

Historic Structures Report

Levi Lowe House



Randolph, New Hampshire

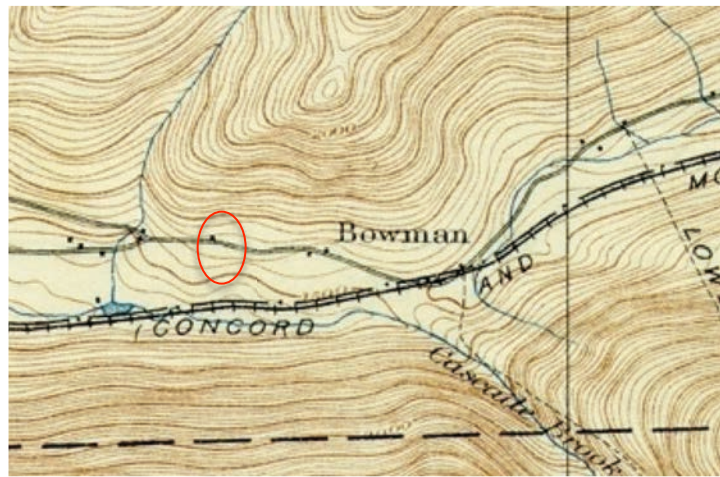
Levi Lowe House
1270 Presidential Highway (Route 2)

Purpose:

This report is based on inspection and research of the Levi Lowe House more recently known as the Almon E. Farrar House. Research and site visits took place intermittently over the course of January through April 2014. I was asked to write a Historic Structures Report by the Randolph Community Forest Commission who took ownership of the property in summer of 2013. The purpose of this report is so that the RCFC will have a documented history of the property, a description of the property, a general existing conditions assessment, and recommendation for its treatment approach.

Summary:

The Levi Lowe House in Randolph, New Hampshire sits on a hillside on the north side of Route 2, looking out across its former fields. It sits on 78 acres that span both sides of the road. For many years it has been thought to be oldest house still standing in Randolph. There is a plaque above the front door that reads "1790." The RCFC acquired the property first and foremost for the forested land, as the Commission is charged with maintaining Randolph's community forest. The Lowe has access points to hiking trails, which could eventually connect to the trail system, maintained by the Randolph Mountain Club throughout Randolph. The house and two outbuildings, a shed and a three-car garage with a second floor apartment, are part of the parcel. Before the RCFC makes any decisions on the buildings and their use, the Commission wanted to gain a clearer understanding of the history of the property, especially of the house since it is believed to be one of the oldest structures in Randolph.



Lowe property circled on detail of 1896 USGS Map of Randolph.

History:

The Levi Lowe house is a small, one and-a-half story cape with a rear ell. On the property behind the house is a wood framed outbuilding that is an early 20th century vehicular shed, two bays wide which contain old farming equipment. Adjacent to the house is a three-car garage with a second story apartment built c.1961 (1266 Presidential Highway). Beginning in c.1790, Silas Bumpus cleared the land for farming. His next-door neighbor, Jesse Bumpus, was likely his brother, which may have been the reason for his choosing this lot. Years later he sold the land to Levi Lowe in 1819.¹

The Levi Lowe family owned the property for eighty years, beginning with Levi in 1819, who arrived



The Lowe House as it looked in the early 1920s when the Ernest and Mildred Farrar lived there. Photo courtesy of Robert F. Ross, Jr.

in Randolph (then called Durand) with his family from Gray, Maine and ending with his grandson Perley Lowe who sold it in 1899.²

The property passed to Mary Lowe, Levi's widow in 1836, then she sold it to her son Justus Lowe in 1857³. By that time the original seventy acres had grown to one hundred acres.⁴

Levi and Justus were both active in town affairs at separate times. Levi participated in calling the first town meeting and was also the first town clerk. Justus was active in all affairs of the town for fifty years until his death in 1877⁵. Mary Lowe made her

own mark in the town's record books. She was the first woman to suffer the injustice of taxation without representation regarding the sale of some heifers. Her letter has been recorded in the town's record books.⁶ Upon Justus Lowe's death, his son Perley inherited the farm. He returned to Randolph from Meridan, Connecticut where he had been living for many years. He owned it 1899. (See full 2003 Inventory Form in the appendix for further details).

In 1897, two years prior to the house being sold to Annie F. Lornegan, an interesting event occurred in Randolph that involved "Perley Low's Place," which may have been this house. A man was shot at the kitchen door entrance to the house, not by Perley, but by his tenant George Staples. The account was

¹ George N. Cross, *Randolph Old and New. Its Ways and Byways*, (Boston, MA: Pinkham Press, 1924) 34.

² Registry of Deeds, Coos County, New Hampshire: Book 97/35 (1899).

³ Book B23/19 (1857).

⁴ Elizabeth Durfee Hengen, "Levi Lowe House," 2003. On file with the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, Concord, NH.

⁵ Cross, 36.

⁶ Cross, 35-6.

written up in the *Berlin Independent* on August 4, 1897, which was reprinted in Randolph's town newsletter, "The Mountain View" in 1992. According to the newspaper, tenant George Staples, who had been renting half of the house from Perley, shot a man, Norman Decost, at the kitchen door. The article referred to Staples' half of the house as "Staples' roadhouse." There were three single women who lived in the house with Staples. On the night of the shooting, besides the three women, there were also a number of men "bearing well-respected names of citizens in Coos County" at the house with Staples according to this article.⁷

It has yet to be determined for certain that this house was the location of this unfortunate incident. There is another rumored location on Valley Road still owned by Lowe relative, where the incident may have taken place. Some of the uncertainty lies with the fact that the story in the newspaper does not give a specific address. However, the Lowe house is divided into two living quarters on the first floor and this alteration could have been done prior to 1897, during Perley Lowe's residency. The two west rooms on the first floor make up a small two-room apartment that is accessible only through a separate exterior door at the rear of the house, the north elevation.

Following the many years of the Lowe family ownership, were a number of owners who did not



c. 1924 Mildred Farrar album. From left: Evelyn, Mildred, Almon, and Ernest Farrar on the front steps of the house. Photo courtesy of Robert F. Ross, Jr.

continue with farming, from 1899 with Annie Lornegan until 1918. That year Ernest Farrar, from Grafton, Maine, and his young wife Mildred purchased the property and began farming the land again.⁸

Ernest and Mildred Farrar raised their three children, Almon, Evelyn, and Elva on the farm. On the southeast corner of the driveway, at the road's edge, was a spring-fed watering barrel. Across the road (rte. 2) from the house was the barn overlooking the fields. More is known about farm life with the Farrars in the early 1900s, than previous families, due to more written documentation of their family history.

The Farrars had horses, cattle, pigs, and chickens on the farm. Most often potatoes were the largest crop grown.⁹ (See Evelyn Mildred Farrar Ross' account in the Appendix for more details about life on the Farrar farm).

Around 1927 the Bowman School became Randolph's only school with eight grades and one teacher.

⁷ Mountain View, "Randolph in the Gay Nineties," Vol. 2, No. 1, (Randolph, NH: October 24, 1991), supplement a-b.

⁸ Robert F. Ross, Jr., "How the Farrars Came to Randolph," Randolph, NH, undated.

⁹ Evelyn Mildred Farrar Ross, narrative of her childhood on the Farrar farm, Randolph, NH, 2001.

A school bus driver was needed and Mildred Farrar filled that role for eighteen years. Her Model T Ford served as first the school bus in Randolph.¹⁰

When Ernest died in 1944, his son Almon became joint owner of the property with his mother Mildred.¹¹ He had already built a house in 1938 for his growing family to the west of the Lowe House on a small parcel, 1.4 acres, subdivided off from the original. Mildred continued to live in the Lowe House until 1961 when she and her second husband Harvey Webster built the three-car garage and workshop with a second story apartment adjacent to the house to the northeast (1266 Presidential Highway). From that point forward she lived in the apartment and rented out the house. When she passed away at age ninety-nine in 1998, Almon and his wife Vera Farrar became sole owners of the property.¹²

They continued to rent out the Lowe House. Almon kept cutting the fields right up to the end of his life, though farming had stopped many years before. The barn was long gone; it had been severely damaged in a 1978 nor'easter and was taken down shortly thereafter.¹³

Almon Farrar was two years old when his parents moved to Randolph and purchased the Lowe House. Except for the eighteen months he served in the military when he was drafted during World War II and summers where he worked construction to support his growing family, he lived his entire life in Randolph on his family's farm. Almon and his wife Vera raised four children in the house he built next door to his childhood home, the Lowe House. Following his death in 2005 the Lowe House property was left to his wife Vera. The property remained in the Farrar family until 2011, when they sold it to David and Doris Willcox. For just over ninety-years the Farrar family lived on the farmstead, ten years longer than the Lowes. In the summer of 2013 the Randolph Community Forest Commission, acquired the property from the Willcoxs.

Structure:

As mentioned in the history section above, the Lowe House is a one-and-a-half story, side-gabled cape. It may have been built originally as a five-bay style cape, but it now reflects late 19th and early 20th century changes. It is clad with wood shingles and plain corner boards, casings, and cornice returns. Early twentieth century photographs show that it had been clad with wood clapboards. The house sits on a granite block and fieldstone foundation. The stone splitting marks visible on the granite blocks are from a plug drill, which were used post 1830.¹⁴ The central,



Stone splitting marks visible from plug drill – post 1830.

¹⁰ Robert F. Ross, Jr., "Mother's Square," Randolph, NH, undated.

¹¹ "Interview with Robert F. Ross, Jr., nephew of Almon Farrar." Interview by author. February 20, 2014.

¹² "Interview with Donna Cairns," Telephone interview by author, May 5, 2014.

¹³ Robert F. Ross, Jr., "My Early Randolph Years," Randolph, NH, unpublished, 2007.

¹⁴ James L. Garvin, *A Building History of Northern New England*, (Hanover, NH: University Press, 2001), 42-45.

brick stove chimney that rises out of the asphalt roof suggests a period from the 1840s to 1850s for construction. Stoves were becoming more commonplace for new houses constructed post 1840 versus open hearths due to their heating efficiency. No evidence exists inside of the house that suggests there were ever fireplaces. The stove chimney coupled with the stone splitting marks on the granite suggests a **construction date for the house in the late c.1840s**. This was the period when Mary Lowe and her son Justus were living on the property.



South façade.

South Façade:

The main entrance is located on this south elevation. It is centered on the façade flanked by sidelights, though both the sidelights and the door have been boarded up for several years now. There is symmetry in the composition of the fenestration, though the



Front door and sidelights.

tripartite window arrangement is an early 20th century change and the 6/1 window late 20th century replacements. The front steps are cut granite blocks.



West elevation of the main house.

West Elevation:

Only one bay, 6/1 window sash on the first floor. Two bays in the gable peak with 1/1 window sashes. Again, these sashes are late 20th century replacements.

North Elevation:

On the western side of the north elevation of

the house, the rear, there are two bays containing doors. The door closest to the west elevation is the only entrance into the two rooms on the west side of the first floor. These rooms had been turned into a two-room apartment near the turn of the 20th century. To the left of this door is another door that was covered over with shingles, most of which have fallen off. This doorway led straight into the interior stairs.



West elevation of the ell. North elevation of house.

Kitchen Ell:

On the eastern side of the north elevation, a 1-½ story ell was added that dates from latter part of the 19th century. It is clad with wood clapboards and plain corner boards on the north elevation, wood shingles on the east and west elevations, and is set on granite block foundation. Asphalt shingles cover the roof and a single brick stove chimney sits at the juncture of the house and ell. There are two bays, a turn of the 20th century door and a single casement window in the gable peak bay on the north elevation and a mix of 19th and 20th century sashes on the east and west elevations.¹⁵



Kitchen ell north elevation.



East elevation.

East Elevation:

A tripartite window, similar to the front façade and a single 6/1 window sash are on the first floor while two 1/1 window sashes are in the gable peak. They are all late 20th century replacement sashes. A third bay at the end of the main house, before the juncture of the kitchen ell, is a door. It is a 20th century six-panel, metal clad replacement door.

Interior Summary:

Over the years alterations were made to the interior. Originally the house floor plan was likely of rooms that flanked the central stove chimney. The front parlors were divided by a solid wall, possibly at the latter part of the 19th century. This alteration distinctly changed the character of a typical cape floor plan, though it is a reversible change.

On the north side of the chimney wall, are two sets of stairs, one leads to the basement and one to the second floor. The upstairs is laid out with a larger room on the east, a deep central closet to the east of the chimney, and two smaller rooms on the west. There is a small door in the knee-wall adjacent to



The solid wall divided the front rooms on the first floor, creating a separate apartment.

¹⁵ Hengen, 4.

the stairs that once led into a crawl space on the north side of the east room.

Originally the walls would have been finished with animal hair plaster and lath, with plain, painted wood trim. Evidence of wallpaper was found in different rooms of the house. More research would be required in order to determine the periods of the paper. The upstairs rooms revealed original wide-pine board floors painted, and two with floor cloth coverings. There are three older doors that are the Greek Revival style four panel doors with mortise-and-tenon joints hung with cast iron double-barrel or fixed pin hinges, also known as cast-iron loose joint butt or cast-iron butt, fixed pin. One is in the northwest room of the apartment, another at the stairs going up to the second floor, and the third is the bathroom door. Upstairs the catches for door latches are still attached to the doorjamb. Though the doors are gone, these are evidence that they had been cast iron latches, likely a plain Norfolk latch or a Suffolk latch given the simpler style of finishes throughout the house. Lastly, as previously mentioned, wood stoves heated the house.



Painted floor cloth in east bedroom upstairs.

Like most houses, style updates and changes were made to the interior to accommodate the needs of the persons living there. Several perimeter walls on the first floor have had the animal hair plaster and lath removed in order to add insulation. The ceilings on the first floor have been replaced or covered with a material similar to beaverboard. The door to the basement, front door, rear ell door, and rear door of the west rooms apartment were changed around the turn of the 20th century to the five-panel style, the exterior doors having a large, clear pane of glass. The doorknobs on all of the doors are turn of the 20th century styles, most of them brass with back plates. Most of the first floor rooms have early 20th century wood floors, possibly covering the wide pine board floors. A mix 19th century and early 20th century doors and hardware can be found throughout the first floor. The heating stoves were updated last in the c.1970s and appeared to have fueled by oil based on the presence of old oil tanks. Stoves were the source of heat for the house throughout the building's history. No evidence of another type of heating system was found in the house.

Fieldstone walls capped with granite blocks surround the dirt-floor basement. Various materials have been used on the walls to try and insulate from spray foam insulation – an irreversible alteration –, to rigid insulation, to plaster and lath. Most have been

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Basement: a variety of insulation can be seen on the foundation wall and the granite post with its splitting marks.

applied to the granite blocks. Split granite posts as well as some wooden posts give support to the floor joists above. There are wood shelves for storing food, that still hold many glass jars and containers, in the center of the basement, and in the southwest corner below a basement window a stall-like structure, perhaps for storing root vegetables.

The kitchen ell contains a large kitchen with painted cabinets that have a rooster design painted by Mildred's daughter Elva.¹⁶ There is a large cast iron sink c.1900-1920s and a free standing hot water tank c.1890s, possibly copper, but it has been painted, with evidence of ceiling pipes above it – this tank would have gotten its hot water from the kitchen range and then plumbed across the ceiling to feed the kitchen sink. The floor has at least two layers of floor covering: a solid vinyl atop an earlier linoleum and there may be an even earlier layer. Behind the kitchen on the north end of the ell is the only bathroom in the house. A small square hall is to the east of the bathroom and has an on three walls each a row of hooks on strips of trim. Most of these hooks date back to the early 20th century or before. In the bathroom there is an early 20th century cast iron tub and sink, and a late 20th century toilet. At the end of the ell, the northern most room, between the small hall and the rear entrance is a room used for storage with access to the ell attic. There is evidence on the wall framing that suggests this was once a finished space with lath and plaster.

Recommendations:

There are some different scenarios that can be recommended.

If the RCFC wanted to use the house for living quarters or even an office space, a great deal of work would need to be done, and sensitively if the goal was to restore the house to a particular time period. Two points in the property's history stand out if that were to be done, the c.1850s period when Mary Lowe and Justus Lowe were running the farm and built the house or the 1920s period when Ernest and Mildred Farrar lived there. Three generations of Lowes and two generations of Farrars lived in the house and worked the farm. The Lowe House significance lies in the fact that it was one of the earliest rural farms in Randolph and relates to what the Lowe and Farrar families contributed to Randolph's early history. Those two family histories would be the ones to focus on if the RCFC decided to rehabilitate and restore the exterior. If this option is chosen I recommend to hiring an architect who specializes in historic buildings as the first step. Accordingly, the house may be eligible for the NH Sate Register, which could be useful in order to receive tax credit and/or grants for such a project.

Taking into consideration, however, that the RCFC's mission is to maintain Randolph's forests, rehabbing a historic house is unlikely a part of their future plans or budget. Maintaining and preserving the integrity of an old, wooden building well is expensive. And, there are two other 20th century buildings on the property to take into consideration, besides the Lowe House. One is the early 20th century vehicular shed and the mid-

¹⁶ "Interview with Robert F. Ross, Jr..."

century three-car garage and second floor apartment. From a budgetary perspective, the mid-century garage and apartment may be less expensive to maintain the building's integrity. It may have the dual purpose of a workshop and office space or living quarters that would suit the RCFC. The vehicular shed, once cleaned out, may also serve a constructive purpose.

With these scenarios in mind, should the RCFC decide that the house is beyond the scope of its mission and its budget, it may be best to either auction off the house and have it taken away or demolish it. Prior to making the latter choice, there is a great deal within the house that can be salvaged. Door hardware, doors, sinks, the cast iron tub, the early 20th century hot water tank, cabinet hardware, the wide pine floors upstairs, the wall hooks in the ell, and likely several more items that should be salvaged. There appear to be more items in the ell attic, the basement, the vehicular shed and the garage that can also be salvaged. This step would be good stewardship in preservation. Prior to demolition, an archival quality set of measured drawings should be made for the town archives. One final step, as good stewards of the preservation of Randolph history, would be to leave an outline of the foundation on the property and perhaps add a small, freestanding exhibit panel that gives a brief history of the Lowe and Farrar families.

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MAPS

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INTERVIEWS

"Interview with Robert F. Ross, Jr., nephew of Almon Farrar." Interview by author. February 20, 2014.

"Interview with Donna Cairns, daughter of Almon Farrar." Telephone interview by author, May 5, 2014.

Photograph Appendix



c.1840s Levi Lowe House on left and 1961 three-car garage with second story apartment on right. Tucked to behind the house and to the left of the garage is the early 20th century vehicular shed.



Front door and sidelights boarded up.



Late 20th century replacement window sashes.



Trim detail covered by wood shingles.



Rear door, north elevation, which is only entrance into the apartment on the west side of the house. There is a door to the left of the red one that was covered over. It opens directly into the stairway leading upstairs.



1961 Apartment and three-car garage built by Mildred Farrar's second husband Harvey Webster. South elevation.



West elevation.



North elevation.



East elevation.



Early 20th century vehicular shed. South elevation.



North and east elevations.



c. 1924 Almon and Evelyn Farrar with barn in background.
Photo courtesy of Robert F. Ross, Jr.



Looking across Route 2 to the location where the barn once stood.



The Farrar family c.1924. Notice the detail of the front door and the wood clapboards on the house. Photo courtesy of Robert F. Ross, Jr.



c. 1920s East elevation, side door (technically the back door as it is the end of the house and before the juncture of the ell).
Photo courtesy of Robert F. Ross, Jr.



Northwest room, first floor of the house. This is part of the two-room apartment.



Some more details of the northwest room. The Greek Revival, four panel door.

Appendix