



# ***Historic Preservation Case Study in Dartmouth, MA***

**Tuesday, March 26, 2019**

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- II. Preservation Philosophy Made Practical**
- III. “The Little House with a Big Story to Tell”**
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## About the Dartmouth Heritage Preservation Trust, Inc.

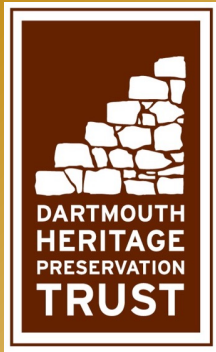
[www.dhpt.org](http://www.dhpt.org)

The focus of our preservation efforts since DHPT obtained its non-profit status in 2007 has been the stewardship of the 1762 Elihu Akin House, a town-owned property which it leases from the Town in order to restore and transform the property into a cultural heritage and education center. This project has benefited from the Town's Community Preservation Act (CPA), funded by taxpayers as a surcharge to property taxes and through generous private donations and memberships.

Without CPA allocations and private donations, significant historic preservation projects like ours cannot possibly succeed. The unquestionable benefits to our Townspeople and surrounding communities are immeasurable as a living history "classroom" and legacy for future generations.

DHPT is an all-volunteer grass-roots organization. It provides in-kind services to support the organization's operations, including but not limited to pro-bono legal costs, marketing & communications, website content, postage, forms & supplies, planning, and outreach. Without in-kind services, expenses would be cost-prohibitive.





## Preservation Philosophy Made Practical

Each preservation project has its own unique characteristics given its historic significance of time, place and context(s), cultural value to community, architectural period(s), original elements, later features, repairs and changes, and the history of its inhabitants over the life of the building.

The Interior Secretary's Standards for the Historic Treatment of Properties: Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Reconstruction. Purists of the past preferred choosing a historic period for a building. Practices have changed. The Akin House lacked sufficient architectural features from one period to conform to standards which were limiting.

Consult with the experts and collaborate with the preservation community for a well-thought approach.

Be prepared to accept criticism. Everyone will have an opinion. There is no one perfect solution. The building will tell you what it needs.

Important for visitors to distinguish between modern amenities and original, early, or later repairs, and new construction.

**Overarching objective: Make it last for another 250 plus years.**





# “The Little House with a Big Story to Tell”

The 1762 Elihu Akin House, 762 Dartmouth Street,  
Dartmouth, MA.



Photographer and date unknown.







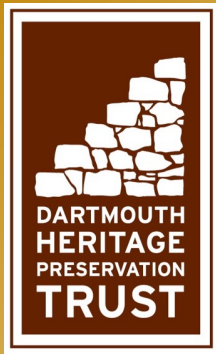
## “The Little House with a Big Story to Tell”



Without Dartmouth’s Community Preservation Act, this property would not have been saved. It is on the State Register of Historic places, and eligible for the National Register. It is protected by a Historic Preservation Restriction by MHC, in perpetuity—the “gold standard” of preservation.

Left: Photo by Fred Palmer, 1905, courtesy of ODHS, New Bedford Whaling Museum. Right: Photo by Diane Gilbert, 2001

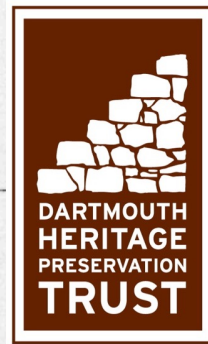




A still from the Elmer Clifton 1921 silent film, **Down to the Sea in Ships**, about New Bedford whaling of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> C. The main character is about to enter “the old homestead”, a ghost-like presence reflecting on the past and as one imagines seeing the future. It premiered in New Bedford in 1922.





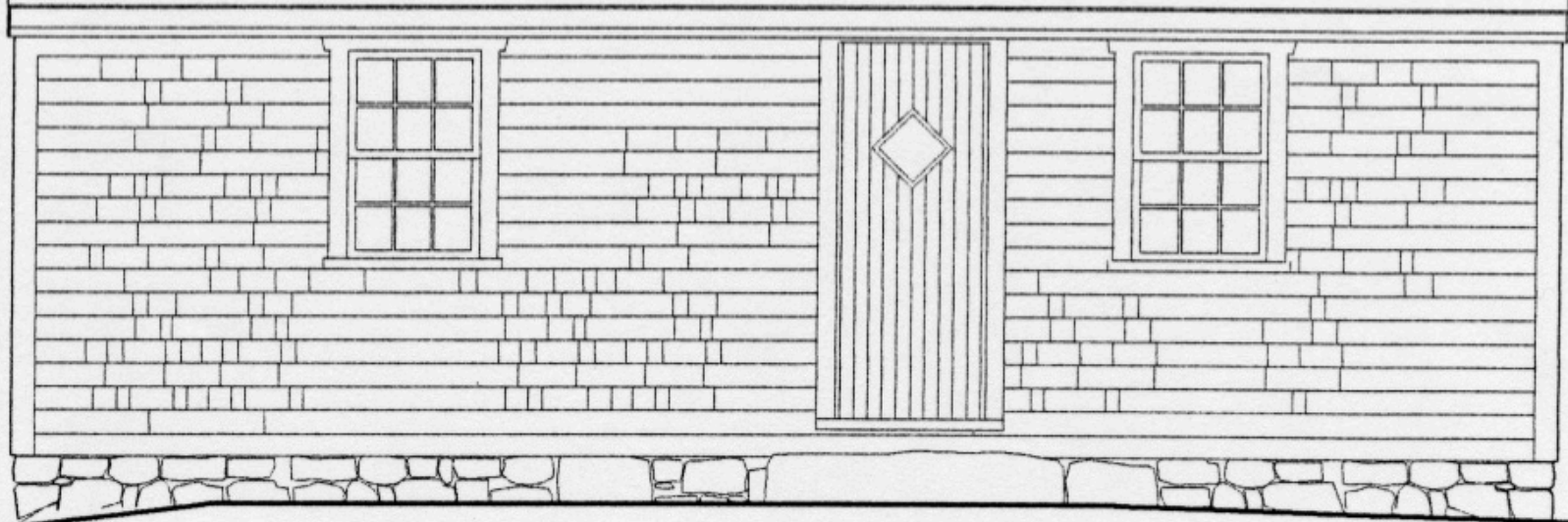


*You have to know where we started  
to appreciate how far we've come.*

1762 - 2019

A Review in Pictures

## "How to Save a Historic House"





*You have to know where we started to appreciate how far we've come. 1762 - 2019*

**Job Mosher (1762 - ca. 1766)**  
**Capt. Jonathan Delano (ca. 1767 - 1768)**  
**Elihu Akin & descendants (1769 - 2003)**  
**WHALE (2004 - 2006) DHPT (2007 - present)**



East elevation upgraded for Universal access at the rear entrance.  
Public funds require public access.







WHALE-sponsored cleanup at the Akin House site, June 2005. Phase 1 of conservation & preservation would follow, along with Phases 2 & 3.



Ownership transfers from WHALE to the Town of Dartmouth & DHPT (lease-holders) following the completion of Phase 1. (2008)



Phase 1.







The Keeping Room. The Greek Revival “upgrade” followed by 20<sup>th</sup> C. installation of a Humphrey gas heater. English bricks reused to rebuild a functional cooking hearth on the footprint of the 18<sup>th</sup> C. cooking hearth with beehive oven in the rear. (2018)







*Home Is where the  
Hearth Is*



**Fireplaces, Fireboxes,  
Flues & Chimney  
Stacks**







## The Anatomy of a Center Chimney in a Georgian Cape Style House







Rebuilt to Code with modern firebricks and terra cotta flues. Important to a functioning fireplace, firebox and beehive oven.

Above, note the footprint of the Greek Revival fireplace which replaced the original cooking hearth of the 18<sup>th</sup> C.







Above, stabilization work in the cellar to strengthen the floor above, near the foyer. Timbers, used as support when house built, saved.







Stabilizing  
the formal  
parlor and  
the second  
story.







The Formal Parlor







The Keeping Room. Steel posts removed. New beam construction added. Steel brackets for additional stabilization from roof line to plate.







Chamfered joists are original to the house, or even earlier. Job Mosher could have repurposed these joists. New construction whitewashed to distinguish old from new.





First layer on wood was analyzed to be a tan primer & an attempt at grain decoration, then another layer of tan paint was applied.

The yellow/green paint color appears to be the last hand-ground oil paint layer and a stable paint layer to retain. — Mussey Assoc.



The Foyer, west side entrance. Repair with wood found in the house at threshold to match late 19<sup>th</sup> C. flooring.





## The Sitting Room / Small Parlor

A grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Fund has made it possible to conduct specialized conservation and treatment of the wall coverings found beneath the plaster & lath and overlayers of wall papers, added up to the 20<sup>th</sup> C.

**The result will be a protected exhibit space within the 1762 Akin House, one of Dartmouth's more significant historic resources. The surprising discovery of extant & delicate decorative finishes on top of original whitewashed boards inspired DHPT to alter its restoration strategy for this room. "The little house with a big story to tell" informed a special conservation approach to treat this room differently from the rest of the house where traffic & 21<sup>st</sup> C. wear & tear can be safeguarded. In addition to the general public, this room will attract historic wall covering researchers, preservationists & the academic community.**







Left: ceiling



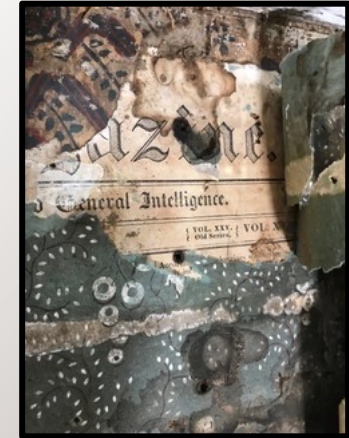
The Sitting Room, as found in 2004, top left. Photos of restoration process. (2018)



## The Sitting Room







Conservation Treatment  
of the Sitting Room,  
funded by a Grant from  
The National Trust for Historic  
Preservation.

Consultants:  
Mussey Associates and  
Studio TKM, Inc.





## The Formal Parlor



Early corner cupboard or beaufait, restored. Historic color selection process.







“Preservation is not  
for the faint of  
heart.”—Tony Souza



The Formal Parlor, representing three periods: Georgian, Federal & Greek Revival with modern touches faithful to early construction. Preservation requires a vision toward the possible.







# **Community Engagement & Storytelling**

## **“The Little House with a Big Story to Tell”**

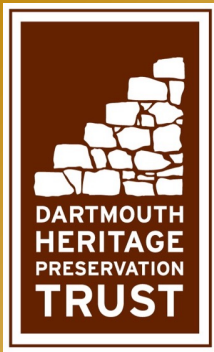
**The people are just as important as the building!**

**They represent the past, the present, and the future.**

**Public house museums or “study” houses quickly lose their luster without attractions to keep visitors coming back. Education programs and events serve to engage the community.**



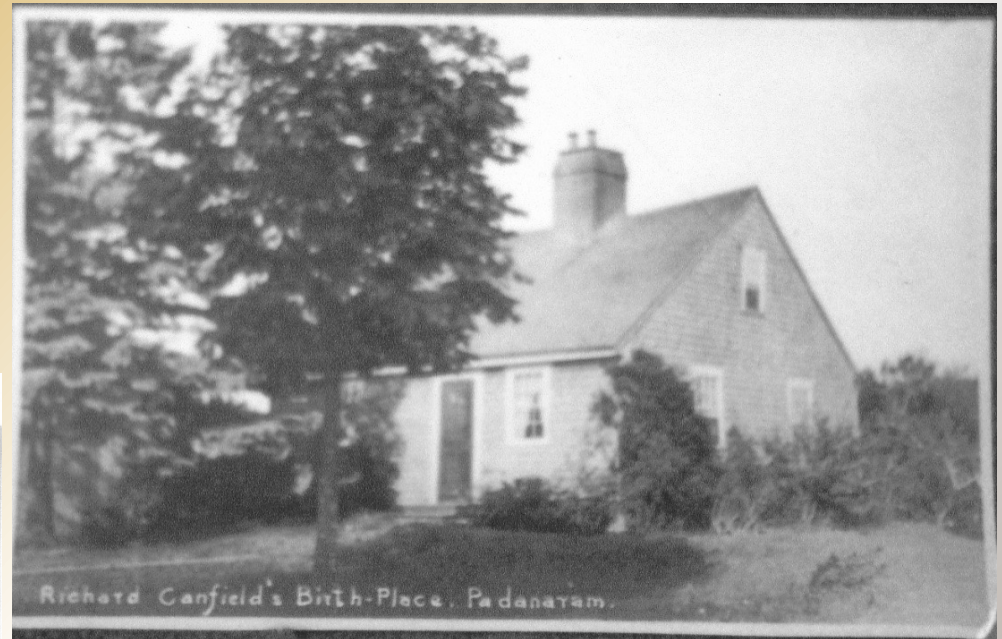




The History of the Akin Ancestors, among Dartmouth's early founders, breathes life into this historic resource.

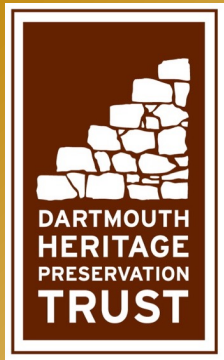


We are fortunate to share the Akin Family Genealogy (family tree) with visitors, rarely found as so complete & comprehensive.



The Akin family descendants touring the Akin House during Dartmouth's 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014. Robert "Larry" Akin is family genealogist.  
 Circa 1920s photographs by Theodosia Chase.



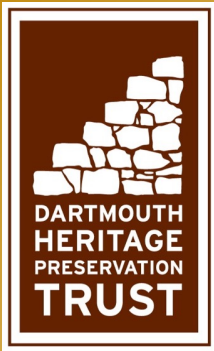


What is found below ground is just as important as what is found above ground.



Archaeological field work conducted in summers 2007, 2008, 2009.





# Community Partnership with Roger Williams University

## *Local History Curriculum Development*



Eight Lesson Plans Developed by Seniors in  
RWU's Elementary Education Program  
in Support of Local History Education in Dartmouth Schools.

2013-14





# Celebration of Dartmouth 350 (2014)







A Treasure Hunt Event for Families at the Akin House in 2015.





## Plans for Future Events: Living History Programming including 18<sup>th</sup> C. Cookery

Left: 18<sup>th</sup> C. cookery in Russell's Mills Village  
in Dartmouth by "Tea to Sea" of Marion.



Above: The Lafayette / Durfee House of Fall River,  
ca. 1750.



The Martin House in Swansea, early 17<sup>th</sup> C.







Testing the functionality of the Akin House cooking Hearth in preparation of cooking demonstrations.

Safety First. Rebuilt according to modern codes. A good draw is everything!



Save the Date: Sunday, June 23, 2019  
“Never Idle Hands” — A Day of Living History.

Demonstrations: Colonial Foodways and Arts & Crafts to Create the Necessities of Daily Living and Survival in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries.







## Interpretative History

**Integral to DHPT's overall strategy to maximize the educational experience of the site, the Akin House will serve as a living history classroom telling particular stories of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> C.—most important, its place during Dartmouth's Revolutionary War era when namesake Elihu Akin (1720-1794) switched alliances from the Crown to the cause for independence, in part influenced by the economics of the time.**

**In September 1778, Akin — a wealthy merchant of the Colonies, a shipbuilder, presumably privateering, a well-known politician, may have lost his holdings when his property was destroyed by Loyalists & the British. In November 1778, he moved to the homestead we now call the Elihu Akin House which he purchased in 1769. He lived there with his wife & family until his death. His descendants inhabited or leased the house until 2003.**





# From One George to Another



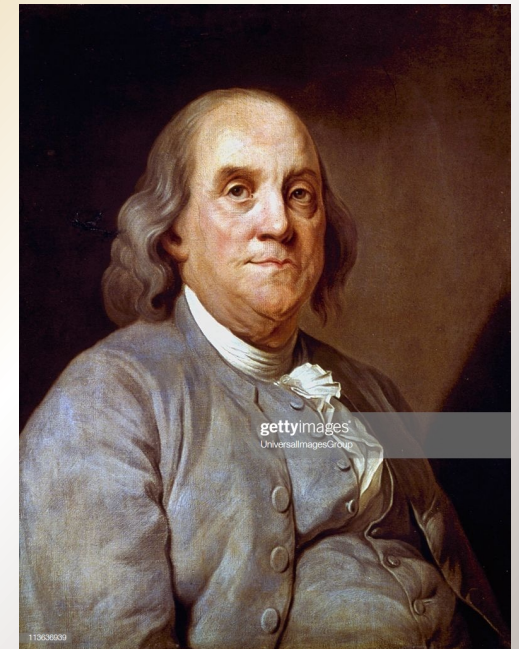
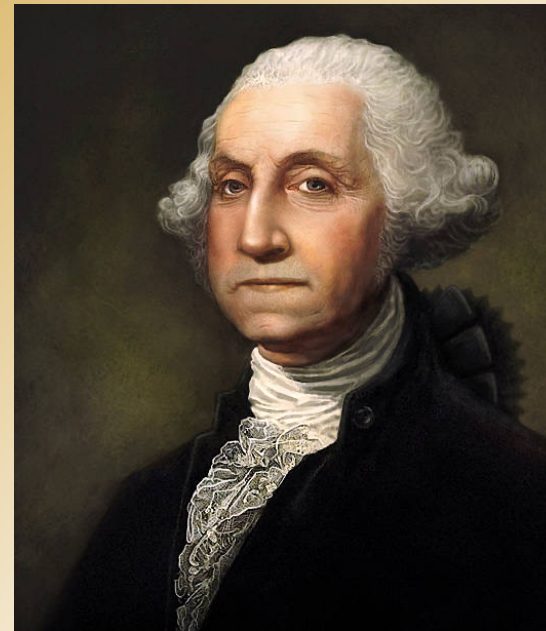
Formal Portrait:  
King George III  
(The Casanova  
Exhibition at  
the MFA  
Fall 2018.)

Allan Ramsay  
British, 1713–1784

*George III*, 1757–58  
Oil on canvas

The British monarch George III (reigned 1760–1820) was indisputably the most elevated figure Casanova met in London. This portrait, painted shortly before he acceded to the throne, shows him in state robes, his coronet as Prince of Wales resting on the table. In fact, the painting helped facilitate the appointment of Ramsay—a Scotsman trained in Italy—in 1761 as the King's official painter. Casanova had arranged for his formal presentation to the new king and Queen Charlotte shortly after his arrival in 1763. He recalled that the king spoke to him in "such a low voice that I could not understand him and had to reply by a bow."

On loan from the Bank of England Museum



The Akin family  
due to their political  
ties had documented  
connections to the  
Founders,  
Benjamin Franklin  
and John Adams.

