

## V. The Nineteenth Century to 1861

After John Appleton bought the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House and its surrounding fourteen acres from Thomas Lee in February 1808, he continued the process of subdividing what had been the Lee estate. Born in 1758, John Appleton was descended from a family with connections to Ipswich and Salem, but also prominent in Cambridge. (His great-grandfather Nathaniel Appleton attended Harvard College and served as pastor of the Church in Cambridge for 66 years, from 1717 – 1783.) In 1807, Appleton married a woman from an important Cambridge family, Sarah Fayerweather, daughter of Capt. Thomas Fayerweather. Appleton later served as U. S. Consul in France.<sup>85</sup> Although Appleton owned the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House for only six years, selling it in 1814, he continued to reside in Cambridge until his death in 1829; in 1822 he was listed as a voter.<sup>86</sup>

John Appleton's brief ownership of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols house had a significant impact on the size of the property. On its western boundary, the former Lee estate abutted property owned by John Fayerweather and probably part of the 45-acre Fayerweather estate.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps Appleton bought the Hooper-Lee-Nichols house and land shortly after his marriage to Sarah Fayerwether in order to be near her family, and then later received part or all of the Fayerweather estate. In 1810, Appleton built a new house on part of the former Lee land, just west of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols house, which survives at what is now 163 Brattle Street.<sup>88</sup> It is possible that he needed a new house suitable to his prominent role as a U.S. diplomat, and the old Hooper-Lee-Nichols house

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<sup>85</sup> Paige, *History*, 482; Mary Isabella Gozzaldi, *History of Cambridge Mass. 1630-1877 by Lucius R. Paige: Supplement and Index* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge Historical Society, 1930); VRC, 2:494 and 2:521.

<sup>86</sup> VRC, 2:521, and Paige, *History*, 448.

<sup>87</sup> MD, 177:437, and Bunting and Nylander, *Survey*, 66.

<sup>88</sup> Rettig, *Guide to Cambridge*, C43.

was not fashionable enough. With its cramped entryway, winding stair, and low ceilings, it hardly fit the prevailing Federal taste for light and elegant classical interiors. This conjecture might explain why Appleton sold the Hooper-Lee-Nichols house in 1814, only six years after purchasing it. He retained most of the property west of what is now Appleton Street, however, selling only “one acre, three quarters of an acre and twelve poles....being the dwelling house and part of the land conveyed to me by Thomas Lee....together with all the buildings thereon excepting the Corn barn which I reserve to myself.”<sup>89</sup> Appleton also granted “the right to pass and repass in a certain passag way [sic] lying westerly of the above described land;” this passageway is the present-day Kennedy Lane. [See Fig. 13]

When Appleton sold the house in 1814, he sold it to a Lee family acquaintance, Benjamin Carpenter. In his 1802 will, Judge Joseph Lee had bequeathed to his nephew Thomas Lee “my House and Land in Salem which I purchased of Benjamin Carpenter, situate on Essex Street.”<sup>90</sup> Having sold a house to Judge Joseph Lee some years earlier, Carpenter now bought what had been Judge Lee’s house in Cambridge, and was living there when recorded as a Cambridge voter in 1822.<sup>91</sup> On July 16, 1823, he married Judge Lee’s grand-niece Deborah, daughter of the same Thomas Lee, Judge Lee’s nephew and heir.<sup>92</sup> Carpenter died at the age of 71 on September 19, 1823 after just two months of marriage, and left his entire estate to his widow.<sup>93</sup>

Deborah Carpenter thus inherited through her husband the house formerly belonging to her great-uncle, Judge Lee. In 1830, when her father Thomas Lee died, she

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<sup>89</sup> MD, 207:277.

<sup>90</sup> MP, 13935.

<sup>91</sup> Paige, *History*, 448.

<sup>92</sup> Deborah was at that time Deborah Austin, widow of Richard Austin. VRC, 2:67.

<sup>93</sup> VRC, 2:496, and MP, 3957.

also inherited property from him, which may have included his house at 153 Brattle Street, though it is not specified in the will.<sup>94</sup> She continued to live at 153 Brattle for a number of years, and rented out the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House next door to tenants. In the 1840s, the tenants were Professor Francis Sales, a Spanish instructor, and his wife Mary.<sup>95</sup> Mrs. George Nichols, (née Susan Farley Treadwell), recalled that around 1850 “my old friend Mrs. Carpenter expressed a wish that we should hire her house next to the one she occupied,” and in that year the Nichols family “hired it at a rent of \$125 on a lease of five years and commenced its renovation.”<sup>96</sup> Deborah Carpenter continued to rent the house to the Nichols family until her death in 1860. After her death, her executor Edward Sohier sold the Hooper-Lee-Nichols house in a public auction in May 1861, at which it was purchased by the tenant George Nichols for \$5560.73.<sup>97</sup>

## **VI. Since 1861: A Brief Summary**

The house was owned or rented by members of the Nichols family until 1923. As tenants in the 1850s, George and Susan Nichols had repaired, remodeled, and enlarged the house to accommodate their family of six children. The alterations and repairs they made cost approximately \$1000, and were well-documented in a set of detailed instructions that George Nichols wrote to carpenter Frances Winn in September 1853.<sup>98</sup> The most obvious alteration to the house was the addition of the baluster railing to the

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<sup>94</sup> MP, 13948.

<sup>95</sup> Seasholes, Nancy, “Report on the Intensive and Reconnaissance Archeological Survey of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols Houselot, Cambridge, Massachusetts,” Center for Archeological Studies, Boston University (1985) 10.

<sup>96</sup> Susan Farley Treadwell Nichols, “Reminiscences,” typescript extract in the files of the CHS.

<sup>97</sup> MD, 874:558.

<sup>98</sup> Susan Farley Treadwell Nichols, “Reminiscences,” typescript extract in the files of CHS; George Nichols to Francis Winn, “Repairs, alterations &c. on house rented by G. Nichols, Brattle Street,” September 1853, CHS files.

front of the roof; Mrs. Nichols wrote that “as the house looked *very* low for its breadth we purchased the discarded railing of the Chancel of St. Paul’s Church, Boston, to serve as a façade giving more height.” [See Fig. 3a] After they purchased the house in 1861 the Nichols family lived comfortably in the home with their children, becoming well-known and well-liked in the neighborhood.<sup>99</sup> George Nichols died in 1884, leaving the house to his wife, who in turn left the property to all the Nichols children upon her death in 1892.<sup>100</sup>

The Nichols heirs reduced the lot size to its current dimensions when they sold the house and 18012 square feet of land in 1893 to Henry Lee, a descendant of Judge Joseph Lee, for \$1.00.<sup>101</sup> They sold the remaining land in the rear of the house (which included the stable) to “a gentleman [who] intends to erect a private residence on it.”<sup>102</sup> However, the Nichols family remained connected to the Hooper-Lee-Nichols house; Henry Lee probably rented the house to Harriet Lamb, one of the daughters of George and Susan Nichols, and her family, because their name appears as residents at this address in Cambridge city directories of the period.<sup>103</sup> In 1905, executors for Henry Lee’s estate sold the house back to one of the Nichols heirs, George and Susan’s only son John W. T. Nichols, again for only \$1.00.<sup>104</sup> In 1916, John Nichols in turn sold the house to his nephew, grandson of George and Susan Nichols, Austin T. White.<sup>105</sup> Austin White hired the well known designer Joseph Everett Chandler to restore the house. Chandler’s work

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<sup>99</sup> Mary Isabella Gozzaldi, “The Hooper-Lee-Nichols House,” *Proceedings of the Cambridge Historical Society* 16 (April 1922): 18-20.

<sup>100</sup> MP 14454 and MP 33435.

<sup>101</sup> MP 2223:455.

<sup>102</sup> John W. T. Nichols to Henry Lee, Esq., April 26, 1894, in CHS files.

<sup>103</sup> Miriam Posner, “The Hooper-Lee-Nichols House: Biographical Sketches of Owners and Occupants, 1663-1976,” unpublished notes in CHS Files, 7-8.

<sup>104</sup> MD 3183:379.

<sup>105</sup> MD 4045:469. Austin T. White’s wife Amelia B. White is named in the deed.

is most obvious in the paneled library, installed in what may have been the original lean-to, and which Chandler believed was a “summer kitchen” in Judge Lee’s day.<sup>106</sup> The house finally passed out of Nichols family ownership when Austin and Amelia White sold it and the 18,012 square-foot lot to Frances White Emerson (no relation), for \$15,000 in 1923.<sup>107</sup>

In the second half of the twentieth century, the house gradually shifted from being a residence to being the headquarters of the Cambridge Historical Society. Mrs. Emerson and her husband, William Emerson, dean of architecture at M. I. T. and a great nephew of Ralph Waldo Emerson, lived in the house until 1957. As early as 1937, they informed the Cambridge Historical Society that it was their intention to leave the house, property, and land to the CHS “when they had both finished with it.”<sup>108</sup> After Frances and William Emerson died within two months of each other in the spring of 1957, the house passed to the CHS. Sterling Dow, Hudson Professor of Archeology at Harvard University, became the first resident curator of the house, and lived on site until 1976 with his wife Elizabeth. During his tenure as curator, Dow collaborated with a number of Boston area experts, including Abbot Lowell Cummings of SPNEA and William Young of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, to restore and study the house.<sup>109</sup> By 1979, the CHS had hired Gerald B. Warden as a consultant to advise them on the preservation needs at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House. In 1981, Anne Grady and Sarah Zimmerman completed their detailed study of the house, which included recommendations for conservation. During the early

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<sup>106</sup> Sutherland, “A House and Three Centuries,” 72-73.

<sup>107</sup> MD 4694:182.

<sup>108</sup> “One Hundred and Twenty-Second Meeting,” December 16, 1937, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Historical Society* 24 (1936-1937): 21.

<sup>109</sup> Sterling Dow, “Report of the Emerson Scholar for the Years 1957 and 1958,” *Proceedings of the Cambridge Historical Society*, Annual Reports (1958): 126-130.

1980s, a large fund-raising and grant-writing effort was launched and a major conservation/restoration of the house began in 1982.<sup>110</sup>

The Hooper-Lee-Nichols house entered its third century of existence between 1985-1990. Since Dr. Richard Hooper first built a frame house on the land he purchased from John Holmes, the house had been enlarged, modernized, and restored by a long succession of owners. At the same time, the parcel of land surrounding the house was expanded in the early eighteenth century while the house served as a country estate, but was subdivided several times before reaching its present dimensions in 1893. Today the house, in the hands of the Cambridge Historical Society, is open to the public and offers an important example of the evolution of a first-period framed structure over generations of use.

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<sup>110</sup> See correspondence, grant applications, and publicity materials in Restoration files at CHS.

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