

14/15



The North River

The North River, with its quiet, serene waters and golden-green marshes, seems to change every time you look at it. No two views across its banks will be the same – from the thick mist that rises across its surface on cold mornings, to the blinding sparkle that dances across it in the summer sun, to the swath of striking blue-black that cuts through iced-over banks in mid-winter. As many as 10,000 years ago, others were noticing the same phenomenon, and, too, thought the North River to be a special place.

This constantly evolving landmark that winds through Southeastern Massachusetts is rich with history, dating back as far as the nomadic tribes that ventured through its marshes 10,000 years ago. This continued through the Native Americans (locally called the Mattakeesett), to the New England colonists who helped carve its place in history with unprecedented shipbuilding.

First documented mention of the North River, once referred to as the “Great River,” dates back to 1632, when then-Governor Winthrop made particular note in his journal of his trip to the river and its waters’ remarkable speed. In the early 1600s, settlers began to be drawn to the river, clearing land for farms, building houses, and trying their hand in the newly-emerging economy of shipbuilding.



This circa 1890 photograph, looking east from the bridge over the North River, shows the banks along the south side of the river where the shipyards were located.

For over 300 years, the River House has stood overlooking the once mighty North River. The “family tree” of people that have lived on and worked the land along the river has deep roots in Pembroke’s and America’s histories. From colonial times in the 17th and 18th centuries, to the Revolutionary War, the beginning, expanding, and ending of the ship building industry, the Civil War, conversion from a farm to a residence, and the birth of an idea that became a world leading technology, River House has endured and prospered. Her walls have many stories to tell. The Sullivan family invites you to share the history and legacy of River House.

Our Story Starts 10,000 Years Ago

The Native People who first came to the river were “hunter-gatherers” who migrated with the seasons. They wintered in the Blue Hills south of Boston and travelled to the Pembroke area in spring to fish the ponds and streams and hunt waterfowl and other game. They quarried stone in the Blue Hills for tools and weapons. When farming came, approximately 1,200 years ago, they built small villages and planted corn, beans, squash and tobacco. They called themselves the Massawachuseuk (Massa for great, wachus for hill or high place, euk [ett to the British] for at the place). Today we say Massachusetts. Village names like Wessagusett (Weymouth), Ponkapoag (Canton), Shamut (Boston), and Mattakeesett (Pembroke); and street names like Wampatuck, Hobomock, and Maquon, all come from the first people to walk the trails we still use today. The “King’s Highway” in colonial times was the main road from Plymouth to Boston. It is also known as the Massachusetts path. It is the migration trail they used for thousands of years, and we continue to use it every day. From about 1656 to the 1930s, it passed by River House on what is today Washington Street.



Wetu huts served as seasonal homes for Native tribes.

Historical Timeline of River House Ownership

1650 - 1826: John Magoun to Daniel Magoun

1826 - 1903: Daniel Magoun to John Wesley Trafton

1903 - Present Day: Trafton to Holmes to Sullivan.

River House History

1650-1826: John Magoun - Daniel Magoun

Our story begins in Scotland at the Battle of Dunbar, 1650. Oliver Cromwell has defeated King Charles and his army of about 12,000 Scotsmen, in an attempt to retake the throne. Thousands of prisoners are taken on a 100 mile journey, by foot, to Dunham Cathedral in England to be imprisoned. Many die on the way and in the prison. Several hundred of the “lucky” ones are sold into seven-year indentured servitude. Some are sent to sugar plantations in Barbados. About 150 are sent to the “colonies” in America, aboard the ship *Unity* that docks at Charlestown Harbor in Boston in December 1650. Of those, many are sent to the Salem ironworks, and some are “bought” by local farmers and businessmen. They are known as S.P.O.W.’s (Scottish Prisoners of War). John Magoun is truly a lucky one. He ends up in Hingham, with the Hobarts, a prominent family. After several years, he marries Rebecca Hobart. They build a house in what was part of Scituate. It still stands on Water Street in Pembroke. They raise at least five children. His ancestors go on to become famous shipbuilders from the North River in Pembroke, to Medford, Boston and Salem. In 1826, his 5th generation descendant Daniel Magoun will own River House. What follows is a timeline and family histories that make up River House's 300 plus years story.

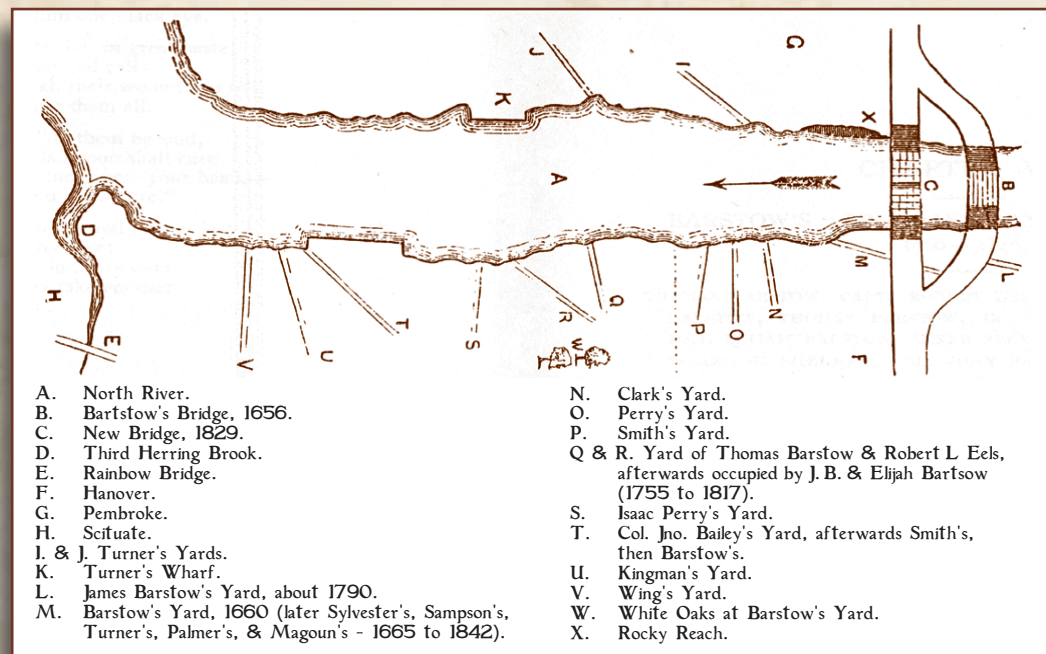


Diagram showing location of shipyards along the North River in Pembroke & Hanover (taken from L. Vernon Briggs' "History of Shipbuilding on the North River")

In 1656, William Barstow builds the first bridge to span the North River, connecting Duxbury to Scituate (today, Pembroke and Hanover). It cuts several miles off the King's Highway between Boston and Plymouth. It is the only road to and from these towns. It also allows access to land on both sides of the river. And so, around 1670, Daniel Turner, son of Humphrey Turner, establishes the first shipyard next to the new bridge. The Turner name will be associated with shipbuilding and River House for almost 200 years. He and his wife, Hannah Randall, raise nine children. They may have had a house next to the shipyard, on the Scituate side. Their daughter Hannah, will marry John Magoun Jr., son of the former S.P.O.W. The shipyard will play a major part in River House history in 1805.

In 1689, Robert Barker Sr. of Duxbury deeds land to his son Robert Jr. that will become the River House property. Robert Jr. sells the land in 1713 to Jonathan (John) Bryant (Briant, Brient, the spelling variations are from Colony deed records). Bryant is a carpenter, and he builds a house, barn and fences, around 1714/15. River House is born. Bryant's wife is Elizabeth Barker, Robert Jr.'s niece.

In 1719, Bryant sells the new house and about 50 acres, for 500 pounds, a considerable price, to Ebenezer Hatch Sr., son of Samuel Hatch, a prominent shipbuilder, and Mary Doty. Her father Edward came on the *Mayflower*. He will not enjoy his new home for long, passing away in 1724, leaving his estate to his young son, Ebenezer Jr. He will marry Sarah Turner, daughter of Charles Turner, and sister of Thomas Turner Sr.



A typical 19th century shipyard.

In 1749, Ebenezer Jr. grants Thomas Turner an easement for a “right of way” to cross his land and access the King’s Highway road and the bridge.

In 1756, Ebenezer Jr. passes away. He leaves his estate to his three daughters: Abigail, wife of Pickles Cushing Jr., Sarah, wife of Samuel Gill Jr., and young Lucy. The widow had been given a 10 year “lease” to stay in the home. In 1766, the house was sold (Benjamin Lincoln acts as Lucy’s guardian for the sale). The buyer, for 333 pounds, 8 shillings, and 6 pence, is Thomas Turner Sr. His wife is Mary Bryant, relative of Jonathan Bryant, builder of River House.

Thomas continues to build ships at Brick Kiln and other yards along the river. Records of most of the ships built pre-Revolutionary War were lost when British troops ransacked the Customs House in Boston. We are fortunate to have L.Vernon Briggs’ book, published in 1889, “*The History of Shipbuilding on the North River*” 1640-1872. He is descended from the Briggs family of shipbuilders, and had access to the records from his family and other yards. It gives the history of not only the ships built, and what yards and builders, but also the histories of all the other industries that grew along the river, including anchor forges.

Benjamin Lincoln will become Major General and Washington’s second in command during the Revolutionary War. He accepts Cornwallis’ surrender at Yorktown, ending the war. He will become Lieutenant Governor to John Hancock, Governor of Massachusetts, and America’s first Secretary of War.



Surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, October 19, 1781.

Thomas Sr. passes away in 1795. He leaves his estate to son Thomas Jr., a Revolutionary War veteran. He rose to the rank of captain. Thomas Jr. continues the family legacy of shipbuilding, and in 1800-1803 he and brother George build three schooners on River House land. When George dies childless, Thomas inherits his property at Brick Kiln. In 1805, he sells part of it to Aaron Magoun, shipbuilder, and descendant of S.P.O.W. John Magoun. Aaron’s son Daniel will own River House in 1826.

Also in 1805, Thomas buys the Judge Benjamin Whitman “mansion”, across the river in Hanover. It comes with 20 acres and a shipyard, the same yard started by his relative, Daniel Turner, around 1670. He pays \$9,000.00 for the property. He also helps his son, Thomas III, and son-in-law Seth Whitman open a store/tavern on the Hanover side of the bridge. Seth and Benjamin are cousins. Seth is married to Thomas Jr.’s daughter Joanna Turner, named after her mother.



Typical Schooner, a ship with at least two masts, with the foremast smaller than the mainmast.

In 1737 Thomas Turner Sr. buys property at Brick Kiln in Pembroke. He is learning the shipbuilding trade from his relative, Captain Benjamin Turner, who established what is believed to be the first yard there, circa 1730. His neighbor is brother in law, Ebenezer Hatch Jr.



*Judge Benjamin Whitman mansion,
on the west side of the North River, in Hanover.*



*The North River bridge,
built in 1829 just east
of the Barstow bridge,
which was built in 1656.*



*The existing bridge,
built in 1904.*

Turner's estate grows to over 500 acres of land and properties in Pembroke and surrounding towns. He has earned the title "Gentleman", reflecting his status as a man of means. However, when he dies in 1808, he is "bankrupt".

In 1807, President Thomas Jefferson enacts the Foreign Trade Embargo Act. The law is an attempt to punish France and England for interfering with American trading ships. The two countries are at war. It was Jefferson's attempt to establish America's place in the world as a major trading partner. It was a complete disaster. It effectively shut down the American economy. No ships were allowed in foreign ports. No new ships were built, and farmers lost their international markets. All aspects were affected. Many ship owners and builders were financially ruined. Thomas Turner did not have the cash reserves to survive the loss of business. When he dies, he leaves debts in excess of \$16,000.

Dozens of creditors file claims for payment against his estate. His son Thomas III and son-in-law Seth Whitman spend years selling off pieces to settle the claims. His widow is granted her "Dower" right to 1/3 of the estate. ("Dower" rights protect widows and date back to English common law.) She retains River House and other parts of the estate. She will sell them all by 1826, when Daniel Magoun buys River House. He is 5th generation descendant of S.P.O.W. John Magoun, and son of Aaron.

Joanna Turner moves in with her son Thomas III in Hanover, a short walk from River House. She dies in 1828, bringing more than 150 years of Turner involvement with River House and the adjacent lands to an end.

Collected to Thomas 1,500 pounds 15/- - - - 16,50
 from Blank and Jonathan Sampson which was deducted }
 from his account against the estate of the deceased - } 43,15
 To 24 tons 153 feet of iron bar sold Kingman & Hayward which }
 was deducted from their account against Thomas Turner deceased } 115,91
 To probate fees - - - - - 15,33
 \$ 16620,25
 Amount of C^t brought down - - - 13364,22
 \$ 3256,13
 Errors excepted 1
 Thomas Turner
 Seth Whitman
 Plymouth, N.H. March 1st 1813 The foregoing account having been duly
 examined and found to be hereby allowed - J Thomas J Prob
 A true Copy of the Original on File
 Attest. Bezor Hayward Reg. Prob

*Document listing debts,
signed by Thomas Turner.*

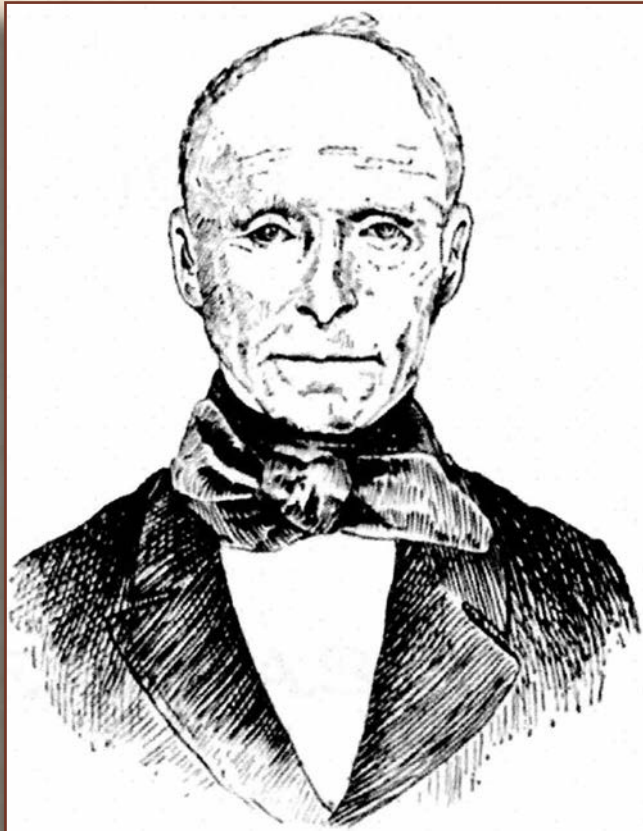
1826-1903: Magoun-Trafton

Daniel Magoun, son of Aaron Magoun, master shipbuilder, 5th generation descendant of George Soule of the *Mayflower*, as well as 5th generation descendant of S.P.O.W. John Magoun, grew up a short walk from River House. His family knew and did business with all the Turners building along the river. Over a period of years, he has been buying up pieces of the Thomas Turner estate. In 1826, he buys River House from the widow Joanna Turner. He continues to buy until he has restored most of the original estate, from the bridge, up Washington street to the Friends meeting house, to Brick Kiln lane. He is listed as a ship owner and a gentleman in various deeds. During his lifetime, he sees shipbuilding along the river come to an end. The shallow channel is insufficient to support the call for larger ships being built at yards in Medford and Salem. Attempts to receive funds from Congress for dredging fail. The money goes to a shipyard in Virginia, along the James River.

Daniel farms the land, growing potatoes, hay, Indian corn, and barley. The barley is an important component of making beer. As Daniel gets older, his son-in-law Lorenzo

Sherman and Lorenzo's wife, Susan Magoun Sherman move in to help run the farm. Their young son Daniel will sell River house to Captain John Wesley Trafton, in 1903.

The 1865 census has Lorenzo listed as a carpenter. He is an 8th generation descendant of both John Alden and Myles Standish of the *Mayflower*.



The last launching on the North River - the Schooner Helen M Foster, 1871.

Daniel Magoun dies in 1869. His will stipulates that wife Mary inherits his entire estate, with two exceptions. Daughter Susan Sherman and granddaughter Susan Chamberlain each get \$5.00, paid within one year of his death.

Mary Magoun dies in 1875 leaving no will, but both Susan Sherman and Susan Chamberlain signed an authorization of administrative agreement. In 1876, Susan and Lorenzo Sherman buy the estate from granddaughter Susan Chamberlain for \$1,420.00. It is listed as 55 acres and 7 acres of woodland.

The 1880 agricultural census lists Lorenzo Sherman as a farmer, and his son Daniel as a brick mason. Lorenzo's mother, Grace Hatch Sherman, is living with them. She is a descendant of Ebenezer Hatch, the 2nd owner of River House (in 1719). The buildings are valued at \$3,000.00, with ten acres of woodland, 9 acres of unimproved land, 25 acres of orchards or vineyards and 20 acres of "tilled land".

Lorenzo dies in 1897, leaving his widow Susan and son Daniel to work the farm. As Susan's health deteriorates, she is moved to the Pembroke Almshouse on Mattakesett Street. It is being used as an asylum for the "insane". She dies there in 1902, of "paralysis", probably caused by a stroke. Daniel sells River House in 1903 to Captain John Wesley Trafton, Civil War veteran.

And so, more than two hundred and thirty years of Barker, Bryant, Hatch, Turner, and Magoun families living and working on the North River, and living on or near River House comes to an end. A new chapter begins.

1903 - Present Day: Trafton - Sullivan

John Wesley Trafton was born in 1839 in Hallowell, Maine. His family moved to Springfield, Massachusetts. He enrolled in the Union Army and was wounded in an engagement in South Carolina. He was transferred to Boston, where he was a recruiter. He enlisted many members of the Mass. 54th Regiment, the all black unit, whose story is told in the movie *Glory*, starring Denzel Washington and Morgan Freeman. A memorial sculpted by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, commemorating the 54th Regiment, stands in Boston opposite 24 Beacon Street on Boston Common.



Mass. 54th Regiment memorial.



Civil War possessions owned by John Trafton, including his photo.

After the war, Trafton worked at the Custom House, in Boston. At the time he buys River House in 1903, he is under a cloud of suspicion of committing fraud. The case of improper duties on cotton goods imported from Scotland involves two years, from 1901 to 1903. He is convicted after a long trial, and serves 20 months in federal prison in Dedham.

He dies in 1914, and his son Mark sells River House to Charles G. Sunergren, a Swedish immigrant and naturalized citizen. The 1910 census has Sunergren living in Arlington, where he is an engraver, with his own office. His wife Mary is from Rhode Island, and is an 8th generation descendant of George Soule of the *Mayflower*.

The 1930 census has them living at River House, with their son Ralph, a World War I vet. He is an insurance salesman. The property is valued at \$6,000.00, and is not a farm.

In 1936, daughter Mary Sunergren sells River House to Willis Gerald and Sarah Canfield Holmes. He is an electrical engineer. In 1938 in a barn on the property, he works on an idea that will become Protectowire. In the 1960s, ownership of the company transfers to the Sullivan family, and the River House and Protectowire are today owned and operated by Andrew Sullivan and family.

And so, a new chapter in the continuing history of River House continues. The Sullivan family are mindful of those who came before them, and committed to protect and share their stories.



The River House barn, site of the Protectowire Company until the new factory was built in 2013.



River House Architecture

Along the banks of the North River is the Turner estate, known locally as River House, though also referred to in the past as the “many windowed mansion” and “Stillwater Farm.” It was built in 1715 and purchased in 1766 by Thomas Turner Sr., who with his family played host to many prominent historical figures, including business associate and friend John Hancock. Local folklore claims the house is haunted — carrying a supernatural aura that even 21st century inhabitants recognize and respect.

Construction

The 1715 two-story Georgian colonial features the classic nine-window façade and center entrance and chimney. Ornamental wooden quoins flank each corner, giving the appearance of stone — a trademark of Georgian style architecture. The front foyer, with its long, narrow window seats, marked a home of prestige, giving the Turner house the nickname, “the many windowed mansion.” In fact, seventy-two original panes of glass have remained intact throughout the years. There is also an unusual pillared back entrance to the house with dentil molding, leading to what was once the office of the Turner Shipyards, used most likely to conduct business, keeping shipyard workers from using the main entrance.

The interior of the home is just as distinct and historically significant. Just off the center entrance, with its secret hiding space under the stairs, was Thomas Turner’s office complete with built-in corner cupboard, perhaps once used to house important ship documents. The kitchen features original 1715 gunstock corner posts and ceiling beams. The massive center chimney features five connecting fireplaces — one complete with beehive oven — most flanked by hand-carved wood panels. Several of the home’s floors are still 12”-20” wide white pine.



River House Today

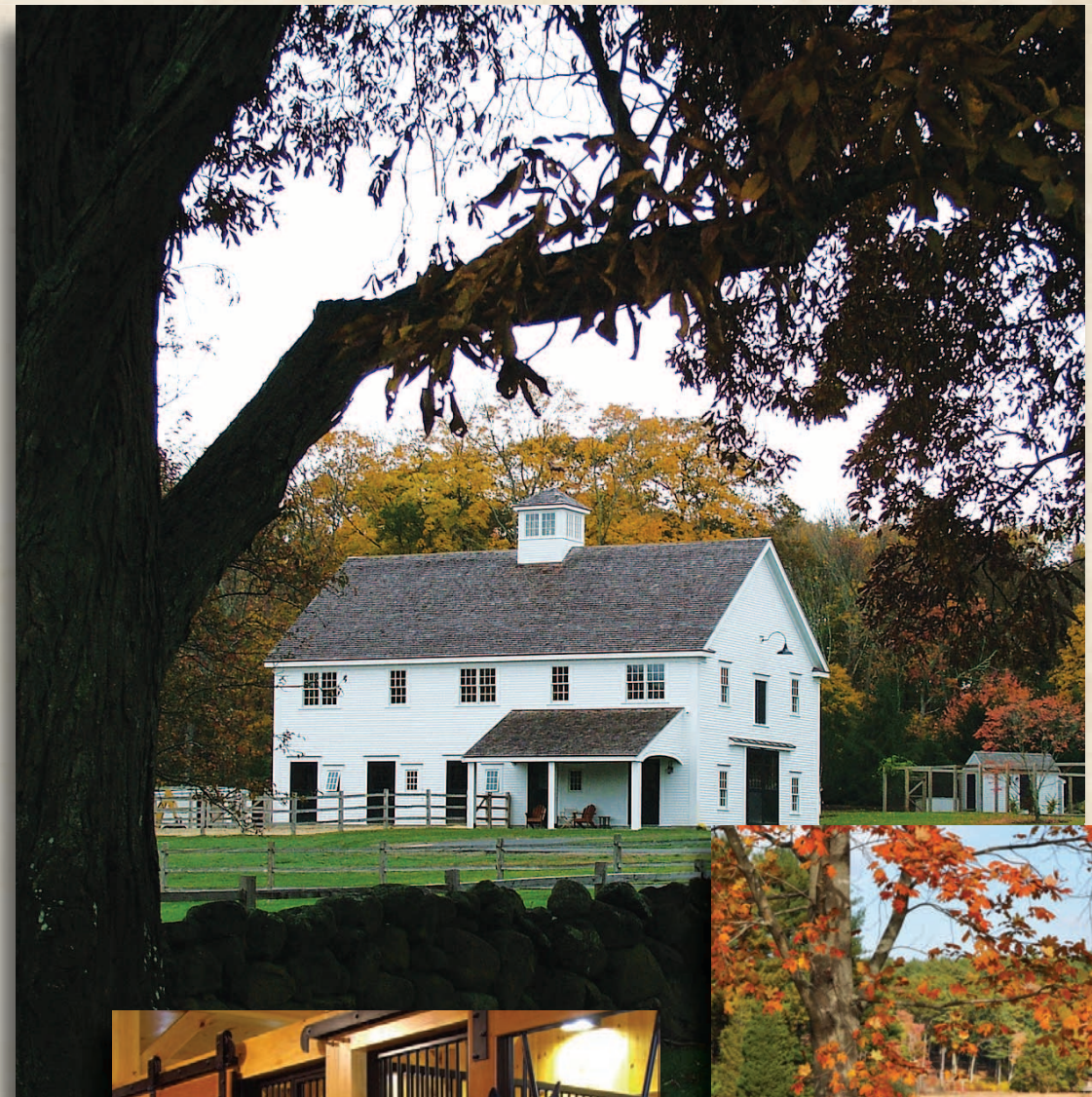
Much of the home's original Georgian and Federal period features remain carefully preserved. When John and Carol Sullivan purchased the home in 1968, they vowed to renovate the house in a true-to-history manner, keeping the wood paneling, built-in cupboards, and wooden ceiling beams exposed. (Carol also brought someone in to quiet the occasional supernatural visitors.) Their son, Andrew Sullivan, now owner of the home, was determined to continue restoring the home to its original appearance, so much so that he brought in expert masons to help discover — and then uncover — the main fireplace's original large beehive oven found in the very back of the hearth behind a more modern one that had covered it. Andrew has also carefully planned the property's additions and upgrades to modern amenities so that they blend seamlessly with the original main house.



Stillwater Farm

Since the River House was built in 1715, the surrounding property has been used as farm and pastureland. Before Thomas Turner Sr. bought the property in 1766, yeoman farmers Ebenezer Hatch Sr. and Ebenezer Hatch Jr. grew corn and raised cattle and pigs on the land. A 1795 inventory of Thomas Turner Sr.'s estate reveals that cows, sheep, and pigs roamed the Turner estate. Turner's barn housed dozens of bushels of corn and rye. In the 1800s, Daniel Magoun and his heirs at the River House farmed between 30 and 50 acres of land annually. Aside from the usual cattle, sheep, and pig meat, the Magoun farm produced butter, eggs, Indian corn, Irish potatoes, rye, oats, cranberries, and apples.

Carrying on this tradition, we have constructed a 40' x 60' classic New England style post and beam barn to house our prize stable of Freisian horses. Acreage has also been cleared to provide pastures and riding trails. The farm includes a coop full of chickens, several goats, turkeys, and extensive fruit and vegetable gardens. Our three children enjoy experiencing this farm atmosphere with us, and we take pride in preserving this special property and continuing the traditions established over the centuries.



River House Family

My family and I are so very fortunate to live in a wonderful corner of the world, along the scenic North River. While I have accumulated more than 4 million miles of lifetime travel, all around the globe, I am always happiest and most at peace here at home.

The history surrounding River House and the folks that lived here has always fascinated me, and it continues to unfold as time goes by. I am always watching for the opportunity to uncover a random piece of the puzzle that is our home, and may explain a certain detail of the construction of the house, or its surroundings.

