

February 14, 1998

## Windham's Oldest House?

179 Windham Center Road.



Several houses in the ancient town of Windham claim to be the oldest—a debate not to be entered into here.

Nevertheless, several were built in the 17th century, including the house which stands at 179 Windham Center Road. Thomas Bingham purchased the surrounding land from John

Mason for £14 in March 1693. The records of the town of Windham reveal that Thomas Bingham, and his large family, arrived in the new township of Windham from nearby Norwich during the winter of 1692/93. He built a house on his new land during the summer of 1693. Sections of this original building are believed to have survived in the present-day structure, including hand-hewn beams, the basement and a fireplace.

What is believed to be the original building, the single story section, was built as a side-gabled post medieval English house with a central brick chimney. Evidence of this can still be seen. Sometime during the 18th century a two story colonial side-gabled house was added. Its second story was badly damaged by fire in 1745, and the house was restructured as a front gabled building. Greek Revival style pilasters and porch were probably added to the new front gable sometime during the middle of the 19th century. Aluminum siding now covers this part of the house, and close inspection reveal numerous changes over the years, particularly in the window configuration. There is a mixture of Victorian 4 over 4 sash, and much earlier 12 over 12 sash, which may be the original windows. The ell is also of post and beam construction, and some of the original wide wooden clapboard is still visible. Most of the windows are 12 over 12 sash, except for those on the south side of the ell, which are 6 over 6. The site was a working farm for most of its life, and as late as the early 1970s there were 12 other buildings on the site, plus a blacksmith's shop. One large barn remains. The Abbe and Larrabee families owned the property during the nineteenth century. Elisha Abbe sold the property to Adam Larrabee in March 1812. The Abbess and Larrabees were also two of Windham's earliest families. The house stayed in the Larrabee family throughout the 19th century. It was sold to Fred and Amy Barber in October 1919. Three years later the Barbers took out a mortgage from the Federal Land Bank of Springfield, Mass under the provisions of the 1916 Federal Farm Loan Act. Interestingly, Windham's oldest house changed hands on only two more occasions. In 1929 the Barbers sold it to the Plaksas family, and in 1983 the Plaksas sold the Bingham house to the Paulovskes.