

The David Hubbard House Hancock, New Hampshire

By ROBERT HARRINGTON NYLANDER

DAVID Hubbard, son of Ebenezer and Hepzibah (Estabrook) Hubbard was born in 1754 in Concord, Massachusetts. He served in the Revolution under Captain Reed, but was discharged in 1776 on account of ill health. In the military records he is described as "5' 8" tall, dark hair, dark eyes, and dark complexion; and belonging to the town of Concord." He married Mary Barrett in 1777 or 1778 and about 1779 went to Hancock, New Hampshire, to settle the land given them by Mary's brother, Charles Barrett of New Ipswich.

Their house was small, about twelve feet square, but had the luxury of a brick chimney. A few years later they apparently became more prosperous, for in 1782 they erected a new house about two hundred feet from the earlier one. This house bore close resemblance to houses in their native Concord.

David Hubbard's name appears frequently in the early records of Hancock: he was selectman in 1783 and 1784, constable in 1786, and had much to do with the erection of the first church. By 1792, however, things had changed, for the selectmen were to decide "the best way to obtain the taxes now due from Constable Hubbard."

In 1796 David Hubbard disappeared suddenly. His hat was found on the shore

EDITOR'S NOTE: The author of this article joined the Society in 1955 at the age of fourteen, and is now a Senior in the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School.

of what was called Greenfield Pond. Friends dragged the pond in vain, and the disappearance has always remained a mystery.

Mrs. Hubbard and her six children returned to Concord, where Ebenezer, the second son, became interested in the preservation of Revolutionary relics. He was by far the most enthusiastic in the North Bridge reconstruction and the Minute Man Statue, and in 1871 left the funds with which those monuments were started.

Lieutenant Ebenezer Knight, the next to occupy the house, came from New Ipswich in 1797. He made several alterations to the house, especially the parlor, and lived there with his wife and two sons until his death in 1815.

The names of the next two occupants are not recorded but it is known that they each lived in the house for about a year, long enough to make themselves known. The first was a band of counterfeiters which came about 1816. They used the house to ply their trade, and there still may be seen in the cellar walls four of the holes in which it is said their tools were hidden.

It is in connection with this group that the "haunted house" legend arises. In the early days it was usual for travelers to stop at the house for a night's lodging. The travelers were made comfortable, but about midnight they heard dreadful sounds like rattling chains, shrieks, or groans. Upon inquiry, they learned that the occupants had heard nothing unusual.

Doubtless any visitor called but once!

The next nameless occupants were a family consisting of a father, his daughter, and stepmother. The father, apparently a trader, was frequently away for long periods of time. It was during these times that the mother shut the girl

Samuel Knight brought his young wife, Lydia Goodhue, and their two children to the farm in 1825. It was during the Knights' occupancy that the building was gradually changed into a finished house of thirteen plastered rooms.

In the reminiscences of Nancy



SOUTHEAST VIEW OF DAVID HUBBARD HOUSE, HANCOCK, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Photograph by the author.

in the dark, damp cellar. Upon one such occasion the child did not cry as usual. The woman ordered her up, but the child replied, "I do not wish to. It is all light down here; Mama is with me." This frightened the woman so that she thought the house was haunted and insisted upon moving away.

Moses Dennis brought his second wife, Jane Graves, to the house in 1818. The Dennises were farmers and probably did not change the house much during their seventeen years of occupancy. They moved to Jasper, New York, in 1825.

(Knight) Fogg, born in 1835, several interesting things of the Knight family life are revealed. In reference to the one second-floor fireplace she says: "During those early years on cold winter days, mother hung bedding back . . . making an inner circle near the fire for the little ones to play in. . . ." Elsewhere she says "when we were all at home we used twenty cords of firewood a year. . . . I heard father's uncle, who was visiting at our home, once say, 'Sam, folk tell me your getting rich, but I can't see much but the children.' Father replied,

'That is just it. My children are all jewels; every son is worth \$1,000, and every daughter \$500.'

The Knights occupied the house the longest of any other family. Of the fourteen children born to them twelve grew to maturity and became members of the Hancock Congregational Church. The two oldest boys gave up their college education to fight in the Civil War. Samuel Knight was one of the earliest people interested in preserving Hancock's history and was one of the leading members of the Centennial Committee in 1879. Through his daughter Nancy the early history of the house is preserved.

Much of the furniture in the house is of the Knight period and some may have been theirs, but only four chairs are known to have been. These chairs were made about 1849 by Mrs. Knight's brother, Benjamin Goodhue, who was also Mrs. Calvin Coolidge's grandfather.

After the Knight occupancy, which came to an end in 1899, the house was owned by numerous families, none of whom stayed long and none of whom made many changes. In 1914 two psychiatric nurses purchased the house. They and their heirs occupied it until 1951 and in 1952 it was purchased by the present owners.

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Undoubtedly the first building erected on the land was the cabin. There is today a small building now used as a chicken house whose dimensions correspond to those of the cabin foundations, and whose framing is similar to that of the barn. When the cabin foundations were recently excavated, quantities of bricks, even the front door latch, were found, but no wood fragments, which leads to the sup-

position that the building was moved.

The barn, a large, framed structure, shows many primitive structural features, such as "gun-stock" posts and pegged floors. These two buildings are now among the oldest in Hancock.

The main house was built in 1782 and, being the first two-story house in town, its erection was of such great importance that it was recorded in much detail.¹ Every able-bodied man in Hancock and the adjoining town of Peterborough was present at the "raising bee," which took two days and a barrel of rum. The festivities of the occasion were kept up all night, and the following day the ridgepole was wet down with a bottle of rum by the most fearless and agile of those present. All the nails used were made by Enos Knight, the nearest neighbor. During the raising, the barn was used as a sleeping apartment and as a storehouse for tools.

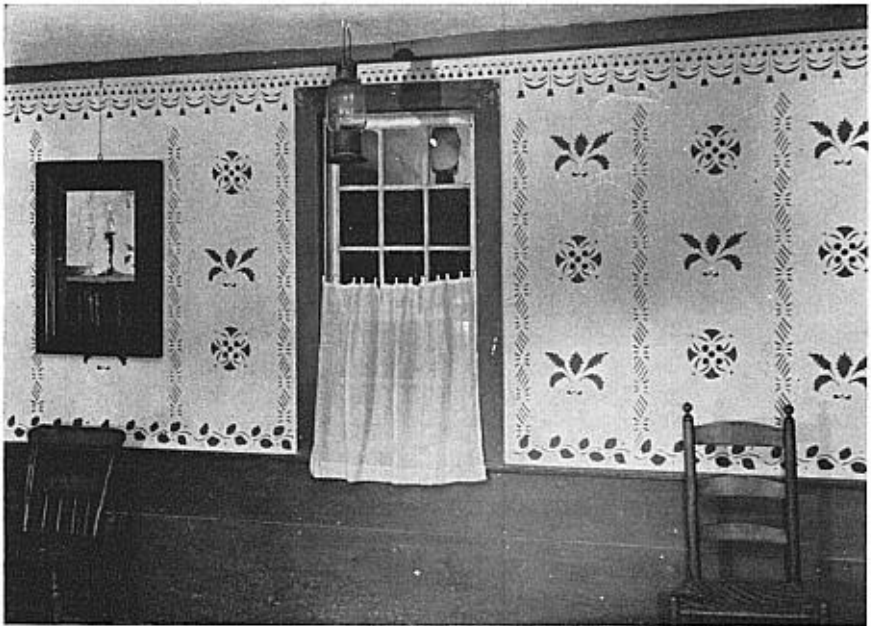
Like all true New England farmhouses, the Hubbard house was never completely finished at one time. The exterior was covered with feathered weatherboarding ranging in width from three to twenty-nine inches. The outside doors were large and the windows were small. The one door which remains is crudely paneled on one side and boarded on the other. The windows were surrounded by a narrow frame and covered with solid shutters. On the gable ends there is some trace of a narrow hewn overhang, but this feature has disappeared completely. The framing is heavy, the summer beams are about fifteen inches square, some of the ceilings have diagonal braces, and the entire roof has diagonal bracing.

The first major alterations to the ex-

¹ William Willis Hayward, *The History of Hancock, New Hampshire* (Lowell, Mass., 1889), I, 33.

terior were the three parlor windows added after 1797. They contained twenty-four lights of six by eight-inch glass, surrounded by a three-inch frame. The house was also painted "Spanish brown" about this time and this color remains on the original clapboards preserved underneath the present clapboards put on about 1830.

Within, all the rooms are of different periods. The first of these, the old parlor, originally contained but one finished wall of paneling. After 1797 beam casing, dado and moldings were installed on the remaining three walls and the room was plastered. At this time the unknown man whom Mrs. Little calls the "border stenciller" who did other work in the



STENCILED EAST WALL OF PARLOR, DAVID HUBBARD HOUSE,
RESTORED BY THE AUTHOR

The windows at this date were all enlarged for fifteen lights of seven by nine-inch glass. The house was then painted red and the windows were hung with green blinds. It was also at this time that the long ell and woodshed were built over the old well. Samuel Knight built a large barn and shed east of the house but only the foundations and a flight of stone steps remain of these.

Hancock area, painted the plaster pink and stenciled in dark green a delicate border around the ceiling line.² A name which is scratched upon the plaster must be mentioned here as it may have been written by the painter. The surname is Stickney and the given name seems to be

² Nina Fletcher Little, *American Decorative Wall Painting* (Sturbridge, Mass., 1952), pp. 101-103.

Thomas, but some of the letters are so large that it could also be Amos. No man of this name lived in Hancock and no biographical information can be found.

Some time after 1818 Moses Eaton added patterns to the plain pink walls.³ About 1830 the woodwork was painted olive green and the doors were grained in imitation of veneer. In the 1880's the woodwork was changed by the addition of a mantle and dado on the paneled wall and the plastered walls were papered over the stenciling. Fortunately the value of the stenciling was realized and some sections were covered with heavy paper before being wallpapered.

The north rooms were originally the most comfortable in the house, for they were sheathed with wood. The only staircase went out of the kitchen, which was not the largest room in the house owing to a small bedroom at each end. The west wall was nearly covered by the enormous dresser, the interior of which is still the olive green it was painted about 1830. This room, like the parlor, had paneling over the fireplace. Here it consisted of one large panel flanked on either side by a small door which led to the chimney. The arrangement of this room was changed in 1888, the main alterations being relocation of the stairs and dresser.

The small room at the west of the kitchen is worthy of note because of some interesting painting found behind the relocated dresser. The base color is buff, which is streaked with red. In one place this has never been painted over and remains as fresh as when applied.

Opposite the parlor on the front is the last room to be finished on the first floor. Its woodwork is in a country adaptation of the Federal style. In this room and the room above the corner posts have been cut back and the ceiling plaster has been brought below the summers, making extremely low rooms. The second-floor woodwork is more elaborate than that in the first-floor room. When these rooms were finished, they were probably used as the "Best Parlour" and the "Master Bedchamber." The woodwork in both was grained in imitation of curly maple. The space which was formerly the front entry was made into the "Hall" with the main staircase.

The largest room on the second floor, and the only one to contain a fireplace, is the north room. It is a dark, sheathed room originally about thirty by fifteen feet. At one end was a large set of shelves which the Hubbards and other early occupants doubtless used as storage space for clothes. In this room the earliest wallpaper in the house was found, some pieces of which are much scribbled on in pencil showing that it had been on many years and seen by many children. The paper is in a geometrical pattern in orange and white upon extremely thin grey paper. In the small room next to this another paper has been found done in blue and white on an off-white ground, along with earlier painting similar to that in the small first-floor room.

On its hundred and seventy-fifth birthday, the house received new underpinnings, which, along with other repair and restoration work, should allow it to stand for at least a hundred and seventy-five years more.

³ *Ibid.*, Figures 120-122.