Report on the History of The General’s Residence
908 Boston Post Road
Madison, Connecticut

November 2020

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Acknowledgements

Thanks go to Mark Edmiston, Jennie Simpson, Dennis Flynn and Denny Van Liew of the Madison Historical Society for their leadership on this project. I am also indebted to Duo Dickinson of Duo Dickinson Architects; Bob Gundersen, Collections Chair, and Barbara Lessard, Office Support, Madison Historical Society; Tod Bryant of Heritage Resources; Nancy Bastian and Bob Gerard of the Charlotte L. Evarts Memorial Archives; James Sexton; Joel Helander, Guilford Town Historian; Karen Erickson of Duo Dickinson Architects and Cynthia Humphrey. I would also like to acknowledge prior research undertaken by Lynn Friedlander and Helen F. Snow on file in the Madison Historical Society archives.

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(All photographs 2020 unless otherwise noted)
Introduction

This report concerning the property at 908 Boston Post Road, alternately known as The General’s Residence and the Capt. Edward Griffin House, was undertaken on behalf of the Madison Historical Society in an effort to document the history of this Madison landmark at the southeast corner of East Wharf and Boston Post Roads. The study includes a chronological and historical analysis based on examination of the house’s structural features prior to and during its demolition in August 2020, amplified by research in primary and secondary sources. The findings are not conclusive, and comparing the physical evidence with documentary data often seemed to raise more questions than it has answered.

We do know that the residence comprised two parts: a vernacular, timber-framed dwelling with a center-hall plan, possibly rebuilt from an older house about 1805–07, and a west ell added circa 1845. Over the years both sections of the building underwent a sequence of subsequent alterations, including a second story added to the ell circa 1915.

In particular, the age of the house’s older, eastern, portion has been long the subject of speculation and rumor, much of it swirling around Edward Griffin (1762–1802), a ship’s captain who briefly owned property at this location, from 1799 until 1802. Griffin’s name was associated with a number of dark stories, and these tales have become so romanticized that they are embedded in Madison history, despite some lingering doubts about whether he ever lived in the house. The name “The General’s Residence” is much more recent, coined in the early 1970s, when it was adopted for a wedding dress shop housed for many years in the old building. The “General” in question was Brig. Gen. William Wright Harts (1866–1961), a distinguished United States Army
The Chain of Ownership

The site of the General’s House is located in a section of Madison that originated as part of Guilford. First settled in the mid-1600s, this portion of the greater plantation of Guilford broke off from Guilford’s First Congregational Church in 1703 to become a separate ecclesiastical society known as the East Guilford Society. The geographical area within the new parish borders was correspondingly known as East Guilford until 1826, when this eastern part of the old township officially separated and incorporated as Madison. Early settlement on the property traces to a family named Hand, who in 1708 sold property in the vicinity of a winding brook known as Fence Creek to Ens. Nathaniel Dudley (1679–1766). Over subsequent decades, Dudley and various family members assembled a forty-eight acre tract, run through by the creek and stretching south from the Boston Post Road to Long Island Sound. The Dudley property was well positioned, for the post road, laid over an old Native American path, was a primary artery through town. A segment of an early coastal route that had connected colonial post riders from the New York Colony to Boston since 1672, this stage road was an important conduit for travelers and news. Owning property with proximity to both the post road and to the shoreline would have been highly desirable for colonial settlers.¹

¹ The post road comprised a complex system of routes developed over preexisting horse paths to facilitate communications between the New York Colony and settlements in Connecticut and Massachusetts. One section passing through Guilford connected New Haven to Saybrook. From Saybrook riders connected to Boston via Providence, RI.
What is now East Wharf Road, referenced in early public records as a “pent road,” was a newer byway, laid out through the Fence Creek property in 1730 after Ens. Nathaniel Dudley deeded land for it to the town the year prior. The term “pent” likely referred to the fact that the road, meant to provide public access to the shore, was gated.\(^2\) The first record of a building on the tract referred to a barn, erected by 1730.

In 1765, town proprietors sequestered a piece of land at the Long Island Sound end of the pent road by means of an agreement with Nathaniel Dudley 2nd (1737–82) in order to establish a public landing. That record mentions a Dudley homelot.\(^3\) The “east” wharf that gives the road its name was finally established in 1792 in the area of what is now the East Wharf Beach.

By 1794, the Dudley tract contained forty-eight acres and was known to contain both a house and a barn.\(^4\) That year—after nearly a century of Dudley ownership—the forty-eight acre Fence Creek property (with a house and barn) was sold by Dudley heirs to one Lyman Munger with the proviso that Abigail Chittenden Dudley, widow of Nathaniel Dudley 2nd, have life use of half the land and the house. After five years of Munger ownership, the homestead (by then encompassing fifty acres) passed from Munger to Capt. Edward Griffin for the purchase price of $1333.34. The deed cited an “old dwelling house” and a barn.

At the time, Captain Griffin, his wife Submitt, and their many children were residing in nearby Killingworth, then part of Clinton, a thriving maritime community. According to two old salts by the names of Capt. Edgar Francis and Capt. Thad Camp, Griffin was master of several schooners built in the Madison shipyard they were later to own. From these two raconteurs come several yarns contributing to reports of Griffin’s unsavory character. One recalls a tale of an enraged Griffin throwing his own son overboard to drown. Another horrifying story tells of the ship’s captain leaving two enslaved persons behind a wall in the cellar of his East Guilford house to die. Census records confirm Griffin’s ownership of two enslaved individuals, but otherwise the grizzly account is unsubstantiated.\(^5\)

\(^2\) In 1729, Nathaniel Dudley deeded to the town (then Guilford) “land for a highway from the Post Road to the sea.” (Guilford Proprietors’ Records, vol. 1, p. 116, 1729–30). See also Philip S. Platt, Madison’s Heritage: Historical Sketches of Madison, Connecticut (Madison Historical Society, 1964), 199.

\(^3\) Dudley exchanged land “On the rear of his father’s ‘homelot’ for the use of ‘a publick landing place forever…” (Guilford Proprietors’ Records, vol. 2, p. 11, 1765).

\(^4\) In 1794, heirs of Nathaniel Dudley sell forty-eight acres with a house and barn to Lyman Munger (Guilford Land Records, vol. 15, p. 13).

\(^5\) See “Stories about Captain Griffin, told by Captain Francis and Captain Thad Camp, about 1912,” transcript, Madison Historical Society archives. Since Francis and Camp were recalling these stories more than a century after the seaman’s death, they could not have known him.
Contemporary newspaper notices do indicate that Edward Griffin captained vessels involved in the West Indies trade, in which ships carried livestock, cheese, butter, wheat and other products from Atlantic Seaboard and other ports to the Caribbean, returning with exotic items like molasses, sugar, coffee and rum. Griffin stocked similar goods in the hold of the schooner Polly when he sailed into New York after a 1795 voyage to Haiti. Other notices placed Griffin (on the sloop Hope and the schooner Freedom) in Charleston, South Carolina, and Cape Ann and Boston, Massachusetts.

The establishment of East Guilford’s new landing in 1792 at the foot of the pent road may have been incentive for Captain Griffin to purchase the Fence Creek property, with a house near the Boston Post Road and the public way leading down to the wharf. A few months after acquiring the premises in 1799, he also invested in a grist- and sawmill operation (including a house), on the Hammonasset River.6

Land and census records reveal that Griffin did not actually take up residence in East Guilford until sometime in mid-to late 1800, by which time he was occupying a house at Fence Creek with Submitt, sons Edward Jr., Charles N. and Harvey Allen, daughters Submitt (Mitte), Julia, Polly and Fanny and two enslaved persons (then very much alive)—constituting a large household of eleven.7 By December 1801, Captain Griffin was advertising the mill property for sale (and again in February 1802), citing failing health as his reason for divesting. By August 1802, the captain was dead at the age of forty. At best, he had lived in East Guilford for about one-and-one-half years.

The next owner, Chapman Warner, of Lyme, Connecticut, purchased the Fence Creek tract from Griffin’s estate in 1805. The Warner transaction involved the same fifty-acre plot that Griffin had acquired in 1799.

Warner, evidently involved in the shipping industry, partitioned the property into three pieces, including a 3.25-acre house lot.8 While he advertised a new house and barn on the premises in 1807, it is relatively certain that the “new” house was in fact a reconstructed house. His reason for dividing and selling off an additional plot of forty-

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6 Guilford Land Records, vol. 16, pp. 154 and 193 (June and August, 1799.)
7 Guilford Land Records, deed of purchase from Lyman Munger by Edward Griffin, vol. 16, p. 187, March 5, 1799, cites Griffin as a resident of Killingworth. A later deed of purchase for a woodlot by Griffin from John Jones in East Guilford, vol. 17, p.19, June 16, 1800, still lists Griffin as being “of Killingworth.”
five acres (for $2469.00) south of the house lot with frontage on the Sound may have been to raise money for the modifications, which appear to have included raising the roof and possibly finishing a remodeling job started by Griffin (see pages 11–25).

In 1809, Warner sold the new, or newly rebuilt, house and erected another one in for himself on the west bank of East River between Guilford and East Guilford, where he established a wharf and store. The next buyer of the newly divided Fence Creek house lot on the Boston Post Road was Reuben Rose Fowler (1763–1844). The 1809 sale of the property to this new owner marked the start of an extended period of ownership by the Fowlers and their descendants, the Hands, lasting fifty-seven years.

Reuben and his wife Catharine Chauncey Fowler (1764–1841) were a couple of considerable social standing, who put much stock in educating their children and preparing them for useful careers. Both had grown up in Durham, Connecticut, at a time when the higher society of that town was known for its sophistication and intellect. The entrepreneurial Reuben, a scholar of the English language and French literature, began his career pursuing mercantile interests in New Haven and in New Bern, North Carolina, before trying farming in the Genesee Valley of New York—then returning to Connecticut to work as a steel manufacturer in Killingworth (meanwhile speculating in land deals in Pennsylvania, Vermont and Canada).

By the early 1800s, Reuben and Catharine were running Reuben’s father’s farm in Durham, where the couple lived in the largest house in town. Upon moving from Durham to the Fence Creek property in East Guilford in 1809, Reuben re-established himself as a merchant, before entering once again into farming.⁹

Of the Fowlers’ four children, the house at 908 Boston Post Road was to find its future in the hands of their daughter, Catharine Worthington Fowler (1802–65), a lovely and cultured woman who caught the eye of Joseph Winborn Hand (1792–1844) in 1819 and married him in 1820. Considered to be one of East Guilford’s most eligible bachelors, Hand, a Yale graduate (1813) had begun a career as a solicitor at the U.S. Post Office in Washington, D.C. He gained this position with the help of his uncle, Col. Jonathan Return Meigs, a U.S. senator from Ohio, who also served as Postmaster General.

For about a decade, the Hands lived together in the nation’s capital. Constant worry over the health risks posed by the humidity and heat there eventually led to an agreement to separate households, allowing Catharine to raise their children in the heathier climes of Connecticut. (The Hands had lost three infant daughters between 1822 and 1826—their deaths perhaps related to living conditions in Washington.) By the early 1830s, Joseph had purchased a farm in Madison, which Catharine occupied and managed with the help of Reuben. Joseph, appointed Chief Clerk of the United States Patent Office in 1836, remained in Washington, D.C.

When Catharine’s mother died in April, 1841, Catharine and the children went back to her childhood home at Fence Creek to help care for the widowed Reuben’s household. That summer, Joseph, constantly concerned about the dangers of hot weather, sent his wife instructions for disease-proofing the house by improving air circulation and keeping the pigs away from it.\(^{10}\)

The Hands were again reunited in Washington, D.C., but following the deaths of both her husband Joseph and of her father Reuben in 1844, Catharine consolidated her assets and made the Boston Post Road homestead her permanent home that same year. She probably added the west ell around this time. A later owner of the house recalled finding a sorrowful message written inside one of its closets, possibly by Catharine at the time of Reuben’s death: “Today I have no more men in my life.”\(^{11}\)

After Reuben died, Catharine stayed on in the homestead with four young children and her sister Eliza.\(^{12}\) In the Fowler and Chauncey tradition, educating her offspring became a priority. By the mid-1840s, two children were enrolled in Amherst Academy in Amherst, Massachusetts (where one was a classmate of a young Emily Dickinson).\(^{13}\) A daughter attended private academies in New York City and Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in preparation for a career as a teacher. Chauncey Meigs Hand (1828–65), Catharine’s eldest son, studied law at Yale. Her youngest boy, Charles Fowler Hand (1837–74), would enroll in Williams College and Andover Theological Seminary.

As of 1850, Catharine was still living at the homestead with her youngest children, Emily and Charles, and an African-American servant, Ann Conover. According to census records, the value of her personal estate positioned her family in the top eighty-five percent of family wealth in Madison.\(^{14}\) In 1860, Catharine’s household included herself and her daughter Elizabeth (1835–1909), then a twenty-five-year-old teacher. While other women in Madison listed their occupations in the census of that year as

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12 Catharine sold all her husband’s property in Madison, while retaining only her parents’ homestead at 908 Boston Post Road. The Hands’ children were: Chauncey Meigs Hand (1828–65), Catharine Chauncey Hand (1830–54), Charles Fowler Hand (1837–74) and Emily Joanna Hand (1840–51).
13 At the time, Catharine’s brother, William Chauncey Fowler (1793–1881), scholar and educator, was serving as Professor of Rhetoric, Oratory and English at Amherst College. Fowler’s impressive career also included a post at Middlebury College in Vermont. He was the author of numerous scholarly works and served in the Massachusetts legislature and in the Connecticut state senate. In 1825 William married Harriet Webster, daughter of the famed political writer and lexicographer, Noah Webster. It is believed that Catharine relied this accomplished man to open doors for his fatherless nieces and nephews and ensure they had the advantages of an excellent education. See Obituary Record of Graduates of Yale College Deceased in the Academical Year Ending in June 1881 (New Haven, 1881).
14 U.S. Federal Census, 1850. Ann Conover’s name was marked with the notation “cannot read.” Catharine’s estate was recorded at $3,000 in 1850. Out of eighty-three households in Madison, hers ranked in the top fifteen for valuation.
“house work,” the field next to Catharine’s name was marked with a single word: “Lady.”

Charles and Chauncey’s hopes for careers were cut short by the Civil War. Both boys enlisted in the Union Army. Wounded, they returned to Madison with their health “forever ruined.”

It was the end of an era, when in 1866, the Fence Creek homestead finally passed from the Fowler/Hand family. The purchaser was another wealthy citizen of Madison, one J. Wyllis Tucker (1818–1900), a farmer who shared the house with his wife, Clarissa A. Fowler Tucker, and a daughter, Harriet M. Tucker.

From the Tuckers, the house passed in 1871 to James H. Bishop, a Madison oil manufacturer. Only a year later, in 1872, Bishop sold the homestead to Mary Elizabeth Scranton (1819–95), whose full name—rather improbably—was Mary Elizabeth Prudden Scranton Brown Scranton.

Mary Elizabeth’s connection to Madison came through her husband, Philemon A. Scranton (1812–78), a Madison native and son of Hubbard and Elizabeth Scranton.

Soon after acquiring the Fowler/Hand homestead, Mary Elizabeth and Philemon moved there from Augusta, Georgia, and the house entered another long stretch of single-family ownership, during which it was known fondly as the “Old Ark.” Between them, Philemon and Mary Elizabeth had two children: Mary Scranton Brown (1839–99), a daughter from Mary Elizabeth’s first marriage to Gardner S. Brown (1810–76); and a son, Philemon Jewett Scranton (b. 1848) from

Mary Elizabeth Prudden Scranton Brown Scranton (Madison Historical Society)

Brig. Gen. William W. Harts (Library of Congress)

16 William Chauncey Fowler, op. cit., 343.
17 Reuben Rose Fowler’s will had divided the homestead in three parts, shared by Catharine, her sister, Eliza and her brother William C. Fowler. Catharine inherited Eliza’s share in 1849 and purchased William’s in 1860. The property passed out of the family through the estate of her son Chauncey Meigs Hand.
18 Born Mary Elizabeth Prudden, Mrs. Philemon Scranton was adopted and raised by her uncle and aunt, the Rev. Erastus and Mary Elizabeth Scranton and took their last name. In 1838, Mary Elizabeth married (1) the Rev. Gardner S. Brown (1810–76), from whom she was divorced c. 1840. In 1858, she married (2), Philemon A. Scranton (1812–78), nephew of her adoptive father, Erastus Scranton. Thus, her full name was Mary Elizabeth Prudden Scranton Brown Scranton.
Philemon’s first marriage. By the time the couple moved to the Old Ark, they were heading into middle age, and their offspring were grown. The younger Philemon was living elsewhere in Madison, and Mary was wed to William Ellery Hale (1836–98) of Chicago and raising their family in the Midwest.19

In 1878, the elder Philemon died, leaving Mary Elizabeth a widow. Sometime after, his nephew, S. Arthur Scranton—who served as caretaker for the homestead—his wife Rose Ann (Williams) Scranton and their daughter, Maud, took up residence in the west ell. Come summer, the rest of the house filled up with the Hales and their children, who traveled east from Chicago every summer for much-anticipated vacations. After Mary Elizabeth died in 1895, the Arthur Scrantons stayed on according to her wishes. As of 1900, their household also included an African-American domestic servant named Mathilda Johnson and a boarder, Emeline Corbett, listed in census records as a laborer (see photograph, page 35).20

Arthur Scranton appears to have been one of Madison’s more entrepreneurial personalities. A pamphlet entitled Madison Illustrated (c. 1900), profiling notable citizens, devoted a two-page feature to Scranton, including a photograph of the fruit and vegetable store he ran near the post office.21 A backbone of the town’s seasonal economy, his summer produce business depended on the yield of a forty-acre farm—ten acres planted in vegetables alone—manned by ten workers. Throwing his hat into the political ring, Arthur served as Madison’s first selectman from 1899 to 1901. Working hard to promote the town as a summer destination in an effort “to locate families of means and society” to Madison, he also worked as a builder and landscaper. During the winter, when things got slow, Scranton supplemented his income by selling ice.

The Old Ark faced an uncertain future after the death of Mary Elizabeth’s daughter Mary Brown Hale in 1899. While her children loved the house, their lives did not center on Madison. When in 1904 the Arthur Scrantons moved out of the west ell, the house stood vacant.22 By then the Old Art was something of an old-fashioned curiosity, still living up to its name. The house still had only rudimentary heating (fireplaces and stoves). There was no running water and the kitchen had never moved out of the cellar. In an effort to spruce up the house for summer renting, William B. Hale (1875–1944), the youngest of Mary’s children, oversaw some interior improvements. Hooking up the building to town water enabled him to install a bathroom for the first time (finally, indoor plumbing!), but his efforts were mostly for naught. With the exception of one season, the Ark had no takers.23

19 William Ellery Hale, a noted Chicago civic leader and businessman, was an early manufacturer of the hydraulic elevator, a device that transformed America’s urban skylines by making the skyscraper possible.
21 Madison Illustrated (L.L. Johnson publisher), photocopy (Madison Historical Society Archives.)
22 At that time, Arthur Scranton built what was later known as the “Kemp House” as his residence.
23 “Harts Property in Madison, Connecticut,” 1932 (Madison Historical Society Archives). Prior to the town water hook-up, household water came from a cistern used to collect rain water and from a well near the kitchen equipped with a hand pump. The water in the kitchen and bathroom drained into a cesspool west of the kitchen.
The house sadly stood empty until 1909, when the Hales’ middle child, Martha Davis Hale Harts (1873–1954) decided to open it for the summer. Martha, married to William Wright Harts (1866–1961), was living in Nashville, Tennessee. At the time, Lt. William W. Harts was serving in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and embarking on the impressive military career that ultimately earned him the rank of brigadier general.

The Hartses were eager to escape Nashville’s unpleasant summer weather. In preparation for their first season in the more temperate climate of the Madison seaside, the family arrived from Tennessee with their servants, who initially occupied a room near the basement kitchen. As the entourage also included horses and ponies, a stable outfitted with accommodations for their stable boy was built behind the house. The Hartses improved the grounds by setting out fruit and shade trees and relocating barns and privies. Their final touch to the property was an impressive rubblestone wall lining the property’s East Wharf and Boston Post Road borders, still in place in 2020. About 1915, the Hartses added a second story to the west ell.

Meanwhile, William Wright Harts’s studies at the Army and Naval and War Colleges, along with assignments with the Army Corps of Engineers (including construction supervision of the Lincoln and Arlington Memorials) and various military posts often kept him away from Madison. From 1913 to 1917, Harts served as military aide to Pres. Woodrow Wilson, and filled that role again in 1918 and 1919 at the Paris Peace Conference. From late 1917, when he attained rank of brigadier general, to the time of the armistice, Harts commanded the Sixth United States Engineers Regiment in France. Later, in 1927, Brig. Gen. Harts welcomed Charles T. Lindbergh with U.S. Ambassador Myron T. Herrick at Le Bourget Field in Paris when the American aviator landed after his historic solo flight across the Atlantic.

Although Harts’s career often had the family living overseas, the couple and their four children missed only a few summers in Madison. In 1930, Brig. Gen. Harts retired, and Martha and William made the Old Ark their permanent home. Martha died in 1954, followed in 1961 by William at the age of 94. Both are buried in Arlington Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

During the 1960s, the house underwent renovations at the hand of the Harts’s daughter, Cynthia Harts Bannister, before its 1968 sale to Walter Maguire. Plans for a

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24 Privies, a corncrib and barns were relocated lower on the grounds, away from the house.
25 William Wrights Harts, notes on the Harts family (Madison Historical Society Archives).
26 Mary Hale Harts obtained full ownership of the property when her siblings signed over their
rights to her in 1928. The children of Gen. and Mary Hale Harts were: Mary Hale, m. Robert
Early Jr. (1) and Stuart Walcott Kellogg (2); Clement Bates Ellery; William Wright; and Cynthia
Prudden (1913–2011), m. (1) Alan Banister and (2) Leonard Jessup Raymond.
fourteen-acre subdivision failed amid community opposition. A subsequent proposal in 1970 for a restaurant also came to naught.\textsuperscript{27}

In 1973 Walter Maguire sold the house to Charles and Dorothy Staley. A lifelong resident of Madison, Dorothy Staley (1936–2019) turned the house into a showroom for her business, The General’s Residence, for the sale of couture wedding dresses of her own design. In 2005, the business expanded when Dorothy’s son and daughter, Paul and Diana Lynch Staley, opened Madison Chocolates in the house. The chocolate shop moved to Guilford in 2011, and the wedding-dress shop closed soon after that. The property went into foreclosure and was posted for sale in 2016.\textsuperscript{28} It was purchased three years later by Adam Greenberg and Timothy Herbst, under the business name the General’s Residence at Madison, LLC.

\textsuperscript{27} The restaurant was to be operated by Albert J. Belmont, Jr., then proprietor of Café Lafayette at 725 Boston Post Road. The dining room was to be on the first floor of the house with a cocktail lounge located in the basement. The Belmonts planned to live on the top floor.

\textsuperscript{28} Docket Number: NNHCV156054001S, Reverse Mortgage Solutions, Inc. vs. Dorothy Staley et al, August 8, 2016.
The Building and its Evolution

Most of the mysteries that enshroud “The General’s Residence” relate to the older, east section of the house, long thought to have been an 18th-century building erected by the Dudley family, or a newer house built around 1799–1800 by Capt. Edward Griffin. When the building was stripped down during its demolition, and it was possible to see “under its skin,” it appeared that the roof had been partially raised and the chimneys built up in stages. Additional framing anomalies suggest that the eastern section was indeed an older house that had been rebuilt—at least once in 1805–07, by Chapman Warner, and perhaps even earlier, by Griffin and/or Dudleys).

This older block of the building was a traditional five-bay, peak-roofed, double-pile (two-room deep) dwelling with a rectangular plan and a fully excavated cellar. Set with its gables oriented east/west, the house rested on a granite foundation, with course of dressed brownstone above grade. The building was located on a south-sloping site, adjusting to grade so that the cellar had exterior access from its south elevation. Its façade was symmetrically composed, with its main entry, marked by a classically inspired portico, centered between two pairs of parlor windows. Second-story windows were tucked directly into the cornice board, and a shallow overhang ran above the first-story windows on the front and rear elevations. Secondary entrances were located in the building’s east gable end, and at the lower rear (south elevation). At the time of demolition, the exterior walls were clad in wood clapboard (not original) and the roof was covered in asphalt shingle. The house’s two chimneys (brick above the roofline) were widely set at the roof ridge.

The center-hall layout displayed a conventional layout, in which the main entry opened into a long stair hall running on axis through the house, front to back. Flanking the hall were two front (north) parlors and two corresponding rooms to the rear, creating a four-room plan. Four corresponding chambers were located on the second floor.

The traditional center-hall plan dictated that the kitchen be located in a rear wing, or in the case of 908 Boston Post Road, in the cellar, where a cooking fireplace and bake
oven were built into the substantial stone base of the west chimney. (Interior access to this cellar kitchen was originally provided by a small, curved staircase, said to be built with balusters salvaged from ships’ forecastles.)

The post-and-beam timber framing technology of the east section represents a type used in Connecticut by settlers of English descent for wood construction from the 17th century well into the 1800s. In this method, the primary timbers were typically hewn and trimmed with a broad axe and adz and chiseled and notched with joints at their ends to fit their corresponding members. Each of these joints, which was worked individually and had only one proper mate, was secured by means of a mortise and tenon (in a method known as tongue and groove).

In the conventional format, corner posts were hewn as single timbers running full height from the horizontal timbers at ground level (sills) all the way to the stabilizing horizontal timbers (plates and girts) at attic level. These horizontal timbers functioned as the outer support beams for the floor joists and were typically fitted with intermediate vertical timbers, known as studs, that were secured between the sills at first story and the girts and plates above. Usually, the housewright laid out and measured the primary posts and beams on the ground (origin of the term “ground rules”) and fitted them together in sections, which would be raised into place as completed segments. The tenon joints were secured by means of pegs and the tightness of their fit; no glue or nails were used.

When the General’s House was dismantled, it became apparent that the way in which it was framed broke with some of these norms. Most surprisingly, the corner posts did not run full height from first to attic story, but instead consisted of two pieces, which were not tenoned together. It was almost as if the building was erected one story at a time, as if one timber-framed “box,” or boxes, had been placed atop another.

29 The kitchen always remained in the house’s lower level. A dumbwaiter eventually delivered food to the dining room, positioned immediately above.
Moreover, the craftsmanship of the joinery and framing was in places rudimentary and overall uneven. Some members appeared to have been shaved off hastily from scrap wood, while others were neatly faired. The timbers, a mix of pine, oak and tulipwood, included numerous recycled pieces. In one section of the attic, girts were secured with straps of hand-forged iron. Stripping off the exterior covering also revealed that the walls had been sheathed in vertical pine planks, about two inches thick. To these slabs, attached to the building’s horizontal timbers with iron spikes, were applied the building’s exterior clapboards and the lath that served as backing for the interior plaster. An alternative to studs, this slabwork was a wood-heavy solution to stabilizing the building against diagonal pull. It required more wood, but less skill and time than the joinery required for fashioning a frame with studs (each with its own mortise and tenon). There was no sign of any insulation whatsoever.

Pine plank, used instead of studs, were put up green and shrank over time, leaving gaps. (BG)
A brace near the west gable end of the building’s old, east section. The brace is not squared and unusually diminutive at its base, where it was roughly pegged into the post, which appeared undersized. (TB)

A truncated corner post and brace, with no tenon at the base to mortise into the post below. (BG)
Vertical planks spiked to the hewn horizontal plate provided backing for clapboards and interior laths. Plank framing was in use in Guilford by the 1720s and fairly widespread by the 1760s. (BG)

The west chimney looking northwest, with its brownstone stack and area of effloresced brick below the red brick upper section. (BG)

The east chimney was built with a stack of granite blocks up to the second story. The area of effloresced brick above the granite, reciprocated on the west chimney, appears to indicate a former roofline. The eroded brick atop the red brick stack may have been part of the older chimney cap. (BG)
The west chimney contained the stone fireplace and a bake oven in its stone base (see page 12) in the cellar. The brownstone section was located in the first and second stories. (BG)

The west chimney, interior, looking west. The roof was framed using a common rafter system, in which these timbers were joined absent a ridgepole. The rafter seen at the left was notched near its end, indicated that this was a piece of recycled wood. The left rafter was oxidized, and planed to a smooth finish, and the right one displayed hewing marks. (TB)
When it came to the old house’s chimneys, demolition uncovered even more curiosities, indicating that, despite their outward appearance, these two building elements were not in fact “twins.” The west chimney, which contained the cellar fireplace in its granite base, was constructed with a stack of brownstone blocks running through first and second stories, while the east chimney had an interior stack of granite blocks in the corresponding position. A difference in their material makeup raises the question that the two chimneys were erected at different times, or at least by two different masons. There is also some indication that the building’s roof had once been lower, as evidenced by areas of effloresced brick above the brownstone and granite sections.

Hand-forged iron brackets and spikes used to brace timbers in the attic. (DD)
The Old House: Unanswered Questions

A key marker in the history of The General’s House was the 1799 purchase of the Fence Creek tract by Edward Griffin(g) from Lyman Munger, which included an “old dwelling” and barn that had been part of the Dudley tract. The unresolved question whose answer is central to understanding the age and evolution of the east, center-hall, portion of the house is whether that “old dwelling” remained standing through subsequent ownership, or whether it was replaced.

One theory is that the “old dwelling” purchased by Griffin was a house constructed for Nathaniel Dudley 2nd, around the time of his marriage in 1761 to Abigail Chittenden Dudley (1734– ), or sometime after the death in 1766 of his father, Ens. Nathaniel Dudley. It is possible that Dudley rebuilt or expanded his father’s house.

The variance in materials in the two chimneys (brownstone vs. granite) may indicate they were erected at different times, but it is not certain proof of that. Moreover, the appearance of brownstone, also used as a top dressing on the foundation, raises its own questions. Even by the early 1800s, the use of brownstone was unusual in Guilford and Madison. Its use for an interior chimney stack that was not visible is baffling.

While it is certain that Chapman Warner made major changes around 1805–07, we can’t be sure he built completely anew despite his enthusiastic advertising. In addition to the chimneys, there is the matter of the strange, somewhat slipshod, framing, apparent haste in construction and cost-cutting measures and evidence of a raised roof. Perhaps Griffin had begun renovations on the house, but ran out of time and money. While ownership of two enslaved persons and other property in town, and some fine belongings
A course of tooth-like dentils drilled with holes ran across under the house’s overhang on the north (front) elevation. This appeared as an unusual feature, but in his Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut, architectural historian J. Frederick Kelly noted that drilled dentils were an 18th-century interior embellishment. It is possible that this dentil course was a “leftover,” preserved on an older house that was modernized by Chapman Warner. During the Victorian era, the house’s trim was picked out in a dark, contrasting color. The dark red paint on the dentils may date from that time, or may reflect a more recent scheme, when the front doors were painted dark red. (TB)

listed in his will, suggest Captain Griffin had some resources, he actually died insolvent. Upon his death, his house was to be readied for sale, with the stipulation that it was to be painted. If a buyer could not be found for the stipulated price of $5,000.00 before his two eldest sons were to reach the age of twenty-one, the boys were to inherit the property.20

Did Griffin’s directive regarding new paint suggest the house was old and shabby, or did it imply that he had begun a building project that had gone unfinished? The asking price, $5,000.00, was more than 3 1/2 times higher than the $1,333.00 Griffin had paid a few years earlier. Did that mean Griffin had poured major resources into the property? Yet when the premises—including a house and barn—were finally sold to Warner at a substantially lower price ($1,725.00), what did that indicate? Were Griffin’s heirs cutting their losses?

What seems possible in light of the structural evidence is that Warner remodeled or rebuilt an older house that had already been cobbled together from parts, possibly raising its roof to finish an attic—a project that Griffin started?) It is worth pointing out that Griffin owned a sawmill and thus would have had access to a ready supply of pine planks and timbers. It is possible that he had begun to build a new house, perhaps dismantling an old building or buildings and re-using the parts and had not finished the job, which was then left to Chapman Warner.

What seems less likely is that the house uncovered in the August 2020 demolition, with all its odd pieces of frame and recycled bits, its lengthened chimneys, and a roof seemingly built in stages, could have been erected all at one time after Warner bought the property in 1805.

In any case, the house purchased in 1809 by Reuben and Catharine Fowler was not entirely “modern” as advertised, but instead appeared to combine old-fashioned features like the overhang and its dentil trim with elements more in keeping with the times. If Warner erected the dwelling from the ground up, its dated appearance could be ascribed to the fact that building customs in rural areas were apt to lag some years behind those in locales where stylistic trends first took hold (ports like New Haven or New London, say). If the house was remodeled or overhauled, then old-fashioned features were likely incorporated into the new design.

20 Notice of probate, Connecticut Journal, August 26, 1802.
The classically inspired portico, or “porch,” was of a style and type that was transplanted to the English colonies through the use of British architectural books and builders’ guides. Its posts may have been later replacements, necessary after years of exposure to weather. (TB)

As of 1809, when the Reuben Fowlers moved in, it is certain that the house had acquired its center-hall plan. While such a layout has been documented in Connecticut as early as the 1740s, historians associate it more closely with the Federal period (c. 1780s to 1820s), by which time it was supplanting the center-chimney plan of days past.31

Since the discrepancies between the two chimneys in the old house may indicate the plan of 908 Boston Post Road evolved over time, it is possible to speculate that Griffin revamped, and remade a center-hall plan out of some earlier layout. (This was relatively common.) How that may have occurred is not easy to explain. If one chimney was older, the logical candidate was the west chimney, which contained the cooking fireplace. But why add a stack of brownstone above? If the east chimney, with its granite stack, was the older chimney, the house could have been expanded to the west and a cellar kitchen added by excavating under the sloping grade. But where was the original cooking fireplace? Removed?

Although the house’s rooms are absent the usual Adamesque decoration normally associated with the Federal style (urns, ellipses, fan motifs and the like), the building’s interior displays an early 19th-century sensibility. In the main parlors, for

31 See J. Frederick Kelly, Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut (Yale University Press, 1924) and Bertha Chadwick Trowbridge, ed., Old Houses of Connecticut (Yale University Press, 1928) for examples of Connecticut houses with center-hall plans.
example, walls were simply finished with painted plaster and devoid of paneling and cornices. What woodworking existed was understated and limited primarily to molded baseboards and fireplace surrounds. The most elaborate examples of the latter were the twin fireplaces located in the two north, front parlors. These were the elegant signature pieces of the interior, flanked by paneled pilasters and surmounted by a classically inspired entablatures incorporating the mantelpiece shelves. Simpler molded fireplace surrounds, also twins, were located in the corresponding front chambers above the north parlors.
Elegant parlor fireplaces notwithstanding, the interior also displayed stylistic anachronisms—notably the exposed corner posts that appeared in the front corners of the four main rooms. This was a dated treatment, out of stylistic sync with the other interior finishes. Were the mantles inserted in an older structural framework as part of a remodeling?

Northwest parlor, north fireplace wall, undated photograph. (Courtesy of the Charlotte L. Evarts Memorial Archives, Inc., Madison, Connecticut) This image of the northwest parlor, once known as the “Stencil Room,” is part of a set of photographs reportedly made for the Smithsonian Institution, probably in the early 1900s. The motifs bordering the fireplace and the baseboards were likely painted in the 1800s the Chapman Warner or Fowler eras. The corner post, above left, was located in the same room.

Primary framing members like this corner post in the northwest parlor were left exposed in the old house’s interior, an apparent stylistic anachronism in a Federal-period house. These posts did not run the full height of the frame, but were truncated at the first story. (RC)
Fireplace, south side of north wall, dining room. Its design consists of a molded architrave with a plain frieze surmounted by simple moldings and a projecting shelf. (TB)

The construction of the cupboard in the northwest corner of the dining room suggests a date of c. 1760-80, but the piece’s placement, against the corner post and overlapping the door frame, is unusually awkward. The cupboard may be an antique, added to the room later. Its base also has been altered. The flush-panel door to its left leads to the house’s west ell, added in the 1840s. (TB)
Side door, east gable end. Hand-wrought iron hardware, including strap hinges represent 18th-century types and craftsmanship. A boxed corner post can be seen to the left of the door. (TB)

A tantalizing clue: The letter “G” discovered on a plank framing the front entry. Was the writing part of a housewright’s signature, or did the “G” stand for Griffin? (RC)
The center hall and staircase, looking east into the former northeast parlor. The simple railing, with its flat profile, and rudimentary newel post appeared to be original. The newel sat somewhat uncomfortably on the bottom tread as though it may have been chopped in to fit. Did the staircase predate it? (TB)
The West Ell and Later Changes

The chronology of the west ell is easier to trace. The Greek Revival styling of the surviving east (left) doorway on its street-side porch indicates that this wing, probably added by Catharine Hand, was built in the mid-1840s, when that style was coming into high fashion. (The porch’s posts were embellished later in the century with jigsawn brackets in the Victorian style, photo, page 35, which vanished at some point in the 1900s.) A new parlor, accessed by a door leading from the dining room at the west end of the old house (see page 23) featured a handsome Greek Revival fireplace as its focal point. That fireplace surround, below, was the only interior element of architectural note in the newer, western part of the house identified at the time of demolition.

Around 1900, when William B. Hale undertook some alterations in an effort to attract summer renters to the Old Ark, he added a bathroom and the wraparound porch at the east gable end of the building. More remodeling followed in 1909, when the Harts family readied the building for their own summer residency. According to family records archived in the Madison Historical Society, renovations included “cutting new doors” and expanding the dining room (achieved by adding the large bay window on the south side of the house). It was probably at this time that the wall between the front and rear east rooms in the old house was removed—a renovation attributed to Martha Hale Harts. The wallpaper, floor boards and fireplace mantel in the southeast parlor (see photo, page 37) may have been added as part of a Colonial Revival redecorating scheme around the same time.
Around 1915, the family raised the west ell by adding a second story, adding an upstairs bathroom for their servants. The exaggerated cornice returns on the west gable end of this wing were Colonial Revival motifs that were becoming fashionable in New England around that time.

Little information has come to light about any significant alterations that occurred during the Hartses’ permanent residency after their retirement in the 1930s. A later round of changes took place after Brig. Gen. William Harts’s death in the 1960s, under the ownership of the couple’s daughter, Cynthia Harts Bannister. Cynthia removed the old curvilinear staircase to the kitchen, added a new stair in the west ell and remodeled the interior of that wing for use as a rental unit. More alterations occurred during the Staley years, most notably when the old, one-story corner porch was remade into a chocolate shop and outfitted with commercial cooking equipment.

The west gable end of the west ell, looking east: The second story, with its oversized cornice returns, was added about 1915. This west addition rested on a high foundation that adjusted to the sloping grade, thus allowing for a lower level, which could be entered at the west gable end. (TB)

A Greek-style fireplace mantel in the former northeast parlor, looking north. Martha Davis Hale Harts removed the wall behind the fireplace, possibly sometime after 1909, when she began renovating the house for summer use. This mantel may have been added at that time. (TB)

The one-story wraparound porch at the east gable end was added in the early 1900s in a bid to make the house more appealing to summer renters. It was used as a sleeping porch by Martha Hale Harts and her grandchildren. The Hartses installed the large square bay window to its west as a way to add space to the dining room. (TB)
The basement kitchen, west ell, looking west, was modernized in the mid-1960s. A new stair was added amid renovations undertaken in order to ready this part of the house as a rental unit. (TB)

The old sleeping porch interior, looking south. This room was remodeled as a kitchen for a chocolate shop in 2005. (TB)
Concluding Thoughts

The General’s Residence has proven to be a fascinating, albeit challenging, study in inconsistencies. Much has been discovered, but there are still outstanding questions about the age and derivation of the old, east section of the house and the role that Capt. Edward Griffins did or did not play in its history. The recent discovery of an 1807 newspaper advertisement (see page 4) for a “house built in the most modern style” on the old Fence Creek tract should have put many of those questions to rest, had it not been for the structural anomalies that came to light during demolition. While many factors—including the center-hall plan, use of brownstone and some of the interior styling—want to confirm an early 19th-century construction date, the building’s piecemeal framing, the strange “lift” in the roof and the house’s chimney incongruities do not make a clean case for this. Then too, a mix of structural features like the overhang and exposed corner posts, normally considered to be relics of 18th-century domestic building, with more “current” elements like the stylish parlor fireplaces raises questions.

In any event, despite his advertising, Chapman Warner (perhaps a canny businessman with a knack for marketing) was not offering potential buyers a “modern” house, but a building with one foot in two different centuries. It is admittedly misleading to rely on preconceived notions of “norms” historians have come to recognize as patterns in early Connecticut domestic building, as every house has the potential to break the “rules.” Surely that is at least partially true in the case of The General’s Residence. The uneven and occasionally slapdash framing—incorporating scraps, re-used timbers and its old-fashioned plank sheathing—at the very least suggest haste and budget concerns. (Was the roof partially raised temporarily during a building lull or a lack of funds?)

Another consideration is the role of local lore. Although hearsay is just that, and should not be construed as fact, the association of 908 Boston Post Road with the name of Capt. Edward Griffin is so deeply rooted that it does bear asking why that should be so—beyond the holding power of some lurid stories. Dozens of references and accounts concerning the Griffin House and attempts to determine its age reside in the Madison Historical Society archives. A list of old dwellings in the town compiled as early as 1899 identifies the house (Mrs. Philemon Scranton) as the Captain Griffin House, built 1759 (!). How, if the house Griffin occupied with his family was torn down and replaced by Warner in the early 1800s (meaning Griffin never lived at no. 908 Boston Post Road) did that fact, along with Warner’s name, become completely lost in the space of only two generations?

One plausible explanation, supported by physical evidence, could be that Griffin was indeed associated with building known as The General’s House—in that he began a new house or partially rebuilt an old house, and Warner finished what Griffin started. Nothing at this point in the research process is certain. That the Madison Historical Society has preserved significant amounts of historic fabric from the building will advance future efforts to understand the building’s past. A dendrochronological analysis of timbers, for example, would shed light on the age of its framing members. It is also

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32 Credit for discovery of this advertisement goes to Joel Helander.
hoped that more historical data will come to light as excavation into the rich historical past of this building continues. Even though the building itself is gone, the stories associated with the many people who lived there remain. These offer an important starting point for exploring how one building can offer valuable insight into the historical and social patterns that shaped Madison’s evolution from the colonial period to the 21st century.
Chronology of Maps and Images

Clark & Tackabury’s New Topographical Map of the State of Connecticut, 1859

This 1859 map shows the East Wharf (just left of center) with a hotel (the Hammonasset House) on the shore. The road to the west of the winding Fence Creek is present-day East Wharf Road. A road or drive appears to loop south off the Post Road in order to reach an unidentified building on the property.
This map detail, which shows the house under the ownership of J. Wyllis Tucker, provides evidence that its west ell was erected prior to 1868. U.S. census records for 1870 reveal that Tucker, listed as a farmer, was then one of the wealthiest men in Madison. As of that year, he was living at the homestead with his wife Clarissa, age fifty-one, and their eighteen-year-old daughter Harriet.
This image was made before 1909, when the stone fence was built. It shows the west ell prior to the addition of its second story. The house then had louvered shutters, which were closed during hot weather to keep the interior cool. The photo also reveals that the east entry door on the porch was enclosed, and the porch posts were trimmed with jigsawn brackets (detail, below). Such embellishments became fashionable around the 1870s, owing in part to the influence of architectural pattern books and mail-order sales catalogs. Fanciful scroll designs like these were common.
A detail from O.H. Bailey’s 1881 aerial view shows the house from the southwest, along with a cluster of outbuildings on the east side of East Wharf Road. When this drawing was made, the house was owned by Mary Elizabeth Scranton and known as the “Old Ark.” Its west ell was still only one story high (atop its lower level).
This image depicts members of the household of S. Arthur Scranton, whose family occupied the west ell from the late 1800s until 1904. At far left is Mrs. Arthur Scranton (Rose Ann Williams). The household also included an African-American domestic servant, Mathilda Johnson (foreground), and the Scrantons’ daughter, Maud, who may be the girl pictured standing by the ladder or seated far right on the lawn. The photograph, showing the south side of the old house, reveals that the corner posts, cornice, overhang, window trim and other exterior elements were accented with a dark paint color. The window sash was painted a light hue, probably white. The three-sided bay window, seen above left, was added about 1909, but the pipe railing was already in place when the older photograph was made.
A detail from a whimsical illustrated map of Madison shows the property under the ownership of Martha Davis Hale Harts and Brig. Gen. W.W. Harts. About 1909, the Hartses raised the west ell with its second story and installed the stone fence shown running along East Wharf Road, to the west of the house, and along the Boston Post Road, to its north.
Southeast parlor, looking west into the dining room, undated photograph. (Courtesy of the Charlotte L. Evarts Memorial Archives, Inc., Madison, Connecticut)

This photograph of the southeast parlor looking west into the dining room was probably taken in the early 1900s. Martha Davis Hale Harts removed the wall to the right (behind the fireplace) sometime after 1909 to make one open room on the east side of the old house (see photo, page 27).
A photograph made as part of the Federal Writer’s Project Survey of Old Buildings in Connecticut reveals that, by the 1930s, the fanciful Victorian porch brackets had been removed. The two-tone color scheme evident in the photo on page 35 was also gone, and the house was painted entirely white. Louvered shutters and the porch entry enclosure were still in place.
This photograph was made before the window at the far right on the porch was replaced by a door, probably in the 1960s, when the ell was renovated for use as rental unit.

The side door in the east gable end, shown prior to removal of a five-pane transom.


Storm windows were in place by 1981. At that time the front doors were painted white.
The house, looking east, when it was a bridal shop owned by Dorothy Staley.
Timeline at a Glance

1708, Nathaniel Dudley purchases land from Joseph and Mary Hand in the area of Fence Creek.

1730, Mention of a new barn on the Dudleys’ land appears in public records.

1765, Nathaniel Dudley 2nd exchanges with Guilford proprietors land “On the rear of his father’s home lot for the use of ‘a publick landing place forever’…”

1794, Lyman Munger purchases forty-eight acres from heirs of Nathaniel Dudley 2nd with a house and barn for 200 pounds, with life use of half the land and the house by Abigail Dudley.

1799, Edward Griffin(g) purchases fifty acres of the Fence Creek property from Lyman Munger for $1333.34 with an “old dwelling house and barn.”

1802, Edward Griffin dies.

1805, Chapman Warner purchases from the estate of Griffin fifty acres with a dwelling house, barn and other buildings for $1,725.00.


1809, Reuben Rose Fowler purchases the house from Chapman Warner.

1845, the house is inherited (1/3) by Catherine Fowler Hand from her father Reuben Fowler.

1849, the house is inherited (1/3) by Catherine Fowler Hand from her sister Eliza Ann Fowler.

1860, the house is conveyed (1/3) to Catherine Fowler Hand by her brother William C. Fowler.

1866, the house is inherited by Chauncey Meigs Hand and Charles Fowler Hand from Catherine Fowler Hand.

1866, the house is conveyed to J. Wyllis Tucker.

1871, the house is purchased by James H. Bishop from J. Wyllis Tucker.

1872, the house is purchased by Mary Elizabeth Prudden Scranton from James H. Bishop.
1895, Mary Elizabeth Scranton dies. The house eventually passes down to her granddaughter, Martha Davis Hale Harts.

1909, Martha Davis Hale and her husband Gen. W.W. Harts begin using the house as a summer residence.

1968, the house is purchased by Walter Maguire from the Harts heirs.

1973, the house is purchased by Charles and Dorothy Staley. Mrs. Staley opens the wedding dress shop known as “The General’s Residence.”

2005, Madison Chocolates opens in the house.

2016, the property goes into foreclosure.

2019, the property is purchased by The Generals Residence at Madison, LLC.

2020, the house is torn down.