

ARCHITECTURAL-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Tenant House at Dorchester Village or Punkapoag Before 1725

It has become clear that the area in which David Tilden received his deed for twenty acres in 1725 had been settled prior to that time. In 1656, a missionary, John Eliot, came to preach to the Indians, establishing their Punkapoag Plantation of 6000 acres in 1654. The cedar swamps about Punkapoag were a source for lumber for the new white settlers as well as the Indians who by 1688 according to Gookin "... get many a pound by cutting and preparing cedar shingles and clapboards, which they sell at Boston and other English towns adjacent."

By the time of the laying out of the twelve divisions of land in the new grant in 1698, the Mission at Punkapoag had become a small village, apparently located near the intersection of Pleasant and Washington Streets, more recently known as Canton Corner. By 1704, the Indians were granting leases to English settlers, among them John Wentworth, a neighbor of David Tilden. The small settlement of Punkapoag was becoming known as Dorchester Village by 1725 (see map) when David Tilden, Husbandman, "...outdone of the English Tenants of Lessees...", for £5 15s, received his deed from Amos Ahauton, Thomas Ahauton, Simon George, Hezekiah Squamaog and George Hunter, all resident in Punkapoag, an Indian plantation for "...a certain message or Tenement with the lands thereto belonging". (See deed, Appendix).

It is clear from the evidence that David Tilden's deed included a building which existed at the time he took title to the property. Not only does the term message or tenement imply an existing structure "...in his possession now being...", but the original survey plat of 1725 actually delineates a small house near the site of the existing building. (see illustration). This indeed proves the existence of a house on the property prior to 1725. Whether Jabez Searle, who received a grant from his father Robert in 1710

and reportedly occupied the property during the laying out of Pleasant Street in 1723, erected the house is not certain. He was admitted to the First Church of Dorchester in 1707, the year of the setting up of the Meetinghouse at Punkapoag when it was set off as a separate precinct, and thus appears earlier in the records than Tilden who seem not to appear until 1725.

At any rate, this earlier structure, undoubtedly in existence prior to 1725, is most likely the present kitchen or rear leanto portion of the house which exhibits construction features more characteristic of the seventeenth than the 18th century in its large crudely chamfered structural members. The surviving portions of this house indicate that it has been cut down both in height and breadth, and it may possibly have been moved from a nearby location up against the rear of the main house sometime in the late 18th or early 19th century since the leanto roof seems to date from the latter period. (see illustrations).

Tilden House - 1725-1773

The main portion of the house as we know it today was very likely built about the time of David Tilden's receipt of title to the property in 1725. This home consists of the two east rooms in the two story front portion of the house. The heavy, exposed framing members with the beaded edges of the summers and girts are very characteristic of the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The west end of the house originally consisted of a one-story leanto room probably added very early in the century if not part of the original construction.

In 1745, Pleasant Street was laid out by the Selectmen of Stoughton, and by 1747, when the "20 Acres "together with housing and building thereon..." was sold by David Tilden, Sr. to his son David Tilden, Jr., Cordwainer, for \$150, the house probably appeared as it does in the "Conjectural Eighteenth Century Appearance" illustration included here. It then undoubtedly consisted of a "hall" with "hall chamber" above, and an adjoining kitchen in the leanto. The earlier "Tenants House" probably stood nearby at least

until the then 27 Acre property was sold by David Tilden, Jr. Cordwainer, to Theophilus Lyon, Farmer, in 1773 for £200. In addition to the basic structure of the building, the early feather edge sheathing of the older portion of the house, the diminutive window frame at the rear, the attic window with its small 6 inch by 8 inch panes and the large four foot by eight foot sheathed fireplace opening of the front room of the later house, as well as remnants of batten doors with strap hinge shadows throughout the house are evidence of the Tilden's occupancy of the house. At this period, the house was apparently sheathed with wide (10" to weather) weather boards, as indicated by those visible under the rear leanto roof on the back of the front leanto kitchen. The existence of these weatherboards also seems to prove the earlier portion of the house to have been moved up against the front portion at a later date.

Lyon's Farm, Tannery 1773-1786

When Captain Theophilus Lyon (a soldier of the Revolution, see Appendix) purchased the property from David Tilden and his wife Rachel in 1773, he apparently set himself up in the tannery business. According to Huntoon: "...In old times these were small tanyards in the country towns to which neighbors carried their hides to be sold or be cured. Theophilus Lyon was the owner of one just below the dawn on Pleasant Street, where Pequit Brook leaves the Reservoir Pond. A citizen records in 1777, 'Lyon has my horse hide'; in 1782 'Carry Lyon five loads of bark.'"

By 1786, the tannery had expanded to the point that Theophilus Lyon, now "gentleman", sold to George Crosman, Jr. one half of his tanyard of $\frac{1}{2}$ Acre including all the buildings on same; bark house, water pit and ditch, bounded by the country road, Pequit Brook, ditch, and the lane from Lyon's house to the country road, all for £45. (see Appendix). This partnership in the Lyon-Crosman tanyard apparently continued until the house was sold to Zachariah Howard, new minister of the First Congregational Church, in 1787. Changes made to the house prior to this time probably were limited

to improvements in the interior finish including the introduction of the four panel doors and panelled chimney piece of the second floor east room as well as possible enlargements or other changes made in window openings.

The Priest Howard Farm 1786-1856

When Captain Theophilus Lyon granted his farm to Zachariah Howard, "Clerk", the property consisted of 27 Acres "...with a Dwelling House and Barn and other buildings standing thereon... including one half of the Tan Yard, Tan House, and Appurtenances..." The other half of the tanyard was reserved for the use of George Crosman who still was present in the area as noted on the 1794 map of Stoughton. (see Illustration). Based on our knowledge of the house and its outbuildings, and using deed surveys and descriptions, we have arrived at a conjectural plan of the farm as it may have appeared c. 1800, before the death of Reverend Howard in 1809 when the farm was purchased by Rev. Mr. William Ritchie, his successor, who erected and lived in the present Draper Mansion. Some improvement seems to have been made to the house between the period of 1787-1809 when occupied by Reverend Howard, and he may have been the one who moved the older structure up against the main front of the house, sacrificing the earlier portion's upper floor to the leanto roof slope. The early, but large window frames in the first floor west room with the six over six sash and 8 inch by 10 inch panes may also be characteristic of this period at the turn of the century when Pleasant Street, according to Huntoon, was known as "Ragged Row".

After the death of Reverend Howard, his wife, Mrs. Martha Crafts Howard continued to live in the Tilden House under a succession of owners. The house is indicated as "M. Howard" on Hodges Map of 1831, (see Illustrations) and again as "Mrs. Howard" on Walling's Map of 1855, so that she undoubtedly retained tenancy while owners Ritchie 1809-1822, Rev. Benjamin Huntoon, 1822-31, and Elijah Crane, 1831-43, lived in the main (Draper) mansion. In 1856, while Thomas W. Ward occupied the property, Mrs. Howard passed away, but considerable improvement had apparently been made

to the house during her lifetime.

It was probably during the Howard's period of occupancy that the house gained much of its present appearance. Upon the addition of the old portion of the house to the rear, the shingles and clapboards we know today probably predominated. Windows were very likely enlarged and added. Most significant, however, were changes in the fireplaces, chimney, and stairs. The front leanto kitchen was apparently changed to a parlor upon addition of the rear portion of the house when that became the kitchen. The federal style mantel of the west front room is consistent with this c. 1800-1825 date. Also, possibly at this time, the stairs were initially rebuilt, and Mrs. Howard, according to Huntoon (who visited her there in her later years) "...had a small stair case made in order that her favorite cats might have access at all times to the upper story of her house." Later on, possibly upon the purchase of the property by Thomas W. Ward, in the last ten years before her death at the age of 95 in 1856, the old chimney was torn out and a new one inserted. The new chimney served stoves in the front rooms, and, perhaps in concession to an aged tenant, a brick beehive oven was constructed adjacent to a small fireplace or range in the rear kitchen. The kitchen, except for the oven details may have appeared very much like the one illustrated in the Boston City Directory of 1853. (see Illustrations).

The Red House 1856-1970's

The "Red House" was apparently painted that color relatively recently in its long history, the early 18th century weatherboards having been unpainted, and the later shingles, clapboards, and trim being white before they were red. This color probably appeared after the Howard's period of occupancy when Greek Revival White would probably have predominated. The property surrounding the house was considerably improved under the ownership of Thomas Ward, an ardent horticulturalist who planted many of the trees, grapes, shrubbery, etc. during his lifetime. The 1876 map of Canton Corner indicates the "Red House" as "Gardner". It was improved outwardly over the years between 1856 and 1970 with the

extension of a bedroom over the parlor where only a leanto attic had been before, and the addition of a small room at the west end of the house. (see Illustrations). Also, in the intervening years, a porch has been added and since disappeared. On the interior, changes to the bedroom and bathroom at the rear of the house, as well as the addition of plumbing and electricity made the house more habitable by today's standards.

Most of the recent changes occurred after the purchase of the Estate by the Charles N. Draper family from Col. Henry L. Higginson (who owned the house in 1893, according to Huntoon). The Drapers lived in the main house, and like Col. Higginson used the "Red House" for their gardener's residence. The old Tilden House continued in this use, and many of the above improvements were made under the tenancy of the Harry M. Alexander family who moved in in 1923. It is through the assistance of Mr. Charles Alexander that we have included such features as the two story, fifty foot long barn with leanto, privy, etc. on our conjectural view of the "Priest Howard Farm of c. 1800. (see Illustrations). Thus, with the installation of a full foundation under the House in the 1950's, the preservation of the structure was secured, and with the current restoration project underway, it is hoped that Tilden's "Little Red House" will be preserved as a memorial to all its former occupants and the early settlers of Canton.

by: Frederic C. Detwiler
November 1975