

Site
number:

Address Mechanic St. cor. Gardner St.

New tax map(1979)U3 lot 41 size 14,200 sq.
Old tax map 7 lot 62-63 size ft.Owner Wentworth-Gardner & Tobias Lear Assoc
Address c/o Boynton, 70 Court St.
Portsmouth 03801Location of legal description:
Rockingham County Registry of Deeds
Hampton Road; Exeter, New Hampshire
03833Representation in existing surveys:
HABS NR x NHL x
HAER Other NR with Lear House.

Date c. 1760

Source: Estimate Other:
Garvin dissertationHistoric name Wentworth-Gardner House
Common nameOriginal owner Thomas Wentworth
Architect/bldr. John or Richard Mills,
joiner; Ebenezer Dearing, carver.

Functional type house

Present use, if different house museum
and apartment.Moved Date
Altered Restored Date1915 and 1930s.
Effect: Focal x Contributing
non-contributing IntrusionPhoto roll no.
Negative with: Portsmouth Advocates
Description
Date taken by

1. Style Georgian No. of stories 2½ No. of bays 5 x 3

2. Overall plan: Rectangle with added rear ell.

3. Foundation: Brick Stone x Poured concrete Concrete block
Artificial stone Other4. Wall structure: Wood frame x Brick Stone Other
If wood: Post and beam x Balloon frame5. Wall covering: Clapboard x Wood shingle Flushboard x Imitation ashlar
Brick Stone Stucco Composition board Aluminum Vinyl
Sheet metal Asphalt shingles Other

6. Roof: Gable Hip x Shed Mansard Flat Gambrel Other

7. Specific features (location, no., appearance of porches, windows, doors,
chimnies, dormers, ells/wings--see also description), decorative elements:
Georgian central hall plan with 2 rooms on either side. Restored broken
scroll pediment, 9/9 sash, 3 dormer windows with 2 triangular and one segmental-
arched pediments, corner gables. Flushboard facade - triangular pediments over
1st story windows.8. Outbuildings:
2½ - story. Gable-roofed warehouse, end
to Mechanic St. (to left of house).

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Description:

The Wentworth-Gardner Mansion is a typical large Georgian hip-roofed mansion type of the mid-18th century, derived from English pattern books. The 5-bay facade is marked by drafted flushboarding, graduated corner quoins, pedimented center doorway with a gilded pineapple in the interstices. The doorway is flanked by fluted Corinthian pilasters. A modillion cornice supports the projecting eaves. Chimneys exist midway up the right and left roof slopes. There is a 2 story ell on the right side of the rear and with its entrance on the right side. Its rear wall retains c. 1880 decorative shingle work in the gable.

Built c. 1760 by Mark Hunking Wentworth as a gift to his younger son Thomas, the Wentworth-Gardner House was purchased in 1916 by Wallace Nutting who restored it, the interiors having remained largely intact through various 19C transformations. The design is "...a product of local craftsmanship, influenced somewhat by Kent's Designs of Inigo Jones," (Garvin). The carved detailing is very similar to that of the slightly later Moffatt-Ladd house, while being more strictly architectonic in its emphasis. Besides Kent, books which may have influenced the design are Batty Langley's The Builder's Director and Batty and Thomas Langley's The Builder's Jewel. Both illustrate details seen in the house - the Scamozzi Ionic capitals, the composite capital (making its first local appearance here) and the Greek key architrave.

James Garvin suggests that Ebenezer Dearing was the carver in this and the Moffatt-Ladd house. He notes that Dearing purchased lots on (present) Pickering Street in 1766-1767 and proceeded to build his own house in the immediate vicinity of the Wentworth-Gardner house. He goes on to suggest John or Richard Mills as the joiner. The Wentworth-Gardner house is also related architecturally to the Governor John Wentworth house on nearby Pleasant Street, built in 1763 and likewise clearly indebted to Kent's Designs of Inigo Jones.

Significance:

The Wentworth-Gardner house not only exemplifies elaborate Georgian styling in New England, but plays an important role in American architectural history. It is a continuation of the British detached house - type which had emerged a half-century earlier and was successfully transplanted in the South and then New England. Southern examples, particularly Westover, demonstrate a heavy reliance on British-produced components and a much closer affiliation with the mother country.

Wentworth-Gardner House (continued)

Significance (continued):

In mid-18th century Portsmouth, however, there were no imports. No matter how British the structure's design, it was executed by native carvers whose skill and knowledge of their craft was extraordinary.

The structure's decidedly English precedents contrast sharply with the native woodworkers who produced it. In this way it symbolically reflects a paradox inherent in late-colonial New England society (statements from NR form).

Bibliography:

Nutting, Wallace. Wallace Nutting's Biography. Framingham, Mass.: Old America Co., 1936. pp. 146-147.

Garvin, James. Unpublished PhD dissertation (in progress 1982).

Howells, pp. 72-86 including photographs and drawings.

Gurney, 100D and 101f. (photograph of house before restoration).

