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## Long Island

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# Preparing a House for Another 350 Years

By TIM WACKER

CUTCHOGUE

**T**HEY really don't make them like they used to. James F. Grathwohl can show you.

He is chairman of the Old House Society, custodian of the 353-year-old Cutchogue home, which has a sign outside proclaiming it the "oldest English house in the state." Mr. Grathwohl and the society he heads are beginning a renovation of the building that they hope will keep standing for another 350 years. The elements, and an ill-advised restoration done a mere 60 years ago, have taken a toll and now repairs are needed.

Work began last week with the delicate extraction of the first of many windows that will be rebuilt in the first stage of a comprehensive restoration.

"We're trying to get as much background on construction detail from Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts as we possibly can," said Peter Stoutenburgh, owner of Environment East, a Cutchogue-based general contractor specializing in historic home restorations. "We want the restoration to reflect the technology used when the house was built and not the technology of other old homes built later in other parts of the state."

That attention to detail was missing in 1940 when the first serious restoration of the Old House was undertaken, creating many of the problems Mr. Stoutenburgh and company must correct now. In 1940 tar paper, an invention of a later era, and sheathing were used to make the house less drafty and leaky, but those operations caused their own problems, Mr. Stoutenburgh said.

Water that got in through the windows couldn't get out, and now major timbers, windows and the siding must be repaired or replaced. The 1940's restorers also failed to include detailed pictures of the original workmanship they were changing, so Environment East has enlisted the help of Bennett Sykes Blackburn, a master joiner from Peconic, to reproduce that workmanship as close to original design, techniques and materials as possible without knowing exactly how the whole building went together in the first place.

"We're going to make subtle modifications in construction detail that will provide some protection from water, but it's detail you will never see," Mr. Blackburn said.

The early records of the Old House are surprisingly detailed. The builder was John Budd, who promptly handed it to Benjamin Horton as part of a dowry for the marriage of his daughter. Mr. Horton's heirs sold the house to Joseph Wickham in 1699.

When Joseph Wickham's grandson, Parker Wickham, pledged his allegiance to the King during the Revolutionary War, New York State confiscated the house and sold it to Na-



Photographs by Maxine Hicks for The New York Times

Restoration is beginning on the 353-year-old Old House on the green in Cutchogue, above. The main room, right, and a bedroom fireplace, below right. The restoration company has enlisted Bennett Sykes Blackburn, a master joiner from Peconic, to help reproduce some of the woodwork.



thaniel Norton, who sold it again to Jared Landon, the local justice of the peace, in 1790. It stayed in the Landon family for 77 years.

The last to live in the house was the Case family, who moved out around the turn of the last century and converted the house into a barn. In 1936, it came to the attention of the regional Historic American Building Survey, which was making a listing of old houses. The Case family donated the house to the Independent Congregational Society of Cutchogue, which evolved into the Old House Society. In 1940, in preparation for the celebration of Southold Town's 300th anniversary, the town undertook the first restoration of the building and in 1961 the federal Department of Interior designated the house a National Historic Landmark, one of only 50 in the country at that time.

"That designation put the Old House in league with the Capitol

Building, the White House and Mount Vernon," said Mr. Grathwohl. "It would be a crime to let the building go to pot."

June S. Metzner, a member of the Old House Society, said that when the Cases converted the house into a barn around the turn of the last century, they added a barn door and made other changes. The house saw earlier revisions as well. Original, leaded pane casement windows in the building were replaced with double-hung windows, although no is exactly sure when, Ms. Metzner said.

Over time, such revisions may change old buildings to the point that their authenticity can be called into question. It was on this touchy issue that Mr. Grathwohl defended the Old House and its claim to be the oldest English house in the state, even though it was built in 1649 while the Halsey House in Southampton is said to have been built in 1648.

"That house couldn't compare with ours," Mr. Grathwohl said. "It has been redone so many times."

The Old House Society has arranged financing for some of the current restoration but more money is needed, Mr. Grathwohl said. He said that the society was eligible for a matching state grant of \$125,000, federal grants are being sought and corporations will be tapped as well, Mr. Grathwohl said. Donations are also being solicited from the public. Eventually, the building's roof must be rebuilt and the top half of the chimney reconstructed, and that's all going to take more money, Mr. Grathwohl said.

"We're thinking we may have something like a buy-a-brick program," he said. "Maybe we'll have buy-a-clapboard or something like that. It's not an emergency, it's more a general renovation of the building. But these things need to be done."