



FIRST CATHOLIC CHURCH

NEWPORT R.I.

1830

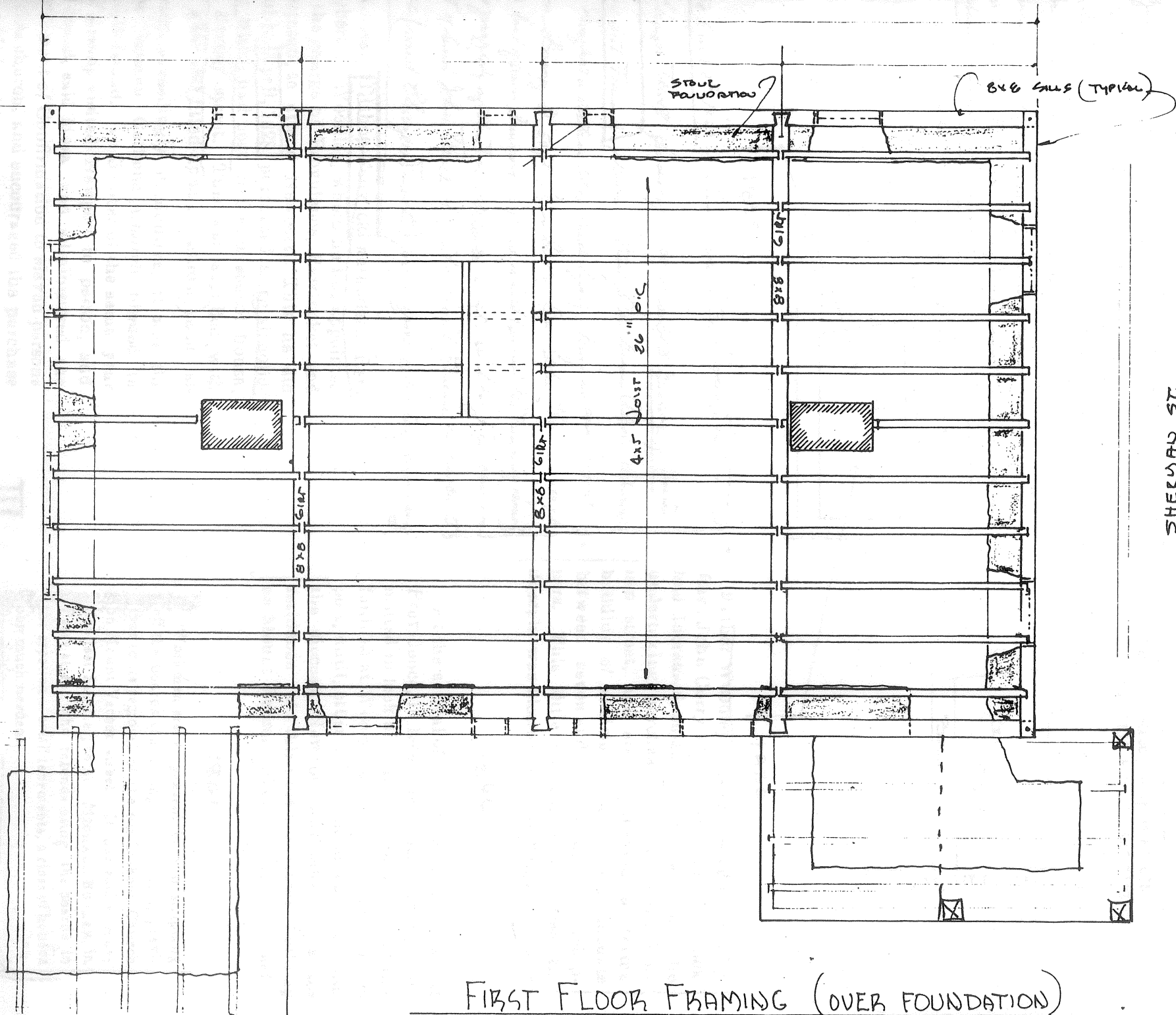
R. R. LOUG

12.3.01



I

II

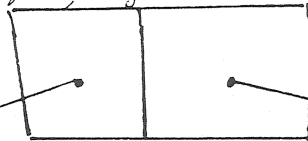


PROPERTY HISTORY.

RICHARD RICE LONG, AIA
ARCHITECT

Jan 1936 Bulletin of N.H.S. by Ruth & Franklin quote
the same year 1805 Elizer Trevett opened a school on Clark
but soon moved to the schoolhouse on Barney St, a one
story building with a belfry, used later as the first Catholic
church in Newport, where the school was discontinued in 1890.
The school had the usual hours for day sessions and a morning
school session at 6 AM as well."

Sig Episcopal Baptist Society to Elizer Trevett
Land Evidence Book 17 p. 39, May 20, 1828

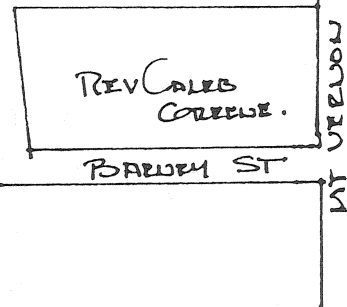


1828

Apr 8th 1828 Land Evidence Book 17 page 26
Elizer Trevett for sum of \$1100.00 sold to Bishop of Boston
resident Fenwick of Boston in trust for the Roman Catholic Church
Newport a certain lot of land lying & being in said Newport
on Barney St. 50 ft. / E. on land of Rev. Caleb Greene - 100 ft.
on land of David Simmons. 60 ft. W. on land (formerly the Tammam Society
now property of the Town Schools 100 ft. It being the same
lot of land John Trevett bought of Caleb Greene and sold to
me (said Elizer Trevett) for purpose of building a Academy.

St. Rev. Bishop Fenwick authorized Rev.
Robert D. Woodley, whom he had appointed
to the charge of Providence, Pawtucket and
Taunton, to attend Newport. This he did
and in April, 1828 purchased a small build-
ing which had been used as a school house,
on Barney street. This was supplied with
an altar and fitted up as a church, and, al-
though exceedingly diminutive, it was the
first Roman Catholic Church blessed in
Rhode Island. In October of the same year
the Bishop visited Newport in person, and
preached, said Mass, and administered the
sacrament of Confirmation to eleven persons
in this church, and encouraged the purchase
of additional land at a future day.

80 Division Street, Newport RI 02840
(401) 847-3131 Fax (401) 847-2212



1830

Father Woodley was succeeded in 1830 by
Rev. John Corry who as soon as the dock
had increased sufficiently to warrant the
undertaking, purchased land on Mount Ver-
non street, and erected thereon a frame
building of sufficient size to accommodate
between seven and eight hundred worship-
pers. This little church, known as St.
Joseph, was blessed August 20, (1837) The

1844

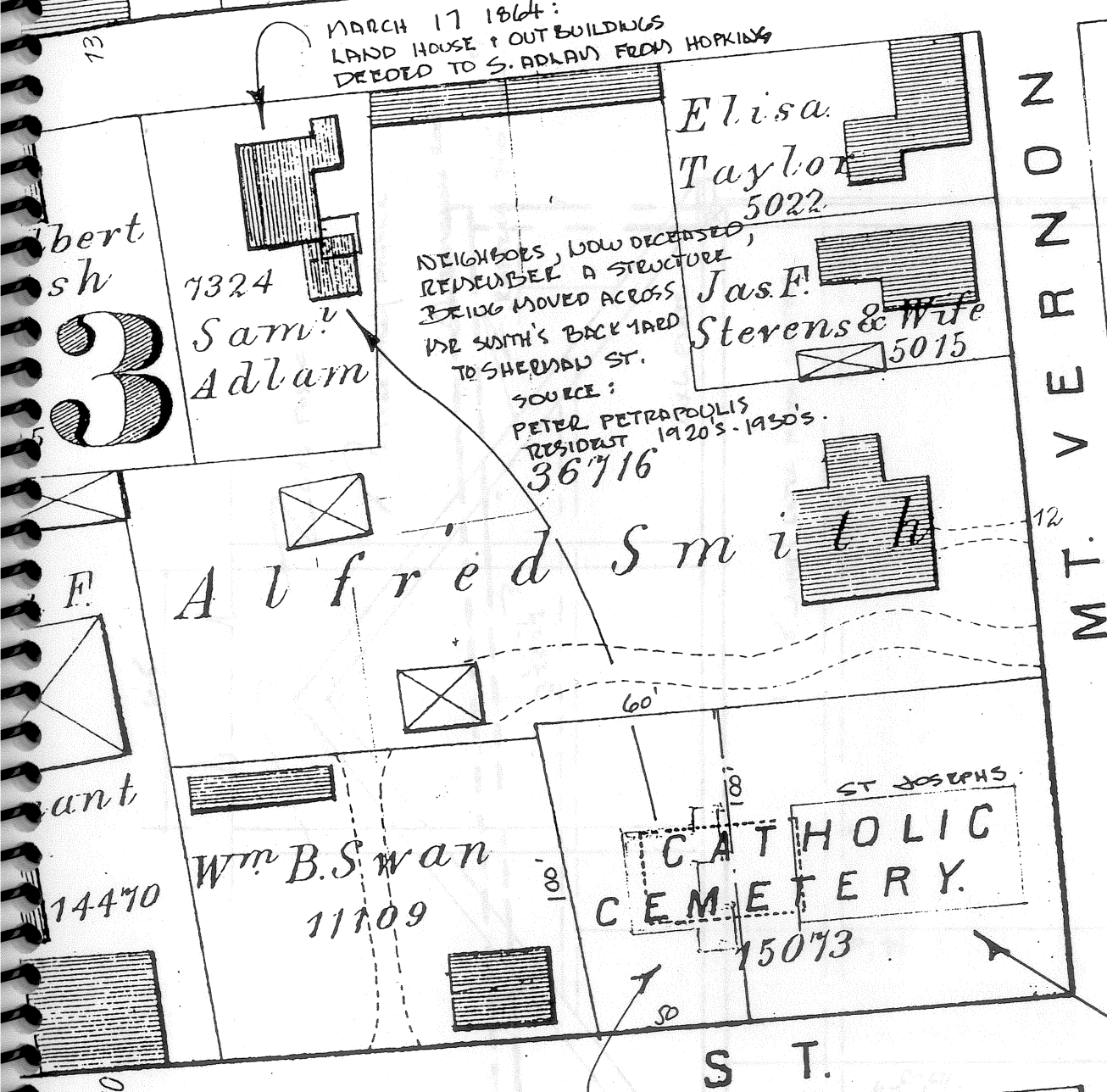
At the arrival of Rt. Rev. Dr. Tyler at
Providence, in 1844, the missionary was per-
mitted to look after the spiritual needs of the
faithful at Woonsocket, Pawtucket and New-
port, until, other laborers being admitted into
the diocese, Newport was selected as his
residence. At this time the frame building
on Mount Vernon street had become unsafe.

1860

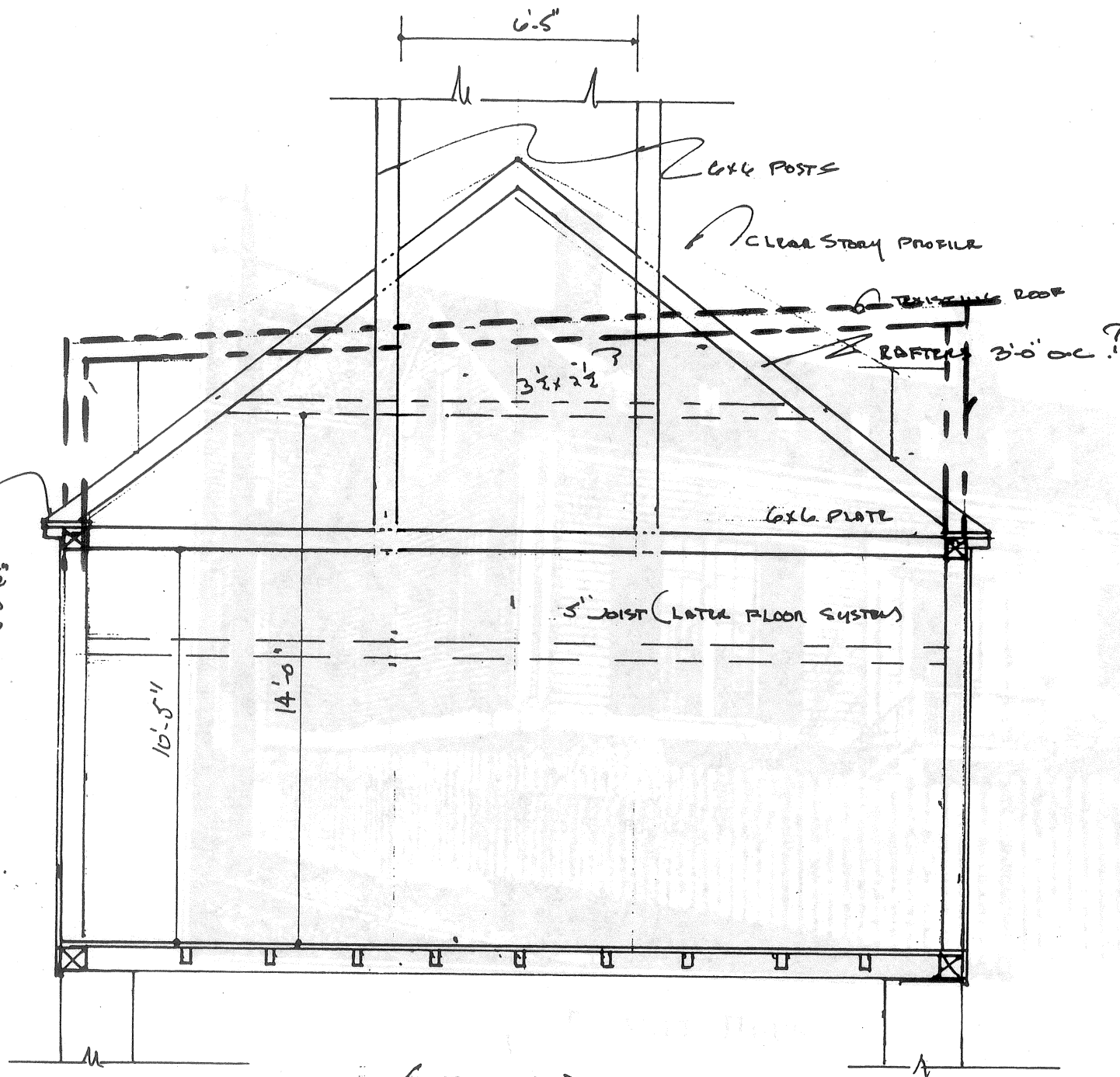
Workmen are at present busy in stripping
off the boards and taking up the floor, previ-
ous to its removal, of the old Catholic Church
on Mount Vernon street. It was sold at Auc-
tion last Summer, to Mr. MICHAEL BUTLER, in
Perry street, who intends using the boards in
the erection of small tenements, a class of houses
now much needed.

SHEET OF 1860 ARCHITECTS

13
 W. & W. J. Herman
 101
 13
 Ann Caswell 1696
 Thos. Sterner
 19
 Peckham Sister 3618
 John & Anna M. Burdick 4890
 3452 Nicholas Marsh Dec.
 4372 Mary Burke
 25



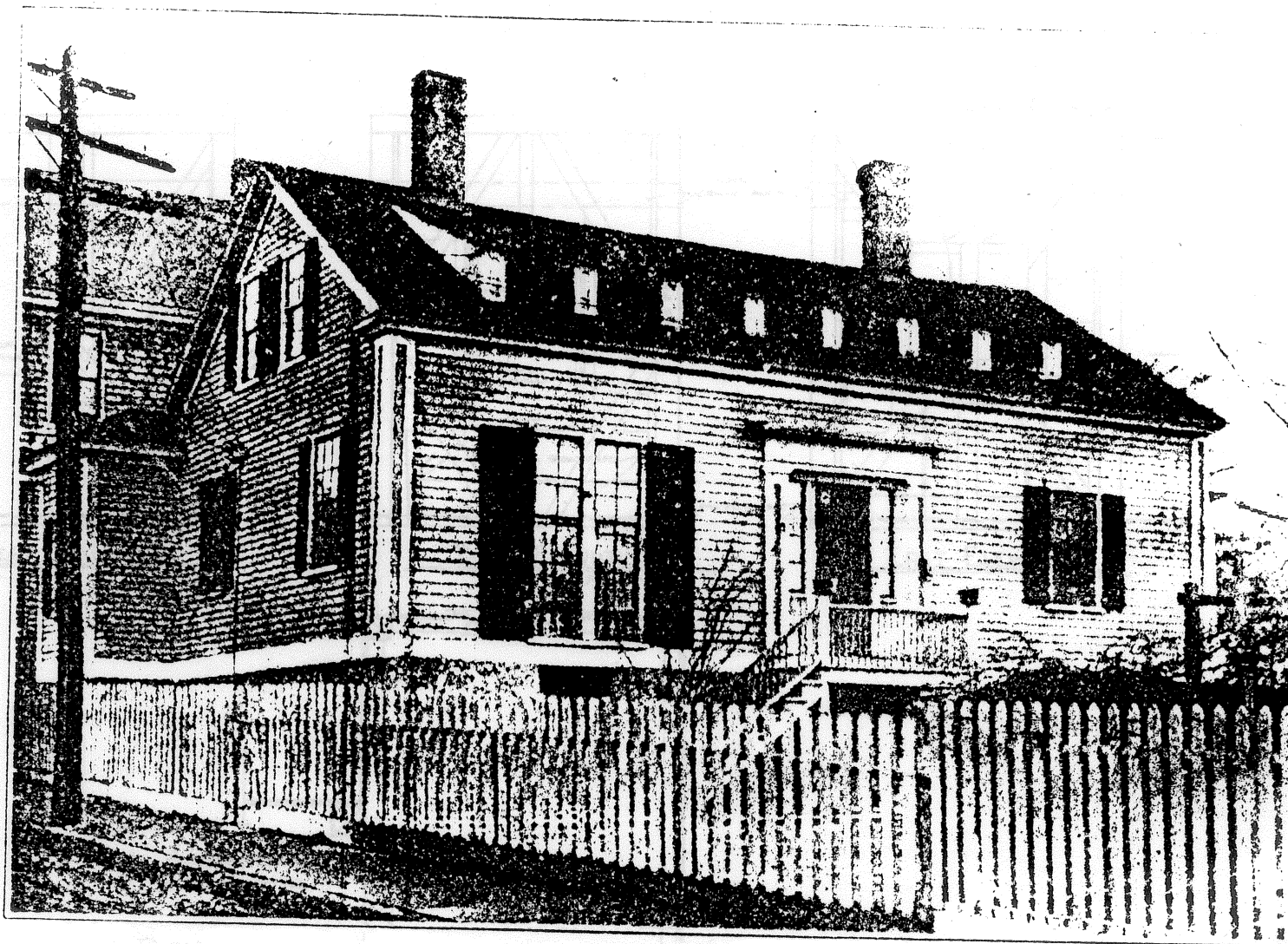
Z
 V
 E
 R
 M
 O
 N
 T.
 12
 10
 14470
 11109
 15073
 ST. JOSEPH'S
 CATHOLIC CEMETERY
 S.T.
 APRIL 8 1826
 ELIAZER TRUETT DEEDS LAND & SCHOOL HOUSE TO BISHOP FENWICK - DIOCESE OF BOSTON
 1830 - FATHER JOHN MCCOBBY BUYS LAND
 1837 - LARGER CHURCH COMPLETED
 1845 - CHURCH DECLARED UNSAFE
 1860 - AUCTIONED OFF TO U.S. BUTLER STRIPPED FOR MATERIALS



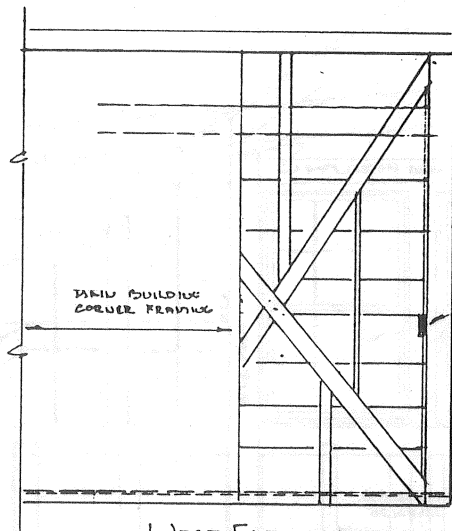
SECTION

1/2" = 21'-0"

V

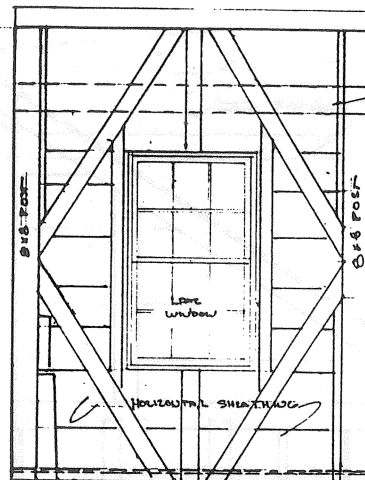


TREVETT HOUSE



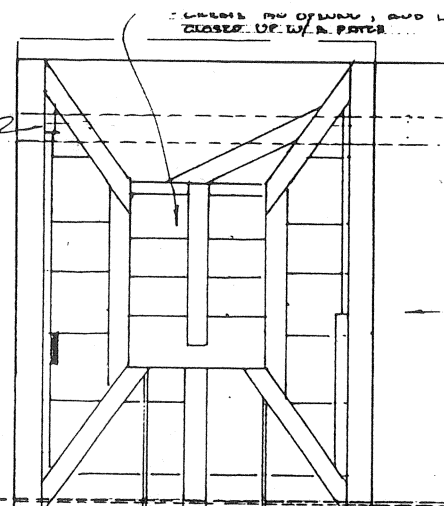
WEST ELEVATION

1/2" = 1'-0"



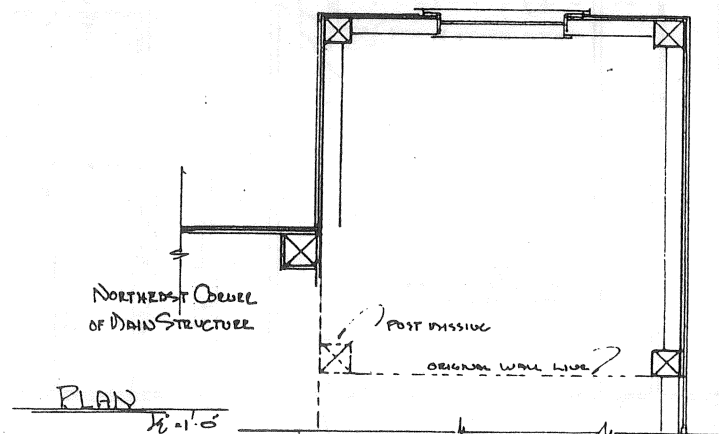
NORTH ELEVATION

1/2" = 1'-0"



EAST ELEVATION

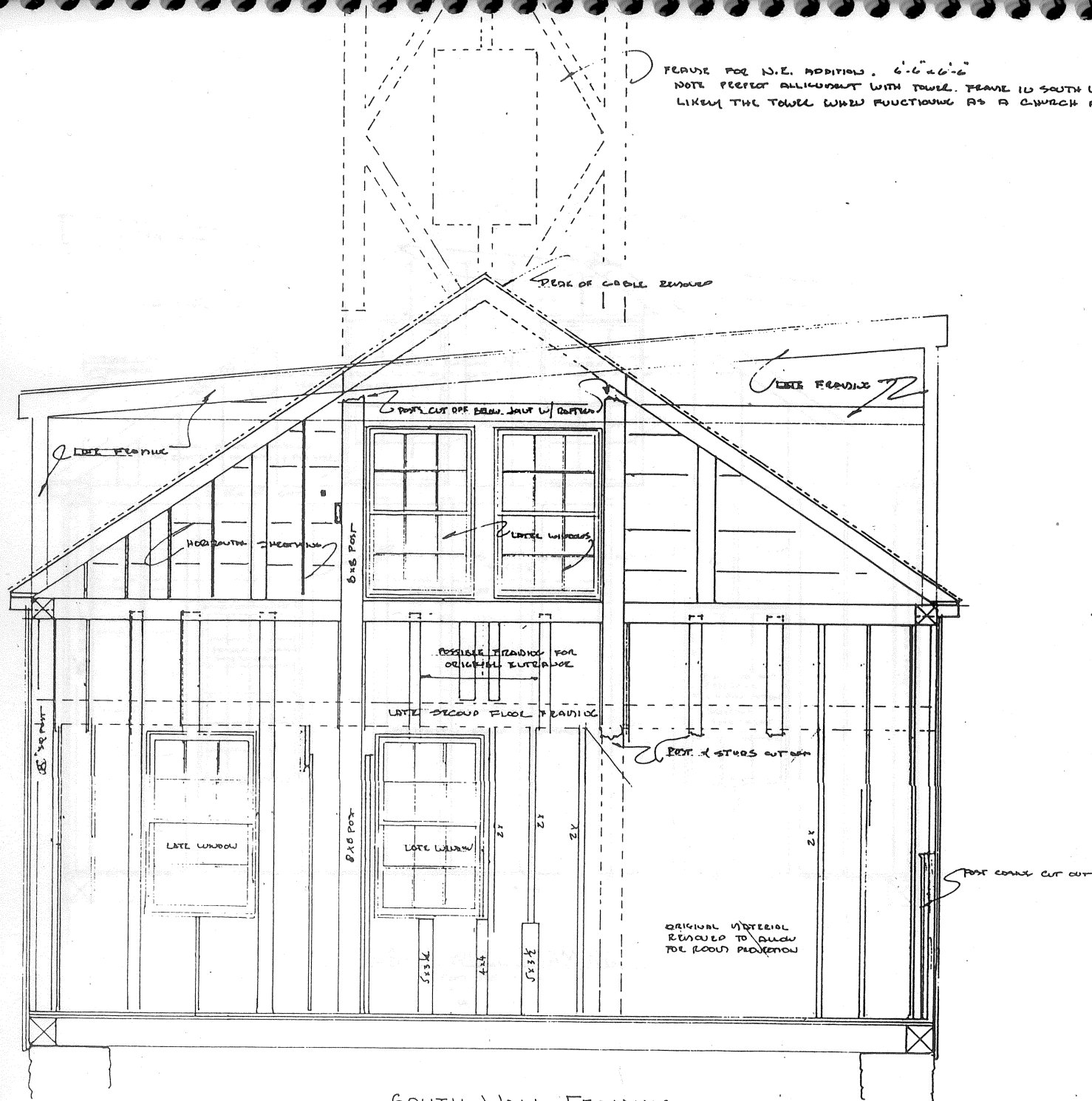
1/2" = 1'-0"



PLAN

1/2" = 1'-0"

FRAME FOR N.E. ADDITION. 6'-6" x 6'-6"
 NOTE PERFECT ALIGNMENT WITH TOWER. FRAME IN SOUTH WALL.
 LIKE THE TOWER WHEN FUNCTIONING AS A CHURCH AND SCHOOL.



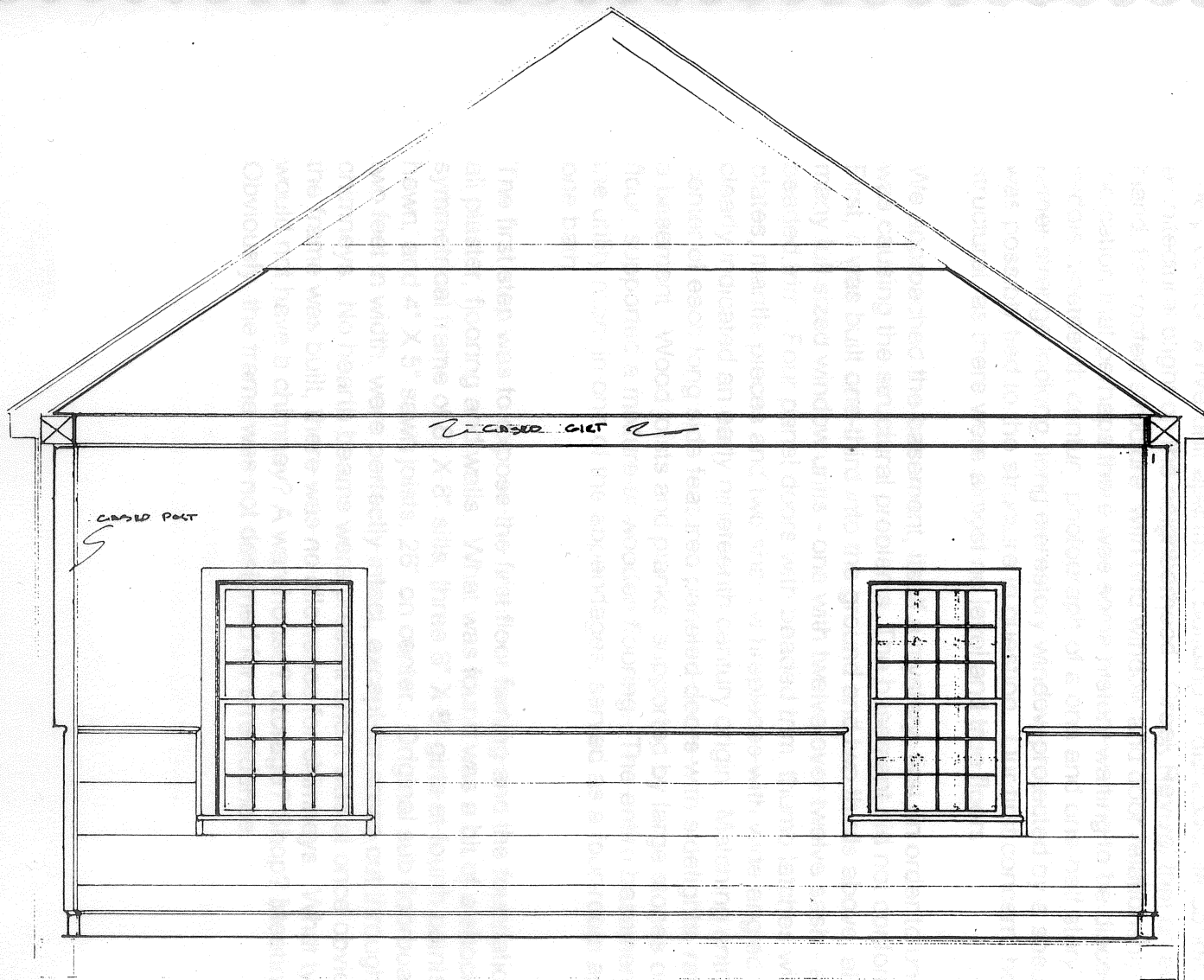
SOUTH WALL FRAMING
 (FROM INTERIOR)
 8.9.01

VIII

TREVETT SCHOOLHOUSE

FIRST CATHOLIC CHURCH

19 SHERMAN ST (PREVIOUSLY BARNEY ST)
 RECORDED - RICHARD RICE LOU A
 AUGUST 2001



INTERIOR FINISH STUDY

1/4" = 1'-0"

The Mystery at 19 Sherman Street

When working with old buildings in Newport, Rhode Island, one never knows what will be uncovered in the process, especially if the buildings have been reworked and added to many times over. I was not prepared, however, for the implications and ramifications of the discoveries as they unfolded at 19 Sherman Street.

I had been retained to improve the appearance and function of 19 Sherman Street by Mr. Jack Dyer, a real estate developer who had been drawn to the City of Newport because of its well-established quality of life and real estate potential. The property, a five-unit apartment building in disreputable condition, was an architectural blight on the neighborhood. Greek Revival trim on an otherwise bland, flat roofed structure, with odd window and door relationships, was the only indication that perhaps there was some history waiting to be discovered. A middle nineteenth century photograph of a one and one-half story building with a rather strange looking, long clerestory window protected by a shed dormer roof was possibly tied to the structure in question. Our first concern, however, was structural, as there were almost no level and true floors.

We approached the basement, itself a mystery, first, in order to understand what was causing the structural problems. The basement did not conform to the norm. First, it was built one-third into the ground and two thirds above, allowing for many full sized window units - one with twelve over twelve sash - and all with beaded trim. Four panel doors with beaded trim, thumb latches with full back plates, mantle pieces and two shallow fireplaces with wide angled sides, all clearly indicated an early nineteenth century origin. Matching entrances at the center of each long side featured paneled doors with sidelights, rather formal for a basement. Wood joists and planks, supported by large stones over the dirt floor, supported a mixture of wooden flooring. The entire basement, except for the utility room in one of the appendages, served as a four-room apartment with one bath.

The first step was to expose the first floor framing and the foundation by removing all plaster, flooring and walls. What was found was a bit of a shock; a perfectly symmetrical frame of 8" X 8" sills, three 8" X 8" girts at fourth points, all hand hewn, and 4" X 5" sawn joists, 26" on center. Original sub floorboards, most over two feet in width, were perfectly intact, except for areas cut through for the two chimneys. No hearth beams were present and it was at once obvious that when the frame was built, there was no allowance for chimneys. What type of building would not have a chimney? A warehouse? Storage? Shop? Meeting hall? Obviously, the frame was not designed for a residence.

Curiosity burning, I called another resident just up the street from 19 Sherman, Brian Pelletier, a man with extensive knowledge of Newport history, to ask if he knew anything about the building. His answer fueled the fire. He had heard that it was once a church and had been moved onto the site. He referred me to Mr. Peter Petropoulos, who turned out to be a great source of information. Living in the neighborhood as a child, he remembered playing with friends in the cemetery which was all overgrown and in shambles - with a depressed area in the middle, the size of our building in question. Petropoulos had been told that a church once stood on the site and had been moved to another site. Subsequently, Mayor Sullivan of Newport, who lived on Mt. Vernon Street opposite the cemetery, was instrumental in having the cemetery cleaned up and the scattered headstones gathered and reset in the depressed area and fenced in.

Further investigation from several sources indicate that a group of Irish immigrants had purchased the property in 1828 in order to establish the first Roman Catholic Church in Rhode Island, the parish of St. Mary. These individuals had been recruited in Ireland; most of them stone masons, for the construction of Fort Adams. They quickly outgrew the first building and built a second church, a structure of gothic revival design, on the corner of Barney and Mt. Vernon. Apparently, the first building was then used to house nuns or perhaps the pastor. Later, these same men contributed much of their time and labor in the construction of the current St. Mary's edifice on Spring Street. When the Spring Street church was complete, the gothic revival was torn down and the first church building was moved to its present location and reworked to a residence - perhaps two units - when you consider the completely furnished basement. The remaining question - does the Greek revival trim reflect the church construction or the later modification to residential use?

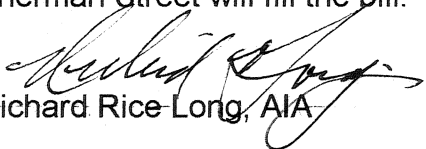
All this however, did not explain the early frame. Documentation does exist that when the Irish purchased the property, a schoolhouse, supposedly built in 1809, was already on the site. This might be the reason for the lack of chimney framing. When the structure was converted to a residence, no consideration was given to the design of the original frame, so many elements were over-stressed, hence the sagging and bending.

Removal of plaster from the upper story revealed gable end framing with rafters in place, cut at the top for the flat roof. They match perfectly with the rooflines shown in the photograph. All upper framing is mortiss and tendon with wooden pegs. The rafter plate showed no mortiss for ceiling joists, but as the church theory strengthened, it seemed logical that a cathedral ceiling open to the rafters, possibly with collar ties, would have been used.

There was evidence of a fire on the west side, which may have precipitated the reframing to a flat roof and an enlargement of the upper floor. This floor, incidentally, appears to have been installed below the plate line (balloon framing) in order to create more headroom on the upper level.

Finally, on the south side gable, there are two 8" X 8" posts built into the frame in exactly the right size for a bell tower, but which are cut off at the top. This detail does not appear on the north side. This would most certainly support the theory of the schoolhouse and church history.

On November 23, 2000, there was a meeting of the owner, representatives of the Irish community and myself to discuss the various possibilities for this historic property. There is a need for a small Irish heritage museum, and perhaps 19 Sherman Street will fill the bill.


Richard Rice-Long, AIA