

BARTLETT-CUSHMAN HOUSE
CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES REPORT

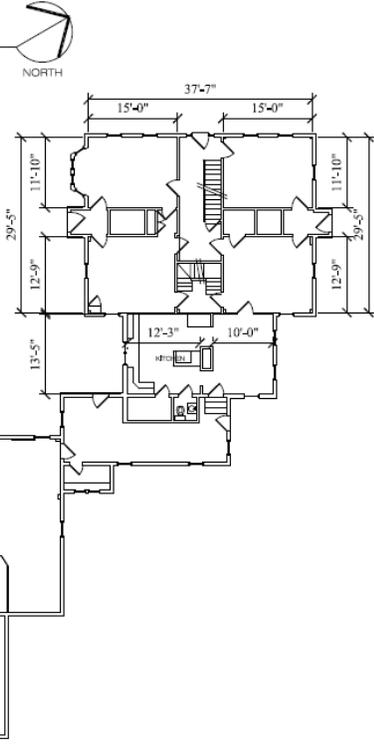
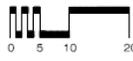


Photograph (1934) courtesy of Stratham Historical Society

Portsmouth Avenue

← Bunker Hill Avenue →

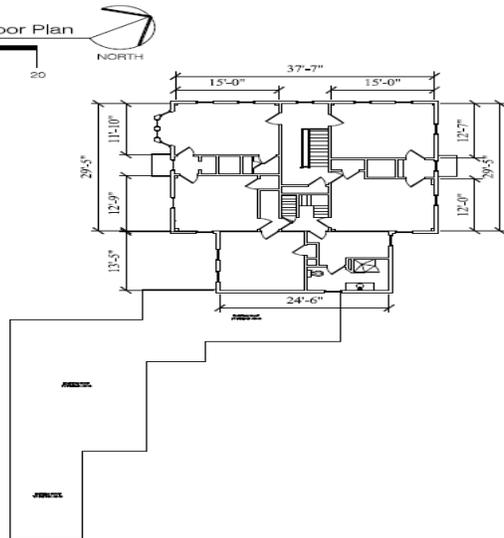
First Floor Plan



← Portsmouth Avenue →

← Bunker Hill Avenue →

Second Floor Plan



BARTLETT-CUSHMAN HOUSE
82 PORTSMOUTH AVENUE
STRATHAM, NH

Character Defining Features

The Bartlett-Cushman House is comprised of four sections: the 1827 main house, an ell, a connecting shed and a small barn. The latter three sections are all of undetermined later 19th century construction. The Federal style main house was modified in the mid-19th century by the addition of a two-story bay on the south façade and a pair of arched dormers on the front slope of the roof. The property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The listing is based on the property's architecture and for its association with patterns of development and use of non-farm related residences in Stratham. The period of significance for the property extends from 1827 to 1964, with the significant dates being 1827 and c.1850.

The Secretary's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings and their Related Guidelines define rehabilitation as the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values. The standards and guidelines recognize that while a property may have original features throughout that are all "character defining" we can categorize these as primary and secondary spaces and features. Primary spaces and features are those that should not be changed or removed unless they are deteriorated beyond repair and should then be replaced in kind. Secondary spaces and features are those that can accommodate needed compatible change when necessary to allow new and continued use of the property.

This report on character defining features follows the format given in *National Register Preservation Brief 17, Architectural Character: Identifying the Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings as an Aid to Preserving Their Character*. The standards and briefs mentioned above are available online. A list of web links to these documents is provided at the end of this report. The report focuses on the character of the property as it relates to its overall setting and the four sections mentioned in the first paragraph.

The field work for this report was done by Peter Michaud, NH Division of Historical Resources and Rebecca Mitchell, Stratham Heritage Commission, on September 12, 2014. The purpose of the report is to support the Town of Stratham's Request for Proposals for the rehabilitation of the Bartlett-Cushman House and to assist potential developers of the property to more easily formulate re-use options that will not only help to ensure the property's future usefulness but will also preserve its most important historical features.

OVERALL VISUAL ASPECTS

Setting:

The Bartlett-Cushman House sits on a lot with the same dimensions as at the time the house was built. The stonewalls on the east and south borders of the lot are likely those that were present in 1827. The main house and its connected projections have a strong frontal presence parallel to

Portsmouth Avenue. Widening of Portsmouth Avenue has diminished the lawn area in front of the house, but the house still retains a feeling of separation from the road.

While there are no remaining immediately neighboring buildings of this same period, the typical pattern is of structures facing the road and surrounded by open space. Although the road level of Portsmouth Avenue has been raised, the Bartlett-Cushman House has retained a slightly elevated position that sets it apart from neighboring structures. This raised position has the appearance of a less formal and more rural version of the terraced positioning of grander houses of that time.

The Bartlett-Cushman House, set on a 2.27 acre lot with its modest-sized barn, is typical of early 19th century town or village houses of the professional class and unusual for Stratham where the remaining historic houses are more typically associated with agricultural uses. For much of the nineteenth century the southwest corner of the lot was used by the Town for a small brick schoolhouse. The outline of its foundation can be seen in dry seasons. Future activities in that area involving ground disturbance should be evaluated for sensitivity. In light of this potential archaeological interest the relevant area of the lot is considered a primary feature.

<u>Primary Features</u>	<u>Secondary Features</u>	<u>Non-Historic Features</u>
Orientation toward Portsmouth Ave.	Mature shade trees	Brushy undergrowth
Stonewalls	Open space in E sector of lot	
Open space in the SW sector of lot		

Shape:

The property consists of a series of rectangular boxes – the main house block and three successively connected projections comprising an ell, shed and barn. The facades of all four elements meet at right angles. The strongly unified appearance of these masses is enhanced by the white paint. The porches and the two -story bay projecting from the main house do not visually weaken its overall rectangular mass and serve to further state the prominence of that structure. The barn, smaller than and set back from the main house block, is in a clearly subservient position consistent with its service function. The main house and barn have a strong, formal frontal relationship to Portsmouth Avenue.

Set back and to the side of this progression of main house and projections stands a low cement block garage. While standing on its own, the garage is another rectangular box form whose mass runs parallel to that of the barn.

<u>Primary Features</u>	<u>Secondary Features</u>	<u>Non-Historic Features</u>
Rectangular massing	Cement block garage	
	Garage extension to barn	

Roof and Related Features:

The main house has a hip roof with paired interior corbelled chimneys located on the roof ridge. The hip roof form is repeated on the two side porches and, in a shallower form, on the two-story bay on the south side of the main house. A pronounced feature of the main house roof is a pair of arched dormers on the front slope of the roof. There was a hatch covered by roofing material located on the upper rear slope of the roof. During the 2014 reroofing the glazed hatch cover collapsed and was replaced by a wood cover. Future roofing jobs may choose to replace the hatch or to remove it creating a flush roof while preserving the framework visible in the attic.

The ell extending from the rear (east side) of the main house has a shallow hip roof that from ground level appears flat. A smaller corbelled chimney is centered on that roof.

The barn and connector shed have gable roofs. The gable of the shed is apparent from the front where it abuts the barn. From the rear the appearance is of a horizontal shed roof sloping downward from just above the first story of the rear façade of the ell and from the gable ridge of that part of the shed connecting to the barn.

The covering of all but the ell roof is asphalt shingles of various ages and colors. (Subsequent to this fieldwork the roofs, excepting the barn, were stripped and resurfaced in 2014)

<u>Primary Features</u>	<u>Secondary Features</u>	<u>Non-Historic Features</u>
Roof forms and shapes on all sections	Roof hatch	
Corbelled chimneys on main house	Corbelled chimney on ell	
Dormers		
Corner returns on barn roof		

Openings and Façade Fenestration:

The centered, six-paneled front door and its surround retain characteristics specified in the 1827 building contract: “there is to be no glass over the front door but a fan blind in its stead gilt in the centre also blinds for the side lights.” The side light blinds are not present and without further investigation it is unknown whether the center of the elliptical fan blind was indeed gilded. The doorway has a simple, horizontal cornice with a flat frieze and architrave molding above paired pilasters.

The porches centered on the South and North facades of the main house give an exterior clue to the room layout of the interior. Both doors are six paneled; the North door is covered by a wood storm door. Above each door is a five-paned transom sash.

The fenestration of the main house has a rhythmic symmetrical pattern interrupted on the south façade by the addition of the two-story bay. All the windows here have two over two double-hung sashes with the exception of the second floor windows over the north and south porches. Those two windows have older six over six sashes. The bay is comprised of four windows on each floor. The double hung sashes are four over four with the top sashes arched. The dormer windows are two over two with the upper sash arched.

The ell and shed have fenestration that is irregular both in its pattern and glazing. The second story windows are six over six, while those on the first story are two over two, or in the case of the south ell façade a mix of mid-twentieth century replacements. The shed windows are all six over six double hung sash excepting the two fixed three over three windows in the small lean-to on the rear of the shed.

The 1827 building contract specifies “green blinds to all the windows excepting those on the backside (& the garret windows) of the house, to be made with a cross piece in them.” Remarkably the majority of the blinds and blind hardware remain on the house, and is a primary character defining feature worthy of rehabilitation. The missing main house S side blinds may be replaced with in kind replicas. Early 20th c. photographs and existing hardware show that at least some of the bay windows also had blinds. Those blinds, some of which are currently stored in the house, should be retained and may be remounted if desired.

The barn door, facing squarely to the road, creates a strong impression only slightly secondary to the main house entrance. A pair of six over six windows flank the almost square barn door. Centered above the door is a smaller square hayloft door, and above that just below the peak of the gable is a third window, one over one. This highly symmetrical arrangement of openings creates a strong visual pattern.

<u>Primary Features</u>	<u>Secondary Features</u>	<u>Non-Historic Features</u>
Front and side facades	Wooden storm door at N side door	Modern shed entry door
Front and S side façade of Barn	Globe lights over front & S doors	First floor elevation of S ell façade
Front door surround of main house		Modern sash barn gable
Side door surrounds		All other exterior lights
Historic Paneled wooden doors		
Barn door		
Main house & ell 2/2 windows		
Main house & ell 6/6 windows		
Existing blinds & blind hardware		

Projections:

The double height bay window on the south façade of the house is a distinctive feature of the Bartlett-Cushman House, both because of its prominence and its departure from the otherwise distinctly Federal period style of the house. The arched dormers are similarly distinctive both for their prominence and for their departure from the Federal style.

The porches centered on the South and North facades, while not unusual for houses of this period, are equal to the bay and the dormers in defining the character of the Bartlett-Cushman House. They speak to the origin of the house as the town residence of a family of the professional class.

<u>Primary Features</u>	<u>Secondary Features</u>	<u>Non-Historic Features</u>
Shed		
Double height bay window		
Arched dormers		
N & S porches		

Trim:

The trim of the front entrance commences with the strong horizontal of the cornice, repeating the horizontality of the roof cornice and the shadow created by its substantial overhang. The cornice is supported by a flat frieze and a pair of shallow pilasters. The relative simplicity and ample proportion of this door surround focuses attention on the six-paneled door framed by a semi-elliptical fan blind and sidelights. Also on the front façade the window blinds reinforce the symmetry of the window array and lend weight to the mass of the house form.

The barn trim is simpler. Its most immediately notable features are nicely molded cornice returns at the gable ends and the shingled hood over the barn door. The hood is supported by a pair of curved brackets.

<u>Primary Features</u>	<u>Secondary Features</u>	<u>Non-Historic Features</u>
Surrounds and trim at all main house entries		
Arched trim with returns at dormers		
Main house and ell cornice including cornice at side entrances and bay roofs		

continued

<u>Primary Features</u>	<u>Secondary Features</u>	<u>Non-Historic Features</u>
Flat stock trim & corner boards on main house, ell, shed and barn		
Hood over barn door & supporting brackets		

VISUAL CHARACTER AT CLOSE RANGE

Materials:

The main house, ell, connecting sheds and barn are all clad in wood clapboards that are primary character defining materials. The wood used for the blinds, trim and historic doors and windows are also primary character defining materials.

The 1827 building contract specifies that “the outside of the house be painted white with two good coats.” As James Garvin points out in A Building History of Northern New England, white lead was an expensive pigment requiring regular renewal. In specifying white paint Josiah Bartlett II was signaling that this was intended to be a gentleman’s home. From early 20th c. photographs it appears that the house remained white through to the present. The white paint color may be considered a secondary feature.

Craft details:

The quartersawn clapboards on the main house are skived and lapped, a practice that James Garvin (*A Building History of Northern New England*) says was abandoned around 1830. The dressed granite foundation and entry steps show an early use of the plug and feathers splitting technique that became common after 1830.

<u>Primary Features</u>	<u>Secondary Features</u>	<u>Non-Historic Features</u>
Main house clapboards	Ell and barn foundations	
Main house foundation		
Granite steps at main entries		

VISUAL CHARACTER OF INTERIOR SPACES, FEATURES AND FINISHES

Individually Important Spaces:

The interior spaces of the main house are consistent with the Federal style noted on the house exterior. Primary character defining interior spaces are the stair hall on the first and second floors, the main house side entrance vestibules, the main house front rooms on both floors, and the first floor NE room. The rear stairway, the first floor SE room and the two rear second floor rooms are secondary character defining spaces.

The interior spaces of the ell have seen a variety of changes. The first floor is a late 20th century open-plan kitchen/dining room with a chimney of undetermined date rising through the middle of the space. This space is neither character defining nor historic. The second story of the ell appears to have been divided into two rooms of roughly equal size.

The north side room was subdivided to create a bathroom. Both rooms may be considered secondary character defining spaces and the bathroom a non-historic space.

The open interior volume of the barn is also a primary, character defining space. Rehabilitation should avoid compromising the overall character of the space with the addition of new partitions or structures.

<u>Primary Features</u>	<u>Secondary Features</u>	<u>Non-Historic Features</u>
Main house staircase & first & second floor stair halls	Back stairs	Second floor bathroom
Vestibules at side entrances	Attic stairs	Ell first floor
<i>First Floor</i>	SE room	
Front rooms & NE room	Rear rooms	
<i>Second Floor</i>	Ell second floor rooms	
Front rooms	Shed	
Barn, open interior and loft space	Basement	
	Attic	

Related Spaces and Sequence of Spaces:

In the main house the vestibules inside both side entrances, which also serve as passages between the front and rear rooms, are primary character defining spaces. Also on the first floor the passage between the south front and rear rooms is a primary character defining space but could be altered by making one door non-functioning. On the second floor the passages between the front and rear rooms that correspond to the vestibules below are primary character defining spaces but could be altered by making one door non-functioning.

In the main house the space occupied by the back stairs and hallway connecting the two rear rooms on both the first and second floors is a secondary character defining space that could be altered without losing the present connectivity between the two rear rooms.

On the first floor of the ell the half bath and small laundry room appended to the kitchen and protruding into the shed are non-historical and may be removed.

The shed plays an important spatial and visual role linking the living spaces with the barn. The small appendage to the rear of the shed, while historic, may be considered secondary, not contributing to the sequence of spaces.

In the barn the area partitioned off in the SE corner while historic may be considered a secondary. Similarly the garage shed appended to the rear of the barn, while historic, is a secondary space.

<u>Primary Features</u>	<u>Secondary Features</u>	<u>Non-Historic Features</u>
Main house side entrance vestibules	Main house back stairs & hallway	Ell first floor half bath and laundry
Passage between S side first floor rooms	Appendage to shed	
Main house second floor passages between front & rear rooms	Partitioned area in SE corner of barn	
Shed	Shed attached to barn rear	

Interior Features, Materials and Surface Finishes:

Main House, first floor:

In the main central hallway the staircase rising to the second floor appears unchanged since 1827. It has delicately turned newel and angle posts and shaped handrail, all unpainted dark wood. The simple square balusters are painted. The open string has gracefully carved brackets.

Of the four first floor rooms of the main house the NW displays the most elaborate joinery. The mantelpiece is finely detailed and the wainscoting remains. The comparable room on the SW corner of the house may have had its detailing simplified when the bay was added. The mantelpiece has been removed but the west façade windows retain the interior sliding shutters specified in the building contract. The floor shows evidence of a possible built-in cabinet in the room's NW corner. The SE room, which originally had a cooking hearth, has simple wainscoting and a cabinet built into the SE corner. The NE room retains its fireplace surround and mantelpiece but no hearth, in this and other respects it is a simpler version of its adjacent NW room. All wood trim and doors have a dark wood grain paint finish.

Main House, second floor:

The two front rooms (SW and NW) have more elaborate woodwork, full mantelpieces, and six-paneled doors leading into the central hallway. The front windows of the SW room, like the room below, have sliding pocket shutters. The closet at the rear of the central hallway has a four panel door and appears to have been a later addition. The SE and NE rooms have noticeably simpler moldings, four paneled doors, and simple fireplace surrounds. As on the first floor all fireplace openings are closed up and hearths removed. The shape of the SE room appears to have been altered to create a closet and hallway access to the S room of the ell. What would have been part of the room's original N wall shows ochre painted plaster with a simple dark stenciled design near the ceiling. The same ochre color is visible under the wallpaper in the SE room's closet. This surface treatment should be documented or preserved.

Ell

The first floor of the ell has plain door and window trim. This area was remodeled in the late twentieth century with cabinetry and a dropped ceiling installed. The second floor of the ell exhibits a few more historic features. A single six over six window remains in the N room and in E wall of the bathroom.

Flooring

Throughout the house the flooring reflects change over time but appears to be minimally altered. All floors are wood boards with the exception of the upstairs bathroom and the cooking area and lavatory in the ell. Those three spaces have vinyl-type sheet flooring that appears to be laid over an undetermined subfloor. The dominant character of the flooring is of simply laid wood boards of various widths, many of them painted.

The dining area in the ell kitchen and the north and south vestibules of the main house have flooring of narrow wood strips unstained or lightly stained and minimally finished. Three of the first floor rooms have wider board floors that appear to be original to 1827. In all these rooms removed hearths have been patched in wood as have areas where heating registers were removed. These floors show evidence of having been painted. The exception is the southeast room that had been the original kitchen. That floor has narrower 3.5" boards, no evidence of the removed cooking fireplace hearth and a patch over an opening for a heating register, suggesting that this flooring was laid when the cooking functions were removed to the ell. The SW room has tacking strips from modern wall-to-wall carpeting. The other rooms show evidence of having had centered area carpets.

The main entry hall flooring as well as the stair treads and risers were painted, with evidence of several different colors. Both the hall and the staircase show evidence of having been covered by narrow runners. The rear stairs are painted gray throughout. The upper front stair hall, like the downstairs hall, shows paint with evidence of a runner. The first layer of visible paint is an ochre color covered by two varieties of red/brown. The colors here are more intact reflecting lighter use of the upper floor.

In the main house the floorboards in all the second floor spaces show evidence of having been painted. Only in the SE chamber have the boards been stripped and refinished. Several of the spaces have boards as wide as 14." In the ell the floorboards in the second floor chambers are of medium width. Those in the N chamber are painted red while those in the S chamber have been stripped and refinished. The bathroom floor has a recent threshold and the sheet flooring mentioned in the first paragraph above.

In any future rehabilitation it is recommended that wherever possible existing flooring be retained. If replacement flooring is installed it should be limited to simply laid wood boards, with possible exceptions in any kitchen or bathrooms/rest rooms. Painting is desirable and any new finish or covering is allowed as long as it protects and does not destroy the historic floors. Such covering could include nonadhered wall-to-wall carpeting and large area rugs. It is recommended that the main stairs and stair halls be painted and covered with carpet runners. With the exception of patching no use of old floorboards to create an "antique" look is advisable.

<u>Primary Features</u>	<u>Secondary Features</u>	<u>Non-Historic Features</u>
<p><i>Main House, first floor</i> Front door and all surrounding joinery</p> <p>All features of central stairs All main house interior doors and trim All main house window trim with the possible exception of that in the SE room Exposed corner posts in main house</p> <p>Baseboard and all ceiling moldings in central hallway</p> <p>Fireplace surround, wainscot, baseboards and ceiling molding in NW room</p> <p>Baseboards, ceiling moldings, bay trim in SW room</p> <p>Wainscoting & built in cabinet in SE room Fireplace surround, all wood trim in NE room Wood grain paint finish in NE room</p> <p><i>Main House, second floor</i> Mantelpieces in SW & NW rooms Bay details SW room</p> <p><i>Ell, second floor</i> Remaining 6/6 windows</p>	<p><i>Main House first floor</i> Flooring Electric sconces NW room Glass fronted cabinet in passage connecting SW & SE rooms Sliding shutters Electric hanging ceiling light</p> <p><i>Main House, second floor</i> Flooring Sliding shutters</p> <p><i>Ell, first floor</i> Window and door trim Flooring</p> <p>Shed windows</p>	<p>S side windows</p> <p>Kitchen cabinetry</p> <p>Light fixtures</p> <p>Dropped ceiling</p> <p>Bathroom fixtures & fittings</p>

Interior: Exposed Structure:

Main House

Where structural elements, such as corner posts, are visible that visibility should be maintained.

Attic and Basement

While the attic and basement may be considered secondary spaces every effort should be made to preserve the exposed structure in these areas, notably the framing in the attic and the brick chimney bases in the cellar

Barn

Valuable guidance on rehabilitating barns for agricultural and non-agricultural uses may be found in National Park Service Preservation Brief #20:

<http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/20-barns.htm>

While it may not always be practical to retain in its entirety the exposed structural system, at the very least enough should be retained to strongly convey the historic interior character. Entirely replacing the historic structural system should be avoided.

Useful Links:

<http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/stand.htm>

<http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/17-architectural-character.htm>

Report prepared by Rebecca Mitchell, Stratham Heritage Commission