

Connecting with Historical Connecticut



CONNECTICUT TAVERN

CASE STUDY: August 2013

An 1812 Tavern Restoration: 30 years in the Making

Ashford, Connecticut is home to a very special 5-acre parcel of land. Originally part of a larger 60-acre estate, the property contains a house once used for 19th Century summer parties. Playing horseshoes and enjoying family gatherings were popular pastimes, proven by antiques, historical documents and photos found on site. From 1929 -1979, the home stood vacant, boarded up and quite forgotten, likely to avoid inheritance taxes. As the years passed, sheep were raised on the surrounding land. It seemed inevitable that the home was destined to eventually fall prey to a bulldozer.

In 1979, fate intervened. Two aspiring young homeowners, husband and wife, happened upon the vacant 3,400 square foot home and decided to take the plunge into the real estate market. They both recall promising each other that their beloved project would be, at most, a 5-year endeavor. It had to be so because both homeowners were working full time and could only labor on the home's restoration at night. Much time also needed to be dedicated to historical home research, and they were absolutely determined to do things the right way. Cheap, modern, substitute materials were

simply unacceptable. In this vein, "...wood was the only choice" for the property's roof, and the Alaskan Yellow Cedar specifications called for **Certi-Sawn® Premium Grade 18" x 5/8" tapersawn shakes**.

A Restoration Challenge

Today the homeowners look back on their 30-year restoration project and smile, saying that when they began to restore the home, they, "...fortunately didn't know what they were getting into." They knew they had a gem on their hands, a wonderful piece of history that they could preserve. What was unknown



Exterior of home

were the sheer amounts of work, research and painstaking attention to detail that their labor of love would require.

In 2013, they tackled the roof, one of the crowning touches to their home's restoration. Research indicated that the home originally had a wood roof. A word of mouth recommendation for **Cedar Shake and Shingle Bureau Northeast District Manager Tony Bonura** resulted in a series of telephone conversations and site visits allowing for ample discussion. The homeowner chose **Alaskan Yellow Cedar** due to its unique properties of strength, natural durability and weather resistance. The homeowners noted hardly any roofing product waste at all and stated it was a pleasure to have such fine materials at their job site. Quality materials make it easier to complete a quality installation. **Cedar Shake and Shingle Bureau** manufacturer member **G & R Cedar Ltd.** produced these **Certi-Sawn®** tapersawn shakes, and they were distributed by **Liberty Cedar, Cedar Shake and Shingle Bureau Affiliate Member** of West Kingston, Rhode Island.

Dan Daggett of DcD Construction, based in Chaplin, CT, was the roofing contractor for the job. **Daggett** is proud to continue his family tradition and is a second generation business owner. A 3-man crew was used for the tear-off portion and 2-3 crew members were on site for the actual installation component. Care was taken to carefully tarp the herb garden and to double-tarp the sides of the home to protect the original windows.



Certi-label™ products on site

Copper flashing was used, as well as a rake edge design specifically crafted for this historical home. The old stone trough gutters were retained, mainly because their performance has proven superior to those currently being sold on the market! With all these details and pieces of history involved, it is no surprise that homeowners report numerous people stopping by during the roofing process to comment.

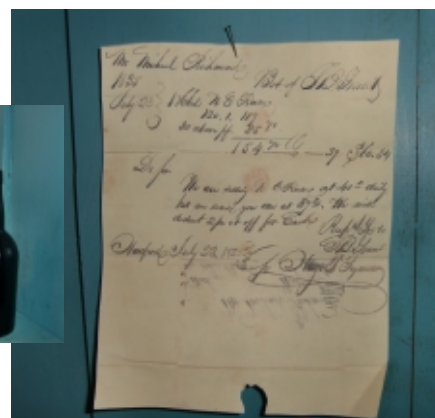
What the Records Reveal

Archival research shows that in January, 1802, the property changed owners, and in 1812, the town paid damages to the owner for putting the Hartford-to Providence-toll road through the property. Cupboard scars and wallpaper marks led to the discovery of a

bar, from which spirits were served to weary travellers. Two counter window-bars were found in the attic and the basement, and matched back to their original place when paint was stripped off the floor. Further evidence that this home once served as a tavern is seen in an original, beautifully scripted invoice for the purchase of rum; the tavern establishment met its end about 1840, when the town passed temperance ordinances.



Antique bar bottles



Liquor purchase tally

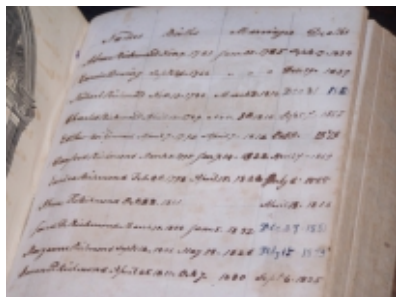


A former tavern seating area



Antique sideboard

Two family bibles are on site. One was found in a trunk and given to the owners, the other at a local antique show. The find from the antique show attended by the homeowners is quite serendipitous.



Family bible entries

The bible is a large, leather bound tome, purchased as a decoration. Since the owners buy and sell antiques, it was also believed that this could be a good resale item. The owners got around

to perusing the contents a mere ten years later... they report shivers running up their spines when they turned the pages and discovered their own home's history, dating back to 1761, within the volume.

Restoring History As Accurately As Possible

The home has been restored to its original colors. Local paint and textile experts have given sound advice. More ideas have been provided by the house itself; for example, the inside of a cupboard, completely shielded from sunlight, provided the 'red lead' bright paint color (today called "salmon") used in the original décor. A total of nine fireplaces have been uncovered, a remarkable feature not seen in many homes today. It is truly amazing how so many interior elements were simply covered up, ready to be rediscovered, as opposed to being irreparably damaged.

When the homeowners first purchased the home, it had one 1920s-era bathroom. There was no central heating and the pipes had cracked over time due to cold weather and lack of use. Frost would form on the interior of windowpanes and after coming home



Antiques on display



Larder with antique pewter plates



Restored bedroom



Sunlit parlor

from work in 1979, the homeowners stoked the wood stove to heat the room. Today, the home boasts new plumbing and wiring, yet all done in a manner sympathetic to the home's original character. Various antiques are on display throughout the home, many placed as per the head of household's inventory list from the early 19th Century. Everything has its place out of necessity, likely because one census record shows a total of 14 people occupying the house!



Rediscovered portrait of a former owner

Artifacts Help Complete an Historical Puzzle

Likely the most wonderful part of this home is its ties to the past. Every year seems to bring another



Intricate stencils uncovered during restoration work

discovery, be it an artifact, letter or interior design component that reveals itself as work continues. Imagine removing layers of old paint and wallpaper to discover the talent of a stencil artist hidden underneath. Once the calcimine, akin to a light coating of plaster, was removed from a bedchamber wall, a tiny area of original stencil peeked out. Ann Eckert Brown is a friend of the couple and an expert

in this subject area. One look at the bare stencil array and she identified the artist as Jay Gleeson, who worked back in the early 19th Century. Letters written to the original owners also left records of having received yarn sent to the house for weaving into fine cloth called shirting.



A resident of the 5-acre property

Another fascinating find was the fire board, formerly used to block up the fireplace in warmer weather so birds wouldn't find their way inside the house. The homeowners found this board nailed to another, up in the attic. When they peeled back the wallpaper covering the two pieces of wood, they discovered a portrait of one of the original owners. This portrait now proudly hangs on a prominent wall. The attic also contains a small room that appears to have been used by a young apprentice from the Ashford Shoe Factory; his graffiti is still on the walls.

Excavating the privy is on the to do list. While it might seem like a bit of an unpleasant task, 90 years of composting have done the job. Shards of glass have already been found in the south herb garden, and who knows what might be found in the privy itself. The second owner of the house was a reputed glass factory owner in the 1850s and one would assume some of his factory's handiwork was brought home for use. Other historical privy sites have turned up jewellery and ladies' hair combs... this is another mystery waiting to be solved.



The finished Certi-Sawn® roof



*Humble beginnings of an historic legacy
Photo supplied by Richmond House Antiques*

Conclusion

Ashford itself is a small village, about 1.5 miles from Yale University Forestry School's 3-4,000 acre research lands. To the north lies a huge state forest. The home is in a lovely location, peaceful and well connected to a bevy of locals who appreciate its history. Ashford's residents constantly look for antiques and documents related to the old tavern and many have been most kind in sharing their discoveries. It seems as though there is a dedicated team eager to piece together the entire history of the house. Most importantly, the home's restoration has kept the architecture pure. Every floor board is the same, and thankfully none of the prior owners altered the original floor plans. Tradition continues with a new **Certi-Sawn® cedar shake roof** and above all else, respect for a brilliant past with a bright future. The tavern has survived temperance and time... and, thanks to some dedicated homeowners, is now ready for the next few centuries.



Written by:

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All Photos by (except where otherwise marked):

Tony Bonura is the CSSB's District Manager, Northeast. He has over 40 years sales and marketing experience in the forest products industry and shares his immense knowledge with a wide range of marketplace participants. Bonura is the Past Chairman of the Joint Forest Products/Coatings Committee, headquartered at the Forest Product Laboratory in Madison, WI. He resides in New York State.



Do you have a Certi-label™ project that qualifies for a case study article?
Email Lynne Christensen, Director of Operations, with more details. While we can't promise to profile every project brought to our attention... we do try our absolute best!