

Dismantling Dispatch: The Martin Homestead's Many Layers

By David Sokol, July 28, 2021

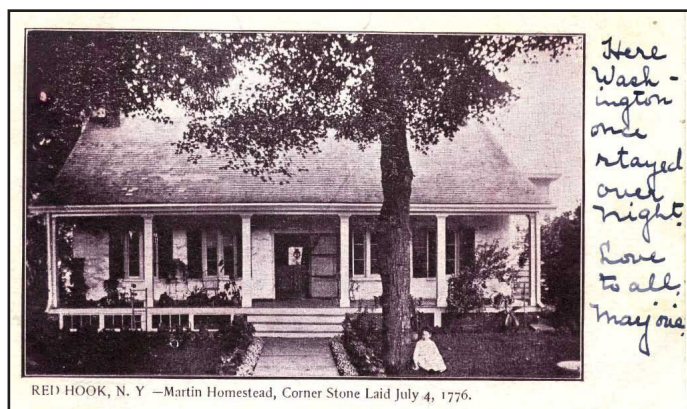
New members as of 2020, David Sokol and Richard East are hard at work, lovingly restoring an iconic piece of Red Hook history: the Martin Homestead, just north of the Elmendorph Inn on Route 9 North. Below, David shares a unique glimpse into the process of research and restoration.

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Boy leaves farm, sees world, makes fortune. Triumphantly returns for plum local job. Renovates family home to reflect new position and ease into retirement. What could very well be the treatment for an episode of *Property Brothers: Forever Home* is actually a recap of Edward Martin's Red Hook homecoming, which took place 150 years ago. That's when steamboat entrepreneur Thomas Cornell chartered the Rhinebeck and Connecticut Railroad Company and tapped Martin as its president. Edward had occasionally come back to Red Hook over his career as a railroad civil engineer. In fact, the 1850 census lists him as an occupant of the house originally built for his grandparents Gottlieb and Ann Catherine. But in order to plan and open the railroad popularly known as the Hucklebush Line, Edward decided to settle in for good. And, in the words of the Daughters of the American Revolution as "a bachelor of considerable wealth, [he] took great pride in keeping the house and grounds in excellent condition."



Martin House now



Postcard of Martin Homestead in HRH collection. The homestead has been the topic of many local legends, as indicated in the notes on the postcard: "Here Washington once stayed one night" [right] and "Corner Stone Laid July 4, 1776" [bottom, left]

The breadth of Edward's wealth was never a question. Triangulate his 1893 *New York Times* obituary with court records, and other accounts and you'll find that, at the time of his death, he was worth more than \$88 million in today's dollars.

On the other hand, determining just how much pride he took in the Martin Homestead came to light only this past winter, as its interior was dismantled. For example, stripping away the plaster-and-lath walls in the wing behind the circa-1777 stone house revealed that its structure comprised salvaged timber and manufactured lumber, which would have been

consistent with supply chains and building techniques of the 1870s. In the garret of the stone house, the exercise exposed similar construction. (It showed that the stone house's original collar ties were fashioned from tree limbs, too.) Edward wanted to make a statement with his Hucklebush presidency, and he did it by expanding the Martin Homestead and converting its attic storage into proper bedrooms.

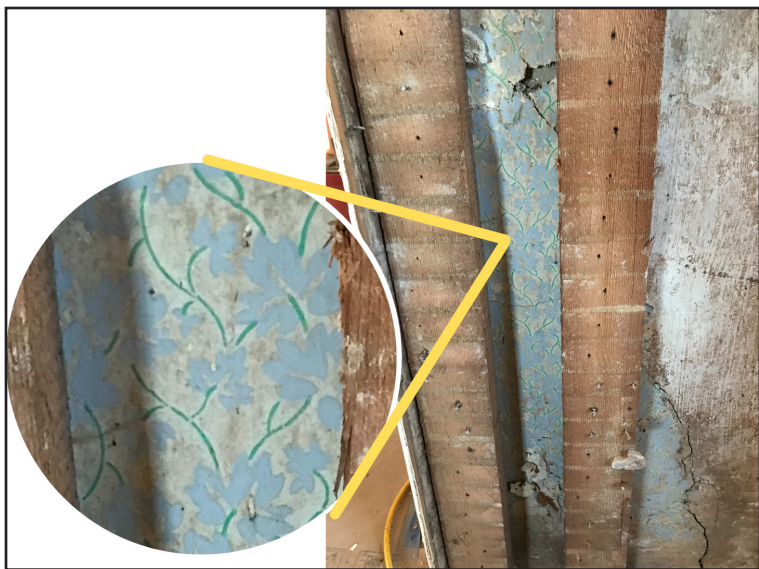
Edward presumably spearheaded many other changes at the Martin Homestead. At first glance, the narrow flooring in the south parlor appears as if it could have been installed at any point in the past century. Upon closer inspection, the planks are fastened by cut nails—not the wire nails that came to dominate American construction by the 1890s. Meanwhile, the entry hall and north parlor still have their original, broad pine planks and hand-forged nails. Some secondary sources also claim that Edward punched through the 26-inch-thick stone walls of the north parlor to flank its fireplace in double-hung windows. But we have not yet found material evidence, nor a paper trail, to confirm that feat.



While the Martin Homestead's circa-1870 rear wing requires some new structure, perimeter framing is being reused.



Dismantling the garret revealed that the Martin Homestead quite possibly had two different rear rooflines before sprouting a Victorian-style gable. Contractor John Somma pictured at right.



Squint at the faded pattern hard enough and you'll see a foliate wallpaper attached to the stone paring at the back of the original Martin Homestead, which was completed by Gottlieb Martin in 1777.

Indeed, readying the Martin Homestead for its next big update has been the source of discoveries that are both clarifying and confounding. Why are there fragments of 1840s-style wallpaper attached to the paring at the rear of the stone house—could the Martin Homestead have gained a rear wing before Edward caught the renovation bug? Or, what to make of the empty rafter notches that we also found in the attic—perhaps Edward had expanded his expansion? When our renovation is complete, we will continue digging, metaphorically speaking, for answers.