

THE OVERVIEW OF THE JOB LANE HOUSE PARLOR RUFUS PORTER MURALS

Rufus Porter lived in Billerica, Massachusetts between 1823 and 1849, He was born in West Boxford on May 1, 1792. In 1824, he began traveling throughout New England painting mural landscapes.

As an itinerant painter, he must have traveled to Bedford, meeting Oliver Abbott, who in 1827 lived at the house now known as the Deacon Job Lane House, also the Job Lane Farm Museum house located at 295 North Road, Bedford, Massachusetts. This is Route 4, the road to and from Billerica. Oliver was deeded the house from Stephen Lane, and this was the youngest of the children, possibly his favorite. He married twice and enlarged the house, but we do not know whether it was for his first or second wife.

The point is, he was a magistrate and may have had man at the house, so appearance was important. Or we could say as Rufus Porter said, painting walls was cheaper than wallpaper, and no bugs would get behind the murals like they would wallpaper.

The murals in the Parlor are not signed but the mere fact that Rufus Porter was living only miles away ~ he could have seen the house being enlarged and Oliver commissioned him to paint the murals.

We would be remiss if I did not also mention that several homes in Bedford also have Rufus Porter murals, but not whole walls as we have at the Job Lane House. Some are on stairways, others on one wall only and some have badly faded.

Back to our house. The Town of Bedford bought the house in 1973, from Louise K. Brown, the Bedford Town Historian at the time, who had bought the house from Olive (Dutton) Nolin in 1972. Olive's mother was Lillian Dutton, the last inhabitant of the house and the herb garden is dedicated to her. Lillian Dutton supported herself and her daughters Elinor and Olive after he husband died with a mail order herb business. Olive tells how her mother covered those murals, once she uncovered them, but never repapered the room again. She realized it was something special, so she covered up the walls with one layer of wallpaper. The sample of this wallpaper is behind the door that leads into the front hall. We saved it and this section of wall, as the paper was removed, and it is under Plexiglas. The murals have not been restored here.

The murals were restored in 1978 by Kathryn Wyatt Carey, Conservator, and a full report dated October 8, 1978, is on file.

PARLOR: 1820's

The Parlor in the Job Lane House was added 100 years after the house was built. It has Rufus Porter murals on the walls. Porter was an itinerant painter from Billerica. He said paint was “cheaper than wallpaper” and bugs didn’t get behind it. It is a mono-chromatic painting. It was covered twice with wallpaper. The first time it was stuck on with animal glue. One piece of wallpaper that was removed has a picture of a house on the back. We framed this piece of wallpaper.

The murals were restored and are now uncovered for you to enjoy. The room has a certain warmth with all four walls beautifully painted and restored. For example, we have a Robert Fulton steamboat on one wall, and experts have said that this dates the mural with great certainty and our steamboat is hand drawn, where most of the other drawings are made with stencils.

We have a beautiful video showing the other homes painted by Rufus Porter, created by: Polly Forcier. Also, please visit the Rufus Porter Museum in Bridgeton Maine, and at: www.rufusportermuseum.org/

Below is an image of a Rufus Porter mural piece at the Job Lane Farm Museum.



Jeannette Pothier
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