

My Truant Pen

Our house



[\(http://mytruantpen.com/?attachment_id=3542\)](http://mytruantpen.com/?attachment_id=3542)

Our home in the snows of last year

When we were in the house hunt, one of the houses we looked at was a house in Woburn that had been built in 1720 or so. It had a weird layout and a rather disastrous crack in the chimney that ran up the center of the house, and we didn't end up offering on it... but I thought it was awfully cool. Paul Revere would have ridden past that house when it was new built. So when we found this house (with a lovely lack of disastrous masonry), it didn't seem all *that* old. The decor was dominantly an 80s horror (helloooo shag carpet and paneling!). The date on the paperwork said it was ~1900. I had hoped we might find some cool old treasures when we moved in, but the prior occupants did an exceptionally good job of clearing out the attic and basement. There were no boxes of old letters we might find, and no ghosts have haunted our sleep. (Well, except the ghost of **fraudulently uninstalled insulation** (<http://mytruantpen.com/2015/08/31/these-days-are-just-packed/>).)

But as we have very gradually updated rooms, we've found these hints of how old our house really is. Most of the walls, under the ugly paneling, are plaster and lathe covered by some truly hideous wallpaper. We had a very brief oral history from the prior owner, which mostly told us the house had been in the same hands for nearly fifty years and they'd raised seven children here. Also, her late husband had done all the "improvements" himself, with his two left hands comprised entirely of thumbs. (Ok, maybe that was my interpretation...)

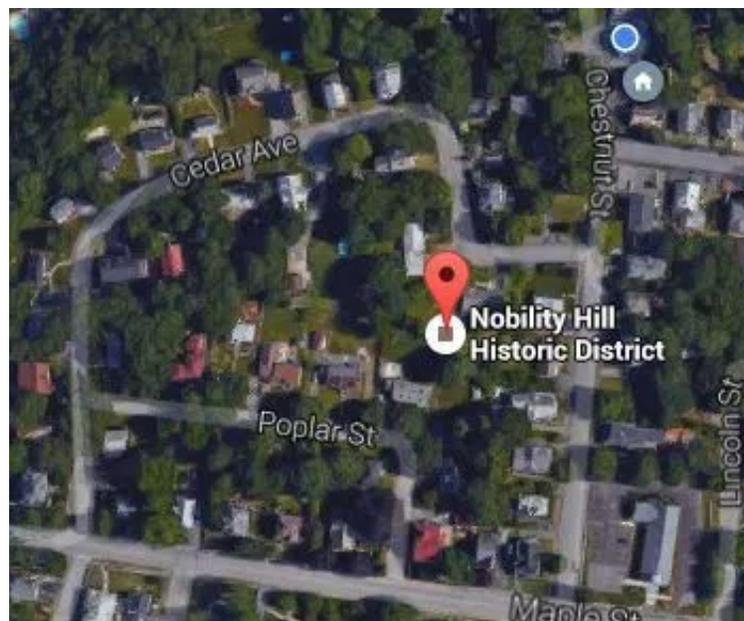


http://mytruantpen.com/?attachment_id=3543

These eagles are now hidden behind the drywall in Thane's room

And then she was gone to Florida, and the history of the house felt like a blank slate.

But as I got a little more involved with Stoneham – as part of the **bikeway kerfuffle** (<http://mytruantpen.com/2015/01/22/thoughts-on-community/>) and got to know the **Historical Commission** (<http://www.stoneham-ma.gov/historical-commission>) folks. One of them came by one morning with a full writeup on my house. We spent the morning in fascinating discussion of the building.



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The Nobility Hill Historic District

It was built in 1898, and the funds to build it were provided by the guy (Lorenzo Hawkins) who built the beautiful white mansion right up the hill from me. That lovely house is an anchor of the Nobility Hill Historic district (which I learned about at the same time). The house, at nearly 120 years old, has been owned by ten owners, and four of those ten were in the 40s. The builder was a man named Parker G. Webber, who also lived in the house for two years after he built it. It changed hands for \$100 in 1944. There was also this really cool list of the occupations and names of the people who lived in the house on various dates. In 1943 the house was occupied by Eleanor Keenan (34, housewife), James Keenan (36, bus driver) and father-in-law Joseph Keenan (69, shoe worker). Likely there were a passel of kids then too.



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More questionable wallpaper choices

Glancing up and down the list for 1948, I noticed a 96 year old resident in my dear neighbor's house down the street... a 96 year old named Parker G. Webber. He lived with what must have been a second wife, Alice F. Webber (77, housewife). So fifty years after he built my home, he was living in close sight of it. He must have spent the greater part of his life on this block – perhaps he built most of the houses in it, and not just mine. It's this wonderful connection to imagine the care that must have crafted my home from a man who was proud enough to live in it and willing to look at his work every single day thereafter.

By the way, the list of occupations is fascinating. There are tree surgeons, a “dier”, a “grinder”, a “burner”, someone mysteriously in the “egg bus.” (A house on **Franklin Street has a prestidigitator** (http://www.stoneham-ma.gov/sites/stonehamma/files/u59/house_marker_list.pdf). Now that would be some exciting history!)

After the visit (well, some time after) I got around to signing up for a **Historical Marker** (<http://www.stoneham-ma.gov/historical-commission/slideshows/historic-house-marker-slideshow>) for the house (**\$55 is the bargain of the century** (<http://www.stoneham-ma.gov/sites/stonehamma/files/file/file/housemarkerapp.pdf>), and they'll help you fill it out). In New England, this isn't a particularly old building, but 120 years old is not pathetic, either. The commission says anything over 50 years qualifies, and this most certainly beat that. I settled on the name “Parker G. Webber” to grace the sign, in honor of the man who had built the house with such craftsmanship a century and a score ago. The signs are all hand made (and come with the research!), so it took a little while before I got it. But I just found it on my porch this week, and I can't wait to get it placed in a prominent location on my house!



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Thanks for building my home, Parker

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Posted on ~~January 25, 2016~~ **January 24, 2016** by [bflynn](#) Posted in [Stoneham](#) Tagged [carpenter](#), [historic commission](#), [history](#), [home](#), [house](#), [research](#), [stoneham](#), [stoneham history](#)

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2 thoughts on “Our house”

1. LAUREEN FLYNN SAYS:

January 25, 2016 at 11:41 am [Edit](#)

I looooooove it. What a marvelous addition to the house, a grace note if you will. Hugs

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2. MELISATHORNE SAYS:

January 25, 2016 at 11:58 am [Edit](#)

Great story! Our current house was built in the 60's but our first home in the 'ham was built in the early 1900's. I always will love that house. When we cleaned it out we found a beautiful mirrored and beveled glass watch repair sign in our basement. My husband tracked down the original house owner's family and his grand daughter was so happy when she came for it. She walked around the house telling us stories of her childhood in our house. We also found letters, post cards, baby shoes in the

walls. (We had re-insulation adventure too). Can you imagine being in a situation where you have to use anything that was around to insulate your home. Oh and we also found 100's of razor blades in the bathroom walls. We were told that was how they disposed of the blades in the past. I love when a home has a story.

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