

Staircase Description

FORM

The staircase follows a simple linear form with no landing or return course. The stair communicates between room 100 and room 200 on the first and second floors. The stair springs from the southwest corner of 100 and engages the 2nd floor at the southwest end of 200. The bottom four treads are the only deviation from the linear course and regular dimensions of the remainder of the staircase. Paint ghosting on the risers and skirt board indicates that the shape and footprint of the stair have remained largely unchanged, although there has been some modification to the form of the bottom four risers, and all of the treads have been replaced with modern oak treads. The treads measure 37 1/2" wide and 11" deep and the risers measure 7" high. A 5" surbase runs along the staircase in between the architrave of the entry door in 100 and the architrave of the door at the immediate right of the top of the stairs. The surbase matches that of room 100. At the top of the stairs where the surbase transitions from its angled run to a horizontal run (just before butting the architrave of the door into 201) the surbase is butted by a surbase which is typical for the 2nd floor and which has been run horizontally across the wall (see Figure). In between the surbase and the skirt board is a solid wood panel which shows many ghost marks which could indicate changes to molding and or finishes, but further investigation is needed.

(more investigation could probably discover the original form of the bottom four steps, total number of treads needs to be noted).

BALUSTRADE

The original pickets are square in section, measuring 1 1/8" square. There are three pickets mortised into each stair which are spaced just under 2 3/8"-2 3/4" apart on center. The stair picket which sits under the half-circle at the top of the rail measures 3/4" by 1 1/8" and may not be original.

NEWEL

There are two newels within the balustrade, one at the top landing and the other engaged to the stair near the bottom (where the fourth tread from the bottom begins to turn off of the primary axis so as to turn the stair from the west wall into room 100). The newels are very simple with no molding or adornment, square in section and tapering from a maximum width of 3" down to 2". The top newel attaches to the rail where it sweeps down from the highest point to realign with the general run of the staircase (see Figure), at ??? from the floor. The top newel measures 2" at the rail and 3" at the floor. The bottom newel attaches to the rail at its lowest point at 74" above the floor, after the rail has returned to the horizontal (see Figure). The lower newel measures 2" at its top and 3" where it intersects with the stair tread, below which it remains at 3" until it intersects the floor. The lower newel is mortised into the floor, and the protruding pegged tenon can be seen from below in the ceiling of room 000.

RAIL

The rail is thickly painted leaving the wood species indecipherable without further investigation. The rail is comprised of at least three pieces along its length. It appears

that the uppermost piece of railing has been replaced, as its profile does not match exactly with the rest of the rail and it appears to have been poorly attached to the original railing (this is the piece which turns the half-circle to return the railing to the upstairs hallway wall). This difference (in addition to other signs of change in room 202 (*the red room*)) would indicate that the wall at the top left of the staircase is not original and that the railing ran in its place and originally returned to what is now the southern closet wall in room 202 (*the red room*). The railing makes an elegant sweep near the top to transition from horizontal to the angle of the staircase, however at the bottom it transitions with a rather abrupt flat angle (*might this be nonoriginal? More investigation is needed*). The original rail itself is likely composed of two pieces, a top cap and the body of the rail which is beaded on each side at the bottom (see Figure).

OTHER

The paneled wall underneath the staircase is very intricately detailed with applied molding and a fluted pilaster (see Figure). The square and triangular panels are delineated with double beaded astragal molding 1/2" wide. Also contained in this wall is a small door (3'2 3/4" by 2'1/4") which is currently sealed shut but would originally have accessed a space beneath the stair. The architrave on this small door matches that of the other doors in Room 100 as do the plinth blocks, indicating that it is original. The presence of this door indicates that the stair into the basement is not original or has changed drastically as this doorway would now open into the space occupied by the basement stairs. The surbase and baseboard of this wall match those in room 100. A large panel of plywood has been added in place of some element 2'6" tall by 5'8 1/4" in the middle of the wall, the plywood has applied molding in the shape of a diamond which matches the infill over the east door in room 100 (see Figure).

Attic Description

GENERAL

The attic is accessible from a hatch cut into the ceiling in room 201 (*correct room num?*). There is no flooring in the attic and the hatch may not be original (*more investigation is needed*). None of the framing is whitewashed or finished and the attic space does not appear to have been regularly used by occupants for any reason. The joist cavities have been lined with batts of insulation and then blown insulation has been placed atop that to come within several inches of the joist tops. The masonry exposed on the interior of the end gables is very rough and does not exhibit any particular bond (*if I remember correctly*). There are no dormers and no evidence to support their existence at any time, and the attic space appears to be relatively watertight, with no major visible leaks or deterioration to the framing.

FRAMING

The original roof framing is completely of oak, and all members are sash sawn excepting the knee posts which are pit sawn. The West Portico addition (visible through a hole cut into the original sheathing) uses circular sawn pine rafters and sheathing. The original roof framing system consists of rafters without collars which extend from a ridge board, at the peak of the roof, down to sit directly on the joists with no false plate. The ridge board is supported by seven center posts set on a center plate and knee posts set on each of the twenty-six joists (*I am reasonably sure this is the correct number of joists, it converges with measurements and observations and might be verified in a photograph*). There are also outrigger rafters set into the masonry atop the end gables to receive the edge of the roof and the cornice board on the exterior. The rafters, knee posts, and joists are set 24" on center. The seven center posts are spaced so that the first and last are placed against the end gables and the remainder are spaced so that the third and fifth posts align with the lap joints on the center plate (see Detail).

The rafters measure 2"-3 1/2" by 3-3 1/2". The seven center posts measure 2 3/4"-3 1/2" by 3"-3 3/4" and are approximately 5'8" in height. The ridge board measures 2 3/4" by 3 3/4" (*is it one solid piece?*). The knee posts measure 2 1/2" by 3 1/2" and sit 5'3" from the edge of the center posts and approximately 4'3" from the rafter ends (at the intersection with each joist). The joists measure 2 1/2"-3 1/2" by 6 1/2"-7 1/2". The center plate measures 2 3/4" by 5 3/4". The northernmost member of the center plate measures 19'6", the middle member 20'1", and the southernmost member 15'3".

The sheathing is of two distinct types: sash sawn and circular sawn. The sash sawn sheathing measures from 10"-15" in width with a relatively consistent thickness of 1" and dates to the original wood shingle roof. The circular sawn sheathing measures around 3" in width with a relatively consistent thickness of 1" and was likely added to facilitate the installation of the extant tin roof. The circular sawn sheathing is placed in between each of the sash sawn boards which were spaced with a gap of at least 3" between each board. At the masonry end gables the sheathing continues past the wall to attach to the outrigger rafters.

JOINERY

The framing members are all either pegged or toenailed, with each application consistent throughout the framing system. Pegged mortise joints are used to join the center posts to the center plate and to the ridge board. The center plate's three members are connected with lap joints of 13-15" with a peg at either end. At each lap joint, the center post is mortised through each of the lap joint members and is pegged horizontally through each member (see Detail). Where each joist passes underneath the center plate, a peg is driven through the center plate into the joist (see Detail). The knee posts are toenailed to the bottom of the rafters and to the joists using hand headed rosehead nails (*I believe this is correct, but I may misremember*). The rafters are toenailed into the sides of the ridge board and into each of the joists. The interior stud walls of the 2nd floor are visible when the insulation is removed, as is the riven lath of the ceiling below. Where a stud wall aligns with a joist (*I believe the interior hallway wall, which we believe was added, falls into this category*), the top of each stud has been notched so as to lap the joist and the lap is flat nailed to the joist (the tops of the studs do not extend past the tops of the joists). Where the wall does not align with a joist (*I believe the wall between the Red Room and the North Bedroom falls into this category*) a board has been laid perpendicular to and between the joists to allow the stud to be flat nailed from the top (*more investigation is needed to refine this description with fasteners and wood type and milling marks and exact measurements for locations of these interior walls*). (*more investigation is needed to attempt to uncover the wall between the North bedroom and the North bath, and between the South bedroom and the staircase – although this South wall may be brick if I remember correctly*)

EXTRAS

There is a unusual board which resembles the roof sheathing (*does it match the sheathing and is it original?*) which is flat nailed atop the joists near the intersection of the rafters and joists at the southwest corner of the attic. Some early period chestnut shingles are encapsulated underneath the West Portico roof, the shingles measure ??? and have a ??? exposure which exhibits remains of red paint/stain (see Pictures). A nail pulled from one shingle appears to date to the mid-early 19th Century and does not match other hand wrought nails extant in the framing.