

# SWETT-ILSLEY HOUSE

~ 4 High Road, Newbury, Mass. ~  
c. 1670

*A Historic New England Study Property*

Private Heritage Tours available with advanced reservations June 1 - Oct. 15.  
Call 617-227-3956. (Also open on selected dates during the year.)

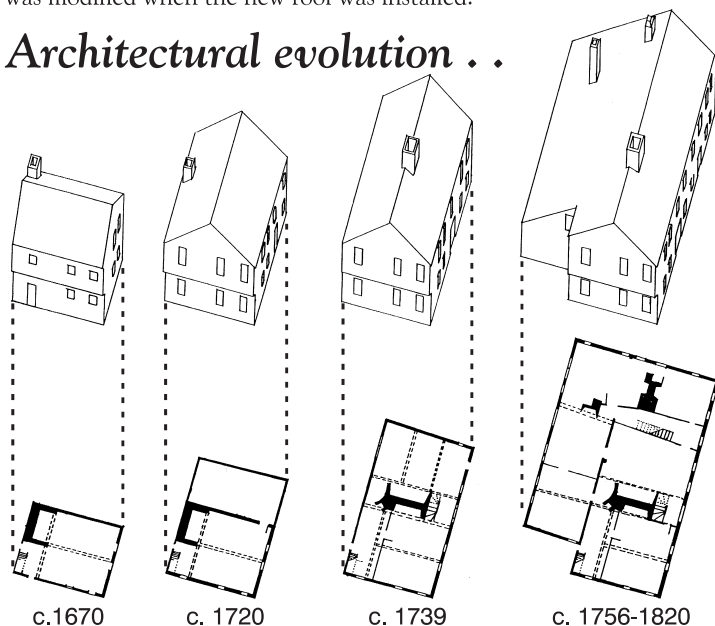
**Directions:** Take I-95 to Rte. 113, Newburyport. Rte. 113 turns into Rte. 1A (High Rd.)  
Follow Rte. 1A for 3.2 miles. Swett-Ilsley House is on the right, at the Newbury town line.



**The Swett-Ilsley House** was SPNEA's (now Historic New England) first architectural acquisition in 1911. Built in 1670 for Stephen Swett, innholder and proprietor of the Blue Anchor Tavern, the original portion of the house was a single room with chimney bay, and faced south.

Passing through a series of owners, the house remained essentially unaltered until about 1720, when it was enlarged in an atypical fashion with the addition of a second unit to the north. A new roof, made in part with the salvaged rafters of the old roof, was built over the whole, changing the ridge pole direction from an east-west to a north-south axis. Although the chimney, then located at the northwestern corner of the main block, was retained, the upper stack was modified when the new roof was installed.

## Architectural evolution . .



The house was further extended to the north, although the addition had to conform to an irregular lot line. The original chimney was demolished, and a new central chimney was added to serve the 1650 and 1720 portions of the house. The irregular perimeter of the house was rectified in 1756, when the purchase of land to the north allowed a final northern addition with stair-hall and separate chimney. The building achieved its present form with the construction of a kitchen lean-to at the west end of the house, complete with one of the most massive fireplaces of the period (over 10 feet wide), containing three beehive ovens.

Over the years, in addition to being a residence, the building is known to have been a tavern, chocolate mill, tallow chandlery, tobacconist shop, printing shop, restaurant, and "house of public entertainment." In addition, owners who were carpenters, cordwainers, saddlers, joiners, and blacksmiths may have plied their trade there. In its last commercial incarnation (1916-1965) it was a tea room and gift shop.

## Visitors want to know . . .

**Why did SPNEA/Historic New England choose the Swett-Ilsley House as its first acquisition in 1911?** SPNEA founder William Sumner Appleton chose the Swett-Ilsley House as the organization's first preservation project because he was interested in saving the earliest examples of humble residential architecture that were the most vulnerable to drastic remodeling or demolition. Such modest houses were less likely to be rescued by private restoration efforts than grand Georgian or Federal houses.

**Why isn't the house restored and furnished?** The original restoration ran out of money, and later, Appleton's outlook on preservation vs. restoration changed. The original work, funded by the local chapter of the D.A.R., peeled away layers of lath and plaster to reveal original timbers, early eighteenth-century paneling, and one of the largest fireplaces in New England. Restoration stopped when funds were exhausted, before any long-gone original features like diamond-paned case-ments were recreated, resulting in a house with an unrestored eighteenth-century exterior and a partially restored interior reflecting both the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Today the house is one of Historic New England's Study Properties, and is purposely left unfurnished to allow architectural historians and preservation craftsmen easy access to the building's original features.

## A Time Line of Ownership . . .

<b>1670-91</b> Stephen Swett (1620-1693) innholder	<b>1691-13</b> Hugh March, Jr. (1656-1727) innholder <b>1694</b> John March (1658-1712) <b>1713</b> John March (1690-?), saddler	<b>1715-52</b> Isaac Noyes (1698-1718) joiner <b>1739</b> Enoch Noyes (1717-1747) Moses Noyes (1714-1754) joiner	<b>1752-65</b> Daniel Clark (1705-1764) cordwainer	<b>1765-72</b> Nathan Pierce (?-?) shopkeeper	<b>1772-80</b> Benjamin Colman (1720-1797) Dudley Colman (1745-1797)	<b>1780-83</b> Nicholas Titcomb (?-?) chocolate, tallow chandlery, & tobacconist business	<b>1783-97</b> Oliver Putman (1755-) blacksmith, scythemaker	<b>1797-1911</b> Isaiah Ilsley (?-1828) joiner Stephen Ilsley (1772-1832)	<b>c. 1832</b> John Ilsley (?-?) Stephen Ilsley, Jr. (1810-1851) <b>c. 1880</b> Stephen Ilsley III (1837-?)	<b>c. 1890s</b> Mrs. Moses (Ilsley) Knight & Mrs. James (Ilsley) Small	<b>1911</b> Miss S.E. Small, g-granddaughter of Isaiah Ilsley, sells property to SPNEA (now Historic New England).
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*Interpretive materials by R.W. Bacon (6/2006)*

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