

The following is a summary of the history of the house at 216 Old Westport Road, Dartmouth. Revision August 12, 2017

Research conducted 2016/2017 by Daniel Socha

The following summary is the result of twelve months of dedicated research consisting of developing resident families' genealogies; reading over 200 land deeds of possible owners; following numerous false leads, making many trips to Taunton and New Bedford land registries; researching wills and old photos; and cross referencing all information with a second source if possible. The research is still not complete.

Documented research currently traces ownership back to the early 1800's and has established that this was the Potter property from 1829 until 1914 when it was sold to Bradford Smith by Patrick's grandson Charles Potter. Patrick Potter confirmed in his will of 1862 that this was already established as the Potter Homestead.

Patrick Potter bought seven adjacent wood lots. The property went from the original eastern line on Old Westport Road to Cross Road, then North across Rt. 6, then east to a point, then South back to Old Westport Road making 95+ acres and including the current Target store and shopping center.

The next step was to establish who sold the property to Patrick Potter. After much research it is established that Patrick Potter bought three farms in Dartmouth, all about the same size (40 + acres). The farm he bought from Washington Tripp in 1854, he sold to Hiram King a year later for \$100 profit. In his will of 1862 he left his homestead farm and the farm he bought from Jabez Barker to his grandchildren. The farm he bought from Joseph, Abthia and Hannah Gifford in 1829 was his homestead farm.

In 1829 Joseph Gifford his wife Abthia Gifford and his sister Hannah Gifford sold a 43 Acre farm (our current property) to Patrick Potter. Abthia Gifford was formerly Abthia Potter, Patrick's Aunt. According to the deed they had the property "seized in fee". Meaning they inherited it.

At this writing no record of a will of their father Gideon Gifford is found. Also no clear land purchase of Gideon leads to this property. The investigation continues!

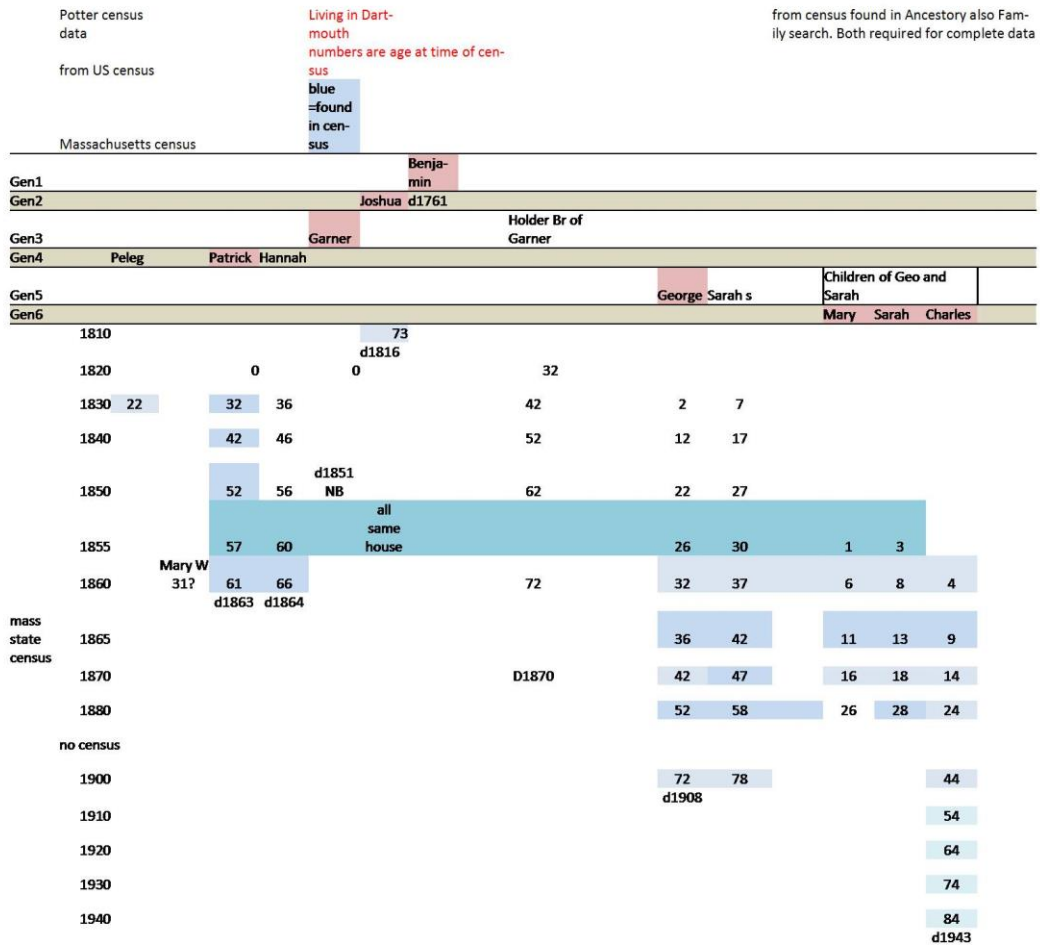
The greatest find of this project is the photo of this house taken in the mid to late 1800's. The photo was in the New Bedford Whaling Museum photo archives. It is mislabeled as the Mott homestead. (A separate research project was conducted to prove it). Upon close inspection it is beyond doubt this is the 216 Old Westport Road house. Everything matches including the barn and shed foundation locations and the house foundation stones.

The photo tells a story well beyond the photo itself. The photo is labeled as an albumen print. Albumen prints were made between 1855 - 1895, roughly dating the photo.

In my original high resolution copy (23mb size), you can see three children in the front door. Two boys and a girl all about 9 or 10 yrs old. To the left is a woman going into the shed, an older man bending down to meet a young girl about 3 yrs. old. Also there is a small boy also about 2 or 3 yrs old.



There are two parts to this photo, the house itself, and the people in it. Lets start with the people. It is established that the Potters owned this land from before, and until well after the 40 year window of the photo. But, are these people in the photo Potters? To find the answer, I added a third piece of information: US census data. I researched several data years to see what Potters lived in Dartmouth, overlaid that information with the known Potters, their names and ages at each census year, to create a matrix to match against the people in the photo. I also took into consideration two assumptions and a question. Assumption 1- Not all the people in the photo live there. (maybe friends or relatives visiting). Assumption 2 - Not all the people living there are in the photo. And question, who is taking the picture?



My conclusion is, they probably are not Potters. I could not fit most of the known Potters from the census into the ages of the people in the photo during the 40 year period. The logical conclusion at this point is the people in the photo are tenant farmers. Farms are a source of income. If the owner does not want, or can't farm, they may lease the farm and live somewhere else. Further confirmation came from the 1900 census. The 1900 census is the first one to include street names. In 1900, there were only eight families on Old Westport Road. None were Potters, although Potters still owned the land. Charles Potter, the grandson of Patrick Potter lived on their other farm on Chase road. George Potter, Patrick's son was living in a rented house on Fall River Road.

None of the families in the 1900 census living on Old Westport Road matched the photo, but since the photo window is 40 + years old, it is reasonable that the kids grew up and moved away, or the family moved. Who the people in the photo are, is still a mystery.

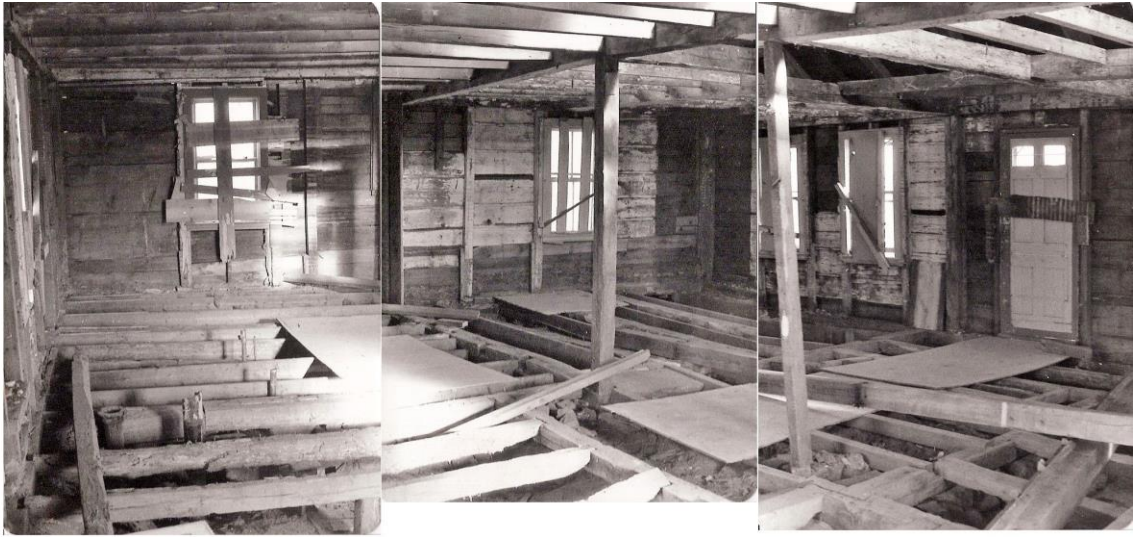
Now the house itself. The house style is a typical first period (up to 1725) house style with a standard 3 fireplace, center chimney layout. It has a large fireplace toward the back in the keeping room, with smaller fireplaces in each of the side rooms. The caption in the photo says the center chimney is removed. You can see two smaller chimneys in place for each of the side fireplaces. If this photo was taken in the mid to late 1800's and the center chimney is already gone, a reasonable assumption is the house

is at least 100 years older than the photo. Since the construction is clearly first period, another reasonable assumption is this is a early 1700's house.

Jump to 1979. The owner of the land and house, Victor Palumbo had to do a full restoration as the house was clearly a tear down candidate. I am grateful for his insight and effort to do such a great restoration job.

This photo is the house at the start of the restoration project. Note, by this time, 100 years after the last photo, only one of the two chimneys had remained from before.





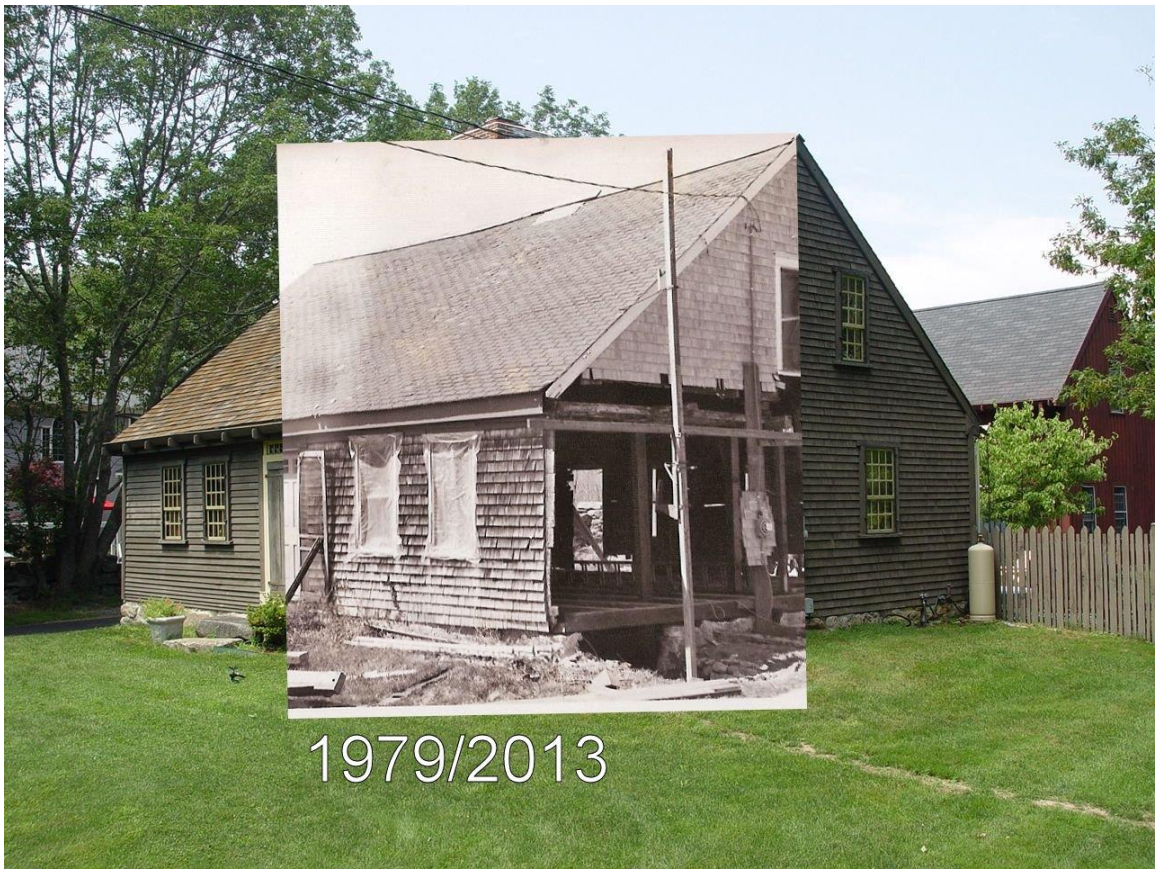
A sequence of three pictures were taken showing the east half of the house in the 1979 restoration.

Sadly, the house was neglected since it's 1979 restoration. When we bought it, there was two feet of water in the cellar. When it rained outside, it rained inside. While it wasn't a restoration to the 1979 level, we still had to do a substantial restoration.

Two pictures from 1998 when my wife, Susan and I bought the house



Below - Ghost of the past.



The house in 2013



