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THE ORANGE WEBB HOUSE

BUILT: CIRCA 1740

Village Lane, Orient, Long Island



*Webb House is open to the public from July 1 to October 15
on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday from 2 to 5 p.m.*

*From the library of
Barbara Ferris Van Liew
Architectural Historian*

The Orange Webb House

BY FLORENCE S. KRAMER

Official Historian, Town of Southold

NOTE: *Webb House is now located on Village Lane, opposite Oysterponds Historical Society at Orient, Long Island. The house is the property of Mr. and Mrs. George R. Latham and is open to visitors July 1 to October 15, 2 to 5 p.m. Admission free.*

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The Orange Webb House

Florence S. Kramer

This account of Webb House was compiled and written by Mrs. Florence S. Kramer. Mrs. Kramer is the wife of the late John James Kramer of Southold.

She was born in Wilmington, North Carolina, was educated in the New York Public School system and was graduated from the Traphagen School of Design. While she was a student there she became interested in historical research.

Originally an inn, this building was erected by Captain William Booth about 1720. Captain Booth died in 1723. He was succeeded by his son Lieutenant Constant Booth, who, in the years he was host, entertained among others, two famous men, the Reverend George Whitefield and Colonel George Washington.¹

The inn was situated near the junction of Sterling Creek and Main Street in the Village of Sterling (now Greenport). It presumably faced the water and a wharf where vessels of from 50 to 80 tons burthen could come for landing.²

Augustus Griffin in his Griffin's Journal, published in 1857, pp. 227, 8, 9, states that "the house stood a few rods east from the Presbyterian Church."

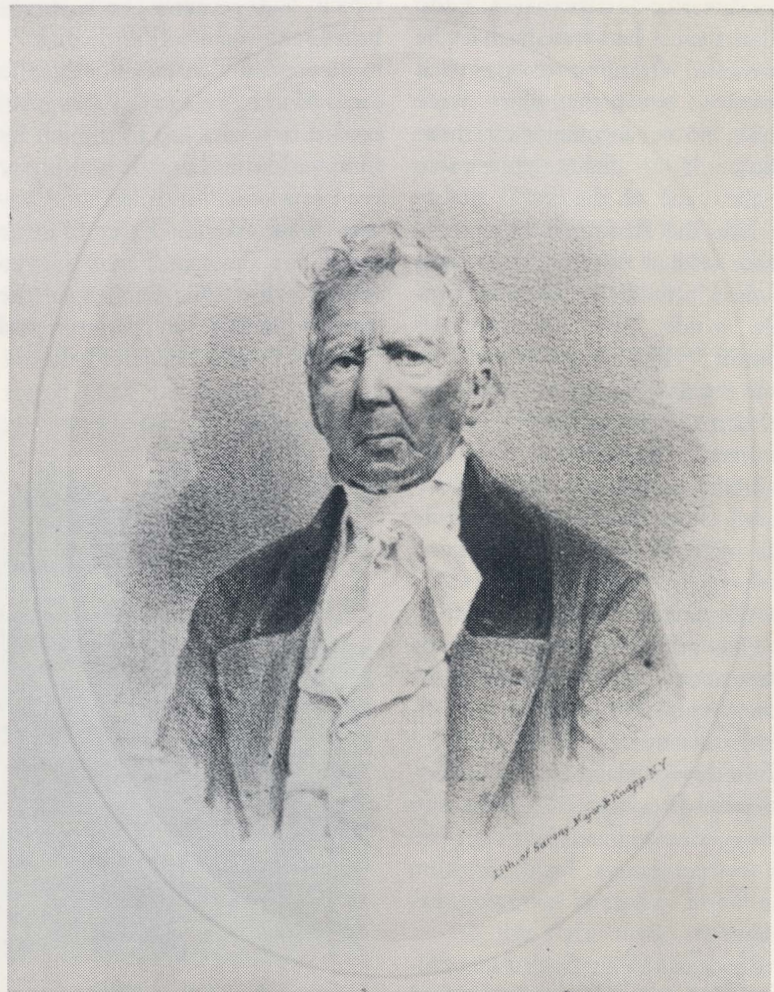
We have the following charming account of Washington's visit from Griffin's Journal. "In the year 1757 George Washington, then a Colonel, stopped for several hours at the inn, then kept by Lieutenant Booth, on his way from Virginia to New London and Boston. In the sitting room in which Colonel Washington passed his time while at this place were five or six young ladies, two of whom were the daughters of Lieutenant Booth, namely Hannah and Mary Booth, and the Misses Mary Havens and

Mary Youngs, the latter a sister of the late Judge Thomas Youngs.

"From Miss Havens I received my information of this interesting interview, and personal appearance at that time of this truly great man whom Providence it seems had designed should soon be regarded as 'first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.' She described him as rather tall and slender, straight, and very dignified, perfectly affable, fair complexion, a placid, even cast of countenance, and brilliant eye; mild in his deportment and having a pleasing, graceful manner. He

made himself quite at home and passed two or three hours in their company. When his servant announced to him that the boat which was to take him across the Sound was ready, he soon rose from his chair, and with much grace, in turn took each lady by the hand, saluted her with a kiss, and gravely asked their prayers, and bade each of them an affectionate adieu." You can well imagine how perfectly thrilled these young ladies were.

In 1763, Reverend George Whitefield, noted evangelist, visited Sterling and stayed at the inn.



Augustus Griffin

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The house as it appeared in 1918 and when it stood in Greenport on the North Road.

In a letter to his patroness, Lady Huntington, he stated that he "preached from an oxcart to a crowd so great that ships were drawn up to accommodate those who could not find standing room in the yard of the inn." Before he left, the Reverend Whitefield wrote with a diamond on a pane of glass in the house these memorable words, "But one thing is needful."³ This glass was removed from the window in 1828 and presented to Augustus Griffin. It was mounted in a frame and bears this printed inscription: "Miss Fanny Booth, the present owner, presents this pane of glass with her good wishes to her friend Augustus Griffin. Southold, October 29, 1828."

This relic disappeared and its whereabouts were unknown for many years. However, it was recently discovered in the archives of the Long Island Historical Society in Brooklyn. This Society was good enough to place the glass on a "permanent loan" basis in the house, where it is now on exhibit.

Reverend Whitefield was a colleague of John Wesley at Oxford and while there joined a society

which had recently been established in the name of Methodists.⁴

Lieutenant Constant Booth, who died March 27, 1774, was succeeded in ownership to the inn by Orange Webb. Later it was under the proprietorship of his son Captain Silas Webb. Later it was owned by Thomas Fanning, who fell on evil days. Members of the Youngs family, John Brinson and Jay, his brother, acquired the es-

tablishment from Fanning's creditors, and, they, about 1810, undertook to move it to the North Road. Forty yoke of oxen moved the house in two days. To save time, permission was given by Jeremiah King to move it across the corner of his land. There was one hitch, however. The work was begun on Friday and was nearly finished late Saturday afternoon. Two hours more and the work would be accomplished. Mr. King forbade the moving for the reason that the Sabbath started at sunset. All pleas on the part of the new owners were of no avail, so it was not until after Sunday afternoon at sunset that the building was slid the last few yards to its destination.⁵ (The site is on the north side of Kings Highway, about 300 feet east of the traffic circle leading into Greenport Village.)

The inn originally had a balcony that ran across the entire front of the building. In the moving, this balcony was so weakened that it was considered unsafe and it was therefore removed and the doorway opening from the second floor was replaced by a window.

Mr. Howard Jerome was the next owner and after him Albert Youngs whose wife, Fannie King,



Getting the house on a barge was a complicated process. Note the elaborate cribbing for raising the house to the deck.

was a niece of Mr. Jerome. The Youngs occupied the house for many years. After their demise, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Sinuta purchased the farm and in 1954 when they were about to demolish the house they disposed of it to Mr. and Mrs. George R. Latham, on condition that it be removed from the premises. The Lathams, interested in the preservation of old houses, undertook the monumental task of moving it to Orient, some five miles to the east.

It was found impractical to transport the building over the land, so Mr. Curtis Davis, of the Curtis Bros. Engineering Co. of Blue Point, who was engaged to do the moving of the great house, suggested the only alternative—water.

In the early part of the summer of 1955, the building was taken from its foundations and the half mile trek down the highway and across farm lands to a barge moored in Sterling Creek, was commenced. It took less than a week. However, the great weight of the seven fireplaces and immense chimneys caused the barge to sink deeply in the mud and it was several weeks before the advent of a perigee moon, which produced a tide sufficiently high to float the barge, so that it could be moved.



Ready to take the journey the house floats in Sterling Creek.

The summer kitchen was moved separately. This has its own huge fireplace and bake-oven.

The journey from Sterling Creek, Greenport, to the foot of Skipper's Lane, Orient, a distance of about four miles by water, was accomplished without mishap. The day was clear and there was little wind. It was comparatively easy to skid the house off the barge and several hundred feet to its new setting overlooking Orient Harbor. Originally the house had rested on a foundation of bricks and stone and had only a small

circular cellar for the storing of vegetables. However, in order to examine the sills and floor beams from time to time, a full cellar had been provided at the site. Brick walks and old boxwood have completed the setting.

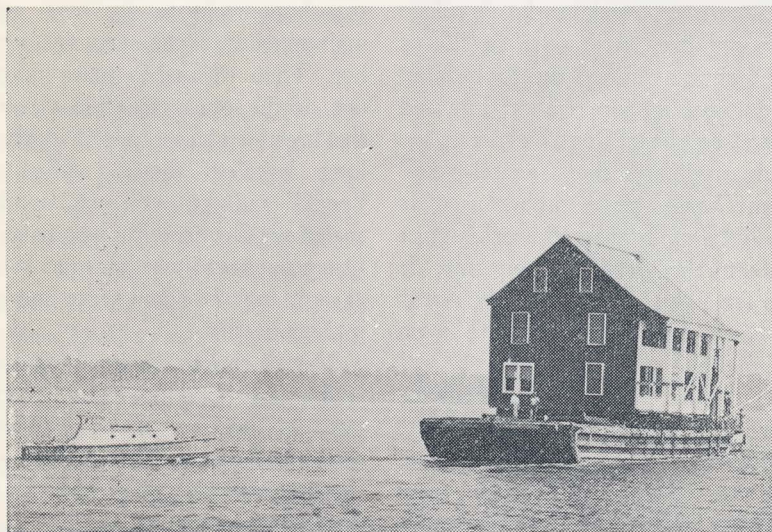
The old roof needed repairs, so the layers of tin and shingles were removed and replaced by hand-rived cypress shingles taken from an old barn in Old Westbury, L. I.

The old house is very pleasing to the eye with its center doorway of Colonial design and the verandah which runs across the front. The windows are large, a dozen lights in each sash, and all windows the same size throughout the house.

The handsome Dutch door opens into a wide center hall which runs through to the back where a step down takes one into the kitchen.

Two large rooms on each side of the hall complete the beautifully proportioned interior, and the same design is followed upstairs, except that there are no rooms over the old summer kitchen.

To the right upon entering is the parlor, suitably furnished with pieces of the Victorian and Empire periods. A portion of the wall has



Enroute to Orient. Tow boat at left.

been left exposed behind a mirror to show the hand-split laths and old plaster which was made with large quantities of hog's hair to bind and strengthen it. This is one of the things which helps to date the house. The proportions of the room are beautiful as are all of the rooms in the house. Each mantelpiece is different in design and all of the mouldings and cornices are hand made. Over the mantelpiece is a curious arrangement of many varieties of seeds and grains sealed in a gold-leaf frame.

Opening off the dining room and sharing the same chimney is the winter kitchen with a fireplace and bake-oven. A built-in cupboard with half-circle doors is an interesting feature here. A round table with a hand-woven cloth is set with the same pattern of Flowing blue china, as in the dining room. You will observe that the cups have no handles. In the early days, it was the custom to drink from a saucer and rest the cup on a cup-plate. When the cups were not being used they were placed on the "cup-board," which is how cupboards got their name.

In this room, there is also an old "baby-tender," forerunner of the playpen.

Across the hall is another room with a fireplace and bake-oven. Since the inn probably had many guests at a time, many cooking and baking facilities were necessary. The furnishings in this room should delight men, especially those those who like the sea, for in it are ship paintings, compasses and sextants and even a sailor's Valentine, probably made for a wife or sweetheart while on ship-board. Notice the long-stemmed clay pipes and the smoking tongs (to light up with hot embers). This was clearly a room where men could smoke and do a little yarn-spinning.

To return to the hall. Over the sofa hangs an important painting by J. A. Woodside. It bears



The Dining Room

the date July 1832 and depicts the seals of the thirteen original Colonies. There is also in the hall, a primitive painting of the Sterling Pottery Company (circa 1810) which was owned and operated by Thomas Hempstead. This pottery was located on Sterling Creek, near the original site of the inn.

Next we come to the summer kitchen which was used during the warm months of the year when fires in the main house would have made the bedrooms very uncomfortable.

We will touch upon the use of some of the tools and implements and try to explain the fireplace construction, as it tells the life of the times. Among the tools is an adz, looking like a short hoe and used to square logs. You can see adz-marks on the "mantel-tree," (the heavy hewn timber used as a lintel to support the brickwork about the fireplace opening). It is far enough in front of the rising column of heat to be safe from the fire.

On the inside of the fireplace are two ledges, one on each side. The "lug pole" rested on these. It was a pole of green wood from which pots were hung to cook. Sometimes if the "lug pole" was

not changed, it would dry out and burn through, spilling the dinner into the fire. Tragic scaldings resulted from this kind of accident before iron became easier to get and was used instead of wood for the "lug pole." Later swinging iron cranes were built.⁶ The "hot water pantry" to the left of the fireplace has its own flue and fireplace. The huge iron kettle was used to heat water for cooking and washing. Water was carried in pitchers to the guest rooms.

Beside the fireplace is the oven. On baking days a fire of maple or oak sticks called "oven wood" was built right in the oven and maintained until the oven was very hot. Then the ashes were raked out of the oven, the flue closed, the bread and pies put in with a long handled shovel, called a "peel," and the oven was tightly sealed until everything was baked. Often the bread was put in to bake at night and the ovens were opened in the morning.

Not all chores were so pleasantly fragrant. Soap-making and "trying out" lard had to be done out of doors because they were such smelly processes. These tasks were done twice a year.

Candles were made from tallow

or bayberries. Some were dipped and some made in candle molds. There are several candle molds to be seen here.

On the hearth you will see an old toaster, a Dutch oven, a spit for roasting big pieces of meat, and one for doing chickens. There is also a pig poke, a small bird roaster and other implements.

There is a lot to see in this old kitchen or "keeping room" but we still have all upstairs to visit, and the attic, so we leave it for the present and go upstairs.

On the upstairs landing there is a section of the railing which had once been removed but has now been replaced. There is an interesting story about this. When Mr. Youngs owned the house, his wife in her later years fell a victim to arthritis and had much difficulty in going up and down stairs. Her mechanically minded husband devised an ingenious "lift" by the use of sash weights and pulleys so that Mrs. Youngs could operate it from the first floor, placing on a platform to be lowered, chamber pots, water pitchers, etc. and also conversely to use the device to haul up firewood, water and cleaning utensils.



The Summer Kitchen

In the upstairs hall there is an early piano made by Astor & Company (circa 1780).

The first room to the right is furnished in a primitive manner with an old rope-spring bed with a straw mattress and home woven sheets. Among other rare things there is a splint-wood cradle of ingenious workmanship.

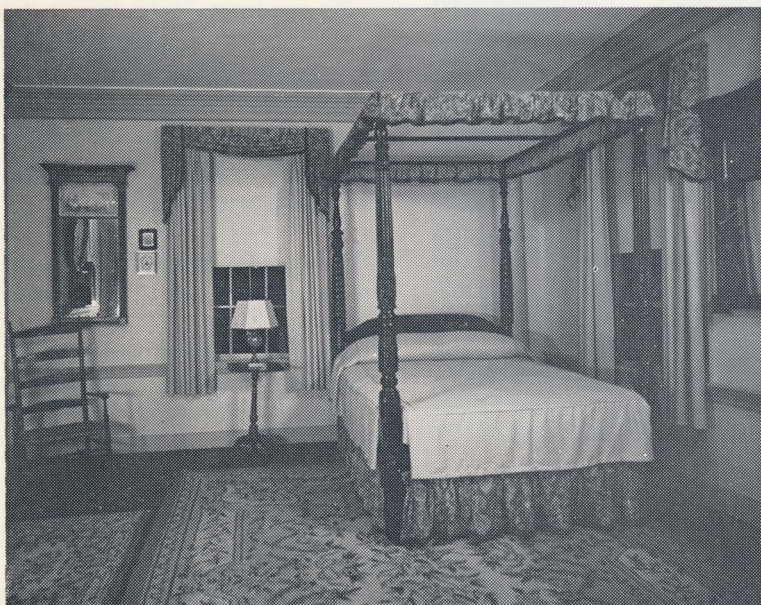
The northwest room is furnished with a four post bed and a trundle-bed. The hand-woven blue and

white coverlet is very old. The homespun bedspread was given by Mary Simon Young, whose husband, Archibald Young, inherited it from Hannah Youngs, who witnessed the making of the bedspread from the shearing of the sheep to the weaving of the wool. The dye used in the stripes in the spread was made from berries gathered on the farm on which this house stood. Clothing of the day hangs in the closet. Some of the hand-sewn gowns are fully lined.

The southwest room also boasts a handsome bed with tester and coverlet and handsewn clothing in the closets. The cornices and mantelpiece are individual and the feeling in the room is one of light and spaciousness. This could have been the main guest room.

As we approach the attic we can see a fine example of a "latch-string" door.

The attic beams are marked with Roman numerals. This was done with an instrument called a race-knife or timber-scribe according to the custom when buildings were framed on the ground. Friends and neighbors would gather to help on the day of the "raising." No nails were used. Instead, locust



The Southwest Bedroom

pegs called "trunnels," a corruption of "tree-nails," driven through the oak timbers held the joints together.

There was a fire ordinance in effect in the early days which made it mandatory to keep buckets of water at the foot of the ladder leading to the hatch. In this house there was a barrel of water and buckets kept filled so that a roof fire (caused by chimney sparks) could be controlled until help arrived.

There are a lot of interesting objects in the attic. There are trenchers, milk maid yokes, winnowing baskets, hatchels, oxen shoes, and even an old "cooler." There was no embalming in the country so when a person died in the summer months, their remains were placed on this cot-like bed of canvas and packed in ice until the day of the funeral—hence the name "cooler". Perhaps you can find the marsh shoes which were worn by horses when they were taken out into the



The Webb House at Orient as it is today

marshlands to gather salt hay.

The old attic is still redolent with the fragrance of past crops of apples, nuts and herbs.

As we descend the stairs we

can see the over-all plan of the house and gain an appreciation of the whole design, and can better compare the proportions of the house, the lightness, airiness, and now especially, we can better see the beauty of the double Christian doors throughout the house. The stiles of the doors resemble crosses which according to legend kept witches away.

As we leave Webb House it is with a feeling of appreciation for the lasting workmanship here, and a feeling of humility and gratitude for all that we have in this country, which our ancestors wrested from the wilderness.



The Kitchen

¹Oysterponds Historical Society, Inc.

²A bronze plaque on a boulder marks the spot.

³Luke: 10th Chapter, 42nd verse.

⁴From Romney Catalogue Raisoone, Humphrey Ward and W. Roberts.

⁵Wayland Jefferson, Historian.

⁶"Colonial Living" by Edwin Tunis.

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