NEW HAMPSHIRE DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES
State of New Hampshire, Department of Cultural Resources 603-271-3483
19 Pillsbury Street, 2nd floor, Concord NH 03301-3570 603-271-3558
Voice/ TDD ACCESS: RELAY NH 1-800-735-2964 FAX 603-271-3433
http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr *preservation@nhdhr.state.nh.us*

# REPORT ON THE WELCH HILLSIDE FARM HANCOCK, NEW HAMPSHIRE

**JAMES L. GARVIN**
**AUGUST 21, 2001**

**Summary:** This report is based on a brief inspection of the Welch Farm on June 12, 2001, in the company of Paul Doscher and other staff members of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, owners of the property. The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the architectural evolution and significance of the house and outbuildings. The Society's 250-acre land parcel will be treated as a conservation tract with existing fields kept open if possible. The last private owner of the property, Elizabeth Welch, has expressed a wish that the Society not sell the house and its environs as a private in-holding within that parcel. Family members have reportedly considered taking possession of the house, but have been deterred by the size of the main building, which had evolved by the turn of the twentieth century into a large summer boarding house. The Society now plans to remove the buildings from the property.

Despite its bleak prospects and its rather deteriorated and unprepossessing current appearance, Hillside Farm is a survivor from one of the most momentous movements to affect New Hampshire's history. The complex is a nearly intact and little-altered example of the rural summer boarding house. Summer boarding arrested a precipitous and cataclysmic decline in many rural portions of New Hampshire during the late 1800s. The adaptation of many farms as summer boarding houses stanched the economic and social collapse of much of rural New Hampshire, preserving the farming way of life for many families for two or three generations beyond a time when the family homestead might have been abandoned. Most important, the summer boarding movement was the first chapter in the history of tourism in New Hampshire, teaching the state how to promote itself as a place of scenic beauty and of wholesome recreation.

Because of the significance of the Welch Hillside Farm as a little-altered document of the summer boarding movement, this report recommends the careful recordation of the complex as it survives today.

**History:** The Welch Hillside Farm buildings survive as an architectural complex that embodies many of the attributes of the New Hampshire farm boarding house. The farm came into the possession of the Welch family, immigrants from Ireland, when A. B. Flint sold the property to John and Eliza Welch in 1862. The 1979 history of Hancock implies that the house then standing on the property had been built around 1780, but the present structure, much altered, appears from fragmentary internal evidence to date from the early 1800s.

As purchased by the Welches, the farm included a small, story-and-a-half dwelling, two rooms deep and facing in a southwesterly direction toward Skatutakee Mountain. The house had originally been a classic "Cape Cod" cottage with a central chimney, and the stone foundation pier for that chimney fills the middle portion of the dirt-floored cellar today.

Probably at about the time of transfer from Flint to the Welches, the house was altered by the removal of the central chimney and the original staircase leading to the attic. The area occupied by the former chimney stack became a central hallway, and a new single-run staircase ascended to the upper level along the western wall of the hallway. There is presently no clear evidence to indicate that a second story was added to the dwelling at this time, although the elaboration of the staircase is unusual for a flight leading only to an attic.

Following this remodeling, the house was heated by stoves that were served by single-flue chimneys placed at either side of the central hallway in the general location of former fireplaces. It is possible that a rear ell as added to the house at this time, with its own chimney for a kitchen range.

According to the 1979 Hancock history, "the farm was carried on in a small way until 1883 when the senior Welches [John and Eliza] and their son William and his wife Mary began taking in summer guests. Later, John, Jr., did much of the work and management."

In opening their house to summer boarders in 1883, the Welches were pioneers in a social movement that was to transform New Hampshire. During the period following the Civil War, New Hampshire's traditional agrarian way of life was shaken by the rapid abandonment of marginal farmsteads in every part of the state. Threatening the fiscal stability of towns that depended on property taxes to sustain local government and its services, farm abandonment also seemed to portend the end of agriculture itself. As a state that had always regarded itself as agrarian, New Hampshire regarded the trend with dismay and disbelief.

In 1889, state government reacted to the crisis by creating the office of State Commissioner of Immigration, appointing Nahum J. Bachelder of East Andover, already serving as Commissioner of Agriculture, to the new post. Bachelder immediately began to survey the extent of farm abandonment and to develop strategies to counteract the problem. One means by which farms could be kept productive, and could expand into a

new realm of operation, was by adapting themselves to receive summer guests. Summer boarders might individually leave only a few dollars with a farming family, but their aggregate contribution to the state's economy was recognized by the 1890s to represent one of New Hampshire's largest sources of income. In 1899, 174,280 summer visitors came to the state, resulting in a direct income to their hosts of $540,000. The total cash they left behind, not including railroad, steamboat, and stage fares, totaled nearly $5,000,000.

Although successful summer boarding farmhouses were seldom adjacent to a railroad depot, such farms were absolutely dependent upon the railroad to bring boarders from New England's major cities to the general locale of the farm. Most boarding houses transported guests to and from a railroad station with regular trips by farm wagon to meet the train. The Welches could not have transformed their farm into a successful boarding establishment if the railroad had not arrived in Hancock in 1878. By the time their summer business reached maturity around 1900, "the Welches met the six o'clock train from Boston with a four-seater wagon (three passengers to a seat) drawn by a pair of horses. A second wagon would follow to carry the luggage."

It is remarkable that the Welches took advantage of railroad connections within five years after the arrival of the new mode of transportation. The concept of remodeling ordinary farmhouses into summer boarding houses, especially houses that were not favored by lakeside locations or striking mountain views, did not really gain momentum until the late 1880s or early 1890s. Most farmers lacked the background or the imagination to conceive that their family homestead might be attractive to strangers from the city. A pioneering proponent of the movement was Thomas J. Walker, editor of the *Plymouth Record*, who in the late 1880s began a widely-emulated effort to "boom" New Hampshire in the press as a health-giving mecca for world-weary city dwellers.

The primary requisites for a successful summer boarding house included easy transportation to and from a railroad depot; a spacious summer porch from which one could enjoy a pleasant view of fields, mountains, or water; good, wholesome food, preferably freshly grown on the property; and plenty of shade trees. By the 1890s, New Hampshire had thousands of modest boarding houses where ordinary city people sought a summer's rest. Nahum Bachelder of East Andover, Commissioner of Immigration, set an example when he renovated several village homes and built a boarding house, named the Halcyon, on his own property for the entertainment of summer people. The heyday of the movement was best chronicled by former governor Frank West Rollins in his 1902 publication, *The Tourist's Guide-Book to the State of New Hampshire*.

Rollins portrayed Hancock, then a town with a population of 642, as a locality that was ideally situated as a place of rest and recreation for summer boarders:

> This southwestern part of New Hampshire is remarkable for beautiful drives, and walks, fine scenery, and high, health-giving locality. . . . The town is traversed with swift-running trout streams, and thousands of that finny tribe are annually caught. The

> lakes, the most important of which are Norway, Half Moon, Juggernaut, and Nebaunsit [Nubanusit], all lie among the mountains. Nebaunsit is seven miles long, and undoubtedly is the highest lake of its size in New Hampshire, its elevation being nearly 1,400 feet. All of the lakes afford excellent fishing. Game is also very plenty in its season. Carriage roads wind about in all directions, and furnish magnificent drives and scenery.

The architecture of the Welches' Hillside Farm clearly records the family's increasing ambition to welcome more summer guests and to accommodate them with greater privacy and comfort. It is possible that a second story had been added to the old Flint farmhouse when the central chimney was replaced by stove chimneys, but the evidence now visible on the second story of the dwelling points to the period around 1900 as the date when the second floor and its associated detailing were added. All visible framing and lathing is circular sawn. While the front rooms of the first story display finely-detailed door and window casings and chair rails of the federal era (prior to 1830), the second story is characterized by flat door and window casings. All window sashes in the house are two-over-two units of a type that did not become popular before the mid-1890s. All doors are four-panel units of a type common around the turn of the twentieth century. Doors in the front rooms are slightly more elaborate and costly than those in the rear portion of the house.

There is little in construction or style to differentiate the added second story of the original farmhouse from the large boarding house wing that extends easterly from the older building (see below, **Description**). It seems likely, however, that the old house was first given a second story and an ell, and was enlarged slightly later by the addition of the extensive eastern wing. In any case, by the early twentieth century the Welch Farm had become virtually a small hotel.

By the time the house reached its fullest expansion, which it retains today, it was a sophisticated operation that attracted a wide clientele. As the 1979 town history relates,

> The house could accommodate thirty-five to forty guests at one time. The farm was a busy place, especially at meal time. . . . The men of the Welch family supplied the house with veal, pork, milk, eggs, poultry, and vegetables. They also raised and sold cattle; bought day-old calves, raised them to two months, then sold the veal not needed as food for the summer boarders, and raised pigs for bacon and pork. Extra milk and cream were sold to Hayward Farm, and surplus eggs crated and shipped to market. There were eight hundred sap buckets for use when the maple trees were tapped.
>
> Butter was also made, especially in the spring, each batch laid between clean white cloths in crocks. . . . The Welches had a walk-in refrigerator and cut their own ice on Hunt Pond in mid-winter,

> where in good years the ice was fourteen to sixteen inches thick. A thousand cakes were brought by sled each year and stored in sawdust in the icehouse at the farm. Putting those blocks of ice in the refrigerator was heavy, wet work, so when electricity was installed in 1926 it was like a miracle that the struggle with ice could be abandoned.
>
> There were several clear wells at Hillside Farm. One served a tank in the kitchen for drinking water; another was for bathroom use; a third was at the barn for watering animals. The water flowed by gravity from springs high on the hill, so pumps were unnecessary.
>
> In the dining room were two large tables, one seating twelve people, the longer one sixteen. When the house was crowded, two sittings were required.
>
> After the discontinuance of the railroad [in 1936] there were fewer summer guests though some came by bus from Boston to Peterborough where they were met by a wagon. . . . With fewer guests, there was more farm produce to send to market. From 1943 to 1960 raw milk, wholesale, in twenty- or forty-quart cans, was sold to Hayward Farms, and eggs were shipped to Boston. Cream in eight-quart cans was sold when butter was not being made.

The Welch family showed unusual perspicacity in establishing, and then enlarging, a summer boarding business before most farms had realized the potential of that business and before state government and the New Hampshire press had marshaled statistics and arguments to move farmers in that direction. The farm's location just two miles outside one of the most picturesque villages in New Hampshire, and only 1¾ miles from the depot, may have induced the Welches to experiment with summer guests before most other farmers.

Perhaps the Welches were influenced by the example of other local boarding house operators of wider experience. The 1979 town history points out that in 1882 William S. Fogg of New York City purchased two adjoining farmsteads. On July 4, 1883, Fogg opened the Prospect House hotel, which had a capacity of about seventy-five guests. Similarly, James Woodward of Temple bought the former Weston Tavern in the village in 1879 and opened it as a hotel called the Forest House. Guests who could not be accommodated in these places of resort may have provided some of the Welch family's first boarders. By 1902, as Frank West Rollins indicated in his *Tourist's Guide-Book*, Hancock had no fewer than thirteen boarding houses.

Undoubtedly, the farm's upland location and its view of Skatutakee Mountain were strong attractions to city people seeking rest, cool air, scenic beauty, wholesome food, and comfortable accommodations. Because the most commodious portions of the

boarding house—the upper floor of the main house and kitchen wing, and the long dormitory to the east—date from around 1900, it may be surmised that the Welch family started their summer boarding business on a modest scale, enhancing their accommodations as their clientele grew. According to the 1979 town history, "groups of friends and families came by train from Boston and Cambridge year after year; there was no need to advertise."

By the turn of the twentieth century, Hillside Farm had all the essential attributes of the ideal summer boarding house, many of them to an unusual degree. The small farmhouse had evolved into a large dwelling finished with modern millwork. Its southern front and its western side were shaded by a spacious porch that offered scenic views. The house offered a sumptuous table, supported by a large kitchen and a capacious refrigerator. Food was fresh and ample. The rooms, though simple, were private and enjoyed natural light and ventilation.

**Description:** Hillside Farm is composed of a main house and attached wings, a carriage house and shed, an ice house, and an automobile garage. The farmstead formerly included a large cattle barn, which was sold a few years ago and dismantled.

In keeping with the origin of the building as a center-chimney Cape Cod house, the fenestration of the main dwelling house is five bays in width. Since about the turn of the twentieth century, the house has been two and a half stories in height, with framing above the first story composed of circular-sawn two-inch scantling. The front (south elevation) and western end of the main house are shaded by a porch that wraps around the building, affording attractive views.

Extending from the northeast corner of the main house is a long, two-story kitchen ell. Like the main house, this wing is two and a half stories high. Its attic framing is coherent with that of the main house, suggesting that the second story of the ell, if not the entire structure, was added when the Cape Cod house was enlarged to two stories around 1900.

As noted above, the main house was served by two single-flue stove chimneys that rise on either side of the central stairhall to penetrate the roof at its ridge. A third chimney rises from the kitchen ell, passes upward through the attic of the dormitory wing, which overlaps the roof of the lower kitchen wing, and emerges through the wing's roof. There was no artificial heat provided to the rooms of the dormitory wing, which was occupied only during warm weather.

Most of the interior finish of the house and the dormitory wing is characteristic of the turn of the twentieth century. The two lower front rooms in the main house retain some federal-style joiner's work. Elements of the old farmhouse include door and window casings in these rooms, which have delicate quirked ogee and bead backband mouldings. The room to the west of the front door also has wainscoting composed of wide horizontal boards with beaded joints. This room exhibits a finely-moulded chair rail with moulding

profiles characteristic of the early 1800s. The plaster in the lower front rooms is applied over split-board lath.

The second floors of the main house, kitchen ell, and dormitory are all characterized by square-edged casings and by four-panel doors. The doors in the front rooms of the main house have ogee sticking around their panels; those in the rear rooms have no sticking, denoting a hierarchy of finish between the front chambers and those at the rear of the building.

The first story of the dormitory wing is composed of utilitarian rooms for storage of firewood, food, and saleable produce like eggs. The second floor is treated as a series of simple bedchambers arranged on both sides of a double-loaded corridor that extends longitudinally through the wing. The dormitory chambers are at the second story elevation of the main house. Because the house and wing are placed on a sloping site, the central corridor of the dormitory wing exits at a door that is only three or four steps above grade and the eastern end of the wing. The attic of the dormitory is a single unfinished room that reportedly served as sleeping quarters for hired men on the farm.

The second-story rooms in both the main house and dormitory wing are finished with simple square-edged trim. All window sashes throughout the entire complex are two-over-two units with ogee and fillet muntin profiles, characteristic of the very late 1800s or the early 1900s. Because of the awkward overlapping of roofs of unequal height and the close juxtaposition of windows in the kitchen ell and the dormitory wing, it appears that the wing was added sometime after completion of the kitchen ell. Similarity of framing and woodwork throughout the entire complex, however, suggests a fairly short time span between enlargement of the main house with a second story and construction of the dormitory wing.

The dormitory rooms are neatly finished with slightly rough plastered walls, probably representing one-coat plastering. Surviving wallpapers suggest that the walls were papered and periodically re-papered. Few furnishings remain in the main house or dormitory, so it is presently impossible to know how the rooms were furnished, or how the furnishings evolved over time.

The entire complex is served by a single principal bathroom in the second story, at the rear of the main house. The plumbing of this bathroom must have been installed after electricity was introduced on the farm in 1926. Before that, the boarding house must have been served by privies or earth closets. Possibly these were located within the building somewhere at the rear of the kitchen wing or perhaps a separate building off the eastern exit from the dormitory wing.

The carriage house stands some distance away from the main house, in front of the dormitory wing and with its axis at right angles to that of the wing. It is a one-story building with a heavy barn-like frame. A stairway at the front of the structure gives access to a second story that is lighted by low kneewall windows under the eaves of the roof. A bank of window sashes of various periods provides ample light at the south gable

of the attic; some of these sashes may have been salvaged from the main house when the current two-over-two sashes were added there around 1900. The interior walls and beams of the carriage house are covered with painted names and dates left by former guests. Mostly dating from the 1890s through the early 1930s, these names clearly represent a longstanding tradition among the boarders who patronized Hillside Farm.

Attached to the south gable end of the carriage house, and extending along the same alignment, is a low, one-story carriage shed. The shed has four open bays that face easterly. The walls of the carriage shed are covered with horizontal sheathing without clapboards.

South of the carriage house and shed is the farm's ice house. This is a low, gable-roofed wooden building that stands over a shallow excavation with a stoned foundation. The building has a single door in the center of its northern end, with a small opening in the gable over the door. The building is not closely boarded or double-walled. Reportedly, it depended on an ample packing of sawdust to preserve its stored ice through the summer.

Standing east of the carriage house is a garage building, a gable-roofed building with several bays for motor vehicles. Built on a mortared stone foundation, this structure is sheathed with drop or "novelty" siding.

**Significance:** The Welch Hillside Farm may be one of the least-altered farm summer boarding houses remaining in New Hampshire. The property has remained in the Welch family since it began to function as a boarding house. The farm passed from founders John and Eliza Welch into management by their sons John, Jr. and William, and by William's wife, Mary. It then descended to the third generation, being carried on in the latter half of the twentieth century by William Welch, John Welch 3rd, and Elizabeth Welch. As noted earlier, Elizabeth Welch was the last private owner of the property.

The property continued as a working farm even after the summer boarding business ended, receiving relatively few modern improvements. This unusual continuity of ownership and use has left the Welch Farm a virtual museum of a turn-of-the-twentieth-century summer boarding house. As the boarding business declined, the Welches simply left the dormitory wing unoccupied and unchanged. Except for the sale of the dairy barn and the furnishings of the property, the Welch Farm remains little altered architecturally from a century ago.

The summer boarding movement was a crucial chapter in the economic and social history of New Hampshire. Taking root at a time when the state's fortunes appeared bleak and when the fabric of traditional farming life seemed to be rent by insurmountable discouragements, the summer boarding movement offered hope for New Hampshire's farms and farming families. Carefully watched and analyzed by state government in the late 1800s, the summer boarding movement pointed the way to an entirely new economy for New Hampshire, that of tourism. Summer boarding showed New Hampshire's government and private entrepreneurs that tourism might become a major economic force in the state.

Measured in the 1890s, after about a decade of experimentation and observation, revenues generated by summer tourists proved to be unexpectedly high. This discovery led to active campaigning to make New Hampshire more accessible and friendly to summer (and later winter) visitors. This campaign included purposeful efforts toward highway improvements, forest preservation, restoration of inland fisheries, and celebration of the state's history and scenic beauty. The most effective proponents of the movement were Frank West Rollins, promoter of the "good roads" movement, founder of Old Home Week in 1899, governor from 1899 to 1901, and a founder of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests; and Nahum Bachelder of East Andover, Secretary of Agriculture and of Immigration, a leader in the state and national Grange, and governor from 1903 to 1905.

The summer tourist movement continued and evolved, moving away from the fashion for extended stays on rural farms. As automobiles replaced trains and tourists became more mobile, summer visitors increasingly spent only a few days in one locale, preferring to tour the state and move progressively to and from tourist cabins or motor hotels.

The classic summer boarding house was a phenomenon of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Because such establishments have not been commonplace for more than half a century, it is rare to find an unchanged example of the boarding house. It is especially unusual to find a boarding house that has remained in a single family for three generations and reflects a conservative and traditional architectural response to the needs of summer guests a century ago.

**Recommendations for mitigation:** Because no family member wishes to undertake the preservation of the Welch Hillside Farm, and because Elizabeth Welch has expressed a wish that the house not be occupied by strangers, it appears that the Hillside Farm buildings will be destroyed. As noted above, these buildings represent an unusual survival of an architectural response to a social movement that flourished for some fifty years, beginning in the 1880s. Rather unprepossessing in their plainness and utilitarian finish, the Welch buildings are, in fact, rare architectural survivors and valuable documents of a social movement that transformed New Hampshire at one of the bleakest periods of our history. These buildings deserve careful documentation if they are to be lost by deliberate action.

The best way to mitigate such a loss would be through the careful recording of what has survived. Ideally, such a record would take the form of measured drawings of all buildings (but especially of the dwelling), coupled with comprehensive photography. This combination of graphic and photographic recordation was perfected during the 1930s by the Historic American Buildings Survey, and remains the standard method of mitigating the destruction of significant buildings or structures.

A second means of mitigating the loss of the human story of the Welch Farm, if it has not already been carried out, would be through the gathering of all available evidence of the life that was lived there. Family records, photographs, and recorded reminiscences of

Elizabeth Welch would be an invaluable chronicle. Such gathered evidence should be placed at the New Hampshire Historical Society, the Hancock Historical Society, or shared by the two. It is clear from the extended story of Hillside Farm that was included in the 1979 Hancock town history that Elizabeth Welch and her then-surviving brother, John 3rd, offered the historical committee a richly detailed and compelling account of their own life at the farm, and that of their parents and grandparents.

The New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources has identified "Boarding House Tourism, 1875-1920" and "Summer Home Tourism, 1880-present" as key contexts in New Hampshire history and as themes that are likely to be reflected in several distinctive building types. Additional contexts that could be illuminated by the Welch Farm include "Mixed Agriculture and the Family Farm," "Maple Sugar and Syrup Production," "Local-scale Dairy Farming," "Dairy Farming for Urban Markets," "Market Gardening/Truck Farming in New Hampshire, 1900-present," and "The Irish in New Hampshire."

Little field research has yet been undertaken on these contexts. The Welch Farm offers one of the first potential sources for the study and understanding of summer boarding a century ago, and for the parallel maintenance of a working family farm, as described in the above excerpt from the 1979 town history.

Specific ways in which the Welch Hillside Farm might be recorded before the removal of its buildings include:

1. Employment of a professional photographer to record the buildings inside and out. If such photography were done to standards developed by the Historic American Buildings Survey, it would utilize large-format (4"x5" or larger) black-and-white negatives and a view camera. Developing of the film and printing would be done to archival standards for longevity. Photographic coverage would be thorough, and would seek to capture the feeling and atmosphere of the buildings as well as to provide a factual record.

2. Graphic recording, including floor plans and elevations of the buildings. Again, the Historic American Buildings Survey has established criteria for such recordation. HABS recordation is normally done with specially assembled summer field teams or with students in a nearby school of architecture. Regrettably, New Hampshire has no school of architecture. The nearest such schools are at Norwich University in Vermont or in Boston. For practical reasons, measured drawings, if produced, might therefore have to be executed by an architect who could afford the time to do the work. A team of two or more people is usually necessary to measure a building effectively.

The Division of Historical Resources will try to offer practical assistance to the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests in pursuing either or both options. The Division would appreciate an opportunity to take its own series of small-format (35mm.) black-and-white photographs in order to provide some record of the buildings at Hillside

Farm for our developing contexts on Boarding House Tourism and Summer Home Tourism.