

The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario,
Port Hope Branch
From Top to Bottom: Field Trip - 20 May 1975.

A - Architecture - Hamilton
Top (10)
(103-02)
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Mr. & Mrs. Jack Beech,
Halfway House, Old Danforth Road, R.R.5, Cobourg.

The house is open to your inspection and it is our thought that you should enjoy the spirit of the enterprise, to try to be both a detective and a booster in viewing the various problems confronting the owners of this fascinating house. The house is certainly worthy of preservation both because of its suspected considerable age and its curious development. Yet in spite of the insulbrick and loss of porches and a few essential details such as the small panes of its windows the house has a feeling of the early 19th century, even a lingering aspect of the late 18th century. All the Beech family can do is go onward and upward and being sympathetic to the cause of preservation will do their utmost to keep the essential character of the original while making the house gradually more comfortable and ensuring that necessary repairs are done thoroughly and competently so that subsequent restoration and refurbishing will not be compromised. Hence the owners have been cautious with their approach, living with the problems first to work out the best solution. We wish Mr. and Mrs. Beech and their children all success and not a little fun to accompany their great and laudable task.

A WARNING: BECAUSE PARTS OF THE HOUSE ARE NOT YET COMPLETELY REPAIRED WE ASK YOU TO TAKE CARE IN VIEWING CERTAIN AREAS AND NOT TO CONGREGATE IN THE FOLLOWING PLACES: (1) THE EAST WING OR STABLE ON THE RIGHT HAND SIDE OF THE HOUSE AS YOU LOOK AT THE SOUTH FRONT FROM THE ROAD; (2) THE FRONT BALCONY, PARTICULARLY NOT TO LEAN ON THE OUTER RAIL, AND NOT TO TRY TO ENTER FROM THE LOFT OF THE EAST WING.

Elsewhere the house is safe although always watch your footing and you will see large numbers pinned up to correspond with the notes in the following pages: We are setting the different sheets near the various areas of interest and suggest you quickly read through the introduction on each page before looking for the clues and their explanation. We ask you at all times to be inquisitive, to examine the evidence and be prepared to ask questions when we finally re-assemble. The explanation, hypothesis if you will, that we have come to we feel is worth exploring further, and you may doubt our interpretation. If you do so do not hesitate to speak out, we wish to have, and need, your ideas too. The final sheet, and our expose will be deposited on the front porch after you have been around: when you have made a thorough tour of the premises please seek a copy as the last sheet of this souvenir.

First of all the exterior. Take note of the assymetry of the façade, basically on the upper level a door almost central, but with flanking windows not evenly spaced. Some explanation of this will come later. Note too the strange and partly unrelated grouping of openings on the lower level with the fascinating glazed door (1) near the centre. Examine trim and door mouldings (2) carefully especially around the windows (3). Under the insulbrick is reported to be boarding suggesting a common convention in principal fronts, especially where protected by porches, of flushboarding, although in the Barnum House this is open to the weather.

To the right a two storey wing (4) once used as a stable with the upper floor possibly a sleeping loft on occasion, maybe latterly mainly for storage. For the moment we shall not go in before perambulating the property. Across the front the remains of the two storey verandah (5) which gives a characteristic hotel or tavern appearance to the building as old photographs show. Maybe you remember Willard's Hotel in Upper Canada Village or the Baltimore Hotel in Cobourg. In the lower left corner is the original dug out well (6), convenient to hand and protected.

Exa
De
unknown
more research
required.

COBOURG ARCHITECTURE

Walk around to the right past the east end of the building and note the foundation problem (7) and repair necessary to siding (8) and the relatively good condition of the structure because timber (9) is mostly well clear of the ground.

Then across the back or north side where the advantage of a sidehill house can be appreciated: a reduced northern exposure and a suntrap to the south contributing much to winter comfort, not to mention lower fuel consumption. From this viewpoint, as comparison with one old photograph of the west end will show the building has lost some of its earlier appendages, mostly protective porches and vestibules leading into the house, the projection on the east end (10) demarcating the limit of the additions, the small extra room on the west end in position (11) now gone. Note too the expanse of wall above the windows denoting the high half upper storey at this level. Window (12) is new and converted from an entrance to the east end of the house, (13) has been altered to a window from an original doorway.

At the west end the original detail of eaves returns has gone and upper windows in the gable have been enlarged (compare with old photograph), while lower sash and trim have been changed. The old photograph shows siding continuous across the gable end and appendage to the rear suggesting re-cladding when this was built.

Now enter the east wing by the lower door following the red arrows for this part of the tour, your next sheet will be just near the door.

CCEGURG ARCHITECTURE

Halfway House: the east wing.

This section of the tour is an examination of the problems of restoration in part and an appreciation of the niceties of craftsmanship in the old days: there are subtleties here that should not go unregarded.

First (14) the structure of the outside walls with very wide hewn timber used as vertical supports and the bracing (15) are noteworthy. Look at the wide boarding some up to 20" or thereabouts - fine pine trees on the Ridge in the early days. Also the face of the main building is neatly clad in horizontal boarding (16). The outside stove chimney (17) appears to be of mid.19th to late 19th century brick, possibly a rebuilding.

Proceed very cautiously upstairs fingering the thumb latches (18) of Norfolk pattern, workshop made with sheet iron pieces and cast malleable iron handles, also the wrought bean latch (19). At the head of the stairs examine the balustrade (20) very carefully feel the edges of its components and note the great attention paid to ornamenting wany edged material used in its construction, one of those notable subtleties previously mentioned.

On the east wall of the main building note the vertical plank (21) apparently part of the solid timber filling to the frame, and exposed during the course of structural repairs to the end plate of the house. Note how the chimney (22) dives into the house at this point. (23) Framing details are well illustrated by the structure of the wing (a) rafter, (b) roof plate, (c) main post (d) corner post (e) stud, (f) brace. Look at the two sashes in the north end, one (24) a very old form with narrow muntin, the other (25) possibly later with fuller muntin, but both exhibiting the undercut curve of the quarter round which gives definition to the profile (outline or shape).

Carefully retrace your steps and follow the black arrows to the top of the house, where you will find your next instalment.

CCBCURG ARCHITECTURE

Halfway House: the third floor

You have arrived at the beginning of the puzzle. Here is where the principal clues to the building's history are most clearly visible, so be on your toes, keep your eyes wide open and see if you can interpret the evidence as we point it out. Follow the blue arrows for the best route.

(26) Note the careful framing of the roof support in effect a permanent scaffold for the rafters serving also as a partition between centre space and side areas. This section, was according to previous owners, not opened up before the turn of this century and therefore suggests the abandonment of this extra space apparently not needed in the final development of the building. We could find no sign of access to this space in the original arrangement. (Remember we are constantly dropping hints to help you in your examination and conclusions). The dark honey colour of the natural pine indicates long exposure to the air, a natural ageing process of over a century.

Check the joints of the framing, the mortises (holes) (27), the tenons (tongues) (28), and trunnels (literally tree nails) or pegs (29) to secure the joint. This framing was obviously erected first to help support the rafters on the plate (30) here acting as a purlin, which has been notched to receive the sloping roof member.

The trim of a simple beaded type (31) applied to this framing is secured with cut nails (32) and the occasional wrought nail (33). Part of this trim has been removed and re-used elsewhere when this section of the attic was opened up near the turn of this century: in other words this part has been cannibalized.

The windows (34) are a later insertion probably to light this space when it was opened up, or to improve the lighting generally.

Near the south-east corner at the floor line can be seen some evidence of decay in a horizontal girt or end plate (35). Further along near the centre of the building this has been repaired already as will be seen later. On the south wall can be seen part of the vertical plank filling (36), and the details of heavy timber framing resembling a barn structure. Note especially the corner post hewn out in the inner corner to become an L form so that the post would not protrude into the rooms below: this is a dodge typical to New Brunswick house framing from fairly early times with posts at hall partitions fashioned in a T form, the stem to be buried in the partition. Earlier Upper Canadian framing, like its colonial American counterpart, frequently had projecting corner posts neatly boxed in with beaded board.

The framing in its general arrangement of posts allows only windows at certain locations, namely on either side of the centre post (37), hence the close spacing of the openings in the two floors below.

Here is your most important clue so see what you can make of it: (38) a distinct break occurs in the roof plate. The framing in the east portion of the house incorporates a considerable amount of straight muly sawn pieces (39). The way you entered (40) and will exit appears to have been a window opening. On the studs beside it are the distinct signs of nailing (41) giving us the clue that this was clapboarded at one time with material from the nail spacing exposed about $5\frac{1}{2}$ " to the weather and likely 6" wide stuff.

Back into the section better finished and known as the Ballroom you will note that the opening (40) was cut through the wall, the original window having been above the chairrail (42), of simple profile. (43) Note that lath is applied to studs first then trim, then plaster taken up to trim. Proceed to the west end and look into the neatly finished closet (44) in the south-west corner. (45) indicates common early "accordion" or expanded wood lath made by splitting a thin rough sawn board and pulling it out to form slits through which the lime plaster reinforced with animal hair (usually cowhair, sometimes soft horse hair) was forced to form the keys locking the finish to the backing.

The chimney (46) is a rebuilding for stoves after a drastic flue fire in the late 19th century and is one of Mr. Beech's greatest problems: it is inadequate in size, occasionally smokes, is unlined and recently caught alight causing some trepidation. This feature needs complete rebuilding. However earlier arrangements have been destroyed. The outline in the floor (47) indicates a hearth for a fireplace. Marks on the end planking (48) show the positions of shelves to a former chimney cupboard, the interior end supports forming, we conjecture the finished lining to this cupboard. Reach down into the opening if you feel inclined and note the neatly finished piece of wood (49) used as furring. It appears this was once a stair tread and was in place as a winder or angled step. So where did this come from?

Before you leave sense the grand proportions of this space truly suitable for a Ballroom, and in any tavern this would most likely have been its function. Was the small end closet a retiring room? Also the stairs are generous and inviting.

Now follow the green arrows into the room at the left of the foot of the stairs as you go down where you can pick up the next chapter.

Halfway House: the second floor or upper level (English first floor) or upper ground floor.

You have entered the eastern section of the main building by the original, and formerly only entrance (50). Note the four panel door (51) typical throughout the house. The trim in this room (52) is slightly more elaborate than elsewhere on this floor suggesting either a best bedroom or a drawing room as the house developed. A stove was the heating for this space. The trim has a fillet or intermediate quirk (53) as well as a backmould (54), with a cyma recta combined with bead and fillet as the profile. (The cyma reversa, its counterpart and common contemporary, has the outside part of the S form curving in instead of flaring out as here, the only way to differentiate the cymas.). This profile in a slightly larger form occurs in the Harris-Inderwick House, 1823 in Perth, and in the de Salaberry House of 1815 at Chambly, Quebec. It is thought of as emanating from tool stocks conveyed through Montreal.

A small back hall (55), serving temporarily as the toilet, was the entrance from the rear or north porch at grade to this section of the house. Adjoining is a bedroom; near the ceiling at the east end (56) are recent repairs to replace decayed and insect attacked timberwork provoked probably by leaks at the adjoining east wing roof.

Cross through the "new" opening (57) at the head of the stairs, made about the turn of this century (and using trim cannibalized from the east attic) to give more flexibility to the plan. You are now in the principal upper room, probably a reception room, of the west section of the house. Note the capacious fireplace with crane, or crook for hanging pots and kettles, at least for tea if not mulled ale upstairs. (As Mr. Beech points out the cant of the crane, the tipping in at the top because of the purposeful misalignment of the crane supports, makes the crane swing back into the fireplace unaided.). The mantelpiece, noteworthy for its elaborate build up of bed moulds, is more late 18th century in feeling, giving the house that early character previously mentioned. The chimney cupboards (58) using up every nook and cranny are another original feature. The chairrail (59) is another notable early feature: in other rooms Mr. Beech has replaced this already, finding it in the shed or storage areas of the house. Note also the trim along the north partition and particularly the jointing (60) which all looks so neat in spite of its inconsistency.

Enter the right hand north door and on your left view the original dark green paint (61) on the horizontal beaded finish made with tapered (62) boards cut as the shape of the tree trunk favoured them. (The new paint is a trial, difficult to match because of differing pigments, vehicles and general qualities of modern paint materials.) This formed one side of an entry to the longer reception room, now the principal bedroom, in the front from the rear or north porch. Signs of the other dividing partition can be seen (63) and the window to this room has been converted from the entry door (64), the original window of the room probably in the end wall (65).

The left hand door leads to another small room exhibiting curious changes adjoining the chimney which we find baffling. Inside the closet can be seen the finishing off of the haunch of the chimney breast (66) in a cobbled though neat wood detail and the chimney shelves (67). An outline in the wall finish found by Mr. Beech and patching filling this in with inferior plaster, led him to suspect an earlier fireplace. The cut outline in the flooring certainly suggests a hearth Hearsay has it that the chimney was rebuilt some time after the War of 1812. Could it have been after the 1837 Rebellion? Our question may be more relevant later. If a fireplace, tucked into the corner here, was in place at one time this might indicate a best bedchamber with drawing room in the larger space to the front.

The curious box hall to the front entrance on the south leading on to the balcony is repeated below and may have been later. Before leaving note the rim lock on the door (68), and for those already intrigued - but take care - go out in no more than pairs on to the balcony to examine the trim on the windows (69) and the doorcase (70) which resemble the moulding profiles of the 1840's. Is this a later refurbishing or a clue to the evolution of the house?

Return via the stair to the ground floor to savour the real flavour of an early building - it could well have been a tavern. Your next chapter will be in the room to your left as you go downstairs. Note the glazed door as you go past.

Halfway House: Ground Floor or lower level.

You are now in the lower level, the working area of the house, the domestic offices, below stairs in one sense but above grade in another. The room you have come into is a reception room, sitting room, parlour or the like, in later Victorian times probably kept tightly shut with blinds pulled half or all the way down, open only on special occasions, to important visitors, a formal place, musty, stove heated in winter, stiff, stuffy and stilted. Earlier it could have served as a family sitting room more formal than the general purpose keeping room adjoining where all domestic activity took place in convivial surroundings by the cooking hearth and bakeoven. To the rear is a small cellar room with doorway to the adjoining shed for easy access for wood and the like.

Trace your step back into the keeping room which with its two entrances could quite well have been a tap room in the tavern use of the place which is the supposed first use of the building. Note the sash on the front with the distinct marks (71) where muntins have been removed. We hope to have taping done to illustrate the original effect - a restoration of the building's essential character removed less than forty years ago.

The east window (72) to this room does not relate to the arrangement upstairs. Checking reveals the door (73), with its upper panels replaced by glazing, to be on centre with respect to this section of the house, the window moved to accommodate the glazed door leading into the hall.

Note the chairrail in this room (74) and the neat and durable corner finish to the box hall (75), definitely a concession to much usage of the room as well as being an early detail. Generous coat rails (76) are all around the room. The fireplace (77) is a capacious cooking hearth complete with crane, poised to fall back above the fire. To the right the bakeoven (78) of generous size typical with its domed or vaulted chamber and front flue joining the main fireplace flue higher up the stack. The oven was heated by burning wood in it for 2½ - 3 hours raking the coals out and dusting off the floor to receive bread, pies and cookies roughly in that sequence of baking, with a pot of beans on occasion (always for Saturday night supper in the Maritimes) The small hole (79) to the fireplace is a mystery: was it to supply air to the oven fire? or a place to shove hot coals on to the hearth? Also note the fine simple mantelpiece (80) of late 18th century feeling. Above the sloped boards (81) provide the formwork or centring for the hearth above. The corner larder below the stair has a lower doorway (82) accommodating the landing above, but the stair itself as seen from the underside (83) has been rebuilt in part it is thought.

The small room (84) off to the north towards the centre is a storeroom, temporarily in part a kitchen. A previous owner attempted to repair a crumbling stone wall subjected to heavy earth pressure by forming and pouring an inner concrete skin, which is again giving way (85) another of Mr. Beech's problems. One solution is to build an adequate exterior concrete foundation designed as a retaining wall or to excavate the area under the former rear or north porches as a new cellar with retaining wall foundation properly waterproofed and drained from behind, thus relieving the pressure on the house, provided space for additional storage and services and incidentally giving the opportunity for a little site archaeology.

In the left room (south-west corner) (86) is a curious arcaway (87) originally accessible from above in the north porch. Its shape suggests a barrel, and it would seem to fit a keg of ale, easy to drop down when full, simple to haul out when empty. So here could have been the bar to the kitchen/tap room in front, rather reminiscent of old English pubs in its arrangements. Mr. Beech - reach for your apron!

Now out on to the porch for the final denouement.

COEURS ARCHITECTURE

372-5364

Colony Conservation, Town May 51

Halfway House: Exposé

You have the clues, you are goggle-eyed, bewitched and it has been a short crash course to stun even the avid preserver of things past. Here are our conclusions.

The most important clue (38) pointing out the separate framing of the eastern section, and augmented by the differing window arrangement, the east end of the west section originally windowed (40) and clapboarded (41), indicates that the building was constructed in two parts. The original was a house of extraordinary proportion with a single end chimney (to the west) and two and a high half storeys to the south front, one and a half to the north, only three bays (or openings wide) a centre door on the lower storey flanked by symmetrically placed windows. Also upstairs the grand doorway roughly central to the facade would appear to correspond in date to the addition to the east, and the original would have had a window in its place aligned with that below. The original plan had a side stair, possibly as at present or reversed with winders at top or bottom.

When the addition was made it is understood that the building had ceased to be a tavern. However, we wonder if this east section was added anticipating a similar use, its reopening, or was it perhaps erected very early, that is soon after the original western section, but not fully finished until later and never entirely used, for the attic was completely cut off. The original concept, a side hall, high, narrow house is a common New Brunswick form, several survive around Fredericton, but in Upper Canada the centre hall arrangement is more often seen, and perhaps this was intended for Halfway House from the start, but never materialized in the normal way.

Mouldings of the interior, doors and sash are similar in the two parts, but moulding planes may have been left behind or were still in use for later finishing. The external trim, and some door panel moulds reflect most closely the 1840's, or at the earliest the late 1830's. The doorway on the upper balcony is particularly reminiscent of this, and heralds the influence of the Greek Revival. Perhaps, therefore, we should be looking for an enlargement c.1835 to 1840 of a house conceivably pre-War of 1812, and apparently used during that period, when references were also found to the Lynde Tavern c.1810 on the western outskirts of Whitby which is a more formal and slightly grander counterpart, and a building now in jeopardy. Were the additions and probably contemporary alterations to the chimney at the upper level made about 1837? And the rear wing and lean-to extended, the east wing added and the two storey porch all part of a drastic improvement at the time anticipating a renewal of activity along this route? Or are we reading too much into this fascinating aspect of the building's evolution and in our romance, which you must admit is catching, letting our imagination run away with us?

ORIGINAL ARCHITECTURE

Macmillan - Rosemont } possibilities for more
Miss Ash } photos of the halfway house.

1819-1910 - James family owned it.
- succession of owners: 1910.

20 May 1975

Peter John Stokes
Consulting Restoration Architect

suggested date - 1810.

Danforth Rd - contractor Asa Danforth 1790.