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REPORT ON THE NUTT-KINGSBURY HOUSE FRANCESTOWN, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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The following report is based on an inspection of the Nutt-Kingsbury House on the afternoon of November 23, 2009. Present at the inspection were Mr. H. Robert and MaryFrances Carey, the owners of the property, and Mary Kate Ryan, Mae Williams, and James L. Garvin from the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources. The purposes of the visit were to inspect the brick portion of the dwelling to refine its date of construction (which has been variously stated) for the purposes of completing a nomination of the property for the New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places, and to review details of the State Register nomination.

Summary: The Nutt-Kingsbury House is one of the least altered representatives of a small group of brick dwellings built in Hillsborough County in the early 1800s. The construction date of the house is given variously as c. 1794 (Gregory Thulander survey) and 1804 (John R. Schott, *Frances' Town*). In either case, the house is unusually early for a rural brick dwelling in New Hampshire. As late as 1811, there were only four or five freestanding brick dwellings in Portsmouth, which soon thereafter became the center of brick architecture in New Hampshire.¹ The Nutt-Kingsbury House seems to relate to a limited tradition of brick architecture that centered on Amherst, N. H. and was reflected in rare examples in neighboring towns. One characteristic of this tradition is the use of brick stringcourses between stories, as seen here. It is impossible to provide a full analysis of the connection of the Nutt-Kingsbury House to this Hillsborough County tradition of brick architecture in the current absence of a more complete survey of brick buildings in the region, yet it is clear that the Nutt-Kingsbury House is an example of a regional brick-building tradition that also includes the Hillsborough Bank building (1806) and the Brown-

¹ For a description of the advent and evolution of brick architecture in Portsmouth, see "Historic Structures Report, Academy Building and Morton-Benedict House, Portsmouth, New Hampshire," at <http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/publications/documents/AcademybldHSR.pdf>, especially pages 89-124.

Lord House, both in Amherst, and the rear portion of the Starrett-Hartshorn House in Mont Vernon. Because the rear (west) wall of the Nutt-Kingsbury is framed rather than brick, the house also relates structurally to the brick-ended framed houses of Hillsborough County, of which several examples survived in Francestown. A study of the interior joinery of the Nutt-Kingsbury House points to its construction after 1800. Even though the house appears not to be as early as its first attributed date of construction, it is the oldest surviving brick house in Francestown and is one of the oldest surviving brick dwellings in inland New Hampshire.

Description: The brick portion of the Nutt-Kingsbury House was built by Joseph Kingsbury, who came to Francestown from Dedham, Mass., circa 1793. This two-story brick federal-period house was constructed as an addition to a wooden dwelling that has been said to date from 1767; this wooden building then became the ell of the larger assemblage. The two-story house is rectangular in floor plan, exhibiting a characteristic central-entry plan with the well-detailed stair hall flanked by a room on each side.



The brick portion of the house has a low-pitched hipped roof with a deeply projecting cornice. The house originally had a chimney in the center of each end wall. The chimney on the south end of the house, nearest the highway, has been removed, and the first-floor sitting room on this end has been given two-over-two window sashes in place of its original six-over-six sashes. The end chimney on the north remains. Another chimney in the ell is placed close to the rear wall of the brick building and rises well above the eaves line of the larger structure.

The brick walls of the house are supported by a split stone foundation with hammered granite underpinning at grade level. A superficial examination revealed no stone splitting marks on the stone basement walls or the hammered underpinning. The basement of the house is deeply excavated and extends at full height under the brick portion of the house.

The walls of the house are laid in Flemish bond in the front (east) and south walls. As is common in brick houses, the north wall, invisible from the public highway, was laid in the simpler common bond. The face bricks are carefully molded (though not re-pressed) and of uniform color. Mortar joints are narrow and the white lime-sand mortar contrasts with the red coloration of the bricks.

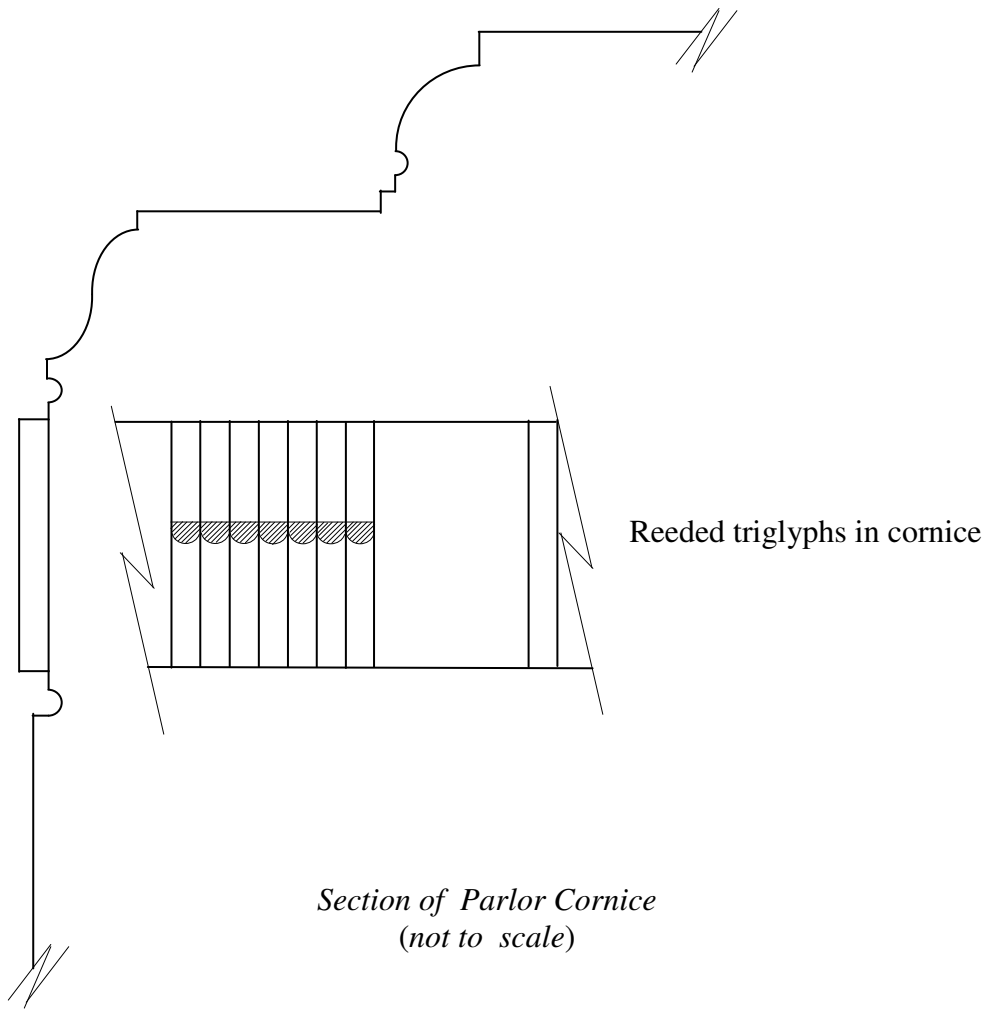
In contrast to the Jesse Duncklee House (1830) and the Porter Dodge House (1837) in Francestown Village, which have stone lintels, the front entrance and the window openings of the Nutt-Kingsbury House display no visible lintels above wall openings. The entrance to the basement, facing the road near the southeast corner of the house, has a brick arch with two tiers of brick voussoirs. The front door is an original six-panel door, and most of the windows, with the exception of those in the lower south room, have six-over-six sashes that likewise appear to be original. The rectangular four-light transom sash over the front door displays a muntin profile that is characteristic of the early 1800s. The exterior window blinds of the house are of an early fixed-louver pattern.

The interior joiner's work of the house survives unaltered in most rooms and displays skill in its design and execution. For the most part, as described below, the joinery appears to reflect the influence of Asher Benjamin's important builder's guidebook, *The American Builder's Companion*, first published in Boston in 1806.

The most elaborately finished room in the house is the parlor on the north side of the first story. This room embodies most of the features seen in other rooms, but displays additional refinements that allow a more trustworthy estimation of the date of the house than do the more general features seen elsewhere. The key features of the room are the fireplace mantelpiece, the room cornice, the door and window casings, and the doors (which match those elsewhere in the house).

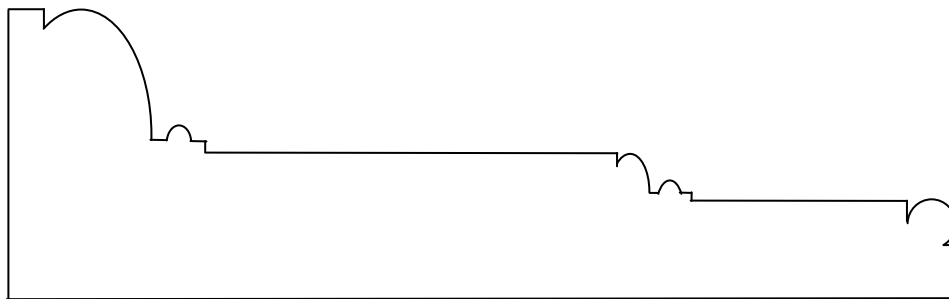
Many of these details include moldings of a Grecian profile, based on conic sections (parabolas or ellipses). Such moldings were relatively little known in New England joinery before the publication of *The American Builder's Companion* in 1806, and especially after publication of the second edition in 1811, where author Benjamin devoted much attention to these sophisticated profiles. Because joiners were learning by word of mouth and were constantly purchasing or making new molding tools in the newer style, the appearance of Grecian moldings in the Nutt-Kingsbury House does not necessarily denote a date after 1806 or 1811. These moldings do, however, argue against the 1794 date for the house unless the parlor and other interior features were left unfinished until some years after construction of the brick body of the house.

The parlor cornice displays this general profile:



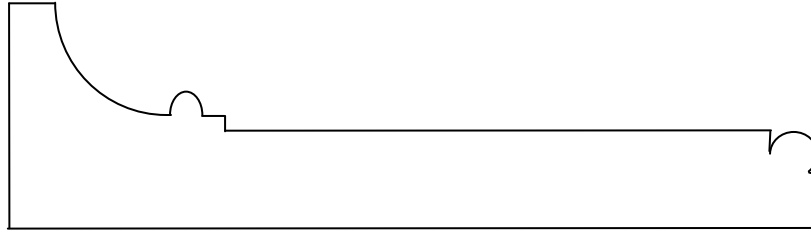
The chair rail above the wainscoting in the parlor is likewise decorated with reeded triglyphs, which echo those in the cornice on smaller scale.

Although the room cornice of the parlor does not display Grecian moldings, other features of the room do. Notable among these are the door and window casings. These are “double” casings, with two distinct surfaces or fasciae, in addition to the backband molding:



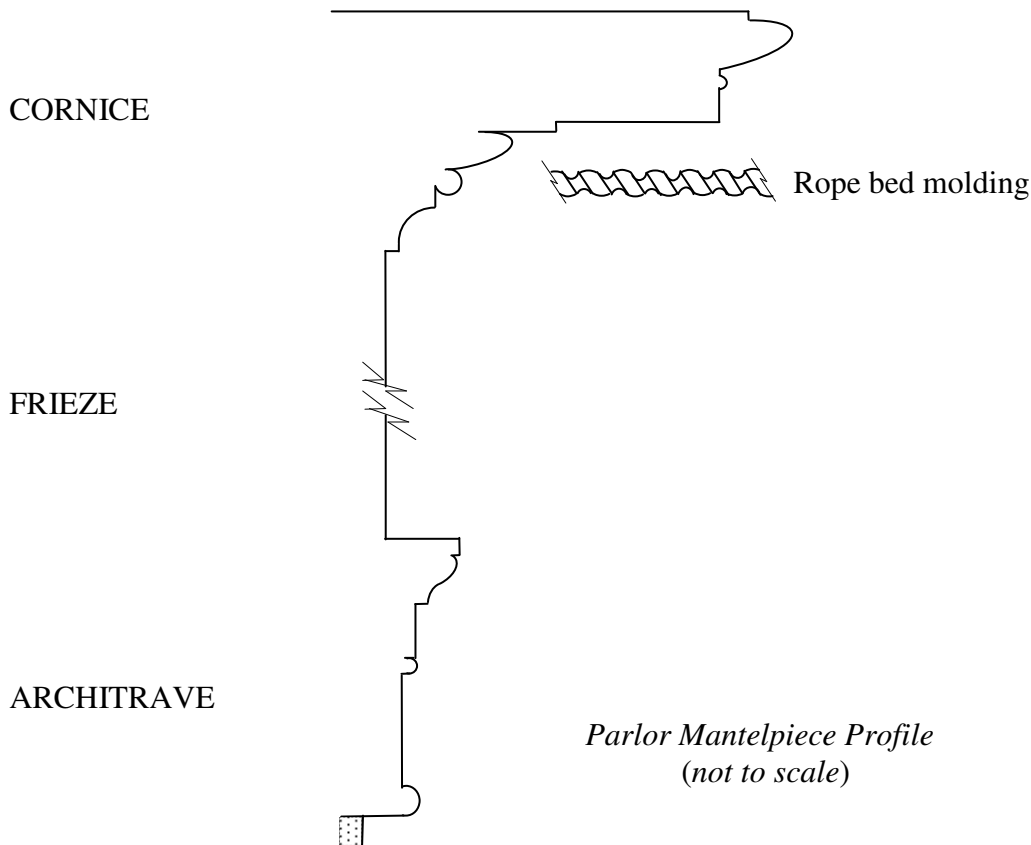
The casings in the entry (stair hall) share this profile, but those of the sitting room at the southern end of the house are “single” casings with no break in the depth of the casing board. The sitting room shares the same backband profile. The backband is composed of a Grecian ovolo molding with an added bead—a characteristic post-1800 profile.

The casings in the chamber above the sitting room have a simpler profile (those in the northern chamber were not observed). The cove and bead used for the backband are also common after 1800, but they also appear before the turn of the nineteenth century and therefore are not as useful a dating aid as is the Grecian ovolo seen on the first story.



*Sitting Room Chamber Casings
(not to scale)*

The mantelpiece in the parlor is especially diagnostic of the influence of Asher Benjamin’s *The American Builder’s Companion* on the joiner who finished the interiors of the Nutt-Kingsbury House. The mantelshelf has this profile:



The Grecian ovolo molding is again evident in the mantelpiece, appearing in the molding on the edge of the mantel shelf and the bed molding just above the rope turning.

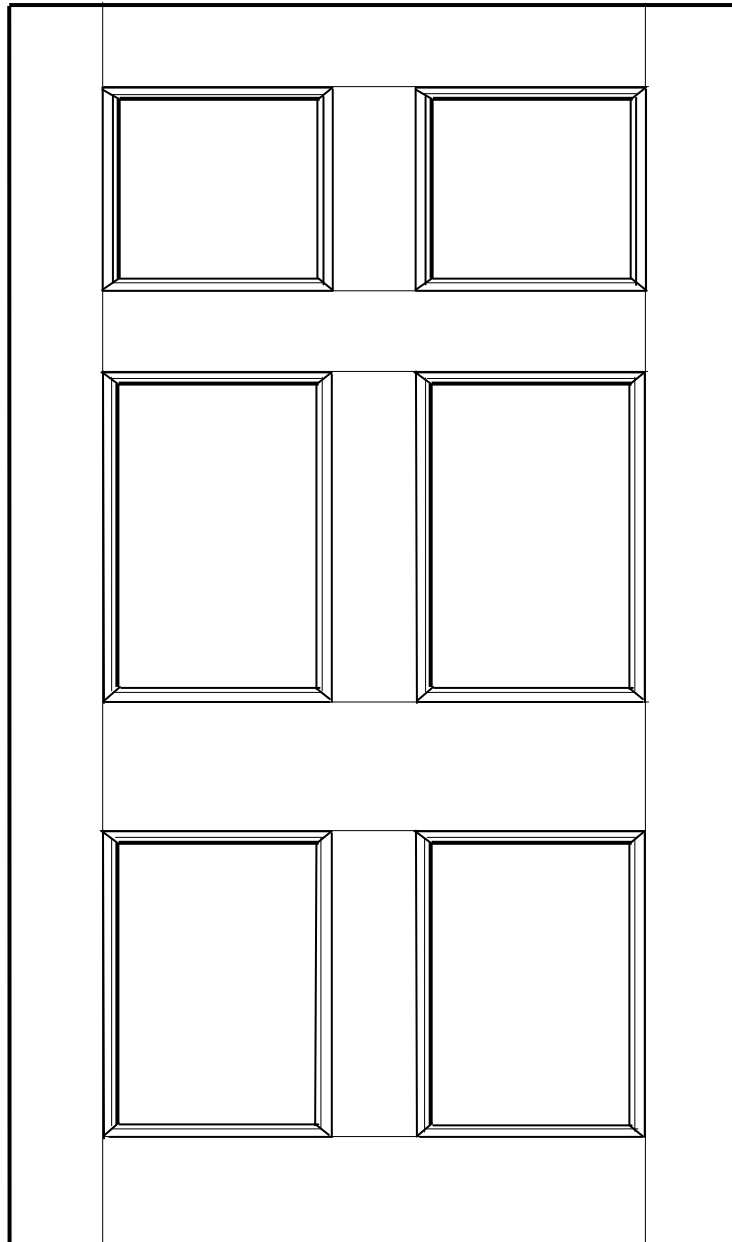
This mantelpiece is of a characteristic federal-style type. Mantelpieces of this type have flat-paneled pilasters on each side of the fireplace opening, supporting an architrave that spans the chimneypiece above the opening. Above the architrave, two short, flat paneled blocks extend upward across the frieze and support the mantelpiece cornice, as seen below.



A mantelpiece of this general pattern was first illustrated in Asher Benjamin's first book, *The Country Builder's Assistant* (1797, with later editions). A number of variations on the type were suggested in Plate 28 of Benjamin's *The American Builder's Companion* (1806, with later editions). The type became far more commonplace after the appearance of the

1806 book. As with other features of the house interior, this mantelpiece suggests a date after 1806. As noted above, the parlor could have been finished after the brick house was constructed. On the other hand, all interior features in the brick building are coherent with one another despite displaying a hierarchy of elaboration from more elaborate rooms to simpler rooms. It therefore appears likely that the interior of the house was finished at one time by one joiner or group of joiners.

The doors throughout the house are of the standard six-panel design, with flat panels, which was dominant from about 1800 through about 1830:



Although not studied in detail, the central stair hall of the Nutt-Kingsbury House also possesses interesting joinery, perhaps diagnostic of a local Francestown school of craftsmanship. The single-run staircase rises against the south (left) wall of the entry. It is characterized by generally simple detailing, with square (rather than turned) balusters and an undecorated stringer. The hand rail of the balustrade is carefully fashioned, displaying a bead under the ovoid hand grip, and another at the bottom of the rail. Most interesting is the turned newel post at the bottom of the staircase. While the newel resembles a generic (and widely used) pattern illustrated in Plate 19 of Asher Benjamin's 1806 *The American Builder's Companion*, the Nutt-Kingsbury newel differs from the book example in having a gently curved or swelling shaft rather than the straight-tapered columnar shaft shown in the book plate. This swelled rather than columnar shaft is not often seen until the advent of the Greek Revival around 1830.

Significance: The Nutt-Kingsbury House is significant as the least altered representative of a small group of brick dwellings built in Hillsborough County in the early 1800s. It is the oldest surviving brick house in Francestown and is one of the oldest surviving brick dwellings in inland New Hampshire. Both aspects of the dwelling make the house an important document in the history of brick construction in New Hampshire.

As noted earlier, the Nutt-Kingsbury House is an outstanding example of a small but important group of brick houses. These buildings stand in Hillsborough County, and appear to be among the earliest brick dwellings in inland New Hampshire. These buildings appear to have been the precursors of later brick dwellings in their respective communities. In Francestown and Amherst, especially, these early brick houses were followed by robust brick manufacturing industries and by a number of brick dwellings that reflect later stages of the development of the federal architectural style. In Francestown Village, such later examples are represented by the two-story Uriah Smith House (1819), the Titus Brown House (c. 1827; now the town library), and the Jesse Duncklee House (1830), as well as by several one-story brick dwellings.

Although examples of this early group of brick houses may yet remain unidentified, those few that have been recognized share certain characteristics and may represent the work of a single bricklayer. Because bricks are heavy and were difficult and expensive to transport before the advent of railroads in the 1840s, many early brick buildings were constructed of bricks that were molded and fired a short distance from the ultimate location of the structure. Thus, early bricklayers were often also skilled brickmakers.

The Nutt-Kingsbury House is the one of the most intact of the small group of early brick houses that have been recognized thus far. A second example is the Hillsborough Bank building (1806) in Amherst. A third, also in Amherst but lying outside the compact village, is the Brown-Lord House, also built around 1806. A fourth is the much-altered Starrett-Hartshorn House on the main street of Mont Vernon Village. All of these buildings share certain characteristics, especially the presence of projecting brick belt courses that mark the division between the first and second stories. While belt or string courses were not uncommon among the more ambitious wooden dwellings of coastal New England, they are relatively uncommon in brick buildings. Where such courses appear in

Portsmouth (mostly on commercial buildings), they are not infrequently executed in marble, not brick.

Amherst appears to have been the early center of brick manufacturing and brick construction in Hillsborough County. By 1807, bricks were being made in large quantities there, and were being sold by the thousand and by lots at auction. Among the early Amherst brickmakers were David Swett and Eli Brown.²

The building constructed circa 1806 for the Hillsborough Bank in Amherst, and later used by the Farmers' Bank from 1825 to 1843, was subsequently used as a dwelling by Charles Richardson and later owners. It is still divided into two parts by an interior brick partition that extends to the underside of the roof, with one half of the building having served as the banking house and the other half as a residence for the cashier. The bricks for the walls were made at Captain Eli Brown's brickyard.³ The two-story building resembles the Nutt-Kingsbury House in several respects, having walls laid in Flemish bond, a five-bay façade, and brick belt courses. The house differs from the Nutt-Kingsbury House in being two rooms deep with four chimneys, and in having splayed stone lintels above the windows. It has a broad one-story front porch, added later.

The Brown-Lord House stands about one mile north of Amherst Village at 40 Boston Post Road (N. H. Route 122), the road that leads from Amherst Village to Mont Vernon Village. The house was built by brickmaker Eli Brown, a retired sea captain who manufactured the bricks for the Hillsborough Bank building on his property. Brown's own house is said to have been recently built when Brown supplied the bricks for the 1806 bank building in the village.⁴ The house was subsequently occupied by the Reverend Nathan Lord, minister of the Amherst Congregational Church between 1816 and 1828, and president of Dartmouth College from 1828 to 1863. It is a large, hip-roofed dwelling with four chimneys. The house has not been studied in detail, so its degree of integrity, or the extent of alterations over the years, cannot presently be defined.

The Brown-Lord House appears to be related to others in the Hillsborough County group, although this house has not been studied. It displays the same general characteristics as the Hillsborough Bank building. These two Amherst structures are large, two-room-deep houses, contrasting in size with the one-room-deep brick portion of the Nutt-Kingsbury house.

² Advertisement, *Farmer's Cabinet*, Amherst, October 27, 1807 (sale by merchant Robert Means of 200,000 bricks "of a superior quality to any heretofore made in Amherst"); *Farmer's Cabinet*, April 11, 1809 (sale by Robert Means of 150,000 good merchantable bricks); *Farmer's Cabinet*, March 6, 1810 (sale by Eli Brown of 100,000 good merchantable bricks at Brown's brickyard).

³ Daniel Franklin Secomb, *History of the Town of Amherst, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire*, reprint of the 1883 ed. (Somersworth, N. H.: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 449-452; William B. Rotch, *Rambles About Amherst* (Amherst, N. H.: Farmers' Cabinet Press, 1890), pp. 32-33. For a photograph of the house and a brief narrative, see "Amherst Village Historic District" National Register of Historic Places nomination, 1982.

⁴ Secomb, *History of the Town of Amherst*, p. 454; William B. Rotch, *Rambles About Amherst*, pp. 32-33; Emma P. Boylston Locke, *Colonial Amherst* (Milford, N. H.: W. B. and A. B. Rotch, 1916), pp. 76-77.

A fourth member of this group of early brick dwellings is actually a remnant. The Starrett-Hartshorn House stands on the main street of Mont Vernon village. The earliest portion of the brick house is the rear section of a two-story, two-room-deep dwelling. The walls of the rear section of the house are marked by brick belt courses, omitted from the later front portion of the house. It cannot easily be determined why the house was built in two sections at two different times. Possibly a later owner wished to enlarge a one-room-deep dwelling. Possibly a fire destroyed all but the rear section of a two-room-deep house.⁵

As noted above, the brick construction of the Nutt-Kingsbury House is significant as a benchmark in the introduction of brick construction into rural New Hampshire. Brick buildings were extremely rare until after 1800. Only with the partial burning of the wood-built coastal town of Portsmouth in 1802 did a substantial number of brick buildings appear within the state. Other Portsmouth fires in 1806 and 1813 increased the number of brick structures in the port town, but elsewhere in New Hampshire only a handful of brick structures had appeared by 1820, and most of these were business blocks, not private houses.

The transition from wooden to masonry buildings occurred first in the larger New England ports because of fear of fires like those that had devastated Portsmouth. The fireproof nature of masonry turned a long-standing New England prejudice against brick into a favorable view of masonry as a safer and more substantial medium of construction. But a growing regard for the fire-resistant quality of brick buildings was soon matched by an appreciation for brick as an attractive building material. Leading New England architects like Charles Bulfinch and Asher Benjamin of Boston developed a high regard for the aesthetic quality, and the appearance of strength and permanence, of brick buildings.

As in Francetown, prospering New Hampshire villages often saw the construction of a few brick buildings during the 1820s, but rarely before that date. Often, brick structures in inland New Hampshire in the 1820s were public buildings like banks or hotels, built by investors as symbols of the growing importance of the community. Brick dwellings remained rare, especially in the earlier 1800s.

The facades or other principal walls of most brick buildings in New Hampshire were laid in Flemish bond until about 1830. More complex than common or American bond, Flemish bond employs alternating headers and stretchers in every course. In these earlier buildings the common bond, if employed at all, was used on the less visible side or rear walls, as seen in the Nutt-Kingsbury House. Any house with walls laid in Flemish bond is unusually rare in inland New Hampshire.

By 1830 or so, at the very time when the fashion for brick architecture spread from urban centers to country villages or rural locales, Flemish bond was supplanted by common bond even for the principal walls of new buildings. Instead of having a header course every five or six courses, as is common in later examples of the bond, these early experiments often

⁵ A report on the Starrett-Hartshorn House can be found at:
http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/publications/documents/starretthartshorn_montvernon.pdf

have ten or twelve stretcher courses between header courses. In some structures of the period, the header courses employ alternating headers and stretchers rather than all headers.

Combining an apparent date of construction in the first years of the nineteenth century with walls of well-manufactured bricks skillfully laid in Flemish bond, the Nutt-Kingsbury House is an important benchmark in the architectural history of inland New Hampshire. The Nutt-Kingsbury House gains further significance as a document in a distinctive but as yet not fully defined regional school of brick architecture.