H.S. and Eliza J. Gray of Nameless, TX: Part II, Documenting the Gray House

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This is Part II of a larger project documenting H.S. and Eliza J. Gray, early settlers to the Fairview community, later renamed Nameless, TX. This part focuses on documenting the house believed built by the Gray's ca. 1876 then lived in by various families until at least 1964.

If you haven't already, you might want start with an overview in Part I**.**

As work continues and we make visits to the house, additional photos and notes are being made; for simplicity these are documented at the end of this document so do skip ahead for the latest. Outline of what follows:

- **Overview**
- **Architecture**
- **More Photos**
- **Update 11/11/2023**
- **Update 12/23/2024**

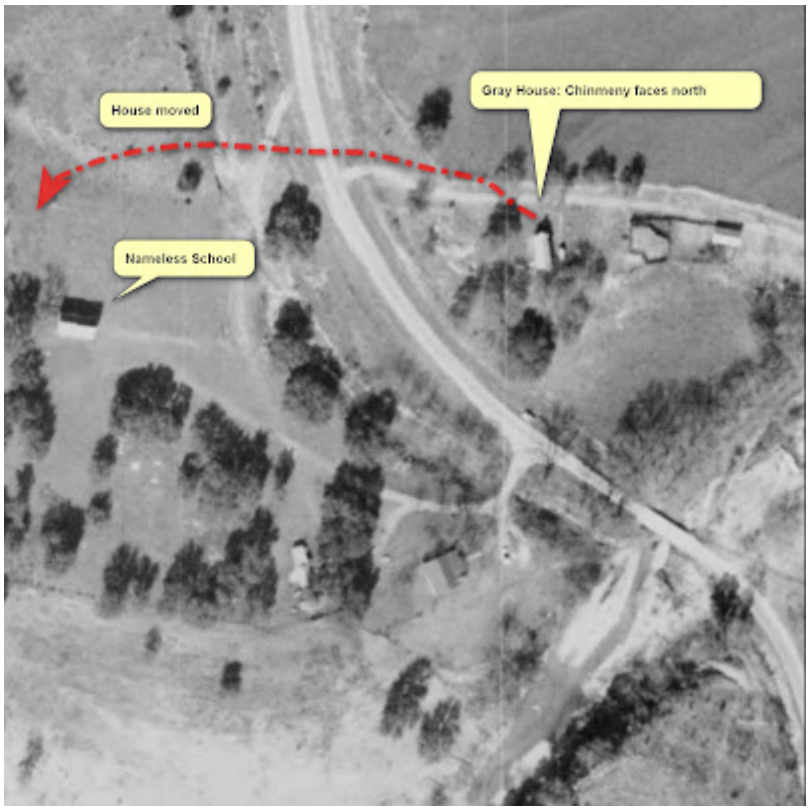
Overview

October 10, 2023 the Turner / Bonnet / Gray house was moved to the county property directly across Nameless Road where Nameless School and Cemetery are located. As there was little time for documenting the house before it was moved (it needed to be moved to make way for construction) this part will focus on what we learn about the house architecture going forward. Friends of Nameless School have plans for stabilizing / restoring the house and new discoveries are sure to be made. See this news video about the move itself https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nANKwuIHh7k

NOTE: References to north, south, east and west are per the original location: oriented long axis north and south, chimney to north, west side facing Nameless Rd. Will use for orientation even after the move (and the post-move orientation renames close to the original). See 1964 aerial below. The house is generally oriented the same at the new location. Also, just to make life easier after the move, any reference to "front" or "back" will refer to the house as it now rests at Nameless School.



1937 aerial. In comparing this image with the 1964 a couple of things of note. In 1937 the east side of the house had a porch and patio cover. The concrete steps on the west side are absent. Also, the hip roof building south of the Gray house is gone in 1964, replaced by the Turner house. We still don't know what this building was.



1964 aerial showing house before move, chimney facing north. Arrow shows general location to which the house was moved in 2023. The orientation is close to the same: i.e. chimney side generally facing north.


House as it sits at Nameless School. For ease of reference, this is the "front" (formerly east side) vs. the back (formerly the west side). Chimney in this photo was to the right (formerly north).

Architecture

Dogtrot, pier and beams. The cabin's architecture seems to be dogtrot, AKA dog-run, later enclosed, sitting on hand hewn pier and beams. Some beams are obviously a sizeable tree about 14-16' in length, rough hewn by hand. Some piers had cut nails in *matching alignment* to suggest they were used to hold probably a skirt around the building; i.e. the piers were not re-purposed from pre-existing lumber that happened to have cut nails. More cut nails were located on beams by the fireplace. A thorough check of the house will likely turn up more.

Chimney. In Texas, Jordan (p.134) says "After the Civil War, and particularly after about 1875, most log houses were built without chimneys "having been replaced e.g. by wood-burning stoves for cooking and heating. Jordan says "The art and craft of chimney building was in severe decline by 1900 .. The chimneys that survive on Texas log houses, and a great many do, are pleasant reminders that craftsmen once passed this way. But in common with all aspects of log folk architecture, these fine chimneys are endangered and inadequately protected for the future."

For buildings with chimneys, Rehder (p.14) says of Tennessee log buildings, a chimney may aid gauging age, stone chimney usually being older than brick. One would assume this rule of thumb applies to Texas as well.

Jordan (p.125) notes the chimney and fireplace of the Anglo-built log dwelling in Texas are nearly always situated at the center on one of the gable walls, with the chimney extending up to and above the peak of the gable. The chimney structure is exterior to the log wall, necessitating the previously mentioned fireplace gap ... [and] Often a large stone served as the hearth...". This matches the architecture of the Gray cabin: A large stone chimney was located on the north gable. Though collapsed, the large limestone hearth was still intact as was the chimney foundation up to floor level.

One interesting feature of some of the stone in the chimney; they included a decorative criss-cross pattern like that on a step from the post-office, preserved and on display at the Nameless School. Genny's book attributes this decoration to Avery Briggs a local resident and stone mason. What is interesting is that the same pattern appears on photos of the John Jolly Cabin (old Jollyville) chimney. That cabin was moved to Pioneer Farms without the chimney, but a photo at the Austin History Center clearly shows the pattern. The John Jolly Cabin ca. 1866 suggests Avery might have been too young, but his father James certainly could have worked on the Jolly chimney. Is this a makers mark? Avery's son later lived in Jollyville.



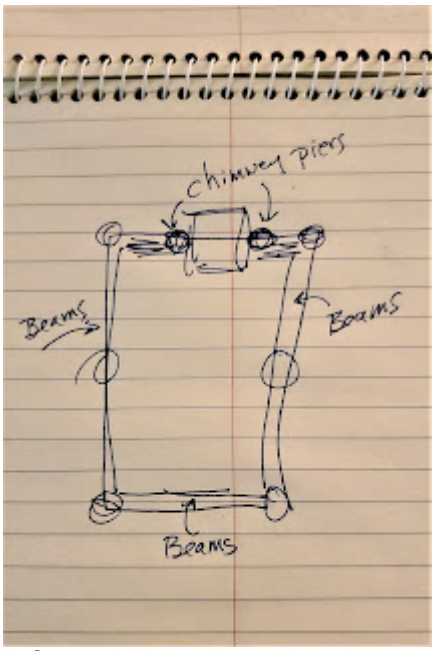
Photo of chimney foundation after house moved. There were two piers on either side of chimney needed to support the beams on either side of chimney; was not possible to have one beam across north end of house. Seen here is pier east side of chimney. That the beams on either side of the chimney rest on hand hewn piers like the other piers and beams suggests the chimney was done same time as pier and beams, i.e. was original to the house's design.



Seen here is the pier on west side of chimney, so this perspective is from "inside" the house looking north out through chimney opening.



We pulled the chimney piers up and brought to house at new location. This is from the east side of chimney; notice notch in this photo. There were no cut nails found in these piers as they were under the house and no skirt or boards nailed to them. They were obscured from our view prior the house being moved due to chimney rubble, etc.



Informal plan view sketch illustrates role of the piers on either side of the chimney in supporting shorter beams on either side of chimney running from fireplace to corner of house. While the south end of the house allowed for a single beam, on the north side the fireplace made this impossible. The solution,

smaller beams on either side of the fireplace supported by corner piers and piers next to the fireplace. Little doubt this was part of the original house design.



Photo of north end of house where chimney was located; this is the original location. Note in this photo the exterior horizontal boards are cut to conform to the chimney which was attached to the outside of the interior vertical boards. This suggests the chimney / fireplace was installed before the exterior horizontal siding which was attached with wire nails. The internal vertical siding seems to have more cut nails and signs (holes) of cut nails. I think it was the original house exterior and done same time frame as chimney; jives with the hand hewn piers that supported beams on either side of chimney.



One question is when was the chimney tore down? The 1966 aerial photo clearly shows the shadow of an intact chimney. Looking through later aerials it appears the chimney was intact as late as maybe 1985 (the shadow in 1985 is not distinct, but there is no rubble pile on the north end). At some point the overgrowth makes it hard to see the building. Often chimneys are the last thing standing on old farmhouses which raises the question why was this one tore down? Sometimes chimneys were tore down to save a house when a chimney fire occurred. But if that was the case, why didn't they repair the hole? Another theory, the chimney was tore down for the rock; but this too raises a question, why leave so much rock behind? Perhaps the chimney did collapse on its own after the house was abandoned. Or an act of vandalism. We don't know.



John Jolly cabin, old Jollyville. Click on photo and zoom in to chimney to see criss-cross pattern similar to that on Gray house chimney stone, and the P.O. step on display at the Nameless School.

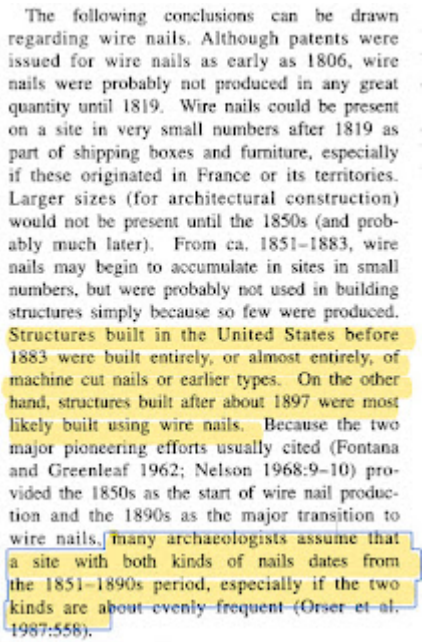
Cut and wire nails. The house is constructed with a combination of older cut nails and newer wire nails. Adam's paper "Machine Cut Nails and Wire Nails" in Historical Archaeology (2002) is a detailed discussion of the use, and problems of, dating a building with with nails. Because we were unable to thoroughly search the area around the cabin after it was moved (we did retrieve the piers), a search for cut nails not attached to the building was not possible. With that caveat, the following points from Adam's paper seem pertinent the house:

(p.70) Structures built in the United States before 1883 were built entirely, or almost entirely, of machine cut nails or earlier types. On the other hand, structures built after about 1897 were most likely built using wire nails ... many archaeologists assume that a site with both kinds of nails dates from the 1851-1890s period, especially if the two kinds are about evenly frequent (Orser et al. 1987:558).

(p.73) A building is repaired with nails bought at a later time, so the longer a building is in use, the higher the number of more recent nails and other fixtures in it.

(p.75) [sites examined in South Carolina and Georgia] show that even when constructed in the 1860s or 1870s using machine cut nails, the wire nails ended up being a significant part of the assemblage ... [i.e the house(s)] had extensive repairs made to it later.

(p.80) Structures built in the late 1860s and 1870s yield from 100% to 30.2% machine cut nails ... however, this lower range reflects the long-term occupation of most sites analyzed. Long usage would have necessitated repairs with wire nails.



The following conclusions can be drawn regarding wire nails. Although patents were issued for wire nails as early as 1806, wire nails were probably not produced in any great quantity until 1819. Wire nails could be present on a site in very small numbers after 1819 as part of shipping boxes and furniture, especially if these originated in France or its territories. Larger sizes (for architectural construction) would not be present until the 1850s (and probably much later). From ca. 1851–1883, wire nails may begin to accumulate in sites in small numbers, but were probably not used in building structures simply because so few were produced. Structures built in the United States before 1883 were built entirely, or almost entirely, of machine cut nails or earlier types. On the other hand, structures built after about 1897 were most likely built using wire nails. Because the two major pioneering efforts usually cited (Fontana and Greenleaf 1962; Nelson 1968:9–10) provided the 1850s as the start of wire nail production and the 1890s as the major transition to wire nails, many archaeologists assume that a site with both kinds of nails dates from the 1851–1890s period, especially if the two kinds are about evenly frequent (Orser et al. 1987:558).

from *Machine Cut Nails and Wire Nails*

Given the documented history of the Nameless area, the house is thought to have been built by the Grays ca. 1876 when they acquired the land the house is on, lived in by the Grays until her death in 1882 then his death in 1886, then was occupied continuously for close to a century, with subsequent updates by owners. Adams research would seem to account for the mix of nails (and construction techniques, e.g. hand hewn pier and beams along side aluminum roof and siding) we see today in the house.

Bottom line, and bringing this closer to home, looking at Austin newspapers the first advertisement I could find for wire nails *available for purchase* is 1894. Cut nails are priced at $1.75 for a 10 pound keg, with wire nails being $2.15 for a 10 pound keg. (*Austin Daily Statesman*, Oct 19, 1894, p.3). From this we might conclude that work done on the house using wire nails was after ca. 1894.

Milled Lumber, Siding. Beyond the hand hewn pier and beams, was there milled lumber available ca. 1876 for the Gray house. Yes.

The first railroad arrives in Austin in 1871 and with it lumber. By at least 1872 we have lumberyards up and running in Austin. T.W. Parr's Lumberyard is getting lumber from the railroad for the "past 12 months" (Austin American-Statesman, 3 Feb 1872). Van Patten lumber (we have ~~one~~ two boards in the house with their stamp) in Austin is up and running before 1879 (Austin American-Statesman, 12 Apr 1879). So milled lumber for a house is now coming into Austin via rail.



LUMBER YARD.

T. W. PARR & CO.,

DEALERS IN

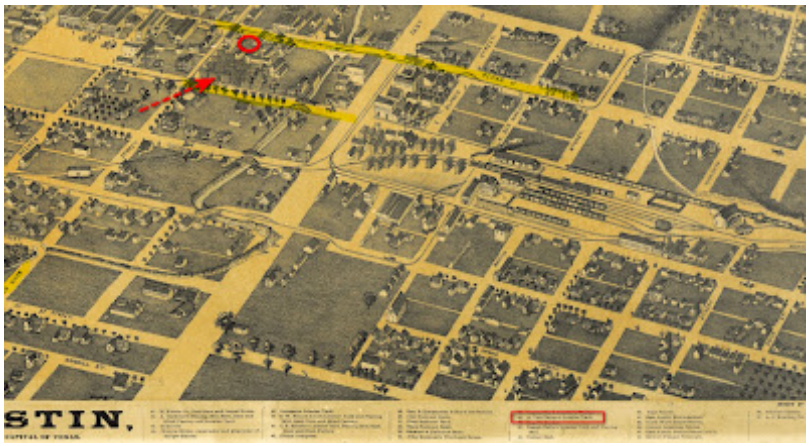
All Kinds of Pine Lumber and Cypress Shingles.

WE HAVE ON HAND ABOUT (500,000) five hundred thousand feet of lumber, and are receiving additions to our supply by every train. We have four steam mills cutting lumber expressly for this market, which are situated in the best and only desirable and accessible pineries in the State. Builders, contractors, and others wanting special bills of lumber sawed, would do well to give us a call, as all orders are attended to promptly, and every bill guaranteed to give satisfaction. We have been engaged in the lumber business at the terminus of the Air Line Railroad for the past twelve months, and we refer to C. R. Johns & Co., bankers; I. F. Battaile & Co., the lumber dealers of Austin, and all those with whom we have had dealings, as to the ability and promptness with which we discharge business.

Office and yard immediately south of the Freight Depot, Austin, Texas.

fe1j6m T. W. PARR & CO.

Advertisement from 1872 for Parr's lumber yard receiving lumber by rail. Austin American-Statesman, 3 Feb 1872



Several lumberyards, including Van Patten's, appear on the *1887 Birdseye Map of Austin* near the rail freight yard. Van Patten sold and retired in 1890. He was a member of the Texas Lumbermen's (sic) Association and was referenced in numerous articles on the topic of lumber in Texas.

On the Gray house, there is an outer layer of horizontal boards nailed (mainly wire nails) to wide vertical boards below. These vertical boards are wide and form the inner wall of house, exposed in places, covered elsewhere. This layer of wide vertical boards appear to have cut nails and indications of cut nails having been there. My hunch is this is the original exterior of the house.

The construction may be similar to "Box and Strip Construction [where] Nailed vertically (rarely horizontally) to the sides of [the house] platform are one-by-twelve boards forming the walls; there are no studs." (Handbook of Texas). While the Gray house does not have the strips as in board and batten, the wide vertical boards and few to no studs seems to match much of the Gray house. The Handbook of Texas (Box and Strip Construction) describes one school where the "strips" (board and batten) were later removed and weatherboards applied to the exterior to decrease drafts. The Gray house's horizontal boards may be the same; and later the corrugated tin.

Looks similar to "vertical plank walls" described e.g. in the Herbert Maximillian Fox House built in 1875 (right age) in Minnesota as described in the National Register of Historic Places. See American historic carpentry (Wikipedia) discussion of "vertical plank wall" houses.

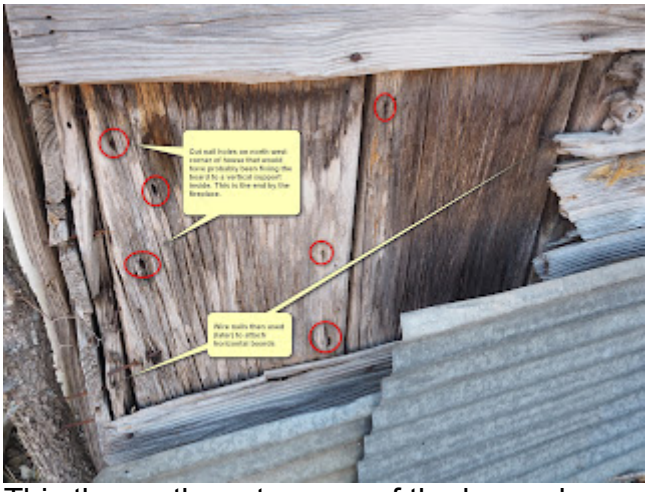
Various informal citations for articles /books on box and batten / box and strip / box frame / vertical plank construction (i.e. no studs) like the vertical siding of the Gray house appears to be:

1856 Dwyer, Economic Cottage Builder
1868 Chase, A Manual on School-houses and Cottages for the People of the South
American historic carpentry - Wikipedia
1981 Robinson, Gone from Texas (box construction)
1994 Box and Strip Construction, Handbook of Texas
Box houses Historic Houses Wiki Fandom
1990 Williams, Pride and Prejudice: The Appalachian Boxed House in Southwestern North Carolina
2015 Vertical Plank Dwellings Around Puget Sound & King County

Photos from back of house (west side) showing use of cut nails to attach vertical boarding.







This the northwest corner of the house by the fireplace along which we found more cut nails in frame around fireplace

Electrical. No signs of knob and tube wiring, including in the ceiling area. Knob and tube was common use in from about 1880 to the 1930s (Wikipedia). So appears to have been wired after that. Rural Electrification Act (REA) was started in 1936, but Genny K. thinks it didn't arrive to the Nameless area til more like the 1940s. North west corner of house is where power looks to have entered the house. Wire was found along ceiling beams to light fixtures, etc.



The fireplace room had a ceiling installed. This view is looking north to fireplace. We climbed up to get photos but found no evidence of knob and tube.

More Photos (no particular order). Click to enlarge.



A board (vertical 2x12" interior part of dogtrot walls) in the house has a lumberyard stamp that includes "Van Patten" of Austin. It is likely Van Patten Lumber Yard. A news paper search from 1800 through 1900 shows Van Patten Lumberyard probably starting *before* 1879 (Austin American-Statesman, 12 Apr 1879). Then there is this article about him: AUSTIN'S PROSPERITY: THE LUMBER TRADE OF THE CAPITAL, Austin Daily Statesman, Jul 8, 1883. By 1890 Van Patten Lumberyard is up for sale, and by 1896 he is 90, retired, and living in NY: STATE LUMBERMEN MEET, Austin Daily Statesman, Apr 15, 1896. Since Eliza died in 1882, and HS in 1886, this

could mark updates made by the new owner after their deaths and before 1890. No reference to "Bessell" was found.



A second vertical plank from the Van Patten Lumberyard was found. Both vertical planks are interior part of the dogtrot walls.

Note: the railroad arrived in Austin in 1871 providing materials to fuel a construction boom. The T.W. Parr lumberyard is running advertisements in 1872 saying they have been receiving materials for 12 months from the railroad (Austin American-Statesman, 3 Feb 1872).



16 foot beams with adze marks

under house, EAST SIDE, before move



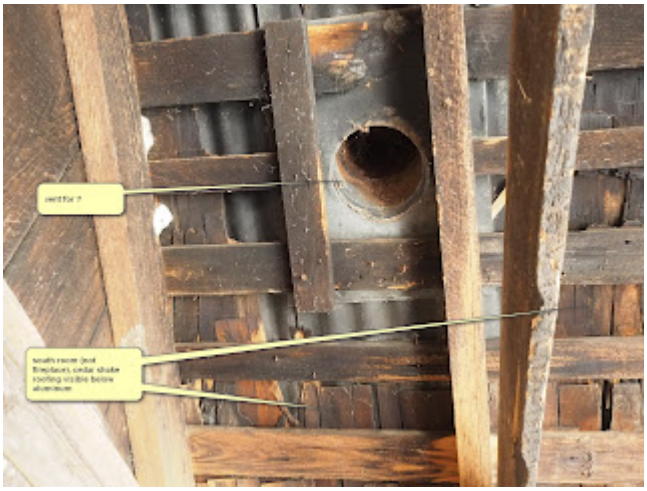
Same beam, different angle after arrival at Nameless School.



Large hand hewn beam after house was loaded for transport. WEST side



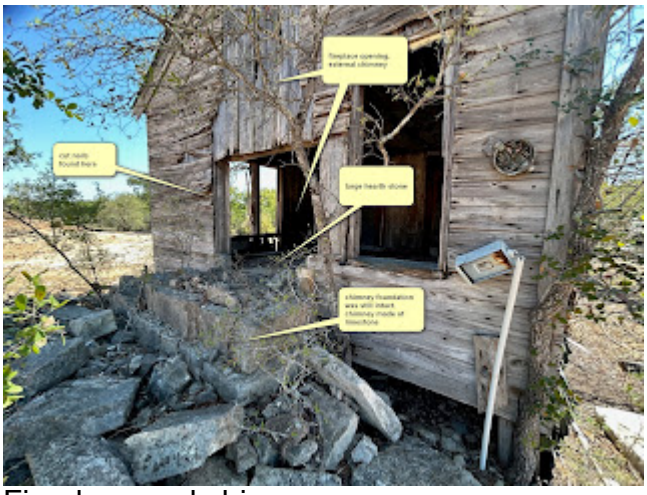
Part of large hand hewn beam, east side of house. Notice notch left end; matching piece detached in move, is inside.



This area is blackened probably from the heat / exhaust from a stove.

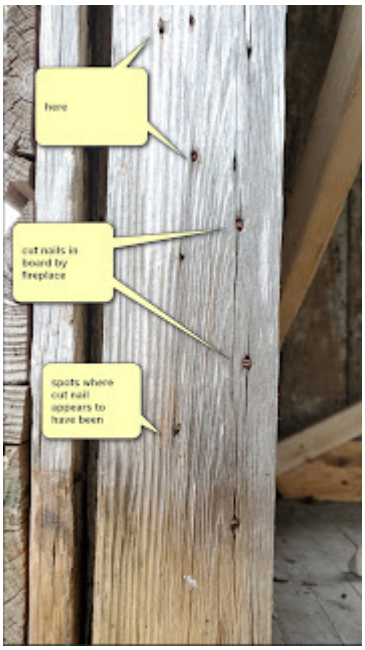


Inside view of hearth made of limestone; chimney opening. North end of house.



Fireplace and chimney.


Cut nail near fireplace. Heavy oxidation.



Beam by fireplace (east side) with cut nails.



Inside view of hearth made of limestone with hand chisel marks.



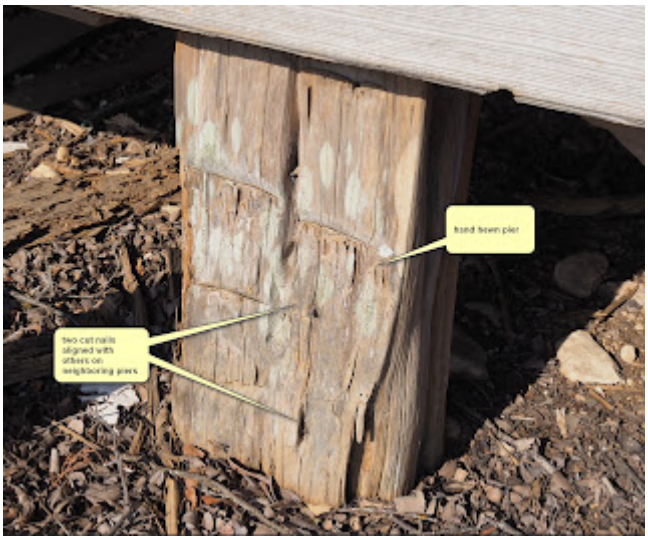
South end of house.



Hand hewn limestone steps, east side of house "in situ".



Pier with cut nail in pier, east side, south end of house.



Another pier, east side of house showing both hand adze marks and cut nails.









Mullins Manufacturing Corporation kitchen cabinets and possibly sink. Circa 50s. This is the south room of the house (not fireplace / chimney end on north).



Photo from brochure showing what the unit likely looked like new.

Photos from 11/11/2023

Bob Ward and Rich Denney had an impromptu meetup with Mary Cameron and Genny Kercheville (Friends of Nameless School) while architect Joel Russell was in town. Joel has old family ties with the community of Nameless so is helping document the cabin with an eye toward future restoration efforts. One of the primary

goals of this quick trip: climb under the Gray house while it is still up on supports to document the old cedar beams it rests upon. For camera enthusiasts, even at f/22 getting a 14-16' cedar beam totally in focus this close-up was impossible. As you can tell from some of these photos, some of the beams were literally rough hand hewn trees. Another goal, document more cut nails in the piers, beams, and house. Click photos to enlarge.





In addition to hand hewn beams on external walls there is a large beam in the middle running length wise to support the house. Likewise, in addition to piers on the external beams, the middle beam had piers(s) to support the house.









Cut nails in vertical boards attached to frame.



Cut nails in one of exposed beams.



Cut nails in one of the piers


Cut nails in one of the piers


Limestone steps to front entrance.

Photos from 12/23/2024

Updated photos after foundation completed, some tin removed from ends and side, work begun on a front and back porch with patio covers (in progress).

Foundation Piers, Beams



Sorting through the foundation piers we have about a dozen seen here. One key pier not shown is one to support the cross beam by the chimney. There was a second by the chimney, but we aren't sure what happened to it. Also here a square limestone with chisel marks; where it was utilized we don't know. The limestone including that in the chimney were moved in bulk by the developer's contractor.



One of the hand hewn piers with distinctive adze marks



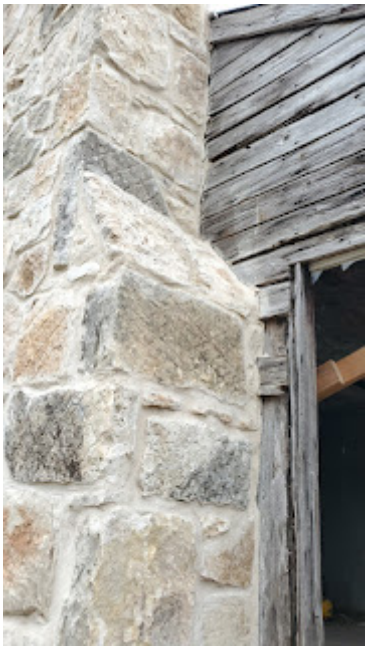
One of the beams (west side, ground sill I think?) that was part of the house foundation. Broken, it as removed when

the house was moved. Notice hand adze marks.

Chimney



Reconstructed chimney including stones with the criss-cross pattern matching the stone from the Nameless post-office step, and also the chimney stone from the Jolly cabin built ca. 1866 (Jollyville). The pattern is taken to be a makers-mark. Avery Briggs was a well known stone mason in Nameless as was his father. In 1866 Avery would have been a teen and likely learned his craft from his father who is likely the one that built the Jolly cabin chimney. The chimney as reconstructed includes about 10 stones with this very distinctive pattern. Click to enlarge.



More criss-cross pattern visible on side.





Dogtrot Rafters

As shown in these photos, the rafters in the dogtrot are rough hewn cedar poles. This is the only part of the house where this was done, perhaps because it was open to the elements requiring wood that was more resilient to rot, and or because aesthetics in this "exterior" part of the house was not deemed as important as milled lumber. The new lumber visible in photos was added for stabilization during the move.







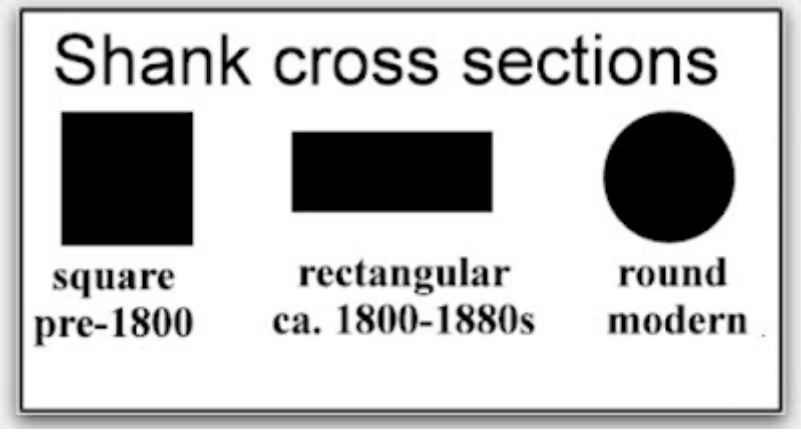


Vertical Planks, Cut Nails

These are from the back of the house, many from where the tin was removed. As work on the house progresses we are able to find more cut nails. Some of these actually look like square nails (see figure below).

In addition to cut nails, also note rectangular nail holes where a cut nail had been. From *Nails as clues to age*, by Mark Chervenka: "Looking at the holes left by the missing nails can provide valuable information [as to the type of nail that made the hole]".

Click to enlarge images.



from *Nails as clues to age*, by Mark Chervenka





Note one right edge nearly off camera







When the house was moved there was no opportunity to find cut nails that may have fallen from the house. But as work on the house proceeds at the new location, cut nails like these are showing up, either in dislodged wood, or loose. These were found on the ground with a magnet. The one on the left still has the head attached looking maybe forged (square nail; see figure above). The one on the right is like many we are finding, the head having fallen off over time.

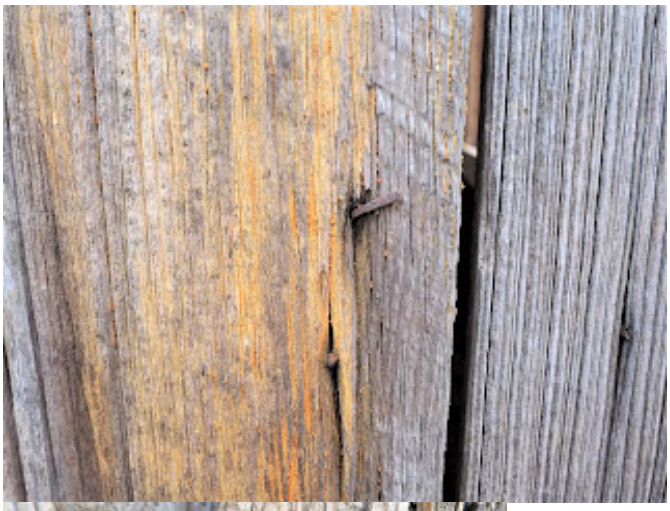


In many spots the cut nail itself is gone, but the rectangular hole remains. This is the

southwest side.



Left plank, bottom; right plank hole. Not sure what the black marking is .. new or old?







Vertical plank looks like it has an adze mark



One of the vertical boards that had been covered by tin hence protected





Richard Denney
Vice-Chair
Travis County Historical Commission

RICHARD DENNEY
History Steward
Texas Historical Commission