

FORM B – BUILDING

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

57.1 Lexington B AC LEX.55

LHD 6/11/1956, NRDIS 4/30/1976

Town/City: Lexington

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):
Lexington Center

Photograph



View from SW.

Address: 5 Harrington Road

Historic Name: Levi & Rebekah Harrington House

Uses: Present: single family residential

Original: single family residential

Date of Construction: 1794

Source: archival sources, deeds, visual assessment

Style/Form: Federal/ 2-sty hipped block w/ saltbox

Architect/Builder: Jonathan Loring, builder

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: wood clapboard & brick/wood

Roof: wood shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

Domestic barn

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

none

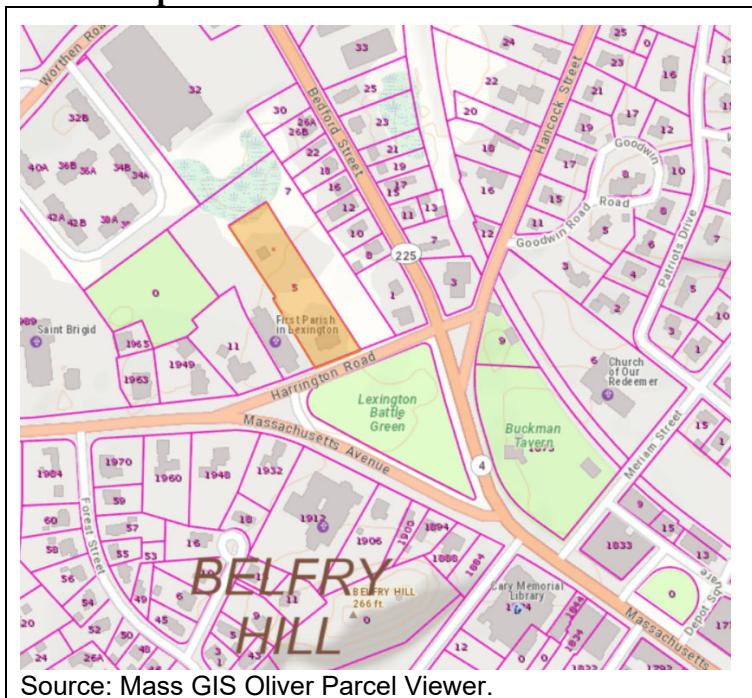
Condition: good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acres: 1.22

Setting: The property is located on a major thoroughfare built out with closely-spaced houses from a broad period of development.

Locus Map



Source: Mass GIS Oliver Parcel Viewer.

Recorded by: Walter R. Wheeler, Kathryn Grover & Neil Larson
Neil Larson & Associates

Organization: Lexington Historical Commission

Date: July / 2021

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Based on fieldwork by Walter R. Wheeler & Neil Larson, 2021.

Original construction

The initial construction period for the Harrington house is well documented by a brief contract between Betty Harrington and Jonathan Loring, builder, in which Loring agrees "to Set up the Frame of a house for Dan'l Harrington Jr near the meeting house in Lexington on or before the tenth Day of April next for the Sum of thirty three Pounds of the following Dementions viz, 38 feet Long 32 feet wide 18 feet Posts with hipt roof, the Sills & posts to be of ok (large) Deep Joyce, all the timber to be large and good by the Judgement of a workman, the Dementions of the Doors & windows to be given hereafter and the Chimneys." The contract is dated 12 February 1794 and is preserved in the house.

This contract describes a nearly square house with dimensions (38 ft. by 32 ft.) comprising the two-story house and the lean-to across the back; it excludes the two-story wings attached to the east and west ends of the house, which were added later in the early 19th century. The contract does not mention that the ends of the front, hipped-roof section are constructed of brick. The front of the house has a generally symmetrical single-pile, center-passage plan and a five-bay facade; the two bays to the west of the central passage are slightly closer together than those of the east half of the house.

The cellar space is directly under both the main block of the house and the lean-to. The rear (north) wall of the hipped-roof portion of the house is supported on a row of posts, which appears to be an original condition, given the specifications in the contract. There is no indication that any of the spaces in the basement were used for habitation. There is no indication of a basement kitchen. Whitewash in many areas, and shelving found within the chimney supports do, however, indicate food storage areas.

The hipped portion of the roof is conventionally framed with principal rafters and common purlins with a ridge beam. The roof is vertically boarded with pine boards bearing broad parallel kerfs and is covered with wood shingles. There is no indication that the attic was ever used for anything except storage; there are no wall or ceiling finishes in this space which has minimal headroom although it is substantially floored.

Nineteenth Century Alterations

At least three rounds of alterations to the house were undertaken in the 19th century. The earliest of these is represented by the Greek Revival architraves and baseboards found throughout the first floor, and in the six-over-six windows and newel and balusters of the main staircase. It may be that the original stair had a different configuration; at the second-floor level, a closed-up door to the northeast chamber is visible within the attic stair enclosure; the present stair configuration would have made access to a door in that location impossible. The two staircases that rise in the lean-to appear to have been constructed at this time. Both appear to make use of newel caps that probably originated with the 1794 staircase, and it is possible that other elements including square newel posts, railings, balusters, and structural elements, may have been reused as well, particularly in the east staircase. The difference in construction techniques used in the design of these two stairs may represent levels of finish desired by members of the two different households, but also probably reflects the need to supplement the 1794 stair materials with new work for the completion of the west stair. It is not presently known whether the lean-to was originally constructed of one or two stories in height; if the former, it was extended to two full stories at this time. This work appears to date to the ca. 1835-55 period.

At a date not long after, and by 1865 when the work is documented by the earliest photograph of the house, the lean-to on the north side of the house was extended east and west in the form of two-story wings. This work was accomplished to further the occupation of the house by two family groups and included the construction of back-to-back fireplaces (possibly for coal burners, given their shallow depth) in the two northern chimneys. The first-floor mantles in both the east and west wings have features that reflect both the Greek and Gothic revival styles, and the baseboards have ogee caps, suggesting a later date of construction than the ca. 1835-55 work, perhaps closer to ca. 1860. The wings were, like the main block of the house, constructed using traditional box framing techniques.

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A third phase of alterations is represented by the fireplace in the west parlor and a similar fireplace mantle that was once located in the east parlor. The mantles and the Minton tile hearths reflect the Aesthetic period, and so may date to as early as c. 1875. It is possible, however, that they may have been installed as late as 1907, when work on the east parlor chimney is documented to have occurred.

Twentieth Century Alterations

An early 20th century tobacco tin, containing a note reading "Fire Place built. Nov. 19 & 20, 1907/ by Charles W. Swan/ & / Michael J. Conlin / for/ George D. Harrington" was found during renovations to the first-floor fireplace in the southeast room in March 1984 undertaken by Frank Hannaford. The presence of early 19th century wallpaper on the south side of the chimney mass argues against a complete rebuilding of this feature in 1907, and so this note must refer to a renovation undertaken at that time. The corbelled chimney flue appears, in photos taken in 1984, to have been previously modified; that work may have been undertaken in 1907. The fireplace in the southwest room with its sculpted wood mantel and tiled hearth likely was installed at this time.

The current owner indicated that work had been undertaken by a previous owner on the north wall of the house, as part of an expansion of the kitchen. This work probably occurred ca. 1910-1940. It was largely removed by subsequent work. The present owners undertook extensive work on the house from ca. 1985 and into the 1990s. This work included removal of a ca. 1830 wing from the back of the house and construction of a replacement wing, using some of the framing elements from the earlier structure. Fireplaces were restored, paneling for the face of the southeast fireplace on the first floor was constructed, and new kitchens were built, requiring some changes to the partitioning and the enclosure of the northwest chimney at the first-floor level.

Porches

The earliest available image of the exterior of the house dates to 1865. It shows the house in its present configuration, with two story wings at the east and west ends. The house did not have porches at that time, however. The entrance was approached via steps without railings, and the east wing had a shed-roofed vestibule sheltering the door there. The front of the west end of the house is not seen in the photograph. The main entry frontispiece appears to remain today as it is illustrated in this photograph, as well as one dated 1867. It probably dates to renovations undertaken in the house in the second quarter of the 19th century, ca. 1835-55.

An undated photograph in the collection of the Lexington Historical Society, probably ca. 1890, shows a narrow, hipped roof front porch supported by two square posts at its outside corners. No porch is seen at the southwest corner of the house; the southeast corner is not visible in this view.

A photo of the house dated 19 April 1910 is in the collection of the current owner. This photograph shows the narrow porch first documented in the ca. 1890 photo. The porch platform was wider than the sheltering roof, and probably represents the width it has today. The two porch posts roughly align with the pilasters forming part of the frontispiece of the door and sidelights. The side porches had been constructed in the years between ca. 1890 and 1910. The main porch and the side porches did not have railings when photographed in 1910.

An exterior photograph in the owner's collection, dating to ca. 1985, shows a much larger porch on the east wing that extended along a part of the brick east elevation. This extension was constructed sometime after 1910, and was removed at an unknown date after 1987 and previous to 2011.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Researched and written by Kathryn Grover & Neil Larson

The construction of the house at 5 Harrington Road is documented to 1794 based on a contract between Daniel Harrington and builder Jonathan Loring that has been preserved in the house. The house was built for Daniel Harrington's son Levi Harrington (1760-1846) and his wife Rebekah Mulliken who he married ten years earlier. The new house was erected between Daniel Harrington's house (not extant) and the First Parish Unitarian Church on the town common. The house was occupied for many decades thereafter by the families of Levi and Rebekah Harrington, their son Bowen (1803-69), and Bowen's son George Dennis Harrington (1843-1929).

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Attorney and local historian Michael J. Canavan determined that in 1763 “Sam Jones” sold blacksmith Daniel Harrington (1739-1818) 4.50 acres of land bounded on the southeast by the “common lands” or the highway, northeast by Jonas Clarke and Abigail Harrington, southwest by William Munroe, and northwest by the eight-mile limit.¹ Harrington built his blacksmith shop on the parcel as well as his own house (not extant) the 5 Harrington Road house, this last probably in 1794 and certainly by 1798, when his son Levi Harrington (1760-1846) came to occupy it.² According to Canavan Daniel Harrington bought 73 acres from John Muzzey in 1784 that extended from “the back of the estates facing on Elm Street” beyond the eight-mile limit.

The 1798 federal direct tax listings credit Daniel Harrington with one house, and in 1800 and 1810 he and his wife are shown with two others in their house next to the household of his son Levi. Daniel Harrington died in 1818, and his will left cash and shares of his personal estate to his four married daughters and his real estate to his “beloved sons” Levi and Nathan (1762-1837).³ The 1820 census lists Levi Harrington and Nathan Harrington consecutively, and in 1830 Nathan Harrington, his son Nathan (1792-1843), and Levi Harrington are listed in consecutive households.

In 1830 Nathan Harrington sold his son and namesake two parcels—half of 0.25 acre and half of the buildings “near the meetinghouse” that bordered Levi Harrington’s land, and 19 acres nearby.⁴ When Nathan Harrington Jr. died in 1844, the administrator of his estate and his widow Martha Ingersoll Mead Harrington (1797-1852) sold to Levi Harrington’s youngest son Bowen (1803-69) the three-acre parcel with its buildings near the meetinghouse and bordering Lexington Common and the Levi Harrington land. Bowen Harrington executed a mortgage deed on the property with Nathan’s widow and his estate administrator at the same time.⁵ In that way Bowen Harrington came to own both his father’s and his uncle’s Elm Street/Harrington Road houses.

Bowen Harrington was born in August 1803 and spent his early career as a grocer and merchant in the North End of Boston. In 1832 he married Elizabeth Price Ward (1811-63) of Boston, and the couple had five children who lived into adulthood—Mary Ward (born) 1834, who married Gershom Swan in 1864; Charles Bowen (1837-62), who died of disease during his Civil War service; William Henry (1840-63), and George Dennis (1843-1929), whose middle name honored his uncle Dennis (1796-1840), who died at the age of forty-four. He was a farmer, and the 1850 census lists him at what is now 5 Harrington Road with \$7500 in real estate in a household with his wife Elizabeth, their four children, and two Irish immigrants, one a laborer and the other a domestic. They shared the house with Bowen’s older, unmarried sister Nancy (1788-1871), her cousin Abijah Harrington (the son of Nathan and Elizabeth Phelps Harrington), and three boarders, one a blacksmith and two butchers. The 1850 agricultural census lists Bowen Harrington with 17 improved acres, 8 unimproved acres, and a farm value of \$1700. By 1860 he had 25 improved acres and 6 unimproved acres, and the value of his farm had risen to \$6000.

¹ S. Jones to Daniel Harrington, 14 October 1765, MSD 65:20 is not currently accessible online at the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds website. The date in the index volumes available on FamilySearch.org may be the recorded date, not the date on which the deed was made, so the deed may be dated 1763.

² M. J. Canavan Papers, Lexington Historical Society, 323-24 (stamped page numbers), 31-32 (typescript page numbers) states, “In regard to the house on Elm St. West of the Common. Dan Harrington lived in a house that was torn down a few years ago and which stood between the present Swan-Harrington house and Miss Gould’s. He was a blacksmith and his shop stood between his house and the house Miss Gould now lives in. . . . Dan built the house where Mr. Swan and Geo. Harrington lived; in 1798 Levi Harrington moved into it./ When Dan Harrington bought this 4 ½ acres in 1763, Abigail Harrington owned the land where Miss Gould lives and she must have been the Widow Harrington in whose house that school was kept when the new school house was being built about that time, 1763.” Canavan did not know who Abigail Harrington was, but she was probably Abigail Marble Blodgett Harrington (1726-1820), the widow of Ebenezer Blodgett when she married Henry Harrington (1711/12-91). Henry Harrington and his first wife, Sarah Laughton, had a son Jonathan (1744/45-75), who married Ruth Fiske of Lexington in 1766 and died in the Lexington Common battle. Ruth Fiske Harrington lived in the Abigail Harrington house in 1775, according to Canavan, and married John Smith of Boston in 1777 and sold the house to her brother, “Dr. Fiske” (possibly Joseph, 1726-1808). The 1975 MHC building inventory form for 5 Harrington Road states that the house was built by Loring and was later the home of Levi Harrington. The current owner of the dwelling owns a copy of the 1794 contract to build the house.

³ Harrington’s children certified on 23 October 1818 that they approved their father’s will asked that his personal estate not be inventoried because it was “very small.”

⁴ Nathan Harrington to Nathan Harrington Jr., 23 March 1830, MSD 296:284.

⁵ William Chandler, administrator estate Nathan Harrington, to Bowen Harrington, 2 April 1844, MSD 447:193; Martha I Harrington to Bowen Harrington, 2 April 1844, MSD 447:194; Bowen Harrington to William Chandler, guardian of Caroline M. and Elvira M. Harrington, 2 April 1844, MSD 447:193 (the grantees on this mortgage deed being the minor children of Nathan and Martha Harrington); Bowen Harrington, to Martha I Harrington, 3 April 1844, MSD 447:197.

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In July and September 1861, Bowen's sons Charles B. and George D. enlisted in the Union Army, Charles as a fifer in Company B of the 18th Massachusetts Infantry and George a private in Company F of the 22nd Massachusetts. Charles became ill in October 1861 and from that point was rarely able to serve; he died in Lexington of consumption in August 1862. George served his full three-year term as the regiment served at Bull Run, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Battle of the Wilderness, Petersburg and some thirteen other battles.

In early June 1869 Bowen Harrington deeded to his married daughter Mary Ward Swan the former Nathan Harrington house that he had acquired from the Nathan Harrington estate in 1844.⁶ Bowen died intestate two weeks later, and his probate records offer no inventory of his real property, nor was any deed between Bowen and his son George recorded. In 1870 George was clerking a grain store and living with his sister Mary, brother-in-law Gershom Swan, their two children, his sister Nancy, and an Irish-born domestic servant. Whether they were in 5 Harrington Road or the former Nathan Harrington house is unclear from the census. Swan is listed as owning \$16,000 in real property, while George is shown with \$2000 in personal property only.

In November 1870 George D. Harrington married Lexington native Josephine Augusta Butters, and the 1880 census lists them and their two daughters Alice Munroe and May Swan, and a domestic in their own household, with his sister Mary Swan's household next door. George Harrington was a clerk in Boston for 25 years, but in 1897 he became the town treasurer and remained in that position until a few years before he died; he also served as town clerk from 1901 to 1910. The 1906 directory shows him at 4 Elm Avenue, now 5 Harrington Road. Daughter Alice married Cambridge physician Ralph Cleaves Wiggin in 1908, and from that time until he died George Harrington lived at 5 Harrington Road with his wife Josephine and daughter May. At both the time of his fifty-sixth wedding anniversary and his eighty-fifth birthday, the *Boston Globe* noted that George Harrington had lived all his life in the house facing Lexington Common in which he had been born.⁷

George Dennis Harrington died in 1929, and his widow Josephine remained in the house with her daughter May until she died in November 1937.⁸ Oddly, Josephine was listed in the 1942 directory with her daughter May at what was by then 5 Harrington Road. May Swan Harrington died in 1948, and the property was acquired by Carolyn B. Phelps.⁹ Phelps was the widow of Duane F. Phelps of Arlington, who when he died in 1945 was treasurer of cardboard box manufacturer Shaw-print of Lowell and earlier president of New England Baking Company.¹⁰ In April 1949 Phelps sold 5 Harrington Road to optometrist Howard William Foley (1913-98), who lived in the house with his wife Mary Lillian Hart Foley (1912-77) and, at least at the time of her death, his mother Jane Maria Arey Foley (1885-1973).¹¹

In 1980 Howard Foley sold 5 Harrington Road to Thomas E. and Carla V. Fortman, who were the owners of record in 2021.¹²

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⁶ Bowen Harrington to Mary Ward Swan, 4 June 1869, MSD 1085:393.

⁷ "Lexington Couple Married 56 Years," *Boston Globe*, 18 November 1926, 18; "G. D. Harrington, Civil War Veteran, 85 Today," *ibid.*, 17 July 1928, 2.

⁸ "Mrs. Josephine Harrington," *Boston Globe*, 13 March 1939, 2.

⁹ The deed recording this sale is not accessible on the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds website, nor is the subsequent deed between Phelps and Howard W. Foley, 12 April 1949, MSD 7146:373.

¹⁰ "Rites Tomorrow for D. F. Phelps," *Boston Herald*, 17 July 1945, 9.

¹¹ *Boston Globe*, 17 June 1973, 51.

¹² Howard W. Foley to Thomas E. and Carla V. Fortman, 3 April 1980, MSD 13938:46; Thomas E. and Carla V. Fortman, 5 Harrington Road, to Thomas E. and Carla V. Fortman, 25 March 1997, MSD 27166:255. The house stands on Lot D of "Plan of Land in Lexington, Mass.," 18 April 1961, MSP 9815:529, which is not accessible on the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds website.

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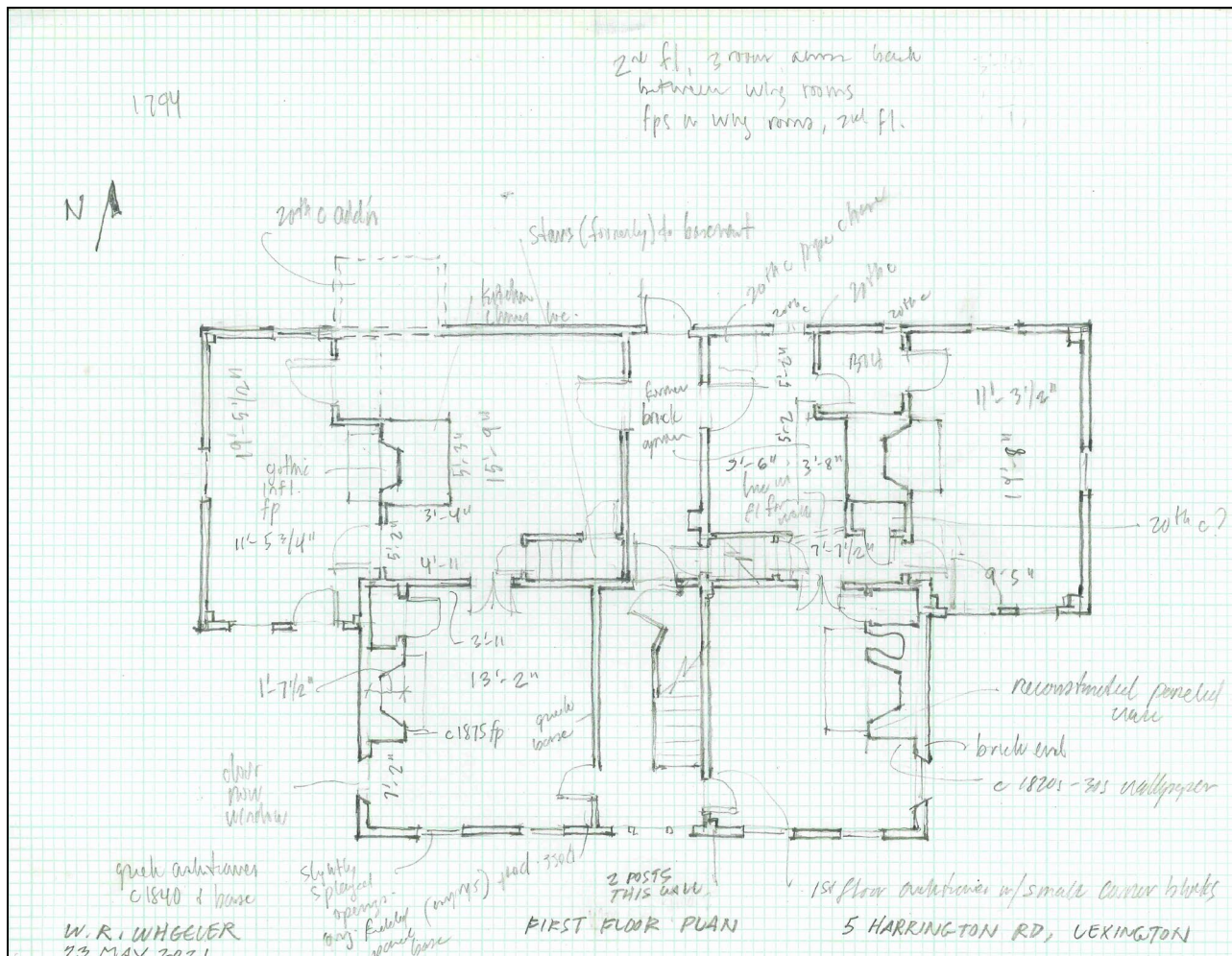
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FIGURES



First floor plan with field notes, Walter R. Wheeler, 2021.

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THE HARRINGTON HOUSES IN 1867

*Society for the Preservation
of New England Antiquities*

Historic photograph, 1867, showing Daniel Harrington house (right, not extant) and the Levi Harrington House (left). From Kelley, *Lexington, A Century of Photographs* (1980), 44.



Detail of 1867 photo of Levi Harrington house. Lexington Historical Society.

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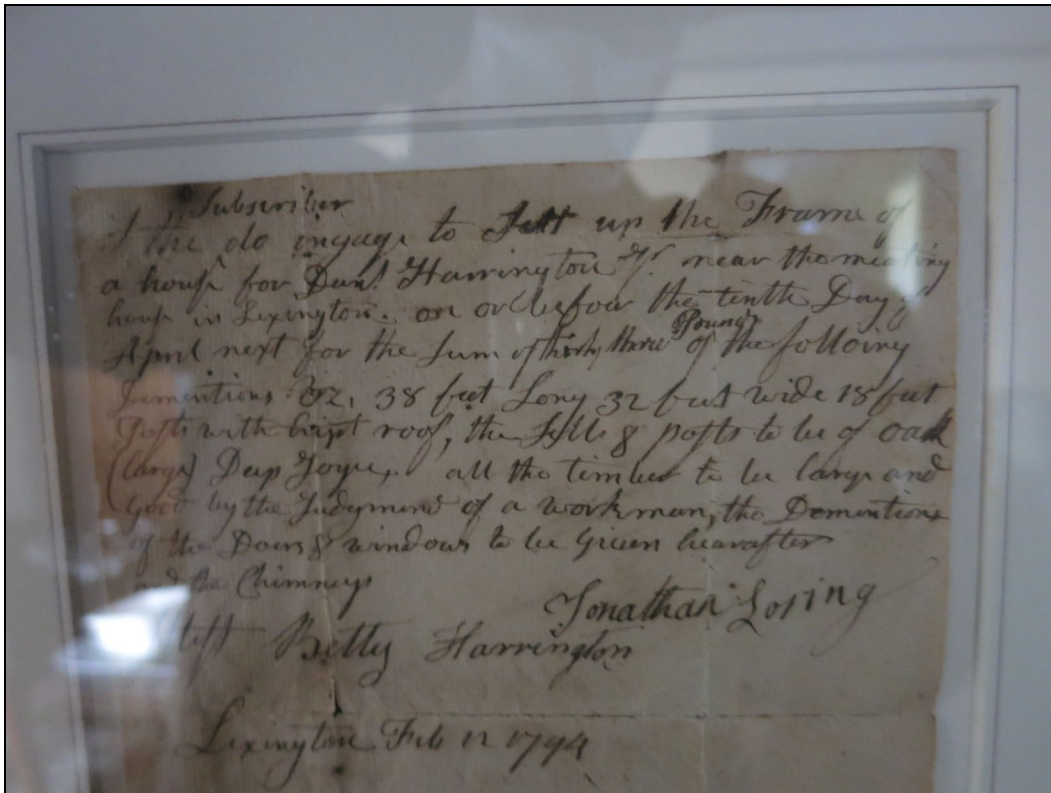
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Building contract, 1794. Owners' collection.



Group photo in front of house showing added porches, ca. 1890.
Lexington Historical Society.

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PHOTOGRAPHS (Credit Walter R. Wheeler, 2021)



View from SE.



Detail of front porch.

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View from NW.



View from north.

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View from NE.



View of east side of wings from SE.

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View of barn from SW.



First floor, SE front room looking east showing restored fireplace & paneling (1984).

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First floor, SW front room looking south.



First floor, SW front room, detail of fireplace, mantel & hearth added ca. 1907.

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First floor, center passage, detail of stairs and turned newel post.

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First floor, east kitchen in saltbox, looking SE.



First floor, east wing looking north.

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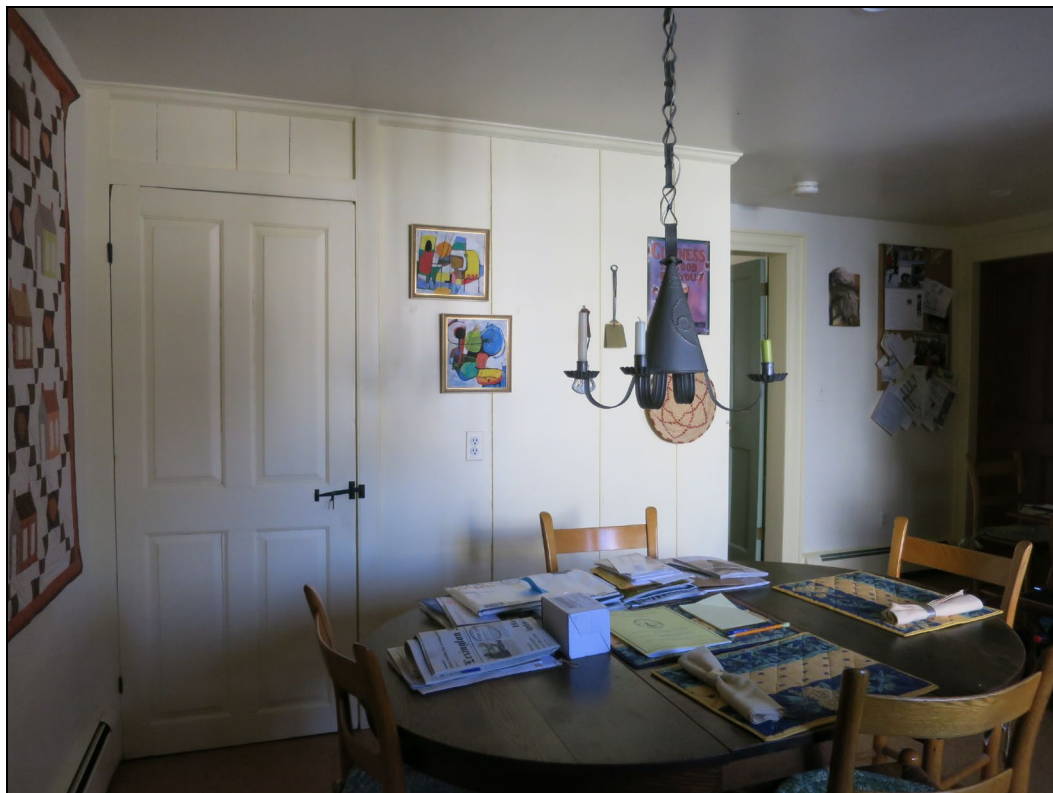
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First floor, west kitchen in saltbox, looking south to back stair enclosure.



Second floor, detail of railing.

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Second floor, SE chamber, detail of fireplace with added shelf.

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Second floor, back hall looking west, showing two sets of stairs. Three chambers partitioned on right.

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Second floor, east wing looking west showing sloped ceiling of saltbox.



Basement, east side showing base for hearth and oven in SE front room.

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Basement looking west in front section showing posts supporting wall where saltbox joins.



Attic, looking east showing ridge beam, principal rafters & common purlins at hip junction.