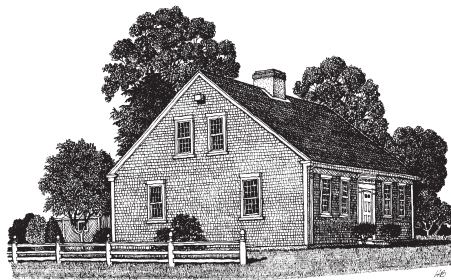




Dennis Historical Society

Post Office Box 607
South Dennis, Massachusetts 02660

"Rebuilding the Walls of Jericho"
Preservation and Restoration of Dennis' First Museum



The Jericho Historical Center

90 Old Main Street
West Dennis, Massachusetts 02670



The Jericho Historical Center

“Rebuilding the Walls of Jericho”

Preservation and Restoration of Dennis’ First Museum

2018 - 2022



Background

The Captain Theophilus Baker House at the Jericho Historical Center located at 90 Old Main Street in West Dennis, is a circa 1801 full Cape design having two first floor windows, two on each side of the front door. It is an excellent example of traditional Cape Cod architecture being one and half

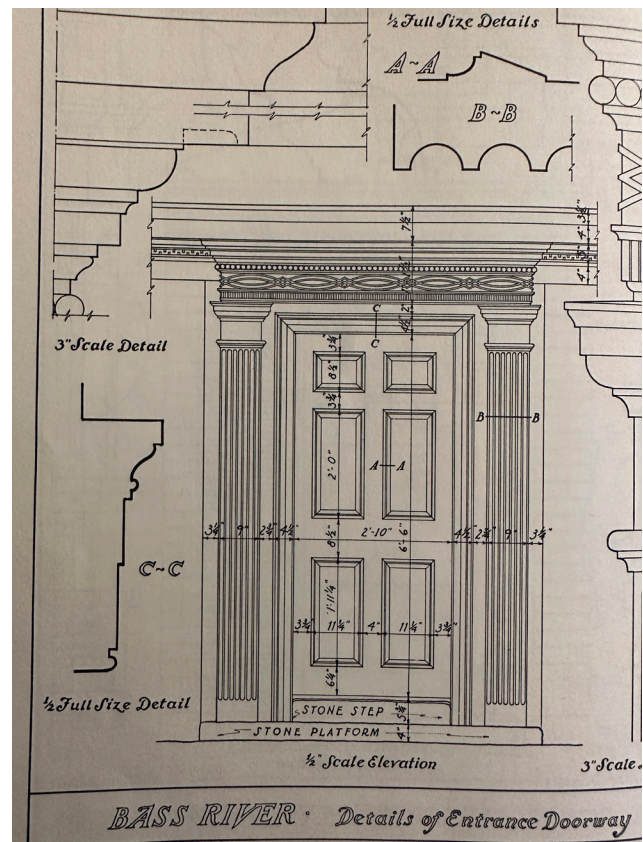
stories in height, having a steep pitched and 'very slightly' bowed roof, and anchored by a central chimney. In its more than 200 years of existence the footprint of the house has not changed, in that the interior and exterior layouts remain the same as when it was built. The exterior architecture reflects the owner's status in the community, that being a ship's captain. It was the fluted pilasters and rich ornamental dentil and lintel moldings of the frontispiece framing the front door, though, that caught the attention of Alfred Easton Poor in 1932.



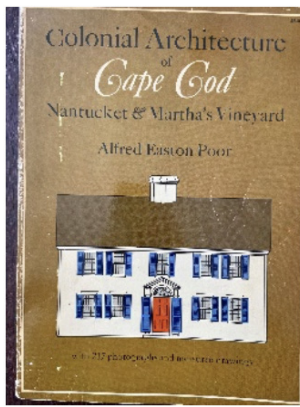
Slightly Bowed Roof



Circa 1932



Front Door



1932 Book

He published the book "Colonial Architecture of Cape Cod, Nantucket, and Martha's Vineyard" to document the extraordinary architecture of eastern Massachusetts in comparison to the rest of the state as well as New England. Poor included a number of photos of Jericho along with a detailed, measured drawing of the front door surround.

The barn sits behind the house. The front part of the barn is of similar age to the house and was first mentioned in the 1854 will of Theophilus Baker Jr. The side and back ends of the barn were built by the Town of Dennis in 1971 to house donations of nineteenth century farming tools including cranberry cultivation and ice harvesting equipment, carriages, sleds, and artifacts from the early salt works industry.



Jericho Barn



Elizabeth Reynard

The House remained in the Baker family until 1955 when Emma Baker died and it was purchased by Elizabeth Reynard. In 1962 this property was gifted to the Town of Dennis by her cousin, Virginia Gildersleeve, for use as an historical center as stated in the deed:

"This deed of gift is made on behalf of Elizabeth Reynard and includes the house, barn, and land known as Jericho, the granted premises to be used as an Historical Center, for the Town of Dennis, in perpetuity, concerned with the past history and legends and the literature and other arts, old and new of Cape Cod, especially of the Town of Dennis. The Grantee shall appropriate sufficient funds at Town Meetings which shall be required to meet the costs of upkeep of the premises including care of the grounds and repairs so that the premises shall always be in really good condition."

Since the Town received the property, it has been managed by citizens appointed by the Select Board to the Jericho Historical Center Committee. The committee works in collaboration with the Dennis Historical Society. With the site and its events managed by the Jericho Committee, maintenance and ongoing repairs have been handled by Dennis DPW.

Despite efforts by DPW over the years to maintain the property to the levels specified in the gift of gift, time and weather had taken their toll. Visible signs of exterior deterioration began to appear in 2016 and 2017 including unglazed windows, missing shingles, decayed architectural trim, chimney cracks, inoperable storm windows and doors, and unsafe entry steps.

Community Preservation Act Funding

In 2018 the Board of the Dennis Historical Society, working closely with the Jericho Historical Center Committee, applied to the *Community Preservation Committee* for funding to define the scope and cost of restoring and preserving the building exteriors. In March 2019, a grant for \$37,500 was awarded to Brown, Lindquist, Fenuccio, and Raber Architects in Yarmouth Port. That grant also included assessment of any site work needed for additional parking and improved building access.

The following areas were identified in the survey for preservation and site improvements:

- *Front and Rear entrance and steps* • *Windows* • *Chimney* • *Shingles*
- *New period storm doors and hardware* • *Pointing of bricks and painting*
- *New parking* • *Brick walkways*

The estimated cost of the above restoration and preservation required at Jericho to meet the Standards of the Department of the Interior for Historic Structures, plus needed site work, was \$353,561. That broke down as follows: *House - \$147,080 Barn - \$86,550 Site - \$119,931*

Second CPC Grant

The second application to the CPC in 2019 was to cover the above costs required for restoration and preservation of the buildings together with the needed site work. That grant was issued on January 21, 2020 to the Jericho Historical Center Committee. Personnel from that Committee worked closely with the Architect, Town Finance, and the DPW to manage this project. For project continuity and overall excellence, the Architect remained the same from the first grant. The only difference was a name change to Catalyst Architecture/Interiors.

The onset of Covid in the winter of 2020, shortly after the grant was issued, resulted in significantly higher costs and longer times to find answers to questions and solve problems. These included trying to locate the Preservation Restriction for Jericho at a time when the Town Hall and Jericho were essentially closed down for many months. Without that the CPC could not grant the funds for historic preservation. The second challenge was how to correct the more than 100 violations pointed out in the recent ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) survey at Jericho. And finally, putting together and sending out the bid packages when important municipal information was not readily accessible. With all costs having escalated considerably since the initial estimates had been put together as part of the first grant, the scope of the bid was reduced to cover only house and site work. This was done in hopes that the costs for these two items would not exceed the grant total for all three. (The Barn restoration will be completed in 2023 with a third CPC grant application.)

The good news is that with the help and hard work of many organizations and people, often outside of Dennis, the above issues were successfully addressed. By September 2021, bid packages had gone out and four bids had been received and examined. Vareika Construction in West Bridgewater, MA, was chosen based on their experience in historic preservation as well as overall cost. The contract was signed on December 15, 2021.



Front Door



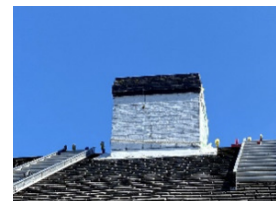
Dennis CPC



Plinth Blocks



1970 Windows



Painted Chimney

Focusing on the Details

Preserving the exterior of a house that is more than 200 years old takes considerable research, time and skilled craftsmen. The reason for that some of what looks original actually is, while other parts had been replaced and “upgraded” over the years. The latter was the case here. The Jericho Committee was fortunate in that photos did exist in Alfred Poor’s 1932 book of the front of the house with excellent detail of the door trim/architecture, windows, steps, and fencing. The decision was made by the Jericho Committee to duplicate those early designs to every extent possible.



Back of House



Redesigned Back Door



Close to Main St.



Back Door

Exterior Doors

When Jericho was privately owned in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, the main entrance was the back door of the house. The reason was that the house was located very close to Old Main St. and the front door presented a safety problem for the owners and guests. As a result, the back door was enlarged by the owners and side window lights were added. The design was “Colonial Revival” and it enhanced the rear entrance.

In studying colonial architecture on Cape Cod from the early 1800’s, however, we saw that the rear door of a Cape house was normally small and plain in design. The reason was that it was used primarily by the family while guests rarely used that entrance.



Rear Door



Hidden Window Header



Former Rear Door Location



New Rear Batten Door

During the carpentry, the header of that rear door was removed. It was then that a faint outline was seen of a smaller header offset to the left from the door opening. The width of that header was exactly the same as headers over the first-floor windows. Perhaps that rear doorway had actually once been a window in colonial times? If that were so then the challenge was to find where the original rear door had been. That started the search for any indication that another doorway had been in the Keeping Room which was the large room to the rear of the house.

After careful examination of the woodwork in the Keeping Room, splits in the wainscoting boards at the end or south side of the room showed that a door had been there where a window is today.



Strap Hinges



Front Batten Door

The Frontispiece (front door trim) was all intact but in poor condition due to extensive exposure to the elements. The plinth blocks had deteriorated and fallen away from the bottom of the fluted pilasters. Parts of the side moldings had also deteriorated as had the lintel moldings. Alfred Poor's book



Rear Door

showed that the plinth blocks were not original and that the fluted pilasters had actually extended to the bottom of the door casement. It was also evident that "dutchmen" had been used over the years to partially replace the deteriorated bottom casings on both sides. And in several cases even the dutchmen had deteriorated and been replaced a second time without much attention to the detail in Poor's book. During construction, all replacement trim around the front door was made from African mahogany to insure long term durability.



Missing Plinth Blocks

Poor also showed the original storm door. As opposed to the white aluminum and glass outer doors installed on the house in the 1970's, batten doors were visible. These are made up of boards about 8 inches wide, parallel in a row, and secured at the back by horizontal supports or battens. Both iron strap hinges and a thumb latch were often visible on the exterior doors of these early houses even though they were not in Poor's pictures of Jericho.



Decayed Pilasters



Mahogany 'Dutchmen' Replacements



Original Front With Glass Storm Door

Window Design



Former Windows



Circa 1932

All 15 windows were of similar design with 12 over 12 sashes meaning that both the top and bottom sashes had 12 small panes of glass. Some of the other historic houses throughout Dennis had the same window design. Even newer houses from the 60's and 70's had that small pane design. Other historic houses, however, had a 6 over 6 design. Examination of the construction of the 12 over 12 Jericho windows concluded that they were fairly modern and perhaps from the 1970's. If the joinery had been mortice and tenon with pegs, then they could have been original.

Poor's book of 1932 showed that the Jericho windows were 6 over 6 and not 12 over 12. The Committee carefully examined the window design of other early houses. What they concluded was that for the most part during the Federal period, circa 1790 through 1830, houses had 6 over 6 windows. It was during the colonial times of the earlier 1700's that the smaller panes of glass in the 12 over 12 sashes were probably the best choice based on cost of glass. The Committee concluded that the 6 over 6 design as shown in Poor's book was the best choice.

Window Construction



Marvin Windows

Now that the style of the windows had been decided the next challenge was choosing the window manufacturer who could best reproduce the original design. Marvin windows offered new, top-of-the-line, historically accurate, double casement window with full mullions (the wood strips that separate the window panes) as opposed to the plastic inserts. The glass was double Thermo-pane for additional insulation.

At first these new Marvin windows became the top choice for installation until the contractor removed the aluminum storm windows. The Committee began to examine the actual window casements in detail. The casements were the window frames and they were also a major part of the wall construction. All the original Jericho frames were mortice and tenon construction joined with pegs.



Original Frames

These frames had two roles: one being part of the wall construction and the second as the casement for the top and bottom sashes. The window sills were the bottom of the original frames and not separate pieces of wood.

The present 12 over 12 sashes were probably installed in the 1960's or 1970's. They did not need casements or sills as they were set within the old frames. The Marvin design, however, had both the casement and sill as part of the actual window. If these had been installed there would have been two casements and 2 sills at each window. This would have made the actual glass area smaller and unattractive for a period house like Jericho. The casements window frames would also have been bulkier.



New Sashes



New Window



Restored Frame



New Frame

Window Manufacturer

The challenge now was to find a window manufacturer who could custom make the 6 over 6 sashes. Our primary contractor had previously worked with someone outside Boston who had spent his career duplicating historic window frames and trim. After an onsite visit the Committee was convinced that he could make the 6 over 6 sashes we needed at a price within our budget.

With his help the Committee chose African mahogany for the sashes since it was the most durable natural product available. The profile of the actual mullion was chosen from a group of federal designs. The additional benefit of using this contractor, however, was his ability to supply the historic, slightly wavy glass. These panes would provide a more historic look to each window.

Before any windows could be installed, however, the architectural trim of all 15 needed major work. Over the years the paint had peeled and exposed the wood. Pieces of trim having unique colonial era profiles were hand planed by the contractor. In other cases epoxy was used to fill the gaps.

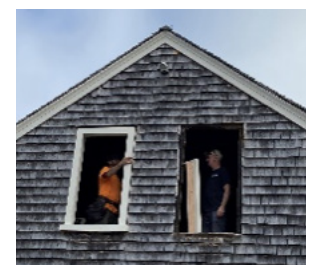
The second story windows presented a slightly different challenge. That is because the original frames had been removed when the 12 over 12 sashes were installed in the 60's or 70's. In its place were modern thin casements with small sills along the bottom. These needed to be replaced with frames that duplicated the originals in the first floor windows. These frames set out away from the walls by several inches. The general contractor was again able to work with the same craftsman who made the sashes, to reproduce the frames for the upstairs windows. And like the sashes, they were also made of African mahogany for long term durability.



Epoxy Filler



Reproduction Glass



Window Frames



Deteriorated Trim



Decayed Frame

Storm Window Design

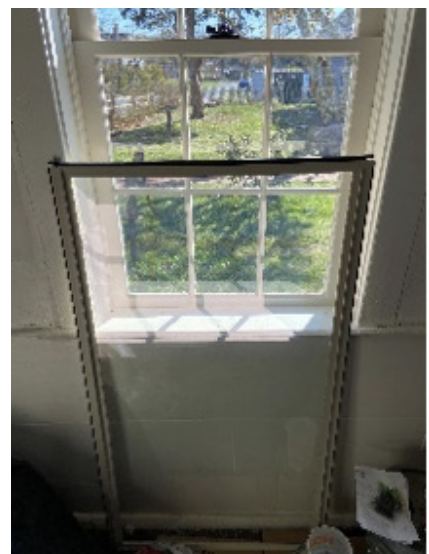
Another challenge was to find a style of storm window that did not detract visually from the new windows. The previous design was combination glass and white aluminum that had not held up well over the years. The added insulation/protection, though, from storm windows was considered a priority. But, any large sheet of glass that would be in the more traditional storm windows would mask the look of the reproduction glass from the outside. The solution was interior storms similar to those at the Josiah Dennis Manse. After an extensive search, a manufacturer was found in Connecticut who had an improved design to facilitate the removal and installation of the windows as needed. The Committee took a trip to Truro to examine these storm windows installed several years ago at the Truro Library. The design was impressive. The sealing mechanism was a “compression fit” as opposed to the more permanent screw installation. And since each window frame was different in size, the manufacturer made a site visit to insure the most accurate measurements.



Old Storm Windows



Installed Storm Windows



Interior Storm Windows

Front Entrance Step

With such an impressive front door entrance to this ship captain's home, the challenge for the Committee was to decide the best front door step. The present one was a combination of flag stone, cement, and broken brick probably from the early 1900's. To get started, a survey was done of area houses of similar age to Jericho. Houses having higher thresholds had two steps, one smaller near the house and a large one further out. In most cases they were granite while some were brick and stone. With the Jericho threshold being fairly low to the ground, there was room for only one step. The choice was a 3' x 5' New Hampshire gray granite slab having a natural edge.



Original Front Step



New Granite Step

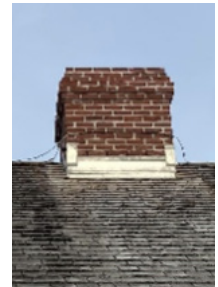
Chimney

Historic Cape Cod style houses, no matter if they are one quarter, one half, three quarter or full Cape in design, are all anchored by a single brick chimney. That is true with Jericho. The chimney supports three fireplaces on the first floor.

The Jericho chimney was painted white with a black rim along the top. Since there were several visible cracks in the chimney, a professional inspector was brought in to determine its structural integrity. No structural problems were evident but additional cracks were found in the exposed bricks. The accumulated layers of white paint over the years had acted as a water barrier. Water which had accumulated between the paint and the bricks and expanded during the colder months, thus damaging the bricks.

To examine those cracks better, an environmental stripping agent was applied to remove the paint. That uncovered even more cracks. As a result, the decision was made to remove the chimney from the roof up and replace it with a similar design using reproduction bricks.

But the question remained as to whether it should be repainted white with black trim. Additional research was needed. Some felt strongly that white and black chimneys were important during the Revolutionary War as a way to identify if the owners were for or against the British. Others said it was more of an 'architectural trend' from the Colonial Revival period in the 1930's. The Committee considered both answers and agreed that the chimney should be left unpainted. By doing that they felt the overall cost of maintenance should also be less.



Chimney Replacement



Stripping Chimney



Chimney Work



Circa 1970



Former Fencing

Fencing

For many years, the Jericho property has had a white, painted wood rail and cement post fence around its perimeter and entrance areas. That fence was probably added in the 1980's and was widely used throughout the Town. Over the recent years the fence along Old Main Street had fallen into disrepair and had not been replaced. The lack of a fence there presented a problem as there would be little protection for guests and visitors walking in front of the house.



Close to Main St.

Pictures from Poor's book shows a two rail, split rail fence along the property in the 1930's. A post-card from 1970 showed a similar design. That fence would weather naturally and blend in with the color of the building shakes. It also would be easier and less costly to maintain and could readily be replaced if a single rail or post were needed. The Committee felt that a two-rail, split-rail design was closer to what was originally there in the 1800's.



New Cedar Fence



New Cedar Fence



New Gravel Driveway



New Driveway Apron



New Parking Area



New Walkways



New Barn Entrance Pad

Site Landscaping

One of the important responsibilities with a Town owned, public property like Jericho is to ensure the public's safety when it is open. Even though no problems had occurred over the years, it was now timely to address accessibility issues.

In 2019 the Select Board contracted with Disability Access Consultants to survey the Town buildings including Jericho. Their objective was to determine if they were fully compliant with the American Disability Act (ADA). Even though there were a large number of accessibility deficiencies at Jericho, many (except three to be discussed later) inside the house and barn were waived due to Jericho's historical significance.

The focus then became the outside, where major improvements were needed for both parking and walkway accessibility.

Since the new driveway would be close to the house, it was important to choose a material complementary to the rest of the exterior of such an historic building. The choice was a pea gravel having a gray color. And since it would not be a solid surface, water drainage and runoff would not be a problem.

The actual ADA parking area, however, and immediate entrances to both buildings would require something harder in order to be compliant with ADA guidelines.

Cement was the chosen surface material. Required parking lines have been added along with a plan in the spring to stain the cement to blend in better with the gravel driveway.

Walkways were then needed from the parking area to the buildings. They also had to be ADA compliant, including the entrances to both buildings. The choice of material was brick which would closely resemble older paver, with the last several feet up to the buildings being poured concrete. An asphalt apron was added between the pea gravel drive and the main road.

As the footings for the sidewalks were being prepared, however, the thresholds at the house and the barn were uncovered, revealing extensive deterioration right into the structural footings. That was a result of a combination of unexpected rodent infestation and water damage over many years. Two thresholds at the barn and one at the rear door of the house had to be removed to assess the full extent of the damage.

After extensive examination it was determined that the deterioration did not extend more than six inches beyond the door frames. New footing sections and thresholds were cut and pieced in place. At that point the work on the new sidewalks could continue.

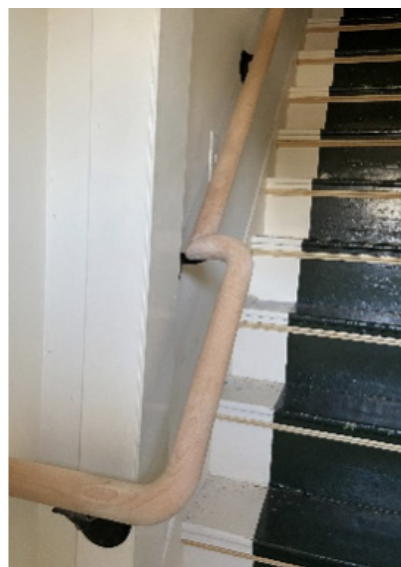


Barn Threshold

Additional ADA Needs

The Accessibility Survey in 2019 highlighted over 100 violations of the American Disability Act within both the house and the barn. It included items like door widths, door latch heights, thresholds, stair rails, etc., throughout both buildings. The Committee felt sure they could obtain waivers to all these since it had been a public museum for over 50 years. They contacted Mass Historic to obtain their support since making those changes would forever alter the historic character of the properties. But even that letter was not enough to convince the Massachusetts Architectural and Access Board (MAAB) to grant us 100% waivers.

Even though the MAAB did agree to many waivers, they did require a new front stair hand rail and additional trim to the stair treads to minimize tripping hazards. In the barn they required ramps between rooms when the floor height difference was more than 2 inches.



Interior ADA Changes to Stairs



New Interior Barn Ramps



During colonial times, the color of the front door often reflected on the owner and his family. The color red indicated gracious hospitality. Travelers were welcomed to spend the night if needed. During the time of the Civil War in some parts of New England, a red front door was welcoming to slaves on their flights north to freedom. Irish immigrants to the area felt that red front doors helped ward off evil spirits.

Special thanks to Betsy Harrison, President of the Dennis Historical Society, for choosing red for the Jericho doors. The Jericho House Committee and the Dennis Historical Society are proud to now have red doors that will WELCOME neighbors and visitors for many more years to come.

The Preservation and Restoration Project at the Jericho Historical Center was completed in December 2022. A very special thanks goes to the CPC for their generous funding to “Rebuild the Walls of Jericho.”



Text and Photography by
Bob Poskitt
South Dennis

*Preservation and Restoration of the Jericho Historical Center
was a collaborative effort of many hard working and dedicated people over five years.
Close to two of those years are attributed to delays from the Covid 19 Pandemic.*

Project Committee

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