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## NEW HAMPSHIRE DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

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### **GEORGE KIMBALL HOUSE 46 PROSPECT HILL ROAD CANAAN, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

**FIELD NOTES  
APRIL 6, 2010  
JAMES L. GARVIN**

The following notes are intended to record observations made on April 5, 2010, for the benefit of consultants who may be employed to prepare a report or recordation of the George Kimball House. Richard Boisvert, Mary Kate Ryan, Peter Michaud, and James Garvin of the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources visited the house on the afternoon of April 5, 2010, to assist local preservationists and representatives of the Cardigan Mountain School in understanding the nature and degree of architectural integrity of the dwelling and in planning for some recordation of its features before the building is disassembled by Anson Smith under agreement with the school. Floor plans and elevation drawings, dated September 30, 2008, were previously prepared by Enfield architect Paul Mirski; please see the Appendix to these notes.

**Summary:** The George Kimball House appears to have begun its existence around 1830 as a two-story house frame, with integral ell, that was soon adapted as a dwelling and dormitory for students at nearby Noyes Academy. Although deed research has reportedly not been carried out on the building, its known history establishes that attorney George Kimball, one of the founders of the racially integrated Noyes Academy, purchased the house circa 1835. Although the northern rooms of the house were remodeled around 1900-1920 and again at later times, the remaining areas of the building today bear traces of both private residential use and adaptation of the ell as a dormitory, undoubtedly with the original kitchen (now remodeled beyond recognition) located on the first story of the wing. The house is remarkable in showing no evidence of fireplaces. It appears to have been heated from the first by airtight stoves and, as a result, was finished with a somewhat modified floor plan within its traditional frame. Airtight stoves were being newly introduced in the early 1830s, and the adaptation of the building for stove heating suggests that the building was not finished on the interior until about the time of the establishment of the academy in 1834. The house has seen a number of changes, the most notable of which entailed the replacement of its original hipped roof with the present gabled roof, perhaps circa 1860 when other discernible changes were carried out.

**Known History of the House:** In the absence of deed research, the known history of the Kimball House derives from secondary sources. The most detailed of these is the chapter on “Noyes Academy” in William Allen Wallace’s *The History of Canaan, New Hampshire*:

During the winter [of 1835] Mr. Kimball devoted himself to collecting funds for the school, and on his return [to Canaan] in February, he announced that he had been more successful than he even hoped. The school was now assured of permanence. He sold his house, next north of the Currier store at that time, now the second [north of the store], and moved into the Wilson house at the corner, opposite A. S. Green’s, with the intention of boarding all the black pupils, some twenty of whom were announced as coming on the first of March, when it was anticipated the “Nigger school” was to begin. He also announced his intention of building a boarding house in the field near the Academy [and south of the house], for the accommodation of black and white pupils.<sup>1</sup>

In a later reference, Wallace refers to the Kimball House as “the Cross house at the Corner where they [the black students] roomed and boarded with the family of George Kimball.”<sup>2</sup> This reference is clarified in a brief history of the house in the local newsletter, *Your Hometown Messenger*, March 1 1995:

It was in this house in which fourteen blacks[,] enrolled in the nearby Noyes Academy, were protected from harm when they were fired upon by the mob. A bullet hole in the wall in the front side of the house remains today. The house was owned for many years by Fred Cross and subsequently acquired by his daughter, Margie, and son-in-law Ralph Howe. Ralph made additions to the house and remodeled some of the interior. Located at “the corner” just off Canaan Street, the house was known as twin gables. It is owned today by Cardigan Mountain School and is called the Howe House.

The Grafton County map of 1860 shows N. Barber living here. The 1892 Hurd atlas shows J. Newton here. United States Census returns may shed more light on these heads of households and their families.

Fred G. Cross (born around 1870) and his wife, May or Ida May, are listed in the United States Censuses from 1900 through 1930 as living at “The Corner.” They and their daughter, Margie (born in 1895), together with hired man George W. Pierre, are apparently the people shown posing with farm horses in front of the house in a photograph taken around 1910. By 1920, Margie Cross was married to Ralph G. Howe, and this couple had a daughter, Beulah, aged five.

As is noted below, the north side of the house and the stair hall were remodeled around 1900-1920, probably by Ralph and Margie Howe, as suggested above, but possibly by Fred G. Cross before his daughter was married.

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<sup>1</sup> William Allen Wallace, *The History of Canaan, New Hampshire*, ed. James Burns Wallace (Concord, N. H.: Rumford Press, 1910), p. 267.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

Attorney George Kimball, who purchased this property in 1835, appears to have been an idealistic but somewhat impractical man. His candid biography in *The Bench and Bar of New Hampshire* sums up his career:

Mr. Kimball studied his profession [of law] with Stephen Moody at Gilmanton [N. H.] In March, 1813, he opened his office in Union, Maine, but removed the next year to Warren, Maine. He then became a successful school teacher in Concord, in Richmond, Virginia, and in the island of Bermuda, where he went in 1815, and probably lived for some years. In May, 1824, he came to Concord, and took charge of a weekly newspaper, the "Concord Register," as publisher and editor. Being a writer of no mean ability, he might have done well in his new calling but for his lack of industry, and his propensity to dream when he should have been wide awake and at his work. . . . About the year 1826 Mr. Kimball resumed his profession [of law] in Canaan. He was not lacking in knowledge, and was a pleasant speaker, but was unacquainted with practice and was inapt to learn what is obtainable by plodding industry. . . . Naturally he fell into difficulties, in which he was fortunate in having the aid and counsel of Nathaniel P. Rogers of Plymouth. They were both anti-slavery men of the most pronounced type, and Rogers, as the stronger and wiser, acted as a second father to Kimball, in giving him advice and assistance. Mr. Kimball was a born reformer. He was instrumental in procuring the erection of the Noyes Academy in Canaan, which was open for the reception of colored pupils; he was a prominent supporter of the temperance movement, new in his day; and active in the crusade against Freemasonry. About 1838, he went to Alton, Illinois, for the purpose of entering into trade. For that he had little aptitude, and after a short time he returned, without having bettered his fortunes. In 1840 he returned to Bermuda, and passed the rest of his life there as a lawyer and a teacher. He [had] married in Bermuda, about 1817, a lady of some property.

**Description and Evolution of the House:** The Kimball house is an L-shaped, two-story dwelling standing on a foundation of local fieldstone. The main or front portion of the house measures about 40 by 18 feet, and stands over a fully excavated cellar. The wing measures about 26 feet in length and 18 in breadth. It stands over an inaccessible crawl space. No part of the house is underpinned with split granite, but the fieldstone walls rise a few inches above grade to support the sills. Thus, the dating evidence that might be offered by stone splitting technology is absent. A few stones split with plugs and feathers are found at a former bulkhead opening on the north end of the house and at a current foundation opening in the western foundation wall, but these stones represent relatively modern changes.

The frame of the house is heavy and hewn. The frame cannot be observed directly except in the attic, where the floor joists are only partially covered with boards, and in the cellar, where some changes have occurred through deterioration caused by chronic dampness.

The four corner posts and the four intermediate or stair hall posts of the main frame are indicated on Paul Mirski's floor plans (see Appendix). It will be noted that these posts define framing bays of unusual and uneven dimensions, seeming to indicate some intention of the carpenter or



framer that did not accord with the final requirements of the rooms as laid out within the frame. The northernmost bay of the house measures about 14 feet from the end of the house to the stair hall framing bent. The central bay, defined by the northern and southern stair hall framing bents, measures about 9 feet in width. The southern bay of the main house measures 18 feet in width, the same width as the ell that extends off the western or rear elevation of the building (photo above). Whereas a house of this date and this L-shaped floor plan would normally have three fireplace chimneys, there is no evidence of large chimneys within this frame. All evidence seen thus far suggests that the house was heated by stoves, utilizing three chimneys, of which two survive in altered condition. The possible use of stoves in a rural house of 1830-35 is discussed below.

As may be seen on the floor plans of the building in the Appendix, the partitions that define the front rooms of the house, especially those on the south (the parlor and the parlor chamber) do not intersect the structural posts of the building frame in the normal way. The northern partitions of the parlor and parlor chamber are offset from the stair hall posts by two or three feet to the south, suggesting that the building frame was hewn before the floor plan was fully decided upon. The original northern partition of the stair hall has been obliterated on the first story, but remains intact on the second. Here, we see that the northern stair hall partition does intersect the posts of the stair hall bay, as was normal in most dwellings.

On the second floor, too, it becomes evident that moving the northern partition of the parlor chamber some three feet south of the stair hall post confers great benefit on the building's floor plan. This location opens a connection between the stair hall and the north side of the wing,

permitting access from the front of the house through a corridor to two bedchambers in the wing. These rooms are sheathed in a combination of vertical and horizontal pine boards with beaded edges, now covered with wallpaper. They share access to a single chimney that rises through the wing. It appears that these chambers were finished as dormitory rooms for the students who boarded with the Kimball family. The rooms have access to the kitchen below via a secondary stairway that descends to a rear entry with doors leading to both the kitchen and parlor as well as to the outdoors (see floor plans).

As noted below, the style of the main staircase of the Kimball House indicates that the current stairway was rebuilt sometime between 1900 and 1920. This remodeling destroyed any obvious evidence of the configuration of the original staircase. The chimney that now rises through the stair hall near the south wall was mirrored by a similar stove chimney near the north wall; a distant photograph of the house from the north shows that now-missing chimney, and a recess cut in the side of a ceiling joist in the attic shows the location of the stack. With two chimneys placed on each side of the central structural bay of the main house, the configuration of the original staircase must have been unorthodox. Further investigation should reveal more about the staircase design.

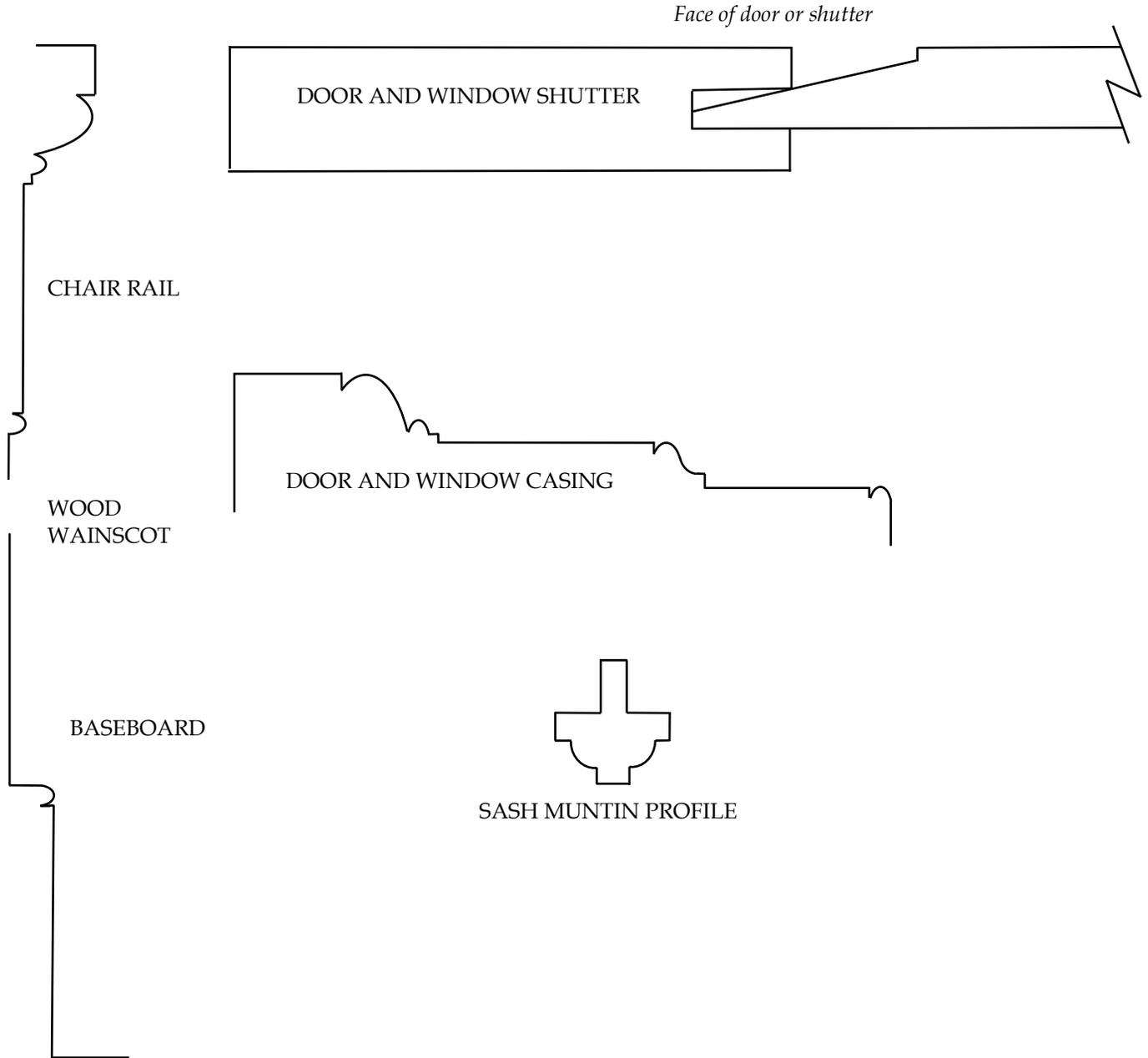
Although the rooms on the northern end of the main house were remodeled sometime after 1900, the parlor on the south side, the parlor chamber above it, and the two bedchambers in the ell remain in largely original condition. Neither the parlor nor the chamber above it reveals any sign of a former fireplace location; rather, these rooms communicate with the single-flue chimney north of their northern partitions by way of iron-lined holes in the walls, sized to allow passage of the small stovepipes or funnels that were employed in the early nineteenth century.

The finish woodwork or joinery in these rooms is of excellent quality. Its style indicates a date roughly between 1811 and 1830. As shown on the two pages that follow, both rooms employ moldings that are based on conic sections—so-called Grecian moldings—and these did not become commonplace until the publication of the second edition of Asher Benjamin's architectural guidebook, *The American Builder's Companion*, in 1811. It is noteworthy that the degree of elaboration on the parlor chamber exceeds that in the parlor. While this is unusual, it is not unprecedented for a bedchamber to be more elaborately finished than a principal first-floor room.

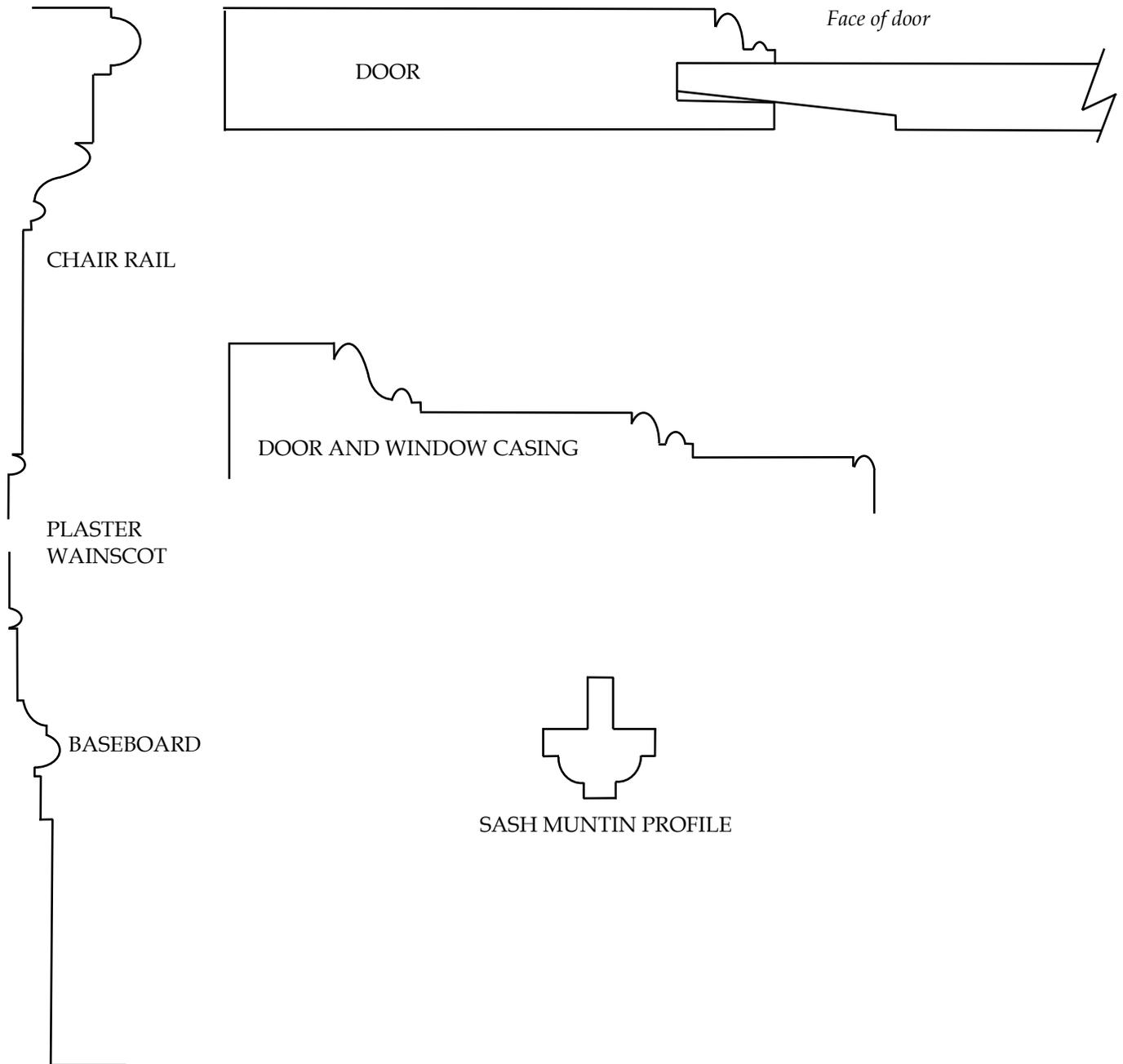
As seen in the drawings, the parlor has simple four-panel doors and two-panel sliding window shutters. Given the delicacy of the stile and rail moldings on the parlor chamber doors, this simplicity appears to be a deliberate choice. It may reflect some perception of the incoming Greek Revival style; in his *The Practical House Carpenter* (1830) author Asher Benjamin for the first time illustrated doors with no moldings around the raised panels.

Apart from the parlor and parlor chamber, the other rooms that retain their appearance of circa 1835 are the two bedchambers in the wing. These rooms are unusual in being finished with wood-sheathed walls rather than with wall plaster. This may have been done in the interest of haste if this part of the wing had previously been unfinished; sheathed walls may have taken less time than splitting lath, applying plaster, and waiting for the plaster to harden, although the ceilings in these chambers are plastered.

**CHARACTER-DEFINING DETAILS**  
**PARLOR**  
**GEORGE KIMBALL HOUSE**  
**CANAAN, NEW HAMPSHIRE**  
NOT TO SCALE



**CHARACTER-DEFINING DETAILS**  
**PARLOR CHAMBER**  
**GEORGE KIMBALL HOUSE**  
**CANAAN, NEW HAMPSHIRE**  
NOT TO SCALE

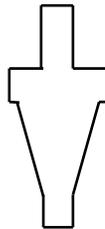


Since the Kimball House was adapted as a dormitory as well as a family residence, it must have had a capacious kitchen. Even if the rooms of the house were heated with stoves, it seems likely that the kitchen would have been provided with at least one brick oven for baking, and a cauldron for heating water for laundry. Although cooking ranges were available by 1835, most cooks were unaccustomed to these stoves and had difficulty in maintaining even heat. Thus, brick ovens, and often large cooking fireplaces, persisted in many homes well after the advent of parlor stoves.<sup>3</sup> Another academy dormitory boarding house, built in 1846 for the Francestown Academy, was warmed by stoves but had two kitchens, each equipped with a cooking fireplace and a brick oven, even at that relatively late date.<sup>4</sup> The area beneath the floor of the ell of the Kimball House may reveal evidence of the cooking arrangements for this building.

The Kimball House has undergone several periods of change, each of which erased some of the features of earlier periods. The first discernible remodeling took place around 1860. At this time, the front doorway of the house was provided with a recognizably Grecian frontispiece. Unlike many massive and plain features of the mature Greek Revival style, this doorway adopted a fanciful variation on the style. In place of the undecorated lintel that characterizes most Greek Revival doorways, the Kimball House was given a flat-topped lintel that was cut to the profile of a cupid's bow on its underside. The same double-ogee contour is occasionally seen on other doorways of the period, as well as on wooden and soapstone (or marble) mantelpieces. The new frontispiece had four- or five-light sidelights and a four-panel door. All evidence of these features was removed when the current front door unit was installed in the twentieth century, but the older doorway is recorded in the photograph of circa 1910, mentioned above.

At the same time, the house was provided with a new side doorway with a transom sash above. This, too, was replaced in the twentieth century.

A few window sashes were also replaced around 1860. They display this muntin profile:



It may be assumed that the now missing sidelights and transom sash of the remodeled front and side doorways shared this profile.

Other changes may have occurred at this time. The house has wide, flat corner boards and exterior window casings that could date from circa 1860. Most significantly, the house may have been provided with its current roof during this remodeling.

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<sup>3</sup> See Priscilla J. Brewer, "'We Have Got a Very Good Cooking Stove': Advertising, Design, and Consumer Response to the Cookstove, 1815-1880," *Winterthur Portfolio* 25 (Spring 1990): 35-54.

<sup>4</sup> James L. Garvin, "Report on the Francestown Academy Boarding House, 'The Beehive,' Greenfield Road, Francestown, New Hampshire" October 12, 2004, including as an appendix, James L. Garvin, "Report on the Stylistic and Structural Integrity of the Boarding House of the Former Francestown Academy, and on Its Potential for Adaptation to Present-Day Town Needs," 1991, on file at the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources.

The current roof replaces an original hipped roof. As shown on Paul Mirski's attic framing plan, the king posts of this original roof were supported by mortised timbers in the attic floor frame. All three of these timbers were located during the inspection of April 5, 2010. Evidence in the wall plates of the house reveals that the original hipped roof was composed of heavy common rafters that were pinned to the plates by wooden pegs or treenails, some of which survive. While a house of this period would have had a rafter-and-purlin roof in eastern or central New Hampshire, the carpentry practices of the Connecticut River Valley always favored common rafter roofs. A number of comparable hipped roofs probably survive in the Canaan area.

The replacement roof had the advantage of transforming an unlighted attic, probably with a low overhead, into a high, lighted attic that was suitable for storage. The transformation of the house may also have been driven by stylistic motivations, since the provision of two front gables hints at the Gothic style that was fashionable during the mid-nineteenth century.

The current roof has circular-sawn rafters. Depending upon the date when the first circular saws were introduced to the Canaan area, this evidence could be useful in dating the present roof more closely. The present roof also displays rural frugality. A number of the roof boards applied to the slopes of the roof were re-used from the original roof and exhibit the marks of the earlier reciprocating or upright sawmill. The large twelve-over-eight sashes placed in the two front gables display a muntin profile similar to that of the original windows below, though more delicate. These attic windows were apparently salvaged from another nearby house that dated from the early nineteenth century.

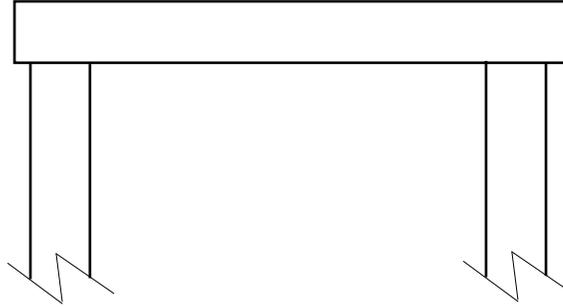
A second major change, referred to earlier, occurred in the early twentieth century when the house was occupied by the Cross-Howe families. The most obvious of these changes was the replacement of the original front staircase with the current stairs. The current staircase clearly displays features of the Craftsman style, which was popular in the first two decades of the twentieth century. These stairs are characterized by heavy, plain, square balusters and square newel and angle posts with ball finials. These stairs are also extremely steep, with narrow treads measuring only about seven inches in depth. The poor proportions of this staircase illustrate the family's determination to have a modern feature even in a space that was inadequate to accommodate it safely.

Other changes probably occurred at the same time, although the *Hometown Messenger* article, quoted above on page 2, implies that much of the remodeling was carried out not by Fred G. Cross, who still occupied the house as late as 1930, but by his son-in-law Ralph Howe, who also lived there. These changes included the installation of a modern kitchen behind the new front staircase in what may have been part of the original stair hall (see Mirski floor plans). This kitchen is finished with wainscoting and cupboards of double-beaded "ceiling" board, commonly used in kitchens and bathrooms in the early twentieth century.

The northern rooms on both the first and second stories were also modernized during the Cross-Howe remodelings, and so thoroughly changed that these rooms display none of the characteristic joinery seen in the southern part of the house and shown above on pages 6 and 7. Since Ralph Howe is credited with remodeling "some of the interior" of the house, it may be that Ralph and Margie Howe principally occupied the northern rooms of the dwelling, while the older

Fred and May Cross occupied the southern rooms, possibly maintaining a separate kitchen in the ell.

Throughout the house, but especially in the northern rooms, older door and window casings of unknown design were replaced by casings of early twentieth century design, still seen in these rooms today. These simple, square-edged casings, often varnished to emphasize the color and grain of southern yellow pine, provided what was termed a “side of trim” for the openings they enclose:



The Kimball House has seen many other changes in more recent years. But in tracing the history of the house as an artifact, the major periods of deliberate stylistic change occurred circa 1860 and circa 1910.

**APPENDIX:**

**SELECTED DRAWINGS**

**OF THE**

**KIMBALL HOUSE**

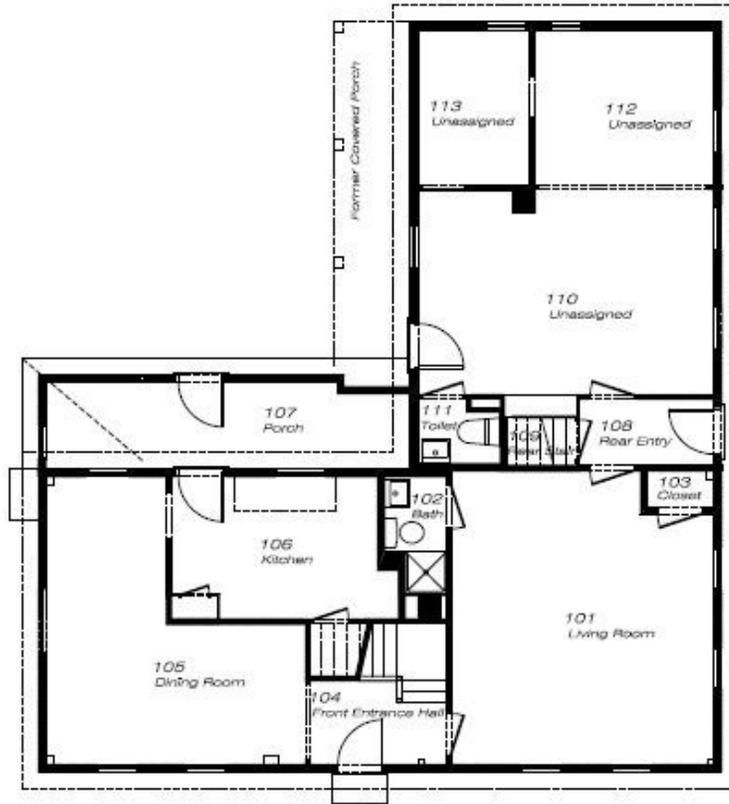
**BY**

**PAUL MIRSKI,**

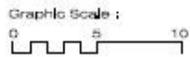
**ARCHITECT,**

**ENFIELD, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

**These drawings are part of a larger set that were prepared by Paul Mirski + Associates, Architects, in September 2008 to assist in planning for the preservation of the Kimball House.**



**X2 EXISTING FIRST FLOOR PLAN**

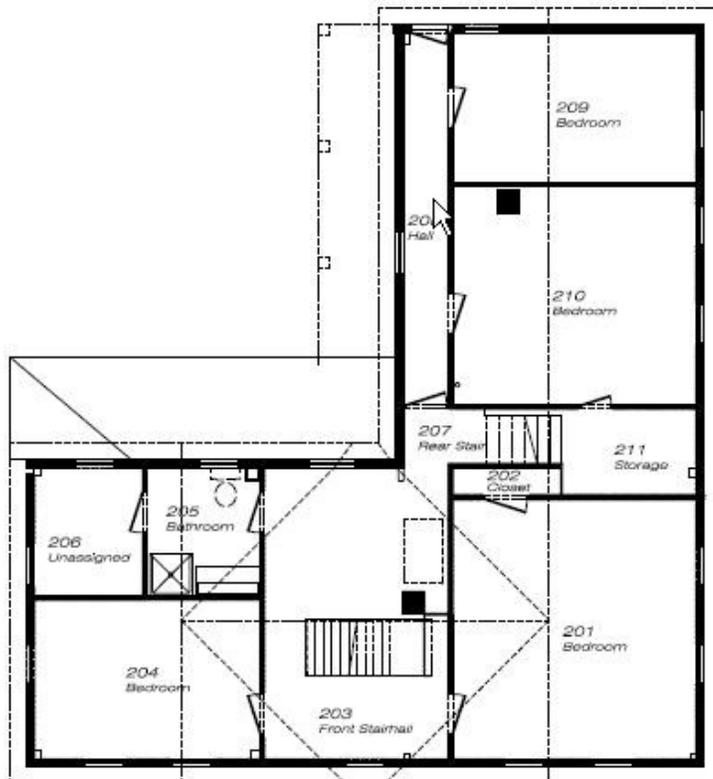


**KIMBALL HOUSE**  
Canaan, New Hampshire

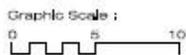
September 30, 2008

*NOTE: The above drawing is schematic in nature, may not be utilized for construction. All representations must be field verified.*

PAUL MIRSKI + ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS, POB 190, Enfield Center, NH 03749 Tel: 603 632 5555



**X3 EXISTING SECOND FLOOR PLAN**



**KIMBALL HOUSE**  
Canaan, New Hampshire

September 30, 2008

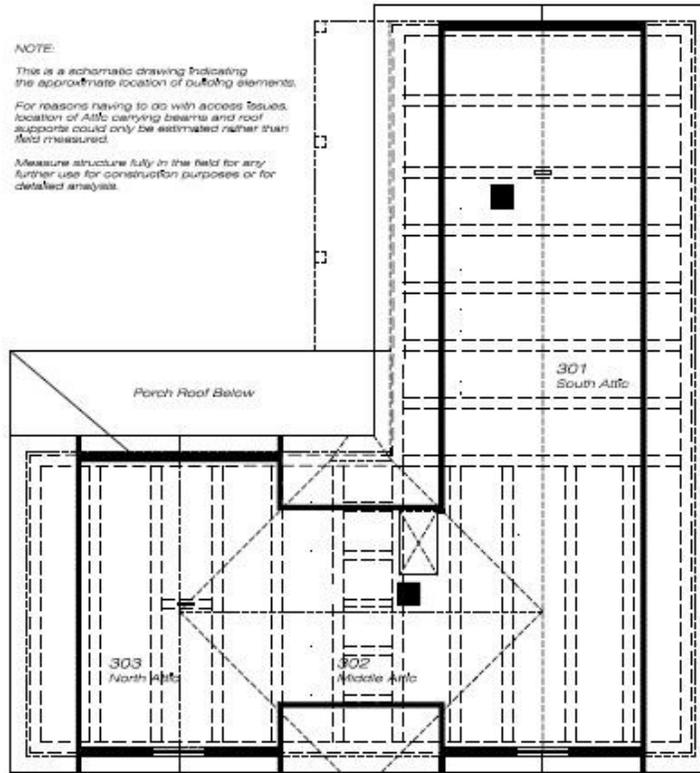
*NOTE: The above drawing is schematic in nature, may not be utilized for construction. All representations must be field verified.*

PAUL MIRSKI + ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS, POB 190, Enfield Center, NH 03749 Tel: 603 632 5555

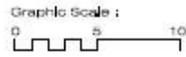


**NOTE:**

This is a schematic drawing indicating the approximate location of existing elements. For reasons having to do with access issues, location of attic carrying beams and roof supports could only be estimated rather than field measured. Measure structure fully in the field for any further use for construction purposes or for detailed analysis.



**X4 EXISTING ATTIC PLAN**



**KIMBALL HOUSE**  
Canaan, New Hampshire

September 30, 2008

*NOTE: The above drawing is schematic in nature, may not be utilized for construction. All representations must be field verified.*

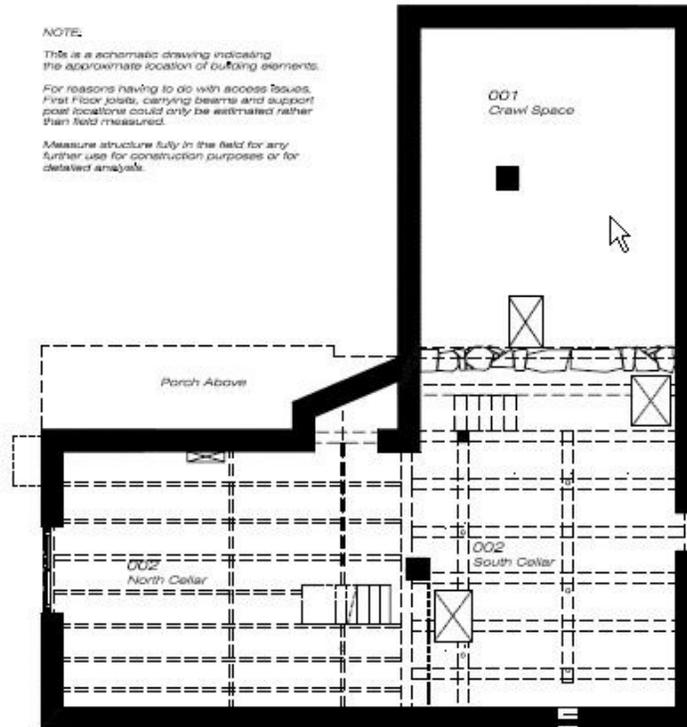
**PAUL MRSKJ + ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS, POB 190, Enfield Center, NH 03749 Tel: 603 632 5555**

**NOTE:**

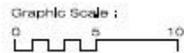
This is a schematic drawing indicating the approximate location of existing elements.

For reasons having to do with access issues, First Floor joists, carrying beams and support post locations could only be estimated rather than field measured.

Measure structure fully in the field for any further use for construction purposes or for detailed analysis.



**(X1) EXISTING CELLAR PLAN**



**KIMBALL HOUSE**  
Canaan, New Hampshire

September 30, 2008

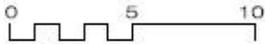
*NOTE: The above drawing is schematic in nature, may not be utilized for construction. All representations must be field verified.*

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**X7** EXISTING  
WEST ELEVATION

Graphic Scale :



**KIMBALL HOUSE**  
Canaan, New Hampshire

September 30, 2008

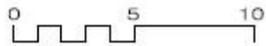
*NOTE: The above drawing is schematic in nature, may not be utilized for construction. All representations must be field verified.*

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**X6** EXISTING  
SOUTH ELEVATION

Graphic Scale :



**KIMBALL HOUSE**  
Canaan, New Hampshire

September 30, 2008

*NOTE: The above drawing is schematic in nature, may not be utilized for construction. All representations must be field verified.*

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