Royalston, Massachusetts: A New England Town

Nat McCormick Summer 1992

About the author and the work

Nat McCormick is a 5th generation descendant on his mother's side from both Barnet Bullock and George Miller, whose houses he describes below.

This work is part of a research project done to complete the Masters of Architecture program and a Certificate in Historic Preservation at the University of Virginia.

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Historical Summary

1730's-1740's: Original four land grants made.

1752: Survey and sale of remaining land.

1762: First settlers arrive.

1764: First meeting house built.

1764: Sir Isaac Royal donates land to Harvard College, the sale of which establishes a professorship of law.

1764: First mill built at Doane's Falls.

1765: Incorporation of Royalston; name changed from Royalshire.

1767-8: Parson Joseph Lee visits, is ordained, and begins a 51 year ministry.

1768: Dr. Stephen Bacheller arrives. He and his son serve the town for 80 years.

1769: First schoolmaster, Simeon Chamberlain, holds classes.

1776-81: 100 men from Royalston fight in the American Revolution; only four deaths are recorded.

1777: Major epidemic kills 40.

1780, 1788: Royalston sends delegates to the Constitutional Convention and the ratification.

1785: Benjamin Blanchard mill in South Royalston.

1786: Shay's Rebellion; Royalston sympathetic but inactive.

1794-5: Dr. William Town survey shows six roads, East and West (Baptist) meetinghouses, seven saw mills, three grist mills, and one pulling mill.

1795: Second epidemic kills 66.

1795: Town divided into districts; schoolhouses built in each by 1797-8.

1797: Second meetinghouse built on Common.

1799: Second Baptist meetinghouse replaces 1779 structure.

1799-1803: Land in South Royalston adjoined to town.

1808-09: Embargo laws cause citizens to complain to President.

1812: Rufus Bullock and Silas Coffin found Royalston Cotton and Wool Manufacturing Company in South Royalston.

1812: First mail service in town along Worchester to Keene, N.H. stagecoach route.

1814: Brief participation in War of 1812.

1830-31: Jonathan Blake Jr. survey and map shows extensive information about the town.

1833: Bullock mill burns; stone mill constructed; company sold to George Whitney and Daniel Day.

1837: Second Congregational Church built in South Royalston.

1840: Royalston's population peaks at 1667.

1840: Great Whig gathering; rally of 3000 supporters of Benjamin Harrison.

1840: Third church built on Common; burns in 1851; rebuilt in 1852.

1847: Methodist church built in South Royalston.

1847: Vermont and Massachusetts Railroad establishes station at South Royalston.

1854: Catholic Church built in South Royalston.

1861-65: 147 men from Royalston serve in the Civil War; 36 of whom are killed.

1865: Centennial celebration.

1867: Town Hall built on Common.

1892: Fire destroys Whitney mill and other buildings in South Royalston.

1904: Second fire in South Royalston destroys church, chair shop, covered bridge, school, store, and other buildings.

1908: American Woolen Company builds mill in South Royalston; employs 150 within a decade; mill closed by depression in 1928; burns 1939.

1915: 3000 people attend Royalston's 150th.

1938: Hurricane floods South Royalston; topples church steeple on Common.

1965: Bicentennial celebration.

Architecture on the Common

The growth of the town of Royalston is typical in many ways of others in the state and throughout New England. In Royalston, there was little development on the Common before 1800; most of the population lived on dispersed farms with large acreages. The Common developed between about 1820 and 1840, when it became a trading center for surrounding communities. It was populated by professionals such as doctors and lawyers, tradesmen such as blacksmiths and carriage makers, and businesses such as stores and taverns. By mid-century, however, development on the Common virtually ceased. As the north industrialized, river locations became the sites of large mills and South Royalston, with its river and railroad link, rapidly eclipsed the importance of the Common. last part of the century saw many of the New England textile towns suffer as the industry moved south to the source of raw materials. Royalston's isolation has kept it from becoming a large and properous place, but at the same time has preserved the character of a 19th century New England village.

These drawings represent about 80 years of architecture on Royalston Common, from the founding of the town to the mid 19th century, when the population was already on the wane. Through them, one can trace the popularity of various styles, from the Georgian Colonial (S. Bacheller and W. Raymond houses), to the Federal (J. Frye and E. Perkins houses), to the Greek Revival (I. Willis, Bartlett-Foster and O. Walker houses). Although little construction occured after the Civil War, many houses were updated with features such as two over two windows, large bay windows, smaller chimneys (and cast-iron stoves to replace fireplaces), and fancy doorknobs to replace the original latches. Despite the various styles and different appearences of the houses, the floor plans are remarkably homogeneous, and a few fundamental types predominate.

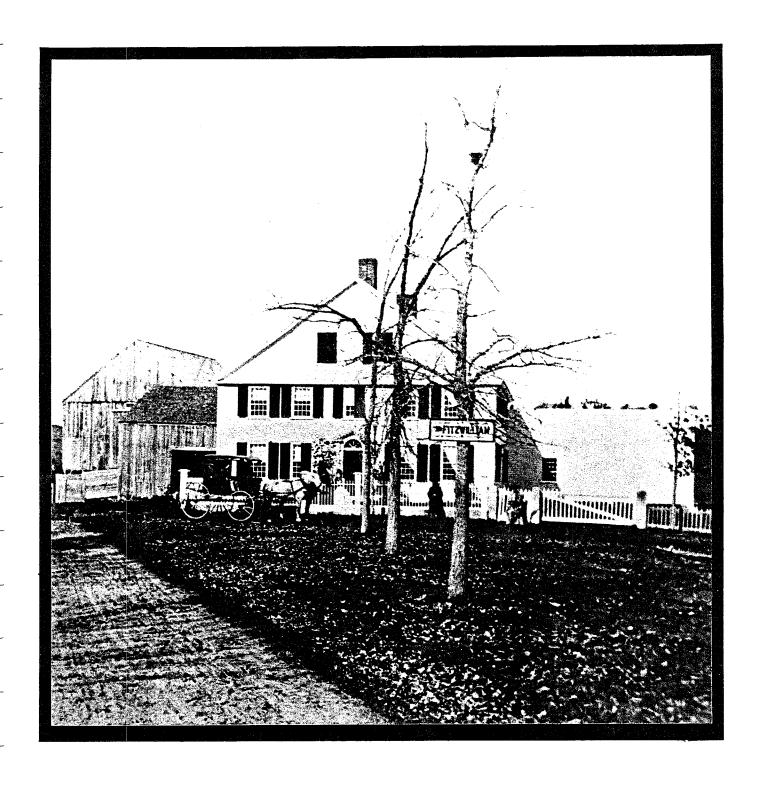


Royalston in 1800

- 1. Captain William Raymond House, C. 1765, 1794, 1847. In 1794, Raymond added an elegant two story addition to the existing C. 1765 cape built by Ebenezer Elliot. In 1847, the house was altered again when the north part (the original cape) was raised to two stories, necessitating a change in the orientation of the roof.
- 2. Joseph Lee Parsonage, 1767-8. This house was built for Joseph Lee, who served the town's first parson until his death in 1819. In 1841 (1844?), an addition was built on the east side of the house which operated as a tavern and store. The building was moved to its current location in 1874, and a new parsonage erected on its site.
- 3. Dr. Stephen Bacheller House, 1768, 1850's. Dr. Bacheller was enticed to settle in Royalston by an offer of the land constituting the west half of the original common. He and his son had a practice in town for 80 consecutive years. In 1849, the house was bought and altered by Chauncey Chase, an architect-builder who also designed the church and town hall.
- 4. Joseph Sawyer House, C. 1790. This house was probably built around 1790, and was bought by Sawyer when he came to Royalston in 1822. Sawyer diverted Little Pond, built a water wheel, and ran a business making pine household furniture in a shop on the east side of the road just below his house. This building burned in 1853.

Royalston in 1800

- A. The original common was established as a ten acre square. Four acres of the western part were offered to persuade Dr. Stephen Bacheller to settle in town in 1771.
- B. The first meetinghouse stood on this site between 1764 and 1797. This was a relatively plain 35×45 foot structure facing to the west.
- C. A cemetary was sited behind the meetinghouse in 1764. This location was deemed unsuitable and had moved to the south of the common by 1771.
- D. A larger, more elegant meetinghouse replaced the first one in 1797. This building was 56 feet long and faced the Lee parsonage to the south. A Revere bell was purchased for it in 1811.
- E. The town's first schoolhouse was built here in 1777. The original schoolhouses were single story buildings of 20×24 feet. Nine of these were built in the different districts of the town by 1798.
- F. This was the site of a town pump.
- G. A hatter's shop owned by William Jerrel stood on this site between 1780 and 1853, when it presumably was moved across the common and remodelled by Anthony Donnelly.
- H. Either an early store or residence stood on this site.
- I. This site is marked on early maps as the location of an "ancient landmark."
- J. A town pound was built in 1796. Its location is unknown.

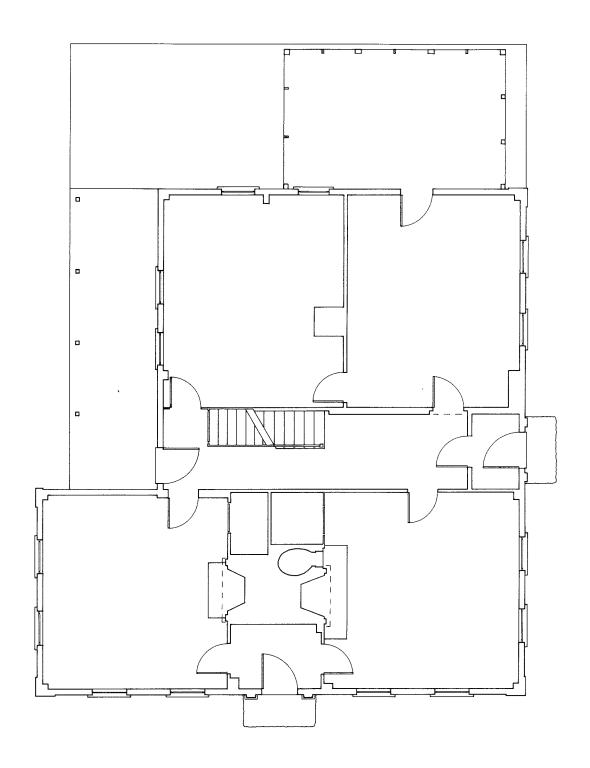


Captain William Raymond House Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873



CAPTAIN WILLIAM RAYMOND HOUSE

C. 1765- C. 1790, 1840'S





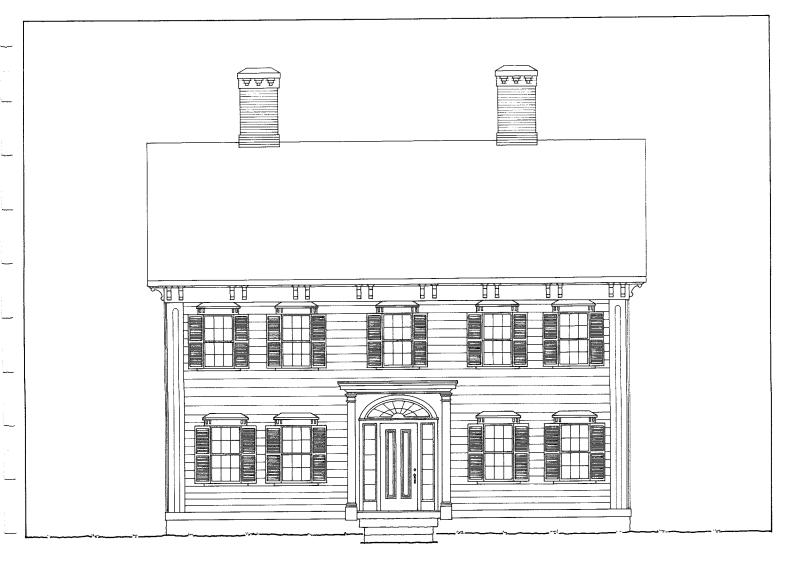
C. 1765- C. 1790, 1840'S



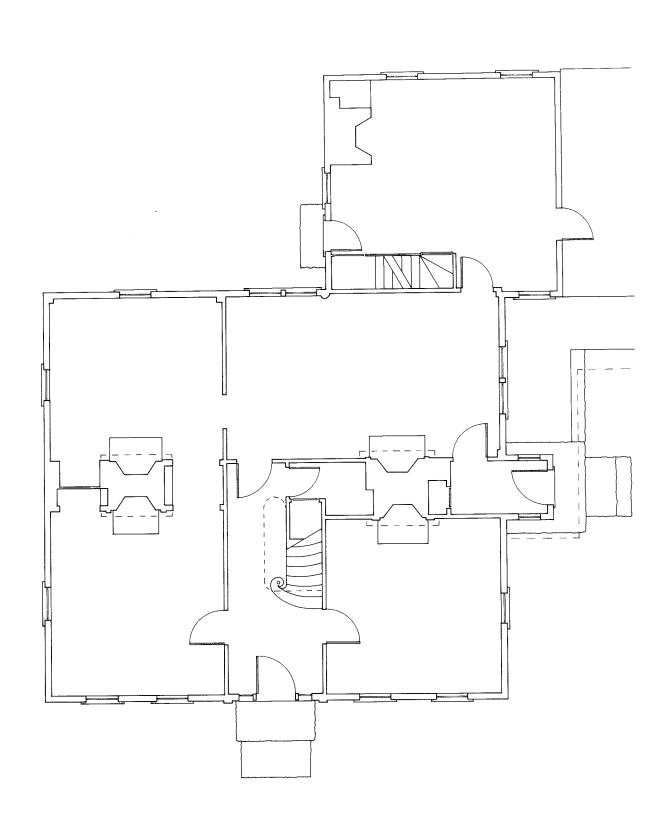
Joseph Lee Parsonage Schoolhouse in background Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873



Dr. Stephen Bacheller House Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873



DR. STEPHEN BACHELLER HOUSE 1768, 1850'S



DR. STEPHEN BACHELLER HOUSE 1768, 1850'S

FIRST FLOOR PLAN



Royalston 1800-1825

- 5. Rufus Bullock House, 1803-12. There are two main hypothesis regarding this large house. One is that is was built as an inn along the Worchester to Keene, NH, stagecoach route. The second is that it was built as a two family house for Rufus and his brother Moulton. In any event, Rufus was assessed for a 43 x 46 foot house in 1815, and bought his brother's interest in 1816. Rufus first ran a store in the ell of the house and, after 1823, when he went into the mill business in South Royalston, the store was run by his brother Barnet until 1856.
- 6. Widow Sibley House, 1818. This house was built by the widow of Lt. Jonathan Sibley, who died in 1818. Widow Sibley lived here until her own death in 1853. In 1872, Obadiah Walker added a store and post office extension, which continued to run as such until the 1950's.
- 7. Reverend Ebenezer Perkins House, 1819. Reverend Perkins was the town's second minister, who took over the ministry after Parson Lee's death in 1819, and served until 1846. He died in 1861, and his youngest son Joseph sold the house in 1870.
- 8. Major John Norton House, C. 1820. Although no building is shown on this site on the 1831 map, histories mention it, and the physical evidence of the structures suggest an earlier date. It is possible that at least part of the building was moved from a different site. The Victorian front was added to the cape after 1873.

Royalston 1800-1825

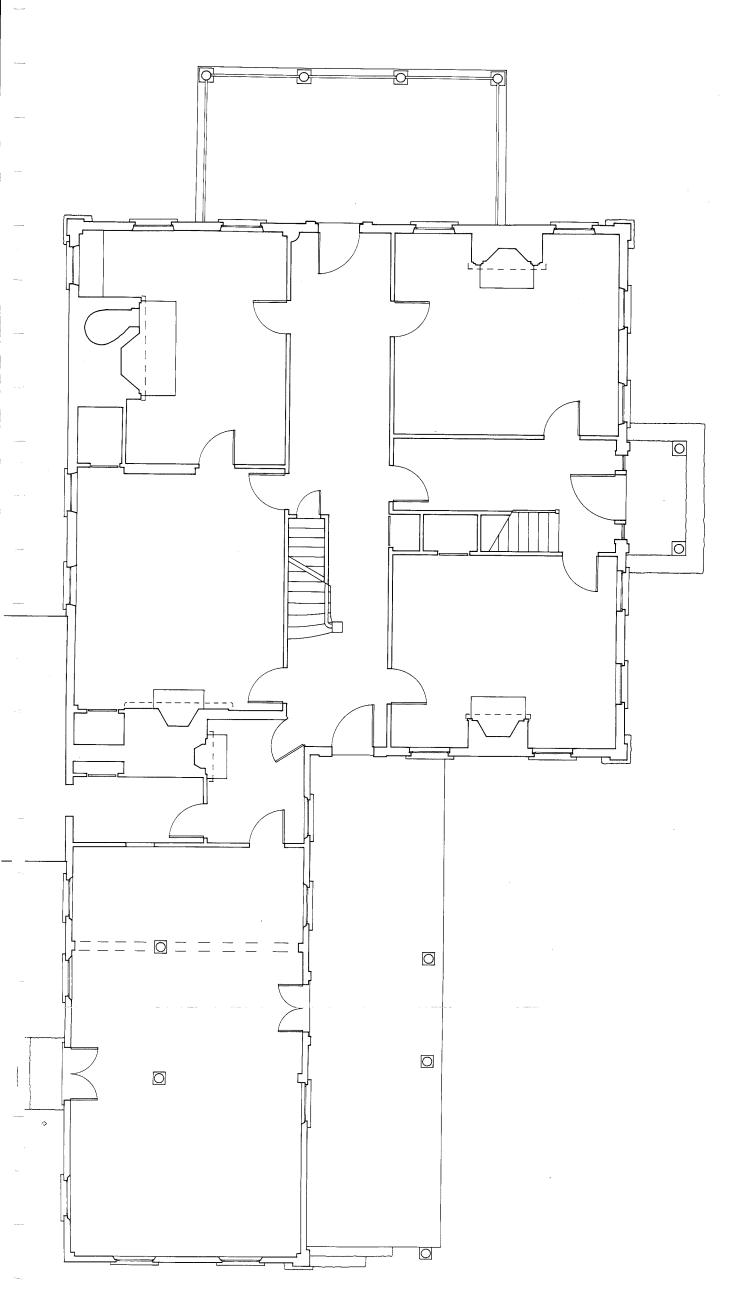
- K. Captain William Raymond gave the land for the north extension of the common in 1802.
- L. A store may have operated here between about 1800 and 1803, when it burned.
- M. Joseph Estabrook House, 1803. Estabrook ran a store here in partnership with Franklin Gregory until 1856. When the Estabrook mansion was built in 1872, this house was moved behind it and converted into a barn.
- N. Palm Leaf Shop, 1803. Estabrook was in the business of processing the leaves for the cottage industry of manufacturing hats and other items.
- O. Estabrook Rental House, 1807. The rental house and the palm leaf shop were removed by 1900 for the construction of the Bertha Lee House.
- P. General Gregory House, 1820. Gregory was Joseph Estabrook's partner in the drygoods business until his death in 1836. The house burned in 1840, and a new residence was built on its site by George Pierce.
- Q. Solomon Crocker House. This structure had disappeared by the 1830's.



Rufus Bullock House Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873

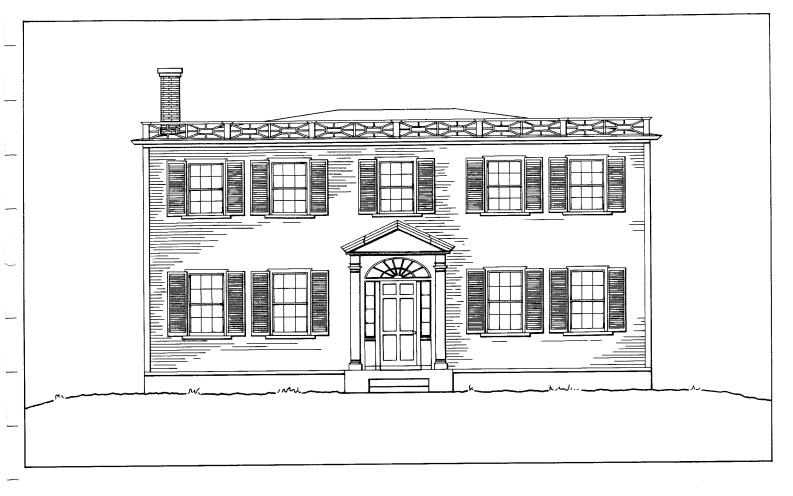


Rufus Bullock House Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873



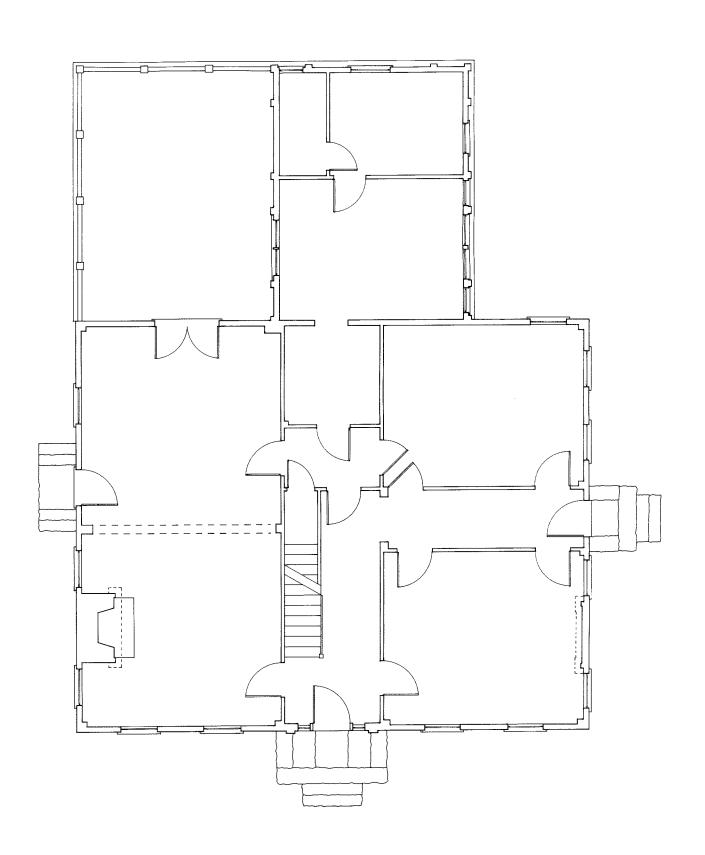


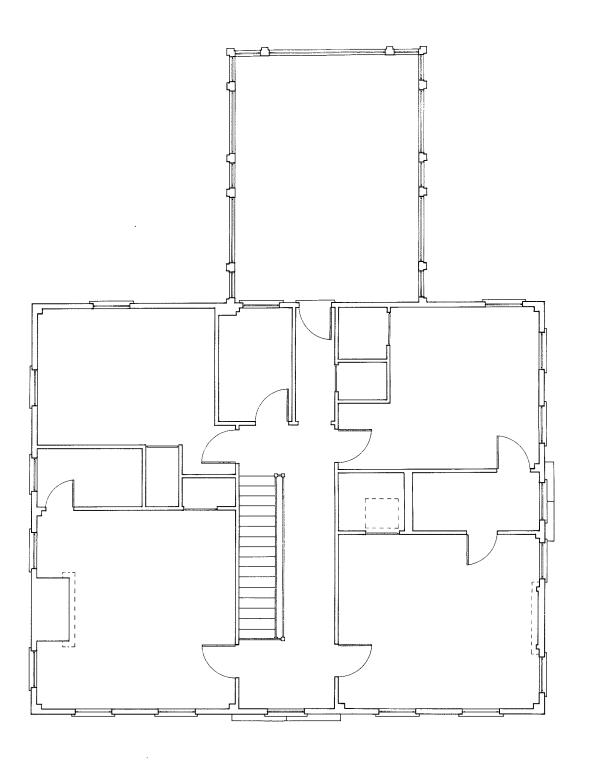
Reverend Ebenezer Perkins House Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873

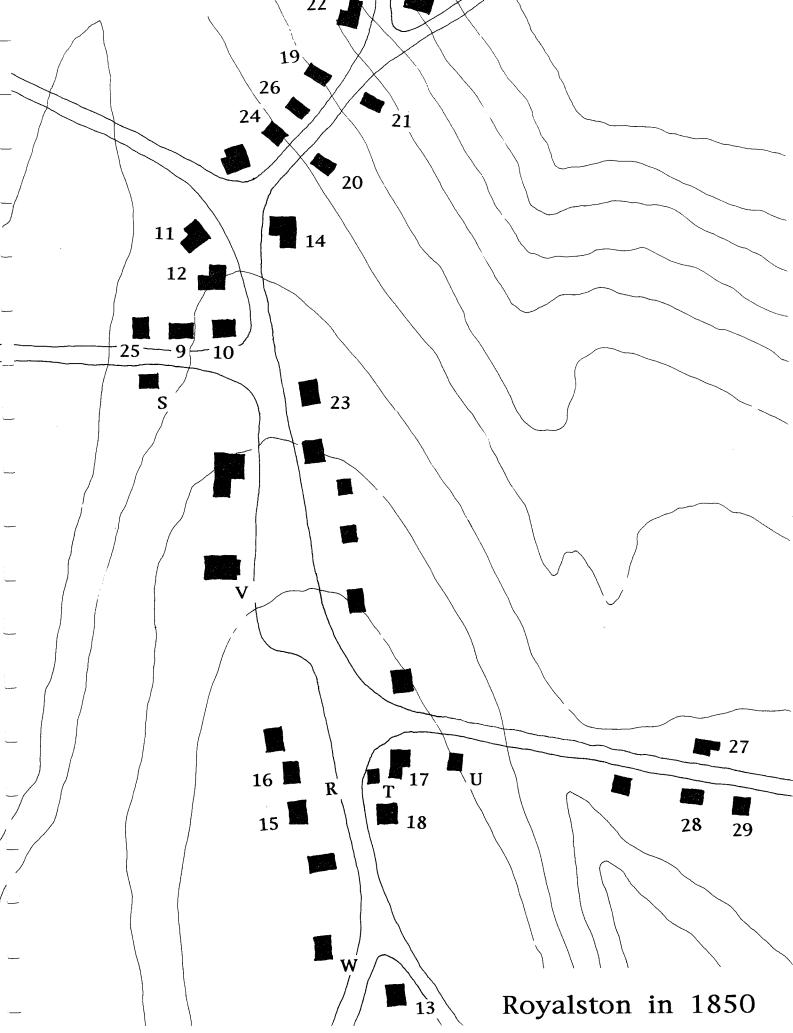


REVEREND EBENEZER PERKINS HOUSE

1819







- 9. Hugh Bullock House, C. 1825. Hugh Bullock settled on a farm in the west part of town before the Revolution. His son Barnet built this house for him in his old age, where he died in 1837.
- 10. Barnet Bullock House, C. 1825. Barnet, one of Hugh Bullock's sons, built this house adjacent to his father's. He spent his career running the store in the ell of his brother Rufus' house, and died here in 1884. The Victorian front was added between 1873 and 1900.
- 11. Joseph Raymond House, C. 1830. This house may have been owned by H. Pierce and sold to Raymond in the 1830's. Raymond died in 1893. The Victorian bays were added around 1874.
- 12. Solomon Tenney House, C. 1830. Between 1857 and 1872 this house was used by the town's ministers. It was subsequently sold to the Raymond family.
- 13. Schoolhouse, 1835 (1837?). This building replaced the 1777 schoolhouse on the common and was one of the two larger structures among the town's twelve schoolhouses. Originally, it faced the other direction, and was turned 180 degrees in 1860. It was last used as a school in 1939.
- 14. George Miller House, 1836. Miller came to town in 1836 as a musical instructor for the church. He lived here until 1851, when the house was sold to George Whitney, who became the town's leading industrialist in the latter half of the century. Whitney died in 1897. He probably doubled the size of the original house.
- 15. Elijah Nichols House, 1836. Nichols, a miller by trade, originally lived south of the common. He died in this house in 1856. His son, the local undertaker, lived here until 1872. In 1875, the house was sold to Dr. Frank Adams, who added the northwest room and made numerous Victorian additions.

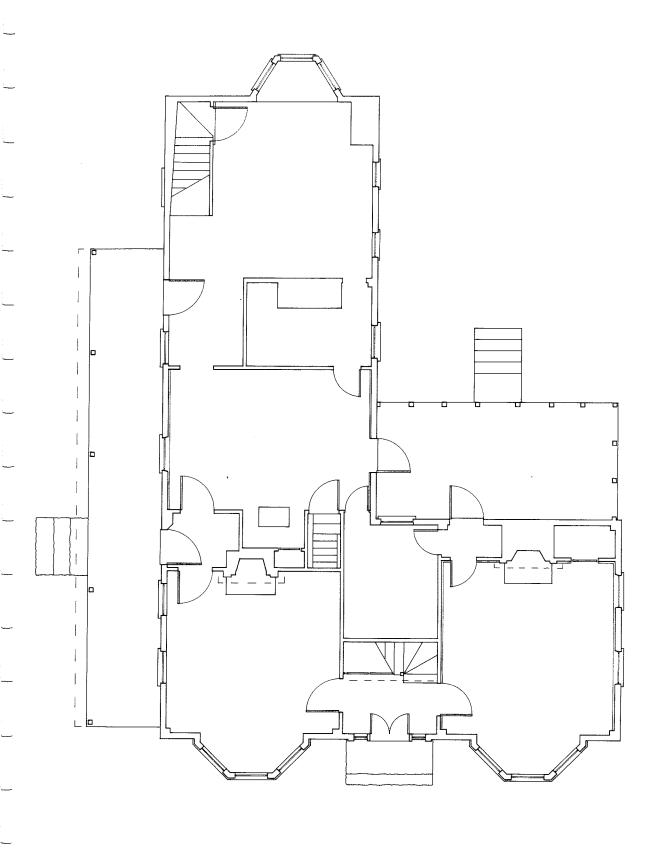
- 16. William O. Brown House, 1837. This house was either built by Colonel Benjamin Brown or his oldest child, William Otis Brown. After the Civil War, Brown worked on the Hoosac Tunnel and held the office of Worchester County Commissioner for seven terms. He sold the house in 1854(?) to Horace Pierce, a manufacturer of wooden buckets.
- 17. Dr. Isaac P. Willis House, 1838. Dr. Willis moved to Royalston from Richmond, NH, in 1838 to take over the practice of the elderly Dr. Stephen Bacheller Jr. He sold the house to George Miller in 1858 and moved next door into the Austin House. The house was doubled in size by Calvin Bullock after 1918.
- 18. J.E.P. Austin House, 1839. Austin was the owner of a drygoods store which stood on the corner of the common to the north of the house between 1837-48. It eventually burned and was not rebuilt. Dr. Isaac Willis moved to the house in 1858 and lived here until his death in 1863.
- 19. Bartlett-Foster House, 1841. This house was built by Ebenezer Cheney, a carriage maker, and sold to Benjamin B. Bartlett in 1848. Bartlett was a farmer, operated a grist mill, worked in a palm leaf shop, and in the Holman-Sawyer furniture shop. He died young in 1852, and his widow remarried David P. Foster, an employee of the furniture shop, in 1859. Foster died in 1903, and his widow in 1907.
- 20. Ebenezer Cheney House, 1842. After building a similar house across the street, Cheney built and presumably occupied this one until he left town around 1850. The house was then sold to William Chase Jr., a farmer and stonecutter who lived here until his death in 1867.
- 21. Leonard Wheeler House, 1843. Wheeler ran a blacksmith shop on the Warwick Road just west of where the library was later built. He moved his operations in 1843, and continued in business with his second son until 1889. Wheeler's widow remarried Reverend Dunn, and died here in 1912.

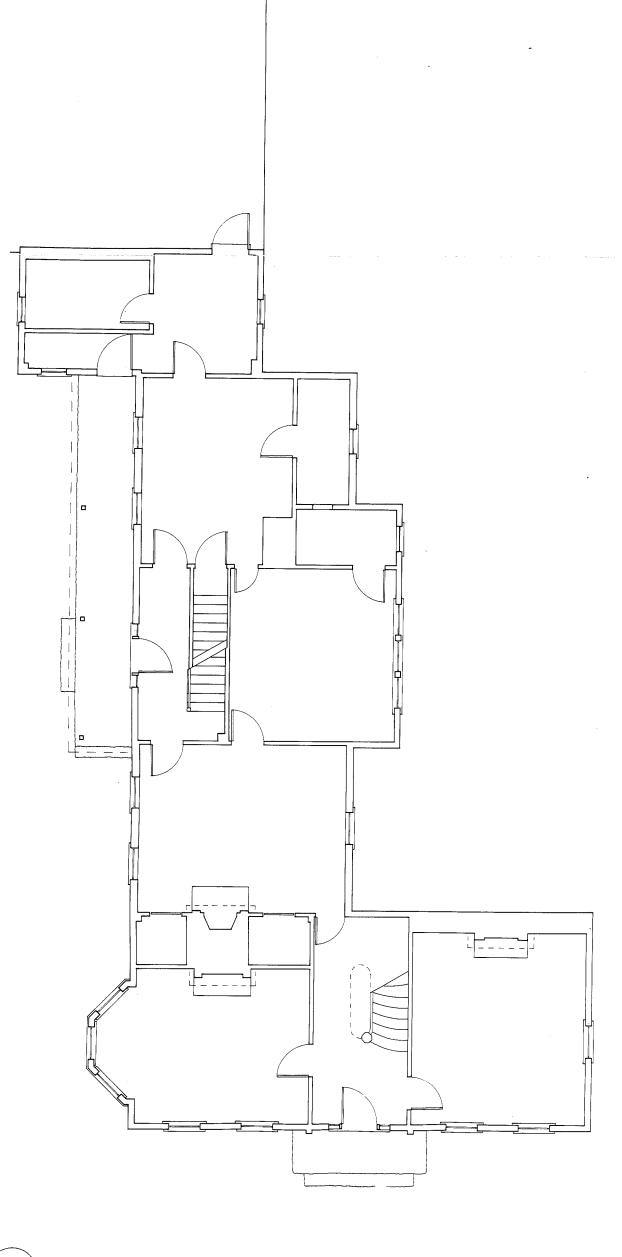
- 22. George Colburn House, 1843-4. This house was built by Leonard Wheeler and occupied by a succession of shoemakers before the Civil War.
- 23. George Pierce House, 1845. This house is located on the same site as the house of General Gregory, which was built in 1820 and burned in 1840. George Pierce, a teacher and livestock farmer, purchased the Gregory property in the 1840's and built the current house. Pierce died in 1892 and his wife in 1893.
- 24. J. Perry House, C. 1845.
- 25. Widow White House, C. 1840's. White's husband, S.P. White, was killed in the Civil War.
- 26. David Foster House, 1850. Foster, an employee of the furniture shop, moved next door when he married Widow Bartlett in 1859.
- 27. Obadiah Walker House, C. 1850. Walker was a peddlar, storekeeper, and postmaster. He owned this house until 1864.
- 28. Franklin Richardson House, C. 1850. Richardson may have bought this house from an S. Lee, possibly one of the children of Parson Lee. Richardson died in 1881.
- 29. William Clement Jr. House, C. 1850. Clement married the widow of Dr. Stephen Bacheller Jr. She survived him and died in 1881.

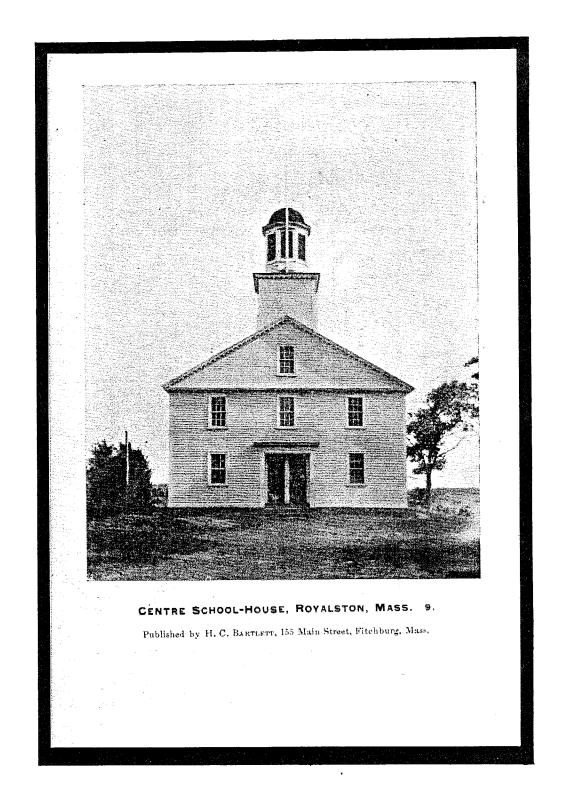
- R. The common was extended to the south in 1835, adding land which was originally Parson Lee's garden.
- S. Blacksmith Shop and Residence. These buildings may have been early structures. Leonard Wheeler conducted his blacksmith business here before relocating in 1843. The buildings were removed by Rufus Bullock in 1855.
- T. J.E.P. Austin Store, 1837. This structure burned in 1848 and was not rebuilt.
- U. Union Society (Baptist) Church, 1839. The congregation of this church wanted a structure on the common but soon lost the enrollment to support it. In 1863, the building was bought and moved by George Pierce to replace his barn, which had burned. It later was used by the town fire department until it burned in the 1920's.
- V. In 1840, the Congregational Church moved and rebuilt their 1797 meetinghouse. It burned in 1851, and was replaced the following year. The Revere Bell was destroyed in the fire, but was recast the same year.
- W. Town House, 1840. Town business was conducted in this single story building until 1867, when the current town hall was completed.



Barnet Bullock House Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873







Center Schoolhouse
Postcard published by H.C. Bartlett, 1906(?)



George Miller House Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873

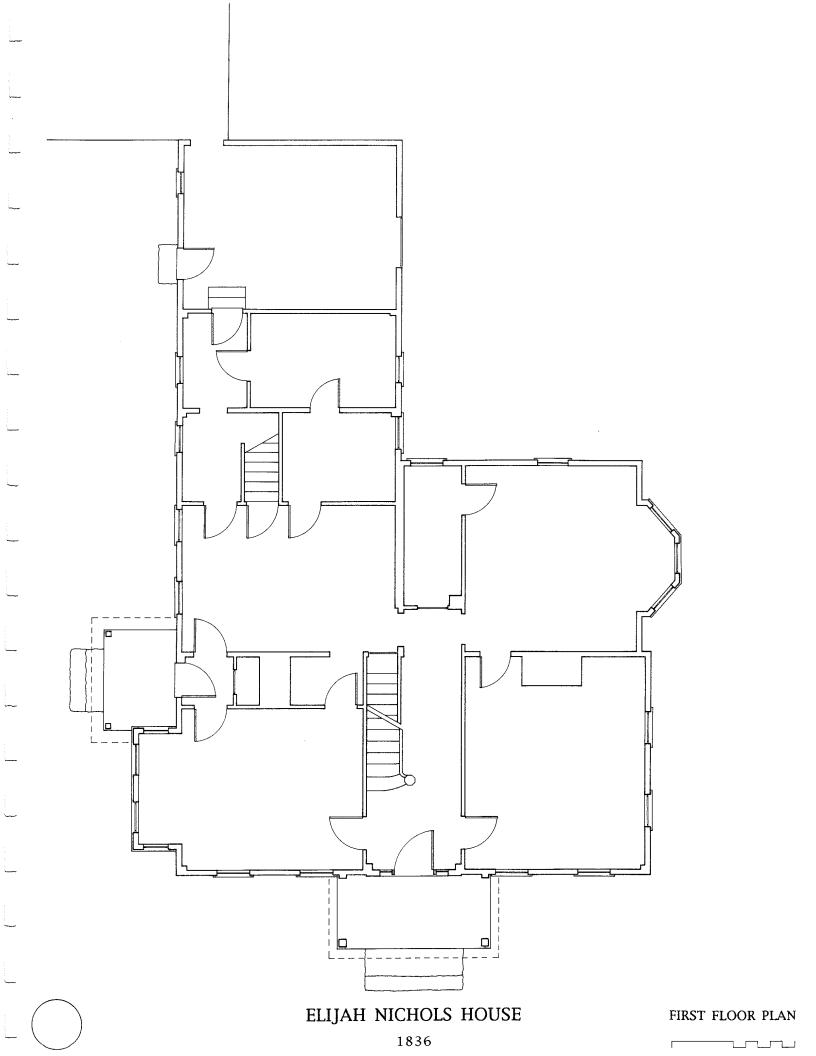


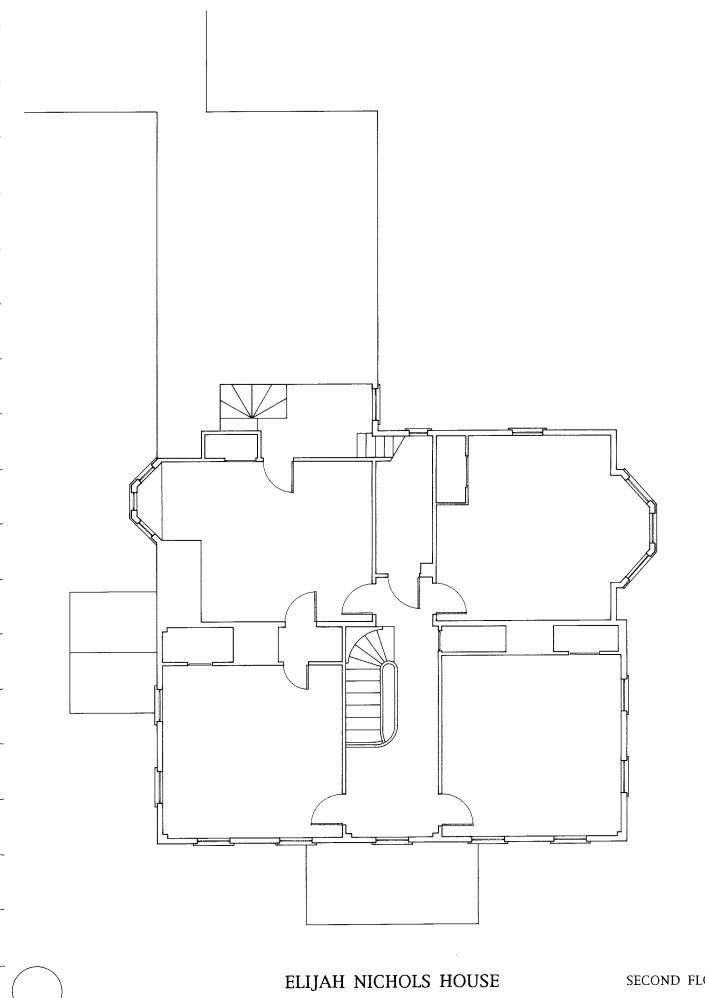
RESIDENCE OF DR. FRANK W. ADAMS, ROYALSTON, MASS.

33

One of a series of 35 Post-Card Views of Royalston, mailed anywhere on receipt of 10 cents per dozen, by the publisher, H. C. Bartlett, 352 Main Street, Fitchburg, Mass.

Elijah Nichols House Postcard published by H.C. Bartlett, 1906(?)



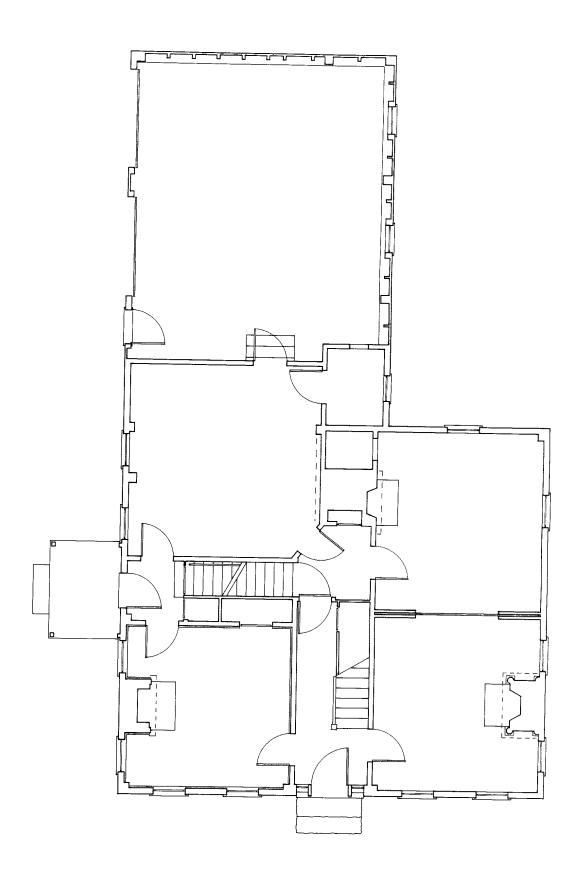




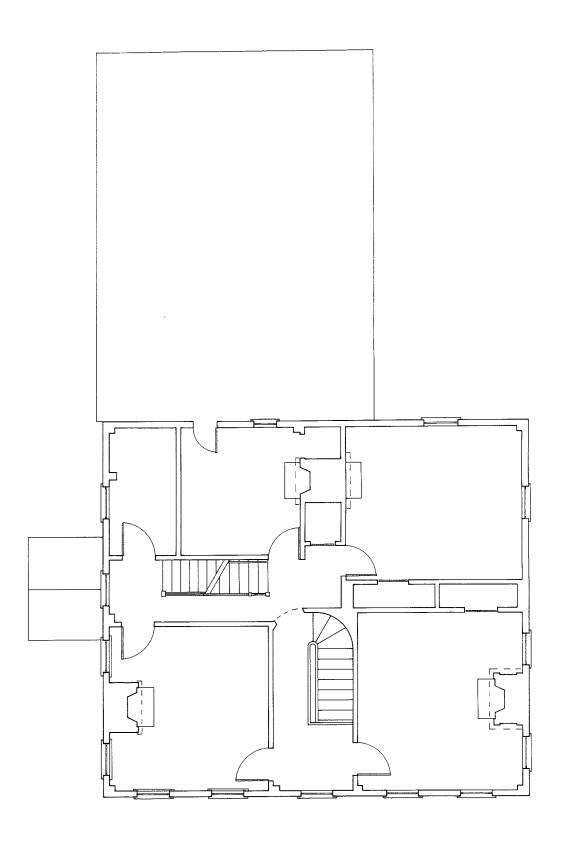
William O. Brown House Dr. Stephen Bacheller House in background Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873

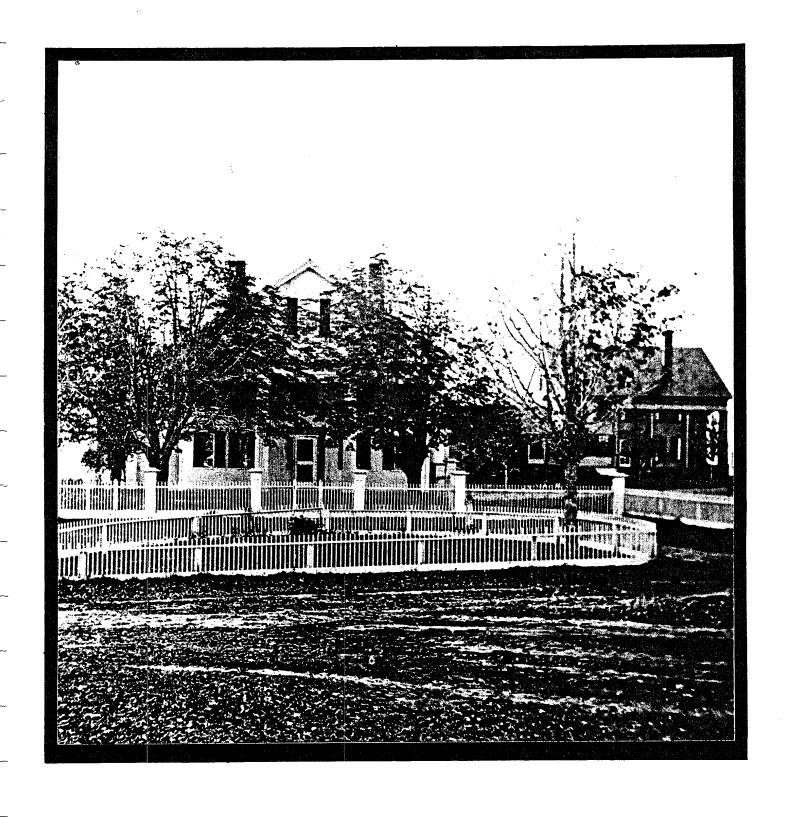


WILLIAM O. BROWN HOUSE









Dr. Isaac P. Willis House J.E.P. Austin House in background Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873



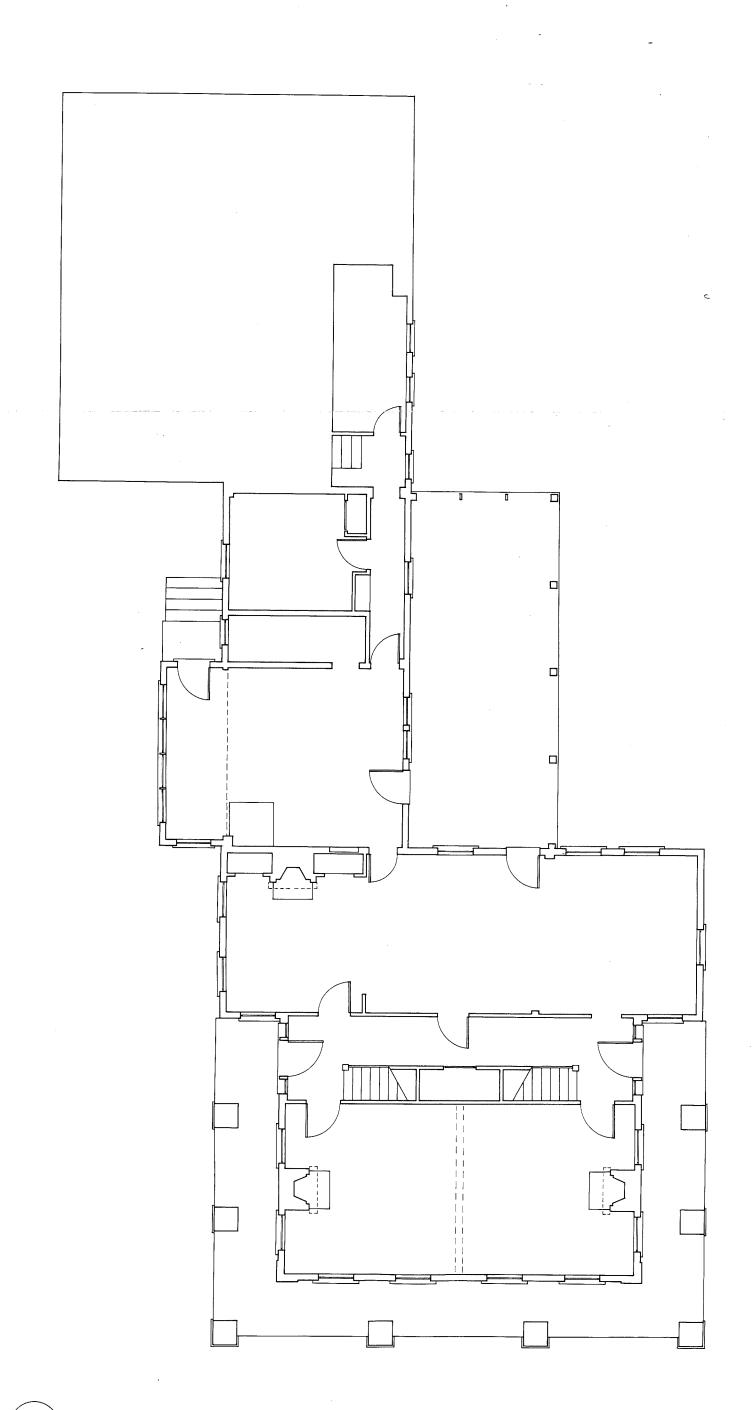
DR. ISAAC P. WILLIS HOUSE
1838

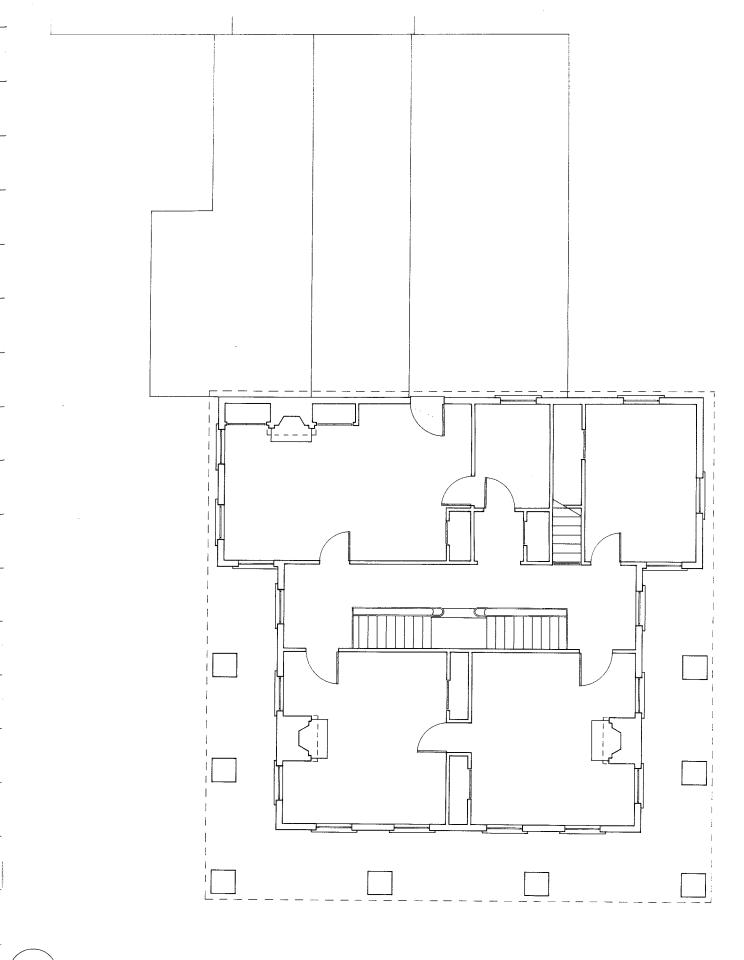


J.E.P. Austin House Stereograph by H.C. Bartlett, 1873



J. E. P. AUSTIN HOUSE





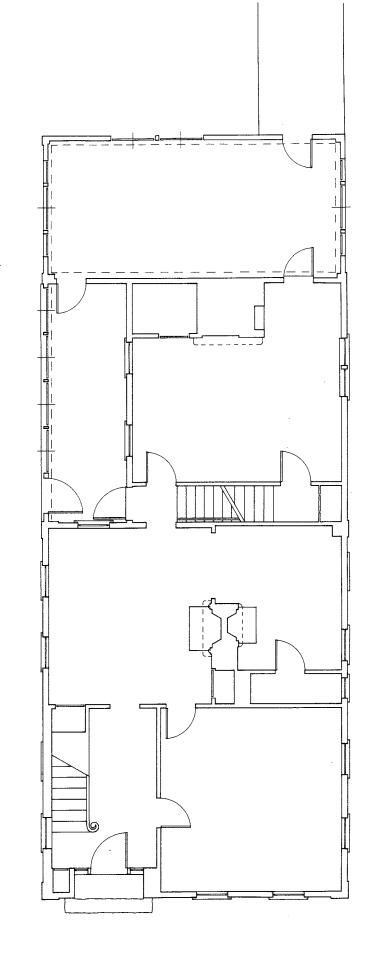
J. E. P. AUSTIN HOUSE 1839

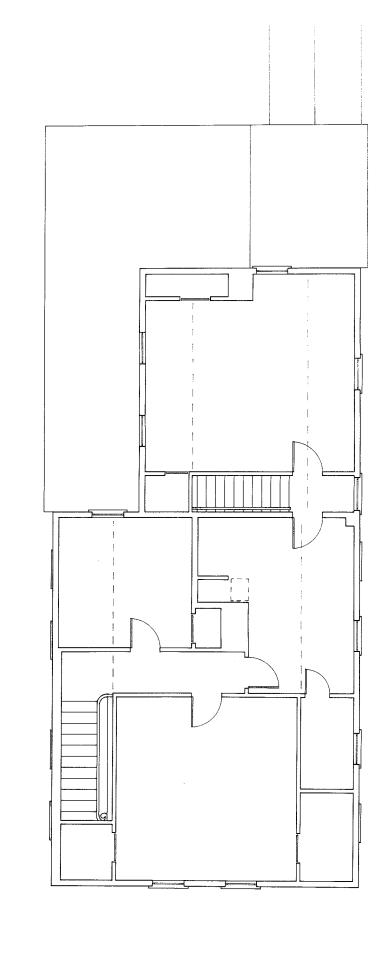


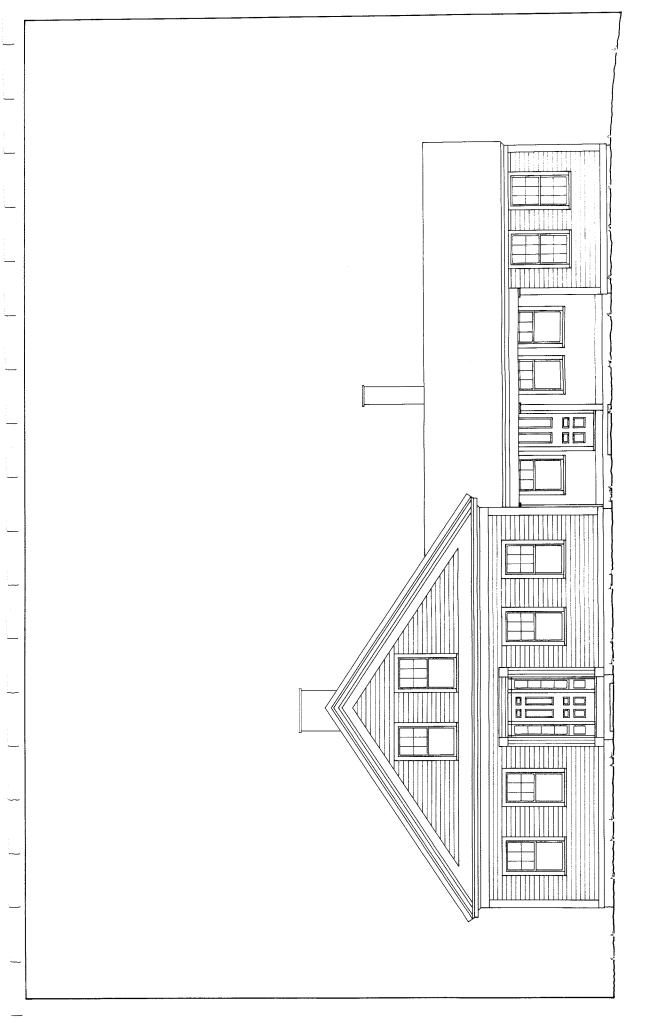
Bartlett-Foster House Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873



BARTLETT- FOSTER HOUSE 1841

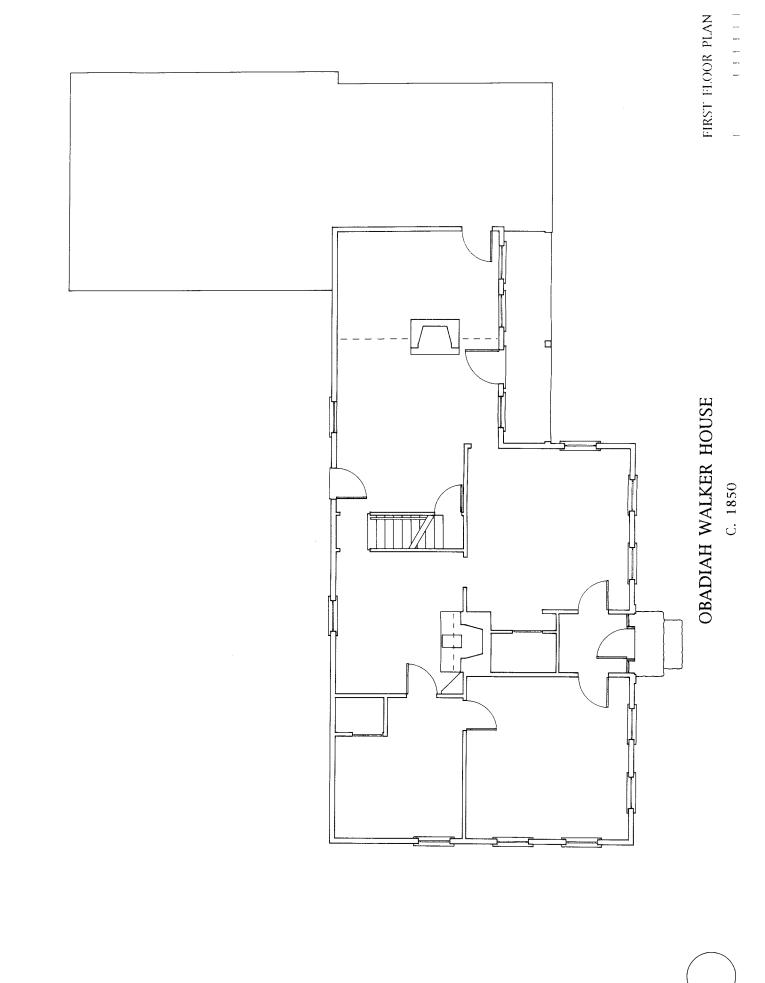


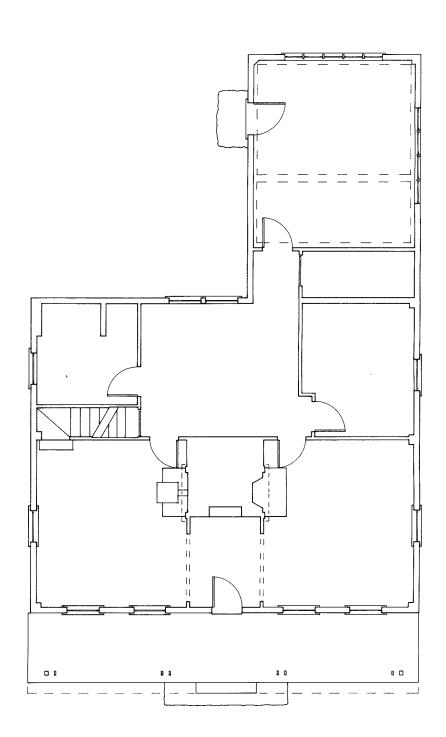


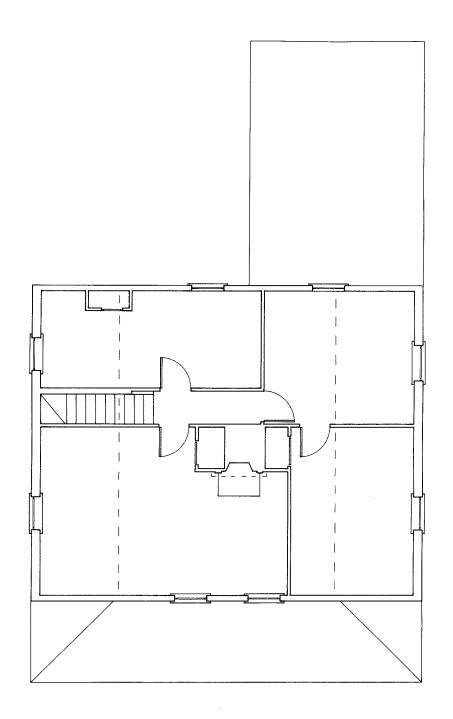


OBADIAH WALKER HOUSE

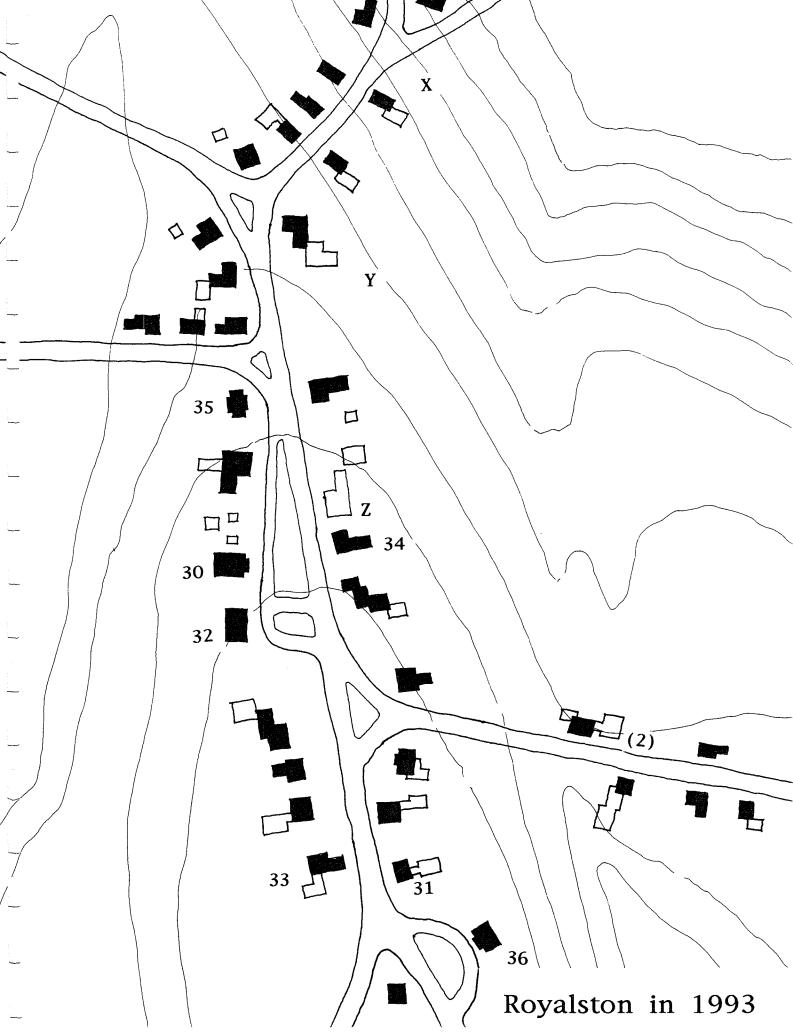
C. 1850







FRANKLIN RICHARDSON HOUSE



Royalston 1850-Present

- 30. First Congregational Church, 1852. This is the fourth structure to serve its congregation. It stands on the same site as the third structure, which was built in 1840 and burned in 1851. This church was designed by Chauncey Chase and built for \$8800. Its steeple blew down in the hurricane of 1938 and was subsequently rebuilt.
- 31. Anthony Donnelly House, 1853. This house is probably the renovation of the hatter's shop built by William Jerrel in 1780 and located south of William Brown's house. It was bought and moved across the common by Donnelly in 1853.
- 32. Town Hall, 1867. Before town and church business were separated by law in 1831, all meetings took place in the church (meeting house). Between 1841 and 1867, the town met in a single story structure which stood south of the parsonage. This building was designed by Chauncey Chase and built for \$9000.
- 33. Congregational Parsonage, 1874. After the Lee house was moved, a new parsonage was built on its site in 1874.
- 34. Bertha Lee House, 1900. J. Howard Lee purchased the Estabrook mansion before 1900, and built this house for his daughter. It stands on the site of a rental house built by Joseph Estabrook around 1807.
- 35. Newton Library, 1910-11. This library was built with a \$10,000 gift by Phinehas S. Newton on land donated by William H. Hill. It was designed by the Fitchburg firm of H.M. Francis and Sons.
- **36.** Raymond School, 1938-39. This building replaced the 1835 schoolhouse next door. It was designed by the Worchester firm of Harry L. Meacham Associates, and built for under \$65,000.

Royalston 1850-Present

- X. By the middle of the century, a number of small industries had built structures on this site. The earliest of these was Sawyer's furniture shop, which obtained power by diverting Little Pond and constructing a water wheel. The furniture shop burned in 1853. Other structures on the same site housed a carriage shop (1842-52), a palm leaf shop (1850's-1870's), and a blacksmith shop (until 1889). All or most of these buildings were gone by the turn of the century.
- Y. Steam Mill, 1857. In 1857, George Whitney joined with several other prominent citizens in an ill-fated venture to industrialize Royalston by building a large steam mill on land behind his house. Due to a financial panic the same year, the four story brick mill never operated and was sold and moved to Fitchburg in 1866.
- Z. Clark-Estabrook Mansion, 1872. This large mansard Victorian was built by Joseph Estabrook Jr. and his widowed sister-in-law Mrs. Clark. It was sold before the turn of the century to J. Howard Lee, a Boston financeer, and demolished for tax reasons in 1923.

Note: Numerous barns, carriage houses, and sheds which once belonged to the houses throughout town have also been destroyed, and their locations are not documented on this plan.



First Congregational Church Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873



Town Hall Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873



View Looking North from the Lee Parsonage Reverend Ebenezer Perkins House (right foreground) Clark-Estabrook Mansion (left of center) Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873



View Looking North Along the West Side of the Common
Elijah Nichols House (left)
William O. Brown House (center)
Town Hall
First Congregational Church
Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873



View Looking North Along the West Side of the Common
Dr. Stephen Bacheller House
Town Hall
First Congregational Church
Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873



Reverend Ebenezer Perkins House (to left)
Dr. Isaac P. Willis House (to right)
Major John Norton House in background
Stereograph printed by H.C. Bartlett, 1873

Purpose

"If the preservation movement is to be successful... (i)t must attempt to give a sense of orientation to our society using structures and objects of the past to establish values of time and place."

While a primary concern for our urban realms remains critical to the future, we must also permit an examination of other community models. In the past decade, there has been an increasing interest in the development of new communities which respond to our needs for a sense of place and identity. The results of such thinking, towns like Seaside or the Kentlands, have followed historical models both in morphology and in style. While the issue of style may be considered unimportant, the element of traditional planning strives to create an environment which fosters human interaction and a sense of community. Nevertheless, these instant towns are troublesome in that there is often more an apparent than a real diversity, and a dislocated genuiness in the rigid adoption of stylistic concerns. The question then poses itself whether our efforts are misdirected: whether, rather than merely imitate the historic towns we may more vitally engage them to find new life in an environment and community which already exists.

¹James Marston Fitch, With Heritage So Rich. (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1983), p.8.



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Sincere thanks to the people of Royalston

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 - 9. <u>History of Worcester County</u> edited by Ellery Bicknell Crane, 1924.

- 10. <u>Reflections on Royalston</u>
 by Hubert Carlton Bartlett
 Published by the Reflector, Fitchburg, 1927.
- 11. A Narrative History of Worcester County by John Nelson, 1934.
- 12. The Story of a Meeting House by Robert W. Adams Royalston, 1952.

B. Maps and Atlases

Maps in the Massachusetts State Archives:

1781, third series, volume 34, p. 10 1783, third series, volume 15, p. 9 volume 21, p. 30 *1794 series, volume 4, p. 11 1798 third series, volume 17, p. 28 1803 third series, volume 17, p. 13 *1830 series, volume 4, p. 2 1859 third series, volume 47, p. 17

Resources in the Massachusetts State House Library:

1857 map, Worcester County
W.E. Baker & Company, Boston, N.Y. Scale: 1" = 1 mile
1870 Worcester County Atlas
F.W. Beers & Company, N.Y. Scale: 1" = 300 rods
1892 map, Worcester County
Geo. A. Walker & Company, Boston. Scale: 1/2" = 1 mile
1898 Atlas of Worcester County
L.J. Richards & Company, Philadelphia. Scale: 2" = 1 mile

^{*} these are complete surveyed maps of the town.

C. Other Sources

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Frances Green
A Big Year for Fair Royalston
Worcester Telegraph, August 1965

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Society of Architectural Historians, New England Chapter *Tour Notes*, by William W. Owens, Jr., 1982

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Athol: Miller's River Publishing Company, 1983

D. Sources for Research

Royalston:

Royalston Historical Society Patricia Poor, Secretary

Royalston Public Library

Royalston Town Hall

Royalston Cemetaries

Boston:

The Boston Athenaeum 10 1/2 Beacon St. 227-0270

Bay State Historical League Massachusetts State House 922-1186 (parent organization for local historical societies?)

Boston Public Library Main branch, Copley Square

Division of Cultural Resources National Park Service North Atlantic Regional Office 15 State St. 565-8841

Massachusetts Historical Commission 80 Boylston St. 727-8470

Massachusetts Historical Society 1154 Boylston St. 536-1608 Massachusetts State Archives State House Library 727-2590 Columbia Point Archives 727-2816

New England Historical Geneological Society 99 Newbury St.

National Trust for Historic Preservation Northeast Regional Office 45 School St. 523-0885

Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities 141 Cambridge St. 227-3956

Worcester:

American Antiquarian Society 185 Salisbury St. 755-5221

Worcester County Court House 2 Main St.

Worcester Public Library

Also:

Research libraries at Old Sturbridge Village and Historic Deerfield, Mormon Library, Salt Lake City.