



Plaster Bits

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Right Next Door...

Between 1780 and 1800, Joseph Dodge was the first occupant of the house now known as the Elijah Wyman House on the Old Dublin Road in Hancock, NH. Josiah Stone lived in the Wyman house from 1820 TO 1823; and while living there he built another charming Cape Cod style house for himself 30 feet from the Wyman House. Since there is no record of why the two houses and a beautiful barn were built within a stone's throw of each other, the possibility exists that a close by neighbor made it easier to share the chores and raise and tend the livestock on the farm. This was termed 'Yankee practicality" by today's owner of the Wyman House. There is no hint that any relationship existed between the two owners.



Elijah Wyman House



Josiah Stone House

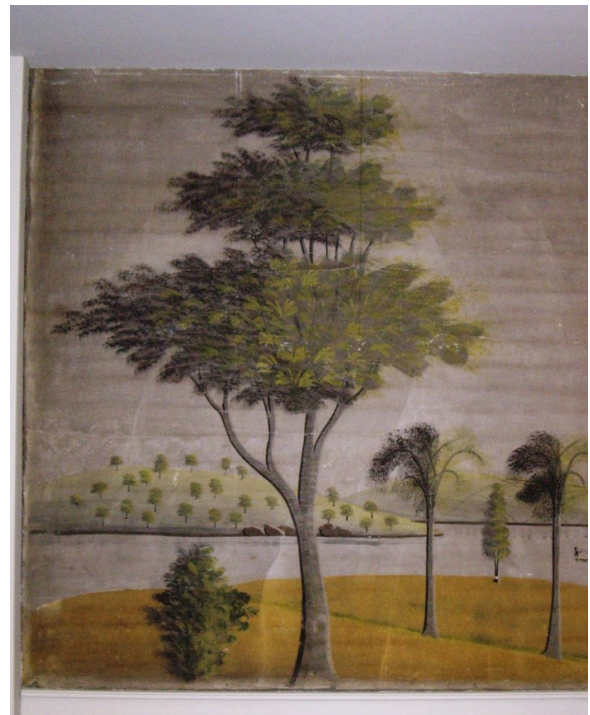
The First Hundred Years, A History of Hancock, NH 1764-1889 by W.W. Hayward regales the reader with many interesting incidents regarding the early homeowners on the Old Dublin Road. Probably the most interesting relationship is that each of these charming little Cape Cod style houses had murals painted by the same hand, at the same time, during Elijah Wyman's ownership around 1825. The palettes of the murals in each house are an exact match for each other in hue and value and the rooms complement each other with motifs. One can just picture the artist completing one parlor and moving next door to lay in the background

colors on the second parlor, before moving back to the tree trunks and detailing motifs on the first mural.



Wyman House and Stone House murals as they appear today. Photos Deb Hayes

The Wyman and Stone House murals exemplify many of the motifs that have been attributed to Jonathan D. Poor in the *Folk Art Murals of the Rufus Porter School, 1825-1840*, by Lefko & Radcliffe. The Federal house, multi-stumped tree, triple tall pines are found repeatedly on signed Poor walls in Maine and Massachusetts. Jean Lipman, in *Rufus Porter Rediscovered* p.153, notes that one room of the Stone house had stenciled walls which were supposed to have been stenciled by Moses Eaton Jr.; but, unfortunately, the walls were re-plastered and they are no longer available for study.



Author Hayward tells the story of a winter Sunday town meeting in Hancock around 1830. The entire town gathered to discuss town issues and then it started to snow. Then it really snowed hard and developed into a blizzard. There were three houses on Old Dublin Road and two of the homeowners started out toward their homes a mile from town. They moved slowly, holding on to fence posts and tree limbs, and eventually made it to the Wyman barn where they burrowed into the hay for warmth. Discovered in the morning, they were brought into the house to thaw out and warm up.



Fig. 16. Porter's "Car for Removing Houses," presented in *American Mechanic*, May 28, 1842.

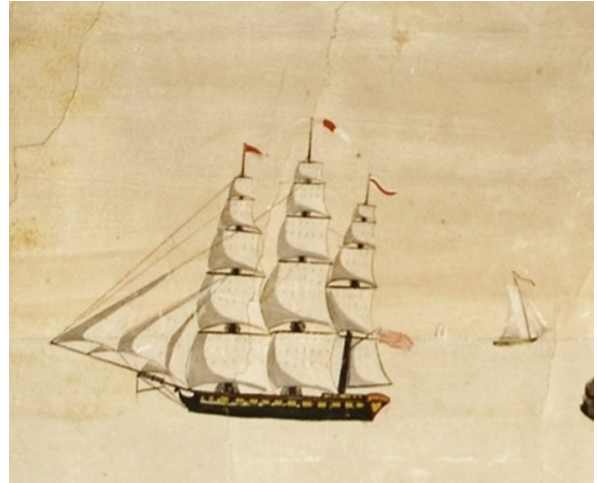
In 1930, the little Cape Cod style Josiah Stone House was lifted off its foundation and rolled down the Dublin Road about a quarter of a mile to the opposite side of the road and perched up on a knoll.

Recently, the current owner of the Wyman House happened onto the son of the man who actually moved the house in 1930. Sharing his childhood recollections of the move, he recalled his father with the draft horses and logs slowly moving the house down the Dublin hill to its new location. There is little or no evidence of plaster degradation due to the move and the walls have never been papered over or cleaned, so the original paint reflects the soot and time worn elegance of the original painter's intent. The little barn on the Stone house property did not move down the road and became part of the Wyman house property.



Josiah Stone House murals as they appear today. The walls have never been cleaned and the soot is apparent giving them the richness of 175 years of living. The motifs- orchard, Federal house are all typical of J.D. Poor's work.

Today the Wyman house exists alone on the original site with the Stone house barn on its property. This is not the original barn which met an interesting fate in the 1940s as recorded by Hayward in *The Second Hundred Years of Hancock*. During 1944, the women of the town met in the livestock and hay filled barn to make bandages and supplies for the WWII effort. The group of women were all compatible except for one. After several work sessions the ladies decided to tell the one that it wasn't working out and please not attend the work-bees. She came back one more time with a box of matches. The barn was set afire but there is no name of the suspected arsonist mentioned in the book. After the fire, there was a follow up article in the local paper, which stated "Arson was Suspected". To this day the name is still a Hancock secret, although families who still live in town would probably know who was involved.



Wyman House ship that remains- striking black and red detail; Stone House ship untouched. The murals in the Wyman house were papered over sometime in the late 1800s. The paper was removed in the middle of the 20th century and the walls were washed, removing most of the glue based water-soluble paint. The Wyman mural walls were originally frescoed - painted on uncured plaster. The calomine in the plaster reacts with the paint and the process leaves an indelible imprint of the original painted design, sinking into the top layer almost like a blotter. The walls have been left untouched other than matching in perimeter plaster repair when windows were moved. The owners have decided they would prefer to enjoy the elegant original remains than have the walls reinterpreted.