

Society  
for the Preservation  
of New England  
Antiquities

Parlor paint  
analysis

October 3, 198



Mr. David Baldwin  
Arlington Historical Society  
7 Jason Street  
Arlington, MA 02174

Dear David:

Here, finally, is the report on investigation of the Northeast Parlor in the Jason Russell House - better late than never, I trust. I do appreciate your patience, and hope you find it useful.

Best regards,

*Sara*

Sara B. Chase  
Director  
Conservation Center

JASON RUSSELL HOUSE  
Arlington, Massachusetts

Investigation of the Northeast Parlor

According to "Jason Russell and His House in Menotomy" (1981 by Robert Nylander), the Northeast Parlor was part of a 1750-1765 addition to the original house, built in ca. 1740 (p.5). A number of construction and stylistic details support a mid-eighteenth century date:

- the lath in the wall by the front hall door are hand split on all four sides
- the post and beam casings on the exterior walls have wrought nails
- some of the floor boards have wrought nails, and are up to 18" in width
- what can be seen of the old summer beam is hewn
- the Georgian raised field paneling on the fireplace wall, as well as the closet door and hall door are hand planed and of mortise-and-tenon construction.

Apparently part of the ca. 1923 restoration are the door to the caretaker's kitchen, the presently visible summer beam sham, a corner cupboard, some of the baseboard, a bullnose moulding around the fireplace, the present ceiling. The 6/9 sash are certainly period - appropriate for the eighteenth century, but may well have been part of the twentieth century restoration work.

In about 1862, the present rear wall was built, and that may also have been the date of a mantel shelf, ghosts of which can be seen above the fireplace. The frame of the door to the kitchen has 6 - 8 paint layers.

The paint layers provide some additional historical information. Twelve to fifteen layers are present on the panelled fireplace wall; about ten layers show up on the more likely Federal (than Georgian) window casings and early piece of baseboard and moulding. The floor has about eleven layers of paint and shows some wear under the first layer.

It appears that the earliest treatment on the earliest wood trim in the room was a deep brown (burnt umber) oil

Jason Russell  
Northeast Parlor  
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stain. That includes the fireplace wall and the beaded corner post casings as well as the door to the hall. The floor at that time may have been bare or sanded.

The next paint color is the sprightly blue-green selected for the 1985 restoration. That it contains some flecks of verdigris as well as Prussian blue pigment indicates the ability to pay a better-than-average price for the paint. They were expensive pigments. The floor's first paint is a rich yellow ochre, probably intended to look rather like good fresh pine. This color appears on both high style and vernacular house floors from the 1750's through 1800 or so. (N.B. Harrison Grey Otis House chambers).

On an exposed area of wall by the hall door were signs of three or four wallpapers. It would have been likely that paint as good as was found on the wood trim would have been applied in a room where wallpaper was applied - a "best" room.

#### Paint layers

Fireplace wall (with color variations due to fading, abrasion, etc.):

wood  
deep brown oil stain  
bright blue-green (thin)  
light yellow-olive (over fireplace on soffit  
of beam is more like khaki) green  
glaze  
light ochre tan  
glaze - deep amber  
2 white whites  
2-3 light pinky tans  
light green (slightly olive) - glaze?  
2-3 off whites

Document wallpaper - recommended by Richard Nylander:  
General John Walker House, # 122437 -  
in document color (ca. 1780),  
Waterhouse Company

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Antiquities

October 3, 1988

Paint layers (cont.)

Floor: soft wood  
rich ochre  
deep red  
medium milk chocolate brown  
the upstairs red brown - 2-3  
2-3 blue greys  
2 present pumpkin

Dear David:

**Recommendation:** An area behind the door should be stripped to show the different colors - Each is a classic period floor color.

Hinges: door to hall - 2 rich browns (between milk chocolate with some red)

Baseboard & moulding: wood  
dull greenish light grey - glaze?  
1-2 (thick if one) white whites  
2-3 pinky tans  
2 light greenish whites  
light tannish ivory  
present white

Window casings and frames same as baseboard above.

Inside closet - 3 paint layers: wood  
light tan  
ivory  
present off-white

Wood trim color (best replicated by Benjamin Moore HC-138; "Moor-o-matic II Universal color system")



Document wallpaper - recommended by Richard Nylander;  
General John Walker House, # 188437 - in document  
in document color (ca. 1780),  
Waterhouse Company

Society  
for the Preservation  
of New England  
Antiquities

Harrison Gray Otis House  
141 Cambridge Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02114  
617 227-3956

February 1, 1985



Mr. David Baldwin, Curator  
The Arlington Historical Society  
7 Jason Street  
Arlington, MA 02174

Dear David:

Although I have not yet finished my report on the (NE) parlor of the Jason Russell House, I do want to let you know that I am not surprised to hear that you found confirmation in your records of my hypothesis that the present ceiling and summer beam casing are relatively recent.

Because our investigation of older material visible through a hole at the west end of the summer beam showed at least one earlier ceiling, I recommend that you remove the new 1½" - 2" fake summer beam and the new ceiling. While doing this, please check to see if the earliest ceiling, one yet higher up, above the hair plaster ceiling which is attached to lath on the bottom of old summer beam, is intact.

Best wishes,

Sara B. Chase  
Director  
Consulting Services

SBC/dw-g

# THE ARLINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

— ESTABLISHED 1897 —

7 Jason Street • Arlington, Massachusetts 02174

December 27, 1984.

Ms. Sara Chase  
S.P.N.E.A.  
141 Cambridge Street  
Boston, Ma., 02114.

Dear Sara Chase,

This letter is to confirm our appointment at the Jason Russell House on Friday January, the 4th, 1985 at 1:00 pm. I understand that the cost of your work will be between \$250-350. I look forward to seeing you then.

Sincerely,

David Baldwin  
Museum Director

Society  
for the Preservation  
of New England  
Antiquities

Harrison Gray Otis House  
141 Cambridge Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02114  
617 227-3956

February 28, 1984



David Baldwin  
Arlington Historical Society  
7 Jason Street  
Arlington, MA 02174

Dear David:

Here is a reasonable match to the "greenish ochre," Benjamin Moore GB-71; for the dark reddish brown stain, try a Cabot's interior stain/wax, or Minwax, using the basic mahogany with enough walnut or some other medium brown to tone down the red a little bit, and to darken it.

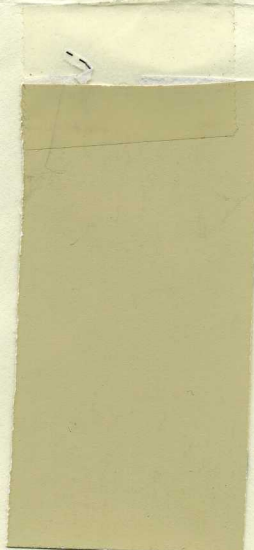
Best Wishes,

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sara".

Sara Chase  
Director  
Consulting Services

SBC/dw



Paint Study of the "Best Room" Chamber  
 (N.E. Corner Chamber)  
 Jason Russell House  
 Arlington, Massachusetts

Introduction

According to Robert Nylander's booklet "Jason Russell and His House in Menotomy" (p.11) the north rooms (and chamber?) were painted "olive green" in about 1814. Although a khaki green is more typical of the Georgian period than the Federal, it is not unusual for more rural houses to have slightly old-fashioned colors and stylistic elements well into periods of newer treatments in city houses. There certainly was a yellow-green (or greenish ochre) on much of the woodwork in the "Best Room" Chamber: on the ceiling cornice, wide baseboarding, raised field panelling, beam casing (west wall), hall door and frame, fireplace surround, and breast board.

On virtually all of the trim elements in the Chamber which have the "olive green," that color is followed by a light blue, and that in turn by an ivory. There seem to be, in fact, no more than eight paint layers on any of the woodwork - quite unusual for rooms which have stood for more than 200 years.

The colors are listed as I found them, using the Bausch and Lomb binocular microscope, 15 X - 60 X) on the various areas I sampled. Assigning dates to paint layers is always a bit risky, even with documentary evidence which give such clues as changes of ownership or use of a room.

It makes sense to restore the room to the period of its most recent alteration (so that the alteration is not given some earlier color it never had), but it is also possible to devise an interpretive program which can make some allowances.

Use a semi-gloss or "egg shell" paint. Old oil paints had a fair amount of gloss.

You could save, and exhibit under plexiglass, a portion of the ceiling beam which has as its first paint layer the early blueish color. I suspect that this was natural wood, darkening with smoke and age, while the room was "olive green".

A final note: the baseboard and the hall door and the large moulding around the fireplace had a dark reddish-brown stain (mahogany?).



Russell HouseRussell House  
Arlington, Massachusetts

North window casing:	wood off-white primer light blue
Raised field panel near fireplace: and baseboard	wood substrate reddish brown stain greenish ochre off-white ivory yellow
Door to hall:	brown-red stain light grey
Fireplace surround, hall door frame, window frame (near door):	wood dark stain (?) light medium grey dull greenish ochre light blue ivory yellow greenish ivory present white
Inside closet to R. of fireplace:	present white
South wall - panel to R. of fireplace:	same as above greenish ochre layer has possible flecks of verdigris pigment
Cornice moulding:	wood dull greenish ochre blue ivory yellow off-white present white
Floor near South wall paneling:	wood dark reddish brown stain deep mud-ochre 2 medium blue-greys dull orange-ochre "barn" red ochre ochre
Door frame to R. of fireplace, Raised panel above fireplace, Fireplace shelf	same as cornice moulding (above)
Beam casing along west wall:	dirt on wood greenish ochre etc.
Beam along south wall:	light blue, light medium grey

Russell House

North window casing:

wood  
off-white primer  
light blue

North wall baseboard:

wood  
blue

Door to hall:

wood  
brown-red stain  
light grey  
greenish ochre  
light blue  
ivory  
yellow  
greenish ivory  
present white

Inside closet to R. of fireplace:

wood  
yellow  
present white

The colors are listed as I found them, using the Bausch and Lomb binocular microscope, 13 X - 60 X) on the various areas I sampled. Assigning dates to paint layers is always a bit risky, even with documentary evidence which give such clues as changes of ownership or use of a room.

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1/4/84 Sara B. Chase, SPNEA  
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