

E. PHYSICAL EVOLUTION

1. Exterior

As the photo of 1897 attests, the Reed Homestead has seen little change. Indeed, only the shutters, the extent of fencing, and the length of the ell separates the present from this 90-year old past, and what we see in 1897 was very close indeed to what was built 90 years before that! Let us address these features in detail:

The fence was always a picket fence supported by granite posts, and the photo of 1897 shows two kinds of pickets: a broad, unpainted picket to the east of the main yard and along the west border of the property, and a narrow, probably 2-inch square picket on the main street frontage and as a separator of front and side yards. The latter is painted white. Until last year, only the granite posts remained (photo 13), but now the Townsend Historical Society has attached to these posts a new picket fence (photo 14) reminiscent of the less formal original. It should be noted, however, that the original simpler picket had voids equal in width to the pickets, whereas the voids in the new one are about half that width. Further, it would surely have been more appropriate to use the fancier picket fence design for the immediate front: it appears more elegant, and would draw greater attention to the property. We recommend this change.

The cast-iron light post, with a pulley arrangement for raising and lowering the lantern, appears on the photo of 1897, and probably dates c. 1850. It is extremely rare and interesting, and is presently defaced by the house sign. This sign should be redesigned and relocated, most likely attached to the fence itself.

The rear Ell or Shed has, of course, changed a great deal. The 1897 photo is the only one to show the 19th century structure, and only dimly: two arched openings with keystones are visible in the part that projects towards the pond. The summer kitchen is original and as old as the house itself, but Mr. E. Hildreth Proctor remembers what lay beyond. In 1918-20, a fire destroyed the original shed, and his grandmother, Harriet Reed Strout, rebuilt and upgraded it on the existing foundation. To the south, towards the pond, was a two-car garage, with the same arched openings and presumably two sets of double doors. Closer to the house was a one-horse stall to the east, with a privy behind it, to the west. Closest to the summer kitchen was the shed itself, with two more arches, a coal bin on its west wall, and a well connected to the new pump in the kitchen of the homestead. From the summer kitchen, under whose floor the oldest well is reputed to have been, it was 3 - 4 steps down to the shed.

Mr. Proctor also recalled that the original shed was destroyed by a fire then ascribed to dry hay and a spark from the passing train. The police chief told him, many years later, that it was arson, that they knew who did it, but had to hush it up.

The replacement shed and garage collapsed in a snowstorm during the depression, and Mr. Proctor helped to clear away the wreckage. The structure was not rebuilt, and the present vault now stands on part of its site. Since the vault is on the same floor level as the house, and not a couple of feet down, and since the land does slope down towards the pond, any attempt to accurately recreate the original shed with its two pair of arches would encounter some difficulty. The best compromise might

be to leave the vault addition alone, but to add the "garage" segment beyond it, 3 - 4 steps down, with its pair of arches. For greater accuracy, one would remove the east window (photo 15) and introduce a pair of false arches with "closed" doors. For daylight, the upper portion of the doors could have glazed lights.

The garden of Harriet Reed Strout was apparently a showplace. Barbara Creighton, who often visited from across the street, remembers that Harriet used her little kitchen bay window for winter plants, and would visit greenhouses every spring in her Model T to collect new stuff for the garden. With an old friend who had attended school with her in New Hampshire, she specialized in peonies. Mrs. Strout was a keen and active member of the Grange, and once bought the very best cake at the Grange Fair to share with all her friends. Apparently, the beautiful gardens were mostly laid out in the 1930's, and oral histories and rough plans should be solicited from Barbara Creighton, E. Hildreth Proctor and others, so that they can someday be recreated as authentically as possible.

When Harriet Strout moved in in 1910, she made two slight changes to the house: a small bay in the kitchen and a small porch over the side door. Both are visible in photographs of 1972 (photos 16, 17), and both were removed in the course of the 1985-86, MHC-funded project. Mr. Proctor recalls that their removal was requested by staff members of the state historical commission. Now that this report has been compiled, and with the wisdom of hind-sight, I would say that a good argument could have been made for their acquired significance and retention. The bay (photo 16) was unusual in form, and linked to Harriet's horticultural predilections, and the side porch, typically Georgian-Revival, emphasized the then-predominant

role of this side entrance. Most important, Harriet Reed Strout was the granddaughter of the builder of the homestead, and only its second and last long-term, full-time occupant. Her changes were made 77 years ago, to a house then just 103 years old. As it is, the introduction of a new double window in the kitchen (photo 18) is neither attractive nor appropriate to 1807, and the new sash has modern muntin profiles rather than the exact reproductions called out in the specifications. Without recognizing the significance of the 1910 changes, it becomes difficult to give proper due to the 1921 electrification, the 1928 bathroom, the kitchen pump, and other charming elements of rural progress preserved at the homestead.

Construction photos fortunately show that the side door retained all of its decorative surround and architrave under the 1910 porch roof (photo 17). This door (photo 19) is thus correctly restored to before the 1910 change, and now conforms to the photo of 1897. The boot scraper, too, appears original (photo 22).

The summer kitchen (photo 20) enjoys a high degree of authenticity as well. It is clad in old plank, visibly original, and its new sill and foundation have been successfully concealed.

The front door (photo 21) is also all authentic, and differs from the side only in having no transom panes. These would have been unnecessary thanks to the second-floor window in the stair hall, and undesirable due to the north orientation of the principal facade.

Drawings and specifications of 1985, as well as construction photos, show that the central chimney was taken down to the roofline at that time and rebuilt. The work was well carried out (with the exception of flashing, to be discussed in Section G), and maintains the proportions and dimensions of the original.

Finally, a closing word should be said about the exceptional 12-over-12 windows (photo 23), all splendidly original. It is very rare for sash to survive 180 years with negligible damage, and even rarer for it to still contain virtually all of its original crown glass. This hand-blown glass, translucent but not fully transparent, can be easily recognized from the concentric circular patterns (photos 24, 25) left by the flashing: i.e.; the opening of the blown form into a disc as the hot glass is twirled in mid-air. As these sash are so remarkable, and some wear is beginning to appear (photo 26), we would recommend that sash conservation be given a high priority. Dried-out putty should be replaced, flaky or unsound paint carefully sanded, bare wood treated with Thompson's Water Seal and then primed, and all woodwork should be given two coats of semi-gloss exterior alkyd oil paint of the highest available grade.

2. Interior

To discuss the physical evolution of the interior spaces at the Reed Homestead, we will again refer to the room designations shown on the previous plans, and describe each room sequentially.

Room A, the parlor, was the second room in the house with Porter murals. Porter, however, seems to have not only done his famous wall paintings, but also grained all of the doors on the first floor, and very beautifully. Nina

Fletcher Little mentions this fact in her description of Porter's work at the Reed Homestead, "also in this house many of the door panels are finely grained in crotch and swirl patterns...." as does Jean Lipman. Indeed, Ms. Little mentions that Rufus Porter was also a grainer, and published, in 1825, A Select Collection of Valuable and Curious Arts and Interesting Experiments, which contains a detailed description of how to paint imitation mahogany and maple. An even more detailed description was published by him in 1846 in Scientific American, the magazine he founded.

The purpose of graining, of course, was not just to have wood resemble itself, or even to disguise one wood into a more valuable cousin. The technique arose out of necessity as well as fashion, at a time when -- as all wood was hand-planed and all lath riven, or split, with the grain -- all finish woodwork and moldings had to be installed before plastering. The dripping of lime water when plaster was applied and spread to meet the non-flat edges of the various dadoes, baseboards and cornices, made it impossible to then use transparent stains. Wood had to be painted to cover up the mess.

The present sequence of applying finish carpentry after plastering was made possible by sawn lath and milled woodwork, and the change-over in techniques occurs between 1825 and 1850. By then, however, graining was appreciated as an art form, not just an expediency. Ms. Little refers to an England writer of 1833, who stated,

"Recommended that all woodwork, if possible, be grained in imitation of some natural wood, NOT WITH A VIEW OF HAVING THE IMITATION MISTAKEN FOR THE ORIGINAL, BUT RATHER TO CREATE AN ALLUSION TO IT, AND BY A DIVERSITY OF LINES TO PRODUCE A KIND OF VARIETY

AND INTRICACY WHICH AFFORDS MORE PLEASURE TO THE EYE..." (my emphasis)

This quotation, reading like some post-modernist philosophy, clearly demonstrates that the unique opportunities for stylizing wood grains into decorative pattern were thought superior to the visual qualities of real wood, and this is evidenced by the intricate effects selected. In the 19th century, the graining comb had replaced the brush, and effects like curly and bird's eye maple attested the new taste for the exotic. The work done by Porter at the Reed Homestead is clearly combed (photo 27), and achieves overall patterns which are as beautifully abstract (photo 28) as they are rich.

The parlor has three full-sized doors and one small overmantel cupboard door, all grained. The one to the stairhall (photo 28), has a small spring latch (c. 1800). This costly device (photo 29), with its small, brass proto-door knob, only occurs at the two ground-floor doors off the principal stair hall. This latch now has a broken spring, and lacks the small knob on the stairhall side. Prevalent hardware for early doors is the HL hinge, two-per-door, attached with early screws (hand-filed slot, no shank, blunt end). The door to the kitchen has such hinges (photo 30), as does that to the stairhall. This door, however, has a wooden knob (photo 31) and mortice lock which, while available anytime in the 19th century, is early enough to be of Porter's era (c. 1835). As the graining stops under the escutcheon, I concluded that the great inventor convinced the Reeds to have at least one modern piece of hardware.

The closet door to the right of the fireplace, actually Dutch doors, is very interesting (photo 32). Since the upper leaf has 2 H hinges, and the lower leaf has

2 butts, I assumed that this door was cut as an afterthought, perhaps by Harriet Strout. Dutch doors were a popular Georgian Revival affectation! Close scrutiny of the door reveals, however, that the lower butt hinges are flanked by the shadow of the leaves of earlier H's (photo 33), so that we are simply dealing with a change of hardware. In fact, the lower leaf sticks even now, and such a defect would quickly have loosened a pair of H hinges. Probably the butts can be ascribed to Mrs. Strout, but they are old enough to date to the Porter ear also. The Dutch doors once had little rim locks (expensive! The closet must have contained the family treasures), but only their shadow now remains. The brass catches which replaced them testify to the lesser value of goods in the post-industrial age, and one is missing its rotating component.

The little cupboard has its own grained panel with a little knob and a later brass catch, and completes the customary hierarchy of panel doors: 2-over-2 for the room doors, one-over-one for the closet, and a single little panel for the cupboard.

The room, overall, is of Federal rather than Georgian construction, as only posts are visible. Girts and Summers are all concealed under a single plaster ceiling surface (photo 34). Between the two front windows is a wood mirror board with wrought hook, and a little shelf with scalloped corners (photo 35), reminding us of the necessity for glass reflecting surfaces in the days when an open fire and its reflections were the only real illumination after dark. The little shelf may have held a steeple clock, since the mantel is not original, and there is also another shelf, this one triangular, mid-way up the northeast post (photo 34). Both shelves appear original.