REPORT ON THE FRENCH-TAYLOR HOUSE
970 WHITTIER HIGHWAY
MOULTONBOROUGH, NEW HAMPSHIRE
JUNE 12, 2017

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY     HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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FARRINGTON HOUSE

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James E. French House, North and West (Front) Elevations
Photograph by Cristina M. Ashjian, 2015
Summary: This report is based on a brief inspection of the James E. French or French-Taylor House on May 29, 2017. The purpose of the inspection was to observe and identify the character-defining features of the dwelling, to begin to determine its architectural evolution, and to prepare an Individual Inventory Form on the house to permit the property to be evaluated for eligibility for the National and New Hampshire State Registers of Historic Places. This report is also intended as a basic evaluation of the house to provide a context for future assessments of the structural condition of the property and its potential adaptation for future uses within the community.
**General description and context:** The French-Taylor House is a framed dwelling standing at 970 Whittier Highway in Moultonborough. The façade of the house faces northwest; for the purpose of describing the building, the façade will be considered to face west. The house is oriented with its western gable end facing the highway and treated as the façade, making the building a representative example of a broad-gabled Greek Revival dwelling, enlarged and remodeled circa 1900 as described below. The building is 2½ stories tall, and measures about 36'-5" in width and about 30'-9" in depth. The façade has symmetrical five-bay fenestration on the first story with a central front doorway, three windows on the second story, and two in the attic, all arranged symmetrically. Most sashes have been replaced, reportedly in the mid-1970s; where older sashes survive, they are 2-over-1 units dating from around 1900. A few transom-like nineteenth-century sashes survive in the unusually long basement window openings of the house.

The walls of the house were clad in vinyl shingles over the clapboards in the 1960s, but the exterior retains wide corner boards and paired eaves brackets, all dating from circa 1900. A 14-by-27-foot one-story screened porch of circa 1900 extends along the full length of the northern side of the house and connects to a secondary entrance door in a projecting corner of the wing.

Attached to the rear of the house at its northeast corner is a two-story gable-roofed wing measuring about 18'-5" in width and 28'-8" in length and providing kitchen, bathroom, and bedchamber spaces. The north wall of the wing projects about 3'-6" beyond the northern wall of the main house, providing a secondary entrance that opens directly into the wing from the northern screened porch. Beyond the eastern end of the wing is a small gable-roofed barn or stable measuring about 26 by 30 feet, with its ridge oriented at right angles to those of the house and wing. Attached perpendicularly to the southeastern corner of the barn is a gable-roofed extension built of circular-sawn lumber circa 1900 to provide three horse stalls and an adjacent tack room. The extension measures about 20 feet in length and 16'-5" in width.

A stereograph (page 3) made in the 1870s or 1880s by photographers Tebbetts and Lindsay of Laconia, N. H., portrays the house as a 1½ story broad-gabled dwelling with a deep classical entablature above the first-story windows, a one-story wing connecting the house to the barn, and a one-story open porch in place of the current screened porch. Evidence within the house, described below, indicates that the house was enlarged around 1900 by lifting the roof structure and adding a new second story to both the main house and the wing. Physical evidence shows that many of the first-story features of the original house are preserved on the first floor of the enlarged dwelling.

The broad-gabled house became a favored domestic form in New Hampshire after about 1830. This building form permitted a small, story-and-a-half dwelling to display its gable end to public view, in turn allowing the house to suggest the form of a Grecian temple, the architectural ideal of the period. While Greek Revival detailing could be applied to buildings of any form, the broad-gabled house allowed a more explicit suggestion of the temple-like façade. Such houses were built as 1½-story and 2½-story dwellings; a number of them, like the French-Taylor House, were eventually enlarged from one-story to two-story houses. In all cases, the houses had unusually long rafters in comparison to the traditional gable-roof house with its rafters spanning the shorter dimension of the building. Depending on the size of the building, the frames of these houses supported the long rafters either by vertical struts extending upward from the tie beams
below the rafter feet, or by heavy roof trusses that are comparable to those of churches of the period. As shown on page 7, the French-Taylor House employed vertical struts to support its expansive roof.

Broad-gabled houses are found in many variants across New Hampshire. Although the building type has not been surveyed or studied analytically, heavy concentrations have been noted in the Lakes Region, in the Baker River Valley northwest of Plymouth, and in the Connecticut River Valley. The facades of the latter concentration frequently display a classical portico on the lower story or stories, with a recessed porch, often with an arched opening, penetrating the pediment above the portico and made accessible through a door in the front wall of the second story or the attic.

Many broad-gabled houses began their existence as small dwellings that were designed to appear large by displaying their longer elevations as the façade and by having an unusually expansive roof supported by long rafters. Like the French-Taylor House in its original form, ½-story broad-gabled houses usually had a maximum of four rooms on the first story, with constricted bedchambers on the second. Evidence in the attic of the French-Taylor House shows that it originally had plastered rooms at least in the front of its upper story, now the attic. These chambers were defined by the spacing of the vertical struts or posts that supported the long rafters from below, and by the horizontal collar ties that linked each pair of rafters to brace them against wind and snow loading. Together, the vertical struts and horizontal collar ties composed a simple truss system that defined the walls and ceilings of the bedchambers and supported the
General Dimensions of the French-Taylor House
broad planes of the roof. The eaves spaces beyond the outside walls of the bedchambers were typically left unfinished but made accessible through low doors and used for storage.

When families that occupied such houses grew more prosperous, or when such houses were bought by new owners, they were often expanded. Expansion usually took the form of transforming the original 1½-story house into a 2½-story house by adding another floor. Since the 2½-story form of the broad-gabled house had been a common variant of the 1½-story form from the beginning, the occasional addition of a second story transformed the small original dwelling into a more spacious or pretentious version of the same house form.

The addition of a second full story to a 1½-story broad-gabled house used two general methods: the lifting of the entire house and the insertion of a new first story below the original building, or the lifting of the roof and the insertion of a new second story beneath the raised roof. An example of the first method of enlargement is seen in the Benjamin Burley House in Epping, New Hampshire (1840; enlarged 1866-7; N. H. Division of Historical Resources survey EPP0011; inventory form revised 2015). ¹ As described more fully below, the French-Taylor House is a representative example of the second method of enlarging such a house.

**Date of the house:** Research on the date of construction of the house is not complete. The surviving interior features of the dwelling, described more fully below, suggest a construction date of circa 1840. The house is indicated on the Topographical Map of Carroll County, published by Smith and Peavy in 1861. It was then owned by Matthias Weeks (1798-1888), who is listed with his family in the United States Census of 1850 as living in dwelling house No. 76 in Moultonborough, with Dr. William H. H. Mason living across the road and attorney Samuel Emerson living on abutting land to the south.

Documentation indicates that Matthias Weeks was a marble worker—predominantly a gravestone maker. The regular Census of 1850 shows Matthias Weeks as a stonecutter, aged 52, and lists his married son, Franklin L. Weeks, aged 28, as a stonewcutter living in the same house. In all, the house sheltered five adults in two generations and three children under the age of twenty-one in 1850. The separate 1850 “Products of Industry” Census identifies Matthias and Franklin L. Weeks as marble workers with $900 invested in their business. They annually used $700 worth of marble, using hand labor (not machinery) to fashion “monuments” worth $1,500. ²

Matthias Weeks sold the house to Augustus P. Jaclard for $1,650 in 1865.³ That deed of sale cites two deeds of 1848, by which Weeks presumably acquired the property.⁴ When examined, these deeds may reveal more about the date of construction of the house.

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² The regular United States Census of 1850 lists Weeks and his son Franklin as “stone cutters,” but the 1870 Census defines the trades of father and son, then living in Tamworth, as “marble workers.” Weeks’ death record in Franklin, Massachusetts, gives his former trade as “stone engraver.” Together, these references show that Weeks and his son worked predominantly as gravestone makers. Moultonborough cemeteries probably include their work.

³ Carroll County Deeds, Book 46, page 19, February 24, 1865.

⁴ Carroll County Deeds, Book 12, page 98, May 5, 1848; Book 13, page 105, July 5, 1848.
**Foundation and cellar:** The original house, before its enlargement with a full second story and its extension to the west circa 1900, stood over a full cellar measuring about 26 feet by 36 feet and having an entrance at the northeast corner, apparently beneath the original northern side porch of the dwelling. The cellar walls are notable for the size of their stones and the skill by which these glacially rounded stones were split and laid with a plumb and even interior face. These stones were split by plug drills and plugs and feathers, a granite splitting method that denotes a date of circa 1830 or later. The split granite underpinning stones at and above grade are backed by brickwork on the interior, but are seen on the exterior to have been split by the same method. The interior faces of the cellar walls have been whitewashed.

The house is presently heated by a one-pipe steam system, and a modern steam boiler in the basement is vented through the northern chimney of the main house (the southern chimney has been dismantled to a point just below the roof). The basement floor reveals the location of a former warm air furnace, and the floors of the upstairs rooms have a number of boarded-over air registers.

One peculiarity of the basement is the presence of two long six-light cellar windows in the front wall of the house and of two more in the southern wall. These transom-like sashes suggest the appearance of the front door sidelights that are visible in the Tebbetts and Lindsay stereograph shown above. The basement sashes are apparently the only windows that survive from the house in its original state. They display a muntin profile that is characteristic of the 1830-1850 period, as shown below.

**House frame:** The frame of the French-Taylor House is generally not exposed to view except in the attic; even areas of the first-floor framing, normally visible in a house basement, are covered by a basement ceiling of planed wooden sheathing. However, the attic provides a number of clues regarding the character of the hidden portions of the frame, and also suggests the original character of the partial second story of the house before the roof was raised and full-sized room added above the first story.
Above: House Frame as Originally Designed

Above: House Frame as Altered circa 1900
The roof frame is composed of four pairs of rafters, including those that define the front wall of
the house and the original rear wall (which was extended easterly by new construction circa
1900). The rafters are hewn. The purlins that span the intervals between the rafters are sawn, as
are the original collar ties, which held the ceiling joists for the original bedchambers beneath the
roof. As seen in the simplified drawings on the preceding page, the original collar ties were
removed (except in the front wall, where they are integral to the wall framing) and reattached
higher up on the rafters to provide some stiffening to the long, unsupported length of the rafters.

As seen in the drawings, the original roof design created a simple truss system that supported the
rafters close to their midpoints.

Assuming that the wall framing of the house is composed of heavy timbers in a manner that
would be expected in the 1840s or 1850s, it may be theorized that each of the side walls of the
original house frame includes corner posts and two intermediate posts that rise through the lower
frame below the two inner sets of rafters. Such a frame is seen in the attached small barn or
carriage house, which, as described below, appears to be contemporary with the house. Any
such heavy wall framing timbers are hidden within the depth of the side walls and do not project
beyond the surfaces of the plastered walls of the first story rooms.

Original interior woodwork: The first floor rooms in the main house retain elements of the
original joinery of the dwelling. The stairhall retains original doors and door casings opening
into the front rooms, but the front doorway (except for its cap) and the staircase were completely
replaced in the remodeling and enlargement of the house around 1900. As noted previously, the
only original window sashes in the house appear to be the long sashes in the basement. Other
long sashes stored in the hayloft of the barn appear to be twentieth-century units.

The original doors of the house are four-panel doors with small panels at the bottom. This
design drops the latch rail below its normal elevation, so the latches on such doors are often
applied somewhat above the latch rail. A quick inspection of the first-story doors of the French-
Taylor House did not disclose signs of former thumb latches on the first-floor doors. The
existing mortise latches are applied at the elevation of the latch rails of the doors. They have
turn-of-the-twentieth-century knobs and escutcheons, but the latches themselves may be original.
If so, they represent the early transition from thumb latches or surface-mounted rim latches to
mortise latches, and should be inspected carefully for maker’s marks.

As shown in the following cross-section, the doors of the first story have very flat Grecian ovolo
moldings applied around the margins of their flat panels. These doors are characteristic of the
Greek Revival style, and reflect both a panel layout and molding detail that were first made
familiar in New England beginning in 1830 through the architectural guidebooks of Asher
Benjamin. Most of these doors were re-hung circa 1900 with three butts instead of the original
two.

The house retains a few elaborate doors with the same applied moldings but with more complex
panel arrangements. One such door, cut down from its original height, is used to close the cellar
entrance on the north side of the house. Another door of a highly unusual pattern is found in the
barn. This is a double-faced exterior door that has a pointed Gothic panel on one face; the other
face displays the same four-panel design seen on ordinary interior doors on the first story of the house. Assuming that these unusual doors originated in this house and were not salvaged from elsewhere, both of them suggest that the original exterior doors of the house were elaborated, and that the house may have included some Gothic Revival stylistic elements in conjunction with its dominant Greek Revival character.

*Characteristic cross-section of original doors*

*Left: Exterior door re-used in cellar. Note that the upper panel has been cut off.*

*Right: Door with Gothic panel re-used in barn. The opposite side is a standard four-panel door.*

Despite the presence of a Gothic element as seen above, the remaining original door casings on the first story of the house are of a pronounced Grecian character, as seen below.
Left: Original door with graining, hardware and adjacent wainscoting added circa 1900.

As seen below, the two front rooms on the first story have plaster panels with wooden trim below the windows. The details of these features match those of the door casings, shown above. Because the tops of the windows are higher than the tops of the doors, the windows lack the pitched pediments seen above the doors.

Above: Plaster panels with wooden trim below first-story windows. Photo by Cristina M. Ashjian.
A number of original interior features must have been removed from the rooms of the main house during the remodeling of circa 1900. The house was originally heated with stoves, and any stove mantelpieces or shelves, which were common accompaniments to stoves in the mid-1800s, disappeared when central heating was installed, probably in the remodeling and enlargement of circa 1900. The original floors of the main rooms were probably native pine, and these have been replaced by hardwood flooring or by southern yellow pine in less formal areas. As noted previously, all original window sashes have been replaced, probably first circa 1900, and again in the 1970s.

**Remodeling of circa 1900:** The remodeling and enlargement of the French-Taylor House around the turn of the twentieth century was carried out under the ownership of James E. French (1845-1919); for a brief biography of French, see the Appendix to this report. French’s remodeling transformed the exterior appearance of the house and enlarged the building not only in height but also in depth. The increase in height through the addition of a full second story can be seen in the drawings on page 7. The house was likewise increased in depth through the addition of a new rear wall some 4’-6” east of the original rear wall, as depicted in the measured drawing on page 4. The volume of the original house was left undisturbed on the first story by extending the addition only at the second floor level, creating a porch beneath the new construction. The addition to the main house was accompanied by the addition of a second story to the wing, adding several new rooms with slanted ceilings under the raised roof of the wing, including the first inside bathroom in the house.

*Left: South and east elevations of the house, showing the original building depth under the porch.  
Photo by Cristina M. Ashjian.*

*Right: Roof extension in the attic, with sawn rafters.*

The remodeling was clearly intended to reduce or remove the Greek Revival exterior character of the house and to substitute such late nineteenth-century stylistic characteristics as paired cornice...
brackets. Not evident in current photographs is the fact that the house was also provided with a substantial front porch or portico, which was removed some years ago, reportedly because of damage from snow loading.

The photograph at the left shows Adele V. Taylor, the owner of the property in the latter half of the twentieth century, standing in front of the portico. This image reveals that the portico was a substantial architectural feature with detailing that corresponded with other elements of circa 1900, especially the cornice brackets of the main house.

The work of circa 1900 also altered the character of the interior. Most impressive was the transformation of the first-story central stairhall. It may be assumed that the original staircase was a characteristic Greek Revival design, probably with a turned newel post and simple—perhaps dowel-like—balusters. The staircase would have ascended to the upper half story, where it would have provided access at the back of the house to the plastered chambers at the front of the half story.

In place of this staircase, the remodeling substituted a highly elaborate staircase with a balustrade that springs from an elaborate newel post, rises to the new full second story, and encircles the stairwell.

Details of the newel post and second-story balustrade. Elements that were removed from the newel post are safely preserved.

The hardwood doors and casings that were selected for the new second story were chosen from the many styles that were available around 1900 to match the character of the original joinery as closely as possible. While the extreme Grecian moldings of the mid-1800s were no longer being
produced by the molding machinery of 1900, some of the eclectic styles of that later era continued to favor four-panel doors and symmetrically molded door and window casings, making it fairly simple to honor the older woodwork of the first story while expressing a fully modern character on the second.

*Above: Cross-section of doors in the main rooms of the second story*

*Left: Second-story door and casing, circa 1900.        Right: Detail of door casing.*

The rooms of the wing of the house, including those of its older first story, were updated during the remodeling of circa 1900. In most cases, four-panel doors matching those shown above were selected for the rooms of the wing, although these areas were treated as subordinate to the
chambers in the main house, and the doors were made of softwood rather than hardwood. In the same vein, the door and window casings chosen for the chambers in the wing were simple, unmolded, square-edged stock, varnished. The first-story rooms of the wing, closest to the main house, were provided with door and window casings that match those of the chambers in the main house. These features are presently painted, although they may originally have been varnished.

**Barn or stable:** The small barn at the eastern end of the wing combines traditional framing practices with the use of newer technology. Measuring about 26 by 30 feet, this structure has the form of an eighteenth-century English barn. Its principal joints, at the intersection of posts, wall plates, and rafters, are classic “English tying joints,” a framing detail that had been used in New England from the time of earliest settlement. At the same time, all the timbers that intersect at these upper joints were prepared on a reciprocating water-powered sawmill with the exception of the longitudinal wall plates, which are hewn. These plates measure just over 30 feet in length, whereas the sawn lateral tie beams of the barn frame measure just over 26 feet, apparently indicating that the sawmill that sawed the barn framing members had a carriage length of at least 26 feet, but under 30 feet. The posts of the barn frame are sawn.

The technology of the barn frame is comparable to that of the house frame. This suggests that the two building units are contemporaneous, although the barn, if configured like an English barn with its principal door in one of the long sides, may originally have stood as an unattached, freestanding building. The barn is a significant late survivor well into the nineteenth century of the once predominant English barn.

The barn frame was altered (or possibly originally designed) to have a first story that was uninterrupted by structural posts. This was accomplished by adding iron rods to the tie beams in the roof frame, and extending these rods downward to support the framing members of the second floor. This method of supporting the second story or hayloft of an agricultural building generally begins after 1850. It is often associated with the use of a building as a combined stable and carriage house. The absence of supporting members on the first story provides space to maneuver vehicles and to harness horses. The same configuration could have facilitated the use of the barn as a marble-working shop by Matthias and Franklin Weeks.
APPENDIX

JAMES E. FRENCH
James E. French (1845-1919) became a legendary political figure in nineteenth-century New Hampshire through his uniquely extended and comprehensive tenure as a local political leader and through an unparalleled duration of service as a representative of the Town of Moultonborough in the House of Representatives and the State Senate. French was remarkable as a resident of a small, rural town who attained stature and power both in his community and in state government in an age when the legislature was generally controlled by professional men from larger cities like Manchester, Nashua, or the state capital of Concord.

French’s unusual influence was summed up on one of many profiles that appeared in biographical dictionaries, the *History of Carroll County*, and the influential and widely-read *Granite Monthly* magazine. In an article on “Official New Hampshire, 1919-1920,” the *Granite Monthly* summed up French’s career at the very end of his life:

> The oldest member of this legislature, as he has been of many others [previously], is the veteran chairman of the Committee on Appropriations, Colonel James E. French of Moultonboro, New Hampshire’s “watch dog of the treasury.” A member of the House of Representatives at fourteen sessions and of the state senate at one, Mr. French has been more times the chairman of an important committee, Railroads at first, Appropriations of late years, than any other man in the legislative history of the state. Moderator and town treasurer for forty years, for a long time postmaster, he has held, also, many more important offices, such as collector of internal revenue, state railroad commissioner, etc., and has gained the title of Colonel by service on a Governor’s staff. Mr. French was born in Tuftonboro February 27, 1845, in the eighth generation from Edward French, who came from England to Salisbury, Mass., in 1637. He was educated in the town schools and at Tilton Seminary, is a Mason, Knight Templar, and Patron of Husbandry; and attends the Methodist Church. The credit for keeping the state debt down to its present reasonable proportions belongs to the voters of Moultonboro because of their wisdom in returning Col. French to the House, session after session, and doubtless they appreciate that fact.

French’s obituary in the *Granite Monthly* of 1919 called him “one of the men of longest and most potent legislative service in the history of New Hampshire.” French’s “potent” hold over both town government and state affairs, especially in state budgetary matters, drew the attention of the *Boston Herald* in April 1907. In the muckraking spirit of the times, the *Herald* referred to French as “a ‘boss’ in every sense of the word, politically and otherwise” whose “manipulation of the wires brought every doubting legislator into line when a test of strength was made, and his has been the tongue which has lashed the more obstreperous of the Republican legislators to the side which he and the machine favored.” The *Herald* predicted that a coterie of political rivals was determined to unseat French in 1907, but noted that French “says nothing, but saws wood all the time.” In the end, French survived the “battle of his life” to continue to hold every local office and state appointment until the end of his life twelve years later.

Despite his intense involvement in both local Moultonborough affairs and in the state legislature and its important committees, French probably held even greater responsibility as district
collector of United States Internal Revenue, with his territory covering the three northern New
England states. French served as Deputy Collector of Internal Revenue from 1882 to 1886,
when he lost that office due to a change in political parties in Washington. In 1889 he was
appointed Collector of Internal Revenue for the district of Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont,
an office he held until 1893.

French is remembered in Moultonborough as having held the offices of town moderator, member
of the board of education, town treasurer, justice of the peace and trial justice (although he was
not a lawyer), and trustee of the public library. Before the town library had its own building, it
was housed, in keeping with the practice in many towns, in a twelve-foot-square room in the
local store, which French owned, and its librarian boarded in French’s house. The library
became the principal focus of French’s philanthropy. French remained a library trustee from
1897 to 1917. When he died in 1919, French bequeathed $5,000 to the town “for the purpose of
building a library building at Moultonborough Corner.” When a boarding house across the road
from French’s general store burned in 1923, French’s widow, Martha, acquired the empty lot and
conveyed it to the town on the condition that a library building be constructed there within seven
years, fulfilling her late husband’s wish. Martha French also established a trust fund for the
purchase of books for the library.

Bibliographical sources on James E. French:

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the Senate and House of Representatives of the New Hampshire Legislature for 1899-1900.
Volume V. Concord N. H.: 1899. (J. E. French 24) (Moultonborough Public Library)

Curtis, Francis. Republican Party: A History of Its Fifty Years’ Existence and a Record of its

“Dethronement of King French is Sought: Moultonborough Neighbors Object to Episode of
Stuffed Ballot Box: Wonderful Career of Country Storekeeper: Has Ruled New Hampshire from
Little Town he Controls Absolutely” (photo caption: ‘Home of “Jim” French, His Church and
Residence, His Leading Opponents’ and also poem ‘Darkest New Hampshire’) ‘Special
Dispatch’ to the Boston Herald, April 1907. (Moultonborough Public Library)

Granite Monthly magazine: Various articles and photographs of James E. French, as follows
(chronologically):

Metcalf, Henry H. “Some Leading Legislators of 1901” Granite Monthly 30:4 (April


