

77 Lancaster Historical Society Wilder-Holton House Museum

Town of Lancaster, Coös County, New Hampshire

The Lancaster Historical Society is located at the Wilder-Holton House Museum, at 226 Main Street at the junction of US Route 2 and US Route 3 in Lancaster, New Hampshire. Given the historical significance of the Wilder-Holton House, it is fitting that the Lancaster Historical Society is located within its walls. The Wilder-Holton House was the first two-story house built in Coös County, and is now considered to be the oldest house in the county. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in the summer of 1975.



The house was constructed by its original owner, Major Jonas Wilder, who began construction on May 19, 1780. This date is significant because it was the date of New England's "Dark Day," referring to a darkening of the sky caused by what is now believed to have been a combination of forest fires, fog, and cloud coverage. Candles were required from noon through the entire next day. The darkness halted construction temporarily.

Boards and the nails used to build the Wilder-Holton House were planed and wrought on site. The building is a great example of the typical Northern New England Colonial farm house: a two story clapboard structure that is basically cubic in volume; protected from the elements by a hipped roof; windows outlined by Indian shutters; and simply, yet elegantly, detailed and designed. Originally, a seven fireplace chimney was present in the interior of the building (now only three fireplaces remain). A number of changes to the interior of the building were made between 1893 and 1915.

After its construction, the house became the anchor of an 800-acre farm that included several large barns and sheds and was eventually acquired by the Holton family. Active farming on the property ceased after a large barn fire destroyed most of the outbuildings in 1917.

From its 1780 completion to the early 1790s, the Wilder-Holton House served as a place for town and church meetings. Beginning in 1810, and for many years afterward, it was used as a boarding house when the court across the street was in session. Because the owner was a known and ardent abolitionist, it's widely acknowledged that the Wilder-Holton House probably served as a point on the Underground Railroad.

Despite pressures to sacrifice their property, the Holton family preserved the Wilder-Holton House for almost 160 years, until they decided to pass it on to the Lancaster Historical Society in the late 1960s.

Sources:

History of Coös County, New Hampshire. W.A. Fergusson & Co, Syracuse, 1888. Print.
<<http://ia700402.us.archive.org/28/items/historyofcooscou00merr/historyofcooscou00merr.pdf>>

National Register of Historic Places. Wilder-Holton House. Town of Lancaster. Coös County. New Hampshire. National Register #75000231. <http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/75000231.pdf>

McMurry, E.R., *et al.* Fire scars reveal source of New England's 1780 Dark Day. *International Journal of Wildland Fire*, Vol. 16 (3), p. 266-270. Published online July 3, 2007.< <http://www.publish.csiro.au/paper/WF05095.htm>>

New England's Dark Day. (2013, March 30). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 14:26, May 22, 2013, from http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=New_England%27s_Dark_Day&oldid=547821208

Costine, Cecile M.. "Wilder-Holton House." *Connecticut River Joint Commission, Inc.* Connecticut River Joint Commission, Inc., June 11, 1975. Web. Accessed, May 22, 2013, L. Morrow. <http://crjc.org/heritage/N20-5.htm>