

CARRIAGE HOUSE
Adams National Historic Site

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by
Cynthia E. Cryston

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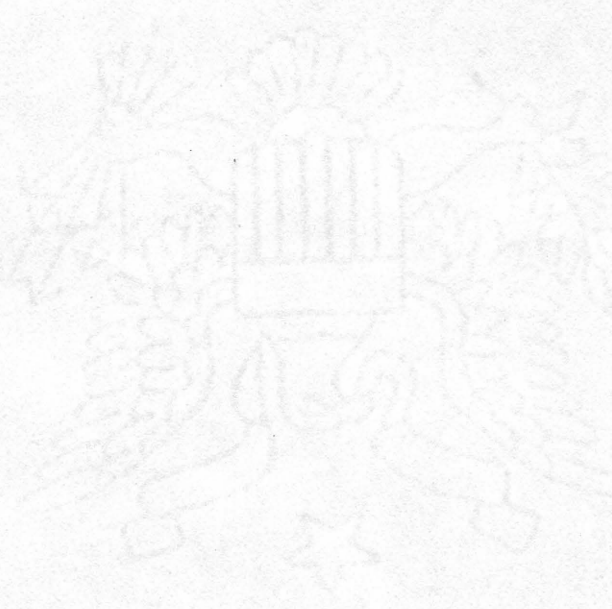
CARRIAGE HOUSE

Adams National Historic Site
Massachusetts

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

by
Cynthia E. Kryston

Undated



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HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT: CARRIAGE HOUSE, ANHS

Source material for an historic structures report on the Carriage House of the Adams National Historic Site will be centered chiefly upon the Diary of Charles Francis Adams for the period 1871 to 1874. Although the references here are brief and sketchy at best, the Diary for this time does contain the most complete information available for details regarding the construction of the Carriage House.

The body of this report will be tentatively divided into three main sections -- the circumstances surrounding the initial commissioning of the Carriage House, the various phases involved in actual construction, and a physical description and diagram of the building itself together with a résumé of its history after the death of Charles Francis Adams, its builder. It is hoped that this will be the most logical and concise division for this report.

The following material covers the first of these sections.

Adams National Historic Site
Carriage House

The last major structural addition to what is now the Adams National Historic Site in Quincy, Massachusetts, was the construction in 1873 of a carriage house and stable by Charles Francis Adams, son of John Quincy Adams. This building was the climax for Charles Francis in a series of projects which included the addition of a laundry and servants' wing to the Old House in 1869 and the construction of the Stone Library in 1870.

Charles Francis' decision to build the Carriage House was precipitated by the town of Wollaston which planned to lay the present Newport Avenue through the eastern boundary of Charles Francis' land. Their plan not only proposed to alter the eastern periphery of the Adams estate but also would necessitate the removal of several of the farm buildings associated with the Old House.

Charles Francis faced this new project, therefore, with extreme reluctance. His activities of the preceding years had involved him more than he felt his age could allow in the details of superintending and building, and he had anticipated undertaking no further major construction at the Old House after the completion of the Stone Library. Consequently, his feelings were recorded in his Diary entry for April 11, 1871:

Went to Quincy early . . . Remained all day, as the Selectmen had sent me a notification to appear and say what I had to object to an application of the Wollaston people to run a road through the whole line of my land. . . . We passed over the long tract and I said all that I could in deprecation of the scheme, but all my experience of these attempts upon property runs one way. One man makes no headway in securing justice

against the wishes of a hundred. Should this go into effect it will once more entail upon me a serious change of plans. Had I not done so much the last two years I should decide to go to Mt. Wollaston.¹

Time proved Charles Francis' conclusions regarding the road to be correct for by February of the following year, 1872, plans for the new road were definite, and Charles Francis was forced to initiate serious planning for the revision of his own eastern boundary. His enthusiasm for the project had not increased, however, for coupled with the necessity of new construction on his property was the imminence of his own departure in April for the Geneva Arbitration concerning the Alabama claims. From the start then "annoyance" was the dominant feeling in his attitude toward further building and an air of gloom pervaded his Diary as he wrote:

. . . the idea of the work to be entailed upon me by the new road the County Commissioners have decided to make is so repulsive, that I sometimes wish the whole burden off of my shoulders. The revulsion from the great interest I took in it twenty years ago is one of the curious features of my life. Singularly enough the suspense attending the commission at Geneva comes in to aggravate the present anxiety.²

Hence, with the prospect of a prolonged absence from Quincy he commissioned the architectural firm of Cummings and Sears in March, 1872, to present him with a tentative proposal for "placing a stable in the most convenient way."³ He envisaged nothing less than a major revision --⁴ "a revolution over the whole ground on the east side" of his estate.

¹
Diary of Charles Francis Adams, April 11, 1873, ANHS film file #33.

²
Ibid., March 4, 1872, ANHS film file #34.

³
Ibid., April 6, 1872.

⁴
Ibid.

The design which the firm presented to him at this point had several merits, but Charles Francis feared the expense it would entail. Added to the mental burden of arranging for the Carriage House's construction, he foresaw the financial burden of allocating his funds to cover its cost. Indeed, he surmised that the plan was "a nice one, but it will cost a¹ fortune."

Little time remained, however, to make definite arrangements because at the end of April Charles Francis departed for Geneva. He returned the following November to find "the men at work, and the preparations making² for the road which is to take so great a part of my land." The decisive turning point had come and he now realized fully the need to crystallize his own plans.

Consequently, early the following February he was in Quincy measuring the site for his new stable and preparing to consult once again with the Boston architects, Cummings and Sears, the firm he had contacted the previous year. His conception, however, of what the new building should look like did not agree with the designs Cummings and Sears presented to him and he quickly demanded modifications in both size and cost. After a visit to the architects, he recorded that:

I explained my objections to the size and the expense, and suggested modifications. He [Cummings] agreed to some but objected to others. Finally he took the plan³ for consideration of the estimates on a reduced scale.

¹
Ibid., April 15, 1872.

²
Ibid., November 26, 1872.

³
Ibid., February 8, 1873, ANHS film file #85.

Some adjustments were made in late February, but Charles Francis remained dissatisfied with the design and maintained that "the reduction of¹ Mr. Cummings' plan is barely sufficient."

By March 4, 1873, therefore, still more changes were added; but Charles Francis' despondency only deepened as he regretted not having left the Old House and built a home for himself on the family's Quincy property at Mount Wollaston. Of Quincy and his ancestral home he again wrote:

I . . . encountered that sense of extreme aversion to everything about the place which I have experienced since the barborous intrusion made by the Commissioners. I am now convinced that I made a great mistake in not building at Mount Wollaston when I came back from Europe in 1863, as I contemplated.²

Delays in starting construction continued to multiply and on March 16, 1873, Charles Francis noted tersely in his journal that there were "no³ stable foundations at all." No satisfactory compromise between his wishes and the architect's plans had been reached for Charles Francis still insisted on lowering expenses. With a reduced household and family he could see no need for a large financial outlay. Thus, he recorded that the architect "still clings to his favorite plan, and promises to try to get lower estimates,⁴ or cut it down. Meanwhile we ought to be setting about it."

April 5, 1873, found Charles Francis accompanying Mr. Cummings to Quincy for still more measurements of the area for the proposed structure -- measurements which Charles Francis believed were deficient for the building he envisaged. He felt that the architect's survey was "out of proportion, but

¹
Ibid., March 1, 1873.

²
Ibid., March 12, 1873.

³
Ibid., March 16, 1873.

⁴
Ibid., March 15, 1873.

I have not the courage to go back upon it. The whole thing is so sickening¹
... that I feel a constant impulse to give it all up."

Two days later, however, on April 7, an agreement was reached.² The building was to be a single, two-storied, granite and brick structure, Victorian in styling, and U-shaped in design with three distinct sections for a stable in the north wing, coachman's quarters in the south, and a carriage room in between. Provisions would be made in the stable for horse stalls and a tack room on the first floor and cow stalls and a goat room in the basement. A hay loft was planned for the second floor above the stable and central carriage room, and the coachman's living quarters were to include a living room and a kitchen on the first floor and bedrooms on the second. The building itself was to stand with its back toward Newport Avenue on the newly created eastern boundary of Charles Francis' property, and a graded driveway would provide access to the structure from two separate points on the Avenue.

Thus, the desire to begin and complete the new building as quickly as possible had forced a compromise so that by April 28, 1873, "the ground was broken and the work beginning."³ Charles Francis Adams' final addition to his ancestral home had at last begun.

¹
² Ibid., April 5, 1873.

² Charles Francis' Diary references include only general allusions to wanting "modifications" made in the architect's plans. He does not enumerate or suggest what these modifications were other than his wish to reduce the cost of the structure. There is no indication of what changes, if any, he may have made in the architect's original design for the building.

³
Diary of Charles Francis Adams, April 28, 1873, ANHS film file #85.