



The Holloway House, front view, Jill Connaughton ©2001

The Holloway House: 448 State Street, Adrian, Michigan

Written by Jill Connaughton

The Holloway House, located in Adrian's historic district at 448 State Street, on the block between Union Street and Michigan Avenue, has been speculated by some to be the oldest home still standing in Adrian. Because of a fire at the Lenawee County Courthouse in 1852 that burned so many of Adrian's historical documents, the exact date that the Holloway House was built is unknown. When deciding whether or not the Holloway House could possibly be the oldest, one must look at many things: the style and form of the house on its own and in relation to the houses around it, the construction elements of the house, and the genealogy of the families that owned the home and property. Through an examination of these factors, it seems probable that the Holloway house was built fairly soon after the neighborhood that surrounds it was platted in 1845. While the Holloway house is certainly one of the most historic structures to be found in town, it probably should not be dubbed "the oldest surviving house in Adrian."

Style and Form

The trend toward building structures in the Greek Revival style was long-lived in America, remaining popular from 1825 until around 1860. The style ranged from governmental and high-style buildings, such as the United States Capital (1855-1865), to vernacular and popular houses as seen in the Holloway House. With many people migrating from the east coast after the opening of the Erie Canal, high style architecture

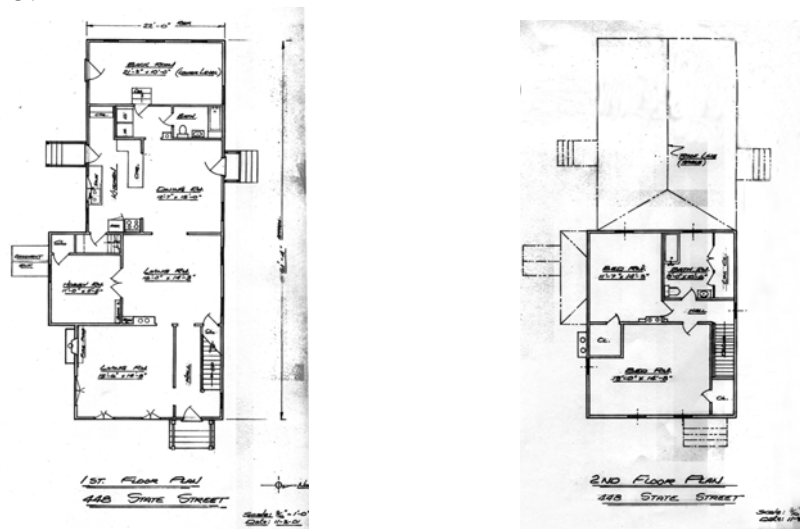
began appearing in Michigan in the 1830s. Larger cities such as Detroit and Ann Arbor attracted trained architects, such as Robert T. Elliot, who worked in Rochester, New York, before moving to Detroit in 1837, where he worked until his death in 1841. Moreover, examples of work by the New York architects Town and Davis can be found in the first buildings of the University of Michigan, dating from 1838 (Hamlin 290). While the people of rural Adrian could have easily been aware of the high-style Greek Revival buildings springing up in nearby Ann Arbor and Detroit, the small settlement could only hope to be inspired by these architects at this point in its history.

The Greek mania that swept the nation in the 1820s filtered down to common farmers as well as pioneers of the new frontier in many parts of the country. The gable front home was extremely widespread in both urban and rural New York, and consequently, through migration, into Michigan as well (Identifying 71). The Holloway House is a case in point. It was built as a one-and-one-half story gable front home in the Greek Revival style.

The Holloway House's status as a gable front house puts it in the category of "popular" architecture, which is a classification that falls between high-style and vernacular architecture. High-style structures, as one sees in the U.S. Capitol, were designed and built by trained architects and builders. They adhered to the styles and innovations of the day. Vernacular or "folk" abodes on the other hand would have been "built by an individual who lacked specific training, but who was guided by a series of conventions built up in his locality, paying little attention to what may be fashionable on an international scale" (Evolution 337). Popular houses, on the other hand, vary from vernacular by their utilization of conventional academic design elements. While these "popular" houses were built without the benefit of a trained architect, their construction typically conformed to popular trends that were guided in by widely distributed pattern books. In 1818, John Haviland wrote *The Builders Assistant*, which was the first American publication to examine the ancient Greek orders. After his, books that followed with Greek Revival patterns include Asher Benjamin's *The Architect, or Practical House Carpenter* (1830), and Minard Lafever's *The Modern Builder's Guide and The Beauties of Modern Architecture* (1830s). By following the instructions in these books, the untrained carpenter could copy their favorite elements of design and incorporate them into their own houses.

The Holloway House's gable front is basically a modified version of the "New England large" or "New England one-and-one half," both of which were popular house forms throughout the Northeast. What makes the gable front distinctive from earlier houses is that it is turned so that the gable is at the front of the building. This change in orientation for the gable front affords a practical result: the house can now fit on a relatively inexpensive, narrow city lot. The Holloway house is a typical gable front, evident when examining its floor plan. The original house, which now has later additions, would have been a perfect rectangle, mimicking the shape of the current second floor. The back wall of the house would have ended where the living room connects to the dining room, creating a four-unit structure that had been typical of vernacular and popular architecture since around 1750 (McAlester 27-28). The long and narrow layout was proportioned perfectly to the shape of the lot that surrounds it, which measures only 66 feet wide. The orientation of this building to fit on a narrow lot is perhaps the strongest indication that it was built after the land on which it sits was

platted, in 1845.



Floor plans drawn to scale by Eugene Eldredge © 2001

When making this point about fitting the house to the lot, it is important to note the trend in housing that surrounded the Holloway House when it was built—a trend that can be observed both in the Holloway House and the similarly designed Governor Crosswell House, at 228 North Broad Street in Adrian, which was built between 1841 and 1843, just a few years before the platting of Dennis and State streets in 1845.¹ Both the Holloway House and the Crosswell House have similar front facing gables, as was the style. However the Crosswell House has an additional wing, a feature that required a wider lot. While houses of this age are often added to over the course of years, the placement of the chimney in the Crosswell Houses indicates that the south wing on this house was original. For example, the Crosswell House presently has two wings, one on each side or what would be called the “hen-and-chick” style house, which was especially popular in Michigan. However, the wing on the north side was clearly added later due to the fact that the house’s two chimneys are both placed on the south side (McAlester 29).

The placement of the chimneys in both the Crosswell House and the Holloway House also helps indicate their date of construction as after 1840. The fireplace for these houses was the primary heat source in homes before 1840. Because of this, the fireplace would have to be placed at the center of the home, or there would have to be more than one in the house, in order to heat the space properly. The fireplace in the both of these houses, located in the parlor, on the outside wall, would not have provided adequate heat for the rest of the house and so it could not have been the primary heat source. These houses were clearly designed to be heated with a stove.

After 1840, the use of iron, wood- or coal-burning, stoves with masonry flues became the common way of heating the home (McAlester 29). In addition, the central chimney shaft that is still visible today in the Holloway House was undoubtedly once the

¹ The Crosswell House can be securely dated to no earlier than 1841 and no later than 1843. This secure dating is made possible through biographical information about the Governor, who helped build this house when he worked as an apprentice carpenter between 1841 and 1845. The current owners of the house, the [Lucy Wolcott Barnum chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution](#), use this information in order to date the house to 1841. Moreover, according to Lenawee County’s earliest surviving tax records, from 1844, now preserved at the Lenawee County Historical Museum, the Crosswell House (described as “House and Lot 155” and owned by Crosswell’s uncle Daniel Hicks) was standing at 228 North Broad Street before 1844.

exhaust outlet for such a stove. Sometime after 1880, heating sources in American homes once again changed, this time to a central furnace with heating ducts. Through the use of heating ducts, areas that were farther from the center of the house could easily be kept warm. The back addition, excluding the garage, was present in 1908, as is evident from Sanborne Maps from this year. It can be estimated that the addition was built around the time a furnace was installed.

On neighboring blocks, gable front houses were built in a style similar to the Holloway House after the platting of the land by the Berry family in 1845. 517 Dennis Street, the house in the neighborhood most similar to the Holloway house, shares many of the elements that make it a Greek Revival style house. The front door on the Holloway House is placed off-center on the front of the house and is a four-paneled wooden door. It is surrounded with a simple entablature with abbreviated lights, as it is missing a transom. At 517 Dennis one finds a similar set up, the difference being that the entablature contains a full transom light (McAlester 179-81).

Still, 517 Dennis Street shows more signs of having been updated than the Holloway House. While the windows found at 517 Dennis Street have been replaced with one-pane double sash windows, the Holloway house retains its originals. The six over six double sash windows, found in the façade and back of the half-story and the north, or right, side of the first level, were the dominant style from the late eighteenth century to around 1850. Handmade glass, "distinguished by curved waves, bubbles and other imperfections," is present in all the windows of the house, including the small frieze windows, typical of the Greek Revival style, located on the sides of the house (Howard 33).

Construction Elements

When evaluating the smaller details of construction inside a house one must be careful not to assume too much. The smaller pieces of hardware in a house can often easily be replaced with newer or older items, thus throwing off the dating. For example, on some of the doors in the Holloway House, Rimlock latches can be found. This is a type of latch that was "used in fancier homes throughout most of the eighteenth century [and] dominated the domestic market from about 1840 until after the beginning of the twentieth century" (Howard 97). While this assessment fits the projected date of the Holloway house's construction, one must keep in mind that locks can easily be replaced with newer forms, or as homeowners begin to restore, "antique" or older models can be fitted into newer homes.

It is best to go to a place in the house where change is the least needed and the least desired—the cellar. In the cellar of the Holloway house today, one finds some interesting elements of construction. Not surprisingly, the floor was originally dirt, and in some sections of the basement it still is. The main part of the basement, where the furnace is now located, has been tiled with one-inch thick stone pieces that, in spots, have broken apart to show its thickness.

When looking up from the floor, one main beam immediately draws attention. This massive beam is distinct from the other boards making up the ceiling in its size and texture. The short undercuts that mar the surface indicate that this is a rough-hewn timber. "Hewing the line" was a labor-intensive process. One man would use a felling

axe to make a series of cuts perpendicular to the length of the log, roughing out the shape of the final product. Then a broad axe is used to slice off the newly perforated edges of the tree. This resulted in a squared timber. (Howard 8).



Rough Hewn beam, two views, Jill Connaughton, ©2001

This process was mostly used in the wilderness, where there was no sawmill. By 1837, Adrian had six sawmills, and so it may seem strange that the timber appears in this home. The most likely explanation, however, is that the builders were simply reusing a beam from an earlier house. The other beams in the house are much thinner and smoother, probably cut with a circular saw, as was the standard tool of choice after 1840.

The foundation of the Holloway House is made of irregular, hand-made brick, a material that was available in Adrian in the late 1820s, but that did not come into common use here until after 1841. Noah Norton made the first brick in Adrian in 1828. He and, later, a man named George C. Knight, among others, made bricks for buildings. But, in 1841, a man named Charles McKenzie started a brickyard on Maumee Street. His booming business made brick buildings and foundations in Adrian much more common in the 1840s. The company employed 30 men at its peak, hand-building bricks for \$1.25 a day and in 1880 opened the Adrian Brick and Tile Machine Company (Early 76-7).

It is also important to note that much of the basement, partitioned off with non-load bearing walls, is dirt filled, up to five feet deep in some places. As Hugh Howard has noted, "The rule in general is the earlier the house, the less cellar one is likely to find." This basement was still being dug out up to twenty years ago, when the current owner finally quit, deciding she had done enough (Eldredge). Because of this relatively recent work, one can imagine the cellar as a much smaller space originally.

Genealogy

It was the third settler of Adrian, Elias Dennis, who first purchased the land upon which the Holloway House now sits, in 1826. Common to early settlements throughout the Northeast, where logs were plentiful, the people of Adrian began by building log cabins. These log cabins were simple in design, often just one large room. The log house of Darius Comstock was described to be "45 x 26 feet, with a space partitioned off at one end to be made into two bedrooms" (Whitney 19). This was an easily built and acceptable form of home for the first decade of the town's existence and it is likely that the Dennis family occupied such a structure upon their arrival.

The property, which consisted of eighty acres, was situated immediately southwest of the original platted town of Adrian. The Dennis family continued to occupy the property for the next 18 years, though seemingly a prime location for development. Pressure to develop the property intensified in 1840, when the the Michigan Southern Railroad, based in Monroe, connected Monroe to Adrian and located its depot where Monument Square is today, just a few blocks east of the Dennis property. It is not recorded which of the streets may have been built on the Dennis property during their ownership. However, it is known that Dallas Street, a short one-block inlet connecting present-day Dennis Street to what would have been the west border of their property, Winter Street, was named by David Dennis, Elias' son. David, a democrat, named the street after James K. Polk's running mate George Dallas, which dates the naming to no earlier than 1844, the year of Polk's candidacy and election (Early 14).

On December 24, 1844, a decade after the death of Elias Dennis, the land was sold to Ambrose and Langford G. Berry who divided the land into narrow city lots (Whitney 49). On the deed of sale, it names David Dennis, Charles Mitchell and his wife, Ann De Lucy (Dennis) Mitchell, daughter of Elias, as the sellers of the property. The Mitchell's are listed as living in Madison Township, just south of Adrian. David Dennis is listed as living in Adrian, presumably on the property since it is recorded that he moved to Coldwater after the year of the sale.

Though unconfirmed, it is probable that the Holloway house was built on Lot 14 and Block 5 of "Berry's Southern Addition," fairly soon after it was platted. The first owners, and presumably the builders of the house, may never be known since records of this information have been lost to fire. The first resident on record as owning the house was James E. Curtis. Moving in sometime between 1859 and 1865, Curtis had lived on Winter Street previously and was originally from Toledo. He was employed as a Train Dispatcher (City Directory of 1865-6).

The next resident of 448 State Street was Silas Holloway who moved to the area with his father and brothers: William, Edwin, and Butler. The brothers had purchased 320 acres of farmland in 1833 in Raisin, located between Adrian and Tecumseh. The farm became known as Holloway corners, "one of the most productive farms in the neighborhood" (Whitney 292). Silas Holloway later left the farm and was living in the Holloway house, at 448 State Street, by the year 1867. He was listed as a sheep dealer (City Directory, 1867-8). Silas was never married but left the Holloway house to close relatives who continued to pass it down in the family through the generations. In the 1960s, the last Holloway to own the house, Sarah Maud (Holloway) Wilson, who was a schoolteacher, died, leaving the house to her husband, Henry (Abstract).

Conclusion

Though none of the points of inquiry in this study have revealed a single date of construction for the Holloway House, there is a consistency in the findings that point to a specific period of time. The style and form of the house was popular in Michigan and through out America from 1825 and we find other homes in Adrian built in the early 1840s in a similar manner. Some of the Holloway House's construction elements, such as the rough-hewn beam in the cellar and the hand-made bricks also indicate an early date. It is the position of the chimney and the positioning of the original structure on the

narrow city plat that reveals that this house was most likely constructed after 1845, in the second half of the forties or perhaps as late as the 1850s. The Croswell House on Broad Street has a date that can be confidently placed in the early 1840s leading the author to conclude that while the Holloway house is certainly one of the oldest structures to be found in town, it should not be dubbed “the oldest surviving house in Adrian.”



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