

Porter-Phelps-Huntington Foundation, Inc.
130 River Drive Hadley MA 01035

Porter-Phelps-Huntington Historic House Museum

Listed on National Register 1973

National Register Statement Rewritten 1999 for the Massachusetts Historical Commission

National Register Criteria Statement

The large gambrel-roofed structure that housed the Porter, Phelps and Huntington families over ten generations is an unusually well-preserved example of the home of a family of the rural gentry, and the workspaces of their employees. As such, it is a record not simply of the worlds of three influential families in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century New England, the Porters, the Phelps and the Huntingtons, but of the world of the working men and women whose horizons may have been more narrow, but whose labors made the success of the prosperous large farm possible. Moreover, the structure retains remarkable integrity of location, design, setting, materials and workmanship, having experienced little physical change since 1799-1800. Especially valuable, its eighteenth-century alterations--including three fairly major remodeling campaigns--are well documented, both in the structure itself, and in a rich collection of related manuscript materials, thus offering a rare opportunity for study of New Englanders' efforts to shape their domestic environment.

Historical Narrative:

The history of the Porter family is inextricably woven through the history of Hadley, and that of Hampshire County. By the mid-eighteenth century, when Moses Porter erected this house, his family's name was among the oldest and most respected in Hadley, and throughout the Connecticut Valley. Family interests transplanted to the New England colonies in 1634 by John Porter were nurtured by his son Samuel, and blossomed under the careful cultivation of Samuel Porter, Jr. The family initially settled in Hartford, but moved upriver with other migrants in the 1660s. The Porter family's mansion house on the Hadley common (26 West Street) in 1713 testified to their wealth and influence. Like his father before him, prosperous merchant and farmer Samuel Porter, Jr. served as a Hadley selectman and county magistrate; he was later elected to the Governor's Council. At the time of his death, Samuel Porter had almost fifty times the wealth of the average Connecticut Valley yeoman. Moreover, if the distance between Porter and his neighbors was already evident in 1722, it had gained visibility for his son (Eleazer Porter) in the 1740s and was glaring when his grandson (Eleazer Porter, Jr.) inherited the farm in the 1760s.

In the third quarter of the eighteenth century, the Porter family (especially Eleazer, along with his brother, Samuel Porter III) dominated the economic and political life of Hadley and the surrounding area. Samuel served eight terms as Hadley selectman, while Eleazer completed fifteen terms as selectman, eighteen as town assessor, twelve as moderator of town meetings, and sixteen terms as Hadley's representative to the Massachusetts General Court. Eleazer Porter was

appointed a justice of the peace, and a justice of the Quorum and Inferior Courts; he also served in the local militia as second-in-command to one of the wealthiest and most influential men in the county, John Stoddard.

Unsurprisingly, the next generation of the Porter family in New England continued to order Hadley's political and economic life. Eleazer's sons, Eleazer Jr. and Elisha inherited the lion's share of the Porters' political power: Eleazer was appointed justice of the peace, justice of the Inferior Court, and probate judge, while Elisha served as an officer in the military, and as county sheriff. Samuel Porter III's son Samuel graduated from Harvard in 1730, and settled in Sherborn, where he was ordained minister in 1734. Meanwhile, his brother Moses pursued a career in agriculture, establishing this impressive farm north of the Hadley village center.

Moses Porter (16??-1755) broke ground for this house, the first outside Hadley's stockade, in the winter of 1752, and raised the roof of his new home and barn May 27, 1752. He and his family moved into the new house on December 5, 1752. The two story, pitched roof structure was unique in Hadley and the surrounding area in that it employed rusticated siding on three facades to suggest the appearance of a large stone mansion. The three presentational facades of the house--the north, south, and east sides--were covered with wooden boards that had been scored and beveled to resemble stone coursing, an effect enhanced with reddish brown paint mixed with sand (mimicking Longmeadow sandstone) on the faux "stones," and white trim in the grooves between, to imitate mortar. While Moses Porter's house was not the only eighteenth-century building so covered in New England, it was among the earliest; in fact, no other houses with rusticated siding are known to have been built in the Connecticut Valley in the eighteenth century.¹ The house was further distinguished in the choice of a central hall, a feature that, while becoming known throughout New England, was innovative in the 1750s Connecticut Valley.

Moses Porter had little time to enjoy his new home, however; he was killed at Crown Point near Lake Champlain in 1755, a casualty of Britain's continuing effort to eject France from North America. His widow, Elizabeth Pitkin Porter (1719-1798, of the politically important Pitkin family of Connecticut), with the help of a series of hired managers to run the large farm, continued on at the house, along with her young daughter, Elizabeth. When, in 1770, Elizabeth Porter (1747-1816) married Charles Phelps, Jr. (1743-1814), her home had remained unchanged from that her father constructed almost twenty years earlier. Four rooms downstairs were separated, two on each side, by a central hall. The second story largely repeated that arrangement. Two chimney stacks on either end of the house were triangular in shape, thus providing relatively small corner hearths to each room.

The young couple had larger ambitions for themselves and their home, however, and immediately embarked on a series of renovations. The first major change to the structure, undertaken less than a year after Charles' arrival, was the construction of an ell, raised in April of 1771. The new structure extended behind the southwest chamber (then functioning as the main hearth for meal preparation) and housed a new kitchen and "keeping" room. The latter kitchen contained a much larger cooking hearth than the previous corner hearth, and a large pantry. A winding stair provided access to the ell's attic. A built-in or "press" bed provided ad hoc sleeping

¹ Historic Structures Report, p. ix.

space. Access between the kitchen and the farmyard and woodpile was available through a south-facing doorway; visitors using this entrance passed into a small vestibule from which one could continue on to either the keeping room on the left (west), or the kitchen to the right (east).

The new ell perhaps embodied the optimism of newlyweds who hoped soon to outgrow that small kitchen; indeed, Elizabeth occupied the new keeping room, adjacent to the kitchen, following the births of her children. But the ell may have reflected other hopes as well. The larger kitchen, for example, helped accommodate the feeding of Charles Phelps' growing number of farm hands, required to work the increasing amount of acreage under cultivation. It seems also possible that the new garret may have provided additional space to lodge servants or laborers, perhaps even Peg (ca. 1742-1792), Phyllis (1765-1775) and Roseanna (1761-1781), three African-American women possessed by the family (though the household possessed slave men, too -- Zebedee Prutt and Cesar Phelps -- it seems more likely that they slept outside the main house). Meanwhile, the construction of the new and larger kitchen enabled the original kitchen to become a more intermediary space, a "sitting room" between the southeast parlor, where social events were held and guests entertained, and the kitchen, in which the hired help congregated. All in all, servants to the household could be kept just slightly more distant, while formal spaces at the front of the house were just slightly more private, buffered by the increased distance and intermediate, intermediary, spaces.

These shifts in room use were formalized in the second, more extensive remodeling campaign, which stretched--perhaps due to the inconvenient interruptions of revolution--from 1775 to 1786. Over the course of this decade, the functions of the house's older rooms were altered and upgraded via refinishing. More elaborate wood trim and finishes (Georgian mouldings, raised-panel wainscoting and baseboards) were added to the central hall, the northeast first-floor bedroom, and three bedchambers on the second floor, while Northampton painters updated the finishes of several interior spaces. The addition of new woodwork, the concealing of the house's heavy frame behind newly plastered walls, the application of paint and trim applied to previously undecorated wooden surfaces, the installation of new window glass--all of these things together gave the house the lighter, brighter atmosphere appropriate to the home of fashionable federalists.

The third round of renovations began after February of 1794, when Charles Phelps, Jr. purchased the property from his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Pitkin Porter. Soon after, more construction was underway, largely in anticipation of the marriage of Charles and Elizabeth's son, Charles Porter Phelps and the newlywed couple's impending return to Hadley. The Phelps household was growing, not only in terms of the return of son Charles Porter, his wife and their hoped-for children, but also in the numbers of hired help that the large farm--now occupying some 600 prosperous acres--required and serviced. Their solution was to construct two additional kitchens, one north of the 1771 ell that would be devoted to the needs of the growing family, and an enormous kitchen in a new ell south of the 1771 ell, to serve the growing needs of the farm. Charles Phelps' influence in the community had also expanded during the past quarter century. He served on Hadley's Committee of Correspondence, and was elected to twenty terms as selectman, as well as nine terms in the House of Representatives. Authority with regard to church matters also accrued to Charles and Elizabeth, who occupied and enjoyed the most prominent seats in the meetinghouse, front and center on the broad aisle. Charles also became a

deacon of the church, and sat on several church committees, directing such important projects as the 1808 construction of a new meetinghouse. In addition to family concerns, Charles and Elizabeth's decisions regarding changes to the house reflected their increasing importance in the community, as well as their awareness of genteel architecture throughout the region, and their desire to bring their house into closer accord with prevailing fashion.

The north kitchen looked much like the other additions of the 1790s: planed board wainscoting, thin chair rails, and Federal-style mantle and surrounds, indicating that some effort was made to make the space both fashionable and functional. The former oblong pantry was dismantled in order to create the new kitchen's large hearth and bake oven. What appears to have been another pantry or kitchen-related space was constructed east of the kitchen, adjacent to the original 1752 structure. This space was probably freely accessible by hired help, since its doors, unlike those in the other bedchambers, were never fixed with locks. Moreover, the doors--recycled from the original double doors at the house's 1752 entrance--held panes of glass that would have afforded little privacy to this space's occupants, and perhaps intentionally permitted their observation.

The second new kitchen, on the south of the 1771 ell, was erected circa 1797. This new structure created additional space devoted to Elizabeth's thriving "making cheese-business" (now given a room devoted solely to the production and storage of cheese) and to feed the growing number of field hands necessary to farm their roughly 600 acres. The size of this kitchen and its relationship to the adjacent rear (west-facing) stoop reflected the growing agricultural labor force on the Phelps farm. The fireplace opening in this kitchen is larger than any other in the house--nearly eight feet across and more than four feet high, with a firebox and bake oven housed beneath the lintel. Unlike the north kitchen, constructed at approximately the same time, the south kitchen had almost no ornamental woodwork, and was the only one in the house without any sort of surround. Only the multi-paned door with sidelights that connects this space with the dooryard nods to the prevailing neoclassical style.

While the creation of the north and south ell additions pushed the cooking spaces further from the parlor, they also facilitated the creation of a truly stylish formal room at the front of the house. The house's original southeast and southwest chambers were combined into a single "Long Room" that became the "most thoroughgoing Federal-style space" at Forty Acres.² Brass hardware on the door from the entry hall to the parlor contrasted with the more crudely-wrought iron hardware seen throughout the rest of the hall, alerting visitors to the importance of this space. Concealing the framing of the house (by building out the plaster walls beyond the face of the beams) further enhanced the sophistication of the room. This renovation also created the room's most impressive feature, the broad, graceful arch that sections off the east end of the room, framing the front windows and helping to create an illusion of symmetry - and completed just in time to shelter daughter Betsy's marriage to Reverend Dan Huntington on New Year's Day, 1801.

In much the same way as the first addition to the house (the 1771 kitchen) had transformed the former working rooms into more intermediate spaces, so too did this round of renovations. With additional kitchens now flanking each side of the 1771 kitchen, that space too was transformed

² Historic Structures Report, p. 29

into something of an informal space or sitting room for the family by reducing the size of the hearth and adding a federal-style mantle and surround. At some point, the press bed that had once occupied the east wall of this room was removed, further limiting the uses of a formerly multi-functional space. The construction of the Long Room also resulted in the creation of a back hall that further separated this sitting room and the formal parlor of the Long Room. The woodwork that ornaments the west wall of the back hallway was recycled from the west wall of the original parlor (where it had been added in the second remodeling campaign that updated older spaces), dismantled at that same time to create a large room, and reused in the back hall. Woodwork once appropriate for the house's formal spaces was downgraded to those spaces only temporarily occupied, and then most often by servants and other workers.

Finally, this latter building effort also involved the construction of several new structures around the farmyard, including a carriage barn (1795; but reconstructed as a dwelling in 1930), and a woodhouse (1797). Two other barn or shed sections were erected on the south end of the new woodshed as well. Other outbuildings included a number of barns, and a ciderhouse, none of which are presently extant. This constellation of spaces--woodhouse and carriage house, service kitchen, milkroom/washroom/buttery--would become a standard feature of "progressive" New England farmhouses by the mid nineteenth century.

The result of these series of renovations were twofold: while bringing the house into closer correspondence with prevailing fashion and progressive farming, the alterations also increased the separation of the family and the household workers. Between Elizabeth Porter Phelps's marriage in 1770 and her death in 1816, some thirty women lived in the house as domestic servants, and an equal number journeyed and lodged there to perform hired needlework. Over the course of time, the alterations to the house segregated family and formal spaces from the working rooms of the farm. In keeping with what historian Richard Bushman and others have observed to be a trend through the century, "every practical function" had finally been removed from the parlor, and now confined strictly to rear service areas (Bushman, *Refinement*, p. 120). From the time that the house was built in 1752 until Charles and Elizabeth's alteration, the house had had a side door that permitted direct entry into the kitchen area, without use of the front door, but while that side entry was once just around the corner from the main entrance, now it had moved significantly more distant. In 1752, seventy-four feet separated the formal and service entrances of the house; after 1771, that distance increased to ninety-six feet, and by 1800, fully one hundred thirty-two feet divided the two.

The external appearance of the house changed greatly when, again, around 1800, the Phelps replaced the pitched roof with an imposing gambrel roof intended to shelter a new third story of rooms. The work was begun in anticipation of their son's return home with his bride. However, when Charles Porter Phelps (1772-1857) and his wife Sarah Parsons Phelps (d. 1817) decided instead to construct a separate house across the street (today, River Road), the work of finishing these spaces was abandoned, and never completed. At the same time, the faux stonework so carefully created by Moses Porter in 1752 more than forty years earlier was now covered by more fashionable clapboarding. The processional path was elaborated by the addition of a new door surround and fashionable Federal portico. The well-traveled president of Yale University, Timothy Dwight, remarked that the Phelps estate at Forty Acres in these years was "the most

desirable possession of the same kind and extent, within my knowledge."³

Though Charles and Sarah elected not to move into the house, Charles' sister Elizabeth Whiting Phelps (1779-1847) eventually returned to the site with her husband, Dan Huntington, (1774-1864) and their nine children. Installed in Litchfield, Connecticut's Congregational Church in 1798, Dan moved his bride there following their 1801 wedding. In 1809 he was a candidate for the pastorate in Hadley, but the effort failed through "jealousy of the Phelps family influence." Instead, Dan and Elizabeth moved their family -- that would eventually include eleven children -- to Middletown, where he accepted a position at First Congregational Church, and the couple opened a boarding school for extra money. But Huntington's ministerial salary was not enough to support his large household. Meanwhile, Charles and Elizabeth Porter Phelps were growing older, and felt increasingly incapable of running Forty Acres themselves. In 1816, the Huntingtons returned to Hadley to manage the farm. During the 1820s and 30s, Dan and Betsy Huntington converted to Unitarianism, and were censured by the Hadley Congregational Church. Betsy attended the Unitarian church in Northampton, but this could not replace the social life she lost by being barred from Hadley church activities. Dan and Betsy gradually sold off sections of the agricultural lands associated with the house. During their tenure, the farm ceased to be one of the community's largest farms, and largest employers of local labor, and became instead a rural retreat for the Huntington's children whose careers included among others the ministry.

Following Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington's death in 1847, Forty Acres passed to her several children. By 1855, the youngest son of Dan and Elizabeth Phelps Huntington, Frederick Dan Huntington (1819-1904), had bought his siblings' shares, gaining full title to the house, which then came to be used primarily as a summer residence. Huntington had studied at Harvard Divinity School and then became an assistant to Reverend George Putnam of Roxbury, a leading Unitarian minister. After serving as minister of the South Congregational Church, he became a professor at Harvard, and a popular lyceum speaker as well. In 1861, he entered the Episcopal Church. After resigning from Harvard, he was elected rector of Emmanuel Church, Boston. Eight years later, in 1869, he was elected Bishop of Central New York. Even after moving to Syracuse, Huntington continued to spend long vacations in the Hadley house until his death in 1904.

The house remained in the Huntington family until it passed to the Porter-Phelps-Huntington Foundation, organized by James Lincoln Huntington in 1955, to be preserved as an historic house museum. Huntington's efforts and approach to saving his family homestead provide an excellent example of early twentieth-century historic preservation.

Since that time, the museum has converted some of the house's former production spaces to office use. At present, guided tours are offered from May to October. More recently (since 1978), the museum has also assumed a role in the community as a venue for cultural events, hosting a summer concert series of international folk music, offering tea and classical music on the verandah, showcasing regional theatrical productions in the corn barn, and offering a variety of other historical and cultural events.

³ Dwight, "Journey to Berwick," p. 259-260

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