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## VAF-New England Field Trip

### Massachusetts South Shore Joiners Shops: Standish-Briggs Shop, Pembroke Luther Sampson Shop, Duxbury

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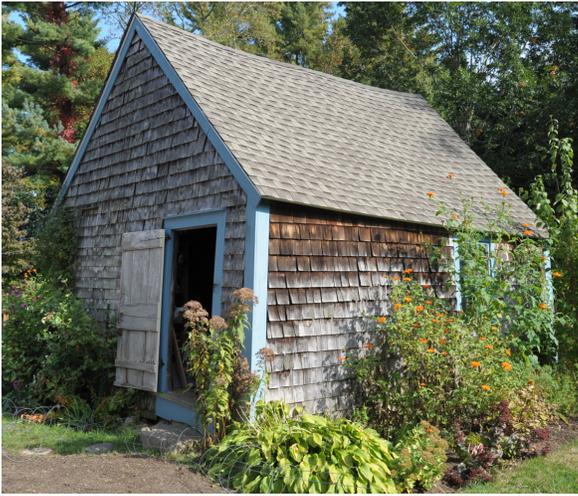
The Hannah and David Standish Property in Pembroke has four historic structures, each of them with complex histories: a dwelling, a shop, a corn house, and an English-style barn. David Magoon purchased the parcel from his cousin Thomas in 1725. He gave the property to his daughter Hannah who married David Standish, a descendant of Myles Standish, in 1746, the date that is presently associated with the dwelling. Subsequently, the property passed to the Turner family who owned it until Luther and Susanna Briggs bought it in 1813. The Briggses owned the property until 1864, after which it went through a succession of owners, who made various alterations to the buildings but did not undertake major new building projects. All of the early owners had associations with shipbuilding on the North River that flows just east of the property.

The house began as a two-story early eighteenth-century half house that includes the east end and a chimney bay. This section has characteristic Georgian details with two-panel doors and Roman moldings. The western two-story section was clearly added as seen from the roof details in the attic but is also eighteenth century and likely from the Standish period. Much of that section appears to be remodeled with late Georgian and Federal details including the 24 light windows, front door surround, mantles and chimney. The chimney is unusual because the fireplaces and chimney mass do not take up the full original chimney bay, leaving space for a small room behind the stairs lighted by a window. The west parlor also has later Greek Revival details from a nineteenth-century remodeling.

The ell contains a cooking fireplace and bake oven behind the central chimney and presumably dates from the rebuild of the chimney, likely during the Briggs period. This early nineteenth-century 1 1/2 story addition has first-floor ceiling joists that are hewn on 3 sides and pit sawn on one face, suggesting they were re-sawn at the shipyard. There are other examples of pit sawing in the cellar. Later remodeling by various owners raised the ell's roof section and added shed dormers. Beyond the ell is a series of later additions and a remodeled wood shed that is probably from the Briggs period

Two other outbuildings—a late eighteenth or early nineteenth century English-style barn, and what was probably an eighteenth-century granary or corn house, later refitted as a laborer's quarters—are available for study.

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## Standish-Briggs Shop

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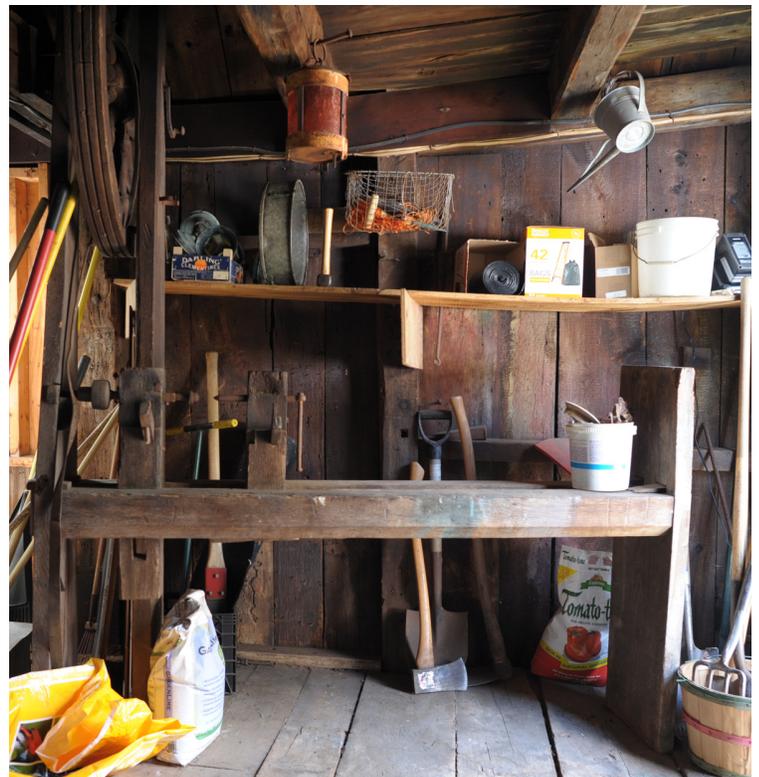
The other outbuilding may be an early eighteenth-century single room dwelling, repurposed as a shop. Although it appears to have had another bay on the north end, the shouldered posts are nicely finished and the southwest corner behind the workbench shows vertical, chamfered paneling painted white. The roof framing is very lightly constructed with a principal rafter and purlin system of very slender dimensions. A direct hit from a tree in the winter of 2013 cracked the middle principal rafter but until that incident, that roof has held up numerous blizzards.

The shop has a nineteenth-century workbench, assembled with cut nails. The really rare feature in the shop, however, is the overhead wheel lathe that probably dates to the late eighteenth century and that might be one of only four or five eighteenth-century lathes that survive in the United States.

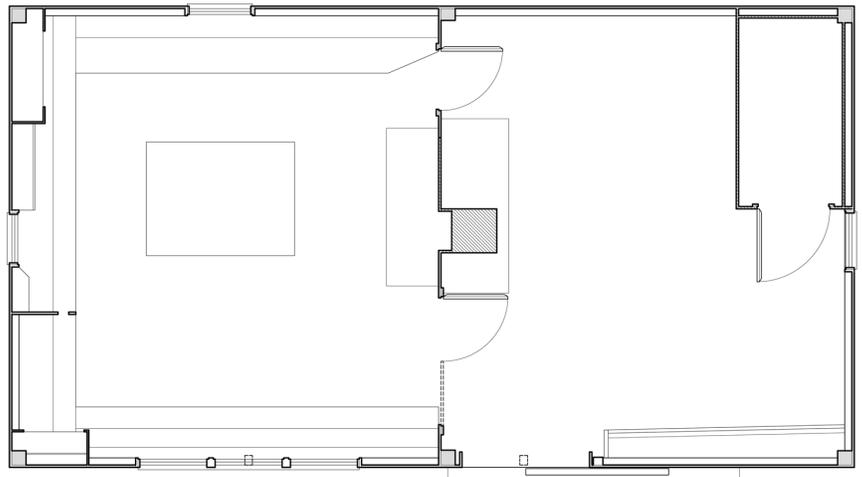
Although it has had repairs in the nineteenth century, the lathe is noteworthy for its integrity. The maker designed the it to be taken apart if necessary so it could be moved. It uses tusk tenons and wedges to assemble the major components. The wheel is similar to but much larger than common spinning wheels. The spokes are turned like late eighteenth-century Windsor chair legs in the area, and the fellies are lapped boards nailed together with wrought nails. To balance the wheel's eccentric crank, the maker drilled holes into sections of the fellies and filled the holes with lead. The three grooves in the drive wheel are for cords that powered the pulley on the headstock, unlike the smooth wheels for leather belts typical of the nineteenth century. The original pitman is now long gone and there is no treadle. It was probably a separate unit and may have been nailed or bolted to the floor. The lathe's standards show signs of being toe nailed into the floor to keep it from tipping over as the wheel makes it top heavy. There is an oiling hole in the headstock to keep the drive shaft lubricated and signs of grease on the slots that hold the drive wheel. The lathe and drive wheel are too tall for the short ceiling height of the building and the floor was cut out in order to accommodate the wheel.

We welcome your thoughts and perspectives on these buildings that are not yet drawn up or recorded.

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# Luther Sampson Shop



FLOOR PLAN  
1/2"=1'0"

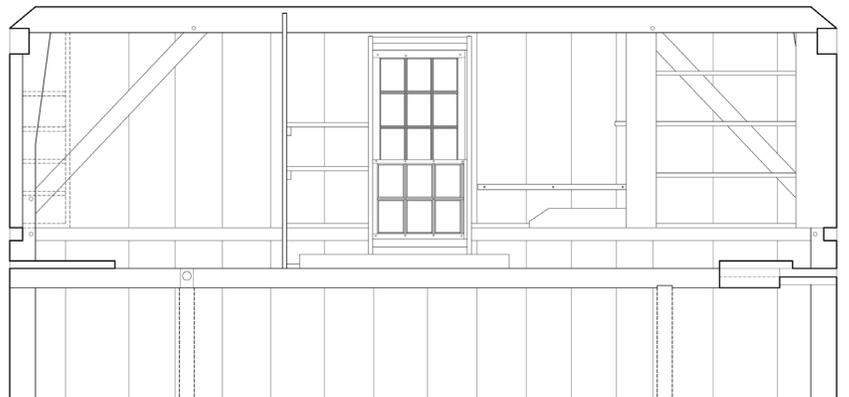


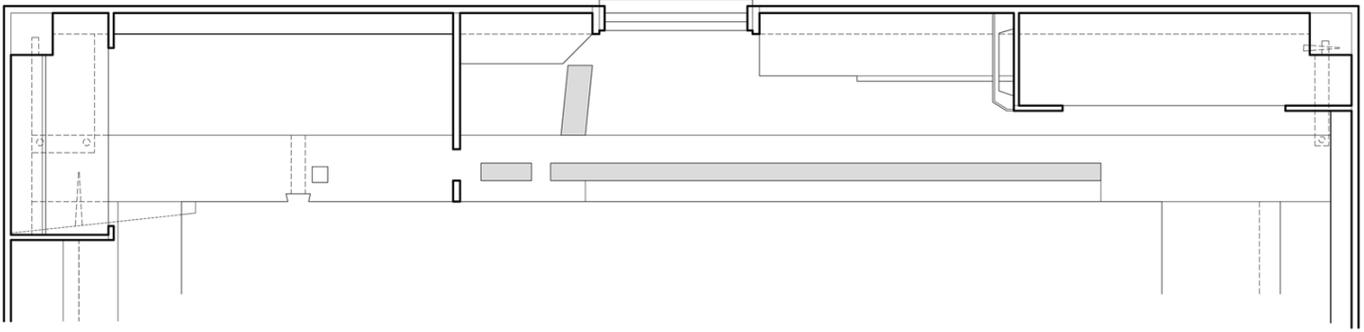
Luther Sampson's shop was 16 feet by 29 feet 6 inches long, partitioned nearly in the middle into two rooms, one of which held a chimney and a fireplace that opened into the main work room. At 480 square feet on a floor, it was comparable to the Boston shops recorded in the 1798 Direct Tax Census and many other joiners' shops in rural Massachusetts. Sampson framed the shop on the side of a hill with a stone foundation under the northern or shop side of the two-room structure and on the south side with a basement room under the one above. The purpose of this basement room remains unclear, but it seems to have included a fireplace from a first period chimney that was replaced, probably in the 1870s, with a stove flue. The joists under the shop are peeled oak poles approximately 8 inches in diameter, but the ones under the south or outer room were hewn.

The frame was simple. Three pairs of shouldered, oak posts about 7 feet tall support the oak wall plates and the 6 by 7 inch oak girts that tie the walls together. Nailing rails set approximately 3 feet off the floor between the posts stiffen the walls and provide support for the vertical board sheathing that runs from the sills to the plates. The rails also supported all the windows that were originally smaller and located above these rails. The floor over the shop held in the heat from the fireplace. The joists are located on 21-24 inch centers with thicker joists set under rafter pairs. The southern room has heavier joists set on 42 inch centers that did not originally have a floor. One of the joists in the outer room has a painted date of 1789. The open nature of the joists in the south room supported storage of lumber or finished sections of paneling that could project into the area under the roof. The floor over the shop enabled workers to walk around but the low ceiling height suggests that the ability to hold in a measure of warmth may have been as important a factor as convenient storage.

Measured drawings by Jeff Klee,  
Department of Architectural Research,  
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Above Right: First floor plan  
Right: West section showing the original planing bench





There were only three studs in the building on the working floor: two that defined an entry into the outer or south room and one at the mid point of the west (house side) wall of the shop. The entry was changed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to enlarge the doorway for the sliding door now on the building. Workers removed the medial stud in the shop's west wall when the triple window was inserted during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whether this stud supported windows or larger doors is impossible to tell at present without removing the vinyl siding to see what the earlier shingle siding reveals.

While the shop's framing was dressed to ease edges, the vertical sheathing was simply nailed up unplanned. Only the fireplace wall of the shop was finished with smoothed boards. This combination of finished and unfinished surfaces seems to be characteristic of shops, barns, sheds, cowhouses, and other support structures in New England. Surfaces that were handled—tool racks for example—might be smoothed, but surfaces that were visible but not touched much were left unsmoothed. It is possible that Sampson intended at some point to panel or plaster the interior but few agricultural outbuildings or purpose-built shops in New England had finished interiors.



The Sampson shop clearly had a fireplace in its first period, marked by cuts in the paneling where the original opening was. While the fireplace suggests that workers sought a measure of warmth during winter months, the nature of the work also drove the design. Hide glues do not cure well at low temperatures. Similarly, paint finishes required a certain amount of warmth to cure properly. Finally, smoothing lumber with hand planes generates a large volume of shavings and wood chips that need to be gotten rid of. Burning them up in the fireplace is a useful way to keep the place somewhat clean and heat it.

The survival of interior fittings including tool racks, workbenches, and shelving are part of the shop's enduring importance as a document. In general, the earliest fittings are separated from later ones by the wrought nails used to attach them to the walls; latter ones had cut nails. The two earliest benches on the northeast and northwest walls of the shop also show different wear patterns. The northwest bench in the Sampson shop was originally a planning bench, converted later to a lathe when the work changed. It is 5 1/4 inches thick and 9 1/2 inches wide, an ideal size for planning the pieces used in frame-and-panel construction. Normally workers do not use chisels or saws on these benches because a scared bench top mars the soft pine commonly found in local paneling. The planning bench has very few scars from stray tools and it is furthest from the fireplace. Shavings pile up, but they are still far from danger. It is also no accident that the shelves for the molding and bench planes are located to either end of this planning bench. Scars show where Sampson and others placed molding planes.

Conversely, the northeast bench is so chopped up, that later workers added a sacrificial plank to reface it. It was here that Sampson and later workers nailed racks onto the board walls (starting from left to right) for chisels, bits, awls, squares, saws and a saw wrest. The racks are similar to those in the Dominy shop at the Winterthur Museum. Workers used this bench for cutting tenons, chopping out mortises, and pinning the joints with pegs.



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