

**Smith-Stanwood House
(Sparks' Tavern?)
CA 1710, date TBD
6-8 North Main St.
Ipswich, Massachusetts**

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The property resting on the west side of North Main Street adjacent to the John Appleton House (on the corner of Central and North Main) has long been known as the CA 1747 Ebenezer Stanwood House. The building is included as a contributing structure to the Meetinghouse Green National Register District and the Massachusetts Inventory of Historic Places, # 95.

When the 6-8 North Main property was listed, it was included on an area form for the National Register District (Meetinghouse Green). This means that unlike many of the other historic buildings in Ipswich, it did not receive the kind of in-depth study that results in an individual Massachusetts "B" form. Its treatment as part of the district was literally a two-sentence blurb.

Looking at Thomas Franklin Waters' *Ipswich in the Massachusetts Bay Colony*, v. 1 (Salem, Mass.: Ipswich Historical Society) 1905, p. 346, the title chain for this house is not as clear and crisp as is usual. Waters himself may have been slightly confused by the complexity of the early transfers, and the fact that the building was added to so many times.

Waters treats this property beginning on page 345 in volume 1, under "William Fuller." The land grant that includes the 6-8 North Main Street House was made in 1635 to Fuller, a gunsmith. The property was transferred in 1639 to John Knowlton, shoemaker and it included a small dwelling, according to Waters. By 1671 William White owned the property. He sold it that year to John Sparks, "Biskett Baker" February 15, 1671. (Ipswich Deeds 3:216).

The description of the two-acre parcel in the deed reads, "house, barn, orchard, garden and parrocke (paddock?) or inclosure of earable (arable?) land adjoyning." Prior to this purchase Sparks ran an "ordinary" or tavern on leased lands on the site of the present Public Library. In September of 1671, just seven months after he moved into the 6-8 North Main location, Sparks received his first license (for a year) to sell, "beer at a penny a quart, provided he entertain no Town inhabitants, in the night, nor suffer to bring wine or liquor to be drunk in his house."

His establishment was well known. Waters says he kept a "famous hostelry" for twenty years and entertained luminaries such as Judge Sewall. "Officers and soldiers were quartered here in time of danger from Indian attacks."

In 1691 Sparks split his large lot, selling 1 1/2 acres with "messuage or tenement, bake house and barn" to Col. John Wainwright. That this transfer did not include the Sparks Tavern is clear from the later

transfer, in March of 1704-5, when John Roper, acting for the widow Mary Sparks, sold a dwelling to Col. Wainwright.

Here's where it begins to get interesting. In February of 1707-8, Wainwright sold his holdings in this area to Deacon Nathaniel Knowlton, and the sale included two separate dwellings. One dwelling was occupied by Thomas Smith innholder, and the other was occupied by Mary Sparks, widow. It is possible that while we have two separate deeds transferring "dwellings" in reality we have a single structure divided down the middle.

Later deed transfers make clear that the "house" occupied by widow Sparks was the portion closest to the Appleton property at 2 North Main St. Waters speculates that her half of the house might be the "small house" described in the 1639 deed of Fuller to Knowlton.

This portion of the Knowlton holdings went to Ebenezer Smith. The dwelling occupied by Thomas Smith, innholder drops from Waters' discussion. I checked Nathaniel Knowlton's probate record. He died in 1726, and the property at 6-8 North Main St. was not in his inventory. This means that sometime between 1710 and 1726 the dwelling occupied by Thomas Smith passed out of Knowlton's hands. I suspect that it was obtained by Ebenezer, who was Thomas' son, but I cannot be sure. I would need to check the deeds at the Registry to attempt to get more clarity on this point.

A map of the meeting House Green area (in the collection of the Peabody-Essex Museum and reprinted in Waters following page 348) shows a building in the correct spot marked "Taverners Smiths." The use of the plural suggests that in 1717 half the house was occupied by Ebenezer and half by his father Thomas. Waters himself discounts this theory (See Waters 1:350), but I am not yet persuaded that Waters is correct on this point.

This is a long way of saying that I suspect that the southern portion of the present house at 6-8 North Main St. may have been The Sparks Tavern (1671-1705, see Waters 1:345-346).

Waters is clear that in 1747 Ebenezer Smith sold half a house to Ebenezer Stanwood, a peruke maker. The description of the deed cited by Waters suggests that Smith sold the north half of the house, since a cartway on the north side is mentioned (which still exists).

On no evidence I can see, Waters suggests that Stanwood built "the house now occupied by Mr. Chas. S. Brown." Perhaps a look at the deed cited would explain Waters' conclusion on this point.

Here again, half a house goes missing in Waters' analysis – no information is given about the half house still owned by Ebenezer Smith.

Waters implies that the whole house came into the possession of Stanwood who sold to Daniel Rogers in 1766. Rogers' heirs divided the house, which passed through separate title chains. The Anderson map of 1832 shows the widow of Daniel Rogers in residence. By 1856, the Walling map shows Thomas Lord as owner. Interestingly, both maps show another building to the south in between the main house and the Appleton house to the south. In the 1832 map this is identified as the Lyceum. In the 1856 map, no information is given about ownership or use. By 1872 lines of division between properties show a small building in between the Hammat (Appleton) house and the Brown (Smith-Stanwood) house, but on the Hammat property. Whether this is the same building or a different one is unclear. Due to the omissions from Waters' chain of title it is possible that this small building is in fact the old Sparks Tavern.

In any event, the Ipswich map of 1872 shows the Smith-Stanwood house in the ownership of Benjamin C. Brown. By this period a one-story addition had been tacked to the northeast corner of the double house. It continued to appear on maps through at least 1916 (Sanborn map). The 1872 map is the first Ipswich map that gives somewhat reliable renderings of building footprints. This map shows what appears to be the footprint of today's house on North Main, with the exception of the one-story pharmacy on the house's northeast corner (that has been demolished).

Waters says that "Chas. A. Brown" occupied this house when he wrote volume 1 in 1905. Perhaps he meant Charles W. Brown. That is the name that appears on both the 1884 and 1910 maps.

Charles W. Brown is listed as a druggist at 10 North Main St. in the 1888 Agawam Manual and Directory, and maps between 1887 and 1916 show the legends "drugs" and "pharmacy."

I have not studied the fate of the house after 1910. Further research needs to be done in the Registry of Deeds to clarify both its recent history and the chain of title for the very earliest land transfers.

Summary

A very cursory physical examination of the interior of 6-8 North Main Street between 2009 to 2010 suggests that at least a portion of this house is First Period (1625-1725) in its framing method and date of construction. My examination did not include removing the casing from the vertical posts or summer beams in the house, so a more precise date awaits a more thorough inspection.

While it is clear that at least one precursor structure of about 1639 existed on the site, and that the Sparks Tavern also operated there between 1671 and 1691, it is not clear if any material from these earlier incarnations survives in the present building. At the very latest, sometime between 1709 and 1747 when Ebenezer Stanwood acquired a portion of a house from Ebenezer Smith, a structure with First Period framing and decoration was erected on the site.

Because I cannot confirm through Waters' title chain that the very earliest buildings on the site survive and because I have not been able to evaluate the framing beneath the eighteenth century casings, I am suggesting a very conservative build date of about 1710, with a revised name of Smith-Stanwood. I would be able to make a much better assessment of the structure once the casings are (carefully) removed and I can view the frame.

END