From Maids to Mary King:
Stories and Spaces of the Nichols House Employees

Abstract:

Since the initial construction of the building now known as "The Nichols House Museum," the structure at 55 Mount Vernon Street has been shaped and altered by and for service. Today, the house is most known as the former dwelling of the Nichols family: Arthur, Elizabeth, Rose, Marian, and Margaret. In the seventy-five years of Nichols' ownership, however, the house was also the residence and site of employment of countless other individuals whose names, positions, tasks, and stories are scattered throughout the Nichols family account books, diaries, and letters. The house itself displays signs of this less-remembered group of individuals, as evidenced in the layered utilitarian alterations in the kitchen, the rear service buildings, and the fourth floor – the initial site of the maids' rooms. This paper combines archival and architectural research to tell a history of domestic employment within the Nichols House. From the early alterations the Nichols Family made to accommodate a butler's pantry to the kitchen updates Rose Nichols carried out after hiring Mary King, this paper illustrates that the lives and labor of those employed at the Nichols House were fundamental to the daily occurrences on the site and the physical fabric of the house itself.

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Introduction

Since the initial construction of the building now known as "The Nichols House Museum," the structure at 55 Mount Vernon Street has been shaped by and altered for differing understandings of service. Today, the house is most known as the former dwelling of the Nichols family: Arthur and Elizabeth, and their children Rose, Marian, and Margaret. As the family residence, the house was the locus of multiple efforts to pursue the betterment of society. Arthur Nichols was a Harvard-trained physician and he saw patients in the front room of his Beacon Hill home, using the space of the house itself for the care and health of members of the Boston community.[1] The daughters, however, took their commitment to service further, contributing to a multitude of efforts dedicated to social improvement locally and globally. B. June Hutchinson, author of *At Home on Beacon Hill: Rose Standish Nichols and Her Family,* explains, writing: "Like many women…the Nichols women used their 'force and energy' in the service of change – both for the rights of women and for the improvement of the world around them, whether that effort took the shape of a beautifully designed garden or the formation of the League of Small Nations."[2] Accordingly, the Nichols family frequently saw their professional and extracurricular pursuits as contributing to progress within their world and society.

Many of the daughters' early philanthropic ventures occurred outside of the walls of their Mount Vernon Street home. When Rose became the owner and sole resident of the house after her parents' deaths, however, she brought her progressive endeavors into the house, repeating her father's practice of serving the broader community from inside of the home. Her work, however, was not part of a professional career.[3] Rose hosted Sunday teas at 55 Mount Vernon Street, gathering a racially, educationally, and geographically diverse group of people into a shared space for stimulating conversations on leading issues of religion, politics, and international

affairs.[4] Overall, from Arthur's medical pursuits to Rose's conversational teas, the members of the Nichols family positioned themselves and their house as contributing agents of service within their broader communities.

Yet this paper looks beyond the Nichols family and their philanthropic pursuits to the countless individuals who spent time serving the Nichols family members and their household. In the seventy-five years of Nichols' ownership, the Beacon Hill house was the residence and site of employment of individuals whose names, positions, tasks, and stories are scattered throughout the Nichols family account books, diaries, and letters. The house itself displays signs of this less-remembered group of individuals, evidenced in the layered utilitarian alterations in the kitchen, the rear service buildings, and the fourth floor – the initial site of the maids' rooms. This paper explores the history of service within 55 Mount Vernon Street as it changed over time, showing the evolving meanings and realities of service that impacted and enlivened the space itself.

The history of the house after initial construction and ownership can be broken into three waves of service: first looking at the many live-in and day maids, cooks, butlers, and others who served the Nichols family during Arthur and Elizabeth's ownership of the house; then looking at the changes to domestic service that occurred when Rose Nichols was the owner, culminating in the employment of Mary King; and finally examining the transition from domestic dwelling to museum institution, discussing the people who worked and work in service to the building's educational mission of preserving the legacy of the Nichols family and the stories of the house in which they resided. Ultimately, the physical house and the role of "service" within it changed in relationship with one another: the arrangement of the house was repeatedly altered to best accommodate servants, and an ever-shifting selection of servants and employees were hired to

carry out the ideal care of the Nichols House and its architectural, domestic, and institutional needs.

For the sake of clarity, this paper employs an expansive definition of "servants" as a category of labor. I use the term to designate a group of people who received monetary payment in return for performing a wide variety of tasks, even though not all those employed by the Nichols family during their time on Beacon Hill would have identified with the term "servant." Broadly speaking, I use "servants" to apply to all those hired, contracted, or otherwise employed by the Nichols family to provide their services for the ease, convenience, and general assistance to the maintenance, improvement, and benefit of the domestic and familial quality of life of the Nichols family as a whole or of any member of the Nichols family individually. Additionally, I use "servant" as a concept and framework for looking beyond the house's existence as a family domestic structure or a residence for Rose Nichols, aiming to examine those who were and are employed to *serve* the Nichols House as a site and the mission of the Nichols House Museum as an institution.[5] As often as possible, I will use the names of those about whom I am discussing. For some individuals, records show a first name but not a last name, creating moments of seeming inferiority and informality in the use of a first name rather than the standard and preferred trend of using last names for reoccurring references to an individual. When this occurs, it should not be seen as a lack of respect towards those mentioned. Instead, it is reflective of the view of the Nichols Family towards the employees and their general lack of attention to the thorough recording and documentation of those whom they employed.[6]

I also differentiate between "service spaces" and "domestic spaces." This categorization is somewhat contrived, as what I am calling "domestic spaces" were also "service spaces," for the whole of the house and property was maintained at least partially through the labor and care

of employed workers. Nonetheless, I use "service spaces" to reference areas of the property and house that were designed and dedicated to the work and lives of those employed to serve the family and property: the kitchen, laundry, sheds, butler's pantry, "closet stack," cellar, attic, and servants' living quarters on the fourth floor. The label "domestic space" is then applied to the areas of the house that were intended to be lived in, occupied, or otherwise used by the residing family and their guests: the entryway, dining room, parlor, central stairs, and bedrooms.[7]

Section One: Designed for Service

Even before taken up as residence by the Nichols family, the structure at 55 Mount Vernon Street was built and altered to accommodate employed labor. The house was constructed as part of Jonathan Mason's Beacon Hill ventures, one of four row houses that neighbored his large, freestanding home [Figure 1].[8] In addition to sharing walls with the conjoined row houses, 51, 53, 55, and 57 Mount Vernon Street are thought to have been built with shared rear courtyard for support services. According to Andrea Gilmore and Brian Powell's 2013 "Historic Structure Report," "it seems very possible that some household support activities which would ordinarily have been confined to each building's lot, extended, perhaps communally, into this service area. There may also have been additional outbuildings, individually assigned or common, of which no trace or memory remains."[9] Despite the initial layout of shared service spaces, Mason quickly interrupted his own plan. In the 1820s he oversaw the construction of an additional row of houses on Pinckney Street in the area most likely previously occupied by service structures and spaces.[10] Thus, from the house's conception, the physical structure and design of 55 Mount Vernon Street was unfixed and evolving, especially as related to the performance of service and domestic labor.[11]

The most ambiguous utilitarian alteration occurred sometime in the house's first thirty years. Records detailing the early years of the house have been lost, but this initial alteration was perhaps in response to the closing off of the rear service courtyard or the decreased privacy that came along with the now semi-communal rear space. Physical evidence shows that the small, four story brick appendage on the rear of the house was added before 1832, though the exact date is not confirmed.[12] This rectangular section of the building has often been called a "closet stack," assumed to be a space that provided residents with additional storage. This use is also one that reflects the current function of the spaces, with the exception of the second floor of the space which is displayed and interpreted as part of the current museum tour [Figures 2-5]. The second floor is the only floor of which the interior of this jutting addition is visible to guests, and it allows visitors to see the dumbwaiter and butler's pantry, and otherwise highlights a space dedicated solely to attending the dining room [Figures 6-8].[13] Contrasting the dominant use of these spaces today, close inspection of the architectural fabric suggests that, prior to the addition of a butler's pantry on the second floor and the accompanying alterations to the first and second floor levels of the "closet stack," this space was not simply one of static storage. Rather, the space allowed for the ultimate utilitarian mobility: this may well have been the servants' staircase.

A number of factors – architectural and historical – support the belief that the small rear brick addition was intended as a staircase rather than a storage closet. Notably, studies on domestic architecture during this time do not make much reference to storage appendages or closets, either as initially included in the floorplan or added as expansions.[14] While this brick townhouse was and is a nice home, lived in by those of means, it was not a mansion or residence of the wealthiest elite. Thus, the residing families would not have had an abundance of personal

belongings that necessitated attached but additional storage space. It was far more common for middle-class and wealthy American homeowners to have rear or otherwise isolated stairs through which their servants could move without interrupting the rhythms and flows of the family they served and without being seen by visitors and their employers alike. According to historian Daniel E. Sutherland,

> Those parts of the house occupied by servants were physically isolated from family compartments so that employers and servants formed 'two separate communities.' Back entrances, back stairways, bedrooms tucked away in rear portions of houses and attics, and service areas partitioned from living quarters by halls, pantries, and doors allowed servants to travel inconspicuously from cellar to attic and to enter and leave a house unseen.[15]

While Sutherland notes that the physical and architectural isolation of servants within the American home was most easily achieved in the dwellings of the wealthiest elite, trends in "ideal" spatial arrangements trickled down into middle-class housing design and urban architecture alike. Even in tight townhouses, efforts were taken to separate out the domestic spaces. Kitchens, cellars, pantries, servants' living spaces, etc., were on the margins of the domestic centers of houses, often accented with an additional staircase that kept the movement of laboring employees out of sight and mind of those whom they served. Put simply, "servants were in the household but not of it.[16] They spent their time living, working, and serving a space, family, and class that kept them socially, economically, and architecturally separate.

Noting these trends, should the brick addition have been a stairway, it would have offered easy movement from the kitchen to the dining room above, allowing servants to carry up meals without having to use the central stair immediately visible from the entryway of the house. When guests were dining with the family, for example, they would not have had to share the stairs with the servants [Figure 9]. Additionally, a few of the servants lived in small bedrooms on the fourth floor of the house, and this stair would have allowed them to move to and from their quarters

without even entering the center of the house at all. For a town house in the nineteenth century, this stair would have offered about as much isolation between the servants and their employers as possible in an urban setting like Beacon Hill.[17]

Historical trends aside, the existing appendage maintains physical features that suggest it was once used as a stair. For example, with the exception of the top floor, the windows along the rear and side walls of the building are not in alignment with one another, suggesting that they were placed to follow or accommodate a rising staircase rather than to maximize light in a small space [Figure 10]. Further, the mere presence of windows on two exterior walls minimizes the practicality of these spaces as closets, as walls with windows are less functional as storage spaces: windows interrupt space for shelves and other storage arrangements. Between the two windows and the entry door, these "closets" would have had only one solid wall for strategic organization.

The brick addition was changed circa 1897 when the Nichols family added a butler's pantry, a reality that disrupts the ability to read the architectural fabric for evidence of the previous alteration.[18] Even so, one of the most telling features is vaguely visible on the first floor behind the current stairs that lead to the butler's pantry. The surface of this area is primarily white-painted brick, simply an enclosed adaption of the previously-exterior wall. At the foot of the stair, however, the brick is interrupted by painted vertical wooden panels [Figure 11]. These wooden pieces cover an area larger and lower than the remaining windows and the covering meets the current floor of the rear entryway. Though the floor is now higher than where the brick addition meets the ground level, the beams could well continue beyond the existing level, thus suggesting that the wooden boards are in fact covering what was once an external doorway into the brick appendage. If this was in fact a doorway, it would be much more logical for it to lead

into a stairwell rather than into the first level of what was already a quite narrow closet off of the kitchen.[19]

One final feature corroborates the idea that this early brick addition was a servants' stair with an external doorway. The hardware on the doors on each level appear backwards, with a bolt or sliding rod on the interior side of the door and a thumb latch on the side of the door that faces into the supposed "closet."[20] While the hardware varies depending on the floor, each level includes an original feature that allowed the doors to be bolted or otherwise blocked from the inside, an odd closure arrangement for closet spaces [Figures 12-14]. In a 2001 interview, former curator William H. Pear II spoke about the unusual hardware on these doors. He speculated that the arrangement of the handles on the interior of the closets was the result of the doors initially being installed incorrectly or as left-handed doors resulting in doors that were opened into the closets. He suggests that this arrangement interfered with the maximum storage potential of the spaces and that the doors were later reversed, but that the hardware was never changed, resulting in the current oddity of the handles.[21] After inspecting the doors and their physical surroundings, however, it is clear that this explanation is not the most practical explanation of the confusing door latches. There is no visible evidence that the left side of the door ever had the proper grooves to allow for the hardware. Additionally, the doors close against frames that disallow them from opening forward into the closet itself, suggesting that the current door position is in fact reflective of the original placement. Read in relation to the possibility of an external entrance that lead directly into a stair stack, it makes sense that thumb-latches would appear on the external side of the doors and that bolts would exist on the interiors to prevent access from unwanted intruders.

While the house was designed to accommodate servants prior to being purchased by the Nichols family, Arthur and Elizabeth were used to being accommodated by servants before they moved into the house on Mount Vernon Street in 1885. Arthur Nichols's account book from the years 1878-1883 records payment to employees as early as January 30, 1878, with "wages to servants" amounting $64.75.[22] These early accounts show a repeated male employee named Siegfried Lorenzo, reoccurring references to a woman named Maria, an Ada Stronach who "left from discontent" on November 20, 1878, along with various other payments to a plumber named William Wills, a gardener named Marteaugh, a woman named Rebekah J. Reed who made shirts, and an unnamed "wash-woman," among numerous others.[23] On May 1, 1880, Arthur Nichols wrote "Cash pd. Siegfried A. Lorenzo, in full to date, who quits my service at this date." Lorenzo was paid $7.00 on this "final" day, yet he reappears in November of the same year as being yet again compensated for his labor.[24] Names, tasks, and wages fill the expense book, and hardly a month goes by without some record of service-related expenditures, showing that, prior to their residency in Beacon Hill, Arthur and Elizabeth Nichols were well accustomed to hiring regular and occasional employees to perform acts of labor in the maintenance of their house, appearances, and general lifestyle. Thus, the relationship between the house at 55 Mount Vernon Street and its new owners was one of shared expectation: the house was designed in a way that expected and accommodated servant labor, and the family was already accustomed to the benefits of the laboring class. Throughout Arthur and Elizabeth's tenure as owners of the house, they continued to carry out changes and alterations – both structurally and cosmetically – to perpetuate the space's ability to attract, accommodate, and otherwise allow for the presence of a community of servants employed by the Nichols family to serve them and their house alike.

Section Two: Serving the Family

Arthur and Elizabeth Nichols moved into the house on 55 Mount Vernon Street in 1885 with their daughters, thirteen-year-old Rose, twelve-year-old Marian, and six-year-old Margaret. For almost eighty years the house served as the residence of members of the Nichols family and the place of work for numerous employees.[25] The decades that followed the Nichols' purchase of the house but preceded Rose's tenure as owner beginning in 1929, were the peak of life in the Nichols' house. The dwelling served as a doctor's office, as Arthur saw medical patients in the front room on the first floor. It was the home of three young and growing girls, who were educated, raised, and who played in the halls and rooms within the four-story townhouse. The domestic spaces of the house were clearly designated for their associated functions. The dining room was for eating meals, the parlor was for receiving guests and for Elizabeth to entertain her friends, and the bedrooms were for private rest. The service spaces were for the care and keeping of the domestic rooms, and were generally not used by members of the Nichols family.

The young daughters, however, sometimes found themselves accidentally undermining the division between familial and employee spaces. For example, on May 18, 1893 a young Margaret took advantage of one of the house's functional and hidden service spaces. Eating ice cream in secret, she found herself stuck in a closet, trapped between women gathering in the parlor and men smoking in the dining room [Figures 15-16]. Eventually worn out by the cramped heat of the small space, Margaret exited through the parlor. According to her account of this event, the women "all made exclamations and asked questions but still I rushed out the door, the[y] did not know from whence I appeared."[26] Margaret's ice-cream incident illustrates the possible invisibility provided by the service spaces of the house, and the ways in which those

activating these spaces could carry on without interacting with the residents and guests of the house.

Elizabeth Nichols was active in the care and keeping of her home. According to B. June Hutchinson, she "was an able and skilled woman, willing to get her hands dirty in the garden, stitch up collars and household items, and work in the kitchen."[27] Nonetheless, the maintenance of the Nichols family home and lifestyle required many hands and a great deal of hired help. Between 1885 and 1929, Arthur and Elizabeth Nichols employed an ever-evolving team of diverse individuals who carried out a wide range of tasks [Figure 17]. Some of these individuals lived in the house itself, sharing a floor with the two younger daughters whose bedroom was on the top floor. Others were day-servants who came to the house regularly but maintained their own lives outside of the house when they were not at work. Another group of individuals are even harder to track down, for this last group is made up of those who were hired on an irregular basis for specialty tasks, perhaps even only employed a few times to fulfill specific and only occasionally needed tasks such as plumbers, seamstresses, and men hired to shovel snow.[28] Despite the holes in documentation, collecting the names, labors, and employment patterns of the many people who entered the Nichols household provides glimpses into the lives of servants and others who performed acts of service for the family. The compiled stories do not paint a full picture of work, but they speak to the specific experiences of a few individuals, and they contribute to a broader understanding of domestic labor in Beacon Hill in the decades before and after the turn of the 20th-century.

Combining the written records with the architectural evidence of the house itself deepens the sense of interconnectedness between the staff and the space itself. As soon as the Nichols moved into the house, they began making changes to the structure's service spaces. They

installed the iron kitchen range currently still in place. It has also been suspected that they simultaneously installed a soapstone sink in the kitchen, which Rose took out in 1946 during a time during which the kitchen was fairly underused.[29] The kitchen, the hub of labor, has seen more changes than any other room in the house, service space or otherwise. The accumulation of renovations and alterations makes deciphering the physical history of the space challenging, as various aspects of the built material have been altered numerous times and are multiple-alterations removed from their original state. Among the room's many alterations are layers of painting, updated sills on the north wall windows, and the gradual construction of the built-in storage cabinets, alterations all presumably overseen in efforts to maximize the function of the space.[30] The utilitarian spaces – spaces of function, rather than formality or public presentation – were altered more than the spaces used by the family and accessible by guests. This speaks to the importance of maintaining the spaces that supported the house and those who lived in the house. It also, especially in the later years and museum years, shows the lack of concern with actively interpreting the spaces that were historically designated for servant use.[31]

Arthur and Elizabeth Nichols did not exclusively update the service spaces dedicated to active labor. Letters between the married couple show that they worked frequently to maintain the house in a manner that would impress, encourage, and maintain skilled maids. On June 2, 1887, Elizabeth wrote to Arthur reporting:

> I have spent some time today in changing about the belongings of the family as I found the attic was [no good] for the servants so I have given them the two rooms at the end of the […] and Marian and Margaret take Rosie's room leaving the one Margaret was to have for Rosie who will use the front chamber when there is no guest. I think everyone is satisfied now and I hope the servants will succeed in sleeping tonight as they have not the past two nights from various causes the most obstinate of which was noise made by rats.[32]

This particularly unsanitary account of the living arrangements shows the complicated relationship held between the Nichols children, the servants, and the physical house. In the article "Polish: The Maintenance of Manners" published in *Women's Work in New England, 1620-1920*, J. Coral Woodbury writes of domestic architecture stating: "Real walls reinforced less tangible ones. The physical design of the mansions themselves defined human interactions. More than half a house could be devoted to service spaces and servant housing."[33] Yet the Nichols House was not a mansion. Over half of the house was not dedicated to servant spaces and housing. The servant spaces were in some ways intentionally and clearly differentiated from the domestic spaces of the house.

Simultaneously, the boundaries between the domestic and service spheres were permeable and fluid. Three, possibly four, servants – maids and a cook – usually shared the top floor of the house with the two youngest Nichols daughters [Figure 18].[34] When the servants' rooms themselves, though not as embellished or pristine as the public spaces of the house or the master bedroom, fell below a tolerable living standard, the room assignments changed to accommodate the needs of the servants.[35] Additional letters speak to further updates in the servants' quarters, and Elizabeth appears to have noted and encouraged many of these improvements.[36]

While Arthur kept the account books and paid the servants, Elizabeth appears to have more regular interaction with and watch over the household employees. Her letters frequently speak on the status of various cooks, maids, and laborers, and her diaries include mentions of her interactions with those whom she employed. This employer-employee relationship played out in seemingly contradictory ways, as at times Elizabeth spoke of her maids, cooks, or attendants with affection towards their appearance, demeanor, or even their pleasant company.[37] Other

records speak of her distrust, dissatisfaction, or general dismissal of those she employed.[38] The perceived class and social distinctions between Elizabeth and her employees is most evident in her interactions with Irish immigrants. It was not infrequent for Elizabeth to refer to her servants and maids generically as "Bridget," a term widely used as a derogatory generalization for Irish women.[39] This habit of Elizabeth's at times makes her written records confusing, as it is unclear if the "Bridgets" she mentions are the same person, an individual's name, a long-term employee, or simply a stand-in for saying "servant." Nonetheless, this habit was not uncommon in Boston at the time, as young Irish women made up a significant portion of the servant class and, as a group, the women were the recipients of judgment, stereotype, and disrespect.[40] In 1895 Elizabeth wrote to Rose about a hiring process, saying:

> The most promising person for a parlor-maid whom I have seen today is one who is just leaving Mrs. Lothrop on Chestnut St. as the Lothrops are giving up their house. It is not quite decided yet but I may take her. She is good looking, though she has red hair, but will not wear a cap. As most of those who I have interviewed have also declined caps I find I cannot hold out for that though I suppose you will not like it. There really seems to be limited supply.[41]

The physical appearance of the young woman in question is a crucial aspect of her consideration for the position, and given the stigma surrounding Irish immigrants at that time, the discontent towards red hair is most likely a reflection of Elizabeth and Rose's general views of Irish laborers.

Even with these glimpses of discordance between Elizabeth and her employees, it would be a misrepresentation to claim that she strictly held an authoritative position above those who worked for her. Her relationship with her employees became particularly complicated after Arthur's death in 1923. In the diary she kept between 1923 and 1927, she at times appears to enjoy the company of many of the people who serve her and her house, and she speaks fondly and with care towards those she has employed for many years. In other passages she dismisses

the very human presence of those who work for her. She repeatedly notes periods of time that she is alone, as her daughters are away on various trips or busy with their own pursuits. Her own entries, however, complicate these claims of isolation, as she was frequently in the presence of her employees. On September 6, 1925, for example, she wrote "Consequently I am alone just now except for the cook. Weather dull and rather cool."[42] In her diary, her employees frequently switch back and forth from being referenced by their name to referenced simply by their position. In one entry she writes "I have Ellen Kelliher, the cook and we get along nicely," to then write three sentences later "the cook has made a number of glasses of jelly and I have given crab-apples away."[43] In this second reference Ellen Kelliher has lost her name, and is known exclusively by the labor she performed for Elizabeth. These seemingly mundane notes on her staff highlight the ambiguous relationship between Elizabeth and her employees, reflecting the complicated nature of many mistress-maid interactions at the time, as they appeared to fluctuate between levels of closeness and professional distance.

Elizabeth's relationship with two individuals most clearly illustrates the highest level of intimacy she held with any of her employees. Mr. and Mrs. Erwin Williams had a strong relationship with the family and worked for them for close to thirty years [Figure 19]. Many factors may have contributed to their long-term employment and the seemingly warm dynamic to their interactions with Elizabeth. The couple worked at Cornish rather than in Boston, a setting that required a larger number of male servants to maintain the ground. Elizabeth spent an increasing amount of time at Cornish after Arthur died, and it is during this time that her diary pays close attention to her company and her time alone. A long-known couple with an established dedication to the family may have simply been comforting to Elizabeth at the end of her life. As a married couple located away from the primary family house, the Williamses would

have held a level of independence not offered to young single female maids and cooks. This too could have contributed to Mr. and Mrs. Williams's loyalty to the family and satisfaction with the job, as it would have separated them from the oversight Elizabeth kept over her single, live-in servants. Elizabeth's relationship to the Williams couple, individuals closer to her in age who were with her as an aging single woman, offers glimpses into the relationship later held between Rose and her employee Mary King. Though they occurred at different times, in different households, and in moments of altered public sentiment towards household care, the relationships suggest that social progress and personal intimacy occurred simultaneously and equally impacted the working relationships between the women of the Nichols House and those they employed for their service.

Section Three: Serving Rose Nichols

Rose Standish Nichols became the sole owner of her parents' house in 1934, and she owned the property until her death in 1960.[44] Rose updated the house to suit her particular taste. She largely rejected the Victorian style of her parents, though she maintained the dark dining room as Elizabeth had arranged it. In addition to updating the appearance of the house, she altered the way the house was run and maintained. According to the institutional memory and stories told on guided tours of the museum, Rose did away with live-in help and depended only on assistance provided by day servants.[45] Rather than focusing on maintaining the domestic lifestyle established by her mother, she instead put her attention towards her position as an independent woman, a landscape designer, and a practitioner of public service. This reality meant that a great deal of the house itself was underutilized during the years of her ownership. Without servants or sisters living in the house, the fourth floor was fairly untouched. Rose Nichols was not known for her abilities in the kitchen, and given that she would have only

needed food for herself, the kitchen was not maintained or frequented with the kind of utility it saw during the days the house was occupied by a full family of five, plus their help. Simultaneously the domestic spaces of the house were increasingly used as public spaces for public service.

In 1957 Rose adopted her mother's tradition of having live-in help. At age 85, Rose was no longer confidently able to navigate the four-story townhouse alone, so she hired a woman named Mary King who could serve as a cook, general caretaker, and as company for Rose [Figure 20].[46] On the professional arrangement, Elizabeth Driscoll and Elaine Negroponte write,

> When Mary King pressed the doorbell at 55 Mount Vernon Street one September afternoon, she was following the precedent that thousands of her fellow Irishwomen had set before her on Beacon Hill and throughout the Back Bay and South End of Boston: an interview with a potential mistress. 'I still see her standing inside the door with that big hat on,' Mary recalled years later. 'She brought me into the parlor … we talked a bit and then she told me to come and live with her, that I wouldn't be sorry.'[47]

King is perhaps both the most quintessential and most peculiar character in the history of service at 55 Mount Vernon Street. Her presence within the Nichols House reanimated the tradition of young Irish immigrant women living and working in the homes of Beacon Hill, catering to their employers' lifestyles, wants, and class expectations. King traveled from her home in County Galway, Ireland in 1957 to find work in Boston. Yet records do not show animosity towards her immigrant status or Irish national identity. Additionally, she did not exist or work within the parameters typically associated with Irish immigrant women who served Boston's middle-class and wealthy classes. In part, she came to Boston after the peak of Irish immigrants who came in the nineteenth century and sought out domestic employment in urban America. Additionally, King was not a "servant," "maid," or "cook." She fulfilled all of these roles and more, taking care of the house, waiting on Rose Nichols, preparing meals for her and for her various guests

who frequently visited for tea, talks, and meals, cleaning the space, running errands for Rose, and generally overseeing the health and life of her employer.

With King also came the return of live-in service, another tradition of the Nichols house that Rose had previously failed to continue. But Mary King did not live in the previously-used servants' quarters on the fourth floor. She instead lived in a bedroom on the third floor, the same floor as Rose's room. Despite becoming the owner of the house after her parents' death, Rose never moved into the room her parents had occupied. She spent her life on Beacon Hill in the same bedroom, using her parents' room as a guest room after their deaths. When Mary King moved into the dwelling, this spare third-floor bedroom was unoccupied and available, ideally located across the hall from Rose's room, which gave King immediate access to Nichols should she need quick assistance. With the occupation of Mary King, the master-bedroom became the dwelling place of the hired, live-in help, a shift within the spatial arrangement of the house as related to hierarchical labor.

Section Four: Serving the House

The tradition of service within the Nichols House did not end with Rose Nichols's death in 1960; service simply took on a new form and meaning. Prior to her death, Rose arranged for the house to become a public museum dedicated to the memory of her parents. With the primary purpose of the house shifting from a private domestic space into a public educational and interpretive space, the staffing needs and general support required for the maintenance of the structure changed. Even so, Mary King stayed in the building, continuing her employment in service of the house and its new mission. King no longer served an individual but instead served a recently established institution. As stated by Elizabeth W. Driscoll and Elaine Negroponte:

> Mary was asked to stay on, guiding visitors, caring for the handsome furniture, and polishing the silver tea urn until it gleamed so brightly that it was the first thing you saw when you entered the dining room. On occasion, she served up a delicious tea for special events or meetings. Mary, who had first entered 55 Mount Vernon in service, was now guardian and mistress of the fine old house.[48]

With the new public function of the house, King took on new responsibilities, maintaining some duties similar to those she performed for Rose Nichols, but working much less as a nurse or personal caretaker.

Even with the changes, King still cooked. In this way, she carried on the long practice of preparing food for the proper presentation and appearance of the house, its occupants, and its mission within a greater Boston society. Under the house's new status as a museum, the kitchen took on a hybrid role as a space for both historic interpretation and institutional functionality. Once altered to best allow servants to cater to the Nichols family, the kitchen and service spaces were continually altered to best serve the staff and board as they carried out Rose's wishes for the space.[49] In addition to maintaining her employment in service to the house, King maintained her status as a resident of 55 Mount Vernon Street. Even with the house itself on tour, Mary King continued to life in the third floor bedroom previously occupied by Arthur and Elizabeth Nichols. Records are somewhat unclear as to exactly how or if the room was interpreted in the years of her occupation. At least one tour transcript illustrates that at times King was actually in the room as tours occurred, and she interacted nominally with the guests, almost as if she was offering first-person interpretation and reenactment of her own existence within the space.[50] Her involvement within interpretation aside, it is clear that King was simultaneously a resident and overseer of the house as it became a museum, dwelling within the historic fabric now on public view.

While the Nichols's primary domestic spaces were largely preserved in their appearance, on display as historic spaces, numerous other areas of the building complex transitioned in their arrangement from serving one type of function to another. With the exception of Mary King's bedroom – a room that holds blurred status as both a Nichols family domestic space and a service space – the public and domestic spaces were preserved for interpretation and the service spaces were modified to assist in the institutional and programmatic needs of the museum. The fourth floor, previously dually functioning as the bedroom of the two youngest Nichols daughters and the living quarters for maids and cooks, became spaces of museum "work," and, at times, served once again as the living quarters for those who served the house. Even today, the fourth floor continues its legacy as a space of service. The room previously used as the Nichols daughters' bedroom houses the museum's archives. The space that once served as the living quarters of multiple servants and which includes the added "closet/stair stack" is now the heart of institutional labor, having been converted into the primary office space within the museum. In its current arrangement, many of these former servants' spaces are mentioned but not seen by visitors, interpreted in relation to the other areas of the house but not as central components to the life of the house and the family in their own right. Thus, they are still spaces of unseen work carried out for the benefit of the curated, visible house and for the betterment of the Nichols family.

Conclusion: Continued legacy of service

The current physical, educational, and institutional presence of the Nichols House Museum maintains the identity of the building as one that hybridizes domestic and public service. From Arthur Nichols's use of the first floor as his medical offices to the presence of the

Beacon Hill Garden Club and the International Friendship League in the kitchen, the house has been one in which individuals of Boston's established society have worked towards the betterment of their world.[51] Yet behind the kitchen doors and on the fourth floor, an additional type of service was and is carried out. Arthur Nichols employed and paid a multitude of individuals who prepared food for his family, drove them from place to place, educated his daughters, cleaned the house, and performed many other duties in the maintenance of the lives and lifestyle of the members of the Nichols family. Rose Nichols hired Mary King to offer general care in her old age. King served Rose Nichols for three years and then served the greater goals of the museum for another twenty-three years overseeing the transition from domestic to interpretive space, and embodying the simultaneous differences and similarities in types of services needed by the building when it was a family residence and then an educational institution.

King herself has become a part of the educational and interpretive scope of the museum. When guided tours reach the third floor bedroom, guests are told of the space's use as a master bedroom and as Mary King's room, learning that she stayed there when she worked for Rose Nichols and after the house was a museum. She spent decades working to benefit the experiences of those who lived in and visited the house, serving Rose Nichols the person and then serving the intentions, memory, and stories of Rose Nichols and the larger Nichols family as manifested in the house. And now Mary King herself is being served by the house and its employees. A Crosley "Fiver" model 517 radio made ca. 1936 sits on a washstand in this bedroom, a visible reminder to visitors that the room was used, changed, and lived in after Arthur and Elizabeth Nichols had died [Figure 21]. Though documents do not conclusively confirm that the radio was in fact owned or used by Mary King, oral histories and institutional lore remembers the radio as

belonging to King, marking the continued updates, modernization, and changes seen throughout the house on behalf of those employed within the building.[52]

Mary King is not the only non-Nichols family member who has become a part of the interpretive legacy of the museum. Just as names and tasks of various servants and employees scatter the documents and records of the Nichols family, the presence, work, and life of servants can be glimpsed throughout the house, the museum's educational endeavors, and the tours. Visitors are welcomed through the main entrance of the house, but led immediately into the kitchen, greeted by staff members who use the servants' quarters as their own point of access to the building. The tour begins in this space, as visitors are introduced to the tour as a whole, but the experience of the kitchen space is still somewhat separate from the movement through the house and the larger interpretation. On the second floor, guests are welcomed into the dining room and told about the décor, the furniture, and the various ways in which the dining room was used by the family. They are then invited to enter a small door on the side that leads into the butler's pantry. The small service space connected the kitchen and the dining room and was designed to be used by those who served the family. Guests are asked to enter only a few at a time, forced to carefully navigate the tight work space, engaging directly a small service space of labor which sits in sharp contrast to the large, open dining room that it looks out upon.

In addition to the routine tour interpretation, the museum has offered occasional special programming that further addresses the role of service in enlivening the house. In October of 2014 staff at the Nichols House Museum put together an outline for a "Servant Life at the Nichols House (1885-1930)" tour. The tour aimed to address the broader "servant problem" of maintaining quality servants, the various types of labor carried out by the employees, and the backgrounds of those who worked for the Nichols family. Additionally, Mary King's

institutional legacy is concretely embodied in the holiday eggnog party. The annual event centers around serving Mary King's "eggnog with a dash of sherry," and for a number of years after she left, board members used the holiday eggnog party to collectively write King a holiday card and express the ways in which her absence was still felt in the museum.[53]

Most recently, artist Jasmine Baetz interpreted the experiences of the servants in her sculptures created for the exhibit "Makers' Marks: Art, Craft and the Fiber of Change" installed throughout the museum between March 30 and September 22, 2017. Baetz' clay pieces were placed on the dining room table as if they themselves were place settings. Yet they were made of abstracted pieces that symbolized those who prepared and served the meals, rather than those who sat at the table and ate them. The twisted spoons and hands were assembled to invite visitors to contemplate those who spent their lives laboring for the Nichols family and the myriad of ways these named and unnamed individuals contributed to the maintenance of life in the Nichols' house.[54]

These examples – conceptualized and planned by the current staff in their fourth floor offices – demonstrate the Nichols House Museum's current intention to carry out interpretation that serves the memory of the Nichols family, as requested in Rose Nichols's will, and the memory of those who served the Nichols family. Though the stories of maids, cooks, butlers, laundresses, and plumbers, for example, are fragmented and incomplete, they are crucial to the history of the house itself. Named and unnamed, the numerous individuals employed by the Nichols family and later by the Nichols House Museum maintained, enhanced, and otherwise enlivened the domestic residence and the historical institution. The physical structure bears the evidence of the changing staffing needs and expectations, clearly illustrating that 55 Mount

Vernon Street would not be what it is today without the long tradition of service-people, from maids to Mary King.

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[1] B. June Hutchinson, *At Home on Beacon Hill: Rose Standish Nichols and Her Family*, (Boston, MA: Nichols House Museum Board of Governors, 2011), xvi.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Throughout this paper I break with the formal writing tradition of using last names to reference individuals when their name is repeated frequently. When discussing members of the Nichols family, it is simply confusing to repeatedly reference to a "Nichols" without their first name. In contrast, using full names becomes repetitive. Thus, for the sake of clarity and ease, I have made the decision to reference members of the Nichols family by their first names.

[4] George Taloumis, "Rose Standish Nichols: Sixty Years Ago She Organized the Beacon Hill Reading Club (1896)," Boston Sunday Globe, September 16, 1956, as reproduced in *Rose Standish Nichols as We Knew Her: A Tribute to a Friend*, (Boston: Friends of Rose Standish Nichols, 1896), 5.

[5] In considering how I wanted to define "service" and "servants," I considered a number of sources who similarly aimed to define the terms. One of particular relevance reads: "Within this framework, *servants* will be defined as free laborers, as opposed to slaves and indentured workers, performing household or personal service in private homes, boarding houses, and hotels. Indoor house servants, as opposed to chauffeurs, gardeners, and handymen, will be the main concern." Daniel E. Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants: Domestic Service in the United States from 1800 to 1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), xii.

[6] Jennifer Pustz discusses the lack of records and archival documentation of hired service in her book: *Voices from the Back Stairs: Interpreting Servants' Lives at Historic House Museums*, (DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 39.

[7] Arthur Nichols' use of the first floor front room complicates this division, since he used the room as an office out of which he practiced medicine. Though this room would best be discussed as a professional space, for the sake of this paper it is clumped into the "domestic spaces," primarily on the basis that it was used by and for Arthur as a member of the Nichols House, rather than by and for the supporting staff.

[8] For discussion of Beacon Hill as a developing neighborhood, see Mona Domosh, *Invented Cities: The Creation of Landscape in Nineteenth-Century New York and Boston*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 30, 33, 100-103.

[9]Andrea Gilmore and Brian Powell, "Historic Structure Report," Appendix C, (Boston, MA: Building Conservation Associations, Inc., 2013), 3.

[10] Ibid.; Also see William H. Pear II, Oral History, June 12, 2001, Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA. "The services came through the alley. Remember we discussed the door pull in the back alley that the service men could pull and ring the bell in the kitchen for the maid to see who's there and what they're delivering. Coal into the back yard, which would have gone down a coalhole, which is still there underneath all of the addition."; "This laundry space we're sitting in would be the wooden sheds, which I've always presumed date way back to at least the 1830s and maybe '40s because the original estate…. Apparently they all shared the service yard, the stable yard, the stables which are now the house with odd windows on Pinckney Street. And so the property wasn't subdivided until after Sen. Mason's death. At which point certain things happened and each of these properties, 51, 53, 55, and 57 had to have their own separate services, would therefore make logical that these sheds and the wooden set were built then."

[11] The scope of this paper does not include attention on the cellar, though the cellar is an area with ample layered use and layout. For discussion of cellars and masonry within New England houses, see: James L. Garvin, *A Building History of Northern New England*, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2001), 42-48.

[12] Andrea Gilmore and Brian Powell, "Historic Structure Report," Vol. I., Section II, (Boston, MA: Building Conservation Associations, Inc., 2013), 7.

[13] For notes on the bell system, see William H. Pear II, Oral History by June Hutchinson, July 31, 2001, Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA.

[14] Romantic styles show closets or storage, but as part of the internal design: James L. Garvin, *A Building History of Northern New England*, 118-119. These examples, though, are later than the addition at 55 Mount Vernon Street. Prior to these floorplans, Garvin's book does not clearly illustrate any internal storage. Garvin does note that closets were not usually embellished as thoroughly as exterior doors: "Closet doors, for example, seldom if ever have moldings on the side facing the closet." Garvin, *A Building History of Northern New England*, 142-143.

[15] Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants*, 30.

[16] Ibid, 30-34.; On stairs, Sutherland writes: "Employers shielded themselves from the daily comings and goings of servants, too. Servants, for instance, always entered and left the house through a servant entrance, which was usually at the rear or side of the house, although in many townhouses it was located beneath the front stoop. In any case, it opened into the kitchen or an adjacent hallway, thus lessening the family's risk of undesired encounters…Employers also designated back stairs for servants' use. These were not found in the average townhouse before about 1850, but thereafter, the growing size of American houses and the need for privacy made them indispensable. At the very bottom or the very top of back stairways one found servants' living quarters. Attic and cellar commonly served as sleeping space in middle-class households."; On the significance of interpreting servants' stairs, Jennifer Pustz writes: "The servants' stairs are also a powerful physical experience. These narrow, steep staircases tend to make profound impressions on visitors and their ability to consider some very basic factors of servant working conditions. While allowing visitors to use these stairways is the ideal experience, when this is not possible (because of accessibility or safety) being able to look up or down these staircases can suffice." Pustz, *Voices from the Back Stairs*, 58.

[17] Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants*, 33-34.

[18] Andrea Gilmore and Brian Powell, "Historic Structure Report," Vol. I., Section II, 9.; Hutchinson, *At Home on Beacon Hill*, 29.

[19] Special thanks to C. Ian Stevenson and Emma Welty for their help in exploring, measuring, and documenting the service spaces of the Nichols House Museum. Your assistance and feedback was crucial to my analysis of the spaces, particularly my argument for an external stair rather than a closet stack.

[20] In his book, *A Building History of Northern New England*, James L. Garvin explains that Suffolk style thumb latches were a common type of door closure in the eighteenth century, fading from style in the earth nineteenth century.; Garvin, *A Building History of Northern New England*, 82.

[21] "Well, down below we find this architectural feature used by the Nichols to put the dumb waiter in. On the very ground floor, it is the kitchen pantry in the corner. In the main floor it is the dumb waiter shaft in the butler's pantry. On this level it's a walk-in closet, 4 feet by 8 feet, and so it is on the next level up, my closet, off the back box room. It is four stories of extra closet space, which shows up on the 1832 Alexander Wadsworth survey, so it is an 1820s addition and very interesting. I think I may have mentioned when we were in the kitchen. It's clearly an addition because on that level the kitchen windows are not the same, for some reason, as upstairs. The wall comes in behind the panes of glass. You can see the end of the brick wall behind the kitchen windowpane. Up here they don't do that…Now what's more interesting to me is the door. Now you can tell by the things that this door was originally hung on the east side of the doorframe and installed to swing into the closet…Now some workman has done this

with no supervision or because he didn't know any better or because the man said to. I don't know. Why would you do that? Even I wouldn't do that. So very shortly after that is done, and I might have done it, because it's very nice as a left-handed door…left hand, and you push open the door and you push it in except it doesn't make the closet work as effectively as you would hope it would, right? So, it's been rehung. I don't know when, but the most interesting part of this historical thing to me is no one, since this fist whatever mistake you would call it, has ever spent any money to change the door hardware. What you see from the bedroom side is the inside, because the thumb latch is inside." William H. Pear II, Oral History by June Hutchinson, July 13, 2001, Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA.

[22] Arthur Howard Nichols personal and family expenditures, 1878-1883, January 30, 1878, Nichols Family Papers, (Series II, Vol. 3), Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA.

[23] Ibid, November 1878; March 27, 1878; April 17, 1878; May 6, 1878; June 7, 1878; March 5, 1879; July 21, 1879.

[24] Ibid, May 1880; November 1880.

[25] Hutchinson, *At Home on Beacon Hill*, 19.

[26] Margaret Homer Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols, May 18, 1893, Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family (A-170, 151-152), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

[27] Hutchinson, *At Home on Beacon Hill*, 33.; Daniel E. Sutherland offers context on the broader phenomenon of service: "Nineteenth-century Americans were burdened with an anachronistic master-servant (as opposed to employer-employee) relationship in which servants lived with employers and depended upon them for food, shelter, and sometimes clothing. This somewhat feudal arrangement required that employers assume the obligation of managing both the working and private lives of their servants. Unlike modern contractual agreements based on economics, service arrangements remained largely informal, based on social relationships or 'status.'" Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants,* 5.

[28] Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols to Rose Standish Nichols, October 23, 1899, Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family (A-170, Folder 57), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.; Arthur Howard Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols, May 11, 1902, Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family (A-170, Folder 11), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

[29] Andrea Gilmore and Brian Powell, "Historic Structure Report," Vol. I., Section II, 8.

[30] Ibid, 20-23.

[31] Ibid, 25.; The layered alterations to the kitchen offer a contrast to the dining room, which "is one of the most intact rooms in the house." This illustrates the way that the dining room – a space of entertainment, family gathering, and hosting guests – was kept in a state appropriate for display, which the kitchen was continually altered to best attend to those served in rooms like the dining room. The kitchen was a space of practicality, not of social performance.

[32] Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols to Arthur Howard Nichols, June 2, 1887, Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family (A-170, Folder 30), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

[33] J. Coral Woodbury, "Polish: The Maintenance of Manners," in *Women's Work in New England, 1620-1920,* edited by Peter Benes, (Boston, the Trustees of Boston University, 2003), 199.

[34] William Pearl on the fourth floor servants' rooms: "I think this is 'back stage'. This is servants' quarters. This is 'back hallways, servants' stairs, kitchens, laundries' where aesthetics are not of any amount to the people deciding…I would think the Nichols in 1885 would have done something, but thereafter for 50 years, the parents, when did they do whatever they did? When was the partition in the front room removed to make it the size it now is?

We don't know that. When was the partition put in the northwest bedroom, making it the box room and the maids' room? We don't know that again." William H. Pear II, Oral History by June Hutchinson, July 31, 2001, Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA.

[35] "There is some indication, which should be looked at, of an 1890 Federal census. I've never seen this. But each census apparently asks different questions. They're not always the same question each decade and they did locate in 1890 five female staff in residence. You would be listed if you resided here, not if you came in by the day. Now who these five maids were, did they include the cook? I have no clue. And how you could get seven people on this floor in 1890 I just have never understood." William H. Pear II, Oral History by June Hutchinson, July 31, 2001, Nichols House Museum.; See also, William H. Pear II, Oral History by June Hutchinson, July 26, 2001, Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA.; "More varied and of poorer quality were servants' living and working quarters. The separation of these quarters from family sections of households often caused servants a good deal of inconvenience and discomfort. Living quarters, especially, were in remote corners and noticeably lacking in pleasantness and attractiveness. Such an environment did little to increase servants' morale or to improve their opinion of service…servants suffered cramped, ill-lighted, poorly ventilated quarters…" Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants,* 114. While they were tight, not wonderfully lit, and somewhat inconvenient spaces in the Nichols House, the living quarters appear to – at least in the minds of Elizabeth and Arthur Nichols – have been maintained to a tolerable and perhaps appealing standard.

[36] For example, on September 9, 1919, Elizabeth wrote to Arthur saying "As it gets near time for moving to Boston I am considering what must be done to the house besides the cleaning, and the first will be to have the maids' rooms in order. For that some painting must be done as I looked at them when I was in town and found them pretty shabby." She continued, "In starting with all new maids it is important to give as good an impression as possible so I want to have these rooms made presentable." Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols to Arthur Howard Nichols, September 9, 1919, Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family (A-170, Folder 48), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.; Elizabeth's interest in updating servants' quarters somewhat contrast to an assumed disregard that employers had towards the living spaces of those they employed. "Neither architects nor employers seemed overly concerned with servants' comfort or convenience in this respect. So universally did attics and basements serve as bedrooms that architects seldom made any other provisions for servants. Only occasionally was a small room adjacent to the kitchen or in the rear of an upper floor provided…"; Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants,* 115.

[37] "We continue to like the new maid, Ruth, who makes an excellent appearance when we have company. We are now trying a new (colored) choreman, recommended by Jackson, the fish-man." Arthur Howard Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols, November 1, 1901, Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family (A-170, Folder10), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.; "I like the French maid very much and she evidently wants to stay so it is all right so far…An extremely attractive-looking waitress came to see me this evening and I am going to interview her present employed [sic], Mrs. Perkin, 28 Chestnut St., tomorrow." Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols to Rose Standish Nichols, April 5, 1897, Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family (A-170, Folder 55), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

[38] Arthur, too, at times was distrustful of those who they employed to work in the house. On May 22, 1902 he wrote to Elizabeth saying "We continue to hear unfavorable as to the maid who left us last week. Why did we not enquire of her last employer? It looks now as if she might have been the thief of our missing silver." Arthur Howard Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols, May 22, 1902, Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family (A-107, Folder 11), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

[39] For example, Arthur noted "Bridget in full to March 10 $16" in his account book for March 10, 1892. This could have been the woman's first name, as other women are mentioned solely by their first name, at times. It could, however, also have been a generalized slur Elizabeth used to reference a woman whose name she did not know. Arthur Howard Nichols personal family expenditures, 1892-1898, March 10, 1892, Nichols Family Papers, (Series II, Vol. 4), Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA.; In October 2014 staff at the Nichols House Museum put together a tour titled "Servant Life at the Nichols House (1885-1930)" which included this quotation, but without reference to the red hair.

[40] Elizabeth Driscoll and Elaine Negroponte, *Tea with Miss Rose: Recipes & Reminiscences of Boston's Teacup Society*, 60.

[41] Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols to Rose Standish Nichols, May 22, 1895, Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family (A-170, Folder 54), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.; Elizabeth continues to state that she looked for candidates at the Swedish Office and had no luck finding applicants.

[42] Elizabeth Fisher (Homer) Nichols diary, 1923-1927, September 6, 1925, Nichols Family Papers, (Series III, Box 8, Folder 11), Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA.

[43] Ibid, September 23, 1926.

[44] "History of the Nichols House Museum," *Nichols House Museum,* accessed August 14, 2017, http://www.nicholshousemuseum.org/history.php.

[45] This statement is according to institutional memory and the information presented on tours.

[46] For King's account of her experience with Rose Standish Nichols see: Mary Myles King, "Mary King Reminisces About Rose Standish Nichols," interview by George Taloumis, April 11, 1978, Oral Histories, Miscellanies (Box 1), Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA.

[47] Driscoll and Negroponte, *Tea with Miss Rose*, 60.

[48] Ibid.

[49] "Well, the stove, of course, was installed by the museum in order to make this a catering kitchen. So were the dishwasher, on the east wall, the cabinets, with drawers and some of them filled with things that were here. (Kitchen equipment, RSN's.) The cabinets themselves…" William H. Pear II, Oral History, June 12, 2001, Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA.

[50] Southard Menzel, "The Nichols House Museum Tour," transcribed by Harry O. Lohr, Jr., March 5, 1981, Historical Administration Records, 1960-1999 (Box 2, Folder 21), Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA.

[51] William H. Pear II, Oral History by June Hutchinson, June 6, 2001, Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA.

[52] William H. Pear II, Oral History by June Hutchinson, July 17, 2001, Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA.; William H. Pear II, Oral History with June Hutchinson, July 26, 2001, Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA.

[53] Transcript of letter and notes to Mary King, December 15, 1987, Institutional Correspondence (Box 1, F12), Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA. Bob Pickard's message read: "Oh what a wonderful time we are having at our Christmas party – very cool and damp outside. We all agree on this – your cookies + other goodies all baked by you – are really missed. Perhaps you could join us just once for the party – how nice it would be! Hope your brother is better – How fortunate he is to have you to look after him. I am sitting by the fireplace as I pen this note to you. Mary, take good care of yourself. Merry Xmas."

[54] Emma Welty, *Makers' Marks: Art, Craft, and the Fiber of Change,* Boston: Nichols House Museum, 2017.

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FIGURES

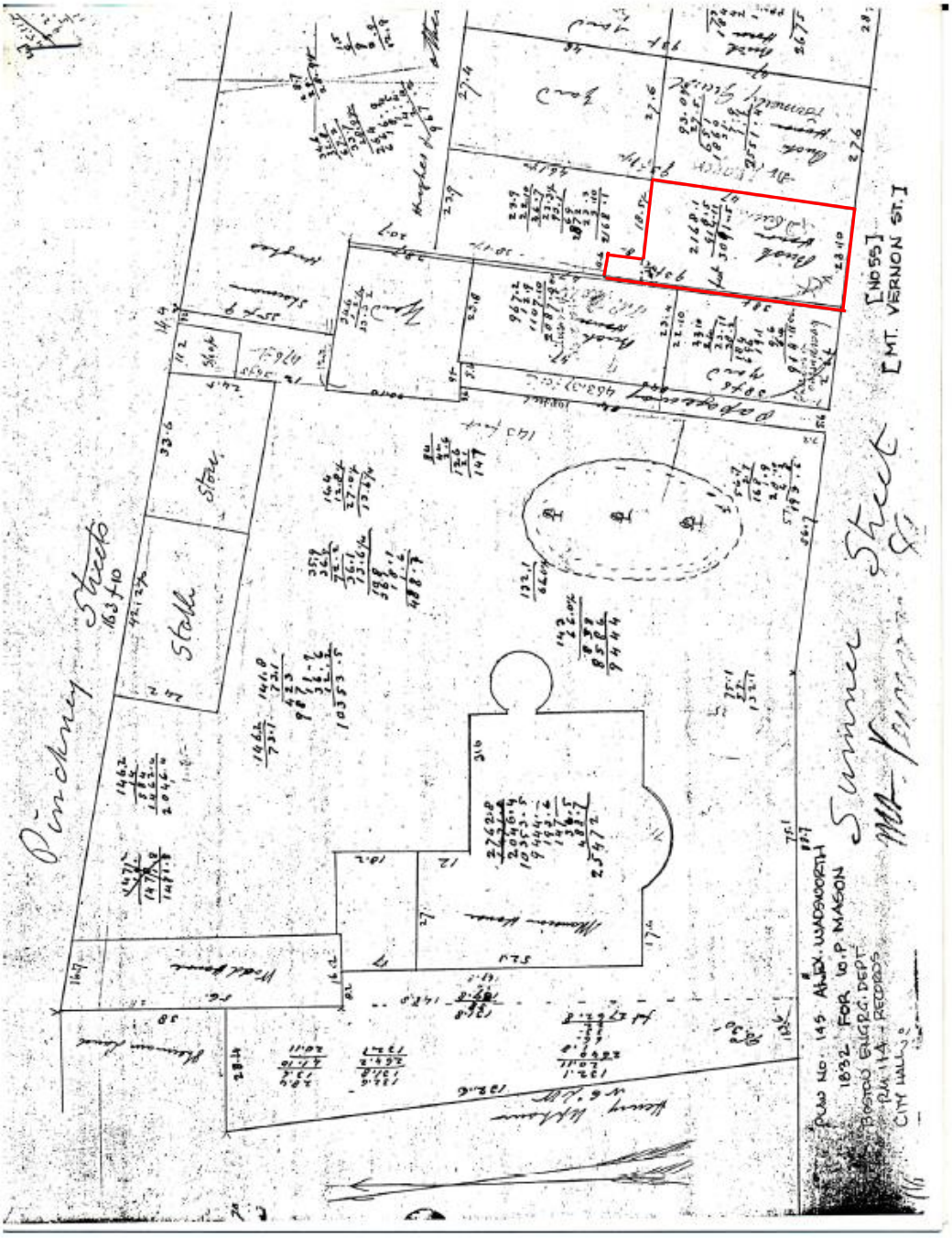


Figure 1: Plan No. 145, Alexander Wadsworth, Boston Engineering Department Records, 1832.; in Andrea Gilmore and Brian Powell, "Historic Structure Report," Vol. IV, (Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA: Building Conservation Associations Inc., 2013), 51. Shows 55 Mount Vernon Street (marked in red, not original to plan). Rear addition of "closet stack" had been added by this time.

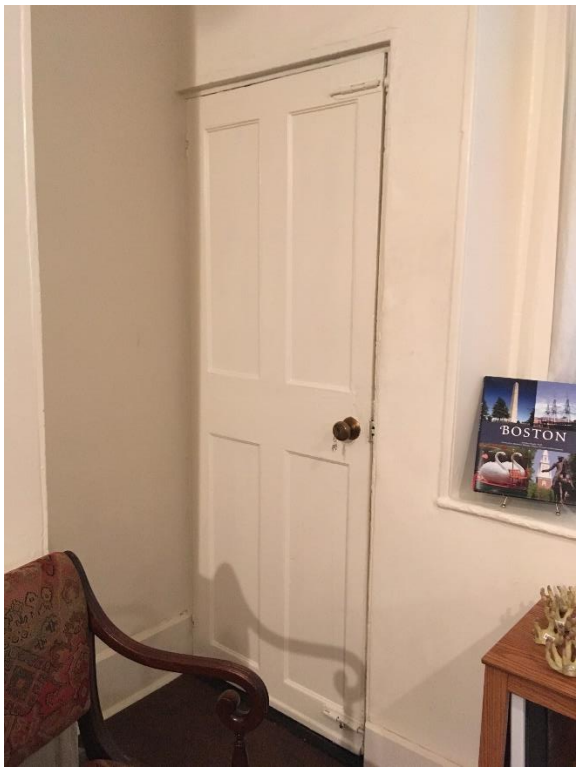


Figure 2: Door to the closet stack/staircase on first floor. This door is in the kitchen which is currently used as a greeting space and gift shop.


Figure 3: Door to the closet stack/staircase on second floor. This is the only level of the brick addition that is interpreted on tour and visible to guests. It holds the dumbwaiter and leads into the butler's pantry, added later.

Figure 4: Door to the closet stack/staircase on third floor. This door is in the third floor bedroom which Arthur and Elizabeth Nichols lived in and which Rose used as a guest room prior to it becoming Mary King's bedroom.

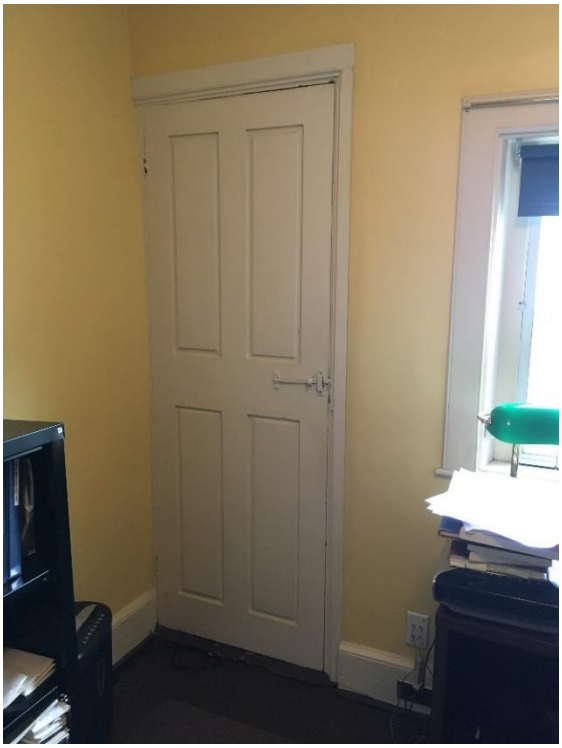


Figure 5: Door to the closet stack/staircase on fourth floor. This was the door off of the servants' living quarters and it is now storage for the staff offices.

Figure 6: W. Pear Room Files, 1971, (Box 4, Folder “Dining Room Photos 1970s”) Nichols House Museum.; Taken in the dining room, the window on the left of this image looks into the butler’s pantry. The six-over-six sash window was originally on the exterior wall, but was enclosed when the butler’s pantry was added onto the house.

Figure 7: Taken in the dining room, the door to the “closet stack” is visible on the left, and leads to a space connected to the later butler’s pantry addition.

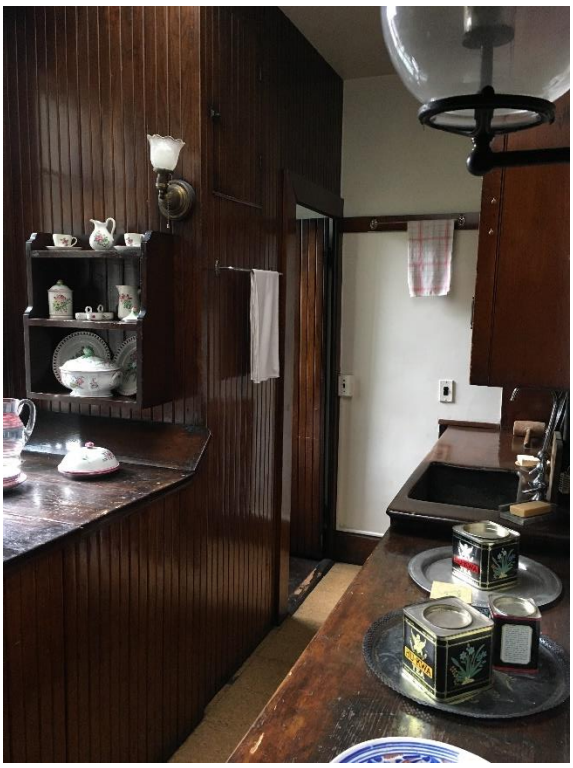


Figure 8: The butler's pantry, accessible off of the kitchen through the brick rear ell.

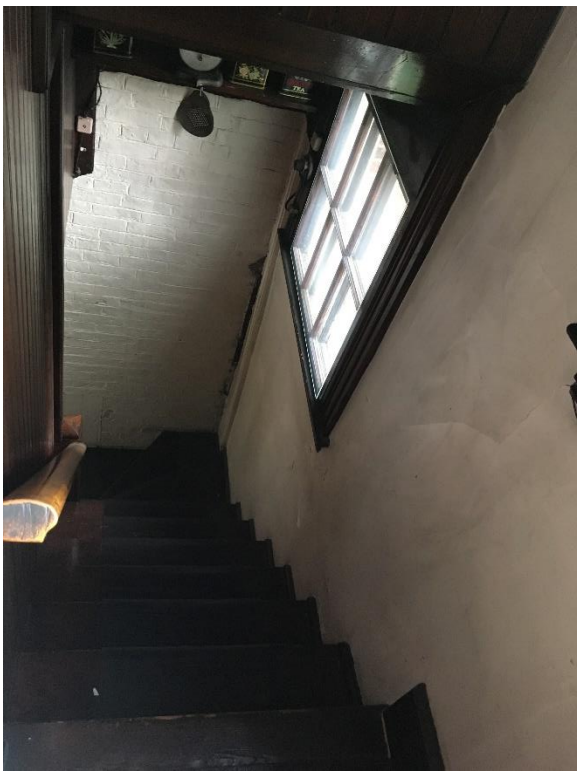


Figure 9: The back stair that connects an external rear entrance to the service spaces to the butler's pantry and dining room above.

Figure 10: The inside of the closet on the third floor. Note that the windows on the rear and right walls are not in alignment, but are staggered, an odd arrangement should this have been initially intended as a closet.

Figure 11: The first floor enclosure below the butler's pantry, looking onto the "closet stack."

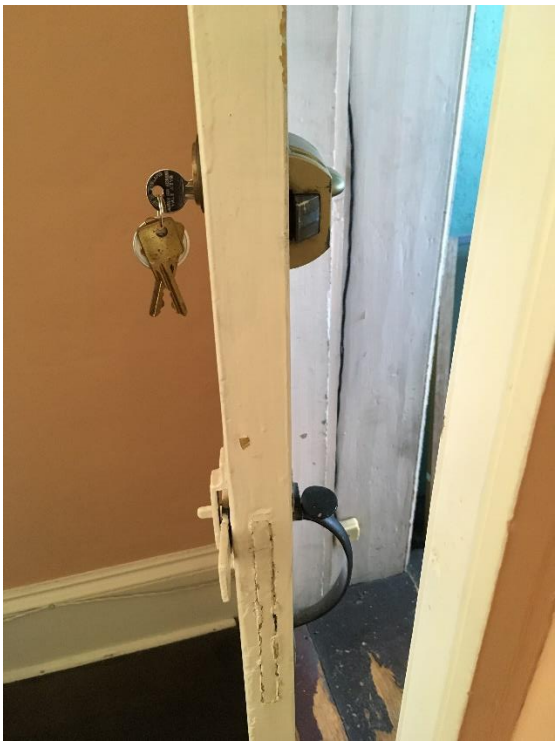


Figure 12: The door to the closet stack in the third floor bedroom shows the most layered use of hardware. In this image you see the original hardware on the bottom and the later key lock above, possibly installed by or for Mary King, though this is not a recorded date.

Figure 13: The hardware for the third floor closet, as viewed from inside of the closet itself. As seen here, there is a thumb latch for use when entering the room from within the closet.

Figure 14: The door and frame for the third floor bedroom closet shows the presence of hardware that has been removed. There is no longer a rod or beam at the top of the door to slide through the metal slot on the right, but this suggests that there was once another way to bolt the door shut form within the bedroom, blocking access for any entering from, perhaps, an external stair.

Figure 15: W. Pear Room Files, not dated, (Box 3, “Parlor Photos ND”), Nichols House Museum. In the back corner of the parlor, slightly hidden by a tapestry, is a door to a closet that connects the parlor to the dining room. This is the closet Margaret hid in, eating ice cream while guests occupied both of the neighboring spaces.

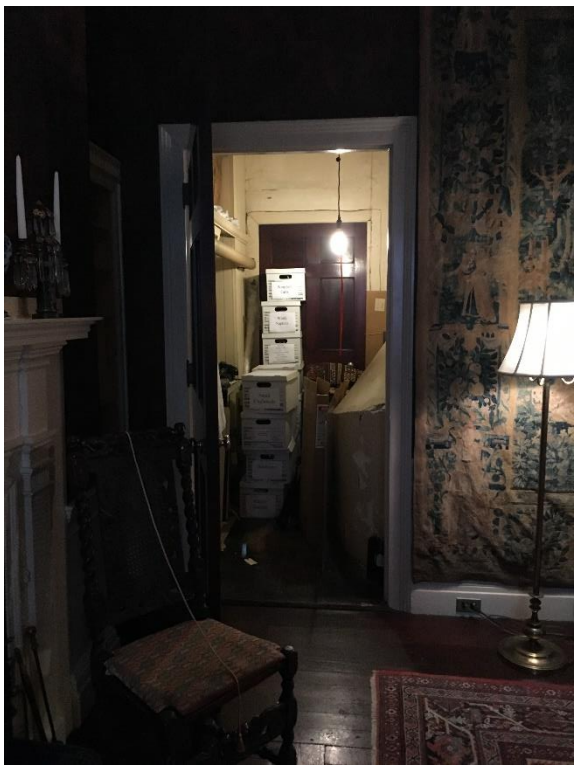


Figure 16: The closet between the parlor and the dining room, as viewed from the dining room.

Figure 17: Front and back of a photo c. 1905, gifted to museum in personal letter. Research Files (Box 1, F22), Nichols House Museum. From left to right, Nora Hurley [Burke], Hannah Burke, and Kate Connolly [Burke]. Kate and Nora Burke both worked for the Nichols family.

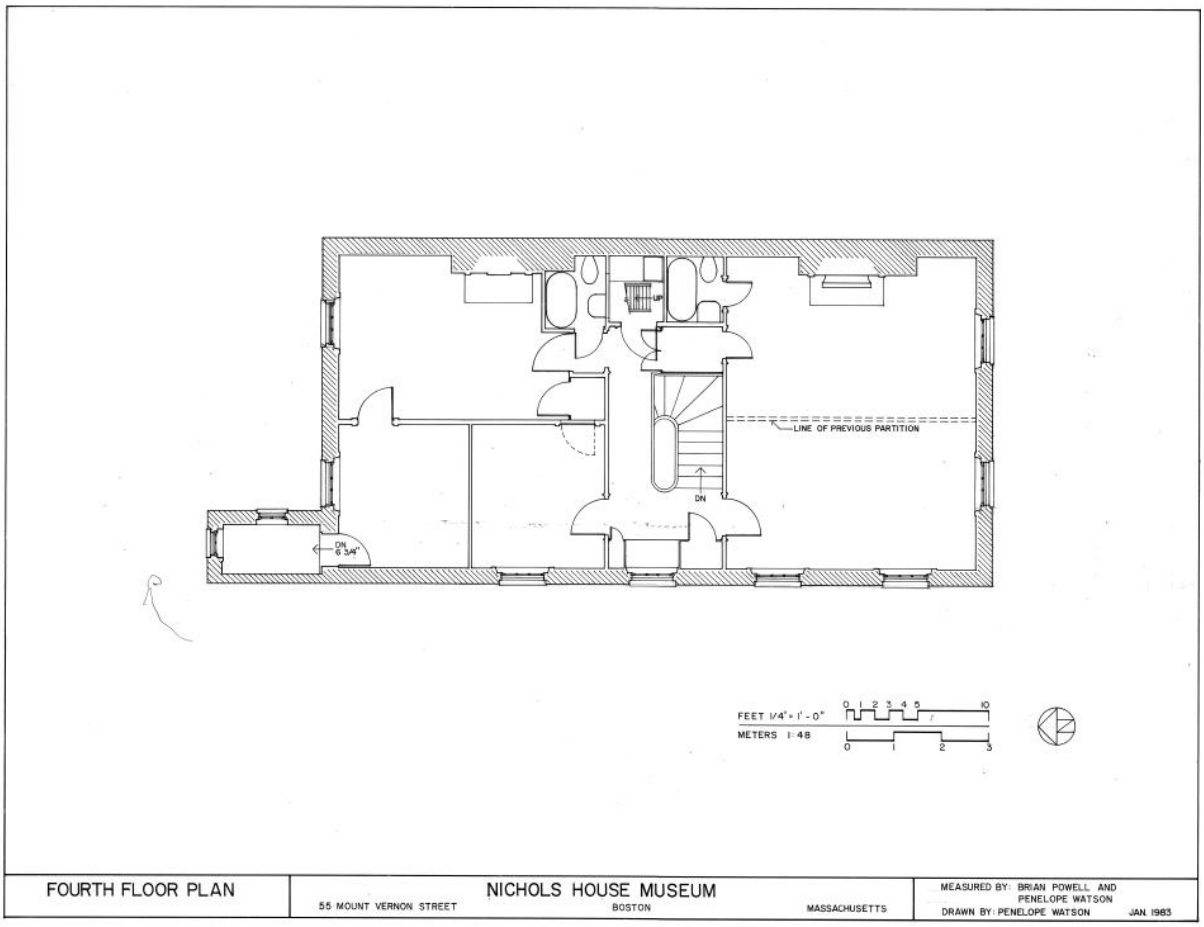
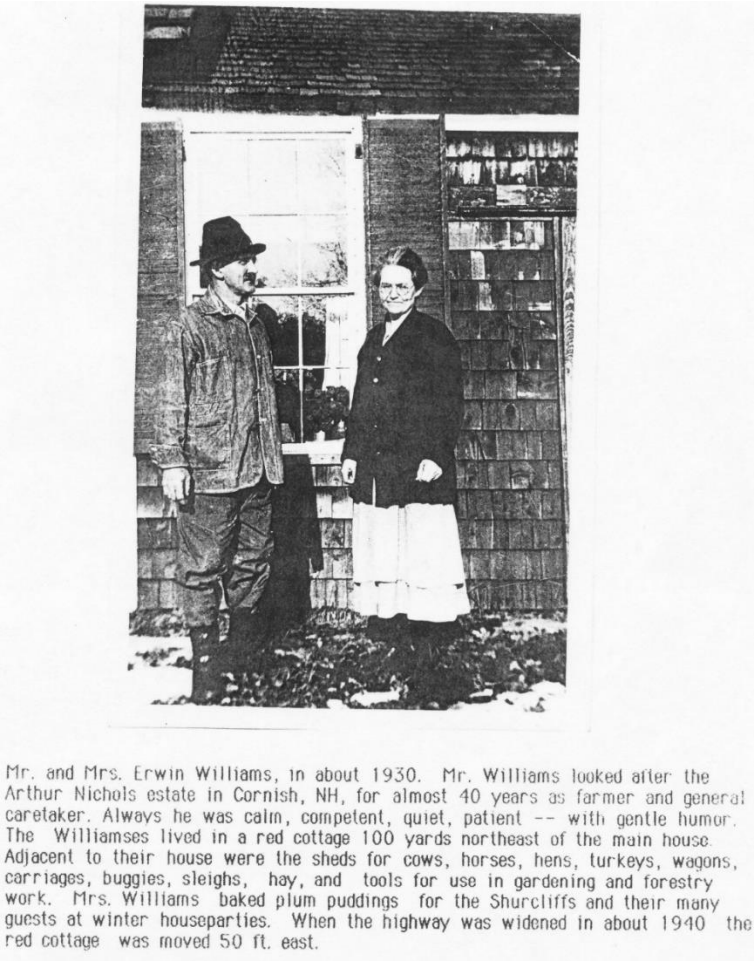


Figure 18: Fourth floor plan. Measured by Penny Watson and Brian Powell. Drawn by Penny Watson. 1983. Andrea Gilmore and Brian Powell, "Historic Structure Report," Vol. I, Section IV, (Nichols House Museum, Boston, MA: Building Conservation Associations Inc., 2013), 67.; The right side of the drawing shows the space lived in by Margaret and Marian Nichols, and later by museum staff member William Pear. The left side shows the spaces used for the quarters for maids and cooks. The top floor now houses the museum's archives on the right and staff offices on the left.



Mr. and Mrs. Erwin Williams, in about 1930. Mr. Williams looked after the Arthur Nichols estate in Cornish, NH, for almost 40 years as farmer and general caretaker. Always he was calm, competent, quiet, patient -- with gentle humor. The Williamses lived in a red cottage 100 yards northeast of the main house. Adjacent to their house were the sheds for cows, horses, hens, turkeys, wagons, carriages, buggies, sleighs, hay, and tools for use in gardening and forestry work. Mrs. Williams baked plum puddings for the Shurcliffs and their many guests at winter houseparties. When the highway was widened in about 1940 the red cottage was moved 50 ft. east.

Figure 19: Original source unknown. Institutional archives. Nichols House Museum.

Figure 20: Mary Myles King. Not dated. Institutional archives. Nichols House Museum.

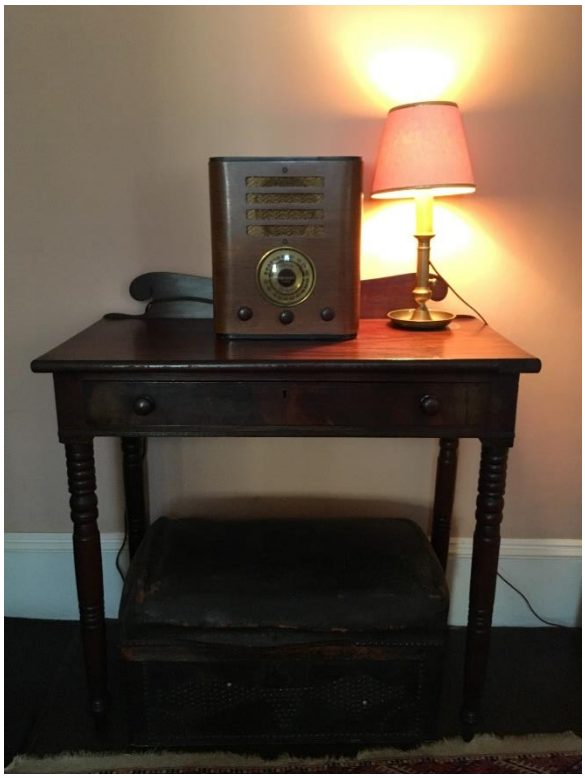


Figure 21: A Crosley “Fiver” model 517 radio, c. 1936, as displayed in the third floor bedroom to assist in the interpretation of Mary King.

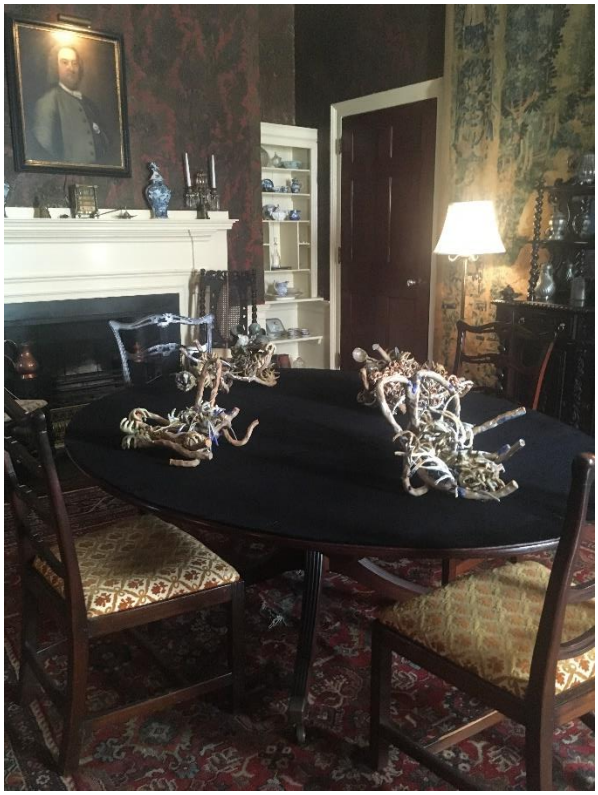


Figure 22: Jasmine Baetz’ sculpture installation in the dining room. Summer 2017.