

THE HOUSE ON HARDCRABBLE ROAD

by

THOMAS M. BOWER*

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INTRODUCTION

This is the story of the house I live in, on Hardscrabble Road, Briarcliff Manor, New York. The real history of this house is not a dry list of two centuries of land conveyances: it is a tiny part of the history of America. To fully appreciate the history of this house, one must review it in the context of what was happening in Westchester County, the New York metropolitan area, the country, and the world at each stage of the house's life. One should also examine the old construction techniques that enabled those long-ago settlers to build a modest, simple farmhouse that has stood for over two centuries. Along the way, one can try to catch glimpses of the generations of real people who lived, worked, dreamed, raised families, and died here.

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That kind of reflection, that kind of tangible connection with the reality of past lives and vanished worlds, is what makes living in an old house so exciting and romantic.

GEOGRAPHY

First built as a tenant farmer's modest farmhouse, for well over two hundred years the house has stood on the west side of what is now Hardscrabble Road,¹ between what are now the villages of Briarcliff Manor and Pleasantville, in the Town of Mount Pleasant, County of Westchester, State of New York. It is between the Pocantico and Saw Mill Rivers, two miles north of the junction of the Saw Mill River and Sprain Brook Parkways. The route now followed by Hardscrabble Road was in use from colonial days, and may have been an Indian trail before the arrival of European colonists, as it skirts the glacial ridge west of the Saw Mill River at this point.

Although within the Briarcliff Manor postal and school districts, the house is not within the village limits. Rather, it is in an unincorporated part of the Town of Mount Pleasant, east of the Briarcliff village limits and west of the Pleasantville village limits. The history of the house is therefore connected to the development of both Pleasantville and Briarcliff Manor. In the Westchester County Index System, the site is in Block 8604, Sh. 119 & 129. The Tax Map Designation is Section 1 Block 6 Lot 1.²

EARLIEST SETTLEMENT AND COLONIAL PERIOD PHILIPSBURGH MANOR

The documented history of this area begins with the arrival in September, 1609, of Henry Hudson in his ship *Half Moon*. Before then, the land was inhabited by Indians, who kept no

¹ The noun *hardscrabble* refers to a thin, rocky soil. As an adjective it means providing meagerly in return for much effort: *the hardscrabble existence of mountainside farmers*. Apparently the farms along these rocky glacial ridges were not known for their fertility or workability. Before the mid- to late 1800s, the road was not called Hardscrabble Road at all, but Crompond Road or "the road from Ackers to Roswell's Corners." The Acker family owned land northward along the road, on the southwest corner of its junction with what is now Briarcliff Road. Roswell's Corners was near the south end of Hardscrabble Road. The Roswell family (also Rosell or Rosselle) owned property on what is now Pleasantville Road, about where Roselle and Weskora Avenues are now. At the time of the Revolution, the northern half of the road was called *the road from Pines Bridge or Kipp Street*. In the late 19th Century, the road was called *Hillside Road* for a brief time, but the name never stuck.

² It is referred to on some documents from the 1950s and 1960s as (a) Section 1, Sheet 3 Block 6 Lot 1 and (b) Section No. 1, Block No. 2, Lot No. 10B-10I.

written records. The following description of those early days is from *A Village Between Two Rivers: Briarcliff Manor*.

Long before the days of the white man, the rolling countryside along the Hudson River that is today Westchester was inhabited by the Mohegan Indians, who were part of the Algonquin Nation. A tribe known as the Sint Sincks occupied the land along the river north of the present day Tarrytown and south of Croton. Little is known of the Sint Sincks other than that they derived a secure living from the river which they called the Shattemuc, or “the stream that flows both ways” because of the tide from the ocean just thirty miles to the south.

Another tribe, known as the Tankitekas, lived a few miles inland as far west as the Pocantico River, or a “run between two hills.” Early European settlers named the Pocantico the Mill River, but the new name did not take.

The land our house sits on was in the western part of Tankiteka territory. The Tankitekas (sometimes *Tankitekes*) had a village at what is now Pleasantville, but the bulk of their territory extended eastward through what are now North Castle and Bedford, into Fairfield County, Connecticut.

In 1685, Frederick Philipse became the first non-Indian owner of this property. The following summary of his personal history and the general history of the area is abstracted from *The Changing Landscape*, a history of Briarcliff Manor by Mary Cheever.

Frederick Philipse (né Vredryck Flypsen) came to the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam from Friesland, in the Netherlands, probably with Peter Stuyvesant in 1647. Damage from a tidal wave that struck the northern coast of Europe in 1634 may have caused both those Friesians to emigrate. Philipse was a carpenter, and his skill in building during his first years in the colony earned him the name of Stuyvesant’s “architect builder.” He became a merchant, trading with the Five Nations (Iroquoian Indian tribes), England, the East and West Indies, and Africa, exchanging furs and timber for woven goods and slaves for sugar and rum. He also manufactured wampum. When the Dutch surrendered to an English naval squadron in 1664, and New Amsterdam became the English Province of New York, Vredryck Flipsen anglicized his name to Frederick Philipse. He married Margaret Hardenbroek, widow of the wealthy merchant Pieter R. DeVries, “a very considerable business partner as well as wife.” When she died, he married Catherine Van Cortlandt, widow of John Derval. Both marriages increased his already considerable wealth, and in 1674 he was rated the richest man in the Province of New York. Philipse had a place on the governing council of the colony until 1698, when the English Lords of Trade found that his connection with Captain William Kidd’s illegal commerce with pirates was clear enough to warrant his dismissal. Philipse, then more than seventy years old, retired.

From 1672 through the 1680s, Philipse gradually extended his land holdings through a series of purchases from Manhattan north to the Croton River and east to the sources of the Bronx River. The local Indians, in an attempt to preserve their way of life [while accommodating and profiting from land-hungry colonists], had adopted a strategy of selling land in small parcels while retaining hunting, fishing, and camping rights. In 1685 came the eleventh and last Philipse purchase in the area: “that tract or parcel of

land commonly called by the Indians Sinck Sinck,” including the site of present-day Scarborough, Briarcliff Manor, and Ossining. Local histories tell us the transaction took place in 1685 on a rise of land east of the present Scarborough railroad station, in the presence of eight Indian chiefs. The name of one of the chiefs has come down to us as *Weskora*, and in 1867 Scarborough, and later one of its great houses, took that name for a time. *Weskora* was probably Wessecanow, “identified as Wiechquaskeck, Wappinger or Kitchawank, depending on where he happened to be living * * * the primary agent between his people and the English from 1676 to 1690.”

According to local tradition, Pleasantville, the village to the east of the house, was first settled in 1685. That date probably refers to Frederick Philipse’s purchase of the Sing Sing tract on August 12, 1685. The story of a political twist to Philipse’s land purchases is told in *A Village Between Two Rivers*:

About 1681, Frederick Philipse began to clear the land at the mouth of the Pocantico River. When this land clearing started, the government of Connecticut complained to the officials of New York that the land that Philipse was clearing and developing was not included in his grant, but was in Connecticut. Through a series of political moves, which were apparently quite persuasive, Mr. Philipse saw to it that the boundary line was moved eastward to the Byram River, which today divides Port Chester, New York, from Greenwich, Connecticut. It is reasonable to assume that if such political arm-bending had not taken place, present day Briarcliff Manor would be divided between two states instead of two townships.

Here is more abstracted from Mrs. Cheever’s local history, *The Changing Landscape*:

When the patent of the English monarchs William and Mary made Frederick Philipse “Lord of the Mannour of Philipsborough” in 1693, no more than twenty families were living on some fifty thousand acres, which included land on the western shore of the Tappan Zee and a large part of what is now the Bronx. The Manor was owned and governed by Philipse and his heirs, in succession, Adolph, Frederick II, and Frederick III, known as Colonel Philipse. Philip Philipse, eldest son of the first Frederick Philipse, first purchased the Sing Sing tract and later deeded it to his father, who survived him. During the Revolution, Colonel Philipse chose to be loyal to the English Crown (to which he owed his status as Lord of Philipsburgh Manor) and forfeited all his property in what became the United States of America.

From its founding in the late 1600s, Philipsburgh Manor enjoyed nearly a hundred years of comparative peace. By 1740 most of the remaining Indians, their preserves trapped out, had gone elsewhere. Philipsburgh tenant farmers were not moved to rebellion against their landlords, although such conflicts raged around them up and down the river. Their farms were on about two hundred acres each, which they could not own. They did own all “improvements” on the land, including their houses and livestock, and could pass those and their leaseholds on to their heirs. They paid a yearly rent of four to six pounds or one-tenth of their yearly produce, and took their grain to be milled at Philipse Upper Mills in present North Tarrytown. The Philipses in return were required to provide the services of a schoolmaster and an occasional clergyman.

Slowly the land was cleared. By 1763 there were enough residents in the vicinity of Sparta Landing (now in Scarborough) to request “regular preaching” of the Dutchess County Presbytery, and Colonel Philipse donated three acres for the building of a church at the Sparta Burying Grounds on the corner of Revolutionary Road and the Albany Post Road.

In the village of Briarcliff Manor, particularly near the eastern border, a few houses still stand that were probably built in part before the Revolution. In most of these the oldest portions are disguised and overshadowed by more recent construction. *All contain some hand-hewn, mortised beams constructed in the Dutch H-frame fashion, but in the absence of documentary evidence only the spacing of the beams and indications of the size of the original rooms can identify them as Philipsburgh tenant farmhouses.*

Hand-hewn, mortised beams constructed in the “Dutch H-frame fashion” are very much in evidence at the house on Hardscrabble Road. The “Dutch H-frame fashion” — more commonly called timber frame or braced frame construction — is one of the oldest construction techniques in the world. The ancient Egyptians built timber frame structures that still stand. Other features of the house indicating very old construction are the Federal or Adam Style architecture, treenails visible in the living room and attic, unbarked and unhewn studs and rafters visible in the attic, wrought nails, pointless screws, six-over-six top sash fixed windows, multiple fireplaces (one quite large, with built-in cooking implements), and unbarked wide plank pine flooring. Those aspects of the house are described and explained in detail in the section of this history on old house construction techniques, below.

UNDERHILL LYNCH

We know a house was here by 1760. At that time it was the residence of Underhill Lynch. We do not know whether he was the first resident, or even how long he lived here before 1760. We *do* know that Underhill Lynch was a Philipse tenant who rented a farm of about 262 acres, with a frontage of about half a mile along Hardscrabble Road (running about ¼ mile from the house up the road, and about the same distance down it) and extending at its widest point at least half a mile west of the road (*i.e.*, most of the way to the Pocantico River, where Route 100 now runs).

Much of that former property is now within the Hardscrabble Wilderness Area. Go for a hike in the Wilderness Area and you will see that even today most of the land is still very hilly and rocky, and must have been very hard to work — especially when all work was done by raw

manpower, with the assistance of a horse or ox. Many old stone walls and abandoned roads — some no doubt dating from Underhill Lynch’s day — still criss-cross the terrain.

Underhill must have had a family, since a solitary bachelor could not have worked such a large farm by himself. Some of the Philipsburgh Manor rent rolls from that time have survived. One from 1760 (entitled *Janry: 10th: 1760 List of Tenants With Their Respective Rents as they are Now Raized*) records that Underhill Lynch’s annual rent was £3 4s 6d (three pounds, four shillings, and six pence) “in New York currency” (the Province of New York then used its own currency). That was neither an unusually high nor low rent for a Philipsburgh tenant. That same year the Philipeses received a total annual rent from the entire Manor of £2,745 0s 11d, so Underhill’s contribution was only a fraction of a percent.

Neither Underhill Lynch nor any of the other Philipsburgh tenants could vote in a provincial or local election, or serve on a jury. The franchise extended only to male freeholders. Philipsburgh tenants were not freeholders, but held their lands under leases “for [a term of] years or at will.”

In 1760, Underhill was probably worried about the latest of the French and Indian Wars, then being fought upstate. Just three years earlier, a combined French and Huron force had forced the surrender of His Majesty’s Fort William Henry, on Lake George, after which the bloodthirsty Hurons had slaughtered the entire garrison.³ Much closer to home, Underhill would have been very interested in the discovery in 1759 of silver deposits just a few miles away, next to what are now the state prison grounds in Ossining. (The Philipeses tried to develop a silver mine there, but nothing much came of it).

Underhill Lynch continued to live here for some years. The *Town Book of the Manor of Philipsburgh* records the earmarks of Underhill *Linch*⁴ on August 8 and November 26, 1761. Eighteen years later, Underhill appears (this time as Underhill *Linck*) as a taxpayer on the 1779 Tax List of the County of Westchester. He was still living here during the Revolution. Up until

³ An incident that became the subject of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*.

⁴ Such variant spellings of names are very common in early documents.

the Revolution, the area that is now Mount Pleasant became more and more settled, less and less wild. Things got so tame that game was disappearing from the area and, in 1773, the Governor and General Assembly of the Province of New York enacted a law prohibiting the hunting, killing, or taking of partridges, pheasants, quails, or their eggs anywhere in Philipsburgh Manor. Violators were to be fined 20s or imprisoned for twenty days and given thirty lashes “well laid on the bare back” in public.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

The following brief summary of the Revolutionary period in our part of Westchester is from *The Changing Landscape*:

Few events of great historic interest are known to have happened within the present [Briarcliff Manor] village limits during the Revolutionary War. A plaque on Hardscrabble Road marks the spot where Major John André is believed to have watered his horse on September 22, 1780. André was riding south toward the British lines with the plans of West Point concealed in his stocking. The plans, which were crucial to the outcome of the war, had been given to André by the commander of West Point, Benedict Arnold, who had also arranged for André to sail back through the lines on the British sloop *Vulture*. While anchored off Teller’s point (now Croton Point), the *Vulture* was fired on by a patriot cannon hastily brought down from Verplanck by Colonel Livingston. The ship retreated down the river, but not before Benedict Arnold had managed to board her and make his escape to join the British army. André, forced to make his way overland, was detained several miles to the southwest of Hardscrabble Road by three local militiamen who turned him over to Washington’s forces. He was court-martialed, found guilty of spying, and hanged.

Major André watered his horse at the spring marked with a plaque at what is now 80 Hardscrabble Road, just a few hundred yards down and on the other side of the road. The spring (and a stone springhouse) are still there. According to the plaque, in 1780 that spring was on the farm occupied by Joseph Durney. André is also said to have exchanged greetings with someone then living at what is now 100 Hardscrabble Road, across the road from Durney’s spring.⁵ After watering his horse at the spring, Major André rode down to the Bedford Road, then turned right

⁵ The course of Hardscrabble Road has changed a bit in the past two centuries, so then the house and spring might have been on the same side of the road. Considering the fact that this area was a hostile no man’s land at the time, it seems rather improbable that anyone living there would have exchanged greetings with a stranger riding down the road. Indeed, it is entirely possible that the house there was abandoned at the time, or that our house was abandoned at the time.

and headed southwest for a few more miles, until he was captured by three local militiamen at what is now Tarrytown.

Just up the road from Durney's farm, across the street from our house, was the 33½-acre farm of Staats Hammond, another of Underhill Lynch's neighbors. Staats (sometimes spelled *States*) was born in 1746. In 1767, when he was about nineteen years old, he got married. He served as a sergeant in the colonial militia during the Revolution and fought as part of General Washington's army, as did many of the men from this area. He was also a Highway Master⁶ for this part of the Manor, according to the minutes of a Philipsburgh Manor town meeting dated "6 Apr 1779 and in the third [year] of our independency." He died on July 26, 1820, at the ripe old age of seventy-four, and is buried in the churchyard of the Hawthorne Reformed Church.

Both armies and the local Philipsburgh militia were active in this area during the Revolution, staging numerous raids, patrols, and ambushes. One group of local patriots prepared rude fortifications on Buttermilk Hill⁷ in what is now Hawthorne (the steep, rocky hill just behind what is now the Westchester County Parkway Police barracks at the junction of Route 9A and the Saw Mill River Parkway), from which they monitored traffic through the valley and sometimes ambushed British patrols and foragers.

The prevailing sentiment among the people of this neighborhood seems to have been Whig: pro-independence and anti-British. One local farmer, John Buckabee, whose farm is now Pace University's Pleasantville campus, almost had his farm appropriated because his Whig neighbors suspected his loyalty to the Revolution!

It is doubtful that Underhill Lynch saw military service, either during the Revolution or earlier. His name is on no Provincial or other muster list, but does appear (along with that of one Jonathan Lynch, who might have been part of his household) on a document called the Old

⁶ Highway masters were local functionaries concerned with the condition and upkeep of the roads. They are not to be confused with path masters, who were concerned with wandering livestock.

⁷ Buttermilk Hill, the northernmost of the Pocantico Hills, is the "Mount Pleasant" from which the Town of Mt. Pleasant takes its name. The hill was also called "Mt. Zion" at one time. The Pocantico Hills are the "great divide" of Mount Pleasant: all precipitation falling west of the hills winds up in the Hudson River, everything to the east in Long Island Sound.

Muster Roll, from around 1778-80. The Old Muster Roll lists the members of what was called Captain Gabriel Requa's Company of East Philipsburgh. It lists, not those men who saw actual military service, but all men of military age (sixteen or older) then residing in the district, whether they enlisted or not. Some of those named on the roll may never have seen service, though they were liable to be called out for emergencies. They were the so-called Minutemen of the Manor, who when not under arms were tilling their farms. We can only wonder what old Underhill Lynch actually did during the Revolution.

Most of Westchester, including Mt. Pleasant, was a dangerous no-man's land during the war, as explained by Mary Cheever:

After the Battle of White Plains in 1776, General George Washington set up headquarters just north of Peekskill. British headquarters were in New York City. Both armies needed provisions, and some farmers, millers, and teamsters were released from active duty to get grain to the Croton River mill and make flour for Washington's army. Other noncombatants, particularly Quakers, managed to do well, but Westchester as a whole, for some seven years was "Neutral Ground" between the enemy camps and suffered greatly from raids and pillage by marauders claiming allegiance to both sides. These were called Cowboys and Skinners, because they stole and skinned cattle and sold the hides and meat to the armies. Livestock and provisions of all kinds were stolen and farms were burned and abandoned. When the end of hostilities was declared in 1783, the countryside was in ruins.

The Continental Army's southern patrol line was at about the level of the Croton River, some miles north of here. The British had some strongpoints and patrols about as far north as White Plains. Everything in between, including the area around our house, was a no-man's land, and no part of the county was safe from sudden raids, patrols, pillagers, and ambushes. The Cowboys were nominally Loyalists, the Skinners rebels; but both were actually more like common robbers and marauders and made the war very hard on those living in no-man's land. Many farms and houses were abandoned and the population of the county fell. Less than a mile from here, at the Washburn farm on what is now Washburn Road, one of Underhill Lynch's neighbors, Joseph Washburn, was viciously beaten by Skinners until he turned over his silver to them, then was hanged from an apple tree when he refused to give them his gold too! Luckily, after the Skinners left, Washburn's family returned in time to cut him down and save his life.

After the Revolution, Loyalists' holdings, including Philipsburgh Manor, were confiscated by an act of the New York legislature and put up for sale. Farmers were then able to buy the land they had worked as tenants. Something like that is what happened to this house.

THE FEDERAL PERIOD AND EARLY REPUBLIC

At the end of the Revolution, this part of Westchester was in ruins and had lost much of its population. The following decades were a time of healing and growth. With the end of the Philipse dynasty, the former Philipsburgh Manor was carved up into freehold farms. As the new farms were established, more of northern Westchester was cleared, brought under cultivation, and organized into towns. From *A Village Between Two Rivers*:

In 1788, the county of Westchester was divided into townships. One of those townships was Mount Pleasant, which originally included all of what is now Ossining, both town and village, the villages of North Tarrytown, Pleasantville, and Briarcliff Manor, as well as the present day hamlets of Valhalla, Thornwood, Hawthorne, Pocantico Hills, Crotonville, Scarborough and Sparta.

JACOBUS MINNER

By 1785, Underhill Lynch and his family were gone from the farm on Hardscrabble Road. Whether they fled the turmoil of the Revolution, or died, or became pioneers on the frontier, or emigrated because of Tory sympathies, we can only speculate. We do know, however, that by 1785 the farm was in the possession of someone else. That year, as part of the sale of Manor properties, the Commissioners of Forfeiture commissioned a surveyor named John Hill⁸ to prepare a detailed plan of Philipsburgh Manor. Hill's plan shows Hardscrabble Road and our house. Next to the house appears the name *Cobus Minner*, a misspelling of Jacobus Minner. The plan suggests that Minner then occupied the house, but did not own the farm. Later the same year, on October 10, 1785, Minner bought the farm from the Commissioners of Forfeiture. The Commissioners' description of the transaction is as follows:

No. 37. Sold to Jacobus Minner of the County of Westchester, Farmer; for one thousand eight Hundred and thirty four pounds — All That certain Farm of Land situate lying and being in the Manor of Philipsburgh and County of Westchester; Bounded Northeasterly by Lands now or late in the possession of John Bulyea and Caleb

⁸ Hill had been an officer on the staff of the British Army during the Revolution. When the war was over, he decided to stay in America.

Underhill;⁹ Southeasterly by the Road; Southwesterly by land now or late in the possession of Jeremiah Syfer; and Northwesterly by land now or late in the possession of Herman Williams; containing two hundred and sixty two Acres more or less as the same was formerly possessed by Underhill Lynch; forfeited to the people of the said State by the attainder of Frederick Philipse late of the said County Esquire.

Jacobus thereby became the first white man outside the Philipse family to *own* this property.

We do not know much about “Jacobus Minner...Farmer.” One Jacobus *Minna* (probably the same person; names were often spelled phonetically in those days, just as they were heard by the writer) was born in 1742 or 1743 in Orange County, New York. On April 29, 1761, when he was eighteen years old, he enlisted in Orange County as a private in Captain Peter Lent’s Company of New York Provincial Militia. His enlistment record says he was 5' 4" tall (not unusually short for that time) and a laborer in civilian life. There was later a *James* Minner from Westchester who fought in the Revolution, but they may or may not have been connected. It is possible they were the same person, since *Jacobus* is a latinized Dutch form of *James*, but that is just a guess.

We do know, however, that Jacobus Minner, like almost everyone else in the area, was a farmer and that this house was the center of a working farm (which it remained until after World War I). In those days overland transportation was slow, expensive, and dangerous, so the local farmers used to take their produce to the docks at Sing Sing (now Scarborough and Ossining) and Tarrytown, from where it was shipped downriver to markets in New York City.

From 1785 until 1812, the history of the house is shrouded in mystery. We do not know how long Jacobus Minner owned the house: no sale of it by him was ever recorded. We know a family named Purdy owned the house by 1812, but their purchase of it was also unrecorded, so we do not know when or from whom they bought it. Early census records provide only obscure hints and guesses.

⁹ A number of families in the neighborhood had the *sur*name Underhill then. They might have been kin of Underhill Lynch, or else the similarity of names might be just a coincidence.

The first United States census in 1790¹⁰ shows a Jacobus *Miner* living in Mt. Pleasant, and he may very well have been the same person as Jacobus Minner. The 1790 census lists John Bulyea and Jeremiah Cypher (two of the adjoining property owners mentioned by the Commissioners of Forfeiture, above) and their names are listed not far from Jacobus Miner's, suggesting that Jacobus may still have lived in the house as of 1790. Jacobus' household then consisted of four free white males of sixteen years and upwards, one free white male under the age of sixteen, five free white females, no other free persons (*e.g.*, freed slaves, Indians), and no slaves.¹¹ No one named Underhill Lynch, Linch, or Linck is listed as living in Mt. Pleasant in the 1790 census.

The Purdys

The next known residents of the house were Thomas and Mary Purdy. Purdy was a common name in early Westchester, as suggested by the present village in North Salem named Purdys, after other members of the large Purdy clan. Thomas Purdy was born in Mount Pleasant (then part of Philipsburgh Manor) on February 26, 1769, the son of Elisha Purdy and Mehitabel Purdy (*née* Smith). The 1790 census recorded an Elisha Purdy living in Mount Pleasant.¹² Elisha Purdy's household as of the date of the census consisted of two white free males of the age of sixteen or older (one of whom was probably his son Tom Purdy, since he is not listed separately as the head of his own household), two white free males under the age of sixteen, seven free white females, no other free persons, and no slaves.

Apart from the excitement of the new-fangled federal census, the Purdys had a lot of other things on their minds in 1790: the removal of the federal capital from nearby New York City to faraway Philadelphia, the death of Benjamin Franklin, the first session of the country's

¹⁰ The 1790 census named only heads of households. Other individuals in each household were enumerated, but not named. The entire census list for Mount Pleasant was only a few pages long and did not give addresses.

¹¹ There were eighty-four slaves in Mt. Pleasant in 1790, and 1,419 in all of Westchester County, out of a total population of 1,924 for the town and 23, 941 for the county.

¹² Elisha Purdy's listing in the census is not near Jacobus Miner's, John Bulyea's, Jeremiah Cypher's, or any other adjoining property owner listed by the Commissioners of Forfeiture in their 1785 notation of the sale to Jacobus Minner. As of this writing, it is impossible to be certain whether Jacobus Minner (or Miner) or Elisha Purdy lived in the house as of 1790.

new Supreme Court, the founding of a future national capital at Washington, D.C., and the continuing turmoil in France (where it looked as if Louis XVI might be headed for serious trouble).

By 1792, Elisha's son Tom was married to Mary B. Davids (born September 13, 1772, died May 16, 1832),¹³ because that is when their first child was born. If they took time off from being busy new parents that year, Tom and Mary might have heard about Kentucky's admission to the Union, or the erection of the first guillotine in Paris, or the stirring new French marching song called *La Marseillaise*. Tom and Mary eventually had eight children, seven of whom survived childhood:

Zipporah ¹⁴	born 12/26/1792, married Noah Washburn, died 1881
Sarah	born 6/24/1795, married Jeremiah Fisher
Mahala B.	born 9/22/1798, married Sands Sutton
Elijah C.	born 8/12/1801, married Phebe Odell
Maria	born 1/20/1804, married Hatfield Fisher, died 1851
Phililla	born 7/16/1806, married Gilbert Odell
Harriet	born 2/23/1809, married Schuyler Tompkins
Esther Ann	born 2/16/1812, died 1828

Some or all of those children were born in the house on Hardscrabble Road. In those days, farmhouses often had a very small room, called a *borning room*, located next to the kitchen for convenience and warmth. Mothers customarily gave birth in the borning room and lived in that room with the newborn for the first several weeks of its life. In Tom and Mary Purdy's day, what is now the front part of the living room was the house's kitchen. Mortises cut in the ceiling

¹³ The Davids family of Westchester are of French Huguenot stock. The main Huguenot presence in Westchester was at New Rochelle, but late in the 1600s, a French Huguenot named Carel Davids settled near the foot of Liberty Street in what is now the Village of Ossining. Some of his descendants later anglicized their name to Davis. The census of 1850 shows a Davids family living up Hardscrabble Road. I do not know whether the Davids family lived there as early as the 1790s, but it would have been commonplace in those days for a young man like Tom Purdy to marry a girl about his own age from a farm just up the road.

¹⁴ In 2004, I heard from a direct descendant of Zipporah Purdy. She had done an Internet search on her ancestor and this history of our house was one of the documents she came up with. She was thrilled to learn all this information about Zipporah, and to learn that the house is still here, centuries later.

beams towards the rear of the living room show that that part of the room was once separated from the kitchen by a wall and divided into two very small rooms. One of those rooms was probably a birthing room, and some or all of the eight children of Tom and Mary Purdy were probably born in it.

The 1800 census showed Tom Purdy still living in Mount Pleasant.¹⁵ His household at that time consisted of one male between the ages of twenty-six and forty-five (Tom himself), three females of ten years or less (daughters Zipporah, Sarah, and Mahala), and one female from twenty-six to forty-five (wife Mary). By that time, Westchester had known nearly twenty years of peace since the Revolution and was making a comeback. 1800 was an exciting year, promising big developments in the future: Thomas Jefferson won the presidential election that year, while down in New York City (population *ca.* 60,000) a fellow named Eli Whitney had started making muskets out of interchangeable parts, and over in Europe a French general from Corsica beat the Austrian army at a place called Marengo.

In 1800, northern Westchester did not look as it does now. For one thing, there were a lot fewer trees then, so the countryside was a lot more open; distant vistas and the contours of the land were far more visible. Early settlers had cut most of the trees for timber¹⁶ or firewood, or to clear the land for agriculture. In 1800, this was not a suburban bedroom community, but working farmland. The land had to be cleared, plowed, and cultivated to be economically viable for farming. In Tom Purdy's day, the park-like shade, seclusion, and greenery we now gratefully get from trees would have been seen as under-used, unproductive land, obstructing the Purdys' view of their fields, out-buildings, livestock, and neighbors.

There were certainly outbuildings on this property, quite near to the house. The dry stone foundations of what seem to have been small barns, sheds, or sties are still plainly visible behind the shed in the back yard, along the property line to the west. Our neighbor, Wayne Byers (who,

¹⁵ The 1800 census does not list any Miner, Minner, or Lynch in Mt. Pleasant. However, the Town of Mt. Pleasant Minute Book refers to people named Minner throughout this period.

¹⁶ The timbers used in framing and flooring this house were very probably cut from trees that once stood here. See the section on old house construction techniques, below.

as of this writing, lives in the colonial reproduction house to our west on Sloehiddon Road), says those foundations were for two pigsties and his woodshed is built on the foundations of one of them. Wayne also says there was a stone springhouse¹⁷ just south of our house, near where the Lindahl cedar home now sits at the corner of Hardscrabble and Algonquian Trail. No trace of the springhouse is left, but a brook still roughly parallels the property line between the two houses.

Tom Purdy was reasonably active in local affairs. He was one of numerous Overseers of Highways (also called *highway masters* or *road masters*) each year from 1805 to 1810.¹⁸ (His father, Elisha Purdy, had been one in 1790.¹⁹) Highway masters were responsible for the inspection and upkeep of roads in a designated district. They supervised crews of local residents, each of whom contributed a certain number of days of work on the road each year. Tom Purdy's contribution, as recorded in the Town minutes, was usually six days a year. Before Tom became an Overseer of Highways, he had been a member of the work force supervised by his neighbor and predecessor in office, Amos Partelow. The district for which they were responsible was described in the town minutes as follows:

Amos Partlows District is Divided from a White oake Bush North of Silas Partelows House Near the Corner of Said House and to Extend Down Said Road to the Bedford Road.

The "Said Road" was Hardscrabble Road (then little better than an ox track), which then extended down to Bedford Road (Route 117), following the line now followed by Hardscrabble Road-Pleasantville Road-Choate Avenue.

After selling the house to Joseph Nodine in 1812 (see below), Tom Purdy moved his family to North Castle, where he died on March 9, 1818, at the age of forty-nine.²⁰

¹⁷ A small storehouse built over a spring or part of a brook, for keeping such foods as meat and dairy products cool and fresh.

¹⁸ Minute Book of the Town of Mount Pleasant, State of New York, 1788-1819, pages 86, 98-D R-12, 103, 103-E R-7, 106, 109, 113, 116, and 119.

¹⁹ *Id.*, at 18-19.

²⁰ The same year that Illinois became a state, Chile proclaimed its independence from Spain, Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, Karl Marx and Charles Gounod were born, and the first professional horse race in the U.S. was run.

THE NODINES

On April 30, 1812,²¹ just two and a half months after the birth of their daughter Esther Ann, Tom and Mary Purdy sold the property to Joseph Nodine of Mount Pleasant, for \$3,625.²² Perhaps after Esther Ann's birth the house was too small for the Purdy family, or perhaps they just needed the cash. In any event, the Purdys moved east to North Castle and the Nodines moved in. The property sold to the Nodines was described as:

All that messuage²³ piece or parcel of land situate lying and being in the town of Mount Pleasant * * * Beginning at the Road, thence along the land of William Fisher thence along the land of Isaac Partlow agreeable to a deed given to him of the said Thomas Purdy thence Northerly along the land of Daniel Washburn to Amos Partlows land. thence Easterly along the land of Partlow unto the road thence as the road runs to the place of Beginning. Containing one hundred and sixteen acres of land²⁴ be the same more or less within the said bounds a foot road reserved for the use of the land in possession of Isaac Partlow along the fence of William Fisher to the highway. With all the buildings houses and out-house. And also all the trees woods underwoods tithes commons of pasture ways benefits commodities advantages hereditaments ways maters and appurtenances whatsoever to the said messuage and land above mentioned belonging or in anywise appertaining.

Joseph Nodine and his descendants owned the house and farm for the next ninety-three years, past the turn of the next century. What we know of the Nodines who lived in our house in the 19th Century is summarized in the following chart. All those listed, except for Joe and his wife Amy, are buried here in Pleasantville.

²¹ The same year that Napoleon invaded Russia, Louisiana became a state, the U.S. declared war on Britain, James Madison beat De Witt Clinton in the presidential election, Charles Dickens and Alfred Krupp were born, and Beethoven wrote his Symphonies No. 7 and No. 8.

²² Recorded on February 13, 1869, at *liber* 702, page 75.

²³ *Messuage* is a legal term denoting a dwelling house with its adjacent buildings and the land appropriated to the use of the household.

²⁴ More than half the farm had been sold off since Jacobus Minner bought his 262 acres in 1785.

***The Nodines of Mount
Pleasant in the 19th Century***

	Joseph ? - ?	Amy 1777 - ?			
Martha 1808-1895	Ben 1810-1854	Amy 1808-1883	Frederick K. 1818-1896		
Elizabeth 1835 - ?	Ira 1837 - 1924	Sarah A. 1842 - 1912	James A. 1841 - 1915	Marietta Boyce 1843 - 1891	Willett Fillmore 1851 - 1866
	Grace 1872 - 1927				

Joseph was of Huguenot stock. His family had settled in Philipsburgh Manor (probably moving there from New Rochelle) in the 18th Century. By the time he bought the house, Joe was already married to Amy Nodine (born 1777) with two small children: a daughter (Martha, born in 1808) and a son (Benjamin, born 1810). A few years after buying the house, they had a third child, Frederick K. Nodine (born 1818). Like the Purdys before him, Joe served the town as one of numerous Overseers of Highways in 1813 and again in 1819.²⁵

On May 14, 1819,²⁶ seven years after buying the house, Joe Nodine bought for \$887.50 an adjoining twenty-acre parcel to the southwest from Isaac and Mary Partelow, bringing his combined holding to about 136 acres. The deed²⁷ recites that Isaac and Mary Partelow were from New York City, where Isaac was a “cartman.” The description of the property conveyed gives some insight into contemporary conditions and notions of land surveying:

²⁵ Minute Book of the Town of Mount Pleasant, State of New York, 1788-1819, pages 133 and 150.

²⁶ The same year the U.S. bought Florida from Spain, Alabama became a state, the future Queen Victoria and Walt Whitman were born, Beethoven became deaf, and England limited children's working day to a maximum of twelve hours.

²⁷ Recorded on May 1, 1869, at *liber* 715, page 200.

Beginning at a rock in the Northwest corner of William Fishers land running fifty four rods²⁸ to a large rock in the South west corner of said Fishers farm; thence a straight line to a black oak tree marked; from thence to a large oak stump by the place called the rattle snake hole; from thence along the land of Daniel Washburn to a heap of stone; thence Easterly to a sassafras; from thence to a walnut continued by a chestnut tree and an oak on the top of the hill from thence to a heap of stone at the corner; thence Southerly to the land of William Fisher; thence westerly to a black oak; thence to a chestnut tree; from thence to the rock at the place of beginning Containing within said bounds twenty acres be the same more or less.

The deed tells us other things about those days. Isaac the cartman was able to sign his name, but Mary executed the deed by making her mark. Their oaths were taken before John Yerks (of another old Westchester clan), who thought it worth specifically noting, “The said Mary being by me privately examined separately and apart from her said husband confessed that she executed the same freely without any fear or compulsion of or from her said husband.”

The 1820 census shows that Thomas Purdy no longer lived in Mt. Pleasant. Two families of Nodines did, however: those of Henry Nodine and Joseph Nodine. By 1830, Henry Nodine was no longer in the Mt. Pleasant census, but Joseph was. In 1840, the town had two Nodine households: the Avery Nodines (with six members) and the Benjamin Nodines (with four).

Meanwhile, the area continued to develop. A hamlet called Clark’s Corners, a cluster of houses and businesses at what is now the intersection of Broadway and Bedford Road, grew up around the farmhouse of Isaac Clark, who had arrived on the scene in 1797. Later, it became the site of a tavern owned by his descendant, Henry Clark. By 1828, Clark’s Corners was large enough to have a post office and Henry Romer, the first postmaster, chose the name *Pleasantville*.

On April 15, 1839, the brothers Benjamin and Frederick Nodine bought an adjoining twenty-acre parcel from their neighbors, Noah and Mary Washburn. The property conveyed was described as follows:²⁹

²⁸ A *rod* is a unit of linear measure, 5½ yards or 16½ feet. The fifty-four rods mentioned in the Partelow-to-Nodine deed of 1819 equaled 297 yards or 891 feet, nearly the length of three football fields.

²⁹ Recorded in *liber* 86, page 378.

Beginning at a rock in the Northwest corner of the land formerly owned by William Fisher dec^d; thence Northerly along said Fishers land fifty four rods to a large rock in the edge of a small brook; thence Easterly a straight line to a black oak tree marked; thence still Easterly to a stone fence adjoining the lands of Joseph Nodine dec^d; thence North by said Nodines land to a small white oak sapling; thence westerly by said Nodines land to the lands late in possession of Daniel Washburn; thence Southerly along said Washburns land to a white oak stump and black birch sapling; thence Southerly along the land of Jeremiah Brower to a place called Rattle Snake hole; thence Southeasterly along the said Browsers land to a marked black oak tree; thence the same course to the aforesaid rock and place of beginning; Containing within said bounds twenty acres be the same more or less. *Also right of way to pass and repass from the said premises along the land or wood road through the land of Joseph Nodine dec^d to the public highway by the said Nodines dwelling house.*³⁰

A couple of years later, the Nodines sold a small part of their recently acquired twenty-acre tract: a parcel of three acres and twenty five 8/10 rods conveyed by Benjamin, wife Amy, and brother Frederick K. Nodine to Hiram Partlow by deed dated November 1, 1839, recorded in *liber* 101, page 25, on February 21, 1843.

By 1850, the U.S. census showed two families of Nodines (a total of eight people) living in the house. The first was that of Benjamin and Amy Nodine, both listed as forty years old, and their three children, Elizabeth (age 15), Ira (age 13; born March 17, 1837; died November 20, 1924), and James A. (or James O.) (age 9, born July 25, 1841; died January 13, 1915). Each of the three children had attended school within one year of the census. The head of the other Nodine family in the house was Amy Nodine, a seventy-three-year-old widow (the widow of Joe Nodine, who had bought the place back in 1812, thirty-eight years earlier, and mother of Benjamin). Widow Nodine's family consisted of herself, a Martha Nodine (age 42), and Frederick Nodine (age 32).

The 1850 census estimated the value of the real estate owned by Ben Nodine at \$5,800 (it had cost his father a total of \$4,512.50 more than thirty years earlier). Of the nearby properties on Hardscrabble Road, most were valued at far lower amounts and only a very few were valued higher (for example, those of Nathaniel Sarles and William Washburn, valued at \$7,000 each). The census enumerator (Jacob Foshay, who lived in the area) reported that everyone in the

³⁰ Apart from being noted on Hill's 1785 Plan of Philipsburgh Manor, this is the first written mention I have found of the house itself, as opposed to the land.

household had been born in America (most of them had probably been born in this very house). Benjamin Nodine's occupation was listed as "farmer," and he is the only person for whom an occupation was recorded (other than his mother, Amy Nodine, listed as "widow").

It is likely that at the time of the 1850 census everyone in the house worked either on the farm or in one of the shoe manufactories then operating in nearby Conklins Corners (now Pleasantville). Shoemaking was an active industry in the area and kept farm families busy during the winter.³¹ Apart from farming, other local industries included carriage making (which had been practiced in the area since colonial days), a sawmill (located in what is now Pleasantville since as early as the 1820s), pickle manufacturing (cucumbers were grown and processed in the area), and a marble quarry (begun in 1858 at what is now the Thornwood Town Center; marble from the quarry was used to build St. Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan).

The 1850 census shows Hardscrabble Road was then occupied by small family farmers, laborers, several shoemakers, and even a blacksmith. What is now an affluent, upper middle class suburb was then a country road lined with small farms and inhabited by working class families. Almost everyone in the area had been born in the U.S., but there was a sprinkling of recent Irish immigrants, most of whom lived with other families (probably as hired hands or domestics). A number of houses in the area contained more than one family, with the additional families being either relatives or hired farmhands. A lot of the names in the neighborhood had been there for generations (some are still represented in Westchester or echoed in nearby place names): Washburn, Fisher, Davids, Ackerman (possibly a corruption of Acker), Sarles, Brundage, Whitson, Tucker, Foshay, and Partelow.

The people of this area probably did not pay much attention to the local census in 1850, because so much else was happening. That was the year President Zachary Taylor died in office and was succeeded by Millard Fillmore as the country's thirteenth President. California was admitted to the Union as a free state. A writer named Nathaniel Hawthorn published a

³¹ Shoes in those days were made one at a time, by hand. Shoemaking was booming in what is now Pleasantville by the time of the Civil War. The Union army's shoe needs gave a sudden large boost to the already busy local shoemaking industry. Shoemaking remained a large part of the local economy until the industry turned to large-scale mechanized production methods later in the 19th Century.

sensational new novel called *The Scarlet Letter* (although not everyone in the Nodine household could have read it, even if they could have afforded to buy it). A promoter from New York City named Phineas T. Barnum introduced the singing sensation Jenny Lind (the “Swedish Nightingale”) to an adoring American public in a concert at Castle Garden (now Castle Clinton) at the Battery.

Of far more importance to the Nodines and their neighbors was the fact that Commodore Vanderbilt’s railroad had arrived (at what is now Pleasantville) in October, 1846. That meant the trip to New York City was no longer a four- or five-hour bumpy ride by stagecoach down the Albany Post Road (now Route 9), but only an hour on a train pulled by a wood- or coal-burning steam locomotive. Daily commuting to the City became possible for the first time and men of affairs from the City soon started making their homes in Westchester, taking the train to New York each morning and to the new Pleasantville Station each night. The center of Pleasantville was then located along Broadway (now Route 117), at its intersection with Bedford Road, where the Daniel P. Hays Volunteer Fire Station is now.³² Within a few years, however, the village’s center of gravity shifted to the area around the new railroad station, where stores, businesses, and even a hotel sprang up.

Just one year after the 1850 census, Ben and Amy had their fourth child (and third son), Willett Fillmore Nodine (born in February, 1851), whose middle name suggests the Nodines had great respect for then-President Millard Fillmore. Unfortunately, Ben Nodine died on September 23, 1854, at the age of forty-four, leaving Amy (then forty-two) to look after their four children (then aged 19, 17, 14, and 3) by herself, although she probably had help from the two older kids and from her brother-in-law Frederick and sister-in-law Martha. Twelve years later, tragedy again struck the Nodine family: young Willett Fillmore Nodine died on April 6, 1866, at the age of 15. Ben Nodine is buried at the Pleasantville Old Methodist Church. Amy lived on until May 20, 1883, and is buried in the same churchyard. Ben’s sister Martha died on December 30, 1895, and is buried in the Banks Cemetery in Pleasantville.

³² Daniel P. Hays, scion of a family that settled at Clark’s Corners in 1800, had an estate and mansion there at the end of the 19th Century.

Upon Ben's death in 1854, ownership of the property became a little complicated. Ben's brother, Frederick K. Nodine (born November 1, 1818; died August 4, 1896), continued to occupy the farm, but it is not clear what happened to the rest of the Nodines. In the 1867 Beers' Atlas of New York and Vicinity, the house is shown with the legend *F.K. Nouine* (as if the top of the letter *d* had broken off).

At some point, probably in the early 1860s, Ben's son James A. Nodine married Marietta Boyce (or *Boice*, born February 23, 1843), who lived at the bottom of Hardscrabble Road, at the northwest corner of its intersection with Pleasantville Road. James and Marietta eventually moved to a house at Pleasantville Station, about where Weskora Avenue is now. Marietta died on October 9, 1891, but James Nodine lived on until January 13, 1915.

Ben's elder son Ira dabbled in real estate in the neighborhood. In 1862, Ira and his wife, Sarah Adaline Nodine (May 30, 1842 - November 23, 1912), bought a twenty-six-acre parcel at the northwest corner of Hardscrabble and Pleasantville Roads, then turned around and sold it to William Boice on April 23, 1863.³³

On November 19, 1867, Ira and Sarah sold the property to Frederick K. Nodine for the remarkably low price of one thousand dollars. The deed³⁴ describes the property conveyed as follows:

All that certain piece or parcel of land lying and being in the Town of Mount Pleasant on the West side of what was formerly called the Crumpond Road and butted and bounded as follows viz: Commencing at the Highway at the lands of Nathaniel Sarles thence running Westerly along Sarles Land to the land of Richard Witson thence Southerly along said Witson's land and John Washburn's to the lands of Hiram Partlow thence Easterly along Partlows land and Elijah Brundage's and Nathaniel Sarles to the aforementioned highway thence Northerly along the Highway to the place of beginning Containing [sic] acres of land be the same more or less Being the same premises formerly owned and occupied by Joseph Nodine deceased.

Frederick Nodine must have had some concerns about possible clouds on his title to the property because, in a series of transactions two years later, on May 1, 1869, he bought from his

³³ Recorded on May 2, 1863, at *liber* 499, page 471.

³⁴ Recorded on December 18, 1867, at *liber* 663, page 127.

brother Ben's estate — and from several other surviving heirs of Joseph and Benjamin Nodine, including Ben's widow Amy, daughter Elizabeth, son-in-law Coles Carpenter, sister Martha, and neighbors Noah and Mary Washburn, William and Charity Odell, and Melanchton and Antoinette Hunt — all right, title, and interest to the property.³⁵ In planning how to consolidate his ownership of the property, it seems that Frederick (or his lawyer) realized that Tom Purdy's 1812 sale of the place to Joseph Nodine had never been recorded, so that was done (fifty-seven years after the fact) on February 13, 1869. He also found that the 1819 purchase from the Partelows had never been recorded, so that was done (fifty years after the fact) on May 1, 1869.

Of the various people listed above in connection with the Nodines' ownership of the house, review of the deeds shows that Tom and Mary Purdy could sign their own names in 1812; Isaac Partelow could and his wife Mary could not in 1819; Ira and Addie Nodine could in 1867 (although she had to make her mark when executing a deed in 1905, thirty-eight years later); and Elizabeth and Coles Carpenter, Mary Washburn, Charity Odell, and Melanchton and Antoinette Hunt could, and Amy and Martha Nodine, Noah Washburn, and William Odell could not in 1869. The passage of fifty-seven years from the Purdys' day in 1812 to Frederick Nodine's heyday in 1869 apparently had no major effect on the general level of literacy in the neighborhood. Note that neither literacy nor illiteracy ran in families: siblings, parents and children, and husbands and wives might all be separated by the ability to sign their own names, or the lack of it.

Meanwhile, things in the neighborhood were rolling along. In July of 1870, a Dr. George C.S. Choate bought a 228-acre estate on the hill now bordered by Pleasantville Road and Choate Avenue. The following year he opened there a private hospital "for nervous and mental diseases." Having a private insane asylum in the neighborhood probably did not make anyone very happy.

In 1871, the new Putnam Division of the New York Central Railroad was developed between the Hudson and Harlem Divisions. Now, residents of the house had three different rail

³⁵ These transactions were recorded on May 1, 1869, at *liber* 715, pages 203, 207, and 209.

lines from which to choose. The Putnam Division had a station in Briarcliff Manor, where the Briarcliff Manor Public Library now stands. The first station was a very small building that looked like a little wood frame house with Victorian gables. In 1880, that station was moved by flatcar from Briarcliff Manor to Millwood, to serve as the Millwood station. The old Briarcliff Manor station was replaced by a much larger and fancier station, paid for by Walter Law, a local millionaire. When it opened in 1880, the new station had wood-paneled walls and oriental carpets on the floor.³⁶

In 1872, Ira and Sarah A. Nodine had a baby girl: Grace Nodine (1872-1927).

On March 25, 1875, Frederick K. Nodine sold a one-half interest in the property to his nephew Ira Nodine (Benjamin's son). The property conveyed was described as follows:³⁷

Beginning on the westerly side of the highway formerly called the Crompond road adjoining the lands of Nathanael Sarles and running westerly along the lands of said Sarles to the lands of Richard Witson deceased thence southerly along the lands of said Witson and the lands of John Washburn and Avery to the lands of Hiram Partlow thence easterly along the lands of said Bartlow [*sic*] and Elija Brundage deceased and Nathanael Sarles to the aforementioned road thence northerly along the westerly side of the aforesaid road to the lands of Nathanael Sarles the point or place of beginning Containing one hundred and thirty five acres be the same more or less of land being the same premises formerly owned and occupied by Joseph Nodine deceased and subject to one half of Four thousand Dollars mortgage on said above described place.

Frederick executed the deed by making his mark, so he was apparently just as illiterate as much of his family.

Fifteen years later, on April 20, 1890, Frederick sold Ira the remaining one-half interest in the property.³⁸ Ira was then fifty-three years old. Frederick Nodine died six years later, on August

³⁶ The Putnam Division (the "Old Putt") closed in 1958. Its old right of way along Route 100 became the North County Trailway, a bicycle path running from the old Eastview station to the old Kitchawan station at the south end of Croton Reservoir. The Briarcliff Manor station is now the Briarcliff Manor Public Library. The Millwood station (which was originally built as the Briarcliff Manor station) is a vacant derelict across the street from the Millwood Garden Center.

³⁷ Recorded on April 1, 1875, at *liber* 893, page 33.

³⁸ Recorded on April 20, 1893, at *liber* 1312, page 298.

4, 1896, at the age of seventy-seven. Like a number of his relatives, he is buried in the Banks Cemetery in Pleasantville.

In 1897 the Village of Pleasantville was incorporated. By that time, the village's commercial center had shifted from the old Clark's Corners area to Pleasantville Station, the area around the railroad tracks, where it still is.

Sometime in the mid-19th Century, the course of the old Crompond Road was smoothed out somewhat, so there would be gentle curves instead of sharp corners, and the new, straighter road was named Hardscrabble Road. Beers' 1867 *Atlas of New York and Vicinity* clearly shows both the old and new roadways. Coming down the old Crompond Road one would have approached our driveway from almost due east, coming towards our house roughly from the direction of the modern house that is now across the street, then turning sharply to the left (south) to continue down towards Pleasantville Road. Straightening the road erased that sharp corner and replaced it with the present curve around our property.

Moving the road created a small isolated parcel of land between the old and new roads, and Ira and his wife, Sarah Addieline Nodine, sold that parcel to Kenneth Hayes Miller and Irma Caroline Miller, his wife, on July 10, 1905.³⁹ The Millers were from Copaigue, Long Island (far from the last Long Islanders to move to Westchester). The parcel was described as follows:

BEGINNING at a point on the easterly side of the new Road known as the Hardscrabble Road, at the southwest corner of the premises about to be described and at the northwest corner of the premises now or late of John Durney; thence easterly along the northerly line of lands now or late of John Durney to the west side of the old Road sometimes known as the Crum Pond Road; thence northerly along the west side of the said old Road to lands now or late of Jeremiah Doody; thence westerly along the lands of said Jeremiah Doody to the easterly side of the said Hardscrabble Road; thence southerly along the easterly side of said Hardscrabble Road to the point or place of beginning. Containing about three (3) acres of land be the same more or less, Being part of the same premises conveyed to Ira Nodine by Frederick K. Nodine, by deed dated April, 20th 1890, and recorded in the Westchester County Register's office in Liber 13112 of deeds page 298, on April 25th 1890.

³⁹ Recorded on July 13, 1905, at *liber* 1713, page 446. The written agreement of sale, dated October 26, 1904, had previously been recorded on December 6, 1904, at *liber* 1695, page 222.

The house is identified as the Nodines' in several maps produced during the second half of the Nineteenth Century. In addition to Beers' 1867 *Atlas of New York and Vicinity*, mentioned above, the house appears with the legend *F & B Nodyne* on an 1851 land ownership map of Mount Pleasant, with the legend *F.K. Nodyne* on an 1858 land ownership map of Mount Pleasant, with the legend *F.K. Nodine 116 a.* on a map of Mount Pleasant estimated to date from the 1870s or 1880s, and with the legend *Nodine Bros. 100 a.* on an 1893 map of Pleasantville (a copy of this last is at the Pleasantville Public Library; the others are in the collections of the New York Public Library and Westchester County Archives). The house is also shown on two different plates in the 1901 *Atlas of Westchester County, New York*. On one plate it is shown with the legend *F.K. Nodine*, while on the other it is shown with the legend *Ira Nodine*. (On both plates it is shown on the east [*i.e.*, wrong] side of Hardscrabble Road.)⁴⁰

THE COMING OF THE DEVELOPERS

As the 19th Century drew to a close, New York City grew explosively and wealthy men with an eye on the future bought up large tracts in rural areas of northern Westchester. One of those men was Walter W. Law, the founder — and at one time sole proprietor — of the Village of Briarcliff Manor. Mr. Law got his wealth as the head of W. & J. Sloan, the now-defunct furniture company. His numerous projects in this area were generally progressive and constructive, but discussing them is beyond the scope of this history. What is significant as far as our house is concerned is that Mr. Law organized and owned the Briarcliff Realty Company.

The Briarcliff Realty Company was the company through which Mr. Law, from the 1890s through the early 20th Century, acquired and held most of the land from the western edge of Pleasantville to the Hudson River, including most of western Mt. Pleasant and Ossining, and including this house and the land on which it sits. His dream was to establish a self-supporting, semi-pastoral community, inhabited by a sturdy and sober yeomanry. He bought his first parcel in the area (232 acres) in 1890, after retiring from W. & J. Sloan. He called that parcel Briarcliff Farms, and it was an actual, working dairy farm, not just a country estate. After buying up about

⁴⁰ Bromley, Geo. W. and Walter S., C.E., *Atlas of Westchester County, New York, from actual surveys & official plans* (Geo. W. Bromley & Co., Philadelphia, 1901), vol II, plates 45 and 49.

five thousand acres in the area, he eventually had his own village incorporated as Briarcliff Manor in 1902.⁴¹ Although Hardscrabble Road is east of the village limits of Briarcliff Manor, Law's Briarcliff Realty Company at one time or another owned most of the property along southern Hardscrabble Road, including this house.

In the spring of 1905, after owning this house for ninety-three years, the Nodine family sold out to the Briarcliff Realty Company. As a preliminary transaction, Ira bought from James O. Nodine and Maryette Nodine, his wife, any right, title, or interest they might have had in the property.⁴² James O. Nodine was Ira's younger brother, listed as James A. Nodine in the 1850 census. A few days later, on May 3, 1905, Ira and his wife, now identified as Sarah *Addie* Nodine, sold the entire family farm to Walter W. Law.⁴³ The property was described as follows in the deed:

ALL that certain lot, piece, parcel or farm of land, situate lying and being on the west side of Hillside Avenue in the Town of MOUNT PLEASANT, County of Westchester and State of New York, bounded on the north by lands now or formerly of Jeremiah Doody; on the east by said Hillside Avenue; on the south by lands now or formerly of Patrick Hogan, and W.J. Brundage, and lands of Walter W. Law; and on the west by lands of Walter W. Law; said premises consisting of One hundred and thirty five (135) acres, be the same more or less; and being all of the property owned by the said parties of the first part on the west side of said Hillside Avenue in the Town of Mount Pleasant aforesaid, , [sic] Subject nevertheless, to a mortgage of Four Thousand (\$4,000.00) Dollars, now a lien upon said premises which said mortgage the party of the second part hereto assumes and agrees to pay as a portion of the purchase money of said premises.

Ira signed the deed. Sarah made her mark. Even though they had sold the family farm, Ira and Sarah kept living here, at least for a couple of months. The 1905 census shows that they were living here on June 1, 1905, along with their twenty-two year old son Edgar Nodine and two

⁴¹ The post office designation for the area had been *Whitson* from 1881 to 1897, after the family that owned land and a house at Whitson Corners, the present intersection of Pleasantville and South State Roads.

⁴² Recorded on April 29, 1905, at *liber* 1705, page 290. The mention of Maryette Nodine in this 1905 deed is strange because, according to Pleasantville cemetery records, James' wife, Marietta Boyce Nodine, had died in 1891: fourteen years earlier. Either the cemetery records are wrong, or James remarried a woman with a remarkably similar name.

⁴³ Recorded on October 4, 1905, at *liber* 1724, page 54.

granddaughters, Hazel (aged thirteen) and Viola Mae Huff (aged eleven), both of whom attended school.

The Nodines' neighbors in 1905 included people like Catharine Riley, Christophe Van Vries, and Oscar and Abbie Washburn (all farmers), George Hazel (a veterinarian), and Ferdinand Jeffries (a physician). The roads in the area were still not paved. Mannville Road, one of the main through streets in Pleasantville, was not paved until 1928.

The following year, 1906, the Nodines sold off a small parcel they still owned on the east side of Hardscrabble Road.⁴⁴ I do not know where Ira and Sarah lived after they sold the family farm. Sarah died on November 23, 1912, at the age of seventy. Ira lived on until November 20, 1924, when he died at the age of eighty-seven. They are buried in the Banks Cemetery in Pleasantville.

After buying up all the land in the area, Walter Law and his Briarcliff Realty Company could write on a clean slate. That is, instead of hundreds of separate family freeholds, Law now owned one huge, homogeneous tract of land that he could cut up and sell any way he saw fit. That is what he did. After Law's great accumulation of land, we no longer find local deeds written in terms of "thence westerly along the lands now or late owned by Nathaniel Sarles," or anything of the kind. The old Partlow land, the Sarles land, the Witson land, "rattle snake hole," and the old Nodine land vanished from the deed *libers* as if they had never been. Instead, the Briarcliff Realty Company cut up the family farms according to its own patchwork map and sold off hundreds of smaller parcels according to real estate market conditions, without reference to the preceding two centuries of local history.

It should therefore come as no surprise that the next time this house was sold, it was as part of a six-acre parcel; a tiny sliver of the old Purdy or Nodine homestead. On September 12, 1919, the Briarcliff Realty Company sold the nearly six-acre property to Katharine [Katherine?]

⁴⁴ Recorded on October 2, 1906, at *liber* 1772, page 187.

Kerr of Wainescott, Long Island.⁴⁵ That parcel included the present house and property, plus additional property to the southwest, in the direction of and somewhat beyond what is now Algonquian Trail, where it bordered other property of the Briarcliff Realty Company.

Miss Kerr moved here at the end of World War I. It was during that war that Flag Hill (formerly called Fox Hill and Sarles Hill) got its name. During the war, someone (whose name is now forgotten) climbed that hill every day and flew a big American flag from its summit. The flag could be seen by people in Pleasantville, on the other side of the ridge. Flag Hill, which had formerly been known as Fox Hill or Sarles Hill, the site of Flag Hill Farm, is the peak of the long ridge west of Pleasantville and east of Hardscrabble Road (*i.e.*, the ridge right across the street from our house, although Flag Hill is about a mile to the north). Flag Hill is now contained within Flag Hill Farm, up the road from our house.

On June 23, 1924, Katherine Kerr sold her property to her friend Emma Cooper.⁴⁶

On September 2, 1924, the Briarcliff Realty Company sold an adjoining parcel of 8.5015 acres to Emma Clare Cooper of Mt. Pleasant, New York.⁴⁷ That parcel included land north and west of the house, in the direction of and somewhat beyond what is today Sloehiddon Road, where it adjoined property owned by one Bevan Jones.

The New York State census for the Town of Mount Pleasant as of June 1, 1925, shows three residents in the house. All three were born in the U.S. and were American citizens. The head of the household was Katherine Kerr, a white, forty-year-old woman whose listed occupation was "Farmer." Also living here was Emma C[lare] Cooper, a white, forty-four-year-old woman, whose occupation was "Farmer (partner)." Last, Editha Hopkins, a fifty-year-old black woman, lived in the house as a domestic servant. The three women were not related to one another. The census form has a heading for the "Class" of each resident. The class of Katherine

45 Recorded on September 16, 1919, at *liber* 2214, page 42.

46 Recorded on June 30, 1924, at *liber* 2509, page 168. Even as late as 1988, when we bought the house, it was still sometimes referred to in the neighborhood as "Miss Cooper's house."

47 Recorded on September 4, 1924, at *liber* 2519, page 311.

Kerr and Emma Cooper was “OA,” that of Editha Hopkins was “W.” I do not know what those letters designated.

On May 5, 1926, Emma Clare Cooper transferred the land and other assets in trust to the Bank of New York and Trust Company (later the Bank of New York), retaining a life estate and substantial measure of control over the property for herself.⁴⁸ The trust indenture instructed the Bank, in the event of Miss Cooper’s death, to sell the property and give the proceeds to the child or children (or other issue) of John Kerr, then of St. James, Long Island, or, if there be no such issue, to John Kerr and his sister, Marian M. Kerr, or their estates.

By 1933, Berger’s Hardware store in Hawthorne was already in business and had ads in local newspapers and on the backs of street maps. It is still going strong and is generally regarded as the best hardware store in Westchester County.

In 1935, one of our neighbors to the north was Richard Lederer, who owned Hardscrabble Farm. In that year, he dammed a small stream on his property, forming Hardscrabble Lake. It was in a cabin on the shore of Hardscrabble Lake a few years later that Dashiell Hammet lived for a while with Lillian Hellman and wrote some of his stories. Mr. Lederer’s son, Richard Lederer, Jr., later wrote *The Place Names of Westchester County, New York* (Harbor Hill Books, Harrison, New York, 1978), in which he mentions how the lake was created when he was a boy.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Recorded on May 13, 1926, at *liber* 2667, page 70.

⁴⁹ On January 11, 2006, I received an e-mail from Mr. Don Vining, who grew up in this neighborhood. His recollection is different:

I came across your ‘The House on Hardscrabble Road’ while searching for information on Lillian Hellman. I believe there’s a small inaccuracy with reference to the cabin on the shore of Hardscrabble Lake where Lillian and Dashiell were alleged to have lived. I remember that cabin well, having moved to Hardscrabble Farm (600 Hardscrabble Road) in 1953 when I was nine years old. My mother rented a small cottage on the main property then owned by Phillip Mygatt. The cabin was an unheated prefab affair, probably used for entertainment. Unfortunately within a few years it was completely demolished by vandals. In any case, Hellman lived in what we referred to as “the big house” which is still there, about a half mile from the lake.

Several years ago I visited the area and was completely blown away by the Hardscrabble Lake development. As a child I knew every inch of the over grown woods (approximately 300 acres) that surrounded that lake. We used to swim in the lake in the summer, skate on it in the winter, cut our own
(footnote continued on next page)

Miss Cooper was still living in our house in 1938, because she is listed on Hardscrabble Road in that year's Pleasantville telephone directory (*The Phon-O-Log of Pleasantville, New York, July, 1938*). Her telephone number was 39. Not too hard to remember, eh? Miss Cooper must have had one of the first telephones in the area.

In 1942, during World War II, Phil Farrow opened a Mobil station on Manville Road. He still owned it when he died, in 2000. Mrs. Farrow runs it now.

Miss Cooper must have died before December 14, 1962, because on that day the Bank of New York (as Trustee for Emma Clare Cooper under a deed of trust made by her on May 5, 1926) sold both of Miss Cooper's adjoining parcels of property — a total of about 14.5015 acres — to Fels and Helen Hecht of Mount Kisco, New York, for forty thousand dollars.⁵⁰ The Hechts bought the property for speculation. The following year, they proposed subdividing the property and got approval from the Town of Mount Pleasant to create a subdivision called Cedarbrook. The subdivision plan was prepared by surveyor Harold F. Campbell of Chappaqua. Our house is shown as Lot No. 1 on the subdivision plan.⁵¹ The plan also shows two small barns about where Wayne and Janet Byers' house now stands. The only other house shown on the property is the old brown shingled house now on the north side of Sloehiddon Road (although that street did not then exist), just before what is now the turnaround at the end of Sloehiddon.

The 1963 Hecht subdivision plan indicates the Briarcliff Realty Company property that had been off to the west of what is now Algonquian trail was owned by someone named Stein in 1963. The property owner to the north of the house (*i.e.*, the owner of the property beginning one lot north of what is now Sloehiddon Road) is shown as someone named Jones [Bevan, or one of his descendants?] on the 1963 subdivision plan.

Christmas trees out of the pine forest (now gone), and picked asparagus and raspberries from the surrounding fields, but try as might, the only landmark I could find was the lake itself.

⁵⁰ Deed recorded at *liber* 6266, page 286, on December 26, 1962.

⁵¹ The plan was filed in the County Archives on July 17, 1963, as Map No. 13737 and in the Town Clerk's Office in the file for Cedarbrook.

On July 17, 1963, the Town of Mt. Pleasant Building Department issued Building Permit 4015 for alterations to the interior of our house, described as a one-family dwelling on Hardscrabble Road. The work was eventually completed as planned and the Town issued certificate of occupancy No. 2409 on August 4, 1964.

On November 26, 1963, the Town of Mt. Pleasant issued building permit No. 63-387 to add a two-car carport, which is now the closed shed in the back yard. The carport was converted into a closed shed in the early 1980s.

During 1963-65, the Hechts sold off a number of parcels from the property. Finally, on May 3, 1965, the Hechts sold the house and its now much-diminished 1.17-acre property to Peter E. and Jean C. McGregor.⁵²

On August 17, 1967, the McGregors sold the house to Dr. Marvin and Muriel C. Maduro Gersh.⁵³ Dr. Gersh was on the staff of Phelps Memorial Hospital. The Gershes later moved to New Jersey. Mrs. Gersh died of pancreatic cancer at Phelps Memorial Hospital in 1992. The Gershes' daughter grew up to be a lawyer; their son a travel agent. They were visiting their mother in the hospital and drove into our driveway in the summer of 1992, so we gave them a quick tour of their old house. The son told me he had once researched the history of the house and learned the original structure dated from 1732 (the year George Washington was born). As of this writing, I do not know how he took his research back that far, because Underhill Lynch and 1760 are as far back as I have been able to go.

On February 14, 1980, the Gershes sold the house to Dudley Livingston Miller, Jr., and Patricia O'Donohue Miller, for \$170,500.⁵⁴ The Millers bore two children while living in the house — a boy and a girl — and had a dog. Mr. Miller went (understandably) by the name Liv or Livy, rather than Dud or Dudley. He was an executive at an advertising agency in Manhattan.

⁵² Recorded on June 7, 1965, at *liber* 6511, page 228.

⁵³ Recorded on August 25, 1967, at *liber* 6727, page 674. The Ossining Bank for Saving apparently had a mortgage on the property, because it got involved in the transaction and its filing is at *liber* 7102, page 51.

⁵⁴ Recorded on March 11, 1980, at *liber* 7621, page 654.

Mrs. Miller was very interested in landscape design and gardening and had some formal instruction in that area. It was the Millers who took down the center section of the stone wall that used to run through the middle of the back yard, cleared the far portion of the back yard (the end near Sloehiddon Road), built the patio, and closed in the front of the formerly open carport.

On June 1, 1988, Dudley Livingston and Patricia O'Donohue Miller sold the house to Thomas M. and Sharon M. Bower of Ardsley, New York.⁵⁵ Between then and the date of this writing in 1992, Tom and Sharon put in a new hot water heater, new septic field, and new oil burner, renovated the dining room, stripped and painted the exterior of the house, replaced several rotten leaders and gutters, replaced the rotten shutters, painted two of the bedrooms, and laid a new gravel driveway.

OLD HOUSE CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES IN THE HOUSE ON HARDSCRABBLE ROAD

Determining an old house's architectural style is often not a simple task. Very few American houses exhibit a single pure architectural style. Very few were designed and built in their entirety at one time or with any unified architectural concept. Rather, they just grew over the years, in accordance with the needs and finances of their owners, available materials, and capabilities of local builders. In addition, American architects and builders have always freely borrowed architectural features from a variety of other nations and styles.

Our house was clearly built in at least two stages. The front part of the house, including the living room, dining room, center halls, master bedroom, and two west bedrooms, were complete before the mid-19th Century. The rearward extension of the house, including the kitchen and rear bedroom, were added in about the 1960s. It is possible that the older part of the house was also built in stages, but that cannot be established without substantial demolition work.

It is important to recall that, until the great suburban migration after World War II, this was always a simple farmhouse, inhabited by dirt farmers. Its construction and decoration were therefore simple, traditional, and cheap, rather than fashionable. It should also be borne in mind

that the house was extensively renovated or restored at least once in this century alone, and God knows how many times during the 18th and 19th Centuries. Such efforts always cloud the historical picture.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE⁵⁶

Beginning our examination of the house on the outside, the house's external appearance is most reminiscent of the Federal Style, also often called the Adam Style (named after two English architect brothers who popularized it), with many features of the Early Georgian Style.

The Early Georgian house style, popular from about 1720 to about 1760, was characterized by:

- ☞ Symmetrical design based on Roman classicism. For example, Georgian houses typically had two end-chimneys, instead of the single center chimney found in Colonial houses. That kind of symmetry is present in our house, although the two chimneys are different: the one in the living room is of brick, the one in the dining room of stone. It is possible that the two chimneys date from different eras, or that the stone chimney at the dining room end is a later reconstruction of an earlier brick chimney (done at the time of the last major renovation in the 1960s).
- ☞ Compared to the earlier Colonial, Saltbox, and Cape Cod styles, which sat on very low foundations (sometimes little more than sills), Early Georgian houses were set on relatively high foundations, with emphasis on an entrance bay in the middle of the house. This feature is present in our house.
- ☞ A wide paneled door would often have a row of rectangular lights (panes of glass) in the door itself, or a transom light above. Our house has no in-door lights or transom, but is flanked by two tiers of sidelights.
- ☞ Columns or pilasters frequently framed the door, with a pediment above. Our main entry is framed by a pedimented porch with columns.

55 Recorded on June 6, 1988, at *liber* 12297, page 117, and *liber* 9206, page 317.

56 The following discussion of old house styles and construction techniques is taken from Evers, C., *THE OLD HOUSE DOCTOR* (The Overlook Press, Woostock, New York)(1986).

- ☞ Plain Colonial eaves were replaced by a cornice, often with classical features such as dentils. The old part of our house has a cornice with dentils.
- ☞ When dormers were present, they had triangular pediments and were spaced symmetrically. This feature is present in our house.
- ☞ Roofs were usually pitched, although sometimes hipped. Ours is pitched.
- ☞ Such houses were typically executed in brick or wood. Ours is in wood.

The Late Georgian style, popular from about 1760 to about 1780, added heavy use of classical details to the basic features of the Early Georgian: *e.g.*, Palladian windows, cornices on window caps, lavish use of columns and pilasters, corners with simulated quoins on wooden houses, and so forth. Our house shows no such influence.

The Federal or Adam style was popular from about 1780 to about 1820. After the Revolution, house designers rejected much of the classical decoration of the Late Georgian (which was thought too English and insufficiently republican), but retained its basic Roman symmetry. The result is often very hard to distinguish from Early Georgian. The Federal style is characterized by the following features:

- ☞ Doorways retained pilasters and columns, usually with a flat entablature. Many, like ours, had a small entrance porch, treated as a small portico. Ours has a pedimented entry porch.
- ☞ Elliptical fanlights over the doors were popular, as were sidelights. Our entry has no fanlight, but does have flanking sidelights.
- ☞ Frames around windows were simple and corners were unmarked by quoins or pilasters. That is the case in our house.
- ☞ Hipped roofs became somewhat more common, sometimes rimmed by a balustrade. Ours is pitched, with no balustrade.
- ☞ Flat boarding was sometimes used on the exterior for a more classical effect. Most of our house now has molded shiplap clapboards, also called *novelty siding*, that probably dates from the early 1900s. We cannot tell how it used to be covered.

We therefore see that our house combines features of the Early Georgian and Federal styles.

TIMBER FRAME CONSTRUCTION

The older part of our house is built with braced frame or timber frame construction, rather than balloon framing. The framing is most visible in the living room and attic, where most of the timbers are hand-hewn (although some are sawed). This construction technique originated in the English colonists' penchant for homes framed with heavy oak beams.

The timbers used in the construction of a braced frame house were invariably *hewn* (*i.e.*, squared with an ax) from large logs held up off the ground on wooden blocks. Because hauling heavy timbers would have been very expensive, and because the state of the local roads probably made such heavy hauling impossible, the logs used to make beams were almost certainly taken from trees cut on the building site. The logs were held onto the blocks with strong metal hook-like devices called *hewing dogs*. After chalk lines were snapped along each long side of the log, a *joiner* (carpenter) would walk astride the log from end to end, making diagonal cuts to and perhaps a little past the chalk lines with an ax. The joiner then used another tool called a *broad ax* — a tool with a short bent handle and a very wide single-beveled blade — to slice off the previously scored sections of the log. When he had hewn to the two chalk lines, the log would be rotated ninety degrees and a new line would be struck, which would be hewn the same way. One side of the log was often left unhewn (*i.e.*, rounded and rough) and would become the underside of a horizontal beam. No flooring or roofing would rest on that side and it would not be visible once the walls or ceiling had been plastered. Such rough surfaces can be seen in a number of rafters in our attic.⁵⁷

The result of all that skilled work would be the hand-hewn timbers to be seen in many early houses and barns, characterized by the shallow diagonal slashes made by the ax in the first stage of hewing.⁵⁸ All the main timbers visible in our living room and attic, plus all the ceiling

⁵⁷ In fact, there are some rafters in our attic that are completely *unhewn*: they just had the bark stripped off them and were then used to hold up the roof. Our attic also contains at least one *unbarked* timber, used as a nailer for a plaster wall.

⁵⁸ It is a common misconception that beams were hewn with another tool called an *adze*. Actually, a joiner would use an adze only occasionally, to smooth beams that had already been hewn.

joists in the front two-thirds of the living room, were hand-hewn on this site, from trees that grew right here and were cut down hundreds of years ago to build this house.

After all the timbers for the frame of a house had been hewn, they would be cut to exact length and marked for the mortise-and-tenon joints that would soon lock them together. The mortise-and-tenon joint has been in use for thousands of years because it is an extremely strong and durable way of joining two pieces of wood. Each one consists of a hole (called a *mortise*) in one timber, into which a corresponding protrusion on another timber's end (a *tenon*) is inserted. The tenon is often fastened into the mortise by a wooden peg, called a *treenail* (often pronounced *trunnel*), inserted into a hole bored through the joint. Mortises, tenons, and treenails were all meticulously and laboriously cut by hand at the building site, by skilled workmen using augurs, drills, mallets, and chisels. Numerous mortise-and-tenon joints and treenails are visible in our living room and attic.

The first step in putting the frame together was to lay the heavy *sills*, or bottommost horizontal timbers, on the foundation, with their ends mortised and tenoned together. A pair of vertical timbers, or *posts*, would next be joined by a single transverse member known as a *girt*, forming the configuration of the letter H, known as a *bent*. This unit was then raised into an erect position by a number of people manning long poles and blocks and tackle. (It was not uncommon for neighbors and friends to show up for a large house or barn raising.)

That procedure was then repeated for as many bents (at least four) as it took to complete the frame. After they were all erected and temporarily held in place, the topmost horizontal timbers, or plates, were lowered onto the tenons that had been fashioned on the tops of the posts. As that was being accomplished, diagonal bracers running from post to plate were inserted into their respective mortises. Once the plates were pinned to the posts, the *rafters* (roof timbers) were raised and floor joists (often just rough logs with their top surfaces hewn) were laid, completing the skeleton of the structure. Small-dimensioned *studs* were used as nailers for inner

and outer wall surfaces between posts, but as these were not structural they were not really part of the skeleton.⁵⁹

The braced frame was extremely strong and durable, but required much time and skill to make and imposed severe restrictions on the form of the building it supported. It was nevertheless more practical until about 1825 to hew large timbers at the building site, than to transport them to and from a distant and rudimentary sawmill, using a slow and inefficient up-and-down saw. There was a sawmill in what is now Pleasantville at the end of the 18th Century, but even that was too far for a private individual to pay to drag numerous large timbers, some of which might weigh as much as a ton.

Beginning in about 1825, the speed and capacity of sawmills using the newly invented circular saw increased dramatically. Large amounts of accurately cut lumber and small timber then became available at affordable prices, opening the door to revolutionary new types of construction, such as balloon framing. That sounded the death knell of braced timber framing. Although barns and outbuildings were often built in the old manner as late as the early 1900s, the balloon frame was used in almost all residential construction after about 1850.

In the rear one-third of our living room, several (but not all) of the ceiling joists are flat-sawn timbers, not hand-hewn. Flat-sawn timbers were sawn with an up-and-down saw, either in a nearby sawmill or an on-site saw pit. Flat-sawn timbers were used in residential construction from about 1700 through 1850 (although they became much less common after 1825). It therefore appears that some of the early hand-hewn joists holding up the upstairs floor in that area had to be replaced sometime after the initial construction of the house, but before 1850, and that flat-sawn timbers were used as the replacement timbers.

NAILS AND SCREWS

The nails in the old parts of the house can give further clues about the house's age. Until about 1800, nails in America were all wrought nails. That is, they were shaped and forged by

⁵⁹ Studs did not become part of the structural skeleton until the advent of *balloon* framing in about 1825. They remain part of the structural skeleton of houses built with so-called *Western*, or *platform*, framing in use today.

hand, one at a time, by a blacksmith. They were therefore very expensive. Wrought nails are irregularly shaped, with bent rectangular shafts and irregular mushroom-shaped heads. In about 1800, most newly made nails became “cut” nails. Cut nails are more regularly shaped than wrought nails, although still rough-looking by modern standards, with square or rectangular shafts (instead of the nice round shafts of modern wire nails). Cut nails were at first made with wrought heads, but machines for making nail heads became commonplace by about 1825, so cut nails thereafter had flat machine-made heads. Cut nails with machine-made heads look something like modern cement nails. Modern wire nails, cut by machine from long steel wires, came into use in about 1850. By about 1900, they had completely replaced cut nails.

It is difficult to see what kinds of nails are used inside the old plaster walls of the house without doing some demolition work. The only places where the nails are readily visible are in the old floors, such as in the living room, where some of them are loose and can be removed pretty easily. In pulling some loose nails from the living room floor, I have found some cut nails with wrought heads and some cut nails with machine-made heads, but none that look to me like wrought nails. There might be some wrought nails, but I just haven't found any. The presence of cut nails with wrought heads suggests that the floorboards were nailed with them in the first quarter of the 19th Century.

In redecorating the dining room in 1989, I found a number of pointless (as opposed to pointed) screws, particularly in the door butts (or hinges). Pointless screws look just like modern woodscrews that have had their points snapped off. Pointless screws were made that way because the machinery to make fine screwpoints was not available until about 1850, after which time pointed screws were used almost exclusively. The presence of pointless screws indicates they were installed before 1850.

WIDE PLANK PINE FLOORS

One of the most visible signs of the house's age is its wide plank pine flooring. The earliest floors were formed of single layers of hand-planed wide pine boards, sometimes joined together with splines, which are thin strips of wood fitted into grooves in the edges of the floorboards. That kind of flooring is visible in the living room, in which the ceiling is nothing

more than the underside of the upstairs floorboards (*i.e.*, there is no separate ceiling or subfloor). Early floorboards were often tapered, following the general lines of a tapered log. Antique wide pine floorboards are very difficult to find today. As handsome as old pine floors can be, they are very soft and show signs of wear quickly. That was a major factor in the quick popularity of hardwood flooring that was introduced in the second half of the 19th Century.

SAWN WOOD LATH

The walls in the old parts of our house are all made of plaster. Except in the attic, it is impossible to tell how the plaster was applied without doing demolition work. In the attic, however, the inside of one plaster wall is visible at the top of the attic stairs, on the right. The lath used in that wall was circular-sawn wood lath, which was in general use from about 1825 to about 1885. Before 1825, most lath was *riven* wood lath, made by alternately splitting a board from each of its ends and then pulling it apart like an accordion. Accordion lath was used until sawn lath from the new circular saw mills became widely available. In the late 19th Century, wire lath and rock lath came into use and are still used today, although plastering itself is now seldom used in residential construction.

DOOR HARDWARE

The hardware on some small doors on our house (*e.g.*, the cubbyholes next to the living room fireplace) include wrought iron “H&HL” hinges, with cast iron butts (which most people call hinges) on the dining room doors. Wrought iron H&HL hinges were in use from the earliest Colonial days through about 1800. Cast iron butt hinges came into use in the late 1700s and went out of favor in about 1900. There are also Suffolk latches (used about 1750-1825) and Blake latches (used about 1840-1925) on closet and attic doors.

It is dangerous to attach too much importance to the house’s door hardware, however, because reproduction antique hardware is readily available from many sources and might have been installed by a relatively recent owner who wanted to use authentic-looking hardware. For example, although the upstairs closets have door latches that seem to date from the 1700s, we know they do not, because (1) there were no closets in American homes in the 1700s (clothes were kept in large chests of drawers called *clothes presses*, not hanging in closets) and (2) close

examination of these particular closets shows they were installed in very recent times; probably in the 1960s.

BUILT-IN COOKING IMPLEMENTS

Another unusual old house feature present in our house is the built-in cooking implements in the living room fireplace. These consist of a swinging metal arm, built into the rear wall of the fireplace, that swings out over the fire. In early days a cook would hang various pots and cooking vessels from the arm, and today an old black kettle hangs from it.

WINDOWS

Except in the attic, the windows in the house are all 6-over-6 sash windows; *i.e.*, they consist of two sashes, each containing six separate panes of glass, each of which is called a *light*. In the old part of the house, they are top-sash-fixed windows, which means the bottom sash can be moved up and down, but the top sash can not be moved at all. When the bottom sash is raised, it has to be held open with a little stick or a peg stuck into the window frame. This suggests these windows were installed between 1800 and 1850.

In the earliest Colonial days (*i.e.*, the early 1600s), ordinary farmhouses often either had no windows or the windows were just openings with no glass in them. Glass was then difficult and expensive to make and to transport over long distances, so the earliest windows were sometimes just openings, or else were covered with oiled paper. They were then protected with heavy wooden shutters. Even after glass-making became established in the New World, it was not known how to make the large panes of glass we take for granted today, so glass windows were made up of many smaller pieces of glass, each of which was called a *light*, separated by lead strips called *calms* (pronounced *comes*). In about 1700, the use of lead comes was discontinued in ordinary residential construction and new house windows were instead made of lights separated by wooden strips called *muntins*. At that time, the state of glassmaking was such that a fair-sized window sash was made up of no less than twelve lights. A normal window, consisting of two sashes (one above the other), would have a total of twenty-four lights. Such windows are commonly referred to as “12-over-12,” meaning twelve lights in the upper sash and twelve in the lower.

Colonial authorities taxed windows heavily, with the amount of the tax depending on the number of lights in the homeowner's windows. There was therefore a lot of incentive to find ways to make larger windowpanes, which would allow windows to be made of fewer lights, and therefore allow the homeowner to pay lower taxes. As the years went by, the state of glass-making progressed and the 12-over-12 window became the 12-over-8, then the 9-over-6, and so forth. Six-over-six top sash fixed windows were installed in American houses from about 1800 to 1850. The 6-over-6 window was extremely popular throughout the 19th Century and is still made in limited quantities. The modern double-hung window, in which both the top and bottom sashes can be moved, came into general use in about 1850.

DOORS

The earliest doors in this country were *batten* doors, made of vertical boards held together and reinforced by pairs of horizontal wooden cleats or battens. The primitive batten door was easy to make, but tended to admit drafts and changed size substantially as the weather got more and less humid over the course of the year. A batten door might change width by as much as ½" between January and August, and therefore seldom fit well. The batten door was therefore eventually replaced by the panel door.

The panel door made its appearance in this country in about 1700. The panel door was (and still is) made of a mortised and tenoned wooden frame consisting of members running vertically (stiles) and horizontally (rails). The rails and stiles enclose a number of separate wooden panels that *float* inside the frame; *i.e.*, they are not nailed or glued to the frame, but are loosely held in it so they do not fall out of the door). The wooden panels are free to expand and contract with changes in humidity, without affecting the outer dimensions of the door. A few details of panel door construction have changed over the years, particularly with respect to the use of moldings and the way in which panels are held in the wooden frame. The really old doors in our house (*i.e.*, the front door and the two dining room doors) have panels that are slightly recessed or flush with their frames and are secured with strips of machine-made molding nailed to the stiles and rails. That suggests they were made sometime after 1835.

Otherwise, wooden panel doors are made pretty much the same way today as they were in the 1700s, but a few things indicate that these particular doors were built a long time ago: their apparent degree of wear (very heavily worn), the crudity of their construction (pretty crude; the dining room doors in particular were made of very rough, unfinished wood), and the types of hardware (Blake latches and rimlocks), nails (cut), and screws (pointless). All those elements strongly suggest that the older doors in the house were probably made and installed between 1835 and 1850.