrary to what you would expect in a First Period house. However, the opening made behind the shutter in the window seat shows a girt that is chamfered, has a lambs tongue

standing of the structure as a First Period house. In the East Parlor the summer beam is chamfered, as is the chimney girt, and the casing removed from around the northeastern corner post in the East Chamber shows a tapered post.



Jonathan Detwiler, Brian Powell, and Charlie Allen uncovering the center post in the Bosphorus Room. Corner: detail of post.

The Families

Richard and Elizabeth Hooper

We know certain things about Richard Hooper. We know that he purchased an 11-acre farm from John Holmes on February 14, 1684, for £45. Holmes had lived in Salem since at least 1673 but was from a prominent Cambridge family. He had married Hannah Thatcher in Cambridge and his father, Robert, had been a Cambridge town commissioner. The deed transference from Holmes to Hooper does not mention a house.

We also know that Hooper died on December 8, 1690, and left his wife, Elizabeth, and two children, Henry and Hannah, a comfortable home that must have been built between 1684 and 1690. The inventory of his estate listed its value at over £330 and included a house that was furnished with leather chairs, books beyond just a Bible, linens, and medical equipment. The property included a barn and an orchard and listed cattle, pigs, horses, and a servant. There is no mention of debt in the probate records of his estate.

What we don't know about Hooper is his position in the community. Before he bought the land in 1684, there is no mention of him in the records of Cambridge or Watertown (the house was in Watertown until 1754). We believe that he may have been from New Hampshire. In the insular communities of Puritan New England, being from a distant town could have been cause for suspicion.

continued on page 10

The Families (continued)

We do know that, in the relatively short time he lived here, he was never appointed to a position of authority in the community. He turned up in a court case — a dispute over the sale of a horse — which was decided against him. There is also a question about his profession. He is referred to as a physician in the records of the purchase of the farm, but in the case regarding the horse, he is called a surgeon. These different positions would have placed him in very different social classes.

Shortly after Hooper's death, however, his family fell on very hard times—how or why, we don't know—deepening the mysteries surrounding him. His widow sought permission "to felle out Lickuers by Reetale." She was apparently operating an inn but was warned by the town "to fre her hous" of several unsavory guests.

After Elizabeth died in 1701, Francis Foxcroft, the administrator of the estate, "found the house so much out of repair & nothing of furniture within, either linen or woollen not so much as to wrap the body of the widow in who at the time was buried at my cost."

The windows were boarded up, and the house remained unoccupied – except for occasional squatters – until the Hoopers' son Henry reclaimed the property in 1716. GWK

continued on page 12

Process (continued)

stop, and appears to be oak. Similarly, the plaster removed from the southwest wall shows a chamfered corner post.

What do these findings imply? At the time, some good theories were postulated. Sally Zimmerman felt that this could point toward the east side of the building being older and possibly the original structure. She suggested going over the probate records again and reviewing what had been assumed in the past. There was a suggestion that the pine post in the Bosphorus Room could be an old post put in to replace a damaged post and cut to fit the existing casings. Charlie Sullivan, Susan Maycock, and Sarah Burks suggested exploring the possibility of dendrochronology.

This first phase did not answer some of our questions: Is the east side the original side and did the building have two stories originally? It also raised new questions: Was the center post a salvaged piece that replaced an older post? Is this post continuous for two floors? If the house was a First Period house, why isn't the chimney girt decorated? Is the summer beam decorated? Has the summer beam been replaced? Is the west side of the building built of salvaged pieces from more than one building?

To answer these questions, a larger group of experts, including Anne Grady, Claire Dempsey, Susan Maycock, Sarah Burks, Brian Powell, and Charlie Allen, discussed some possibilities of additional openings and developed a set of options to consider. Bill Bibbins,

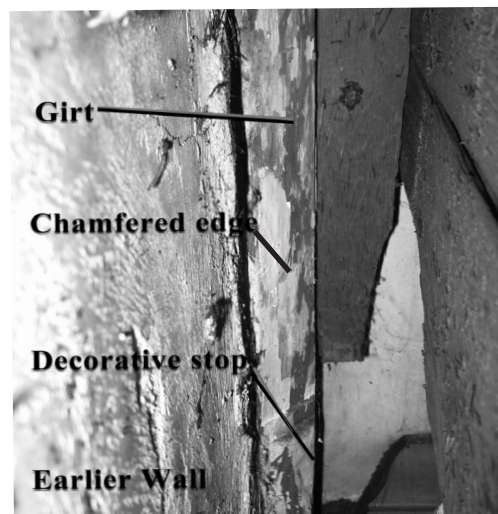
Heli Meltsner, and Kathy Born were also consulted independently, and it was agreed to make a second set of exploratory openings in the two rooms on the west side of the building.

It was decided not to recommend openings on the east side of the building, as the east side seems clearly to be a First Period house. In the West Par-

lor (Bosphorus Room), we planned to expose the summer beam by cutting the nails that attach the bottom of the casing to the side and to cut two windows behind the shutters in the window seat on the west wall to allow us to look at the wall's construction.

In the staircase from the Chandler Room to the office, we lifted a wooden plank and cut a hole in the plaster to reveal the back of the joint,

made up of the center post, the summer beam, and the girt in the Bosphorus Room. This allowed us to see if the post continued through two stories or if part of it had been replaced. Finally, in the West Chamber (Naples Room) we cut a window into the casing around the corner post in the southwest corner of the room, so we could see if the corner post on the first floor also continued through both stories.



Gavin W. Kleespies



Gavin W. Kleespies

Back of Bosphorus Room joint from opening in back stairs

Process (continued)

What we discovered was confusing. The summer beam is pine and has been severely cut back. It appears that the small block set into the center post was part of the summer beam and that those two members were built to fit each other. The summer beam has been cut almost in half, so there is no way

Jonathan Detwiler and Charlie Allen uncovering summer beam. Summer beam and center post joint showing earlier tenon. Detail showing paint line on post.



Gavin W. Kleespies

to see evidence of possible decorations. Because we dropped only the horizontal cover, we could not see if there was any whitewash on the sides of the beam. Given how the beam and post fit together, it was suggested that the post had been cut back and cased at two different times. A small piece at the top of the post protrudes farther than the rest and has a paint line on it. There are also two small fill pieces on either side of the casing of the summer beam that correspond to that paint line. This suggests that the casing and cutting back happened in several stages.

The opening behind the shutters in the west window tells an entirely different story. There you can see a decorated oak end girt running from the southwest corner toward the window and from the window to the northwest corner. There is plaster on the walls

under the furred-out wall; in general, this is consistent with what we saw on the south wall.

On the second floor we found some answers. Inside the southwest closet, we removed a small square piece from the casing on the corner post to see if it was continuous with the post on the first floor. It appears to be. The post has been cut back, but you can see the remnants of a chamfered edge, and the post is oak, as was seen on the first floor. In the stairway from the Chandler Room to the office, we removed a small amount of plaster and were able to see the back of the pine post in the West Parlor. This is a two-story post and is fitted to the girt going into it, which also appears to be pine.

We believe that the south and west walls have whitewashed, decorated oak structural members, the north and east walls have whitewashed but not decorated pine structural members, and the summer beam is pine and severely cut back.

Thus we have a fascinating view into the construction of the house; however, it is difficult to make any strong conclusions about what it means. It seems plausible that only a portion of Richard Hooper's house survived, which might explain the unusual mixture of building materials and styles on the west side. Considering the findings of our dendrochronology study (see page 12), it seems unlikely that the east side is the original side of the house or that nothing of Hooper's house survived. However, that does not exclude the possibility that the east side is older, but not originally on this site, or that a large portion of the house was removed and replaced. Many questions remain, but we have exposed much more of the history of the house and now have more information, if not a more clearly stated history.

Paint Color Choice

By Gavin W. Kleespies

Working in a house with such a complicated history, the choice of a paint treatment is not simple. With an extensive paint analysis underway, we were faced with choosing a time period to uncover. The interpretation of the rooms is not the same as the period treatment of the walls. So the paint choice did not dictate future displays, but there is certainly a connection, and it was a choice that had consequences for the use of the house.

The house is a First Period structure that was remodeled in the Georgian style in the 18th century, decorated with scenic wallpaper in the 19th century, and then given a Colonial Revival addition in the 20th century.

We discussed the possibility of using different time periods in different rooms to reflect the building's history, but this seemed confusing. We talked about using the colors from the era of the American Revolution, but unless we removed the 19th-century additions and the renovations made by Joseph Chandler, there would always be inconsistent items in each room. We also consulted other professionals from the Cambridge Historical Commission, the Longfellow House, and Historic New England. In the end, it seemed that the only honest choice was to include the whole history of the building, and that meant we chose the period of the last alterations to the house. In other words, we used Joseph Chandler's colors.

The Families (continued)

Henry Hooper

Henry Hooper was 16 when his mother, the Widow Hooper, died, in 1701. He was apprenticed to a physician; then, after his marriage in 1716, he returned to the family farm. A detailed bill suggests the extensive repairs he had to make as well as the work involved in “taking down, Carting and Raising” a house. We believe this suggests that he attached another building to the existing house.

Hooper soon bought out his sister’s share of their father’s estate and set about acquiring additional land. Much of it was prime meadow and salt marsh, and one lot provided direct access to a dock on the Charles River.

It was, commented the landscape historian Karen Forslund Falb, “a country seat with a grand appearance as seen from the road and the river.”

By 1733, however, Hooper had moved to Newport, R.I., selling the property to Cornelius Waldo. GWK

Cornelius Waldo

Cornelius Waldo was perhaps not the first, but certainly not the last, Cambridge developer. Much of his wealth came from the slave trade. He was one of the city’s leading merchants with his ship, *Africa*.

Waldo made a number of improvements, including casing some of the exposed beams and adding some Georgian panelings. In

continued on page 13

Using Dendrochronology to Date the House

By Anne Grady

Since 1980, when Sally Zimmerman and I prepared the Historic Structure Report on the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, using dendrochronology to obtain a scientifically accurate construction date for the house has been on our wish list. We learned in graduate school that dendrochronology, first developed in 1929 for dating Anasazi sites in the Southwest, could give the date that trees were felled in a region. In early New England, carpenters used unseasoned timbers because they were easier to work.

Construction generally began in the same year that the trees were felled or shortly thereafter. Oak was the usual species for building frames in the 17th century.



Dr. Daniel Miles of Oxford Dendrochronology taking samples in May 2009

A dendrochronology study of the house presented several problems. First, in 1980, the data on tree-ring widths in the Northeast necessary for dating had not been collected. In the last ten years, what is known as a reference chronology has been developed for oak. Second, on the three floors of living space in the house, much of the framing was concealed in cases or behind later walls. Accessing the timbers would be destructive. Third we identified oak timbers in only a few places; the rest are either pine or are painted so that their species can’t easily be determined. A pine chronology is in the works.

In our Historic Structure Report, we cited evidence that the earliest parts of the house — the front rooms

on the first and second floor — were the result of joining two early building components. At least one of those parts might have been built between the time that Richard Hooper purchased the land in 1685 and 1689, when he is recorded as living there. We were hampered in determining which portion was the older by not being able to examine more of the framing, which would have provided clues to the age of the building. With the evidence we had, we speculated that the west rooms and the chimney bay



Cynthia Brennan

were the earliest part, based on joist spacing in the west part (17-18 inches), which was narrower than that in the east part (19-20 inches). Also, when we looked above

the west part’s current ceilings, we noted plaster between the joists, a ceiling treatment consistent with the construction of the better houses of the later 17th century. The east component appeared to be the frame of a previously existing structure of not quite the same dimensions, which had been joined to the west part. The chamfering of the few exposed beams of the east part was a simple sort that was used into the 18th century. Dendrochronology, we thought, could verify our speculations, even though it might not indicate the date that the frames were joined.

Probate documents suggest when the joining might have occurred. They indicate that the house had fallen into such disrepair that no one would live in it after the death of Hooper’s widow, in 1701. It was

Dendrochronology (continued)

not until 1716, when Hooper's son, Henry, charged his father's estate £61 for various building materials, that the house was apparently made livable again. It seemed logical that the frames were joined during the repairs. The expense list even included "taking down, Carting and Raising" a building frame.

Recent investigations have raised new questions about the construction history of the house. A 2008 probing revealed that in the west rooms, most of the framing members in the south and west walls (to the extent that they could be viewed through the new holes) were oak, while those on the north and east walls were pine. This finding was unexpected. It seemed that perhaps the severe damage referred to in documents might have necessitated substantial rebuilding of the north and east portions of the west part in 1716 as well as adding a frame on the east. Pine might have been chosen for the repairs in 1716 because, by then, oak supplies were running out.

Given the excitement generated by the investigations in 2008, the Society agreed to a dendrochronology study of whatever suitable timbers could be found, knowing that some timbers might not date. On May 17, 2009, Dr. Daniel Miles and Michael Worthington of the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory in England (website: dendrochronology.com) examined the house and found two oak timbers from which to take core samples in the west cellar and one in the east cellar. Three samples are fewer than the number needed to verify the date of a building.

Only one of the three timbers could be definitely dated, that coming from a sample in the west cellar, giving a date of 1685.

A Primer on Dendrochronology

Dendrochronology, according to a primer from the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory, is "the answer to the building historian's dream, an absolute dating process accurate to a single year, if not the season the tree was felled."

"The way dendrochronology works is relatively simple," the primer notes. "As a tree grows, it puts on a new growth or tree-ring every year.... Trees grow, and put on tree-rings, at different rates according to the weather in any given year.... In effect, the span of years during which a tree has lived will be represented by a unique fingerprint."

"To obtain this fingerprint," the primer continues, "a radial section of timber [usually a core one-half inch in diameter] from the pith or centre of the tree out to the bark edge" is taken, then measured and "compared against a dated sequence, known as a reference chronology."



Dr. Miles holding a core sample, May 2009

Cynthia Breman
While dendrochronology can give only "the date or date-range

when the tree was felled,... we know from numerous documentary sources that oak" — as in the beams examined at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House — "was used 'green', or unseasoned. This means that construction probably took place in the year of felling or within a year or two thereafter."

The Families (continued)

1742, he placed a "to be lett" advertisement in the *Boston Newsletter* for a "house with gardens and other accommodations to a gentleman for a country seat."

And it is Waldo, courtesy of one of his sons, who left the most personal record of any of the owners' presence — the words "Daniel Waldo" scratched in a window pane in the West Chamber (which was broken in 1982). A "small act of graffiti," commented Kelly H. L'Ecuyer in her report on the house.

He had bought the house from the last of the Hoopers in 1733; his widow sold it to the first of the Lees. MK

Joseph Lee

Joseph Lee bought the house in 1758 and owned it until his death in 1802. As "Judge Lee," he is the most public figure among all the owners of the house.

Born in ca. 1710, he is described in the records of his Harvard class of 1729 as "one of the more disorderly members of a quiet class." He became a merchant and a land speculator and married the youngest daughter of Lieutenant Governor Spencer Phipps in 1755. Three years later he bought the Brattle Street house.

A number of civic activities engaged his attention. Lee was elected to the Massachusetts Bay House of Representatives but was denied reelection in 1766 by the radical faction. In 1769, he was appointed to the Court

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The 1932 Measured Drawings

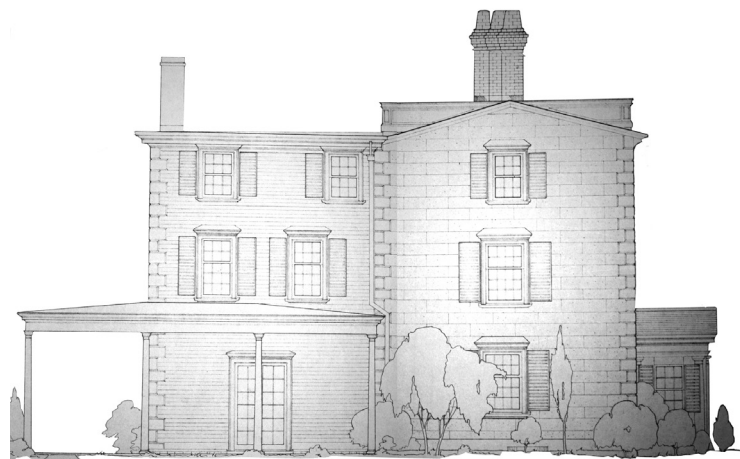
By Michael Kenney

The measured drawings of architectural features of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House seen throughout this book are, we believe, published here for the first time. They are the product of an assistance program for architects and engineers during the Depression of the 1930s.

The house had been given to Frances Emerson by her father as a Christmas present in 1923. The measured drawings appear to be a gift from her husband, William.

William Emerson was the dean of MIT's School of Architecture and, as an architect himself, had tastes more contemporary than those prevailing in the 18th century. But as the Depression worsened, the Boston Society of Architects and the Engineering Society of Boston sponsored an Emergency Planning and Research Bureau to provide work for architects and engineers. Among those involved in the project was Ralph W. Horne, an MIT graduate and later president of the engineering firm of Fay, Spofford and Thorndike.

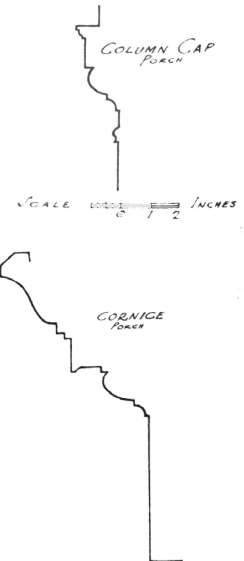
The measured drawings, the work of F. L. Tittle and E. T. Sperring, are credited to the Emergency Planning and Research Bureau. This group was apparently absorbed by the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, the New Deal agency headed by Harold L. Ickes. An initial publication, *A Report on Slums and Blighted Areas*, included Boston.



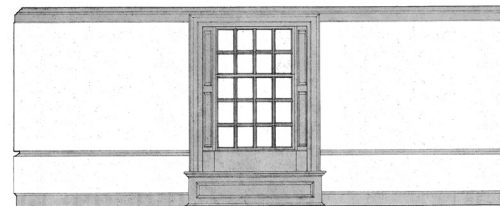
WEST ELEVATION
Side
Scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"

• The Judge Joseph Lee House • Cambridge Mass •

BALUSTER

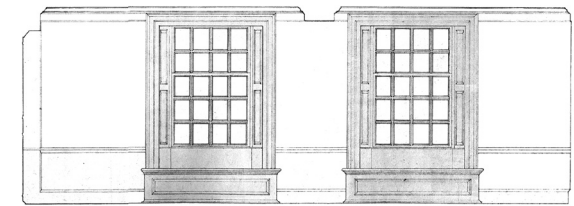


SCALE 1/8" = 1'-0"



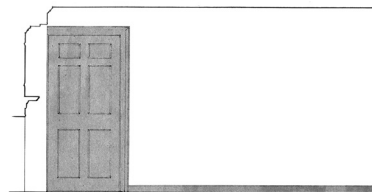
WEST

West wall, West Parlor (Bosphorus Room)



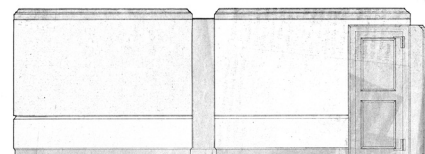
SOUTH

South wall, West Parlor (Bosphorus Room)



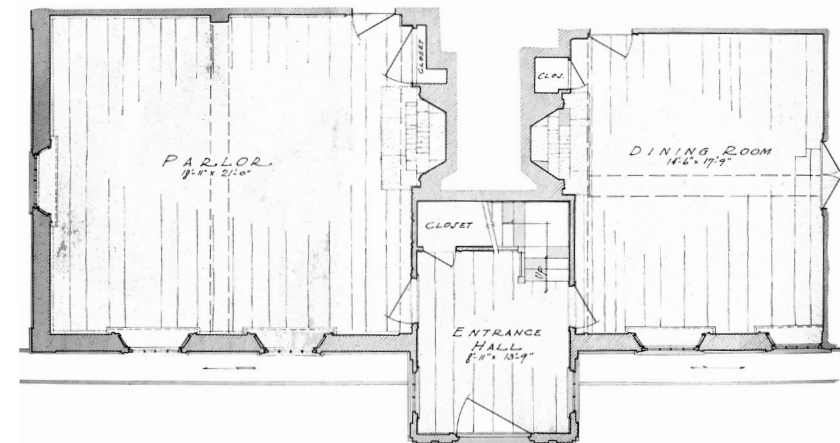
NORTH

North wall, East Parlor



NORTH

North wall, West Parlor (Bosphorus Room)



1932 Tittle and Sperring drawings (not to scale)

A Roof over Our Heads

By Charlie Allen

Today, the greatest asset of the Cambridge Historical Society is the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, and with it comes the very real obligation of the stewardship of the second oldest house in Cambridge.

The house was last renovated in 1916 by the architect Joseph Everett Chandler for its new owner, Austin White. It was rewired, replumbed, given an addition, and freshly painted. It was the 1916 counterpart of the large renovations we see up and down Brattle Street today.

Frances Emerson donated the house to the Society in 1957, with a \$20,000 endowment from which only the interest could be used for maintenance. As long as the house was used by the Society, it was ours. Failing to do so would cause the title to the house to be transferred to Harvard.

Mrs. Emerson's gift was thoughtful but inadequate. A study by the Society in 1967 found that beetles and fungus were destroying the house. In 1969, a major project to repair the basement and foundation timbers was undertaken, which included fumigating the house for three weeks. The 1970s brought roof leaks and collapsed ceilings, as well as leaks in the plumbing and heating systems. An assessment and another round of major repairs followed in 1982, funded by the Massachusetts Historical Society.

The most recent chapter began with yet another roof leak. This time, though, the resources to properly address the situation were at hand. Community Preservation Act funding from the City of Cambridge in



Replacing the roof in 2006

2006 allowed us to replace or repair all of the roofing, rebuild the rear chimney, and restore the roof balustrade.

Shortly after the roof project ended in late 2007, we found failed wiring while repairing a light that had stopped working. A cursory inspection of several



Rewiring the archives in 2008

Chandler wiring. The Society received a grant from the Community Preservation Act, this time to rewire the house. The grant also provided funds to repair and repaint the walls after the rewiring work.

As they often say, "The rest is history." You'll read elsewhere how a subsequent analysis of the paint

used in the house has added greatly to our understanding of its history.

We owe a large debt of gratitude to the succession of presidents, executive directors, and dedicated members who cared for the house with few funds as the systems aged. Out of necessity, their approach was most often a holding action, purposely doing no harm to the historic fabric of the house. They fought the infestations and leaks, tended antiquated mechanical systems, and tried to keep paint on the house while waiting for a better day.

When the Society was awarded the first CPA grant, I was asked to sit on the CHS Council and assume the chair of the Facilities Committee. The officers thought having an old house renovator on board to oversee the grant would be a good step. Our process can be recognized by most home owners: I interviewed the mason, roofer, and carpenter, wrote a detailed scope of work, obtained fixed pricing, and supervised the ongoing work.

Being able to write a proper scope of work for what ailed our antique house was a real joy, all made possible by funds from the CPA matching grant and the determination of the CHS Council to fund the matching portions of the grant to the fullest extent.

There is, of course, much left to do. The shutters have sagged their last sag, the Chandler plumbing system must be replaced, and soon we'll need to paint the exterior. Stewardship is continual, but now it is a responsibility with much more promise than ever before that it can be accomplished.

The Families (continued)

of Common Pleas but was rejected as being unfit for a permanent appointment — “purely politics,” as one comment put it.

He later stuck his neck out further, accepting appointment to perhaps the most controversial, and certainly most reviled, body in the colony, the Mandamus Council, a body appointed by the king in 1774 to replace the elected officials.

So Lee was not just a Tory but a very public one. When he was alerted that protesters were gathering against him, he hastily resigned — “on first rumor of disturbance,” said General Thomas Gage, the military governor. His neighbor, Lieutenant Governor Oliver, waited to resign until the crowd surrounded his house.

But Judge Lee was covering his bets. He had published notices in the Boston papers of his resignation from the Mandamus Council and, on that basis, obtained a letter of safe conduct from the Charlestown Committee of Correspondence.

“Having given satisfaction” of future good conduct, the committee declared, “we doubt not he will be treated by all the Friends of our happy Constitution, with such civility and respect, as shall do honour to our common Cause.”

However, when Tory Row’s world turned upside down after public protests took to the streets, Judge Lee followed his neighbors to Boston, which was held by the British.

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Uncovering the History Beneath the Paint

By Brian Powell

Our best old houses give up their secrets only slowly. The Hooper-Lee-Nichols House has enjoyed the attention of antiquarians for many years, using the eyes and tools of different periods. We’ve just completed another investigation, one in which I had two roles: joining in the targeted probes done as the renovation and reinterpretation process began, and studying the trim paints.

In recent years, a comparative analysis of paint sequences has become a standard tool in the study of old buildings. If that door casing shows a deeper paint accretion than this window architrave, it is presumably older. Working element by element and space by space, much of a building’s history can be reconstructed.

After a close look at exposed features for clues of changes, painted surfaces on representative elements are examined with a field microscope to gauge depths and note interesting paint layers. Plugs of paint, including their substrates of wood or plaster, are then removed for laboratory study. Parts of the samples are cast in resin and polished to form cross sections — sandwiches of layers — that are photographed at high magnifications in two types of light, visible and ultraviolet.

By closely examining these photographs, the relative ages of elements can be determined and features of particular treatments, like wood graining or polychromy, can be seen. If color reconstruction is also a goal of the project, the layers of the target time are identified and the uncast parts of the samples are further processed.

The strength of cross-sectional analysis is in establishing sequences. It is not necessarily able to determine specific dates of added features or even to provide bracketing dates unless a material with a known date of introduction is present. (If a layer contains

zinc white, say, it can’t predate the early 19th century.) Therefore, other types of investigation are often necessary to guide and inform paint research. Chief among these are physical, documentary, and stylistic evidence.

The early history of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House is particularly challenging to reconstruct, for its three 18th-century owners, Henry Hooper, Cornelius Waldo, and Joseph Lee, all made significant alterations in a short period of time during which there was little technical change and much stylistic overlap. Our study of its paints has allowed us to tighten the house’s historic narrative and has added some interesting details in the five spaces we looked at — the firsts and second-floor front rooms and the stair hall.



Brian Powell doing a field inspection

Lewis Bushnell

Paint Analysis (continued)

Our most important finding has been that the building was given its Georgian elements in two stages, not in a single campaign as had been thought. We believe these remodelings were done by Cornelius Waldo in the 1730s and Judge Lee in the 1750s. The extensive work done by Henry Hooper in 1717, after the building had gone through a period of decay, was done in a late First Period style, with glimmerings of proto-Georgian.



Brian Powell explaining sampling techniques to Karen Davis and Charlie Allen in the East Chamber

Lewis Bushnell

Resources

Among the many documents and early images of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, a few have been particularly helpful. The starting point for any study of the building is the excellent Historic Structure Report (HSR) done in 1981 by Anne Grady and Sally Zimmerman.

The earliest surviving record of changes is an accounting of repair costs incurred in 1717 by Henry Hooper, the son of the first owner. It doesn't describe the work but allows inference based on a comprehensive list of material costs. Two records also survive of work done in the mid-1850s.

Lois Lilley Howe's *Details from Old New England Houses* (1913) includes a measured drawing of the main staircase before its restoration. A series of elevations done in 1932 by the architects Tittle and Spering shows the hall after its restoration, as well as views of other rooms. There are also a few late 19th- and early 20th-century interior photographs in the collection, one of which records the east wall of the East Parlor during an interim period.

I was also assisted toward the end of the study by a group of vernacular architecture scholars and craftspeople. This group, which included Grady and Zimmerman, conducted the probes in which some concealed elements were examined.

The West Parlor (Bosphorus Room)

A quick glance around the West Parlor finds quite regular Georgian features with a single discordant element — the large closet door at the north end of the chimney wall has a panel distribution that differs markedly from the rest of the wall. Its six panels are arranged in four rows that alternate, from the top down, single, paired, single, paired. Its top and bottom rails are narrow and appear to have been cut to fit this opening.

The panels to the south, between the fireplace recess and the hall door, show three sets of two stacked panels, six in all, with the upper panels slightly taller. In vertical dimensions, they match the panels of the front hall and north wall doors and, at a glance, appear to be of a piece with them.

Anyone might assume from these gross features that the two doors and the panels to the south of the fire

The Families (continued)

Just two years later, he was back home in Cambridge. He returned to his house after the 1776 evacuation of British from Boston and the departure of the Continental Army that followed.

Lee spent the rest of his life in his Brattle Street home, living to be the last surviving member of his Harvard class. His obituary in the *Columbian Centennial* took pains to address his political trimming: "Attached to government from principle, he was a good subject to his king, under whom he executed the duties of an important office with fidelity and honor — and with equal fidelity he adhered to the government of the United States, since the Revolution." MK

Thomas Lee

Judge Lee died wealthy and without children, leaving the house and farm to his nephews, Thomas and Joseph Lee. Thomas immediately bought out Joseph's portion of the property. Like Judge Lee, Thomas was an affluent merchant from the prosperous trading town of Salem. He had also made a fortune as a master mariner. The well-connected Lees were closely related to many of their upper-class neighbors along Brattle Street. However, they did not wish to live in the old house.

In 1803 Thomas built a Federal mansion for his family on part of the farm's acreage and began nearly a half-century's practice of renting out the old house while living in his new house next door. He began a second tradition

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The West Parlor



Nichols Family Papers, CHS

Looking east, ca. 1875



CHS Records

Southwest corner, ca. 1925

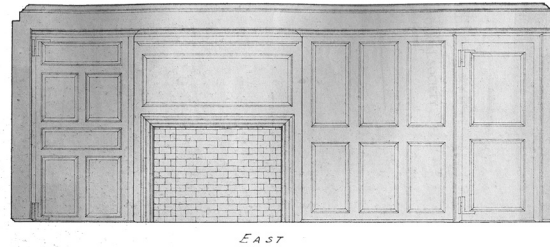


CHS Records

CHS members inspecting the scenic wallpaper, ca. 1956

Paint Analysis (continued)

place date to the same renovation, and that the north side closet door was added, reused, at some later point. Paint research shows that this is not the case; it is the south side paneling that is later.



Measured drawing of the east wall of the West Parlor, 1932

CHS Maps and Plans Collection

The West Parlor's older Georgian elements share a paint accretion that begins with a thin red wash. Their first true paint treatment is a brownish salmon applied over a gray base coat. (These color descriptions are based on their appearances under the microscope.) Elements showing this sequence include the hall and north wall doors and their architraves,¹ most post and beam casings, the crown moldings, and, on the chimney wall, all elements except the paneling between the fireplace and hall door. The apparently reused north side closet door also shows all of these layers and therefore appears to have been installed in the building's first Georgian remodel.

The brownish-salmon treatment shows a refinement in the picking out of the fireplace bolection molding² in a very dark gray or black applied directly over the salmon. The paneling between the fireplace and hall door begins its paint sequence with the treatment

¹An ornamental band framing a rectangular opening.

²A bolection is an applied, projecting molding, usually with a convex center part, often used to frame fireplace openings in the early 18th century.

that appears immediately after the brownish salmon on the older elements, a glazed gray. That this paneling is younger than the hall door is also shown by how the door's architrave is put together. Were these elements all the same age, it is likely that a single board would have been used as both the farthest south stile (continuous vertical member) of the paneling and the door's north side architrave stile, with an added molding dividing its two sides to make them appear to be separate elements. This is a very commonly seen detail. But the door architrave was put together independently, with its upper rail continuing to the north edge of the individually applied north stile.



CHS Records

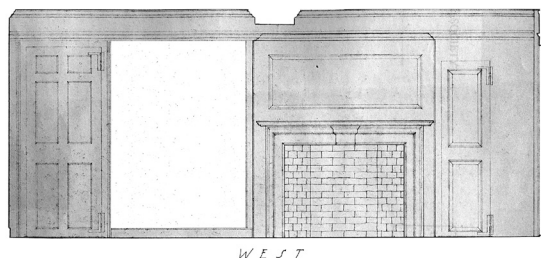
East wall of the West Parlor, ca. 1925

The added chimney wall paneling was installed during the room's second Georgian renovation, which also repositioned the exterior walls inward and added the present window architraves and seats. All three of the window assemblies show sequences that match the added paneling. The preexisting crown molding was repositioned on the new furred-in south and west walls at this time.

Paint Analysis (continued)

The East Parlor

As in the West Parlor, the Georgian trim of the East Parlor dates to two separate projects. The first fitted the room out as a kitchen. (Whether it was already used as a kitchen is not known.) The second, which furred in the front (south) wall and added the window seats, was presumably done when the West Parlor got its window seats and when cooking was moved to the rear of the house. Unlike the West Parlor, which saw little subsequent change, the East Parlor was updated again in the Federal period, when it got its present mantel and front hall door; it saw a few changes in the mid 19th and early 20th centuries.



Measured drawing of the west wall of the East Parlor, 1932

The earliest trim paint on the exposed features in the East Parlor is a very dark red-brown, which appears on only a few elements, including the hall door architrave, the southwest post cover board, the northwest post casing, and the pilaster strip at the south side of the fireplace recess. It does not appear on the chimney girt or its crown molding, the summer beam or its crown molding, the raised field panel over the fireplace or its rails and stiles, or the north end closet door or its architrave. These are Georgian II, beginning their paint sequences with the treatment that followed the red-brown.

The upper part of the fireplace's shallow recess has an unusual form: it appears to show an inner cased beam with a corner molding below and to the north of the main chimney girt. The soffit (underside) of this apparently shallow casing shows the red-brown, as do the sections of crown molding that hug it in the fireplace recess. The length of molding that continues at the same level above the north end closet door is later, showing the Georgian II sequence. Looking closely at the crown molds of each age, their profiles differ a bit. So this area has been altered.

Inside the north end closet, an old bake oven and the north end of a former, larger, fire box survive. At the top of the shallow area between the old fireplace and the present closet wall, the soffit board shows a telling pattern. Against the old fireplace wall is a bare wood strip with no paint on it. Running parallel to it toward the room is a band of dark paint that is the early red-brown, preserved with no overpaint. This records the placement of a Georgian I period crown molding. It may have been this piece that was cut down for the short length now on the north side of the fireplace recess.

No other presently exposed element in the East Parlor bears this early red-brown, so little of the early Georgian kitchen survives. But the red-brown can be found in the present pantry, on the vertical sheathing boards to the south of the arched doorway. It is very possible that the pantry, whose present trim was installed mostly by Chandler, was a separate space in the early 18th century and was painted to match the larger, adjoining room. (It may even have been in place before that.) But it is also

The East Parlor



Northwest corner, ca. 1950

A Tribute to William Emerson, CHS



Federal mantel, ca. 1925

CHS Records



East Parlor, 2009

Gavin W. Kleespies

The East Parlor



CHS Records

West wall, ca. 1925



CHS Records

Pantry door on east wall, ca. 1925



Gavin W. Kleespies

East Parlor, 2009

Paint Analysis (continued)

possible that these boards once faced into the old kitchen and were moved here subsequently. A probe on the East Parlor side of these walls, which we did not make during the recent study, might settle the question. If they show the red-brown, the pantry was likely in place during the first Georgian period.

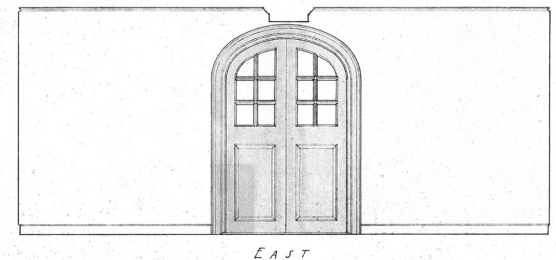
The second Georgian renovation put the chimney wall in its present state, except for the Federal mantel and hall door. It also furred in the south (front) wall and added the window seats and crown molding. The double-leafed, arched doorway in the east wall appears to have been added shortly afterward and to have been painted to match the existing trim. The clearest proof of this is in the differing appearances of the base layers of the multilayered treatments in ultraviolet light.

We might expect that the same work would have continued a crown molding around the whole room, but none now appears on the north or east wall. In fact, moldings were put up there and later taken down. Diagonal paint scars and small infill pieces at the east ends of the front girt and the summer beam record the change. Paint comparisons of samples from inside one of the summer beam's diagonal scars and the mantel show that the moldings came down when the Federal changes were made. At that time the mantel didn't have a shelf. The shelf's original black paint treatment places it in the Greek Revival period. The whole mantel may have been marbled at that time, as was the fashion.

The surviving Georgian features of all periods show matching later paint sequences with one exception, the arched doors. Both leaves share the early treatments found on the second Georgian period ele-

ments and the room's most recent paints. But they lack the middle series. Rather, they show at this level a sequence of paints that do not otherwise appear in the room. This suggests that the doors hung here for some years, were moved elsewhere, and then were reinstalled in their old opening. Two bits of evidence show that this is exactly what happened. One is Susan Nichols Carter's 1893 letter, recalling her early memories of the house:

At the time my father took the house, two paneled doors which now enclose the kitchen closet, formed an alcove room in the parlor on the right of the front door. This little room Mr. and Miss Sales used as a dining room in winter, as the house had no furnace at that time and was very cold.



CHS Maps and Plans Collection

Measured drawing of the east wall of the East Parlor, 1932

Photographs taken during the later Nichols years show the east wall with the arched architrave in place but without the doors. A six-panel door appears just to the north of the arch where there is now a short infill piece in the baseboard. A solid wall appears at the north end of today's pantry, where there is now a door. During his restoration work in 1916, Chandler reworked the area and restored the arched doors.

Paint Analysis (continued)

The West Chamber (Naples Room)

Except in its earliest years, the West Chamber saw less change than any of the five rooms we studied. The chief change since the room's Georgian I remodeling has been the addition of the two closets in the west end corners. Confirmation in both field microscopy and cross-sectional analysis was made especially easy because of the very distinct Georgian paint treatment.

All the early elements were primed in gray and finish coated in red, with the exception of the baseboards, which were painted a darker red or red-brown. Field microscopy found the original red on all of the non-closet doors and their architraves, all of the window architraves, the exposed crown moldings and post casings, and, in traces, on the window sash. The red also appears on the corner posts and cornice parts inside the west end closets, whose parts were cut to let the original trim run past them.

The closet trim facing the room shows a paint sequence starting with the treatment that follows the red on the older elements. It is likely that the closets were added by Deborah Carpenter in or before 1823, when she put up the present scenic wallpaper.

The only trim in the room that does not show the early reds or match the closet trim are the three lengths of bolelection molding framing the fireplace.

The fireplace appears in an old undated photograph that seems to be the same age as a photograph of the West Parlor's chimney wall dated "Christmas 1875." The fireplace is shown with an iron insert set well inside a surrounding element that could be the

present bolelection. Is this today's bolelection or another molding?

Field microscopy immediately showed that the bolelection's early paints differ from those of the room's other trim. But an early bolelection might well have been picked out differently, like the one in the parlor below. The subsequent layers, as seen both under the field microscope and in visible light in cross section, initially appear to be a match, with the somewhat thicker sequence on the bolelection perhaps explained by the touching up of an element worn by proximity to the fire box. But in the ultraviolet, the similar light layers take on quite different appearances, showing that the later bolelection sequence is different. Therefore this bolelection molding is a genuine antique, but from someplace else. It was likely put here by Joseph Chandler.

During the repair and preservation work in the 1980s, a section of the wall to the south of the fireplace was hinged to display evidence of rare early faux paneling. There was a very brief time in the transition from First Period taste to the Georgian when panel construction was suggested by the surface application of faux edge moldings to sheathing. Students of the period concur that this probably was not happening in New England as early as the 1685 building of the house, so it more likely dates to the 1717 renovations of Henry Hooper.

Paint evidence doesn't help us to understand or date the faux paneling, as no paint can be found on it, though the wood is darker in the panel areas than where the faux rails and stiles would have been. But the paneling does contribute to speculation on the greater history of the house, considered below.

continued on page 24

The East Chamber



Northeast corner, ca. 1925



Southwest corner, ca. 1925



Naples Room, 2009

Fashion and Function in the Naples Room

By Heli Meltsner

Called the Naples Room after its scenic wallpaper added in the early 19th century, this room underwent repeated changes between its original construction and 1916.

Once the east and west halves of the house were joined after 1716, it was called the West Chamber and used as a second-floor bedroom. Many of the owners updated the room to conform to current fashions, others, to render it more functional.

Significant changes occurred in the first part of the 18th century. The owner (either Henry Hooper after 1716 or Cornelius Waldo between 1733 and 1742) altered the room to suit the Georgian style in vogue at the time. The room's First Period features — heavy, exposed, and whitewashed (and perhaps decorated) posts and beams — were covered with wooden casings, and the walls were treated with plaster. The window openings were also made symmetrical to give them a more formal appearance. These alterations changed the room from a simple space to a high-style room, suitable for a wealthy physician or country gentleman.



Gavin W Kleespies

Another Hooper update was

to the fireplace wall, traditionally the focus of decorative attention as well as the source of heat. Broad, unpainted vertical boards were laid around the high fireplace opening. Carpenters applied a system of

thin wooden strips to form a grid that would mimic expensive Georgian raised wall paneling. This faux paneling is believed to be unique in New England.

Judge Joseph Lee, who purchased the house in 1758, must have considered the room old-fashioned. He updated it by plastering over the faux paneling and installing figured wallpaper throughout. Samples of this paper were recovered during a 1981 restoration project and were dated to between 1760 and 1780. On the samples removed from the walls, you can see the English tax stamp on the reverse side.



Northwest corner, 2009

Gavin W Kleespies

At the same time, Lee probably took advantage of new building practices by reducing the size of the original large fireplace to throw more heat into the room instead of up the chimney. Lee fled from Cambridge during the Revolution but was the only Tory allowed to return to his Tory Row mansion. He lived out the rest of his life in the house and continued to enjoy his stylistic and functional revisions to the room.

When Deborah Carpenter inherited the house in 1823, like her great-uncle Judge Lee, she made both aesthetic and practical alterations. As the original room lacked storage space, she added capacious closets at the west end. Soon thereafter she covered Lee's wallpaper with a paper picturing the Bay of

Naples. Manufactured in Paris by Dufour, the leading scenic wallpaper company in the 1820s, it was an expensive addition to the private second



South wall, 2009

Gavin W Kleespies

floor of the house. This is even more unusual considering that Deborah Carpenter lived in the house for only a few months before her husband died and she returned to her father's house.

Over ninety years passed before the room underwent another stylistic renovation. In 1916 Austin White hired the architect Joseph Everett Chandler to update the room in the prevailing Colonial Revival style. Chandler's alterations were restrained. He added a molding and "fine old Dutch tiles" to the fireplace surround and restored the scenic wallpaper. When the paper again needed restoration in 1957, conservers installed a movable panel to enable visitors to see the wall's earlier treatment. Once again visible are the ghost lines of the ca. 1717-1742 faux paneling wall, formerly hidden by the wallpaper.

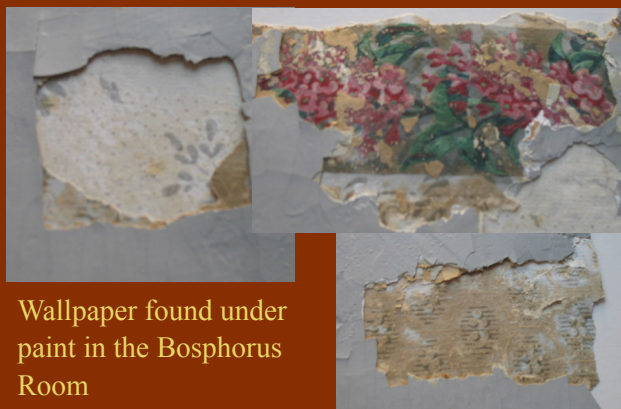
Today, the Naples Room demonstrates continuous changes in attitude toward the styles of the past. Early 18th-century owners wished to disguise the First Period features they thought awkward and backwards, wanting instead to copy the newer Georgian English models. By the early 20th century, its owners felt proud of their Yankee Colonial heritage and wanted to display the room's antiquity. Current interest lies in explicating the lifespan of the room over its total period of use.

Restoration Work Uncovers Wallpaper

By Gavin W. Kleespies

While the contractors were preparing the Bosphorus Room to be painted, they were lightly sanding and scraping the plaster walls below the Dufour “Paysage Turc” paper. To everyone’s surprise, they lifted large pieces of wallpaper that had been covered by layers of paint.

They stopped working, and the CHS staff reviewed the records. We found that this wallpaper had been discovered before. There are at least three distinct papers under a number of layers of paint, although one seems to be a border. The bottom layer is a white paper with a light gray pattern of dots and small flowers. A number of samples of this paper were uncovered in 1981 and are filed in our wallpaper book.



Gavin W. Kleespies

This book contains samples and a note that says: “August 1981 — This paper is the bottom layer of 2 wallpapers beneath the French scenic wallpaper (the so-called ‘Paysage Turc’) in the west parlor of the H-L-N House. There is an English Tax stamp on the reverse of the large piece. The date of the wallpaper ranges between 1760-80.”

The second layer of wallpaper uncovered appears to have a red and green flowered border and a simple gray or brown pattern. This was also seen in 1981, and our wallpaper book has a few samples and a note that says: “August 1981 - This paper is the top layer of 2 wallpapers beneath the French scenic wallpaper (the so-called ‘Paysage Turc’) in the west parlor of the H-L-N house. It dates to ca. 1820 and is probably French.”

In the East Parlor, when the painters were trying to fix a buckle in the north wall that abuts the kitchen, a large piece of plaster fell off to reveal previously unknown wallpaper. This wallpaper was beneath hand-split lath and on a board wall. The opening was enlarged and the lath removed to get a better look at the paper.



Wallpaper fragments uncovered in the East Parlor

Unlike the wallpaper we uncovered in the Bosphorus Room, the Society had no record of this wallpaper. It was decided that this discovery should not be completely recovered, so our contractors built a small window around a portion of the area that was uncovered so that the paper was protected but visible. When the larger exposed area was covered, a small sample was taken to keep with our wallpaper collection, and it was discovered that there was

another wallpaper layer below the first one. This appears to be a gray, blue, and white floral paper.

Around the same time, it was also discovered that the south wall, which had been furred out to make window seats, seems to be made from reused exterior sheathing boards. This wall was covered in a flat white wallpaper that had bubbled and was removed. There was a hole in one board that had been loosely packed with plaster. The plaster pack was removed, and inside, one could see a decorated girt, as you would expect for this side of the building.

Meanwhile, in the East Chamber, our contractor was lightly sanding the girt on the south wall. When a piece of paint chipped off, we could see that there was some sort of floral paper on the beam. This is such a small piece that it is very hard to see anything clearly, but it is definitely a printed paper.

While speaking with Jonathan Detwiler about the construction of the house, we noticed that the electricians had made a hole in the ceiling of the closet in the Naples Room. It appears that

there are about six to eight inches between the ceiling we see and another ceiling above it. This suggests that the ceiling in that room is a drop ceiling and that there may be something above it.



Wallpaper fragment discovered on south girt of the East Chamber

Gavin W. Kleespies

The East Chamber



CHS Records

West wall, ca. 1925



Gavin W. Kleespies



Northeast corner and detail, 2009



Gavin W. Kleespies

Southwest corner, 2009

Paint Analysis (continued)

The East Chamber

The East Chamber is an unusually motley room and for that reason is particularly rewarding to study. It is clear from the framing evidence outlined in the Historical Structure Report that the east frame was constructed separately and joined to the west frame at an early date (see page 6). While nothing in either frame establishes which is the first one on the site (i.e., the original Hooper house), the location of the present chimney suggests that it was the east frame that was brought in.

The west frame is unusual in the size of its footprint, which, with its transverse summer beams, suggests that its rooms may originally have been bisected by partitions. If so, only the east side rooms would have been heated, as the original chimney was likely where the present one stands.

The broad outlines of the east frame are not unusual. They suggest a simple one-over-one, two-story house with a narrow chimney bay at one end. That bay, which would also have housed the original staircase, now holds the East Chamber's southeast alcove and a bathroom installed by Chandler where a side staircase had been. The fact that the East Chamber and Parlor are both heated by a chimney in the west frame strongly suggests that this frame lost its original chimney, which in turn suggests that this side was moved.

The subsequent early history of the east rooms is cloudy, and more so on the second floor than below where the former chimney bay was likely reworked into a buttery/pantry and stairway. In the East Chamber, it appears that in an early period, the pres-

ent alcove was open to the larger room, as the south wall post at their meeting point is decorated on both sides, as would be done along an unbroken wall. However, easily visible paint scars show that the alcove was also once partitioned off. A passage in Susan Nichols Carter's 1893 letter confirms it:

When my father took the house and long afterwards, a little room, separated from the south-east bedroom on the second floor, opened on the side staircase, but it now forms the recess to this room.

So, the Nichols family removed a preexisting partition of unknown date well into their ownership of the building. The generally accepted history of the room presumed one subsequent change: Chandler's removal of selected casings in 1916.

In fact, much of the exposed frame, including the



summer beam, was never cased. While the evidence is scant and equivocal, it is likely that Chandler found and removed casings on only two elements.

To understand what paint evidence can and cannot tell us, it is helpful to begin with the present features and move backward in time.

Gavin W. Kleespies

East Chamber, 2009

Paint Analysis (continued)

The Georgian East Chamber

Unlike the front parlors, the East Chamber was fashioned to be a Georgian style room in a single campaign rather than two. Most of the present trim shows an original paint treatment of dark green over a gray base coat. The dark green appears on all of the nonbaseboard elements of the chimney wall with the exception of the mantel, which is Federal. Dark green appears on the window frames of both the main room and east alcove and can be detected in tiny traces on the older sash. It is also found on the door and door architrave leading to the present bathroom. Paints indicate that the greater part of the main room's baseboards also date to the Georgian renovation, though they show a black treatment where the dark green appears on the upper trim. The north wall alone shows an early dark red at this level, a change discussed below.

The Georgian green treatment appears on none of the exposed frame elements in either the main room or the alcove, with the single exception of the summer beam, which also shows the room's complete subsequent trim paint sequence. It was never cased. The summer beam's crown molding was added in the Georgian remodeling, applied directly to the timber.

A few of the Georgian elements show treatments under the green, including the southwest post casing and the door to the closet at the north end of the chimney wall. That these earlier paints do not match each other and also don't match a treatment

preceding the green on the summer beam indicates that they were reused rather than dating to an earlier campaign to refashion the room in the Georgian style.

The exposed elements bearing the early green treatment reconstruct much of the Georgian room for us, but a few questions remain: chiefly, was the alcove partition part of that room and were the other structural members cased?¹



Delft tiles, installed by Chandler in 1916. Upper from West Chamber, lower from East Chamber

The partition scar in the ceiling paint along the south end of the east girt extends in the same plane as the present wall of the northeast corner bathroom. That wall's trim — the door, door architrave, and baseboard — is all Georgian and shows no evidence

¹ The history of the north wall, which I didn't address, also remains in question and will need to be studied with close reference to the rear part of the house. Chief questions will be (1) was the north girt cased and, if so, did it have a crown molding, and (2) is there evidence for door or window openings of any age? Openings might support speculation on the history of the building's lost lean-to.

of having been moved. This suggests but doesn't prove that the lost alcove wall was an extension of it. The wall would have run along the north side of the posts at the meeting point of the main room and narrow east bay in a way that neither post nor their connecting girt would have been expressed in the chamber. Rather, they would have been seen, whether cased or not, in the small southeast corner room and the side stair hall.

We would have easy proof that the alcove was partitioned in the Georgian renovation if the original paint of its window frame differed from that of the larger room's windows, but they match. The alcove's baseboards are younger and so don't provide a comparison. It is not clear when the floors began to be painted, but when they were, the same paint was used on both sides. That the next two floor paints in the chamber do not appear in the alcove confirms the prior division but doesn't tell its date. So paint evidence and surface clues are consistent with a Georgian division of the space, but they can't prove it. My

supposition is that the wall was there and that it hid the east girt and the present south midwall post, then the southwest corner post of the small corner room. The location of its door can be seen in the floor.

This leaves the question of the Georgian treatment of the front girt, which is presently not cased. The earliest trim it shows is a light green that was also the first treatment on the Federal mantel. Under this paint appear, in scattered spots of chance survival, at least two generations of wallpaper. This is not

Paint Analysis (continued)

surprising. It was common, at least by the early 19th century when they began to seem very archaic, to paper over exposed structural members as though to pretend they weren't there. This appears to have happened here in the late 18th century, perhaps because the room is so low-studded, and papering over the girt made the wall appear taller. This pushes the lack of a casing on the front girt well back in time. That the small area of the southwest post casing which a girt casing would have butted shows the full early paint sequence finally pushes the lack of a casing back to the Georgian renovation. Like the summer beam, this girt was never cased.¹

The last East Chamber casing issue is the treatment of the south midwall post and south end of the girt that hits it from the north. We know from Carter's 1893 letter that her family took down the wall between the chamber and the alcove sometime late in their occupancy. This would have exposed the post and girt. Did the Nichols family then case them? Repeated attempts to detect paint scars of such casings within the partition scars on the timbers and on the plaster surfaces they would have hit have failed, as have attempts to find casing nail holes. Is it possible that the family was aware of the earliest glimmerings of the Colonial Revival and that they found the tooled timbers picturesque and interesting? We know from Mrs. Nichols's memoir that the house had been touted to them as the oldest in Cambridge when they moved in.² The earliest commonly cited starting point of interest in Colonial American artifacts and houses is the famous New England Kitchen exhibit at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition

¹ A more complete description of the findings in the alcove is available online at www.cambridgehistory.org.

² Mrs. George Nichols, "Reminiscences," excerpted on page 32 of the HSR.

in Philadelphia. Perhaps the East Chamber is the beginning of the Colonial Revival in Cambridge.

Paints cannot determine firmly whether the Nichols family cased the post and girt but finally suggest that they did. The sequence on the narrow band of the summer beam exposed when the wall came down and those on the west sides of the post and girt all match and are quite shallow. The first treatment is a light tan that has a very bright yellowish glow in the ultraviolet. It has a very close resemblance to the paint Chandler used in the stair hall and to the paints ascribed to him in the other rooms as well. This, and the shallowness of the sequence, argues that this is his paint too. If so, the Nichols family did case the midwall post and the girt meeting it from the north, and Chandler removed the casings. Why he didn't also expose the alcove's southeast post at the same time is puzzling. Our generation has just exposed it.

The Pre-Georgian East Chamber

Paint evidence gives little help in understanding the original state of the East Chamber or how it may have been modified on its joining to the west frame. Much evidence of early whitewashing survives on its timbers but offers little information. The composition of whitewash is usually very simple, preventing the confident tracing of particular layers from element to element, and, being very brittle, it tends to spall or be scraped off, so deep accretions are rare, preventing even the crudest attempt at dating by comparing layering depths.

Fortunately, gross features offer some guidance. The summer beam shows flat chamfers with lambs tongue stops on both sides of both of its ends at

the present chimney girt and at the girt framing the end bay. It was common in the First Period to concentrate fancier decoration on the more important members, generally the summer beam and chimney girt, and use less ambitious details elsewhere. But here the original chimney girt, presumably the present girt dividing the main room from the alcove bay, shows a flat chamfer with simple "lift stops" on either side of the summer beam rather than lambs tongues. And at the south wall, the chamfer has no terminating detail at all but rather meets the similar chamfer of the post.³ A possible reason for this lack of detail was suggested recently by Anne Grady while discussing the West Parlor's chimney girt, which probes found not to be chamfered at all. While chimney girts were usually decorated, some examples are known where chimney wall sheathing was applied in front of the girt, concealing any tooling entirely.⁴ Such sheathing, presumably "crease" or "shadow" molded on its edges, would likely have hidden the present south midwall post as well. This would explain the girt's tooling. (The mere fact of chamfering does not contradict the possible original hiding of the chimney girt. First Period carpenters sometimes put simple chamfers on edges that were never going to be seen.)

The girt of the present chimney, presumably the original end girt of the west side, is not chamfered at all, as shown by a probe through its casing. Whether it is original to the east frame or was replaced during the early joining to the west frame has not been

³ This end of the beam may have been retooled when the east frame was moved here. See below.

⁴ See Abbott Lowell Cummings, *Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1979), 172, 174.

Paint Analysis (continued)

explored. (Probes showed that, on the first floor, both the summer beam and the present chimney girt were given flat chamfers. Their terminations were not seen.)

The only other presently visible original framing member in the East Chamber is the front girt, the original building's front plate (the beam that received the roof rafters). It shows an unusual right angle chamfer termination at its east end, where a slanting triangular stop would be more typical, and probably the same detail on the west, where it is partially obscured by the corner post casing. It would be interesting to probe the north wall to examine the likely chamfer and stops there. It would also be interesting to search for pinning evidence on the north, south, and, if original, west girt to locate studs that framed window openings. This would allow a tentative reconstruction of the original room.

Returning to the midwall post, its bottom detail supports the theory of having been reworked in place. Both corner chamfers stop at floor level, where the timber widens out into a rectangle that extends farther north than the face of the upper section. I had never seen this detail, nor had the group of scholars assembled toward the end of the paint study. It very much looks like something done remedially.

If all this is true, the East Chamber showed its First Period features during its first years on this site, with the Georgian remodeling occurring later in the 18th century. If, as seems likely, the frame was brought in by Henry Hooper in 1716-1717, he extended the room into the old chimney bay and retooled the south mid wall post in the process. The Georgian remodel was likely done by Cornelius Waldo, allow-

ing him to describe a house with "Accommodations to a gentleman for a country seat" in a 1742 *Boston Newsletter* advertisement.

Stair Hall



Second-floor hall, ca. 1925

CHS Records

Little is known about the original front stair hall. Because the west frame may not be complete on its east side and because the chimney appears to have been rebuilt, even its original footprint cannot be known.¹ We can assume that it had a triple run staircase and the same number

of risers as today. The date of the vertical sheathing reportedly seen behind plaster and lath on the east wall of the first floor during recent electrical work is not known. I have not seen these boards.

The hall's subsequent history is also uncertain — whether its lower flight was put in before the house was raised to a full three stories or whether it always rose two flights, as it does now. Complicating the question is the fact that staircases in early two-story houses often rose into unfinished attics.

Gross features suggest at a glance that the present staircase always rose to the third floor and that the roof was raised when it was built. All of the parlor and chamber doors with the exception of the East Parlor's Federal replacement are of early Georgian

¹ "Abbott Cummings believes the main chimney of the house to date from ca. 1710," HSR, 11.

East Frame vs. West Frame

By Jonathan Detwiler

Among the questions that occurred to me during our study of the house is whether the east frame of the structure could be older than the west frame, even if it was not original to the site.

The East Chamber flooring seems to be the oldest in the house. The wear, lack of uniformity, and movement plane suggest an earlier period than its counterpart on the west.

However, all previous studies suggest and seem to prove that the west frame predated the east — at least at this site. I never thought this to be the case. Both before and during our restoration work, however, my reasoning was more instinctual than factual.

The trim paint and the condition of the walls and ceiling on the east side required substantially more work than any other part of the house. The crudeness of the frame, both in its production and present racked and rolled state, is not nearly as true as that on the west side. The rear board wall in the East Parlor also indicates early construction. The longitudinal summer beam bisecting the pantry transverse beam also feels more First Period.

Without taking the whole house apart and looking inside, we may never know, but from my experience with old houses, I wonder if the west end of the house was at this location first? Maybe the east side frame actually predates it.

The Families (continued)

when he divided his property in 1808 and sold the old house and 14 acres on the west side to his friend John Appleton. HM

John Appleton

John Appleton came from a prominent Cambridge family: his grandfather was the pastor of the First Church of Cambridge. Like Thomas Lee, he had been a merchant in Salem. In the 1790s he served as a consul to France at the port of Calais and had two sons with an English woman. Leaving her in England, John brought his sons back to Massachusetts and in 1807 married Sarah Fayerweather, whose cousin lived in the Ruggles-Fayerweather House (175 Brattle St.).

On part of the Lee estate, Appleton built a Federal mansion (163 Brattle St.) and continued to rent out the old house.

In 1814, he sold the old house to Benjamin Carpenter with only 1.34 of 14 acres. The Appleton mansion burned to the ground in 2005, but the family is remembered by Appleton Street, at the former southern boundary of the property. HM

Benjamin and Deborah Carpenter

Benjamin Carpenter, a privateer during the Revolution, was a retired ship captain from Salem in the China and East India trade and a friend of both John Appleton and Thomas

continued on page 29

Paint Analysis (continued)

one-over-one panel construction. And their architraves are similar. The balustrades, too, appear similar, showing no obvious break or change in form. However, on close examination, the third-floor balusters are seen to have different profiles than the lower ones. It is likely that other upper-level molding profiles also vary. (I examined them only with a crude profile gauge.)

A first look at the paint layering sequences suggests that the top floor is later. The first- and second-floor door, window, and casing sequences show a red wash followed by a multilayer treatment that is very distinct in cross section, a light gray base coat, a pinkish or salmon finish layer, and a top glaze. The balustrade — newels, rails, and balusters — also shows this sequence from top to bottom, as do the floor reveal boards (the boards casing the openings at the second and third floors). The third floor's doors, windows, and casings, however, do not. They show, over a red wash, an unglazed dark gray instead of the glazed salmon. This would seemingly allow the lower floor trim to precede the fitting out of the top floor, with the staircase either having been extended and painted to match the lower portion when the roof was raised, or having originally risen into an unfinished attic, perhaps without the present third-floor balusters.

Early stair halls were not, however, necessarily painted identically on each floor. A more expensive treatment might extend only to where polite eyes would see, with a cheaper treatment used beyond. And lower floors were often repainted when upper floors were not, as certainly happened here in later years. The hall sequences at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House become shallower at each level.

The key to deciphering the hall is the early grays. This might seem to slight the evidentiary value of the red wash, which is difficult to detect on many features but certainly appears at each level. Red washes were sometimes used to prime, sometimes used as stains, sometimes given red overfigures to produce grained effects, and sometimes used thickly as opaque coatings. And, while they became unfashionable in higher status spaces as the Georgian period progressed, they were used for many years. Their presence here can't confirm like age of elements, nor can the early reds themselves often be distinguished; like early whitewashes, they tended to be simple mixes of sometimes identical pigments.

Sampling the stair hall thoroughly and examining the cross sections, an interesting variation in the gray base layer of the salmon treatment appears at the door to the East Chamber. The architrave shows the light gray common to the lower two floors. But the door shows, under the salmon, the dark gray of the third-floor trim. This is the same sequence seen on the third floor's reveal board, where, were it not also found on a second-floor door, it would seem to indicate that an existing paint treatment was extended to a newly trimmed-out space. So, thanks to someone's apparently running out of the light gray base paint and needing to mix a new batch before finishing work on the second floor, we have good proof that the present staircase was built of a piece reusing some parts — the third-floor balusters — and that the roof was raised at the same time. (Reused material was installed at the same time in at least two other rooms, the West Parlor and East Chamber.) As will be outlined below, it seems likely that this was done by Cornelius Waldo.

Paint Analysis (continued)

The first change in the front hall after the raising of the roof was the addition of the first floor's projecting entry, which is widely believed to have been done by Judge Lee when or shortly after he bought the house in 1758-1759. Cross-sectional evidence is consistent with this, as the projection's window frames and the lengths of baseboard below all start their paint sequences with the treatment that followed the early salmon.

Only one change can be detected in the stair hall between the time of the first-floor projection and the documented work of the 1850s: the replacement of the East Parlor's hall door with the present Federal six-paneled one, done in tandem with the parlor's renovation. To prove this in paints is difficult, as the door has been thoroughly stripped on both sides. However, careful inspection with the field microscope detected tiny bits of an original light green treatment that escaped stripping. This paint appears as the second treatment after the salmon.

The next hall work was done by Francis Winn in 1853. His surviving contract specified extensive rebuilding of the main stairs, including the replacement of treads, risers, balusters, and newels.¹ The paint evidence shows conclusively that this was not done, though the treads and risers were replaced in later years. Susan Nichols Carter implied as

¹"Francis Winn. Repairs, alterations &c. on house rented by G. Nichols, Brattle St, Cambridge, Sep. 1853." *Rediscovering the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House*

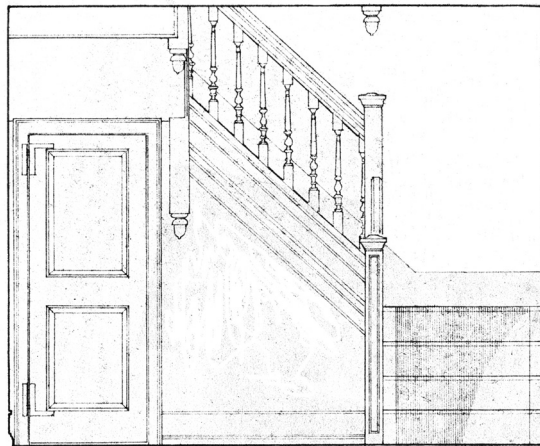
much in her 1893 letter: she doesn't mention the staircase, though she seems to record her family's changes quite encyclopedically. Indeed, Lois Lilley Howe's 1913 drawing of the staircase shows it as it now appears, with the exception of the differently turned pendant drops that preceded today's acorns. So it seems that stair changes were planned but not carried out in the mid 19th century. The 1853 contract

has misled previous researchers, who have assumed that Chandler must have restored the staircase to its present appearance (an easy belief, as his work is so poorly documented). He didn't.

Carter's 1893 letter records another stair hall change, the removal of a closet door: "Under the staircase in the hall was a small closet with a door. This door was plastered up, but the closet still exists under

the stairs." The work was outlined in Winn's contract: "Front-Entry. Take away closet flush with wall under the stairs & fill up the opening with lath & plaster." Indeed, no door appears where the present one is in Howe's drawing. It was put back shortly afterward, as it does appear in the Tittle and Spering drawing of 1932.

Paints show that the door itself is a genuine antique with a very deep paint accretion. But it clearly hasn't been hanging in this opening very long, as it matches the hall sequence only in its uppermost



Measured drawing of entryway and staircase, 1932

CHS Maps and Plans Collection

The Families (continued)

Lee. He compiled a beautifully detailed log describing his voyage to Calcutta in 1792. When his second wife died, he married Deborah Lee Austin, the daughter of Thomas Lee. She had been living with her father next door, at 153 Brattle St., after the death of her first husband. Benjamin and Deborah were married in 1823, but Benjamin died two months later, leaving the house to Deborah. She remained in her father's house and, like the Lees and Appletons, rented out the old house. The last renters were her old friends George and Susan Nichols, who ultimately purchased the house. HM

The Nichols Family

George Nichols (1809-1882) was born in Salem to George Nichols Sr., a merchant and shipmaster, and Sarah Pierce Nichols. He graduated from Harvard Divinity School in 1828 and bought the University Press in 1833 with Charles R. Metcalf and Owen S. Keith and the University Bookstore with James Munroe in 1847. In 1843, Nichols worked at Harvard's library as a proofreader, appointed by Harvard's President Josiah Quincy. He edited the works of Edmund Burke and completed a five-volume edition of the papers of Charles Sumner.

In 1834 he married Susan Farley Treadwell. She was born in Salem to John White Treadwell and Susan Kendall Farley in 1810 and was educated at Salem's Eastern Female School, established by Joseph Peabody, Stephen White, Judge Story, and her father for

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The Families (continued)



Nichols Family Papers, CHS

John White Treadwell Nichols and Susan Farley Nichols at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, ca. 1890

the education of their daughters. After their marriage, George and Susan Nichols lived at 144 Coolidge Hill in Cambridge, then moved to Brighton. In 1850 they returned to Cambridge, renting 159 Brattle St., which they purchased from the estate of Deborah Carpenter in 1860. The Nicholsons had five daughters, Susan, Lily, Harriet, Lucy, Mary, and one son, John White Treadwell Nichols. George Nichols died in Cambridge in 1882, leaving the house to his wife.

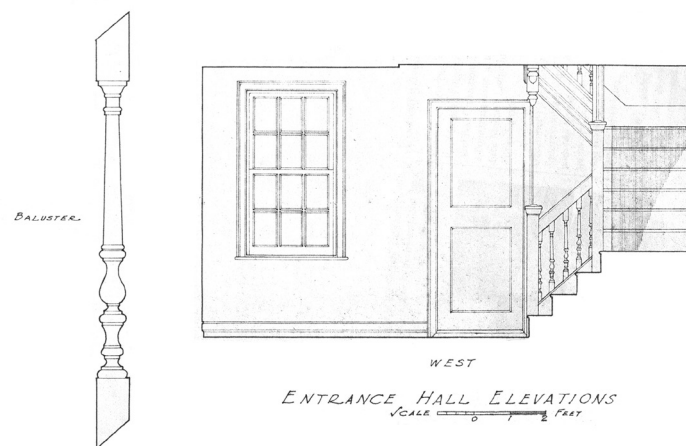
While the family lived in the house, Susan Farley Nichols was involved in charitable activities at Christ Church. According to Mary Gozzaldi, she had a fondness for children and formed the Constellation Club, for neighborhood children, where they stargazed and socialized. The house also welcomed meetings of the Bee, a young women's sewing circle that produced goods for the Civil War effort; Lucy and Mary Nichols were founding mem-

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Paint Analysis (continued)

layers. The door architrave's flat fascia members are also reused, showing extra layers below the recent light ones that do not match the door sequence and do not otherwise appear in the room. But new edge moldings appear to have been added when the door was reinstalled. They show only the shared upper layers.

Chandler worked in the house in 1916, between the times of the two staircase drawings. We know that he installed the present wide front door based on



Measured drawing, entryway and staircase, 1932

evidence he claimed to have seen. The new door's paint sequence matches the closet door architrave edge mold sequence exactly. Therefore, it was Chandler who restored the closet.

Ascribing Early Changes

Various dates have been suggested over the years for the raising of the front of the house to a full three stories. Grady and Zimmerman concluded in the HSR that the house was probably raised by Cornelius Waldo in or shortly after 1733.

A comparative paint analysis establishes the sequence of the hall's changes and the raising of the roof. But it doesn't tell which owner did the work, nor do documents or observable changes in technology. Grady and Zimmerman faced the same challenge. "We cannot be certain of the dates at which the roof was raised, only the sequences in which it occurred" (HSR, 29). Two things allow us an educated guess, the style and the history of the other rooms.

The two owners most likely to have installed the staircase are Henry Hooper and Waldo, whose ownership is separated by a mere seventeen years, a period of little technical change and much stylistic overlap.

The Hooper-Lee-Nichols House has a closed stringer staircase. These staircases were built from the earliest days in New England and began being replaced by open stringer stairs with the spread of the Georgian style.¹ I have seen open stringer stairs in New England as early as 1711 (the very high style Warner House in Portsmouth, N.H.) and

closed stringers as late as 1816 (a vernacular house in Connecticut). That Brattle Street tended to have high-style houses from an early time might suggest that Waldo, who was quite wealthy and who touted his rental property as worthy of a gentleman, might have chosen open stringer stairs shortly after he bought the house in 1733. This would date the stairs, and therefore the raising of the house, to Henry Hooper in 1717.

¹Closed stringer staircases have a diagonal outer skirt that hides the sawtooth pattern of the stairs. In open stringer staircases the sawtooth is seen.

Paint Analysis (continued)

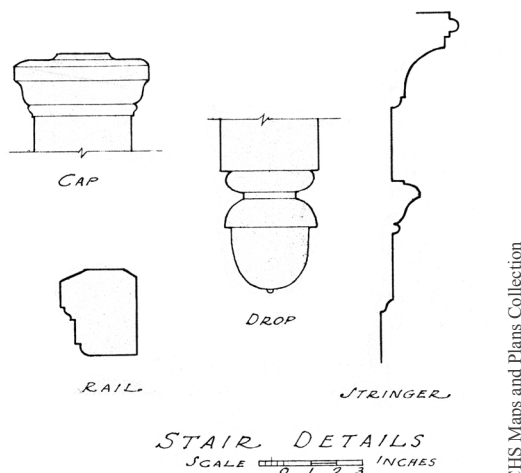
If it was Judge Lee who raised the house, as some have thought, he would have been installing closed stringers in or shortly after 1758, a date which would be astonishingly late on this fashionable street. Grady and Zimmerman make a very strong point in comparing the raised façade of Hooper-Lee-Nichols to that of the 1733-1737 Royall House in Medford and pointing out its great difference from the 1759 Vassall (Longfellow) House just down the street (HSR, 23). Judge Lee likely found the present stairs in place.¹

Another feature that seems rather earlier than later is the two-over-two panel construction of doors on all three floors. A useful comparison here is Cambridge's Cooper-Frost-Austin House, whose ca. 1720 west addition included two-over-two doors. It seems very plausible that someone across town might have included such doors in a major upgrading only three years before.

Stylistically, however, both the staircase and the doors have features that would put them after Henry Hooper and closer to Cornelius Waldo. Hooper-Lee-Nichols's balusters are relatively narrow compared to the fatter ones typical of the earliest examples. The balusters in the closed stringer staircase of Boston's ca. 1711 Pierce-Hichborn House offer a good comparison. They are thicker than these and more widely spaced. (Hichborn is the house across the courtyard from the Paul Revere House.)

¹ The 1975 National Register form split the difference and placed the raising of the roof approximately 12 years after Waldo bought the house and 13 years before Lee did: "The house was remodeled in the Georgian style in c. 1745, at which time the roof was raised." The December 30, 1916, *Cambridge Tribune* article "The Lee - Nichols House" dated the raising to Lee: "Judge Lee probably built the third story and made other improvements."

The rather narrow feather edges of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols doors also suggest a later date. Cooper-Frost-Austin's feather edges are much wider.



Measured drawing of entryway and staircase, 1932

On the other hand, is it feasible that an educated and well-heeled person in a sophisticated area would have spent a large amount of money renovating a building in a style that was already passé among the elite? It is helpful to consider the histories of other rooms in the house, specifically the East and West chambers.

I argue that at the time the east frame was joined to the house, its chamber was extended into the space of the original chimney bay and the south midwall post was retooled. It would be very surprising if this had not happened during the renovation of 1717. This argues that Henry Hooper did his renovation in a fading First Period style. The chamber's two-over-two hall door seems certainly to have been installed later, probably by Waldo.

The Families (continued)

bers. Lily married the Civil War commander Edward Hinks, who was most famous for leading the 3rd Division of the 18th U.S. Army, a unit of black soldiers. After he returned from the war in 1864, he remained in the house well after his wife's death, until Susan Nichols died.

Susan Nichols died in 1892, leaving the property to her children, who promptly sold the house to Henry Lee, a descendant of Judge Joseph Lee. Probate records indicate that on Henry Lee's death in 1898, he left the house to John White Treadwell Nichols, who received it in 1905. Living in New York, he rented it to his sister Harriet Nichols Lamb. She lived there with her son, Charles Lamb, his wife, and their two daughters, Harriet and Frances, until Nichols sold the house to his nephew Austin White in 1916. MV

Henry Lee

For the price of one dollar, Henry Lee may have saved the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House from demolition. In September 1892, after the death of Susan Nichols, the *Cambridge Tribune* reported that the property was to be sold, with the house to be "taken down... much of the wood-work being decayed."

Nothing further on the matter of demolition was reported, but in April 1893, the Boston merchant Henry Lee, a descendant of Judge Joseph Lee, was recorded as buying the property for "One Dollar." And in November, Susan Nichols Carter wrote to Lee from New

The Families (continued)

York that “it has been a great satisfaction to me, as well as to members of our family, that [the house] has been returned into your hands, as having a hereditary regard for it.”

Twelve years later, Henry, the last of the Lee owners, had died, and the property was conveyed back to the Nichols family — for the original price of one dollar. MK

Austin and Amelia White

Although they owned an estate in Weston, Austin and Amelia White purchased the house in 1916. The grandson of George and Susan Nichols and a successful mining executive, Austin bought the property “largely for sentimental reasons,” having been born and raised in it. Perhaps he wished to rescue it.

Although he planned to rent it, White hired the architect Joseph Everett Chandler to enlarge and remodel the house “in order to embody all the requirements of comfort of a modern-family in the neighborhood.” One reason was clearly preservation; a second may have been to render it equal to the other fashionable houses on Brattle Street.

White, a member of the Bostonian Society, further demonstrated his identification with the property and its historic significance by placing a bronze plaque on a gate post, designating it as the Nichols House and dating it (incorrectly) a quarter century earlier than it had actually been built. HM

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Paint Analysis (continued)

The rare and interesting faux paneling on the chimney wall of the West Chamber is Georgian in style, but of a very primitive and incipient type. The fact that the now-lost faux rails and stiles protected the wood behind them from darkening suggests that new boards were installed with the treatment. The boards are nailed to the rear (east) side of the frame.¹ The time that this might most easily have been done would have been during the 1717 renovation. Primitive faux paneling of this type seems unlikely to have been put in by Waldo as late as the 1730s. So Henry Hooper probably put the wall in, suggesting that his renovation was actually stylistically transitional, using First Period features but, in the most desirable bedroom, including a more fashionable touch. The West Chamber’s two-over-two hall door is clearly later and was likely installed by Waldo. And the doors are contemporary with the staircase.

So, while we will probably never have absolute proof, a preponderance of evidence attributes the house’s raising to a full three stories and the installation of its present front stairs to Waldo, who fitted the house out with early Georgian details. The final Georgian step, including the furring in of the first floor’s south and west walls and the construction of the window seats, seems safely attributable to Judge Lee.

In sum, our paint study and the other investigations described have built on the work begun in the 1981 HSR to provide a much fuller understanding of the evolution of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House. Much more remains to be done. It is likely that an investigation of pinning and other framing evidence would

¹ HSR, 17.

allow the window openings of the original First Period houses to be reconstructed, while invasive probes might complete our view of their interior tooling. Other invasive probes might determine if the original west side parlor and chamber were, as seems likely, partitioned into separate spaces, and tell when the east frame’s narrow east bay was and was not partitioned from the larger room on the first floor. Future study might describe the north, south, and east wall treatments of the early Georgian kitchen in the present East Parlor. Work in the stair hall might date and determine the surface treatments of its hidden vertical sheathing. Another study might try to attribute the house’s growing group of early wallpaper fragments to particular times and owners and link them to trim paint treatments.

Our best old houses give up their secrets only slowly. But, with hard work and commitment, we can learn their stories.



Entryway and staircase, ca. 1925

CHS Records

“None . . . Less Changed by Years”: Joseph Everett Chandler and the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House

By Timothy T. Orwig

If you know the complicated architectural history of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, you can’t help but chuckle when you read this description of it and Tory Row in a 1922 article in the magazine *House Beautiful*:

In all this row of mansions, which were owned and lived in at the outbreak of the Revolution by Tories . . . there is none which is less changed by years, none more noticeable for its severely beautiful ancient façade than the old Judge Joseph Lee house.

The author, Joseph Everett Chandler (1863-1945), had renovated and put an addition on the house, so he knew that his statement was a romantic oversimplification. Although Chandler has been criticized for ambitious restorations, his work at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House demonstrates his guiding principles.

Chandler has long been known for restoring historic houses as museums. He restored such Massachusetts icons as the Paul Revere House in Boston, the Cooper-Frost-Austin House in Cambridge, the Rebecca Nurse House in Danvers, the Isaac Royall House in Medford, the Harlow and Hedge houses in Plymouth, and the House of the Seven Gables in Salem. His books on American architecture — *The Colonial Architecture of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia* (1892) and *The Colonial House* (1916) — and his essays for the White Pine series helped establish the canon of early American architectural landmarks. Despite his prominence, shortly after his

death his files, plans, and blueprints were destroyed, and he slipped into obscurity. In 2005, Historic New England acquired Chandler’s personal diaries, 25 years of daily accounts. Though he wrote primarily of his gardening and social life, the diaries also reveal a prolific five-decade career of over 500 architectural consultations and commissions. His previously unknown original architecture, for example, includes shingled seaside cottages, Arts and Crafts mansions, and Colonial Revival commercial blocks, fraternities, libraries, and subdivisions.

Chandler specialized in restoring Colonial houses, from country farmhouses to Beacon Hill townhouses, for Bostonians searching for the next “new old house.” The diaries bring to life Chandler’s world of wealthy clients demanding both historical authenticity and modern conveniences in houses that served as summer cottages or year-round homes. Several houses that Chandler restored as homes subsequently became museums, including the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, the Winslow/Mayflower Society House in Plymouth, and the Stevens-Coolidge Place in North Andover. The meticulous nature of Chandler’s work preserved these historic houses and made them worthy of their later rebirth as museums.

Austin White, a successful businessman who was born in the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, acquired it in 1916 for “sentimental reasons” and asked Chandler to restore it. White’s grandparents George and Susan Nichols had purchased the house in 1861, and it had remained in the family; White bought the



Joseph Everett Chandler

Historic New England

Chandler wrote, “There are some houses of the Colonial type of architecture which seem the architectural embodiment of a great and rare quality: spontaneity. Of such is that most admirable house of all the admirable houses of Germantown, Pennsylvania — ‘Wyck.’ Of such is that splendidly conceived masterpiece of simple, yet grandiose, domestic architecture which our nation may call itself fortunate to be heir to — Mount Vernon.

“And of such, widely differing in scale, is this modest mansion of ante-Revolutionary building, the home of Judge Joseph Lee. All widely different, they seem to have sprung without too much effort from the soil beneath them, to be the home-building synthesis of good sense in adaptability of site, materials and the personal requirements of their owners, and thereby to have avoided the curse of evidence of too much striving.”

Joseph Everett Chandler, “The Judge Joseph Lee House,” *House Beautiful*, February 1922.

The Families (continued)

William and Frances Emerson

William and Frances Emerson were excellent stewards during their 35-year ownership. Although William was an architect, it was Frances who loved the house when the couple lived just across Brattle Street. Her father bought her the house in 1923 as a Christmas present.

To document the building, William had drawings made in 1932 (see page 14). He served as dean of MIT's School of Architecture from 1919 to 1939, overseeing much educational innovation and introducing courses in city planning. His fascination with Byzantine architecture prompted a longtime interest in the restoration of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul.



A Tribute to William Emerson, CHS

When Frances died in 1957, she left the house to the Historical Society with the stipulation that her husband could live there for the rest of his life. After his death a few months later, the title and an endowment of \$20,000 came to the Cambridge Historical Society. The Emersons wanted the house to be preserved to benefit the people of Cambridge. HM

Chandler (continued)

house from his uncle John Nichols. As a member of the Bostonian Society, White would have known of Chandler's expertise from the restoration of the Old State House.

A 1916 article in the *Cambridge Tribune* attributed numerous repairs and alterations at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House to Chandler: opening up fireplaces and framing them in Dutch tile, uncasing beams, repairing the scenic paper, expanding the rear ell, adding the two-car garage and chauffeur's quarters, and remaking the front gate (including topping it with urns). Chandler carefully conserved the "severely beautiful" façade on Brattle Street, which he felt linked the house to its owner during the Revolutionary War. Chandler knew that this patriotic link was an essential selling point for the house and his alterations, even though Judge Lee had been a Tory.

Perhaps Chandler's most controversial change was the construction, as part of the expansion of the rear ell, of a library with First Period finishes. This seeming contradiction arose out of the need for space on the ground floor for relaxation and entertaining. Neither the formal dining room (East Chamber) nor the parlor (West Chamber), with its scenic wallpaper, would do as a library. Writing in *House Beautiful*, Chandler justified the changes to the rear of the house: "The ell and piazza are new. The latter, as designed, frankly acknowledges this fact but it meets the necessary modern living requirements."

At the same time, he saw the library as a chance to demonstrate the post-Medieval chapter of the history of the house, to "carr[y] back in general finish to the early period of the original building." He

started by opening the large rear fireplace, through which he discovered and recreated the brick floor. While he conserved the façade and front rooms for their Georgian character, the library allowed him to suggest the core and origins of the house. He had already restored contrasting 17th- and 18th-century rooms in other houses, most prominently at the Paul Revere House.

When Boston's Faneuil Hall was "restored" in 1899, nearly all the interior wood was replaced with iron and steel for fireproofing. Seen against that act of vandalism, Chandler's work at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House is conservative indeed. Chandler brought many gifts to his restorations, including a thorough understanding of Colonial architectural history, a love of good craftsmanship and historic materials, and a talented circle of collaborators, including restoration carpenters and masons. A primary goal in restoring such houses was to demonstrate their authenticity as real antiques, worthy possessions of the historians and collectors who were his patrons. At the same time, Chandler needed to update these houses to 20th-century expectations. His work on this house reveals this delicate balancing act.

In 1926, William and Frances Emerson asked Chandler to consult on the hall wallpaper, according to Chandler's diaries. When the Cambridge Historical Society received the house in 1957 as a bequest, it was the product of a half century or more of careful preservation. As such, it is a document that reveals as much about the life of Colonial Revival Cambridge as it does of Colonial Cambridge. A century later, we can more easily understand and value that chapter in its history.

Legends of the House

By Michael Kenney

During its 300-year lifetime, the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House has become a place of numerous legends dating back to the beginnings, with an encounter in 1685 involving Richard Hooper and a horse.

As recounted by Roger Thompson in *Cambridge Cameos*, 18-year-old Samuel Rolfe wanted a horse, and Hooper, recently arrived in town, had one for sale. After some haggling, they agreed on a price. Rolfe made a payment and rode off on the horse.

His mother, however, after riding the horse to meeting, found it “very dull notwithstanding [having] spent a great deal of oats on him.” So when Hooper showed up seeking the balance owed him, she refused, and Hooper took the matter to court.

The jury found for the mother. Thompson speculates Hooper’s “exoticism” as a newcomer “probably swayed the jury against him and against the temptation to teach incautious adolescence a lesson.”

Then there is the story of the Hessians buried under the present library. The source is a “reminiscence” recorded in 1981 — a full two centuries after there were any Hessians in town — by Francesca Wiig, the daughter of Mrs. William Emerson.

Mrs. Wiig said she had the story from one of the elderly sisters of John Nichols, who “was there with her brother... when the skeletons were dug up, and showed us the exact place in the present library where they were found — not buried too deeply, and covered with lawn grass.”

Rediscovering the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House

The five skeletons, identified as Hessians by their uniform buttons, had been members of the British army defeated at Saratoga and held in Cambridge and Somerville during the winter and spring of 1777-1778.

General John Burgoyne and his officers had been paroled, and a few of the deserted Tory mansions served as their quarters. Of course, Joseph Lee returned and reclaimed his house in 1777, so it is unlikely that any of these soldiers were ever housed in this building.

Karen Forslund Falb, in her “Cultural Landscape Report” on the house, writes that “recent attempts to document this historic find have included inquiries to the Massachusetts Historical Commission, Peabody Museum at Harvard, and City of Cambridge Cemetery with no success,” perhaps demonstrating, she concluded, a certain “love of telling tales.”



Map by Samuel L. Batchelder, 1925

The Evolution of a Museum

By Gavin W. Kleespies

The Cambridge Historical Society began in 1905 as a relatively exclusive group that met in the homes of its members and occasionally held programs in Harvard buildings.

The Hooper-Lee-Nichols House was not the first house offered to the Society; 9 Follen St. had been left to the Society a number of years earlier, but CHS did not keep the house. The fame of the 17th-century Hooper-Lee-Nichols House may be why the Society chose to accept it as the gift of Mrs. Emerson in 1957, to use as its headquarters.

Sterling Dow was elected the first CHS Emerson Scholar, the curator of the house, in 1957. He and his family lived there for almost 20 years, a period when the CHS Council met monthly in the house and held special events there. However, like many along Brattle Street, the house was seen as the home of a Harvard professor.

It was a socially and economically changing city that Gerald B. Warden found when he succeeded Dow in 1976. Cambridge had become a center for progressive politics, the industrial core of Cambridge’s economy was collapsing, and, despite opposition, the universities were rapidly expanding into the areas vacated by the factories. The city now also had a Historical Commission and the Longfellow National Historic Site.

Nationally, the Bicentennial of the American Revolution was prompting a huge expansion in support for local history, with many communities establishing historical societies.

continued on page 36

Evolution (continued)

Warden, a Yale Ph.D., moved the living quarters to the third floor, opened the house for tours, and began interpreting it as a historic house. This move toward treating the house as a public space continued with the hiring of the first part time professional staff member in 1983. Bettina Norton expanded Warden's work by establishing an office in the house and expanding public access.

Although it was not an easy process, the Society emerged with a plan to expand its membership and use the house as the center of activities.

In the following years, the stability that the veteran museum administrator Warren Little brought during his 10-year tenure as director allowed for the expanded use of the house and the Society's role as a resource for the community. Aurore Eaton and Sally Hild expanded the membership and the appeal of the organization to the community. Karen Davis brought her knowledge of preservation and architectural history and was able to stabilize the house through funding from grants. This placed the house on a solid footing for the years ahead.

Most recently, thanks to the support of the Cambridge Savings Bank and the hours of work of the president, curator, treasurer, facilities chair, and the staff, the Society has turned another corner in the use of the house.

The Society has now created flexible spaces that allow the house to continue to exhibit its architectural history and use these new display areas for exhibits on the history of Cambridge. This more flexible space could never have been realized without the work of the past 30 years. The house has continued its evolution to become a museum of the history of Cambridge.

Legends (continued)

In a paper given at a meeting of the Society in 1918, Samuel F. Batchelder said that Burgoyne's officers filled the streets of Cambridge, "prancing and patrolling in every corner of the town, ornamented with their glittering side-arms... demanding our houses and colleges for their genteel accommodation." Writing in 1871, Thomas Coffin Amory recalled an afternoon with "the amiable hostess of the mansion" — which would have been Susan Nichols — during which "she mentioned several traditions connected with the house."

One such involved "a festival occasion," probably concerning Judge Joseph Lee's time before the Revolution. It was, she recalled, a strawberry party. "The company assembled early in the afternoon in costly apparel, and their manners excessively polite were much more formal and ceremonious than anything we know."

Not strawberries but pears figured in a story told by John Nichols in his account of his life as a child in the house. It concerns a "Harvard Professor Sophocles," who, he wrote, "came to supper one night when the new pear tree in the garden had borne three pears." He identified himself as a connoisseur, but said "I never can tell what kind a pear is until I test it." He then proceeded to slice and eat all three pears while the family watched "in horrified amazement."

Falb commented, like the story of the Hessians, "it perhaps demonstrates the Nichols and Emerson families' love of telling tales."



View across Brattle St., ca. 1893

Nichols Family Papers, CHS

From more recent times, there is the story of the rare and valuable collection that is no more. It comes from Sterling Dow, the Harvard classicist who was the Society's resident curator from 1957 to 1976, a position that had been established by Mrs. Emerson when she left the house to the Society.

According to another legend, although this one is true, Mrs. Emerson had been given the house as a Christmas present by her father, William Augustus White, a financier and book collector.

As Dow told it, White "had the foresight to realize the worth of the poet and artist William Blake and to collect everything that had to do with Blake." It must have been, "a fabulous collection, housed in part and at times on the shelves" of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House. But "the world of taste and of collectors caught up with the intuition of the financier," and while "many persons felt some intensity of longing to have the collection nearby," White left it to the British Museum.

It had been, Dow wrote, "the most marvelous lot of material ever to be in the house."

New Research Tools Open Paths of Study

By Sally Zimmerman

Since 1981, new avenues of architectural and historical research have opened for First Period timber-framed structures. The most notable advance in architectural investigation is dendrochronology, which provides powerful evidence linking the construction attributes of these buildings to the chronological age of their materials.

Limited dendrochronology has established that a spanning beam on the west side of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House dates to 1685, affirming the 1981 study that identified the structure as including the ca. 1685 dwelling of Richard Hooper. This date further strengthens the evidence that the west half of the house, which includes closely spaced joists (less than 18 inches apart) and a layer of plaster on the ceiling sections between the joists, two features that Abbott Cummings cites as indicators of pre-1690 construction, was new in 1685.

There is always more to learn from early houses, as the Powell analysis of paint sequences in the first- and second-floor front rooms demonstrates. This analysis corroborates how extensively the house was reworked, structurally and in terms of cosmetic finishes, either by Hooper's son, Henry, in 1716-1717 or by its second owner, Cornelius Waldo, sometime after 1733. The paint layer history for the front rooms shows patterns of consistency in their early Georgian features, but with such a brief 16-year window between the two possible renovation dates, the paint analysis cannot corroborate a specific date for the finishes.

However, another new research tool, the Internet, allows us to study social and historical factors beyond the structural data. Since 1981, when Anne Grady and I studied the house, the explosion of information technology and the ever-growing availability of historical and genealogical records online facilitate connections too cumbersome to have been pursued 28 years ago. In a matter of a few hours' research online, a fuller picture of the Hooper family and

other individuals associated with the house can begin to be drawn, and from it some inferences made about when the first Georgian elements might have been added.

An online investigation of Henry Hooper's life points toward his being the instigator of the early Georgian finishes indicated in the paint record. After Dr. Richard's death in 1690, the Hooper family endured such hardship that it was penniless by the time of the Widow Hooper's death in 1701. Its dwelling was then so deteriorated that it could not be tenanted, even rent free. The 1717 restitution of the homestead by Henry Hooper implies a strong desire to start anew.

Recent research expands on the knowledge that in 1717 Hooper was married (on December 10, 1716) to include the information that his bride was Remember [Hewes] Perkins, the widowed mother of two young children and the daughter of a fellow physician.¹ It seems consistent on a personal level that Henry would choose to refurbish the dwelling with Georgian finishes, reusing the frame of an earlier house at the east end and marrying it to the larger frame at the west end.

¹ James Savage, *A Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England, Before 1692* (3: 396), lists John Perkins "of Boston, son of Edmund, m. 17 June 1708 Remember Hewes, d. of William Hewes, had John b. 4 Aug. 1711; and Remember, 30 July 1714." *Mayflower Families Through Five Generations: Family of Isaac Allerton* (L. M. Kellogg, R. S. Wakefield, 1999, 28) indicates that William Hewes was a physician in whose will were listed his grandchild Remember Perkins, as well as the children of his daughter and Dr. Henry Hooper. A source at www.5thirdstreet.com/somerelations indicates Remember Hewes was born on March 7, 1687, in Boston.



Southeast view, ca. 1893



Southwest view, ca. 1900

Nichols Family Papers, GHS

Nichols Family Papers, GHS

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Research Tools (continued)

Given its deterioration in 1701, it is also possible that the house was entirely rebuilt using materials salvaged from the 1685 structure: the bay spacing of the west/parlor end and the wide chimney bay seem quite generous for the early date.¹

It seems certain that the front half of the house took on its current lateral dimension by 1717. Other evidence of major reconstruction in 1717 includes the

four-hearth center chimney, dated by its features to ca. 1710², as well as the spacious, triple-run stair in the chimney bay, which paint analysis has shown to be largely intact and of the early 18th century.

Linking the structural evidence with previously unrecognized historical documentation through online research also demonstrates the potential for other

¹ Table 1 in the Appendix of Abbott Cummings's *Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay* shows very few houses from 1637 to 1706 with recorded dimensions over 27 feet in length: with the chimney bay, the west end of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House is approximately 32 feet long.

² "The Hooper-Lee-Nichols House," Anne Grady and Sarah J. Zimmerman, 1981, 11: "Abbott Cummings believes the main chimney of the house to date from ca. 1710 based on the plastering of the interior surface of the original fireplace in the east room and the lateral placement of an oven in that fireplace . . . Henry Hooper's account includes a payment for the laying of four hearths."



Isabella Carr Thompson and Lovell Thompson from the northwest, ca. 1904.

Andrew Leighton

new and compelling avenues along which to enrich our understanding of the history of the house.

Among possible lines of research suggested by recent online investigation are the following:

- What were the antecedents of Richard Hooper's life? The history of Hampton, N.H., reveals that Dr. Richard Hooper resided there prior to 1684 and was the victim of a notable assault³;
- Would the will of Dr. William Hewes (Suffolk County Probate) contain any legacies pertinent to the family of Remember [Hewes Perkins] Hooper and Henry Hooper⁴;
- Henry and Remember Hooper were married at Trinity Church, Newport. Does this Anglican connection suggest an area for further study, given the strong Tory attachments later evident in the Brattle Street estates; and what are the Hooper connections to Newport, where Henry Hooper lived after 1733 and where he and his second wife, Deborah Bennett, are buried;



Back of house, ca. 1893

Nichols Family Papers, CHS

³ Joseph Dow, *History of Hampton* (1893), at www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/dow/chap5/dow5_13.htm.

⁴ Probate records available from Mass. Document Retrieval Services.

Research Tools (continued)

- How likely is it that Cornelius Waldo ever lived in or made more than cosmetic upgrades to the house: all evidence is that Waldo, a Boston merchant, with his cousin Samuel, a slave trader, lived his whole life in Boston; the Worcester Art Museum, which holds portraits by Joseph Badger of Waldo and his wife, Faith Savage Waldo, has extensive catalogue research on Waldo's life¹;
- What was the nature of Benjamin and Deborah [Lee Austin] Carpenter's ownership of the house (1814-1861)? Benjamin Carpenter (b. 1751) was a Salem ship captain, a founder of the East India Marine Society of Salem, and at the time he purchased the house in 1814 married to the second of his three wives, Abigail Gerrish (1743-1822); his marriage to Deborah was vanishingly brief (variously noted as July 23, or September 16, 1823); Captain Carpenter died on September 18, 1823²;

¹ http://www.worcesterart.org/Collection/Early_American/Artists/badger/cornelius/discussion.html

² Henry Fitz-Gilbert Waters, "The Lee Family," in *The New England*



East view from Kennedy Road, ca. 1893

- How might the very strong familial linkages in its ownership inform the social history of the house (in addition to connections with Judge Joseph Lee, the third owner, through Thomas Lee and Deborah Carpenter, and through the Nichols and White families; it also seems likely that the last owner of the house, William P. Emerson, may have been distantly related to Cornelius Waldo);
- Finally, for long periods of time, the house appears to have been rented: what other uses of the house might be gleaned from census schedules?

In both its structural and social history, then, the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House continues, even after years of concentrated historical focus, to raise questions and challenges for scholars. As stewards of that history, the Cambridge Historical Society can be confident that the passage of time will reveal more and more of the house's past to its members and the people of Cambridge.

Historical and Genealogical Register, July 1922, 205; available online at Google Books.



West view from Appleton Street, ca. 1893

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