

John Fiske House
22 Berkeley Street
Cambridge
Middlesex County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-1018

HABS
MASS
9-CAMB
18-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

JOHN FISKE HOUSE

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MASS
9-CAMB
18-

Location: 22 Berkeley Street, Cambridge, Middlesex County,
Massachusetts

Present Owner
and Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. Stanley D. Sheldon

Present Use: Private residence

Statement of
Significance: This was the home of historian John Fiske. The building is conservative in style when compared to the house designed six years later by H.H. Richardson for Fiske's mother, Mrs. Edwin Stoughton (HABS No. MASS-1033).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1877-1878.
2. Architect: Griffith Thomas, 1820-1879.
3. Original and subsequent owners: References are to Middlesex County Registry of Deeds and Probate.

1877 Mary Fiske Stoughton, John Fiske's mother, bought land on Berkeley Street from William Newell. Deed Book 1441, p. 46. House first appeared on city tax records in 1878, assessed to John Fiske.

1892 John Fiske bought adjoining lot of approximately 5400 square feet from Frances B. Newell, widow of William. Deed Book 2161, p. 34. He conveyed this adjoining lot to Mary Fiske Stoughton in 1897. Deed Book 2593, p. 242.

1905 After the deaths of John Fiske and Mary F. Stoughton, Anna Wambaugh bought the land and buildings from the heirs of Mary Stoughton. Deed Book 3168, pp. 464, 465.

1938 At the death of Anna Hemphill Wambaugh, the land and buildings were bequeathed to her husband, Eugene Wambaugh. Probate 221966.

1940 At the death of Eugene Wambaugh, the land and buildings were bequeathed to his daughter, Sarah Wambaugh. Probate 234131.

1956 After the death of Sarah Wambaugh, Stanley D. and Sayre P. Sheldon bought the land and buildings from Mary Wambaugh, executor of the will of Sarah Wambaugh, and her husband, Miles Wambaugh. Deed Book 8722, p. 338.

4. Builder: A Mr. Chesley is referred to in some letters of Fiske's.
5. Original plans and construction: See references to Fiske's letters under primary sources.
6. Alterations and additions: References are to building permits.

1936 (36991) New bathroom created; small window cut.
Mechanic: Harvey L. Betts.

1956 (56005) Kitchen remodeled. No architect given, but the architect was Robert Woods Kennedy, according to the owners. Contractor: The Marian Company.

1967 (66346) Porch repaired and rebuilt. Contractor: E.L. Johnson, Inc.

A few minor architectural changes have been made: west window of kitchen enlarged, glass panel inserted next to kitchen door on south side, third floor has modern partition to separate stair well from hall, rear porch has been rebuilt, and the front porch is to be slightly remodeled.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The house was built for John Fiske, 1842-1901, an historian and active promoter of Darwin's theory of evolution. Fiske served as Librarian of Harvard College from 1872-1879, and traveled throughout the United States giving history lectures. His correspondence reveals that he played a major role in determining the design, layout, and interior detail of 22 Berkeley Street and personally supervised the actual building of the house.

C. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Letters written between 1877 and 1878 from Fiske to his mother and stepfather concerning the building at 22 Berkeley Street.

Letters from Fiske to Griffith Thomas, architect.

Preliminary specifications for carpenter's work at 22 Berkeley Street.

All of these sources are contained in the collection of Fiske papers in the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, Department of Manuscripts, San Marino, California 91108. Xerox copies of letters, etc. relevant to 22 Berkeley Street are available at the Cambridge Historical Commission, 57 Inman Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Allyn, Alice C. "A History of Berkeley Street," Cambridge Historical Society, Publications, Vol. XXI (Proceedings for the Years 1930, 1931), pp. 58-71. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1935.

Page 59 refers to 22 Berkeley Street.

Clarke, John Spencer. The Life and Letters of John Fiske, Vol. II, pp. 80, 94, Boston, 1917.
Exterior photograph and interior photograph of library.

Fisk, Ethel, ed. The Letters of John Fiske. New York, 1940.
Numerous references to 22 Berkeley Street and its construction. On page 534 there is a photograph of John Fiske in his library.

Rettig, Robert Bell. Guide to Cambridge Architecture: Ten Walking Tours. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1969.

Prepared by Susan Maycock
Survey Associate
Cambridge Historical
Commission
June 20, 1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The John Fiske House is a rather conservative mansard-roofed house by Griffith Thomas built between 1877 and 1878.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent; well maintained and restored.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The house is a square block, 40 feet (three bays) x 40 feet, with an ell at the southwest corner, 24 feet x 15 feet, a front porch, a rear porch, and a conservatory. The main block is two-and-a-half stories.

2. Foundations: There are fourteen courses of pressed brick, composed of stretchers with headers every ten rows. The brick rests on a base of gray stone with 45° beveled edges, each stone is approximately 4 feet long. The lower foundation at the cellar entry is coarser brick below grade. The remainder of the foundation below grade is random laid stone walls faced with brick on the interior of the basement.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Flush siding of tongue and groove panels, 3-3/4 inches wide, with corner quoins. Painted light brown.
4. Structural system, framing: Stanley Sheldon, present owner, has studied the construction of the house and reports the following: In remodeling the kitchen, corner posts were found that measured approximately 6 inches x 6 inches and at the corners a 45° brace connected the post with the floor beam above, with pegged mortise and tenon joints; the tenon enters at right angles to the beam above, not at the 45° angle. The outside studs were 2 inches x 6 inches with every third or fourth stud thicker, approximately 4 inches x 6 inches. The exterior walls were composed of the following layers: flush tongue and groove siding, paper (not tarred), rough board, studs, lath, plaster, strap, second lath, and finish plaster. Floor joists are 2 inches x 12 inches and 10 inches on center.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: Front porch is reached by seven risers, with the stairs across the complete width of the porch with balustrades at the edges. This porch is to be remodeled, making the stairs about the size of the entrance opening with the balustrade brought in to the new edge. The porch, approximately 7 feet x 14 feet, has three arched openings at the front; the central arch with a key-stone and one arched opening at each side. The west side porch to the kitchen is reached by six risers and has one turned post to support the roof. Below this the cellar stairs lead down to two entrances, one straight into the main cellar and the other right into the laundry rooms. The rear stoop from the kitchen appears modern, but uses old stone risers. The turned posts of the south side rear porch have been replaced by modern posts which are square and copy those on the conservatory next to the porch. This porch seems to have been planned to extend across most of the south side, but during construction it was decided to make the west half into a conservatory. As evident in the basement, the conservatory floor rests on streetcar rails, flat side up, running east-west, which rest on wider spaced rails, round side up, running north-south.
6. Chimneys: There are three original chimneys, at the edges of the mansard, of brick with inset panels at the top

and a flat stone cap. There is one original plain chimney, barely visible from the ground, near the center of the roof. The fifth stack from the kitchen was rebuilt.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The paired front doors have two panels on each wing, with the upper panel of glass. A large light fills the segmental arch above the door. The rear door from the dining room is a nine panel glass door with one wood panel below the glass. The side door is nine glass panels over two wood panels; the rear door of the kitchen and the door from the conservatory to the porch are the same. There are French doors of six large panes connecting the living room/study to the porch.
- b. Windows and shutters: Over the front porch there are paired, narrow one-over-one light windows, in one enframingent. On the second floor of the east side, at the northeast corner, is a one-over-one light window. The bay window at the southeast corner has one-over-one light windows on each side and double one-over-one light window on the front. The windows of the conservatory are four-over-four lights. At the rear of the kitchen there is a 6-1/2 foot vertical pane by the door (a new addition.) All other windows are two-over-two lights. The window enframingents are simple with a pedimented lintel with a six-lobe convex rosette on the fascia. The sills and pilaster-strip jambs are supported by two brackets. The cellar windows have gray-green stone lintels. There are no shutters now, but a view from ca. 1930 shows the house with shutters.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Mansard roof; the second slope is almost flat and cannot be seen from the street. The roof is covered with greenish-gray rectangular slate.
- b. Cornice, eaves: There are projecting wooden eaves supported by brackets with drops. The brackets are made of three pieces of wood with the center section twice as thick as the two outer sections. The brackets are paired at the corners. The upper edge of the mansard also has a cornice. The ell has a similar arrangement, but the brackets are not paired at the corners and the bracket cutting is simpler.
- c. Dormers: There are three dormers on the front of the house, three on the rear, one on the west, and two on the east. The ell has two dormers on the west,

one on the north, and one on the south.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: There are laundry rooms under the ell with a finished floor. An exit on the south side of the laundry rooms led to a drying yard, according to Mr. Sheldon. The yard has since been removed and the door has been sealed. There is evidence of a large number of coal bins, many still exist, in the main part of the basement. Near the door to the outside is a large built-in icebox. The partition arrangement is set so the laundry rooms and stairs to the kitchen can be locked off from the rest of the cellar and the door to the outside entrance. The basement has brick support pillars and segmental openings. The plan is similar to the first floor plan.
 - b. First floor: Central hall plan with two rooms on the east and one room plus the stairs and a hall to the ell on the west. The dining room is at the far end. The kitchen and a back hall are in the ell.
 - c. Second floor: The plan is the same as the first floor except on the east side the two bedrooms are separated by large wardrobe closets (the master bedroom has the original sink and shelves in this dividing closet). There is a bath and sewing room over the dining room and two servants rooms over the kitchen.
 - d. Third floor: Contains bedrooms and a modern kitchen at the north end of the hall.
 - e. Kitchen ell: Kitchen has been remodeled. Originally there was a pantry with a passage. There is a bathroom under the stairs that was remodeled soon after 1956 by Robert Woods Kennedy, a Cambridge architect. The bathroom originally had a gray marble wash stand, a water closet with oak tank, and lead piping as found throughout the rest of the building.
2. Stairways: The front stairs have runs of twelve risers, four risers, and four risers with a half turn and two landings. The newel post is carved with an elaborate ball finial and the balusters are spirally turned. The stairs to the third floor have runs of eight risers, four risers, and five risers. The rear stairs in the ell are a straight run of fifteen risers with a slight curve with winders at the bottom. The ell is three steps lower than the main house.

3. Flooring: The master bedroom on the second floor has a floor of oak with walnut and cherry edging. The bedroom in the southwest corner of the second floor has northern white ash for the floor. Third floor has hard pine. The main floor has mostly oak floors, except for pine in the reception room in the northwest corner of the house.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings are either painted or papered plaster; the cellar also has a plastered ceiling. The music room, according to Mr. Sheldon, originally had pseudo-damask covering in a magenta color, with a border in yellow paint and a vine and flower frieze. The dining room had William Morris embossed paper of gold tulips which has been removed. A frieze in the dining room had various convivial sayings painted on it by the Wambaughs (1906-1955), such as "grace and good company," but can barely be discerned now below the overpaint. The hall originally had blue flock paper. The reception room walls were white with gold trim. These rooms were refinished by the Sheldons. The ceilings are eleven feet high on all three floors. The music room ceiling has a simple round rosette in the center with a heavy cornice molding at the edge. The hall ceiling has panels, 3 feet x 6 feet, divided by dark strips of wood with a dark molding. The study has a heavy beam ceiling with four drop pendants. The dining room has a lattice-beam ceiling with plaster painted in fruit and foliage pattern with butterflies. The bosses at the intersections of the reeded strips are formed of four acanthus leaves. This ceiling was painted for Fiske after the house was completed. The second floor has simple ceiling moldings and in the bedrooms there is a center rosette, for a gas chandelier, of leaves in a star pattern; the gas butt remains. The third floor ceiling has no medallions or moldings, but is hung from beams in the ceiling.
5. Doorways and doors: All doors are 8-1/2 feet high and made of oak veneer panels. The reception room and music room doors have paired leaves of four panels each. Elsewhere in the house there are single doors of four panels. There is a two-leaf sliding pocket door between the music room and the study. The second floor bathroom by the master bedroom has a door cut into the room through marble veneer. The door from the dining room into the side hall was walled in by the Wambaughs and a new door was cut next to the fireplace directly into the kitchen.
6. Decorative features and trim: There is oak panel wainscoting in the front hall, the second floor hall, the music room, the reception room, and the dining room. The music room has window shutters in reveals. The study has built-in shelving with closed shelves with doors below open shelves.

There is an arch in the hall on the first and second floors, but not on the third floor. The second floor sewing room has built-in shelves and cabinets of red gumwood. Fiske used this room for writing, according to Mr. Sheldon.

7. Hardware: The house was piped for gas (see below). Water pipes, many still in use or in place, have wipe joints. The laundry had soapstone set tubs. Original brass (?) door knobs are on the first floor and white porcelain knobs on the second. The window shutter reveal panels have knobs with relief patterns.
8. Lighting: Most fixtures seem original. There are many gas butts and fixtures throughout the house. In the cellar there is a complete example of the wall gas fixtures that were throughout the house. These gas fixtures had what seems to have been an automatic sparking device of a thin electric wire with one end next to the gas jet which would spark when the gas was turned on. This system was disconnected by Mr. Sheldon. The chandelier of bronze now in the reception room was originally in the music room. The library has a six-arm chandelier, originally gas, with an Italian marble bowl below, added by the Wambaughs. Mr. Sheldon mentioned a photograph of Fiske in his library with a table lamp taking gas from this chandelier. The dining room chandelier has five green etched glass globes around a brass ring with insets of colored glass, now electrified.
9. Heating: The house originally seems to have been heated by fireplaces since the later furnaces vent through these chimneys and there is evidence of changes in the brick to accomodate these pipes. The fireplace in the music room has a colored tile hearth and enframement and a wooden mantel supported on two brackets and pillars. The study fireplace is half oak with a mantel supported by four brackets and elaborate tapered side columns. The fireplace has a red tile enframement with a green hearth border, with some black and white tiles. The fireplace in the dining room is elaborately carved with three lion-like heads and paired turned spindle supports on each side. The reception room fireplace is simple white alabaster supported on two somewhat Romanesque columns with eight-lobe rosette on impost block, similar to exterior window rosettes. The fireplaces on the second and third floors are simple iron grates with tile enframements. The original stove is still in the kitchen, but it now uses oil heat. There is an oil-heated forced hot air furnace and a gravity feed hot water gas furnace.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The front of the house

faces north-northeast. The building is on a spacious lot on the corner of Berkeley Street and Berkeley Place.

2. Landscaping, walks and enclosures: There are some screening shrubs on Berkeley Place and various other trees.
3. Outbuildings: There is a modern garage. Mr. Sheldon notes that there does not appear to have been a carriage house.

Prepared by Daniel D. Reiff
Survey Associate
Cambridge Historical Commission
January 20, 1968

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of a cooperative project between the Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC), Albert B. Wolfe, Chairman, and the Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service. The project followed a previous one conducted during the summer of 1964 under the same auspices and was initiated in September 1967 and completed in June 1969. It was under the general direction of Robert Bell Rettig, Associate Survey Director of the CHC, and James C. Massey, Chief, HABS. Miss Susan Maycock, CHC Survey Associate and graduate student in architectural history at Boston University, was responsible for the historical data; the architectural data was written by Daniel D. Reiff, CHC Survey Associate who was at that time a Harvard University doctoral candidate in the Department of Fine Arts; and the photographs were taken by George M. Cushing, Boston. Certain data was supplied by Dr. Bainbridge Bunting, CHC Survey Director and Professor of Art and Architectural History at the University of New Mexico. The records were edited by Denys Peter Myers, Principal Architectural Historian, HABS, and Deborah Stephens, Architectural Historian, HABS.