

Early American Life

traditions
period style
antiques
architecture
history

History of 241 Main St., Hampton, Connecticut

Written in the summer of 2017 by Richard Prario, owner

Dr. John Brewster, 5th generation descendant of the Plymouth, MA, pilgrim Elder William Brewster, was born in Canterbury, CT in 1741. Later, he moved one town north to Hampton, and became the town's first resident doctor in the mid 1700s. He settled on Main St., eventually at #249, a house which is still there today, albeit in an altered form. The Descendants of the Mayflower Society states that Dr. Brewster "studied medicine with Dr. Barker of Franklin, CT."

One of Dr. Brewster's children from his second marriage, Betsey Avery Brewster, married Joseph Prentis, born in Weathersfield, VT in 1787. He was an 1809 graduate of Dartmouth College in New Hampshire and then "read law with the Honorable Sylvester Gilbert at Hebron, CT." (Excerpted from "Sketches of the Alumni of Dartmouth College" by Rev. George T. Chapman, published by the Riverside Press in 1867 in Cambridge, MA.) The Prentis/Brewster wedding was performed in Hampton in 1815 at the Hampton Congregational Church. Joseph started his law practice in the town probably circa 1812, the year he was admitted as a freeman. Sometime between 1812 and 1819, Dr. Brewster helped him build a one-room law office on Dr. Brewster's Main St. property, south of the latter's house. On February 2, 1820, Windham County Surveyor and builder, Jonathan Clark, agreed to build 241 Main St. for the Prentis family, which at that time comprised Joseph, Betsey, and their daughter, Eliza. Son John would be born in 1821. The frame of the house was raised on June 21, 1820, and the dooryard finished on December 1, 1821. (These precise dates can be ascertained because they appear in Jonathan Clark's journal, now preserved at the CT historical Society in West Hartford. A Hampton antiques dealer, Don Ladd, discovered the journal many years ago and donated it to the Society. I believe a copy of it exists in Hampton's Town Hall, but am not sure.) The house was completed on February 11, 1822 at a cost of over \$2,000, which Dr. Brewster partially bankrolled. The deed said that the house would be the legal property of Betsey and Joseph Prentis, but that they would agree to allow Dr. Brewster and his wife, Ruth Avery Brewster, now in their 70s, to live in it with them until they died. Both died in 1823.

At the time the house was built, the Prentis law office, already on the building site, was moved about 50 feet to the south to make way for the construction of the house, a 2-story, hip-roofed, twin chimney, partial center hall structure in the Federal period style, replete with Palladian window, pilasters, recessed entry, and a heavily carved frieze on the façade as well as both sides. A one-story kitchen/work room wing was attached to the rear, and a barn was constructed about 100 feet behind the house. The lot size was rather small then, but in the next few years the property grew to about 15 acres until 1870, when Wolcott Cary and family sold off most of the land, reducing it to about 4.5 acres.

From the beginning, Prentis had difficulty paying for the house, and eventually went bankrupt in 1826, selling it to one of Betsey's brothers, Dr. William Augustus Brewster, who kept it until 1853, when he sold it to his son, Dr. Francis Brewster, who promptly sold it in 1854 to William Clark and his wife, who were tailors. The one-room, lawyer-then-doctor office next to the house now became a millinery shop. The

small structure was no longer in existence on an 1870 map of Main St. Perhaps it was dismantled or used as part of the mudroom/formal side entrance added to the house about the same time by the Cary family. Incidentally, when the house was reroofed about 2012, the original 1820 roof was discovered under the 1870 mudroom roof, and several of the 1820 wood shakes were retrieved.

PRIVY/OUTHOUSE and SHUTTERS

The house retains its 1820 privy/outhouse. In 1820 it was located somewhere in the back yard, but in the latter 1800s it was attached to the southwest corner of the kitchen/workroom wing. About the year 2005 it was moved back into the rear yard. Upon removing narrow, vertical, beadboard from the privy's interior, underneath were revealed several layers of wallpaper, the earliest of which may date to the 1850s. The main house had long since lost its wallpaper, so it was an especially gratifying surprise to find some in the outhouse. I doubt that in 1850 there was a specific type of wallpaper for privies. So, I assume it was wallpapered with leftovers from the main house. By the way, the privy is a 2-seater with two small, fixed shutters for ventilation, one on the rear and one on the west side. The shutters match in style the 1820 shutters on the main house so are probably original to the structure.

Speaking of shutters, when I bought the property in November 1997, there were none on the house. However, I found inside 3 sets of ancient ones plus a fanlight shutter. At Old Sturbridge Village (OSV), Curator Ed Hood authenticated them, stating that they were rare examples of their type. Mr. Flynt at Historic Deerfield agreed. A few years later, I donated them to OSV's research collection. However, I retained the fanlight shutter which now sits in its original location over the fanlight on the Palladian window. Before I donated the shutters, I had a paint analysis performed, which revealed multiple layers of paint, many of them bright green.

Ed Hood gave me a documented paint formula for shutters dating from the 1820s-30s. It turned out to be a very bright green as well, so when Bill Treiss of Lebanon, CT, made new shutters for the house which matched the 1820 set, I used that color, a hue I fondly call "John Deere Green." By the way, the color caused a bit of a stir with the townspeople. I just call myself (instead of Ann of Green Gables), Rich of Green Shutters. A few years later, OSV changed the shutter color on their Salem Towne House from black to this color. I was a bit smug in teasing Ed Hood that I had accomplished the task several years before the Village.

A few more words about the shutters. One of the original pairs confused my restoration carpenter, Bob Garofalo, because one shutter was wider than the other. He was frustrated because he couldn't find the window on the house to which the pair had originally been affixed. Finally, he had an epiphany. He discovered that this adjustment had been made in order to avoid overlapping shutters on the front of the house. This brought up the question as to whether I could live with asymmetrical shutters. Well, indeed I could! It is very difficult to discern the asymmetry unless they are closed over the windows.

BARN

The barn was constructed at the same time as the house, I believe. It is a typical vertical board, gable-roofed, English-style structure with a cupola. Around 1880 its vertical boards were covered with horizontally-placed clapboard. In the 1980s or 90s, the barn was saved from collapse and repaired by then owners, Steven Buncher and Robert Boylan. They shifted the east entrance door a bit toward the south, so it no longer lines up with the cupola. It is my guess that they also removed the horse stalls and the loft floor. In addition, on the west-facing side, they added two small entrances, on either side of the original, large center opening. All doors on the openings were made new at this time. Finally, new flooring was laid and the louvered vents (fixed shutters) in the cupola were changed to 4 pairs of six-paned windows. About the year 2005, my carpenter, Bob Garofalo from Chaplin, replaced one north-facing cupola window with a fixed shutter in order to reestablish good ventilation for the barn's interior.

As for the color of the barn, my guess is that it was initially left unpainted. An 1850 photo donated by a Brewster descendant appears to show this. But eventually it sported a red color. Evidence was found in that regard by examining the layers of paint on some of the barn's original exterior boards. It is hard to

determine if it had red trim at the time. But, time marches on. In a photo of the house from about 1903, the barn appears in the background painted totally in white! So, to recap: unpainted; red; white; red with green trim (1980s); as of 2017 red with white trim and a greenish east-facing door. WHEW!

A few more notes about the barn. In 2016 I had a light on a timer added to illuminate the interior of the cupola. The first attempt was a failure, because the wattage was way too strong. From the exterior, it was Vegas on the Hill and risked being added to aviation maps as a new guidepost for passing jetliners. However, once the brightness was adjusted, it became the Beacon on the Hill I had envisioned, not historically appropriate, but, hey, this is not a museum property. Another aside about the barn: With such a marvelous asset, I had always wanted to use it for a large party. So, twice in the past 10 years, I hosted a Bastille Day (July 14) party. Given that I am a French (and Spanish) teacher, I thought it appropriate to celebrate the French independence day as well as that of the USA. The events began just down the street in the Hampton Congregational Church where we sang the French and American national anthems, accompanied by the organ. Additional American patriotic songs were sung, but since I didn't know any French ones except for La Marseillaise, we were content with Alouette and Frère Jacques. After the song fest, everyone (about 60) processed down the street to the barn where we shared a wonderful potluck dinner followed by a performance by a cabaret singer. A French family was in attendance and after the church singalong, the wife said that during the singing of her national anthem, she teared up, saying that it was one of the most moving moments of her life.

Parties to come? Perhaps in 3 years to commemorate the 200th birthday of the property.

THE HOUSE – EXTERIOR

To describe the exterior of the house, I will quote the 1930s Pine Series? data sheet prepared by the architect who visited Hampton in those years. (Originals are in the Hampton folder at the CT Historical Society in West Hartford.)

“Census of Old or Distinctive Buildings in the State of Connecticut” “Hampton” “Present owner: Mary S. Clapp”

“Wood, 2 ½ story, hip roof, 2 brick chimneys.”

“Wood, 1 ½ story” (off-center rear ell, one brick chimney. My comments).

“6 over 6 windows, first floor with moulded cornices.”

Doorway and Façade: “The doorway is unusually fine and has a Palladian window arrangement. The door is double, recessed 18 inches, has one-half sidelights, fourteen pane fanlight with moulded rim and keyblock. Above is three over six Palladian window with one-half sidelights and woven effect fan. On either side of each sidelight is a fine reeded pilaster with reeded capital. Straight pilasters run up the front of the house on sides of door and Palladian window, with spiral carving above capitals. Between pilasters, on frieze, is more woven effect strapwork.”

Exterior: “The walls are clapboarded and the corner pilasters are tapered and edged with moulding. The cornice projects twelve inches all around (front and sides of 2 ½ story part of house), On frieze is alternate diamond-fluted pattern, about six inches deep. Above pilasters is double spiral arrangement. “

(The diamond-fluted pattern is repeated in miniature just above the recessed front door. My comment.)

“This house, facing east, is four feet above and fifty feet from the main road. It has a fine lawn in front and maples; also barberry bushes. At the rear is a barn and apple trees.”

THE HOUSE – INTERIOR

The first and second floor plans are almost identical, as is typical for these Federal period “boxes,” thousands of which were built in the New England countryside in the first half of the 19th century. The floors of most of the front rooms are of southern hard pine, probably harvested from trees in Georgia. The rear rooms have oak? chestnut? flooring. The pine and oak/chestnut floors are original to the house. The floors in the rear ell are of narrow oak boards dating from when the ell was redone about 1880. Ceiling height on main floor: 8'2". On second floor, 7'8".

First Floor

Partial center entry hall with stairs on north wall leading to second floor. Hall is flanked by two front parlors, the “best room”(formal parlor) in the northeast corner and the sitting room in the southeast corner. Behind the parlors is a dining room (southwest corner) and a den/bedroom/?/ in the northwest corner. Between these two rooms is the 1820 pantry/buttery, and enclosed back stairs which lead to the second floor. Both the pantry and the back stairs disappeared about 1870 when the Wolcott Cary family expanded the dining room, a change which created a huge, grand, rectangular room. In the 1970s or 80s, the owners of the house had the rear stairs put back into the original space, but they did not put back the two walls. Thus, the new staircase was open on both sides and came roaring into this huge room, creating an odd alcove behind the stairs. It was finely crafted of oak, and the spindles and newell post were copies of those on the front staircase. Yes, nicely done, BUT a design disaster(DD). So, very soon after I bought the house in 1997, I pulled out a sledgehammer and restored the area to the original floor plan: to wit, a pantry, plus an enclosed staircase my carpenter probably bought from the old house parts king, Rudy Reznikiewicz, in neighboring Brooklyn, CT. The newly-installed antique staircase sports marvelous wear on the risers and treads. Bob Garofalo, my supremely talented carpenter at the time, added a bit of height to each riser and put the first step in the dining room to make the stairs less steep.

Now back to 1870: At the same time the Cary family expanded the dining room, they put a small addition on the south side of the house, a bump-out as I like to call it, from which one could enter either the kitchen or the now-huge dining room. The “new” exterior door used for the addition was actually the 1820 front door of the house! After Cary had it removed from the façade, he had TWO, narrow doors milled to replace it. I have left them there because they show a reasonable evolution in the history of the house. Moreover, they function better in the tiny, front foyer than a single door, because the double doors can each lie flat against the wall when opened, allowing easy passage to either front parlor. I surmise that the original side entry to the house led into the kitchen. This new configuration must have mightily impressed the Carys’ guests: formal side entrance leading to a huge dining room, furnished perhaps with a 10-foot-long banquet table. Puttin’ on the dog Victorian style.

A final word about the dining room. When the bump-out was added, the west-facing window in the dining room was replaced by a door, which allowed one to enter the room from the bump-out. This door was milled to match the 3-panel configuration of the interior doors original to the house in 1820. Since this change decreased the natural light in the room, a second window was added to the south wall of the dining room, thus disturbing the exterior symmetry of the south-facing side of the house. By the way, when the owners just before me stripped the 1870, 3-panel door, they discovered written on it in pencil the mill order for the door and window! It is still visible: “One 12-light window and one 3-panel door, each 2 dollars. (signed:) W. Cary Hampton Hill.

Now how cool is that?!

CHIMNEYS

Oh my, the CHIMNEYS!! Well, let’s start at the very beginning; it’s a very good place to start. (to quote “Do, Re, Mi”)

The house was built with 3 of them, one on each of the rear walls of the front parlors, and one on the rear wall of the kitchen, all probably sporting huge, oak bases in the cellar. Somewhere between 1870 and 1940, they were removed and replaced with much smaller, “stove” chimneys into which pipes were inserted to vent parlor stoves in each room. At this time, I surmise that all the mantelpieces were removed as well. In 1997, when I purchased the property, there was an early Victorian mantelpiece in the best room (northeast parlor), but behind it there was no firebox. Above it were cupboard doors, probably original to the house, which also opened to a solid wall but which did reveal a filled-in hole where a stove pipe had entered the stove chimney. This was certainly good evidence for an 1870 or 1880 time period for the removal of the 1820 chimney. There was no hearthstone. It had been removed long ago, but the opening where it once had been located had been carefully filled in with narrow boards.

In the northwest parlor as of 1997 there was a crudely made mantelpiece which was probably created anywhere from 1960 to 1997. The difference here, though, was that there actually was a firebox in which one could build a fire. No hearthstone, though, but once again, the 1820 floor cut-out.

The dining room as of 1997 had no mantelpiece, but there was an expensive wood stove dating from the 1970s, I would guess.

It was vented into the stove chimney. The wall close to which it sat was partially bricked over as a safety measure: quite a conglomeration and not a very visually appealing fireplace wall.

The northwest room (den/bedroom) had no mantelpiece or fireplace as of 1997, but once again there was the cut-out in the floor where the hearthstone had rested.

The kitchen as of 1997 had no fireplace. The replacement stove chimney (20" by 20") protruded several inches into the room. Into it ran a stove pipe from a small, circa 1980 Vermont Castings wood stove. No sign of an 1820 hearthstone cut-out because about 1880 the rear wing was gutted, so the flooring, unlike the rest of the house, is not original, but rather of narrow, oak boards.

Upstairs fireplaces? There was indication of only one, and it was in the southeast chamber. Carefully pieced-in wood filled the location of the hearthstone. Otherwise, no hint of a fireplace. No mantel, nothing.

The other front chamber (northeast parlor chamber) showed zero sign of ever having had a fireplace. The 1820 flooring was still intact where a hearthstone could have been. But if there had been one, it would have had to sit on top of the flooring.

Possible but doubtful. In the two rear bedrooms, zero evidence of ever having had a fireplace.

When I first considered purchasing the house in 1997, I quickly decided my major task would be to tear out all 3 non-original chimneys, rebuild them in the earlier, larger size, and install the 6 fireplaces that had been there in 1820. Those fireplaces had been and would once again be the focal points of the rooms! This would include finding antique mantelpieces, searching out early 19th century brick, and tracing down appropriate hearthstones and lintels—not an easy or inexpensive undertaking.

Within a year or two of purchasing the house, the non-original southeast parlor chimney was removed: base, first floor, second floor, attic, roof. Five years later the northeast chimney was redone. After a number of years, I tore out the non-original kitchen chimney but decided not to replace it with anything. The cost saving plus the added usable wall space were my motivation.

During the periods of demolition and restoration of the parlor chimneys, each side of the house was in turn sealed off and furniture removed. Restoration mason Ray Paine (retired) from Pomfret, CT and his assistant, Steve, did the work. Before the projects commenced, I visited several houses where Ray and Steve had built new, period-looking fireplaces. They all had a slightly different look, though. When I found the one I wanted, that gave Ray an exact idea of what to build. I am so glad I did that legwork, for it meant there would be no misunderstanding between Ray and me. I wanted the fireplaces to look as if they had been there since 1820, and I think I was successful, given the genius/artistry of Ray and Steve.

Now, it was off to find “new,” antique mantelpieces. The dining room one came from Steve Bielitz, a restoration carpenter in Glastonbury, CT. He had been saving this surround for a future project of his own, but I managed to convince him to sell it to me. It had come out of an early house in Glastonbury which was being torn down.

The southeast parlor mantel surround came from an antiques shop in Rhode Island. I purchased it mainly because it had a carved motif in the shape of diamonds, which echoed the diamonds in the frieze on the house's exterior.

The northeast parlor mantelpiece came from an antiques shop in southern New Hampshire. Since it was for the formal parlor/best room, I wanted it to be the most ornate of them all, so I was willing to overspend for it.

The northwest room (den/bedroom) now sports a Rudy mantel. It is simple but appropriate. By the way, when clients of Rudy Rezniewicz buy used house parts from him, they refer to them as a Rudy item. For example, “a Rudy door, a Rudy sink, a Rudy latch, a Rudy mantelpiece.”

The second floor southeast bedroom now has a small, simple Rudy mantel surround. A special moment in the restoration of the house came when Ray lit the first fire in this tiny firebox, the first fire there in probably 120 years! Goose bumps time.

And I said to myself, “Well, if my money is going to go up in smoke, it may as well go up my own chimneys.”

I scheduled the two chimney rebuilds during the summer, during which time I would be free from teaching to act as a gopher/go-fer: a bit of sweat equity to lower the cost.

A few last words about the chimneys. When the originals were torn out, many if not all of the bricks and stones from the 1820 fireplaces were buried or reused in the yard. Some of the stones were used to create a walkway along the south side of the house. In fact, in one of them by the side entrance, you can

see two small areas that were dug out to secure the feet of a parlor stove. Other stones were found under the outhouse after it was detached from the rear of the house. One of them was a lintel, probably for the kitchen fireplace or bake oven.

Another longer stone was also there. I decided to reuse/repurpose these historic artifacts by creating a stone garden bench which now stands in the yard behind and to the south of the barn.

Of note, also, is that one of the other supporting stones found under the outhouse was a tombstone-top granite gate post from the early 19th century fence that once stood in the front yard. That post has now been repurposed as well. After my current carpenter, Bob Inman, repaired it, it was placed as a hitching post along the driveway. By the way, Bob is a superb craftsman and does stone work as well as carpentry. I was so lucky to have found him, because a few years ago, Bob Garofalo and his wife retired to northern Maine. I was so upset when he broke the news, it was like a divorce. So multi-talented was he that he also made tin wall sconces, several of which grace my house. He was so particular about his work, he called himself an artist, and indeed he was. By the way, when I first met him, he said he was a practicing Christian and ran his business as such. How often does one hear that? Another comment he made was memorable: "I will not work on a house later than 1850; and your house from 1820, was the last of the good ones."

THE HOUSE - INTERIOR - NOTES ABOUT EACH ROOM

Northeast parlor/Best room

Original woodwork here is more ornate than in most of the rest of the house (window moulding and baseboard) because this was the best room where the family had its most prized possessions. Three-panel doors are not present here; these have a FIVE-panel configuration which could be unique to Jonathan Clark, the builder. The cupboard door was discarded when, many years ago, a passage was made to the rear hall to the south of the fireplace. I had Bob Garofalo recreate the original cupboard, and he hand-made a 5-panel door to cover it! It matches the room's entry door, which sports a more expensive latch than any other interior door. When I moved in, the entry door to the room had a modern door knob, but Bob found the outline of the original iron and brass latch on the door's paint history. A reproduction latch (which fit perfectly) was ordered from Ball and Ball Restoration Supply in PA. Flooring in this room and in the other front rooms on the main floor is of hard pine, probably from Georgia. Flooring in the rear, less public rooms is of chestnut? Or oak? Flooring in the rear wing is of narrowly-cut oak, placed when the wing was redone in the late 1800s or early 1900s. The original, wide-board floor is probably underneath it.

Southeast parlor/Sitting room

Moulded window trim. Plain, flat baseboard. Three-panel doors. However, the door from the center hall has FOUR panels, and is probably an early replacement. No sign of any chair rail in the entire house, nor crown molding. In 1997 when I moved in, this room did have cheap, modern chair rail and crown molding from the 1970s or 80s, but I removed it. YUCK!

Dining room

To the south (right) of the fireplace was an open alcove, probably not original to the house. So, Bob Garofalo created from it a china cupboard and found a 3-panel door from another part of the house.

As already mentioned, the room is now back to its 1820 size and shape, as are the stairs. Incidentally, Bob G. found evidence that the original stairs were extremely steep, stayed within the pantry, and took a 90 degree turn. The quarter-round molding around the windows is 20th century. Plain, flat baseboard.

1820 Pantry

Next to the dining room, to the north, is the 1820 pantry, a room which disappeared when the dining room was enlarged in the 1870s. The pantry reappeared when I had the original floor plan reestablished. Underneath the Victorian-era plaster on the west and north walls was discovered the 1820 wide-board paneling. I also discerned, from paint lines, where the shelves had been, so they were replicated. To the left of the current sink (south of it) was an 1820 doorway which led to the kitchen. I closed it off and converted the space to a linen closet. Since the house has a Victorian-era pantry where the kitchen chimney used to be, I converted this 1820 pantry into a main floor bathroom. A coat closet was created under the new/old staircase.

Northwest Bedroom/Den

Probably during the 1960s or 70s, this room was cut in half by a wall down its center, parallel to the west and east walls.

The front part of the room was a pass-through to get to the full bath in the rear section. The clawfoot tub now in the current pantry/bathroom was as of 1997 sitting on the rear wall of this room to the north of the window. The sink and toilet were on the south wall. When I “recovered” the 1820 pantry and decided to turn it into the main floor bath, I simply transferred the tub to that room, tossed the sink and toilet, and removed the non-original wall. Voilà! 1820. Original to the room are two pairs of raised-panel interior shutters, the only ones in the house. It is surmised that they were installed here to help keep the room darker and warmer when it was used as a sick room. In fact, the deed signing the house over from Dr. and Mrs. John Brewster to Joseph and Betsey Avery Brewster Prentis states that one of the conditions for their receiving title to the property was that they agree to allow Dr. and the Mrs. to live in the house with them and to take care of them until they die.

Well, they were both in their 70s as of 1820 and both died in 1822. So, I assume this room was their bedroom: shutters for warmth and darkness, two closets, on the main floor so no stairs to climb, out of the main traffic flow.

Main floor - Center hall

(Ceiling heights are 8'2” in main floor rooms.)

All-original staircase to second floor on north wall. Doorbell affixed to south wall around 1860 or 1870. Hard-pine flooring, probably from Georgia.

Second Floor – Center hall

(Second floor ceiling heights are 7'8”.)

Hard-pine flooring, magnificent Palladian window: “Often copied; never duplicated!” ☺ This is the only Palladian window I know of that Jonathan Clark crafted.

Northeast bedroom/Parlor chamber

I have been told that building practices when this house was built dictated that the parlor chamber always be located over the best parlor. Such is the case with this house. The woodwork is more elaborate in this bedroom than the others,

and the room sports 5-panel doors (entry and closet) as does the best parlor below.

There is no evidence of the room ever having had a fireplace (undisturbed 1820 hard pine floor), but perhaps it had a parlor stove or Franklin stove because they did not necessarily need a hearthstone, or perhaps the “stone” sat on top of the wood flooring. I have been told that parlor stoves started to be seen in the 1790s, and by the 1820s they were more common. Furthermore, this was a center village, rather ornate house, and this was the master bedroom. So, perhaps it had state-of-the-art heat, too: a stove. Note: After Jonathan Clark finished my house in 1820, his diary/journal states that he went over to “alter the Taintor house.” What he did was gut it, converting it from the older-style center chimney floor plan to the more up-to-date twin chimney/center hall plan. I have been through that house, and in the front bedrooms, there are mantel surrounds but no fireboxes, and the hearthstones sit on top of the wood flooring. Is that what existed in my house in this upstairs bedroom?

Southeast chamber

Three-panel entry door and 2-panel closet door, simple window trim and mopboard, small fireplace with firebox.

Southwest chamber

This is the largest of the 4 upstairs bedrooms. No sign of a fireplace. Plain woodwork, an 1820 closet with 2-panel door. Entry door is a small, 4-panel door with a transom light over it to light the dark, rear hall. It seems that this was added a short time after 1820. There is a long, second closet which Bob G. made more accessible by making two large 3-panel doors.

There is also a HUGE 3-panel door (original) opening to a large staircase to the attic. On the west wall is the entrance to the attic of the rear, one-story kitchen wing. As I remember, this ell attic has formal, narrow-board oak flooring. Did hired help sleep there?

Northwest chamber

Three-panel entry door, 2-panel closet door, plain woodwork, no sign of a fireplace.

Attic

Magnificent and in pristine, original condition. Craftsmen who visit the house all say that this is their favorite part because of the beauty and skill shown in the craftsmanship of the two gunstock posts (chamfered!) and roof

rafters which are hand-pegged into the posts. Chestnut flooring. West-facing dormer window. The sash of this window (now in the barn) was in poor condition, so Bob G. removed it and replaced it with a fixed shutter, giving the attic great ventilation. I assume that in the 1800s the attic was used as a spinning room and perhaps even for sleeping. After all, it is commodious, the roofline is rather high, and there was light from the west-facing window. Maybe the two posts were chamfered to remove sharp corners that could hurt someone as they walked by? Perhaps the attic was partitioned off, but I

have not looked closely for evidence, mostly because the space is now loaded with insulation.

Basement

There is a lot of water that comes off this hillside, so perhaps the bases of the 1820 chimneys were structurally compromised and that is why they were removed and rebuilt.

I don't know. Just a guess. Of course, it could have been simply the result of changing taste and technical advances in heating.

The basement of the main house has a concrete floor (from the 1950s?). Foundation is cut stone and very tight. There is a bulkhead on the south wall. Not sure when that was built.

The basement of the rear wing is a crawl space with about 2 or 3 feet of height with a dirt floor. Foundation is rubble stone.

NOTES on HOUSE INTERIOR DESIGN ELEMENTS

Wallpaper

Frank Racette, Putnam, CT (retired) is a genius. His degrees are in music from prestigious institutions but he also is a national expert on historic furnishings and interior design. As such, he has served as restoration design consultant for several house museums. A special interest is wallpaper, and until recently he ran a wallpaper business in Putnam, CT. When I approached him to help me with the restoration of my house, he was excited to participate. He created a plan which included machine-made wall coverings with historically accurate colors and patterns produced by Waterhouse. Soon after meeting Frank, he recommended Cathy Taylor (retired) of Putnam, CT, to install them. The first room was the southeast parlor. Just before Cathy started, I asked her to keep the doors shut until she finished. I didn't want to see the room in progress. I wanted the dramatic effect of before and after, and, by George, did I ever get it. When she was done, I opened the door, and, voilà!, I was in 1820! The room was transformed. And at that moment, the words of Ed Hood returned to me: "When you get to that point in restoring the house, REMEMBER THE POWER OF PAINT AND WALLPAPER." Was he indeed correct!

But the southeast parlor was just the start. Next was the center hall, then the best room, and finally, three of the four bedrooms. Wallpaper has not been in fashion for a while in the USA, so when people visit the house, they are surprised to see it. But what really grabs their attention is the bold colors and unusual patterns for our times. Many also observe that each room is so different from the next, each standing on its own and sporting its own special character. The wallpaper has a lot to do with that. I know that open floor plans are very popular nowadays, and I do appreciate them. However, I also like the intimacy and individual feel of a series of smaller living spaces.

Frank Racette was not finished creating his magic. He suggested historically accurate materials for window hangings and designs for hanging them. In the southeast parlor he used dimity draped in a simple but elegant manner. The drapes are functional as well, easily raised and lowered by a cord off to one side. A phrase that came to me to define this effect was "simple elegance" or elegant simplicity." In other words, for something to be pleasing to the eye and practical as well, it does not have to be complicated and expensive. Sometimes less is more. Frank suggested a more elaborate treatment for the best room, but I asked him to hang those drapes in the same way as in the southeast parlor. So, he did, but added some bells and whistles such as fringes, tassels, and material made of silk. For the upstairs bedrooms, he recommended simple, white curtains, so as not to compete with the very active patterns of the wallpaper. These curtains came from Country Curtains Company in Sturbridge, MA. The main floor drapes were made by Frank Racette's seamstress, Lynn Von Conta, in her 80s and still active.

Paint colors

In most of the interior rooms, I tried to return to the 1820 wood trim colors. For example, all the rear rooms had trim painted gray. So, that is what I have used. The best room had white and it does now. The other front parlor (sitting room) sported a yellowish color, so I went for that, esp. since it goes well with the wallpaper. The dining room trim color is a Federal period blue, but not the original color, which was a

grayish blue, rather drab. The walls in the dining room were painted in a golden hue (ochre?) I opted for a brighter yellow.

No sign of the house ever having had stenciling on the walls.

Window cornices

Frank Racette recommended adding two wooden window cornices in the dining room in order to add interest to the space. He put me in touch with a local artist, Will Perkins (deceased), who crafted views of what Main St., Hampton, possibly looked like in the 1830s. One view is of my

side of the street, and the other is of the houses facing mine. Included is the one-room law office, but missing is the large house that was added just north of mine in 1870. To adjust the lighting from the windows in the dining room, I installed wooden Venetian blinds made by the DeVenco Company of Decatur, Georgia. Their motto is: "In the spirit of colonial America."

Fireboard

Diane Coté of Willimantic, CT, created the fireboard that now graces the best room fireplace. I had not been thinking of one for the house, but a louder, modern furnace in the basement changed all that. To lessen the noise in the best room I added insulation in the firebox. It did the trick. And since I had recently purchased a modern piano which now sat close to the fireplace, I decided not to use the fireplace to burn wood. It was then that the idea of a fireboard came to mind. I had seen several depicted in Nina Fletcher Little's

book, "Country Arts in Early American Homes," so I pulled it out, and there was a photo of a very cleverly executed trompe l'oeil fireboard. So, I showed it to Diane, and she took photos of my fireplace and duplicated my firebox on wood with the same trompe l'oeil effect. When she delivered it, she said, "I don't want to look at another brick for the next 10 years!"

Furnishings

An over-arching theme that guided the restoration was an attempt to present the residence as if a family were living here anywhere between 1820 and 1860. This was one of the reasons I purchased a baby's crib for one of the bedrooms. The other reason was because of the beauty of its tiger maple and the turnings on its posts. (There is a similar example at the magnificent museum house, Boscobel, on the Hudson River north of NYC.) Another guiding principle for the furnishings was that if I could not afford the antique, I would purchase a good quality reproduction (i.e., Hickory Chair, Council Craftsman, Southwood)

Northeast parlor/Best room

The best room contains a pianoforte made by Alpheus Babcock in Milton, MA, in 1826. I purchased it from a private party in western Massachusetts whose last name was DuPont. It is missing its ivory keys, but it is a beautiful piece of furniture and fits very happily into its space, probably because that is where the family would have put a piano, had they owned one in 1820. There are about 100 Babcocks known to exist, and Darcy Kuronen, Curator of Historical Instruments at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), gave me a tour of their collection and played one of the Babcocks. He subsequently sent me an audio CD of a popular song from the 1830s played on the Babcock I'd seen. As an aside, I will say that I am always taken aback on the rare occasion I visit a new-furniture store, because 90% of the pieces would be too big for this house. Times have changed! The other pieces in the room include reproductions, including a banjo timepiece made by Foster Campos of Scituate, MA, in the 1990s.

Southeast parlor/Sitting room

Furnishings include an inlaid, walnut, fall front desk made in Pennsylvania circa 1800. Also a sewing stand, probably a late 19th century or early 20th century reproduction. Also an Eli and Samuel Terry pillar and scroll clock. Other pieces are reproductions, including the 4 shield-back, clawfoot chairs which are probably centennial chairs or from the 1920s.

Dining room

An 1830s-40s gate-leg dining table, 6 New York tiger maple fancy chairs from about 1820 (part of a set of 8), a Scottish tall case clock from 1825 which is the first antique I ever bought, while still living in a high-rise apartment in Friendship Heights, Maryland in 1976. The Harman pellet stove is from about the year 2008. Note that on the upper front of the stove is iron grillwork that is almost identical to the frieze above the Palladian window on the front of the house. What a coincidence!

Northwest parlor: Den/Bedroom.

My family and friends have nicknamed it the man cave.

Circa 1840 Empire mahogany secretary with diamond-shaped panes of glass in doors above 4-drawer base. 1770s

country Chippendale chair. 1810s paint-decorated step-down

Windsor chair. Silas Terry Empire shelf clock, circa 1831.

Two 1980s Bradington Young leather recliners. Other repro pieces.

Kitchen

1820s chair table with oval top. Custom, bench-made Pennsylvania step-back cupboard in strong tiger maple made by Kendl Monn of Irion Furniture Company, Christianna, PA,

circa 1980s. Irion is no longer in business. Two 1840s paint-decorated chairs, part of a set of 8. Two stripped Hitchcock-style chairs, part of a set of 4, circa 1830? Unusual trencher on Windsor-style legs, circa 1810.

Kitchen cabinetry was hand-crafted from antique wood by Bob Garofalo of Chaplin, CT.

Bob also obtained the large stone sink from Rudy Rznekiewiez in Brooklyn, CT.

Room behind kitchen

Work room/wood storage room

Period Pembroke breakfast table. Six paint-decorated chairs, part of a set of 8. Church pew from the Baptist Church of Wilton Center, NH (now closed).

1820 Pantry (now the main floor bathroom)

Stone sink purchased about 2005 in an antique shop in Peterborough, NH. Bob Garofalo made the base of the vanity from antique wood. Hitchcock-style chair is circa 1850.

Clawfoot tub was on the west wall of the northwest parlor when I bought the house in 1997.

Second floor: Northeast parlor chamber

Twin beds, one is an antique from about 1850, the other a copy of it that I had made about 1985 by Irion Furniture Company, Christianna, PA. 1830s paint-decorated washstand. 1840s Empire chest of drawers. Feather basket. Antique dome-topped storage trunk.

Southeast parlor chamber

Reproduction Pennsylvania House full size bed from 1980s.

Lowboy from the Bartley Collection (purchased in kit form, then assembled and stained), 1980s.

Tiger maple crib from about 1820 with beautifully turned posts. Experts have said this was made for an important baby.

Southwest parlor chamber

Queen size tiger maple tester-top bed hand-made in Youngstown, Ohio, by John L. Treharn about 1990. Bed hangings can be very expensive, so I opted for a simple fabric to cover the tester. It was a close-out item from Country Cutains. Swell/bow front tiger maple chest of drawers circa 1820. Sheraton serpentine 3-drawer dressing mirror/stand.

Antique rocking chair (stripped). Paint-decorated storage chest by a New Bedford, MA, artist from the 1970s depicting a small boat chasing a whale (“Nantucket Sleigh Ride”).

Barn

The makeshift loft I created in the barn’s southeast corner contains a lot of wooden architectural items, most having come from the house. However, the pair of 1820s? dark green exterior door shutters I bought at a yard sale at a house in Canterbury, CT, at the southeast corner of the intersection of Rtes. 14 and 169.

HISTORY OF OWNERSHIP OF 241 MAIN ST.

1820 – 1826 Joseph Prentis, lawyer, and wife, Betsey Avery (Brewster) Prentis.
1826 - 1853 Dr. William A. Brewster, medical doctor. Dr. Brewster was Betsey Prentis’ brother.
1853 – 1854 Dr. Francis A. Brewster, medical doctor, son of Dr. William Brewtser.
1854 – 1867 William Clark. He and his wife were tailors.
1869 – 1903 Wolcott Cary. Farmer and mill owner?
1903 – 1914 Henry L. Wade
1914 – 1920 Mary Wade Brayman
1920 – 1947 Henry and Mary? Clapp
1947 – 1972 Clarence M. Webster and his Belgian wife. Dr. Webster was an English professor at Brown University in Providence, RI, and author of the 1945 best-seller “Town Meeting Country.”
1972 – 1987 Arthur and Dorothy Blondin
1987 – 1997 Robert Boylan and Steven M. Buncher
1997 – Present Richard T. Prario

TRIAL OF A RUNAWAY SLAVE

Soon after purchasing the house in 1997, I consulted the U. S. Census data pertaining to the property. In 1840, among the occupants of the house was listed “one free colored female” between the ages of 10 and 24. Years later, a reporter from the New London Day Newspaper, Maria Hileman, contacted me, saying she was writing a series of articles about the Underground Railroad in eastern Connecticut. When she visited, she showed me a copy of a letter written by a Joel Fox dated July 30, 1896, Willimantic, CT. Ms. Hileman found it as part of the Wilbur Seibert Underground Railroad Collection at the Ohio State Historical Society in Columbus, Ohio. Here is the condensed story:

A young Black woman was brought to Hampton by Dr. Brewster about 1840. About the same time a supposed slave-catcher, Doit Price, arrived to take her back to Florida, but Dr. Brewster would not give her up. So, the case went to court in Plainfield, CT. During the hearing Price was asked to produce papers showing his family did indeed own the woman. He said he left them in his hotel room. The next morning in court he produced the papers, but in judge’s chambers all agreed they were a fake. Price’s lawyer told him that he better get out of town fast, because he was going to be charged with forgery. So Price took off on the stagecoach to Norwich/NYC, and managed to elude the sheriff who had given chase. Subsequently, the young woman went to live with Rev. S. J. May and was not bothered again. I have attached the entire letter to this history of 241 Main St.

JOSEPH AND BETSEY PRENTIS AFTER 1826 BANKRUPTCY

After the 1826 bankruptcy of Joseph Prentis, he and his wife and two children moved about 20 miles north to Douglas, MA, where he practiced law. After a few years there, he moved back to Hampton about 1834, but I do not know where they resided. Betsey died at the age of 40 in 1838, a few months after the death of an infant son, their third child. I surmise that after that event, Joseph and son, John, may have returned to Douglas to stay with his daughter Eliza’s family, who had married John Dudley of that town.

About 1842, Joseph Prentis and his son, John, left New England, headed to Wisconsin and were among the very first inhabitants of Doane County. John stayed there, married, had children, and was a successful farmer and merchant. One of his children, Charles E. Prentis, eventually settled in Vermilion, South Dakota, and operated for many years an extremely successful store which grew to be a department store. His daughter married and had a son, Stanley Munger, who is an attorney there. I have talked to him on the phone, and he sent me a copy of the Prentis genealogy that his mother had researched. I told Stanley about the existence of early-American family portraits of Joseph and Betsey Prentis, and he was floored, especially when I sent him digital copies. That branch of the family had no idea that they existed.

In 1849 or 1850, Joseph and a friend left Wisconsin in the California Gold Rush. The U. S. Census for 1850 shows Joseph Prentis in Placerville, CA, with the profession of “mining for gold.” He exchanged letters with his family back home, but in 1852 all correspondence from him ceased. About that time, there was a terrible fire in the area, so he could have perished in it. Or did someone jump his claim and kill him? Or, or, or.....

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: BURIAL LOCATIONS FOR BETSEY AND JOSEPH PRENTIS

Early Hampton Brewsters are buried in Hampton’s South Cemetery. However, there is no tombstone for Betsey Brewster Prentis, even though she died here in 1838. Neither is there a stone for her in Douglas, MA. So where is she buried?

To help solve the mystery, I invited former CT State Archaeologist, Nick Bellantoni, to take soil core samples and to do ground radar imaging in and around the Brewster plot at South Cemetery. He did find an unmarked grave, but found no buried tombstones.

And of course there is the mystery of where, how, and when Joseph Prentis died while he was in California. An article about these two mysteries appeared in the Hampton Gazette in 2016, very ably written by Jean Wierzbinski. A copy is attached to this document.

JOHN BREWSTER, JR., EARLY AMERICAN DEAF FOLK ARTIST

One of the children from Dr. John Brewster's first marriage was a son born in 1766, John Brewster, Jr. The child was born deaf but nevertheless was able to develop his natural talent in art. After taking a few lessons from Hampton's Congregational minister, Joseph Steward, he embarked on a lifelong career as an itinerant portraitist throughout New England and New York. A well-known antiquarian, Nina Fletcher Little, rediscovered him through her research during the 1960s, and as a result, a major exhibition was mounted of many of his known works by the CT Historical Society. After that event, the value of his paintings skyrocketed. Even today, he is considered one of the best folk artists the United States ever produced.

John, Jr., was the half-brother of Betsey Brewster Prentis. Both of them grew up at the 249 Main St., Hampton, address. In the late 1700s, he moved to Buxton, Maine, to live with another sibling, Royal Brewster, a doctor in that town. Brewster would live there the rest of his life and is buried in the cemetery across the street from the Brewster residence, a huge, Federal period house. Two hundred years later, Dr. Harlan Lane, Professor of Psychology at Boston's Northeastern University, would write a biography of the artist, "The Worlds of John Brewster, Jr." As part of his research for the book, Dr. Lane visited Buxton, and saw that John Jr.'s tombstone was in a very bad state of repair, so he paid for a new one to replace it. I was one of the many people Dr. Lane consulted during his research, and just after publication, he visited me and I showed him the Brewster houses in Hampton. We had lunch at Sharpe Hill Winery in Pomfret where he was astonished to discover that the vineyard's owners had chosen as a label for one of their wines the same Brewster portrait that he himself had chosen to adorn the cover of his book. Before leaving the restaurant, he bought two cases of Ballet of Angels!

When I moved to Hampton in 1997, the antiques dealer across the street, Don Ladd, told me about the artist and of the existence of five portraits John, Jr., did of his own relatives. However, he did not know where they were. So, I embarked on a mission to uncover their whereabouts. My research led me to the Manning family in Douglas, MA., descendants of Joseph and Betsey Prentis' daughter, Eliza. In a phone call with Mrs. Manning, she told me that the five portraits had descended in their branch of the family, but that they had sold four of them many years previous to an important American antiques dealer, William Samaha. The fifth portrait the family had donated to Old Sturbridge Village. My next step was to call Mr. Samaha and OSV with the intent of obtaining photos of the portraits and then printing them on canvas and hanging them in my house. I was ultimately successful. So, instead of paying tens of thousands of dollars for the originals, I was able to realize my goal at a price within the budget of a school teacher.

The five family portraits are: 1. Betsey Brewster at 5 years old; 2. Betsey Brewster Prentis at about age 30; her husband Joseph Prentis; Betsey's sister, Sophia Brewster, who died at age 5; and the double portrait of John, Jr.'s parents, Dr. John and Mrs. Ruth (Avery) Brewster. In addition, I have copies of two other Brewster portraits, not of family members.

My research about the house led me early on to Old Sturbridge Village, and they put me in touch with another Brewster/Prentis descendant, Dudley Marsh, from the Douglas, MA, branch. He was at the time I met him retired and living on Cape Cod. He and his wife befriended me, and they were thrilled to see my restoration project at 241 Main.

DESCENDANTS MARSHALL AND DOROTHY (BREWSTER) BRAINARD

About 10? Years ago, I got a phone call from Fernandina Beach, Florida. It was Marshall Brainard and his wife Dorothy, the Brewster/Prentis descendant. They were in their 80s and had just finished Marshall's genealogy and were now tackling hers.

I seem to remember that Old Sturbridge Village put them in touch with me. They picked my brains about what I knew about her ancestors. They also wanted photos of the Brewster houses. They sent their

son, an architect in Boston, to Hampton's town hall to photocopy hundreds of Brewster/Prentis land transactions. He and I finally convinced his parents to fly to Connecticut and spend several days in Hampton at my house. I can see it even now: Dorothy was standing in the dining room, all 5 feet of her, jumping up and down like a school girl, proclaiming, "I'm going to sleep in my great-great-great?-grandfather's house tonight!" The Brainards subsequently finished the family history and had it published in hard cover, with several copies going to historical societies, friends, and family. A truly amazing couple, and two of the finest human beings who ever walked this Earth.

THE LAND ON WHICH THE HOUSE SITS

The house just south of mine was also built by Jonathan Clark, this one for Col. John Tweedy in 1802. Standing in front of the two houses, one can see the evolution of the builder's style, transitioning from a steep, center chimney hip roofed structure to a lower pitched hip roof with twin chimneys and partial center hall. However, there are striking similarities in the friezes which adorn both buildings.

In front of my house there is a long, rough-hewn, flat-topped stone which could have been an alighting stone as visitors descended from their horses, carriages and coaches.

There are also two hitching posts next to where the road once was. In the early days, a narrow village green/common ran from the church to the current post office. In the automobile era, probably in the 1930s, the State of Connecticut put a modern 2-lane road down the center of the green. The leftover land on either side was added to peoples' front lawns. Still state property, but we have to mow it!

Jonathan Clark made a map of Main St., Hampton, in the 1850s.

It shows the setbacks of all structures and fences measured in rods and links. I believe a copy or the original map is at Hampton Town Hall. The map shows the setback of my house, the millinery shop, and the front yard fence. I converted his measurements to feet and inches and then checked the accuracy of Clark's measurements with today's reality. They were perfect. The distance from the state land marker to my house is 100% correct. And now I know exactly where the fence was. Some day, I or someone else should probe the ground to find the location of the bases of the snapped-off stone fence posts. You may remember that I found the stone gate post under the outhouse!

In 2016 I had Jim Campiformio of Ashford? Eastford? Put in a green privacy barrier along the driveway to afford privacy between my house and the one just south of it. At the same time, he relocated the walkway to the side door with stones given to me by my neighbor on the north side of my house, Marijo Dennison. Thanks, Marijo! Jim also added a picket fence around the old patio. The gate hardware came from Rudy R. in Brooklyn.

The privacy landscape plan was a gift to me from former University of Connecticut Professor of Landscape Architecture, Rudy Favretti.

FUTURE PLANS

1. Redo upstairs bathroom.
2. Maintenance, maintenance, maintenance.
3. Enjoy the fruits of my labor and of the many others who made my dream come true.

