

A brief introduction to the Brickett Place

In the Evans notch, white mountain national Forest Service

This one and a half story brick farmhouse, known since it was erected over 160 years ago as the Brickett Place, has long been a landmark at the southern end of Evans Notch, on the New Hampshire- Maine border. Built in an era and a region in which wooden construction was the usual style, this structure is unusual for both its building material and for those times, its size. It is the only building from this era still standing on public land in the Cold River Valley. It has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1982.

Early history

As happened elsewhere in northern New England, Europeans settled first in the valleys of the major rivers in this vicinity- the Saco to the south and the Androscoggin to the north- where towns had been founded before the American Revolution. Gradually, though settlers moved up the valleys of the smaller streams such as the cold River, cleaning the land and establishing farms. In 1807, Josiah Batchelder received a land grant for 28,222 acres in the upper part of the Cold River Valley, from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which then had jurisdiction over Maine. One condition of his grant was that he had to settle at least twenty families on the land. John Brickett, a young man from New Hampshire, was some of those who purchased a tract in Batchelder's Grant and moved there with his wife Catherine, about 1816.

The Bricketts

John and Catherine Brickett gradually opened up their farmland at the end of the road winding up the valley through Stow, Maine and North Chatham, New Hampshire. Beyond their homestead, there was only a rough track, passable on foot or by horse and sleigh in the winter, through the Notch to Gilead, Maine. The Bricketts had themselves in the area. Lucinda Brickett married an Abel Andrews, who built a farmhouse out of split granite blocks, near the foot of Rattlesnake Mountain about two miles from her parents' house. Like the Brickett Place itself, Stone House still stands, but remains in private hands. When John died in 1863, his farm and the house were inherited by his son Gardner Brickett. In 1877, the property was sold, and passed out of the family's possession/

Later history

For a brief period in the 1860's, there was discussion of building a railroad line through Evans notch. These plans were shelved when the chief engineer, John Anderson, who knew the Notch well, reported that the rise in altitude was too great. According to some accounts, Anderson used the height of Royce Mountain as his basis for that rise, deliberately misleading the planners and leave the Notch unspoiled.

After 1977, the Brickett Placer had a series of owners, including the Hastings brothers who lumbered extensively in the Evans Notch region, especially in the Wild River Valley to the north. When their holdings were purchased by the United States Forest Service in 19189, the house became publicly owned. In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps established camps at

Cold River and the village of Hastings, while opening up the present road through the Notch Gilead, and used the Brickett house as its headquarters for the project.

Subsequently, the building was used by the Forest Service itself as a ranger station in the 1930's and early 1940's. From 1948 to 1957, the Appalachian Mountain Club, (under a special use permit, operated it as one of the mountain huts. From 1960 to 1993, it served as a facility for the Boy Scouts of America, and as a youth center, also under special permits, before reverting to the Forest Service in 1993. It is currently being evaluated for renovation and possible use as a visitor information center for this part of the White Mountain National Forest.

A New Perspective on the Past

As part of the forest Service's evaluation of the building and site for future use, an archeological team conducted a series of excavations on the property in the summer of 1994. Over 11,000 artifacts were recovered, including materials from prior renovations and alterations of the building, animal bones and other items discarded by residents, and fragments of different styles of crockery, all of which have helped clarify more of the building's history.

Local historians had long claimed that the present Brickett Place had been erected in 1816, and that John Brickett's choice of bricks made on the site reflected his distance from the nearest sawmill, over twenty miles away on poor roads. The evidence from the archeologists, however, strongly suggest that the house in fact dates from about 1830, and probably replaced an earlier wooden frame or log structure, the remains of which have a long since vanished. While many details of Brickett's story remain unknown to us, the crockery and the comparative elegance of the house, with a number of Greek Revival features in its construction and on the inside, indicate that John Brickett was probably not the "typical" pioneer, struggling to make a living at the edge of the wilderness, but a man of some means, able to erect a substantial house for his growing family and provider them with some comforts and simple luxuries.

Today the Brickett Place I no longer "the house at the end of the road," but standing beside John Brickett's home, with descendants of his orchard seedlings on the hill behind us still bearing fruit, we can experience some of the serenity and beauty which perhaps helped draw him and his young wife to this place.