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REPORT ON THE SAWYER HOUSE AT THE DANIEL WEBSTER BIRTHPLACE SITE WEST FRANKLIN, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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Summary: The Sawyer House, built in 1794 adjacent to the site of Daniel Webster's birthplace, is the oldest intact structure on the property. The old portion of the small nearby building that is known as Webster's birthplace was long a summer kitchen or shop attached to the rear of the Sawyer House; it was detached from the larger dwelling in 1913, moved to a nearby cellar hole, and enlarged to its present configuration. From that time, the Sawyer House has served primarily as a residence or as headquarters for attendants at the Webster birthplace. Despite its subordinate role and utilitarian use, the Sawyer House has value in its own right as a characteristic New Hampshire center-chimney farmhouse of the late eighteenth century. The architectural evolution of the house can easily be understood and explained to the public, and the building has interpretive value as a historic house of a type not otherwise represented in the New Hampshire Parks historic site system. The Sawyer House is presently in dire jeopardy due to leaking roofs. Repairs to these roofs must be made within the next few weeks; delay beyond this point will advance deterioration of the house to a level that will require demolition of the building and foreclose all other options for its future use.

The following report is based on an inspection of the Sawyer House on the afternoon of June 26, 1992.

History: According to the testimony of Sawyer descendants, the Sawyer House was built in 1794 by Stephen Sawyer, Sr., on land sold by Ebenezer Webster, Daniel Webster's father, to Joshua Sawyer in March, 1785.¹ The Sawyer family evidently continued to live here until about

¹ Deed, Hillsborough County Registry of Deeds, vol. 21, page 52, from Ebenezer Webster to Joshua Sawyer on 12 March 1785, copied by Esther Stevens. The date of construction of the Sawyer House is given in several letters

1851, when Daniel Webster stated that he had “recently repurchased this spot.”² Certain changes (described below) were made to the Sawyer House at about that time in the interest of repairing or modernizing the building. Pending further research into deeds and into Webster’s own financial affairs, we may theorize that these changes were made on Webster’s order. After Webster’s death in 1852, the property evidently passed through several hands. On January 19, 1882, the centennial of Webster’s birth, an interesting and informative column by “F. F.” in the *Boston Morning Journal* stated that the Sawyer House was then owned by “Hon. George W. Nesmith of Franklin, an old personal friend and admirer of the great statesman.” “F. F.” further stated that “this building [referring either to the Sawyer House or only to its wing], now much dilapidated, is occupied by John A. Frost, an intelligent farmer, and family;” later in the article, Frost was referred to as “the tenant” of the property. In 1890, according to John J. Dearborn in his *History of Salisbury*, the farm was still owned by the Hon. George W. Nesmith; one account suggests that Judge Nesmith bought the house from the Sawyer family in 1851 and “deeded it as a gift to Daniel Webster, the year prior to Webster’s death.”³

Later, according to one history, Arthur C. Jackson (a noted promoter of schemes, some ill-conceived) purchased the farm from George H. Hosmer, then its owner, on January 18, 1904, with the intention of preserving the site of Webster’s birth.⁴ After Jackson lost the farm in a mortgage foreclosure in 1910, the Daniel Webster Birthplace Association (patterned after a similar organization formed by Jackson in 1904) acquired the property.⁵

According to a prospectus published early in 1913, the Association intended to remove the ell of the Sawyer House (which by tradition was a portion of the house in which Webster was born) and “place it, restored to its original form, upon the spot which was certainly the Birthplace,” and also to repair “the large mansion to make it suitable for the home of a faithful guardian of the

written during the 1950s by Lt.-Col. Arthur M. Edwards, USA Retired, to Mildred Stevens and Elmer Munson Hunt (photocopies in the files of the New Hampshire Historical Society). In a letter of 28 March 1952 to Elmer Munson Hunt, Col. Edwards stated, “My mother was born upstairs in 1844. The house was 50 years old then (Sawyer House). In 1910 on a visit to Franklin, the Daniel Webster Assn asked me for \$10.00 to help move the birthplace ell behind the big Sawyer house back to the birthplace site as proved by Webster himself. This Assn included prominent people of New Hampshire who accepted my presentation as told by my ancestors who were responsible people.”

² Daniel Webster to Edward Everett, 18 October 1851, published in *The Private Correspondence of Daniel Webster* (2 vols., Boston, 1856): II:480-481; George Ticknor Curtis, *The Life of Daniel Webster* (2 vols., New York, 1870): II:530; Charles Lanman, *Haphazard Personalities* (Boston, c. 1885): 131; *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster* (National Edition, 18 vols., New York, 1903): 480-481.

³ *Boston Morning Journal*, January 19, 1882; John J. Dearborn, *The History of Salisbury, New Hampshire, from Date of Settlement to the Present Time* (Manchester, N. H.: William E. Moore, 1890), 831; see W. G. C. Kimball, “Stereoscopic Views of Orphans’ Home and Webster Place Scenery, Franklin, H. H.,” with descriptions of each view “prepared by the Hon. Geo. W. Nesmith, LL.D., an old friend and neighbor of Daniel Webster;” see also *Daniel Webster Memorial House* (undated flier), which states that the property “became in 1851 the property of Judge George W. Nesmith, who deeded it as a gift to Daniel Webster, the year prior to Webster’s death.”

⁴ Omar A. Towne, *Birthplace of Daniel Webster, Franklin, New Hampshire*, second ed. (Franklin, N. H.: Towne & Robie, 1922), 15-16; for more on Arthur C. Jackson, see William David Barry, “Henry & Me,” *Down East* 36 (April 1990): 52-63.

⁵ *The Webster Birthplace Association of Franklin, New Hampshire* (prospectus, c. 1913); Towne, *Birthplace of Daniel Webster*, 16-18.

premises, and for such other larger use as time may show to be wise.”⁶ Later that year, the Association carried out its plan to detach the ell of the Sawyer House, moving the fragment to its supposed original site nearby and reconstructing the birthplace around this core. At that time, “the large dwelling-house, barn and other buildings” were described as being “out of repair;” the Association’s available funds had permitted only “urgent” repairs to be made on these buildings, leaving much more to be done.⁷ A photograph taken on August 28, 1913, the day of dedication of the restored birthplace, shows that the Sawyer House had been recently clapboarded on the lower parts of its front wall. The house retained the two-over-two window sashes that had been inserted in its first-story windows in the late 1800s; as shown by the photograph of 1913, the first-floor sashes had not yet been restored to their nine-over-six configuration, nor had the house received its side porch.

On September 24, 1917, the Daniel Webster Birthplace Association conveyed the farm to the State of New Hampshire. At some point either before or after this transfer, certain repairs and changes to the Sawyer House were undertaken (see below), bringing the building generally into the condition in which we now find it.

Interpretive potential: The Sawyer House is an excellent example of a two-story, center-chimney farmhouse of the late 1700s. Such dwellings are regarded by most Americans as a classic New England form of architecture. Although many such houses survive in New Hampshire, very few are available for public visitation. Even as an empty building, the Sawyer House would certainly be of interest to the majority of visitors to the adjacent Webster birthplace, most of whom would have had no opportunity to examine such a house. If the house were put in stable condition and cleaned up, it could be shown in an unfurnished state as an architectural exhibit, perhaps with some simple labels explaining its features, until some more sophisticated interpretive plan can be devised. For those visitors who are interested only in Daniel Webster, there should be a strong interest in the fact that Webster several times alluded to his deep emotional ties to the site and actually acquired the Sawyer House, by purchase or gift as the case may be, the year before his death, perhaps even ordering the modernization that took place at that general period.

As mentioned above (and described more fully below), the house underwent some remodeling around 1850, with fashionable mantelpieces, new doorways, new exterior window casings and roof trim, and some new window sashes being installed as that time. If these changes can be linked to Daniel Webster’s acquisition of the house, they will assume an especially great interest to visitors. If not, the remodeling remains interesting in its own right as a typical modernizing carried out when architectural styles had changed enough to make the original features of the house seem out-of-date.

Other changes occurred in the early twentieth century, probably after the Daniel Webster Birthplace Association acquired the Sawyer House and adapted it as a caretaker’s residence.

⁶ *The Webster Birthplace Association* (prospectus).

⁷ *Program of Exercises of the Daniel Webster Birthplace Celebration in Franklin, New Hampshire, on Thursday, August 28, 1913.*

These include modernization of the kitchen with a new wood floor and pressed metal ceiling, and the addition of the side porch with a second side door leading from the porch directly into the front sitting room. Because these features also mark an important transition point in the history of the property, they should be retained and explained as part of the interpretation of the house.

If a friends' group could be formed to raise funds for repairing and redecorating the Sawyer House, the building could easily and inexpensively be transformed from an empty and cheerless structure into a homelike dwelling. The installation of some wallpapers, perhaps representing the taste of the mid-nineteenth century, the repainting of woodwork and floors in appropriate colors, and other simple changes would enhance the feeling of antiquity that lies latent in the dwelling. A relatively small expenditure would transform the house into a major interpretive asset at the Webster Birthplace historic site.

A friends' group should be able to encourage or sponsor occasional events in the house, making it a true public facility of value to Franklin, Salisbury, and other neighboring towns. After appropriate research has been carried out on the Sawyer family and their life on the farm, such a group might undertake the refurnishing of some rooms as they would have looked in the mid-nineteenth century, at the end of the Sawyer period and at the brief interlude of ownership by Daniel Webster. Furnishings of the mid-1800s are both easy to acquire and relatively inexpensive, so such a furnishing program would be feasible and would have a real educational value if guided by good probate inventories and other documentation.

In summary, the Sawyer House presents an opportunity to offer guests at the Webster birthplace site an enriched tour, allowing them to follow the history of the Webster-Sawyer farm from the 1780s down to the present, seeing both a recreated settler's dwelling and a characteristic farmhouse of New Hampshire's early period of agricultural prosperity.

Description and evolution of the house: The Sawyer House is a large and heavily-framed center chimney farmhouse. Its exterior is marked by a symmetrical façade (south elevation) having five bays on each floor. The house has clapboarded walls. Photographs taken very early in the twentieth century suggest that at that time the house had old, weathered clapboards, with deterioration noticeable in the lower clapboards and trim in areas where roof water had long splashed back on the walls. Since that time, virtually all of the clapboards appear to have been replaced, some in 1913 and the rest at later times. The presence of wooden shingles on the rear wall of the house, seen at the end of the attic of the 1913 wing, probably represents only a temporary protection against the weather, added when the older ell was detached and moved across the driveway. A stereograph of the old ell, probably taken about 1878, shows the rear wall of the Sawyer House to have been clapboarded at that time.

The roof of the house is covered with asphalt shingles. As noted earlier, the shingles on the southern slope of the roof of the main house, and on both slopes of the roof of the wing, have deteriorated to the point of causing serious and potentially catastrophic leaks. Photographic evidence from early in the twentieth century shows that the house and its summer kitchen wing (the "birthplace") were then covered with wooden shingles which had also reached a deteriorated

condition. These shingles were apparently renewed at the time of reconstruction of the birthplace in 1913; the date when asphalt shingles were substituted for wood is presently unknown.

Exterior trim of the house is Greek Revival in style, and shows every evidence of having been replaced in a general remodeling of the house around 1850. The front doorway has a seven-light transom sash, four-light sidelights (now fitted with twentieth-century sashes), and casings and panels beneath the sidelights with typically Grecian mouldings. Early twentieth-century photographs show a front door with two glazed upper panels and two smaller wooden panels below; this door has recently been replaced by a modern six-panel door. Exterior window casings are similar to those around the front doorway opening, except on the rear of the house, where windows have plain, flat board casings. The eaves trim along the raking edges of the roof is well detailed; it has a flat Grecian ovolo moulding between its upper and lower fasciae, again denoting mid-nineteenth-century work. Similarly, the crown moulding beneath the front eaves of the house has been altered to a flat profile, although the bed moulding of this cornice, an ovolo-and-cavetto, may date from the original construction. The rear cornice of the house has flat boards for both crown and bed mouldings and thus appears to have been completely rebuilt in the mid-nineteenth-century remodeling.

The house stands on a fieldstone or split rubble foundation with hammered granite underpinning at grade. The underpinning stones have been split by flat wedges rather than by plugs-and-feathers (which came into widespread use around 1830), and so may be original to the house. If so, the use of hammered stone indicates considerable prosperity in the Sawyer family at that period, showing that the dwelling was intended to be more than an ordinary farmhouse.

The cellar of the house extends only beneath the eastern room and the front entry.

The chimney of the Sawyer House appears to have been largely or completely rebuilt. Typically, a chimney of the 1790s would have had its bricks laid in clay. There is no sign of clay mortar in any part of the chimney stack now visible. All of the fireplaces in the house have new jambs and hearths, regrettably laid up in an inappropriate modern extruded brick. The oven to the right (west) of the kitchen fireplace has a vaulted top rather than the original domed shape. Oddly, even though it is quite new, the hearth in the eastern first floor room has subsided since it was laid.

It is possible, and even likely, that the fireplaces of the Sawyer House were bricked up during the remodeling that added the Greek Revival mantelpieces. This was a period when stoves had attained general use, and when fireplaces were commonly closed up. It is clear that considerable rebuilding has been carried out on the chimney; perhaps this took place when the bricked-up fireplaces were reopened in the twentieth century and judged to be in deteriorated condition.

The floor plan of the house is generally typical of that of a center-chimney dwelling, and is similar on both floors. In front of the chimney is a small lobby entry with a triple-run staircase. On each side of the entry is a large front room, heated by a single fireplace. The rooms on the

west side, both downstairs and above, are the best-finished chambers in the house. Behind the chimney lies a kitchen on the first floor; this is flanked by an entry passageway and small room (now a bathroom) on the east, and by a well-lighted room (now a modern kitchen but originally perhaps a downstairs bedchamber) on the west. Upstairs, the house has two front bedchambers and, behind them, a central room that appears to have no fireplace and to have remained unfinished until the twentieth century. This room is flanked by two corner bedchambers that may have been first partitioned off and finished about 1850. The appearance of the entire area at the rear of the second floor suggests that this was a long-unfinished storage or work room (not uncommon in large country houses), later finished in stages as new chambers were required.

The floor plan of the Sawyer House is nearly identical to that of other center-chimney houses built in Salisbury in the late eighteenth century, and the house could therefore properly be interpreted as a good example of vernacular New Hampshire architecture.

The Sawyer House has a massive frame which, where exposed to view in the attic, reveals interesting technological advances that were taking place throughout New Hampshire in the 1790s. The roof system is composed of six sets of rafters, each set linked together at the rafter feet by heavy tie beams, and at the rafter midpoints by collar beams. The rafters are further braced by diagonal struts extending upward from their tie beams. Each set of rafters is thereby framed into a rigid truss. The roof of the house is further strengthened by diagonal wind braces that run from the outer sets of rafters on the rear (north) slope of the roof to the second set of rafters. The tie beams at the outer walls of the house and at the chimney bay are supported at their midpoints by prick posts, thus gaining extra support. The tie beams are hewn and are a full twelve inches in width.

The roof system of the Sawyer House is unusual in two ways. First, almost all members of the frame are white oak rather than the more commonplace (and weaker) eastern white pine. Second, and more interesting, all members of the frame except for the tie beams, purlins, and one rafter on the eastern end of the house are sawn on an upright saw. The forming of the rafters is especially impressive, because these members have been sawn to a taper. This would have entailed the sawing of three sides of each oak log in the normal way, followed by the placement of the log on the sawmill carriage at a precise skew before the fourth side was sawn. The most massive of the rafters are those that flank the central chimney; they have a uniform width of five inches and taper from a depth of eleven inches at their feet to five and a half inches at the ridge. While sawn roof frames were becoming more and more common during the 1790s, it is rare to find a frame that is carefully sawn or as well preserved as this. Perhaps the former Webster sawmill on nearby Punch Brook was still being operated by the Sawyer family when the framing members for this house were prepared.

The lower portions of the house frame are presently covered, and so cannot be examined for similar technological evidence. It would not be surprising, however, to discover that such elements as floor joists, braces, and possibly even posts were also sawn rather than hewn. If so, the Sawyer House would provide an important benchmark in an ongoing survey of the evolution of New Hampshire house framing technology and practice.

The interior joiner's work of the house is mainly the product of two periods: the late 1700s and the mid 1800s. The original detailing of the interior was well executed but conservative in character, showing no hint of Federal-style design except in a few moulding profiles. In general, the earliest joiner's work of the dwelling is similar to that of the pre-Revolutionary era, with raised panels, vertical wall sheathing, and Georgian mouldings. This is to be expected in a rural; area of New Hampshire in the 1790s, and, in fact, was also largely true of coastal communities at that period. It is likely that the joiner's work of the Sawyer House was done by a local craftsman and that it relates closely to work in other houses of the period in the Salisbury area.

The mid-nineteenth century joiner's work of the house is generally well executed on the exterior, where the doorways, window casings, and roof trim are thoughtfully designed and make effective use of Grecian mouldings. The Greek Revival mantelpieces installed at this time in the principal rooms are generally of heavy design and reveal the great change of taste that a half century had produced. Despite the great difference in character between original detailing and mid-century alterations, however, the craftsman who remodeled the rooms generally used mouldings similar to those of the original work and, in the southwestern parlor, appears to have gone to great trouble to reproduce an old chair rail in conjunction with his new mantelpiece.

The house today has four different styles or periods of window sashes. The oldest of these are typically Federal in style, and would normally be thought to date from the original construction of the house. Yet because these sashes share a muntin profile that is also found on newer transom sashes associated with the front and side doorways, these sashes appear, in fact, to date from the mid-1800s. Possibly the house originally had sashes of a still older style, now completely missing, that were changed when the exterior window trim was renewed in the mid-1800s.

Pictorial evidence clearly shows that the house received two-over-two window sashes on its first story by 1893.⁸ These have since been replaced by modern sashes of an appropriate nine-over-six configuration. These newer sashes do not have a historic muntin profile, but few visitors would notice the difference between these and the older sashes in the house.

The stairhall is one of the best designed and least changed areas of the house. The stair handrail has a moulded cap similar to the type used before the Revolution along the New Hampshire seacoast, but the balusters are not turned, as in earlier work. They are simple square shafts, but are set diagonally beneath the handrail to provide an interesting visual effect. The door casings of the entry have cavetto-and-bead back band mouldings; the same moulding is frequently used elsewhere on the first floor, sometimes in conjunction with other mouldings, to embellish chair rails, baseboards, and the like.

⁸ As shown by a drawing of the Sawyer House published in George A. Cleaveland and Robert E. Campbell, *American Landmarks* (Boston: Balch Brothers, 1893), the nine-over-six first-floor sitting room windows of the house had been replaced by two-over-two sashes by 1893. This drawing was reprinted in Edmund V. Gillon, Jr., *Early Illustrations and Views of American Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971), No. 139.

The interior detailing of the front doorway, like the exterior design, is strongly Greek Revival in character. The seven-light transom sash and the two four-light sidelight sashes flood the stairway with light, doubtless producing a far different effect than did the original doorway. The sidelight sashes are modern in detailing, dating from the same period as the restored nine-over-six sashes on the first floor. Below the sidelight sashes are panels that are bordered by flat Grecian mouldings, similar in character to those used elsewhere in the remodeling of the house. We may assume that the original front door had six raised panels like the doors in the upper entry, and that the newer front door that accompanied the present Greek Revival frontispiece was similar in design to the surviving side door of the house: a five-panel door with four vertical panels and one horizontal panel at the center.⁹

Later, as old photographs reveal, this Greek Revival door was replaced by a four-panel door that apparently had two lights of glass as its upper panels; possibly, this could have been a two-leaf door, with the halves hinged on both left and right jambs. It seems likely that this glazed door was installed when the old nine-over-six window sashes were replaced by two-over-two sashes on the first floor. The only photograph thus far discovered that shows the house with its old nine-over-six sashes intact is a picture post card with a 1905 postmark; the photograph on the card could be some years older than 1905. Regrettably, the photograph on this card is too small and indistinct to show what style of front door the house had at that time.¹⁰

The front room to the left (west) of the entry is the best-finished room in the house and was clearly the parlor. This room retains virtually all of its original joiner's work, but the original sheathed chimney wall has been overlaid with plaster and a mid-nineteenth-century mantelpiece.

In distinction from all other rooms in the house, the parlor has sliding window shutters. These have been sealed into their pockets, and their dividing rails have been removed, but all six shutters in the three windows of the room appear to be present. The room has twentieth-century sashes replacing the former two-over-two sashes seen in old photographs.

Elsewhere, the room has uniformly good detailing. The window casings are "double" (with two fasciae) and have cavetto-and-bead back band mouldings. The room is wainscoted with wide, flat boards. The wainscoting has a baseboard capped with a Grecian ovolo-and-bead moulding and a chair rail moulded with a torus supported by a cavetto-and-bead. The door leading from the entry to this room is a modern six-panel unit, but the old six-panel door in the upstairs

⁹ On September 13, 1993, subsequent to the compilation of this report, the late Dr. Dorothy M. Vaughan of Portsmouth donated a photograph of the Sawyer House to the New Hampshire Historical Society. This photograph appears to be the earliest full view of the Sawyer House yet located. As shown by a drawing of the Sawyer House published in George A. Cleaveland and Robert E. Campbell, *American Landmarks* (Boston: Balch Brothers, 1893), the nine-over-six first-floor sitting room windows of the house had been replaced by two-over-two sashes by 1893. The Vaughan photograph shows nine-over-six sashes in these window openings, and therefore dates before 1893. This photograph clearly shows the façade of the Sawyer House when the house retained its nine-over-six window sashes and its Greek Revival front door of circa 1850. The door can be seen to have been a seven-panel door with horizontal full-width panels at the top, midpoint, and bottom, and with two pairs of vertical panels between the three horizontal panels [James L. Garvin, February 6, 2007].

¹⁰ See note above regarding the design of the Greek Revival-style front door [James L. Garvin, February 6, 2007].

bathroom may have come from this location or from the room opposite; paint color analysis could settle the question.

The chimney wall of the parlor appears to be sheathed from floor to ceiling with vertical tongued-and-grooved sheathing fashioned with the same panel raising plane that was used to make the doors of the house. When the Greek Revival mantelpiece was installed in this room, a chair rail, closely matching those on the other three walls, was applied across the face of this sheathing, transforming the lower zone of the sheathing into wainscoting. The wall above the chair rail was plastered to provide an appropriate surround for the mantel. It is likely that the fireplace in this room was originally trimmed with a simple architrave matching those used on the windows.

The present mantelpiece in the parlor is constructed of heavy members intended to convey the plainness and massiveness that were characteristic hallmarks of the Greek Revival style. This mantel may originally have been painted black to suggest the fashionable black marble or soapstone mantelpieces of the mid-nineteenth century.

The opposite room, which would have been a front sitting room, had relatively simple original detailing. The sitting room has been remodeled more extensively than the parlor. It has a heavy mantelpiece similar to the one in the parlor, and also has flat-board door and window casings which evidently date from the same period; similar casings are also seen in the two second-floor rooms in opposite rear corners of the house. The sitting room shows signs of heavy use over the years, and its doors, of several periods, denote more frequent remodelings than any other room in the house except the adjacent kitchen.

The kitchen retains its original plan. Like most kitchens, it has been modernized more than once. It presently retains the character of a turn-of-the-twentieth-century kitchen, having a pressed metal ceiling and a floor of longleaf southern yellow pine. The cupboard in the southwest corner of the room, which projects into the adjacent modern kitchen (probably once a bedchamber) at the northwest corner of the house, appears to be made from hand-planed boards, yet has doors and an upper cabinet door which clearly date from around 1900. The cabinet door is a reused sliding window shutter from an unknown location; the dimensions of the shutter are less than those of the windows on the first floor of the house.

Other areas at the rear of the house deserve a fuller examination. The walls of the modern kitchen at the northwest rear corner of the house are covered with gypsum board, making it impossible to investigate the original character of this room. The entry passageway, pantry (now a bathroom), and stairways east of the kitchen also need closer study than was possible during this brief visit.

The second floor of the house reflects the hierarchy seen on the first story. The parlor chamber, on the southwestern corner of the house, is the most elaborately finished room on this floor. It has door and window casings with ogee-and-bead back band mouldings. The room's plaster wainscoting has a well detailed chair rail, and a baseboard decorated with the same ogee-and-

bead moulding that is applied to the casings. The mantelpiece is Greek Revival in style, with characteristic black paint under more modern colors. The upper shelf, however, has a federal style edge moulding much like that on the baseboard of the parlor below; this shelf is probably a remnant of an original mantelpiece in this room.

The bedchamber opposite, on the southeast corner of the house, is finely yet simply detailed. It has undergone less change from its original appearance than any other room in the house, and still retains the character of a Federal-style bedchamber. It has four-panel doors on its closet and leading to the rear area of the house, a six-panel door to the upper stairhall, flat door and window casings and baseboards, a simple chair rail above a plaster dado, and an ogee-moulded architrave around the fireplace opening. Old red paint, probably representing the original color of the woodwork, is visible where recent roof leaks have damaged the overlying paint.

As mentioned earlier, the rear half of the second floor appears to have remained unfinished for many years. Such unheated second-floor lofts are not uncommon in large, two-story farmhouses. They appear to have served many utilitarian uses, providing food storage, weaving and workshop space, sleeping areas for servants, and an extension of the main garret of the house.

In this case, it is likely that the central section at the rear of the house remained unfinished until well into the twentieth century. All finish in this area is composed of modern machine-planed woodwork and gypsum wall board. The present floor, of machine-planed narrow pine boards, appears to be laid atop older and probably rougher pine flooring.

The two corner rooms that flank this central section appear to have been finished at the same time as each other. Both have very wide pine flooring attached with exceptionally large cut nails, flat board door and window casings, and four-panel doors with unmoulded stiles and rails and flat panels. All woodwork in both rooms is hand-planed, so the rooms were probably finished off around 1850. Projecting into the northwest corner room is a plastered closet. This now has modern doors opening from the adjacent parlor chamber and from the room behind the chimney, but originally had a door that opened from the northwest corner room itself.

Suggestions for further research: This brief report is presented as a preliminary overview of the history and potential of the Sawyer House. The main purpose of the report is to suggest the value of the house and the wisdom of undertaking needed maintenance now in order to gain time to study the house further, to develop a full interpretive plan, and to gauge local interest in establishing a friends' organization that might wish to assist in the future utilization of the house.

It will be obvious from the preceding remarks that the history of the house is far from clear, especially in the period between 1851 and 1910. Since the above comments are based on a cursory examination of the house lasting only about three hours, the building demands much closer physical analysis. This analysis should eventually extend to paint color research in order to establish the chronology of changes, a more precise comparison of mouldings, and a closer examination of such technological clues as nails, lath types, and the marks of hand tools or machinery.

Clearly, much remains to be done in the area of documentary research; this, in turn, will enrich and illuminate the clues offered by the house itself. This research should include the genealogy of the Sawyer family, examination of census returns to determine who was living in the house and what the farm was producing at various decades, a study of family wills, concentrating on probate inventories, a search for lawsuits that may have resulted in attachments of the property or in the submission of bills for unpaid work done on the building, deed research to clarify the chain of title of the farm, and biographical research into those who owned the property after it left the Sawyer family in 1851.

It would be especially helpful to document the history of renovations and repairs to the Sawyer House since its acquisition by the Daniel Webster Birthplace Association. While the records and accounts of that Association may be unobtainable, there may be clues in the New Hampshire State Archives that will document some of the state's undertakings since 1917. We presently do not know, for example, when the two-over-two window sashes on the first story were replaced, when the side porch was added to the house, when the exterior was re-clapboarded, or when electricity and the steam central heating system were installed.

Suggestions for future maintenance: Recent leaks on the south (front) slope of the roof of the main house have caused some deterioration of the roof frame. There are areas of white fungus growth on roof boards and rafters, and the attic floor boards have cupped from wetting. Equally dangerous, the rock wool insulation under the attic floor has become soaked with rainwater. Like a sponge, this insulation will hold water and promote decay unless attic floor boards are taken up and the insulation is either removed or dried after the roof is re-shingled.

The first maintenance task at the house, then, will be to ensure that no further damage results from the roof leak.

The plaster ceilings in the two front second-floor bedchambers are fully saturated with water. Thus far, the plaster has remained firmly attached to the split-board lath, but the lath will have to be dried to prevent its decay and the rusting of its nails. Drying should be carried out slowly to prevent the sudden shrinkage of the wooden lathing; this could damage the plaster keys and weaken the attachment of the plaster to the lath. Modern preservation practice stresses the retention of old plaster, which once was casually stripped out of old houses if it showed the least sign of deterioration. Methods and materials have now been devised to reattach old plaster that has become partially loosened from the underlying lath. Every effort should be made to preserve existing plaster throughout the Sawyer House; no new plaster would have the subtle texture of the original.

The saturation of these ceilings has caused the calcimine to dissolve and the later ceiling paint to peel off. When fully dried, the ceilings should be scraped and washed with trisodium phosphate to remove all remaining calcimine before any attempt is made to repaint them with modern ceiling paint.

As I mentioned in a memorandum of 30 November 1987 to the New Hampshire Division of Parks and Recreation, the house suffers from chronic dampness in the cellar. Since that time, it appears that some of the wooden debris then in the cellar has been cleaned out, reducing the amount of mold growing in the area. The basement dampness could be greatly alleviated by further cleaning the cellar and then laying polyethylene on the floor. This should be done, since decay has already weakened the floor joists overhead and will continue to do so as long as the dampness continues.

Another water-related problem in the house is the rotten house sill at the front door. After years of slow decay, this has finally crumbled to the point that the door threshold has dropped away and the doorway trim has slumped, requiring that the front door be secured with a wooden cleat and a brace against the stairs. If this decay extends to the feet of the chimney posts on either side of the entry, the next result will be the subsidence of the entire central section of the frame. While repair to this sill is not as urgent as repair to the leaking roof, it should be given serious attention as soon as possible.

A third problem, and one that has been obvious for several years, is the collapse of the side porch of the house. The slumping of the porch has been stopped temporarily by wooden shoring. If funds do not permit the rebuilding of the porch, this shoring should be left in place until a preservation plan is developed for the entire house. It seems likely that the best interpretive plan for the dwelling will include the changes of the early twentieth century, since those changes resulted from the great campaign to acquire the site and reconstruct the birthplace. Thus, the porch will probably continue to have both a practical and an interpretive value.

In general, it should be said that a broad and interesting interpretation of the history and evolution of the Sawyer House need not be based on major changes to the structure, much less on "restoration" of the building to some early period. Rather, interpretation should attempt to tell the whole intriguing story of the house from its construction down to the present. Such an interpretive approach is now being practiced at Strawberry Banke Museum in Portsmouth, where a deliberate effort is being made to trace the history of a neighborhood from the seventeenth century down to the 1950s, when the entire nine-acre parcel was acquired by a federally-funded urban renewal program. This approach entails the retention of later changes to the Strawberry Banke buildings, the gathering of old photographs and oral histories surrounding the individual houses, and the undertaking of thorough and continuing research, including archaeological investigation, on each structure and site. Some Strawberry Banke houses are now furnished in two different periods; we might consider the same approach in various rooms of the Sawyer House.

By adopting such a method for the interpretation of the Sawyer House, we would need only to stabilize the building and, initially at least, make its rooms attractive with paint and wallpaper. Later, following further research, we could furnish certain rooms as they appeared at given dates or periods. Still later, if we felt that some later changes to the house were truly detrimental to an educational program, we could always remove those features.

Given the chronic shortage of state funds, our ability to do more than merely stabilize the building may well depend upon public interest as expressed through a friends' group or perhaps through already existing organizations like the Salisbury, Franklin, and Andover historical societies.

SELECTED EARLY PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE SAWYER HOUSE

[NOTE: PHOTOGRAPHS ARE NOT INCLUDED WITH THE DIGITAL VERSION OF THIS REPORT]

1. This photograph is from a post card that was postmarked in August, 1905. This is the oldest photograph yet located, except for a stereograph by W. G. C. Kimball that probably dates from circa 1878. The post card photograph shows the Sawyer House with nine-over-six windows on the first floor, and so dates before 1893. The image is not sufficiently clear to show the type of front door then on the dwelling.¹¹
New Hampshire Historical Society.
2. Photograph showing new two-over-two sashes in the first story windows and a front door with two glass panels. The roof and lower front wall of the house show deterioration.
New Hampshire Historical Society.
3. Similar photograph, evidently taken in the autumn.
New Hampshire Historical Society.
4. Photograph showing repairs to the lower clapboards and probably a new roof, circa 1910(?).
New Hampshire Historical Society.
5. Post card, undated, circa 1910(?).
New Hampshire Historical Society.
6. Photograph taken on August 28, 1913, at the dedication of the memorial. This picture shows new clapboards and corner boards on the lower front of the house, the new ell built to replace the summer kitchen that was removed to form the core of the reconstructed birthplace, and a tent and flagpole that were erected on the knoll behind the house. From *The Daniel Webster Birth Place Celebration at Franklin, New Hampshire on August 28, 1913* (Concord, N. H.: Rumford Press, 1913).

¹¹ See footnotes above describing the Dorothy Vaughan photograph now in the possession of the New Hampshire Historical Society, also dating from before 1893 and clearly showing the design of the Greek Revival-style front door [James L. Garvin, February 6, 2007].