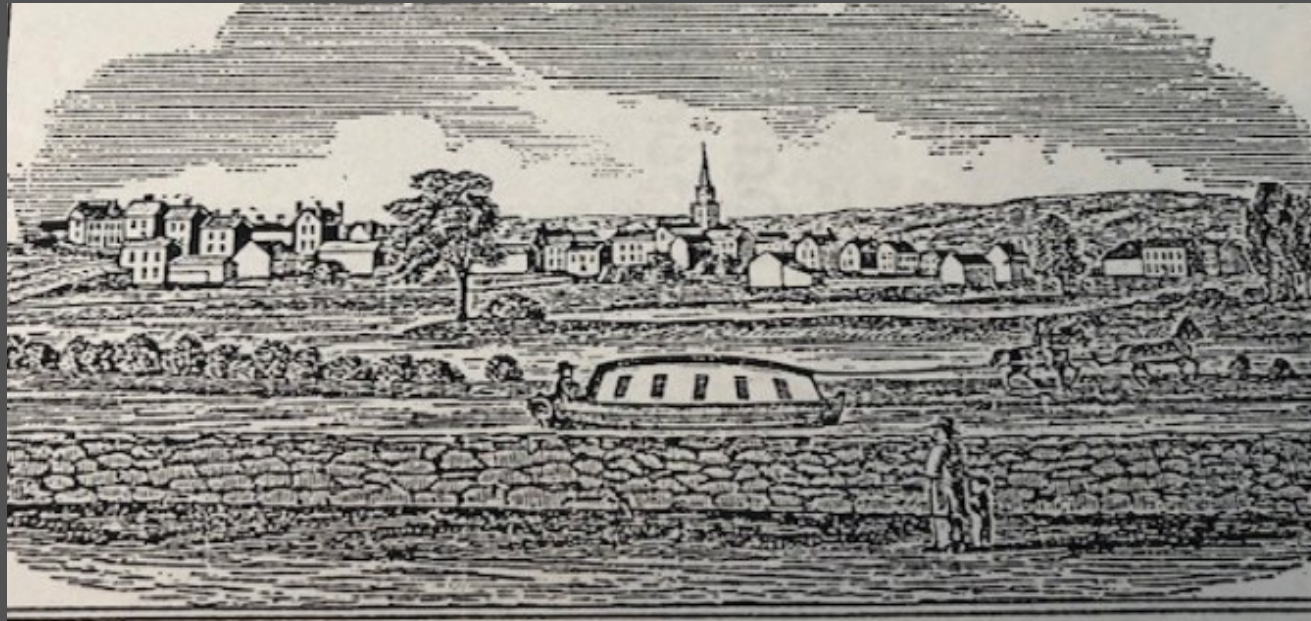


The Asa Waters Mansion the first 100 years



Asa Waters, 2nd

- Asa Waters, 2nd was one of nine children born to Asa Waters and Sarah Goodell in the town of Sutton, Massachusetts in 1769.

His father and uncle, Andrus, opened an armory on Singletary Brook and produced arms and gunpowder for the Revolutionary cause.

- Asa Waters, 2nd and his brother Elijah carried on the family business and opened a larger armory in the newly formed town of Millbury.

- Contemporaries remarked upon Waters' active and creative mind, mechanical ability, energy, perseverance, and skill in business. Public-spirited, he was described as a "friend of whatever related to the good of the community". ¹



Susan Holman

- Susan Holman was born in 1784 to Colonel Jonathan Holman and

- Asa and Susan had eight children, all born between 1803 and 1826. All were daughters except for the third, Asa Holman Waters.

- Although there is not a lot written about Susan Holman, I feel this excerpt from a letter to her daughter Elizabeth helps to give us idea as to the type of mother she was. “You cannot realize how sorry I am to hear of your ill health, it really made me very wakeful last night, yet I cannot think it is going to be permanent. Why did you not tell me sooner... You ought to be cautious about keeping your feet warm and dry, you have not got the right kind of overshoes for such walking as you speak of”.-a letter dated Feb. 2, 1849 from the Mansion archives.

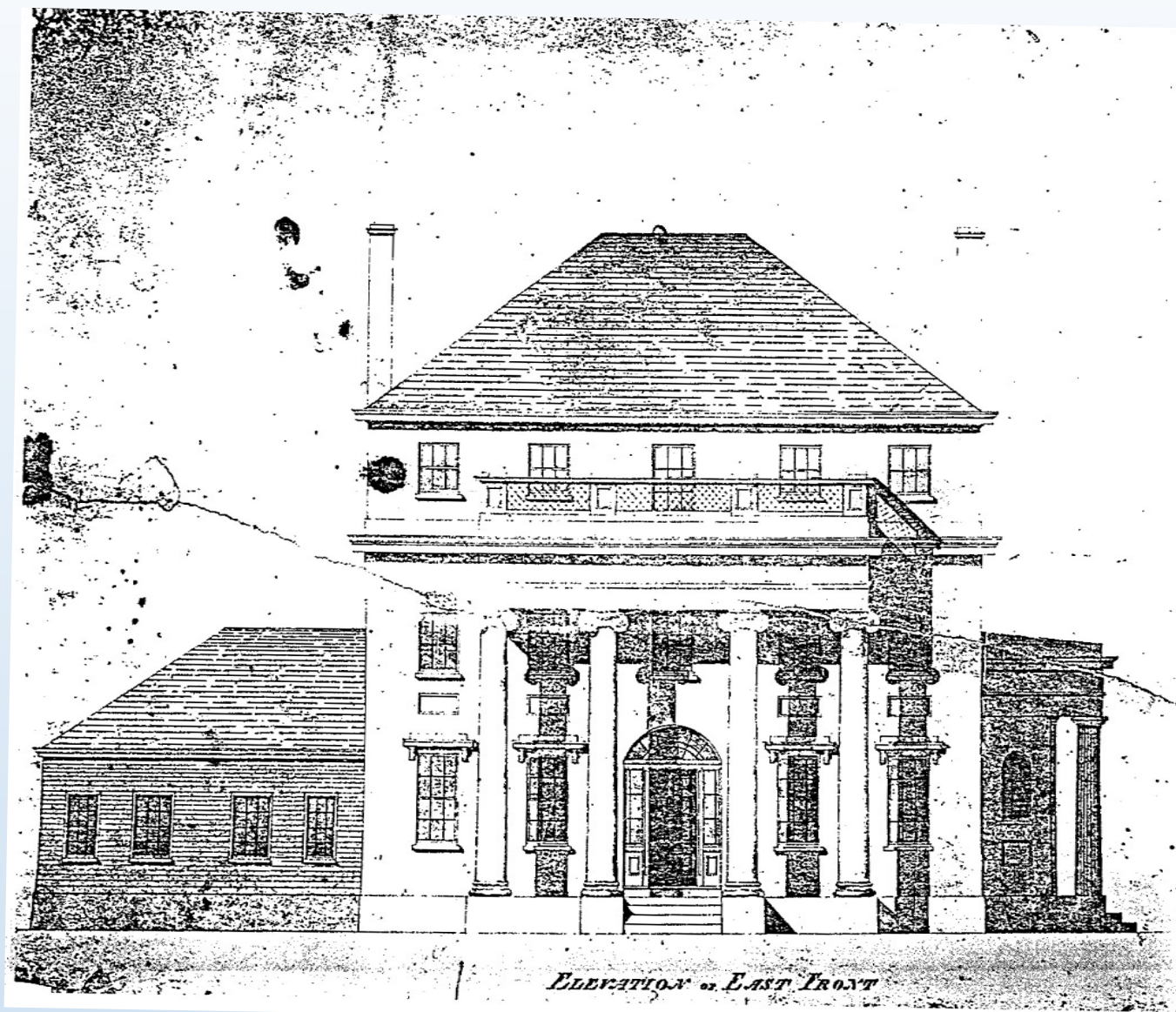


The Waters Armory

- Asa the 2nd and his brother Elijah followed in their father's footsteps and became gunsmiths themselves.
- In 1797, they purchased a waterpower site and land along the north side of the Blackstone River, where an "iron works" had been operating as early as 1740.
- They first operated blacksmith and scythe shops equipped with forges, trip hammers, rolling and slitting mills, a saw and mill iron factory and a steel furnace. ²
- In 1808, they built an armory and entered into a contract with the U.S. government to manufacture guns for the army.

The Waters Armory

- The Waters Armory began to supplement arms manufactured in Springfield and Harper's Ferry along with 5 other private armories.
- Elijah and Asa continued to supplement their arms income with their other manufacturing enterprises begun in what was now called "Armory Village". In addition to guns, they also made scythes and sawmill saws and carried on iron smelting and steel casting.
- After Elijah passed away in 1814, Asa continued to run the armory, making innovations to the gun making process that were to revolutionize gun manufacturing in the U.S. and abroad. 3



Watermarked 1820, drawing of East Elevation from American Antiquarian Society Collection

Construction of the Asa Waters Mansion began in 1826 and concluded in 1829.

Materials such as Southern pine, Pumpkin pine from Maine, Mahogany from Central America, marble from Italy and Baltimore bricks were all brought in by wagon and were used throughout.

Elaborate wood carving was done by local artisans.

Captain Lewis Bigelow of Worcester is listed as being the builder but there is not confirmation as to who designed the building. Although Bryant was credited to be the architect of the mansion, it is thought that Asa Holman Waters might have mistakenly credited the wrong person. It is thought to be more probable that either Alexander Parris or Asher Benjamin were the actual architects.

The Asa Waters Mansion was built on land that appears to have been part of a 1797 purchase by Asa Waters 2nd and his brother Elijah, of a site on the Blackstone River. The site included land on the north side of the river, extending northward to Elm Street. The house was located in what was then known as Armory Village, a short distance northwest of the gun manufactory that had been built by the brothers on the north side of the river in 1808. At the time of construction, the armory was solely owned by Asa.

One of two frieze on Elm St. side



Left-One story porch with full Corinthian entablature topped by flat roof with balustrade

Above-trim detail on East porch



The architecture of the Mansion reflects a transition from the Federal style to the Neo-Classical. It shares features of both and foreshadows the popular Greek Revival style. The square form of the house and its balustrated hip roof were common to both the Federal and Neo-Classical styles.

The Waters Mansion colonnade was probably the first example of a colossal Classical colonnade to have been built for a dwelling in the Central Massachusetts area.

Extending across the entire width of the east façade, the style of this colonnade might be taken, at first glance, as Greek Revival without the typical gabled roof. Yet its columns are not Greek, but Roman in derivation.



The five bay deep east elevation is dominated by six column Corinthian portico with full entablature and shed roof.

The windows have molded cornices and bracketed hoods.

Significant Interior Architectural Details of the Mansion

Fanlight and Sidelights at
East Entrance, metal
muntins with some early
glass

Mahogany 6 panel door,
possible original altered
with horizontal panels at
top during late 19th-early
20th century



Original plaster ceiling
medallion depicting Acanthus
leaves



Wide moulded door frame with
floral-motif corner blocks



East Foyer plaster frieze-grapevine motif

Arched door frames have possible original moulding with 20th century addition of door jambs.

Glazed-panel arched-top doors are early-mid 20th century

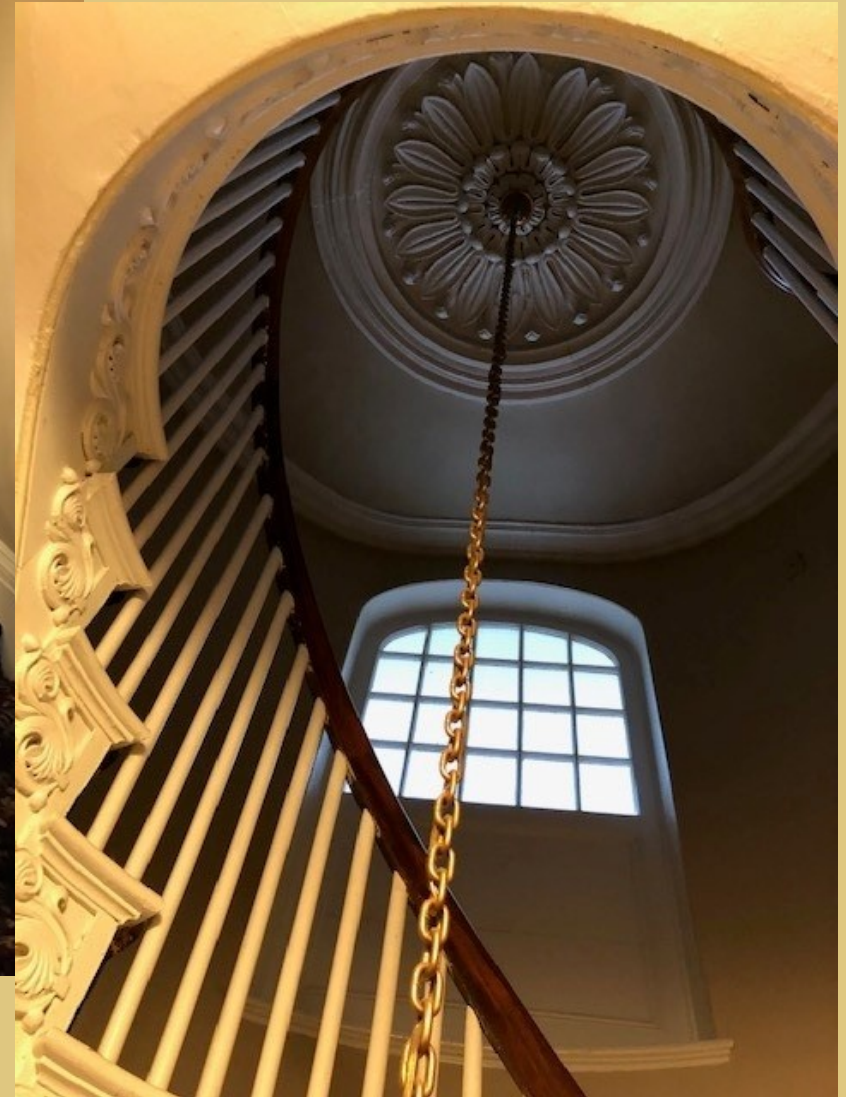
On right-spindles, balusters, risers, treads and end ornament of the spiral staircase



View looking down from second floor



Third floor ceiling medallion



Paneled plaster archways with wood paneled Doric pilasters. One at each section of central hall.

Below, leaded fanlight over door. This inner doorway is not original and was probably closed off early 20th century. Fanlight possibly brought from other location



Dining Room ceiling medallion,
Acanthus leaves



Original Mahogany doors with
mercury glass knobs displayed
throughout first floor



Fanlights &
Sidelights, metal
muntins with
some early glass



The East Parlor is the most original of the rooms. Original wood floor shows no knots and attached with countersunk wrought nails. Tack marks around edging shows evidence of carpet. Elaborate plaster ceiling medallion shows recurrent Acanthus leaves. Chandelier appears to be mid 19th century.



Original plasterwork in parlor shows floral pattern.

Right, a view of interior wooden shutters that line each window on first and second floors in Main Building of mansion.



“When completed visitors flocked here from all quarters, to see the new wonder of all this region, there being nothing in Worcester, or anywhere near to compare with it in point of architecture. Even the Governor of the Commonwealth, Levi Lincoln, invited Daniel Webster and a party of prominent officials to ride down from Worcester and visit this house.”-Asa Holman Waters 4

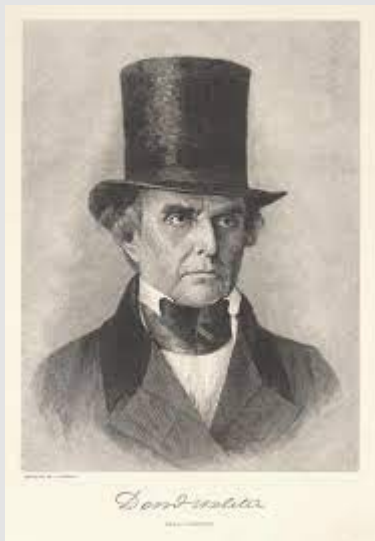


“With a natural inclination to hospitality, the house was a center of cultural and social activity that included reception, soirees, Christmas parties, and family weddings. The Waters welcome not only members of the local citizenry but also persons of state and national importance”



6

Governor Levi Lincoln

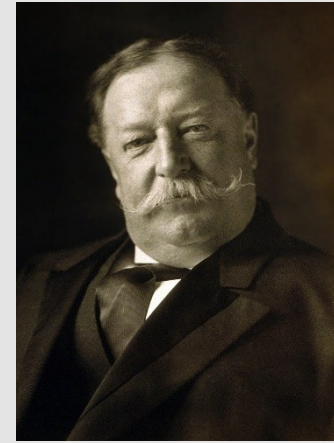


7

Daniel Webster

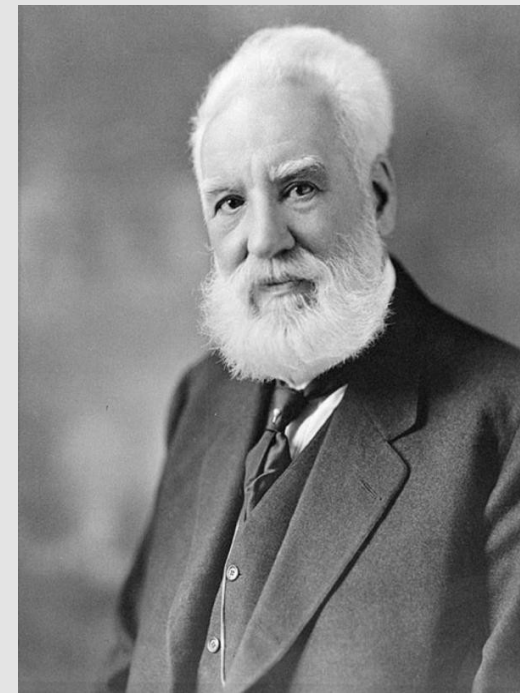


Abby Kelley Foster 8



President William Howard Taft 9

His aunt, Delia, lived across the street in the Torrey House. Susan Waters, daughter of Asa and Susan, married into the Torrey family.



10

Alexander Graham Bell
His daughter Elsie May Bell married Gilbert Grosvenor, grandson of Asa Holman Waters

Asa Holman Waters had graduated from Yale and later attended Harvard Law School before being admitted to the MA bar in 1835. In 1837, he was forced to give up law due to his father's ailing health. When Asa Waters, 2nd passed away in 1841, his son Asa Holman Waters inherited the house. In 1849, he married Mary Elizabeth Hovey. The couple had three children-Isabel Holman, Lilian Hovey and Florence Elizabeth.

Like his father, Asa Holman Waters was president of the Millbury Bank and served in political office. He was a member of the MA Legislature and served as a member of the 1853 Constitutional Convention for the amendment of the state constitution. He also held the position of Millbury Postmaster from 1836-1848.

Active in the anti-slavery movement, he was a frequent speaker at meetings throughout Worcester County. He was also a member of the Free Soil Party.



A member and occasional Trustee or Vice-President of the Worcester Horticultural Society, Asa Holman was an avid gardener.

Asa Holman Waters lived in the house until his death in 1887. After his death, the house continued to be the home for his wife and children until the last remaining daughter passed away in 1928.

Uncovering the mystery of the greenhouse

Below, you will see a room coming off the west side of the mansion. The greenhouse would be connected to this room just out of the frame.

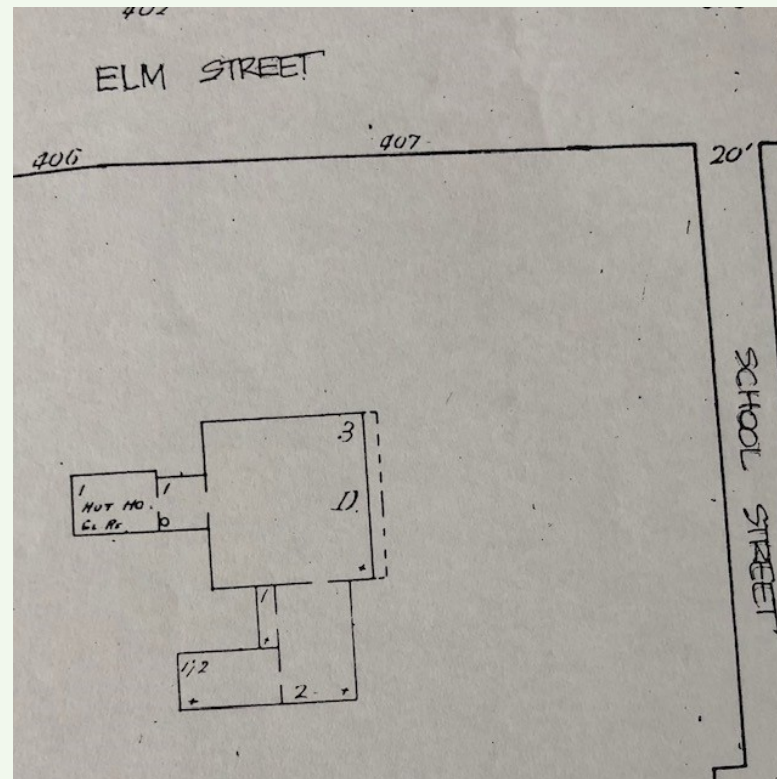


11

Not known by many, but there was at least one greenhouse adjoining the building which no longer exists.

In 1841, Edmund Quincy, noted in his diary, “while admiring Waters’s spacious house, greenhouses, and well-tended gardens...”

In 1860, Millbury tax records list a Hot House as part of the property’s assets.



12

In 1894, this insurance map shows the location of the greenhouse and the connecting room.

By 1913, the greenhouse has been removed.

Another alteration to the mansion design is the change to the Second Floor Ballroom.

Sometime after the family sold the mansion, the original ceiling was removed and a new drop ceiling was installed to give the new tenants an additional space above. Unfortunately, this resulted in the vaulted coffered ceiling trimmed with stucco rosettes and Classical details to become lost in the process. To the right, you will see an image of the ballroom taken sometime after the family had taken an extended trip to Turkey from 1874-1876, as evidenced by the oriental rugs and artifacts.



References

Title page Illustration

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-Barber, John Warner. Historical Collections, 1839 (The house is seen at far left. No ell is shown)

The bulk of material was taken from the Documentary and Physical Research Report funded by National Trust for Historic Preservation's Cynthia Woods Mitchell Fund for Historic Interiors prepared for the Asa Waters Mansion. This is an unpublished, private document.

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4. Quote from the scrapbook of Asa Holman Waters
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11. Photograph of Millbury Parade of new Fire Engine, Courtesy Millbury Fire Department
12. Sanborn Map, Millbury, January 1894
13. Photographic of Ballroom, American Antiquarian Society, 1880-1890.