

1684 STRUCTURE FOR SALE  
THE WILLIAM CORNWELL HOUSE



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# The William Cornwell House

This late 17th century house is a rare jewel of its kind, with all the hallmark characteristics of a vernacular building style. The first framed houses built in New England were built by men who had learned their housewright trade in England through years of apprenticeship and who constructed after the matter and pattern with which they were familiar. Only in later years did the effect of the melting pot blur the very pristine, very pronounced original architectural principles which stand in pure form in this house. This 40' x 20' building is exceedingly rare.



# Family History

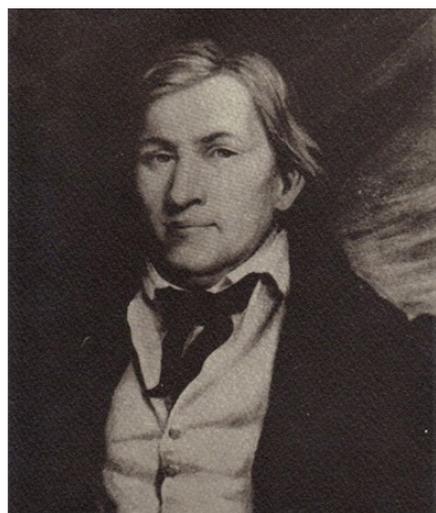
The William Cornwell House, originally located one-tenth of a mile north of Ellsworth's Corner in Wangunk Meadow, was built before 1691. It was sited diagonally to the present Glastonbury Turnpike (Route 17) and oriented to face an early east-west road which was replaced in 1764 by the road known today as Meadow road (Town Votes and Proprietor's Records Vo. 2, p. 306) running forty rods to the south.

The inventory of William Cornwell II, written in October 1691, lists a house and orchard on 20 acres of land in Wangunk Meadow, which appears to be this house on Glastonbury road. It is difficult, however, to establish exactly when this house may have been built. A 1676 deed to Cornwell from his father corresponds partially to this piece of property (Beers History of Middlesex County, Conn., p. 498). The Town Votes and Proprietors' Records (Vol. 1, p. 144) contain a 1688 reference to William Cornwell's "hous", although it is not clear if the "hous" is on the east side of the "Grate River". Both Cornwells are frequently appointed to do surveying and fence viewing in Wangunk, indicating that they had extensive contact with the area during the last

two decades of the 17th century. There is a possibility that the house was originally used as a temporary shelter, during the planting or harvesting season, and so may have existed from the beginning of the cultivation of the land, around the 1670's. The Town Votes and Proprietors' Records (Vol. 1, p. 107) contains a 1673 reference to Cornwell's father, Sgt. William Cornwell's, "farme" on the east side of the river - the word "farm" is remarkable because all other references to property across the river at this time use the word "land". The term "orchard", used in the 1691 inventory, implies the existence of fruit-bearing trees, which would have required at least fifteen years to cultivate.

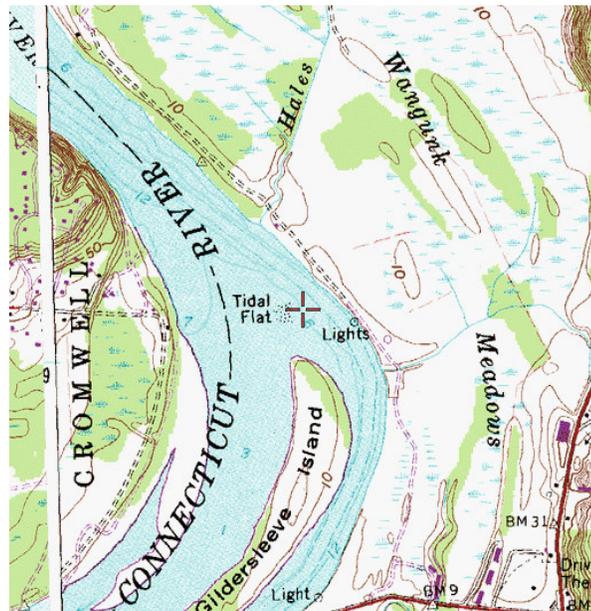
William Cornwell was the son of Sgt. William Cornwell, one of the Middletown Proprietors. He died at age 50, four months before the birth of his sixth child. His oral deathbed will, given to two residents of the west side of the Great river, mentions lands "at the upper lott" (Cromwell or outer Portland), "at Towne" (Middletown), and "at home". Cornwell's eldest son, William III, acquired the house. William III is the Cornwell claimed by local histories to be the third Portland resident, arriving in 1703. No evidence has been uncovered for this particular date; it would seem likely that William III, who married in 1692, lived here earlier than 1703. He served as the first tithing man in Portland (then east Middletown) and with Thomas Miller, operated the first grist mill, possibly on the stream which crosses present day Wilcox Hill road not far from the Cromwell house. Two deeds from 1736 clearly establish that this house was the home of William Cornwell III (MLR 6:284 and 300); one of those deeds gives this house and property to his son Andrew.

Andrew Cornwell was born in 1700. He married Elizabeth Savage from Upper Houses in 1725 and they had four children. Elizabeth died in 1747 and Cornwell remarried a year later. Two sons, Thomas and Timothy, resulted from this marriage. The youngest, Timothy Cornwell, eventually received the house from his father's estate. Young Cornwell fought in the outward

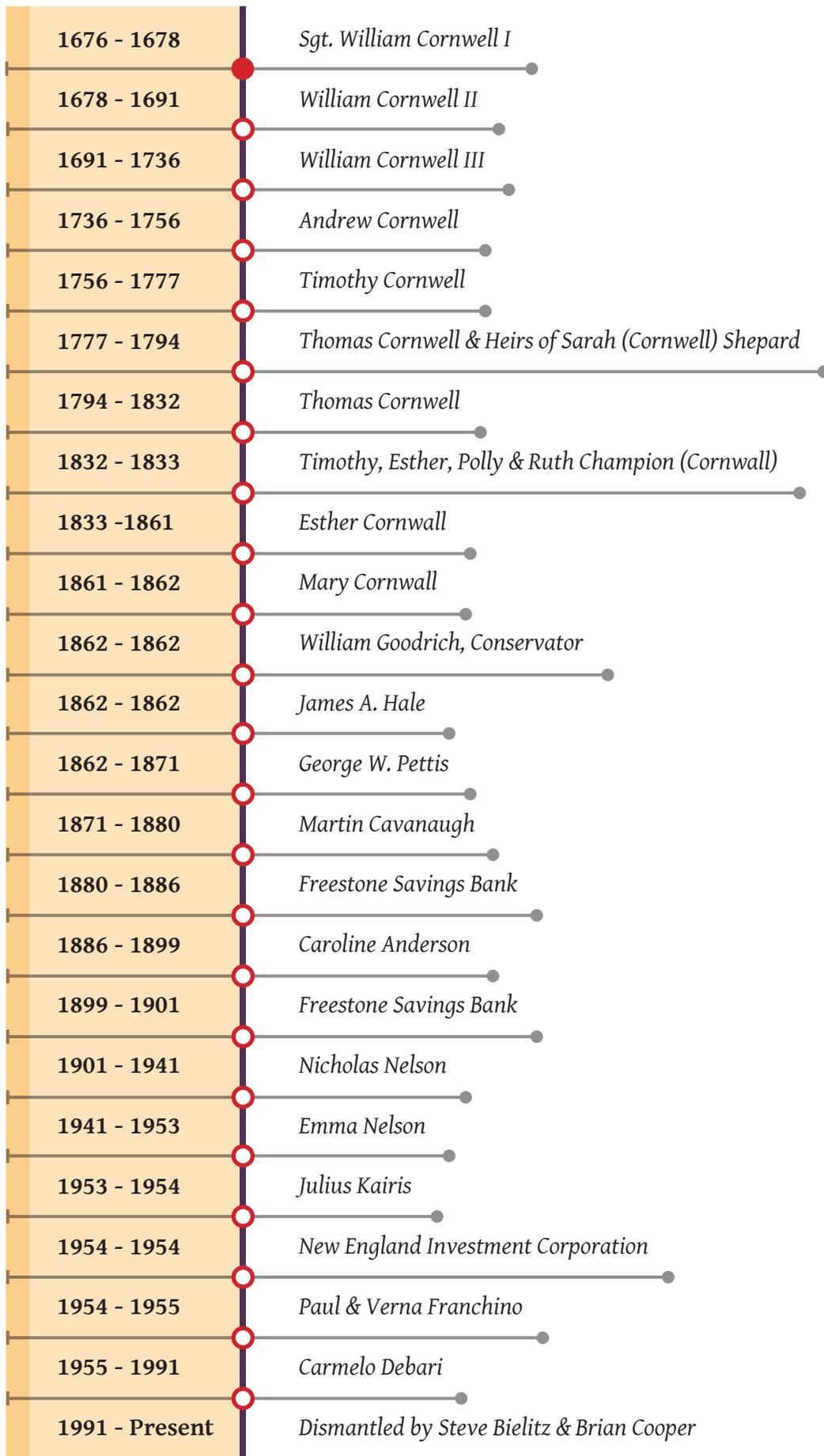


Revolutionary War, serving under General Israel Putnam at the Battle of Bunker Hill, but he did not return to the house in the meadow. He died in 1776, probably as a result of battle wounds, illness or imprisonment, and the house went to his older brother Thomas. (Interestingly, the house is recognizable in Timothy's distribution: his young widow, the former Amy Sage, is given the "outward" room as her dower --in this one-room deep structure there is now need to specify "front outward" or "rear outward". The same situation occurs in Thomas' 1832 distribution, when his widow Ruth receives the "east room", not "northeast" or "southeast", or "east rooms".) Thomas Cornwell lived here until his death in 1832 when the house passed to his two daughters, Esther and Mary. (At about this time the spelling of the family name changed to Cornwall.) They spent the next thirty years here and following their deaths the house left the Cornwell family.

It is commonly believed in Portland that there are no houses remaining from the 17th century; this house derives its significance from the fact that it appears to trace back at least to 1691 and probably several years earlier. It also suggests that here may have been more 17th century activity than local historians believed.



# Land & Ownership



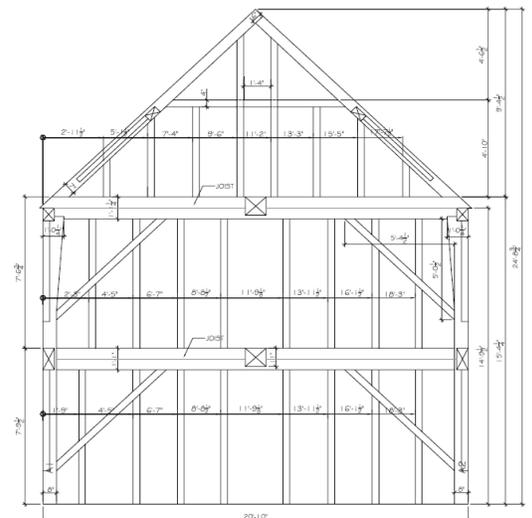
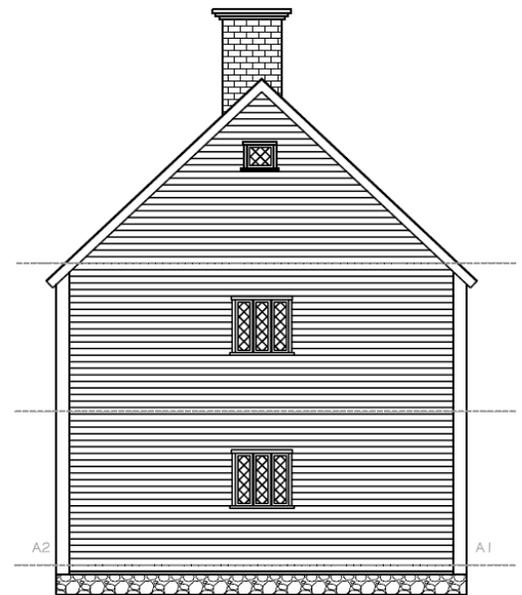
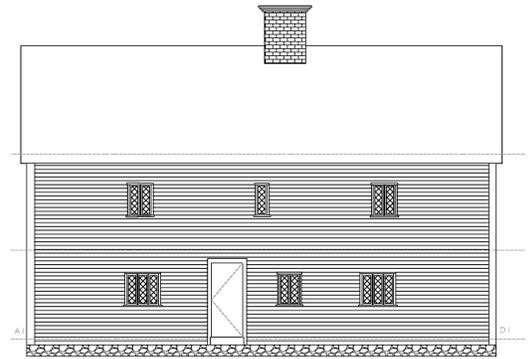
# 1693 Post Medieval English House

The house was sided with asbestos and sat on a fieldstone foundation, predating the more commonly used cut brownstone. It is 2 ½ stories tall with a 45 degree pitch to the asphalt shingled gable roof. The façade is 3 bay at the second story level, but 5 bay on the first story; the 5 bay configuration is quite likely a later modification of an original 3 bay configuration. The clearest exterior indication of the age of this house is the single window for each story in the gable end – a sign that the house is an older, one-room deep style. The rather steep angle of the roof, the 40' x 21' floor dimensions, and the original 3 bay façade combine to produce a marked similarity to the 1692 Buttolph-Williams House in Old Wethersfield, although the Cornwell House displays no overhang. However, other earlier houses in Portland also display no overhang (492 Main street – ca. 1715; 613 Main street – ca. 1703).

The cellar of the Cornwell House, also extremely similar to the Buttolph-Williams House, extended under only half the house, the left half, in each case, as viewed from the front. The cellar stairs of each house are not particularly steep and run from right to left in front of a 7'-8' wide fieldstone chimney base. The cellar under the original block of the Jonathan Warner House (613 Main Street) is similar, although as an end chimney house, there would be no "right half" of the house.

In the interior, the uncased, chamfered summer beam also provides clear evidence that the house was intended to have one room on either side of the chimney, as opposed to the five room floor plan of most 18th century Colonial period houses. Framing visible in the attic also displays an older construction technique identical to the Buttolph-Williams house.

The roof is carried by four principal rafters with three to five narrower rafters between them. Three separate purlins run between the principal rafters, supporting the narrower rafters. The gable ends reveal primitive stud framing, which predates the more common plank houses of the 18th century. With the exception of the White House and the Warner House, the construction methods employed in this house exist nowhere else in Portland.



# Classic Features of the Period

- Asymmetrical presentation of doors & windows
- No Cornice
- Small windows, originally with narrow surrounds
- Vertical Batten Doors
- Frame is Summer Beam constructed, 40' x 20'
- Hand Planed Wooden Ceiling

## **Authentic Two over Two Configuration:**

- Two rooms upstairs and two rooms down.
- Downstairs: the Hall & Parlour, Upstairs: two Bedchambers
- Central Chimney
- Attic Space



*Steeply pitched, side gabled roof with little or no rake or eave overhang.*



*Attic has a Purlin roof system with hewn studs (not sawn).*



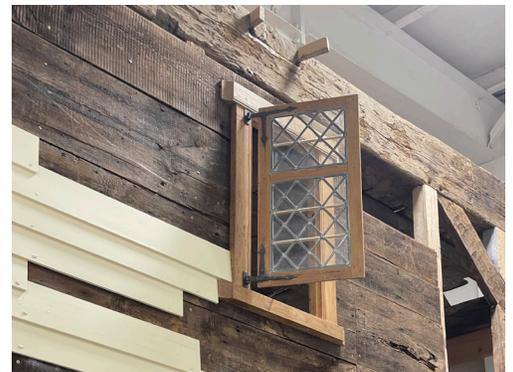
*Horizontal Feather Edge Paneling on second floor.*



*Large gunstock posts.*



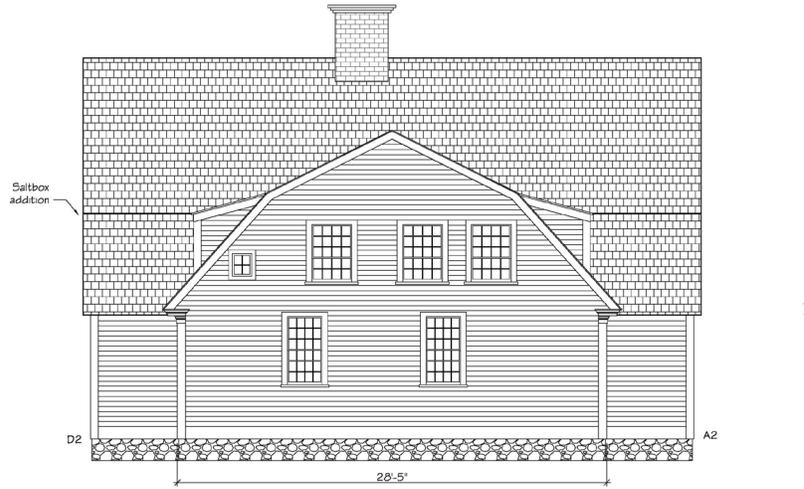
*Summer Beams have chamfers with lambs tongue terminations.*



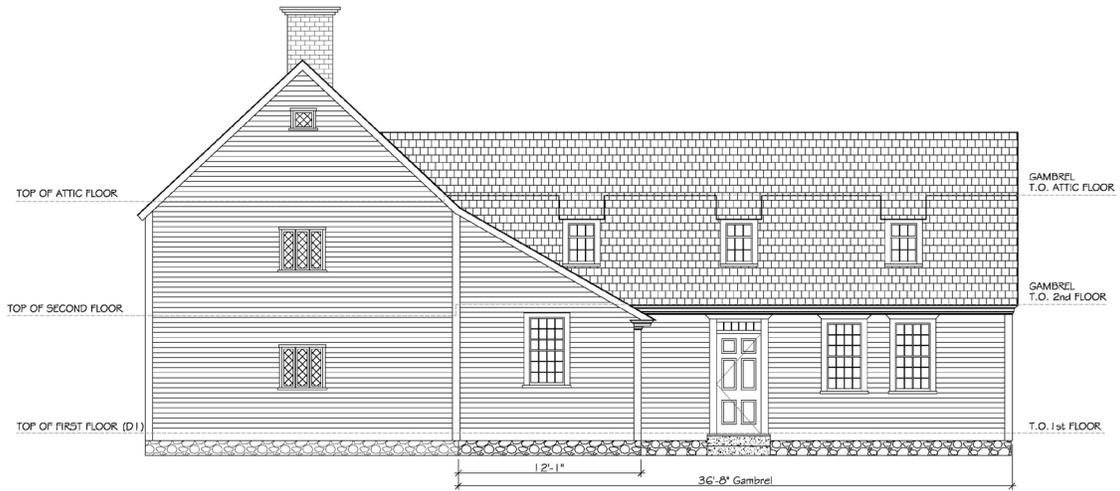
*Diamond shaped window panes.*

# Design Options

RANGE "2" - ELEVATION FROM OUTSIDE (BACK)



BENT D FROM OUTSIDE



BENT A FROM OUTSIDE

