HEWLETT-MUNSON-WILLIAMS HOUSE, MANHASSET, NEW YORK

HISTORICAL SURVEY

prepared for
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PURPOSE

The Hewlett-Munson-Williams House at 200 Port Washington Boulevard, Manhasset, New York, exhibits significant evidence of early construction although previous attempts at identifying its date(s) of construction have been unsuccessful due to the lack of documentary evidence. The purpose of this survey has been to review and supplement the recorded history of the house by examining new data such as the United States Census records; in addition, dendrochronology has been employed in order to establish, if possible, specific dates of construction and alteration.

The results of the survey are contained in two sections: Historical Data and Physical Data. The Historical Data is a review of all available recorded documents including the census records which reveal the succession of occupants, if not the actual owners, of the house. The Physical Data is contained primarily in the appendix which describes the methodology and findings of the dendrochronological testing.

The assembled data indicates that the house grew in at least three early stages, and that two of the construction
periods took place during the seventeenth century. The history of the structure, therefore, coincides with the history of the settlement of Cow Neck itself and exceeds the documentary record by at least half a century. Until a similar investigation has been carried out at other eligible sites, it is reasonable to conclude that the Hewlett-Munson-Williams House is the earliest documented structure standing in the vicinity.*

HISTORICAL DATA

Munsell's *History of Queens County* (1882) provides the following sketch of Cow Neck's early history (p. 411):

Though this and the adjoining territory had for a long time belonged to the Dutch government, yet there had been none but very sparse settlements made prior to about 1670. The first important settlement was made, or rather attempted, near the head of Cow Bay, in the spring of 1640, by a small colony of English immigrants from Lynn, Massachusetts, under the command of Captain Daniel Howe...

Cow Neck, containing about 6,000 acres of land, was at the earliest settlement of the original town of Hempstead used principally for pasturing cattle by the inhabitants of other portions of the town... For a long period and up to about 1676 Cow Neck continued to be used by residents in distant parts of the town, including the present town of Hempstead, as a common pasture; and for this purpose was fenced from near the

*Hereinafter referred to as the Williams House.
head of Cow Bay across to near the village of Roslyn. The freeholders of the town were permitted to pasture a number of sheep or cattle proportioned to the number of panels of this fence they had respectively constructed. These rights of pasturage were bought and sold much as we now sell bank stocks or railroad bonds. The land was divided among the claimants (probably in the same proportions) subsequent to 1695.

The early generations of the Hewlett family are closely associated with this settlement period, inasmuch as George Hewlett (1634-1722), the first of the name, is recorded in the Town of Hempstead records as pasturing his cows on the Neck as early as 1657. His name occurs frequently in these records during the following decades; they suggest that he prospered and amassed a considerable estate in the area.

Because of the ambiguities of reference points and boundaries cited by the printed records, the extent and location of George Hewlett's Cow Neck tract remains uncertain. It is suggested by a family history (1903), however, that his third son, Lewis (1686-1763), "settled on land bought by his father, George, at the head of Cow Bay (now Manhasset)." In light of the recent confirmation of a 1675 date of original construction for a portion of the Williams house, it would appear likely that it was either built or moved to the site by either George Hewlett or his son Lewis.
Lewis Hewlett inherited his father's Cow Neck property in 1722. Lewis married twice; first to Grace Hallet, in 1710, later to Hannah Kissam, date unknown. He had eight children in all, two of whom were sons, Samuel (1712-1800) and James (1717-1805). To these sons Lewis Hewlett devised the bulk of his estate; his will, dated 1763, reads in part:

I will and bequeath unto my two sons Samuel Hewlett, and James Hewlett and to their heirs and assigns forever all my houses buildings lands and improvements, which I have lying on Cow Neck in the township of Hempstead aforesaid to be equally divided between them in quantity and quality...

It is clear from this reference that more than one dwelling existed on the extensive Hewlett tract by this period, and that each of the two sons inherited an equal share of their father's estate including a place to live. The subsequent chain of title for the Hewlett Homestead across the road suggests that Samuel inherited that portion, whereas James secured title to the portion of the property containing the house under examination.

Like his father, James married twice. He married Sarah Lawrence some time before 1744, when a daughter Hannah was born. A second daughter, Katherine, was born the next year but died in infancy. James remarried in 1772; the second union produced no issue. Thus, in 1763 when James
inherited the property, he was in all likelihood already occupying the structure. His daughter had married Capt. Stephen Hewlett in 1761; his first wife may or may not have been alive by this time. His second wife, Jemima Jackson (1739-1825) outlived her husband by twenty years.

James Hewlett's will was dated 1801 and admitted after his death in 1805. Perhaps because he lacked a son, James devised "...all the lands and meadow lying in North Hempstead and in Hempstead and all my negroes that I gave my said wife the use of as long as she liveth my wife, to James Hewlett, son of my brother Samuel Hewlett decd."

The younger James Hewlett, nephew of James and son of Samuel, was the third of five children born to Samuel Hewlett. James Hewlett was born in 1780 and was lost at sea, unmarried, in 1805. Thus, the elder James' estate was not settled until after the expiration of his wife's life interest which occurred in 1825.

Apparently on the occasion of Jemima Hewlett's death in 1825, her nephew Lewis S. Hewlett (1776-1846) secured a clear title to the parcel. The deed reads in part:

Whereas James Hewlett at the time of his departure from N(ew) Y(ork) on a voyage to West India in Jan(uary) 1810 (?) was possessed and seized in fee
of R(eal) E(state) in Q ueens) C(ounty) on Cow Neck T(own) N(orth) Hempstead and T(own) Hemp(stead) on Little Merrick whole of which was devised to him by his father Samuel Hewlett or his uncle James Hewlett. The said James Hewlett never returned from said voyage but is supposed to have been lost on Sea...

All those certain parcels of land on Cow Neck as fol(lows) All that parcel of land and dwelling house on w'ly side rd. that leads through Cow Neck...

This is the first conveyance of the property which distinguishes the portion of the ancestral Hewlett land on the west side of the present-day Port Washington Boulevard. Lewis S. Hewlett, who inherited his father's tract across the road in 1800, thus became the owner of both parcels by 1825.

The early census records shed further light on the composition of the two households. In 1800 there were two Hewlett households, that of Lewis S. Hewlett and his uncle James Hewlett (who died in 1805). Samuel Hewlett, Lewis S. Hewlett's father and brother of James, had apparently died just before the census was taken and had devised his principal dwelling to his eldest son. The Lewis S. Hewlett household was composed of seven individuals, only one of whom was a non-family member, presumably a farm laborer.
Of the other six, four were men between the ages of 16 and 26, and the other two were women aged 16 to 26 and 45 or over. The identities of these family members were as follows: Lewis S., aged 24; James, aged 20; Samuel L., aged 18; William H., aged 16; Phebe H., aged 21; and their mother Ruth, aged 49. Lewis S. Hewlett was the first to marry in 1802; thus, in 1800, all of his brothers and sister continued to cohabit the family dwelling with their mother, and Lewis S. was considered the head of the household.

The other Hewlett household, that of James, was composed of nine people; five of those were slaves and four were family members. Of the four, two were men aged 16 to 26 and 45 or over, and two were women aged 16 to 26 and 45 or over. The identities of the younger man and woman are not known, whereas the man and woman who were over 45 years of age were James (aged 73) and his wife Jemima (aged 61).

Ten years later, in the census of 1810, the two households appear to have been merged. In that year only Lewis S. Hewlett was listed as a head of the household which was composed of twelve people. His uncle James had died in 1805 leaving Jemima who, nevertheless, was not
listed as the head of a distinct household. It is therefore uncertain who was living in the Williams house on the west side of the road. The other Hewlett household, however, was composed of eight men, three women, and a free person of unspecified age or sex. The identities of two of these people, a man and a woman, are unknown although their ages were between 10 and 16 and between 16 and 26, respectively. The other members of the household were Lewis S. Hewlett's three sons (Daniel Alfred, Stephen D., and Samuel L.), his three brothers (William H., Samuel L., and James), and himself; the women were his wife Hannah and his mother Ruth.

Similarly, the census records for 1820 do not appear to have two Hewlett households and the composition of the one in question remains a mystery. That of Lewis S., across the road, is recorded. It is known that Jemima Hewlett lived until 1825 and assumed that she continued to reside in the family's dwelling whose use was devised to her in 1805. Nevertheless, she was not counted as its head-of-household in either the 1810 or 1820 census.

In the census records of 1830 and 1840, however, a new Hewlett household appears which reflects the purchase of the property by Lewis S. Hewlett in 1825. His son Samuel L.,
who was born in 1803 and married Maria Thorne in 1822, was apparently the occupant of the Williams house during this period. The coincidence of the marriage of Samuel L. and Maria in 1822, the purchase of the other house by Samuel's father in 1825, and the birth of their son Henry Thorne Hewlett in 1827 suggests that Lewis S. Hewlett acquired the property after his aunt's death in 1825 in order to provide his son and daughter-in-law with a house of their own.

Lewis S. Hewlett died in 1846. Prior to that date, in 1841, he and his wife Phebe had conveyed a parcel of 87 acres to Samuel L. Hewlett; after his father's death, Samuel L. inherited all of his property. The other two sons, Stephen D. and Daniel Alfred, had died unmarried at the ages of 25 and 24, respectively. Thus Samuel L. and Maria took possession of the Lewis S. Hewlett house in 1846, and thereby vacated the Williams house on the other side of the road.

Within four years they conveyed the property to Samuel L. Hewlett's uncle, William H. Hewlett, who was Lewis S. Hewlett's younger brother. William H. was then 66 years
of age and a widower, his first wife having died in 1844 at the age of 56. Although he would remarry in 1852, his only children were those by his first wife: Martha Maria (1821-1864) and William Henry (1827-1898). William H. Hewlett acquired the property for the use of his daughter and son-in-law, John S. Morrell, who were recorded by the 1850 census as living there with their first-born, Anna A. (aged 3 months). The conveyance of 1850 describes the property as comprising 191 and 3/4 acres.

In 1860, John S. Morrell and his wife Martha M. are recorded as living in the same place, although their first born had apparently died in infancy. Two other girls, Martha M. and Maria L., are listed as aged 7 and 3, respectively. A black servant named Adille A. Mayhew, aged 17, completed the household.

Martha M. Morrell died in 1864. Her father's will is dated April 1, 1864, and was apparently prompted by the death of his daughter. William H. Hewlett devised his own house and adjacent mill property to his son, William Henry; he devised the other property to his son-in-law in trust for his granddaughters:
I give devise and bequeath unto my son-in-law John S. Morrell for & during the time which shall elapse until Matilda Morrell & Maria Louisa Morrell his infant daughters of my deceased daughter Martha Maria Morrell shall arrive at lawful age the use income & profits of the farm of about 190 acres situate on Cow Neck T(own) N(orth) Hemp(stead) recently occupied by him & my daughter Martha Maria & now occupied by him the said John S. Morrell...

William H. Hewlett died in 1866; his granddaughters were then 13 and 9 years of age.

John S. Morrell continued as the head of his household in 1870 and 1880. He had apparently remarried by 1880, when his wife is recorded as Louise, aged 35. Only one of the two daughters is listed in that year (Matilda), although her age appears to have been confused with that of her younger sister, Maria. A farm laborer named Bill Brown, aged 30, completed the household.

The deletion of Maria Louisa Morrell from the 1880 census suggests that she had died by that date. She is known to have predeceased her uncle, William Henry Hewlett, who died in 1898; furthermore, she had not produced issue by that time. Therefore, it would appear that Maria Louisa did not reach her maturity and that her older sister, Martha Matilda, became the sole heir to her grandfather's bequest.
Although John S. Morrell was still listed as the head of the household in 1880, his daughter at age 27 had legal title to the property. Martha Matilda conveyed the property to Carlos W. Munson and Mabel Williams Munson in 1904, at which time its legal description and total acreage remained the same as that which was contained in the conveyance from Samuel L. Hewlett to William Hewlett in 1850. Subsequent to the Munson acquisition, the property passed into Levitt family ownership after Munson's death in 1940. The real estate developers partitioned the parcel, and the house itself on a reduced lot of several acres was acquired by the present owners, Mr. & Mrs. Henry de V. Williams, on August 23, 1944.

A synopsis of the chain of title is as follows:

1675-1722    GEORGE HEWLETT (1634-1722), by purchase
1722-1763+    LEWIS HEWLETT (1686-1763+), by will
1763+-1805    JAMES HEWLETT (1717-1805), by will
1805-1825     JAMES HEWLETT estate (1780-1805), by will
1825-1846     LEWIS S. HEWLETT (1776-1846), by deed
1846-1850     SAMUEL L. HEWLETT (1803-1868), by will
1850-1866     WILLIAM H. HEWLETT (1784-1866), by deed
1866-1874  JOHN S. MORRELL, in trust for daughters
          MARTHA MATILDA & MARIA LOUISA, by will
1874-1904  MARTHA MATILDA MORRELL (1853-     )
1904-1940  CARLOS W. MUNSON & MABEL WILLIAMS MUNSON,
          by deed
1940-1944  LEVITT, by deed
1944-present  MR. & MRS. HENRY DE V. WILLIAMS, by deed

A synopsis of the occupants of the house is as follows:
pre-1722   unknown
1722-1763+ LEWIS HEWLETT and/or others unknown
1722-1805 JAMES HEWLETT and/or others unknown
1739-1825 JEMIMA (JACKSON) HEWLETT, w. JAMES HEWLETT
1825-1846 SAMUEL L. HEWLETT, son of LEWIS S. HEWLETT
1846-1850 SAMUEL L. HEWLETT and/or others unknown
1850-1904 JOHN S. & MARTHA MARIA (HEWLETT) MORRELL
          and daughters MARTHA MATILDA and MARIA
          LOUISA
1904-1940  CARLOS W. & MABEL WILLIAMS MUNSON
1940-1944  unoccupied
1944-present  MR. & MRS. HENRY DE V. WILLIAMS
PHYSICAL DATA

Both the chain of title and the history of those who occupied the house relate to the apparent construction and alteration dates which have been independently documented by dendrochronological testing. Excluding from consideration the west wing, which was a free-standing structure moved to the site by the Munsons in this century, the house appears to incorporate four distinct periods of construction.

A visual survey of the first floor framing suggests that two separate house frames have been combined to form the center hall, five-bay configuration of the center block. And further, the section to the left of center has been extended in depth to correspond in size to that which lies to the right of the center hall. These three sections of framing, all visible in the present-day full cellar, were apparently raised at a later date to create a full two story dwelling with a roof of mid-nineteenth century construction. A relative chronology for this gradual enlargement of the original house is as follows:

STAGE I  the one-room, one-story cell now to the left of the center hall, surviving intact or as a fragment of the original, seventeenth
century house frame;

STAGE II expansion of the house in length with the addition of a pre-existing house frame, thus creating a center hall, five-bay dwelling of one or one-and-a-half stories;

STAGE III addition to the back of the original frame, carried out at the time of enlargement to the east or at a later date, including the addition to the west of the one-story kitchen;

STAGE IV construction of a full second story and full attic above the existing dwelling, the roof fabric of which is extant and representative of mid-nineteenth century construction.

Based upon the results of the scientific analysis of the beams employed in these several stages, it is now possible to superimpose a more specific chronology to these stages. Both the section to the left of the center hall (front room) and the section to the right, including the hall (full depth of the house), are of seventeenth century construction: c. 1675 to the left and c. 1695 to the right.
The actual date of their connection -- Stage II -- may be the mid-eighteenth century, if the character of the raised paneling in the front east room is attributed to the same period. Similarly, the enlargement of the older section on the west -- Stage III -- appears to have taken place in the mid-eighteenth century as well; its 1½"-thick plank floors are representative of the technology of the period. And finally, the sawn dimensional lumber employed in the roof construction appears to be of mid-nineteenth century date. It may have replaced a lower gable or lean-to roof of the earlier expanded dwelling, the end rafters for which survive in part in the extant end walls.

In summation, it may be concluded that the documented Hewlett family history coincides with both the empirical and scientific evidence. Although it is not possible to document the fact that the first generation of Hewletts actually resided in the house, it is nevertheless proven that both of the principal sections of the house were constructed in the seventeenth century and later improved by a Hewlett. And until further research of this sort is undertaken, the
Hewlett-Munson-Williams House may be regarded as the earliest extant structure in Manhasset, and one whose origin is contemporary with the area's seventeenth century period of settlement.
A DENDROCHRONOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE WILLIAMS HOUSE,
PORT WASHINGTON, NEW YORK

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Introduction

In an effort to establish some absolute dates and the chronological sequence of building phases in the Williams House, a dendrochronological analysis of some major structural beams has been performed. From architectural evidence, three separate structural components are evident or suspected. From the "oldest" central section, seven basement beams (designated WHA) and three ceiling and vertical support beams (designated WHD) were cored. Of these ten specimens, two proved to be American chestnut (Castanea dentata). The remaining eight beams were from oak (Quercus) species. Although the actual species could not be positively identified, white oak and red oak are highly probable species. From the large east wing addition (designated WHB), five basement beams of all oak were cored. And from a small addition on the north side of the earliest WHA section (designated WHC), four basement beams were cored. Of these, two proved to be chestnut. Only the oak specimens have been examined in the study because of low number of annual rings in the chestnut cores (26 to 41) and the lack of any dated chestnut chronology from living trees. Thus, of the 19 sampled beams, 15 were examined for this study. See Figures 1 and 2 for a schematic layout of the beam locations.
The majority of the oak basement beams had the original bark surface present. Unfortunately, the degraded quality of the outer few annual rings (estimated to be 2-5 in most cases) resulted in the loss of those rings in coring the beams. Fortunately, a ceiling beam and a vertical support beam in the WHD section each had a solid bark surface which provided a complete ring sequence.

Dendrochronological Analysis

The 15 oak cores were mounted and surfaced to a high polish using increasingly finer grit sandpaper. The annual rings of each core were counted and skeleton plotted in traditional fashion. The total number of rings ranged from 30 to 141 with the majority in the 40 to 60 year range. This is a low number for tree-ring dating which necessitates some caution in interpreting the results of this study. The skeleton plots revealed some internal cross-dating among three beams of the WHA and WHD sections and among all five beams of the WHB sections. The two WHC oak beams showed no cross-dating among themselves or with any other beams. However, these results were extremely encouraging given the shortness of the series. More significantly, there was also an indication that the WHD and WHB cores cross-dated between themselves with an offset of 16 years, the WHD cores being 16 years earlier than the WHB cores.

All 15 cores were then subjected to a statistical cross-dating program based on a sliding correlation method. By this method, two undated master (or average) chronologies were developed in a stepwise manner for the WHA–WHD and WHB sections. Again, the WHC cores failed to fit in. Each undated master contained the same cores with the identical alignments found by skeleton plotting, thus verifying the earlier subjective (but nonetheless reliable) method of dating. Finally, the WHA–WHD and WHB masters were computer cross-dated. The
only significant match occurred at an offset of 16 years, again verifying the skeleton plot method results. The probability that this match occurred by chance alone is only about one in a thousand. On this basis, the WHA-WHD and WHB masters were combined into an undated composite master 68 years long.

To place the WHA-WHB-WHD master correctly in time, this series was computer cross-dated against a dated master chronology developed from living trees and a house constructed in 1738. The house is located only about 25 miles from the Williams house in the southern Hudson Valley. The complete dating master begins in 1491 and is dominantly constructed of the house material up to 1738. The living tree chronology is from near New Brunswick, New Jersey, and spans 1674-1981. The computer cross-dating program produced only one significant match between the two series at 1690. The probability that this match is spurious is less than one in 500. Taking into account the 16 year offset of the WHA-WHD and WHB masters, the older central section was probably built shortly after 1674. This is a bark or cutting date of the trees because of the excellent preservation of the outer rings. The east wing addition, WHB, was probably built from trees cut no later than 1693-95 based on the estimated number of rings lost in coring. See Figure 3 for the exact temporal placement of the beams used in the WHA-WHB-WHD master. The actual construction dates could be a year or two later than the cutting dates depending on whether or not the logs were stockpiled and seasoned.

Discussion

The proposed dendrochronological dates for two construction phases of the Williams house differ significantly from some historical evidence that may apply to this house. The may is very important since the historical evidence could be for a nearby house across the road. Given the shortness of the WHA-
WHD-WHD master series (only 68 years), these dates should be accepted with a closing caveat. Additional tree-ring chronologies from historical structures and living trees on Long Island could reveal strong enough differences with the chronology used to date the Williams House to warrant a reevaluation of these dates. While not likely, this eventuality must be kept in mind. It may also be possible to date the currently undated beams this way. The cause for this lack of dating is presently unclear. A different oak species is one possibility.
Figure 1

Williams House
Basement Beams
Cores for study

Not drawn to scale

WHA-1, WHC-2, WHC-3, WHC-4

Newer beams

1-84, 2-84, 3-84, 4-84
Figure 2.

Williams House Beams cored above basement

Dining Room

Above WHA Section

Not drawn to scale

South side of house

Foyer
Figure 3:
Williams House Beams Used in
Master to Establish Construction
Dates of Two Sections.