

ALEXANDER KNIGHT HOUSE

The PROJECT

The Alexander Knight House project represents the collaborative efforts of a group of passionate individuals. Restoration specialist James Whidden, housewright, and local architect Mathew Cummings have assembled a diverse team of skilled craftsmen, historians, and artists to build an authentic re-creation of an early, English-style timber frame house from 1657 as described in Ipswich town records.

The project was inspired by the team's respect for history, love of building, and a desire to make a lasting contribution to Ipswich's historical legacy. Between them, Whidden and Cummings have restored many of Ipswich's most impressive and important historical homes. The restoration process oftentimes reveals unseen details beneath the layers; examination and consideration provide unique insight and knowledge.

The Alexander Knight House Team will make a gift of the completed building to the Ipswich Museum. The donated structure will become a permanent exhibit on the grounds of the 1677 Whipple House.



The Alexander Knight House will provide visitors, students and scholars a chance to see and experience everyday life of the "middling sort" in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Special hands-on opportunities, like open hearth cooking displays, will be possible in this re-created house; in a way that the Museum's historic and fragile buildings cannot accommodate.



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The TEAM



The AKH Team, along with a generous donation (used for materials only) are working to provide this gift of the past to the Ipswich Museum for present and future citizens.

James D. Whidden: Proprietor, James Whidden ~ Woodwright, LLC. A master housewright for over 20 years.
www.jameswhiddenwoodwright.com

Matthew Cummings: Principal, Cummings Architects, LLC, an award winning firm with over four hundred completed projects. Mat is also VP of the Ipswich Museum.
www.cummingsarchitects.com

Richard Irons: Principal, Restoration Masons. Richard has over 35 years of exceptional dedication to preserving, restoring, and reproducing historic masonry.

Susan S. Nelson: Principal, Goodship Research. Susan is an Architectural Historian and renowned expert on all facets of Ipswich history.

Timothy Chouinard: Principal, C.H.S. Landscape Concepts. Tim has over 26 years of experience combining walls, patios, walkways, and water features into custom environments.

Cynda Warren Joyce: Proprietor, CWJ Designs. Cynda provides documentation of the project, photos, video, text, and designs and maintains the website.
www.cwjdesigns.com

The Ipswich Museum has extensive collections of fine and decorative art that celebrates the historical and architectural significance of Ipswich. The museum is anchored by two important properties: the 1677 Whipple House and the 1800 Heard House. Both properties are filled with original architectural detail, furnishings, and artifacts that give visitors an intimate glimpse into the lives of early Ipswich residents.
54 South Main Street, Ipswich, MA 01938
www.ipswichmuseum.org



ALEXANDER KNIGHT HOUSE 1657



A Re-Creation First Period Timber-Framed House



Work and Exhibit Schedule at
www.ipswichknighthouse.org

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The **HISTORY**

The rise and fall of Alexander Knight, one of Ipswich's first settlers (1635), is an intriguing tale in the Massachusetts Bay Colony's history. Knight, thought to be a prosperous innkeeper from Chelmsford, England, immigrated to the Bay Colony with wife Anne (Hannah) Tuttle. Knight's first home was on Meeting House Green near many of Ipswich's most prominent residents.

In 1648, however, Knight experienced a rapid decline in fortune. While there is some mystery surrounding the incident, we know that Knight's infant son Nathaniel burned to death when his clothes caught on fire. The Essex County Quarterly Courts fined Knight heavily in March of 1654 for "carelessness in not preventing fire after warning." It is possible that Knight himself was injured in the fire and probable that his house was lost.

In January 1656 Aron Pengry, who boarded Knight and his family, asked the Town to end the arrangement. At the April Town Meeting of 1657, the Town voted to provide housing for Knight and his family "whereas Alexander Knight... is altogether destitute, his wife alsoe neare her tyme."



The original April Town Meeting of 1657 document from the Town of Ipswich records.

It was unusual for a Town to provide a dwelling house for a pauper. Secondly, this unique Town Record gives us a glimpse of what the ordinary houses of the first half of the seventeenth century must have been like. If originally built as planned, the house would have been a modest 16' x 12' single-story building, probably with only one room and possibly with a loft space for storage.

Knight's death records in 1664 indicate a man with few possessions. Most of his estate comprised the land grants made to him when he arrived in Ipswich.

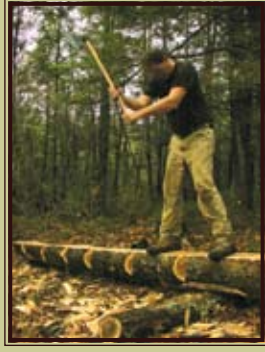
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The **BUILDING**

The team building the Alexander Knight House will be using traditional materials, tools, and methods of First Period builders during all phases of construction. While typical, modest, early homes like the Knight House rarely survived, the process of creating them has. These are key elements of early houses and some of the skills that will be on display during construction.

Trees

White Oak was the choice for New England builders as it was very strong, rot resistant, and familiar to them as a cousin of the English Brown Oak. The forest provided the best trees for hewing, without lower branches, or knots. Trees were chopped, hewn, and dressed where they fell. Knowledge and skill was required to cut the English style joinery which was chiseled and sawn into the timber, scribed, fitted and numbered. Shaved pegs (trenails) held the joinery in place.



Frame

The traditional housewright must fully envision a frame before raising it. Having the pieces meet in the correct order was critical as the joinery locked the completed frame. Jowled posts, girts, and braces were fitted to form an end wall. Plates, studs, joists, principal rafters and purlins could then be pegged in place to complete the frame.

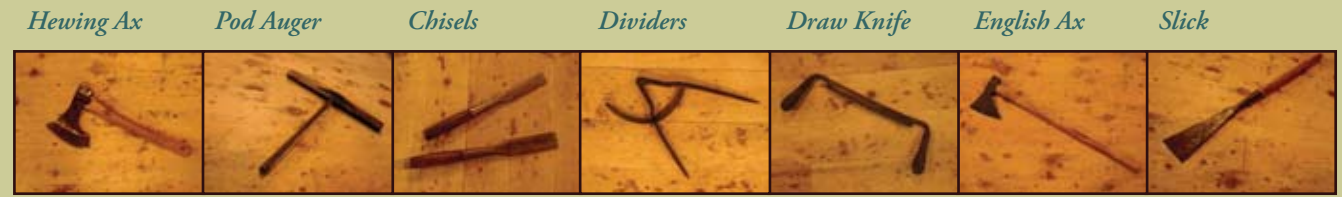


Foundation

The hole was a shallow excavation with a deeper portion for use as a root cellar. The walls were built of dry laid local stone.



English Carpentry Tools



Roof

Steep pitches were necessary for thatched roofs (common in the early settlement period) and also provided more loft space. Thatch was rapidly replaced by hand-split shingles.



Sheathing

Horizontal boards, nailed to the frame, kept out the harsh New England weather. A steep bevel, cut for lapping purposes, was scribed along the edges of white pine allowing the boards to fit tightly together.

Doors and Windows

Early houses had a plank door of clinch nailed, shiplapped boards, built on site. Window sash might be added later; an oilcloth or shutter would often suffice. Glass was imported and expensive—a luxury.



Hardware

Wrought iron Suffolk thumb latches, hinges and nails were imported from England or forged locally.

Chimneys

Built of brick or "wattle and daub" (riven oak and clay), chimneys were vital. Fires were constantly burning for cooking and washing; the heat did little to supply winter comfort.