

**PARMELEE FARMHOUSE**  
**Killingworth, Connecticut**

**HISTORIC FABRIC ASSESSMENT SURVEY**

**Prepared for**  
**The Town of Killingworth**

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## PARMELEE FARMHOUSE HISTORIC FABRIC ASSESSMENT SURVEY

### Objectives and Methodology

An on-site visit and inspection of the Parmelee Homestead was carried out on November 20, 2010. The objective of the site visit was to locate and identify architectural elements that are contemporary with the structure's initial construction, components introduced subsequent to the initial construction, and those of recent origin.

Style and methods of fabrication along with hardware and fastener morphology, were the predominant criteria for assigning a period of installation for individual architectural components or assemblies. In order to provide a clearer understanding of the interior evolution of the building, the paint stratigraphy of certain elements were inspected with a 20x Nikon binocular field scope. All photos in this report were taken by Tom Paske.

### Description

Constructed in 1847<sup>1</sup> the structure consists of a three bay frame, two piles in depth. An integral kitchen wing is constructed on the south side of the house. The building is located on-site with its longitudinal axis (ridge) in the north-south orientation. The original first floor plan of the main block is typical of rural New England houses constructed during the 18th and first quarter of the 19th century. The front pile of the building is comprised of a center chimney flanked on its north and south by rooms of similar size. In front of the chimney a small entry space contains a segmented stairway that accesses the second floor. Originally the rear pile was made up of three rooms. A secondary stair is located in the southern room allowing for communication with both the second floor and basement. The original second floor plan is similar to the first floor; a stairway accessing the garret is located in the southern room of the rear pile.

The kitchen wing appears to have consisted of a single room containing a fireplace with bake oven.

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<sup>1</sup> *Thomas L. Lentz, Municipal Historian*

The house's structural components are fabricated and laid out in a pattern common to farmhouses constructed in western Connecticut during the first half of the 19th century. Sills approximately square in section are located along the perimeter of the building. Beneath the front pile, the sills support two transverse girders flanking the chimney mass and the exterior ends of sawn joists that support the first floor. Supporting the floor of the rear pile, transverse joists of rectangular section are carried by the rear sill and a longitudinal girder separating the front and rear pile.

Eight two-story posts delineate the bays of the building and are located at its exterior corners and at the front and rear of the chimney bay. The posts are connected mid-span and at garret floor level by girts that support the joists that carry the second and garret floor. At the top of the posts rest a front and rear plate. This plate supports sawn rafters installed at regular intervals. The rafters are supported mid-span by a front and rear longitudinal purlin. Each purlin rests on four inclined queen posts. The roof system has no ridge pole; front and rear rafters intersect without the aid of more complex joinery typically found in earlier Connecticut buildings.

## **Exterior**

The exterior of the Parmelee House exhibits many of the characteristics found on timber framed buildings constructed throughout New England during the 18th and 19th centuries. Fenestration of the façade is laid out in a symmetrical five bay pattern that originated with the introduction of the Georgian style to New England during the 18th-century. Individual window assemblies consist of two 6-light sashes. The only exceptions noted are the sash found in the gable ends of the main block and kitchen wing, and a modern window assembly located in the front of the kitchen wing, and another adjacent to the rear door.

Siding consists of sawn, tapered clapboards applied with uniform exposure. Stylistically the building is quite simple; ornamentation is limited to the front entry way, cornices, and gable window sash. These elements are fabricated and arranged in a pattern found on Greek revival buildings constructed beginning in the 1830s. On the Parmelee House the

ornamentation is of an applied nature. The proportions and orientation of the building are similar to buildings constructed during the Georgian and Federal period. The Greek style is only represented by the building's mildly elliptical exterior moldings, entry way surrounds, door panel configuration, and friezes.



**Left, Exterior of the Parmelee House looking northeast. Right, Front Entry**

## **Interior**

Although the farmhouse has undergone some modifications much of the interior fabric appears to be contemporary with structure's original construction. Subsequent alterations were mostly completed during the second half of the 20th century and are therefore easily discernible.

For purposes of clarity a brief description of individual spaces with an abridged list of surviving components follows.

## **Basement**

Most of the original framing, foundation, and chimney stack is still visible in the basement. The chimney base is of particular interest; on its north side the remains of a basement kitchen fireplace survive. Although basement kitchens are found in buildings of this period throughout Connecticut, they are by no means common. The location of this

fireplace and its relationship to the kitchen wing could suggest a more complicated food processing regiment possibly relating to a divided household or variations in seasonal activities.



**Basement looking northwest**

The shell of an early octopus style hot-air furnace survives adjacent to the chimney mass. Although this type of heating system was once common, improvements in mechanical systems throughout the 20 century has led to the disposal of earlier examples of heating technology.

## **Main Block, First Floor**

### **South Room**

Presently this room extends from the front to the rear wall of the structure. Seams visible in the flooring along with anomalies in paint stratigraphy of the room's trim indicate this space was once divided into two rooms. The front room contained was heated with a fireplace with wrought iron crane. The rear room was more utilitarian in function; the stairway and the rear exterior door allowed for direct communication with the farmyard, the cellar, kitchen, and storage in the garret of the main block and kitchen wing.

Although this room has undergone extensive modifications during the 20th century much of the original fabric survives;

- Fireplace, mantel and hearth
- Flooring
- Cupboard above the fireplace
- North doors and casings
- East exterior door
- South window sash
- Stairway



**South room, north wall, arrow indicates location of earlier partition**

### **Entryway**

The space directly in front of the chimney was originally used as the formal entry of the building. It contains the original staircase that accesses the second floor. The handrail, balusters, newel posts are somewhat old-fashioned for the period; however, this is a continuation of the pattern found throughout the building, where most ornamentation is minimal, applied to a structure of very traditional form. An exception to this is the front door and surround. This doorway contains more stylish elements indicating the hierarchy of the entryway and its proximity to the best room in the house, the north parlor.

Interesting features in the entryway include the beveled fascias surrounding the doorways and the flush panels of the entry door. Door latches in the entryway are Blake's latches patented in 1840. These latches are used throughout the structure and represent the rapid introduction of cheaper mass produced hardware available during this period. Most of the

architectural fabric in the entryway is contemporary with the original construction and include:

- Flooring
- Entry door
- Sidelight entrances
- Interior doors
- Hardware
- Stairway
- Door casings



**Entry looking north**

## Northwest Room (Parlor)

Originally this was the best room in the house and it exhibits the most sophisticated trim found within the structure. The doors, windows, and mantel support facias have extended head casings (crossette). Unlike the trim found in the other rooms of the structure the door, window mantel architrave and baseboards have fully developed Grecian ovolo band moldings applied to them.

The presence of accordion lath, plaster, and lack of masonry hearth indicates this room was built originally without a fireplace. The mantel was placed in the traditional location; however, its purpose was strictly ornamental. Originally a stove was located in front of the mantel and surround and vented through the surviving thimble. This is another indicator that this parlor was the best room in the building. Although stoves had been available for decades, in rural areas they would have been considered modern innovations.

Most of the architectural fabric in the space is original including:

- Mantel
- Doors and casing
- Windows and casings
- Flooring
- Hardware



North parlor, south wall

## **Northeast Room**

This space contains very little original fabric and was converted into a bathroom and laundry room. Surviving fabric is limited to the doors accessing adjacent rooms.



**Northeast bathroom**

## **East Central Room**

The room directly behind the chimney stack was possibly used as a bedroom during the Parmelee's tenure. Unlike the second floor chambers it was originally heated and contains a small fireplace with hearth. The trim in this room is simple; it is not ornamented and except for the mantel shelves' support no molding is found. Modern shelving has been installed along the north wall otherwise the majority of the space's architectural fabric is contemporary with the original construction of the homestead.

These components include:

- Fireplace and hearth
- Mantel
- Cupboard above mantel
- Doors and casing
- Windows and casing
- Flooring



**East central room, west wall**

### **Kitchen Wing**

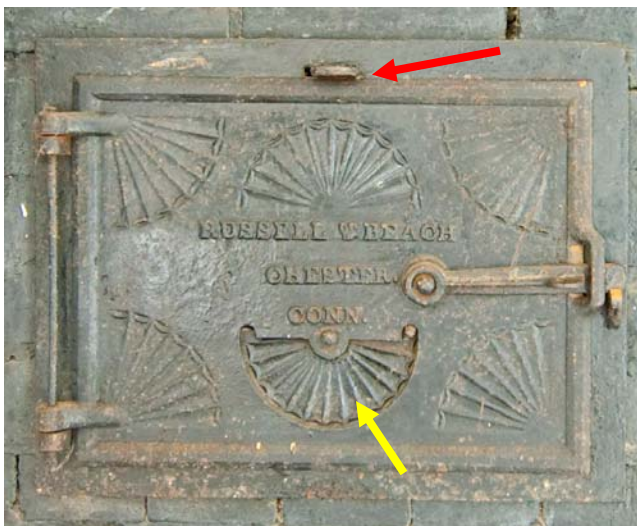
Although not common in Connecticut the practice of locating the kitchen in an attached wing begins to be adopted in parts of rural New England during the 1830s. During the last phase of occupancy the kitchen wing was still used as a kitchen. It contains a modern sink and utilities installed during the last quarter of the 20th century. The space does retain its original kitchen fireplace with external bake oven, hearth, stone fireplace jambs, lintel, and bake oven door. Based on a cursory inspection of the paint stratigraphy surrounding the fireplace much of the trim has been replaced or modified. The cast-iron

bake oven door is a particularly fine example. This type of fixture was commonly found in buildings constructed during the first decades of the 19th century. It was manufactured by Russell and Beach located in Chester, Connecticut. It exhibits ornamented draft control and an integral damper. Surviving components within the space include:

- Hearth
- Fireplace and crane
- Bake oven with cast-iron door
- Exterior door



**Fireplace and bake oven, kitchen wing**



**Bake oven door manufactured by Russell and Beach, Chester, Connecticut. Damper control (red arrow), draft control (yellow arrow)**

## **Second Floor**

### **Southwest Chamber**

Although unheated this space was most probably used originally as a bedroom. A closet is located in the north wall. Most architectural elements within the space are original and include:

- Doors and surrounds
- Flooring
- Post casings



**Southwest chamber, north wall**

### **Central Stair Hall**

Trim located in the second floor of the front entryway is similar to the first floor; however because of its separation from the more formal and public rooms some economy is visible in the fabrication of several elements primarily the doors. Unlike the doors found in the entryway and adjacent rooms these doors are two panel as opposed to the four panel doors found in the better spaces of the first floor. An exception to this is the

rear exterior door located in the south room. This exterior door was used to access utility spaces and farmyard. Surviving original elements include:

- Flooring
- Doors and casings
- Window and casings
- Balusters, newel post, and handrail
- Hardware



**Stair hall, second floor, looking north**

### **Northwest chamber**

Finish in the northwest chamber is similar to that of the southwest chamber. The larger closet that can be accessed from both this room and the rear hallway. Although modified, it appears to be an original feature. Original elements located within the space include:

- Doors and casings
- Post casings
- Baseboards
- Flooring



**Northwest chamber, south wall**

### **Northeast Chamber**

This room has undergone more modifications than the adjacent northwest chamber. Sections of the south wall have been rebuilt and it is unclear whether there was originally a closet located on the wall. The sash is modern along with sections of baseboard.

Original elements survive include:

- Flooring
- West door and trim
- Southeast door
- Post casings



**Northeast chamber, south wall**

### **Rear Central Bathroom**

This bathroom dates to the second half of the 20th century. The only surviving original material appears to be the window sash. It is unclear whether this bathroom was installed within the footprint of an earlier room.



**Rear central bathroom, looking northeast**

## **Southeast Chamber**

This room has also undergone extensive modifications during the 20th century. The area's original plaster work has been covered with vertical, knotty pine boarding. It is unknown if earlier wall finishes survive beneath this treatment. The southeast door used to access the garret stair has been re-hung. This along with a patch at the top of the garret stairs suggest the garret stair was moved approximately 3 feet toward the east sometime during the 19th or early 20th century. If the adjacent bathroom was not constructed within the footprint of an earlier room the north wall of this chamber is contemporary with the bathroom. Surviving elements contemporary with the original construction of the building include:

- Doors and door surround
- Window and casing
- Flooring



**Southeast chamber, south wall**

## **Kitchen Wing Garret**

The garret of the kitchen wing is almost completely intact. Surviving 19th-century plasters on its walls indicate this space was used for some type of produce storage or possibly as lodging for farm workers.



**Kitchen wing garret, looking south**

## **Garret, Main Block**

The garret is mostly unaltered, the original framing is visible, much of the chimney also appears to be original. Sections of the flooring have been replaced possibly because of decay or to facilitate the installation of insulation or wiring.



**Garret, main block, looking north**

## **Significance**

The Parmelee Homestead is an important component of the cultural landscape of rural Connecticut. Unlike many other preserved houses in this area of New England it is the location of no extraordinary historic events or famous individuals. The Homestead represents an agricultural lifestyle once common throughout southern New England. Although farm buildings constructed in this period are found throughout the northeast United States, in southern New England most of the attention in preservation and interpretation of house museum sites is focused on buildings built during the colonial period or later in the Victorian period.

The 1847 construction date of the Farmstead allows for the development of an interpretation plan representing a transitional period in New England agriculture and construction.

For educational purposes the site itself provides the space and opportunity to showcase once common agricultural practices.

An archaeological survey of the Farmstead would not only provide important information regarding the location of hidden features such as wells, privies, and out-buildings but would also have a positive effect on the visitation and fundraising.

The building itself contains enough original fabric to allow for a comprehensive study of the structure that would provide a clearer understanding of the building and its development and also aid in the restoration and interpretation of select spaces within the building.