

## History of the Pierce House Research Project

The research found on this web site represents four years of work and brings together a series of reports and primary materials that will serve as a resource for many years to come. The project began in April 2001, when Historic New England, then SPNEA, undertook a full-scale study of the Pierce House and its occupants as the foundation for a new interpretation and use of the property. The resulting Historic Structure Report, completed in October 2001, included an architectural analysis of the house and its condition by Anne Grady, a structural analysis, and a hazard assessment report as well as a family history. Researched by Susan Walton, Susan Porter, and Laura Driemeyer and written largely by Susan Walton, the family history section was based on public records and the documentary evidence then available.

The findings in that report led to a decision by the Proactive Preservation and Interpretation Planning Committee to remove the asbestos shingles that had been added to the exterior in the late 1930s (based on the hazard assessment and the plan to use the building primarily for school programs). The shingle removal disclosed serious damage to the structure. The work required to stabilize and repair the building, performed by Steve O'Shaughnessey with the aid of Robert Adam and students in his Advanced Preservation Carpentry Class at the North Bennet Street School, revealed important further information about the Pierce House's design, construction, and physical changes over time. In addition the findings of a dendrochronology project managed by Anne Grady revealed that the original building and the west addition were constructed later than previously thought. With this new knowledge, we began to rethink the chronology of the family history and the house, and Laura Driemeyer took on the task of tracing back the trail of the Pierce family's complex land transactions. In the end, she discovered that the land Robert Pierce purchased in the 1650s was an entirely different parcel from that occupied by the Pierce House. The Pierce House, built in 1683, and the farmland around it were purchased by Robert Pierce's son Thomas in 1696.

The research into the family history, now informed by this startling news, was bolstered by Anne Pierce Shaughnessey's support of the project. The last owner of the Pierce House, Anne Shaughnessey was deeply attached to her family home, and she was pleased about Historic New England's renewed interest in her, the family history, and the building. She had carefully safeguarded the family papers and she began to share some of them with us. Eventually Historic New England –SPNEA was able to purchase the most significant items. The Shaughnessey family has also donated several batches of documents and other ephemera. The acquisition of the Pierce Family Papers, particularly the extraordinary collection that documents Colonel Samuel Pierce's life (1739-1815) in the era of the American Revolution, but also other memorabilia like Antoinette Pierce's late nineteenth-century scrapbooks, allowed for further research and understanding of the family's history. Historic New England's School Programs staff, Amy Peters, Kate South, and Kathleen Simone have developed several excellent school programs based on particular family members and documents. These include "A Revolution in Dorchester," based on Colonel Samuel Pierce's experience during the American Revolution, "Colonial Trades: Making Community Work," which draws on Colonel Pierce's account book to

demonstrate the interconnectedness of a pre-industrial community that used barter as its common means of exchange, and an afterschool program, “Hands-on-History,” that uses a reproduction of Antoinette Pierce’s scrapbook. In 2004, Historic New England published *The View from Dorchester: Colonel Samuel Pierce, Farmer and Patriot, 1739-1815*, written by Susan Walton, as a resource for educators and others.

As the Pierce House school programs expanded and we learned more about the Pierce House neighborhood, a predominantly Irish-American community, Historic New England decided to investigate the history of the Shaughnessey family to link the immigrant story with that of the Pierces. Susan Walton took on this additional project and discovered that the Shaughnessey family history, like that of the Pierce family, reflects broad themes of American history.

This Historic Property Report includes all of this new historical research in the family history section rewritten by Susan Walton as well as an updated architectural analysis section revised by Laura Driemeyer, with input from Steve O’Shaughnessy. Laura Driemeyer also reworked the various appendices regarding land and probates and added additional explanatory material. I created the original family genealogy, but the current version has been much improved by Kathleen Simone. She and Kate South also transcribed Colonel Samuel Pierce’s journal. Anne Grady wrote the first draft of the virtual tour and Laura Driemeyer and I revised it.

The HPR would not have been possible without the support of Lorna Condon, Peter Gittleman, Michael Lynch, and Anne and Jean Shaughnessey. The production of the report has also been a team effort. Jennifer Tobin scanned Anne Grady’s and other photographs that did not exist in electronic form. Nancy Curtis designed the first edition of *The View from Dorchester* and Peter Gittleman has been responsible for recent corrections and updates. Leah Walczak designed the architectural analysis and family history sections and incorporated all the images. Susan Walton joined me in editing, proofreading, re-editing, and proofreading yet again all sections. I thank them all as well as others who helped with copying and collating. Even so, there are undoubtedly errors in this report. I hope that future researchers will continue to add to our knowledge of the Pierce House and the Pierce family.

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