

MAPLEWOOD HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Designation Report for Historic Landmark

Landmark # D001-05

Public Hearing: July 11, 2005

1. Historic name of property: **Aaron Brown house**
2. Street address: 81 Parker Avenue
3. Tax Map information: Block: 25.03 Lot: 109
4. Description at time of designation:

The house sits on a large, polygonal lot at the northeast corner of Parker Avenue and Richmond Avenue. The main structure is situated west to east, and is set at a slight angle to the sidewalk and Parker Avenue. There is a driveway on the east side of the house that leads to a separate garage near the eastern edge of the lot. The garage/barn is clapboard-sided, with a pitched roof, two stories, and double/hung, 6/6 wood sash windows. It also has a non-historic door. A slate walkway leads from the sidewalk on Parker Avenue to the central entrance. There are numerous mature trees and shrubs on the lot.

The main part of the house is five bays wide and two and one half stories high, with a pitched roof. The main entrance is symmetrically located in the center bay and is fronted by a shallow-roofed open porch supported on slender columns. Two windows flank the central entrance on the ground story with five windows on the second story. Each bay on the front of the house has a single window with double-hung wood sash, and 6 over 6 lights. There is a two-story wing, including a one-story open porch in the front, (added in the 1920's) on the east side of the building. This addition is set back slightly from the main structure. There are also additional porches at the rear of the building. The building is faced with wooden clapboards and the roofs are covered with asphalt shingles. The foundation of the original part of the house is ashlar sandstone.

It appears that many of the original materials may still be in place (e.g. clapboards, most windows, window shutters). Windows on the second story of the addition and on the rear porch are wooden casement. Others are double-hung.

Materials that appear to have been updated or added to replace original materials include an asphalt shingle roof, aluminum window screens and storm doors, as well as aluminum gutters and the front door. There is replacement sash on several second story windows on the sides of the building.

5. Ownership History: (Primarily from property records at the Essex County Register)

- c. 1805 House constructed by Aaron Brown and Dorcas Ball Brown
- 1861 House inherited by Aaron Ball Brown, oldest son of Aaron Brown
- 1889 House inherited by Abby Taylor, daughter of Aaron Ball Brown
- 1896 Brown family members sell the property to South Orange Heights Development Company, but continue to live in their houses through 1902.
- 1903 House sold by Cornelius A Baldwin (a director of the South Orange Heights Development Company) and wife to Richard P. Ashwell
- 1919 House sold by Richard P. Ashwell to George Gibson and Isabel H. Gibson
- 1924 Houses sold by George and Isabel Gibson to Alfred I. Phillips
- 1927 House sold by Alfred I. and Josephine Neall Phillips to John N. Berry
- 1935 Foreclosure by Essex County Sheriff
- 1937 House sold by National Commercial Title and Mortgage Guarantee Co. to The Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle in the State of New York
- 1939 House sold by Missionary Society to Eugene M. and Ethel B. Katzin
- 1967 House sold by Ethel Katzin to Gustave A. and Virginia E. Hunkele
- 2002 House sold by Gustave and Virginia Hunkele to Julie Boas and David Ray

History of the property

The first European settlers in what is now Essex County came to Newark from the Connecticut colony, led there by Robert Treat in the mid-seventeenth century. By 1678, the outer limits of the Newark Colony stretched to the top of the First Watchung Mountain. Early roads from Newark were surveyed, often along old Indian trails, two of which eventually became South Orange and Clinton Avenues. Settlers from the Newark Colony, in search of land, moved west along these roads. They established farms where they grew wheat, rye, Indian corn and fruit trees, raised cattle and set up grist and saw mills.

Over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, small settlements developed in the western and eastern parts of what is now Maplewood. These settlements took on local names; that in the west eventually took the name of Jefferson Village, the east, North Farms. A few local roads developed creating links between farms in the area, including Ridgewood, Elmwood, Parker (sometimes known as Hillside), Tuscan and Valley. Another important artery, the Newark-Springfield Turnpike, was built in 1806. Because those who settled here primarily came from England, their farmhouses generally followed English traditions and were built close to these main arteries. Early families such as the Balls, the Crowells, the Baldwins, the Beachs, the Browns, the Smiths, and the Heddens bought large plots of land and eventually members of these extended families owned considerable property throughout the area.

The area around Parker and Prospect was primarily rural and those who lived there considered themselves part of South Orange Village, which was a larger settlement at the time. Several of Maplewood's earliest families held property in the vicinity of this

house throughout the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century. The Crowells had a large fruit orchard near Parker and Valley Streets, with a cider mill on their property. Further up Parker Avenue, the Beach family had large land holdings, as did the family of Aaron Brown, and members of the Ball family. Parker Avenue, a dirt road until 1890, was originally called Crowell Road and the hill rising from Valley Street was commonly called "Vinegar Hill" because of the cider mill. The rolling hills invited the names of "Hilldale" and "Chestnut Hill" for this section of town. The name of Parker Avenue has been described variously as being for New Jersey Governor Joel Parker (served in 1862 and in 1871), and for Cortland Parker, a noted lawyer and jurist.

Aaron Brown was born in 1779, the eldest of eight children of Job Brown II and Jane Tompkins of South Orange. Brown was a direct descendant of John Brown and his wife May who had come from Connecticut in 1666 with the original settlers of Newark. Aaron Brown received a sum of money from his uncle which he used to purchase property in South Orange Village. Early in the nineteenth century, Brown married Dorcas Ball, from another prominent early Maplewood family. Her ancestor, Edward Ball had also been a founding settler in Newark and many members of the Ball family lived in the area. Dorcas was the daughter of Aaron Ball who had settled on Parker Avenue in 1741. His house, where Dorcas grew up, is now located at 103 Parker Avenue. Her mother was Sarah Crowell, daughter of another early Maplewood family. Upon their marriage, the young couple were given sixty acres of land and built this house c. 1805. (Some reports state that the property was given to the couple by the bride's father and other records indicate that Brown purchased the land.) Aaron Brown sold his home in South Orange and continued the family tradition of farming, although he was also listed in the directories as a justice of the peace. He lived the rest of his life in this house, where he and Dorcas raised their six children.

There is some indication (so far unsubstantiated) that the existing house was constructed around a small preexisting house dating to c. 1749, that includes the area on the western section of the house. This section of the house has a rough stone cellar with a large hearth. Originally two rooms with two adjoining fireplaces that shared a chimney, it would also have had a small loft. Aaron Brown and Dorcas Ball either built the original house, or enlarged the existing structure to a one-and one-half story building to have a center hall with living rooms on one side and dining room and kitchen on the other. Aaron Ball Brown inherited this house from his father upon the latter's death in 1861 and raised his four children there. Around 1880, he enlarged the house to two and a half stories. After his death in 1889, his daughter Abby Taylor inherited the house and property and several members of the family continued to live on it. In 1896, Ashbel and Charles Brown sold the large farm (on both sides of Parker Avenue) to the South Orange Heights Development Company. The land was surveyed and lotted for development, although Ashbel Brown and his wife continued to live in this house until 1902, and another brother, Charles Brown had a house on the family property further north, near what is now Garfield Place in South Orange. Cornelius A. Baldwin, a director of the South Orange Heights Development Company purchased numerous lots in 1902 and began selling them off. In 1903 the house was sold to Richard Ashwell. Between 1919 and 1927, the house changed hands three times and was enlarged, by the two story

kitchen wing that was added on the eastern side of the building. After a foreclosure in 1935, the house was sold to The Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle, and again in 1939, to Dr. and Mrs. Eugene Katzin, who named it "The Latches." They had a small brass plate inscribed with that name affixed to the kitchen door. They lived there until 1967 when Gus Hunkele and his wife bought the house. They held it until 2002 when the present owners, Julie Boas and Dave Ray purchased the property.

Sources:

Maplewood Past and Present, Helen Bates, Ed. (Maplewood, NJ, 1948).
Brown family genealogy, in papers held by owners of the house
Bea Herman archives, Maplewood Library
Biographical and Genealogical History of the City of Newark and Essex County, New Jersey (New York: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1898)
Essex County Register, Deeds and Conveyances

6. Statement of significance:

According to the criteria set forth in Section 7 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance of the Township of Maplewood (#2166-01), the Aaron Brown House is qualified to be designated a local Historic Landmark.

It is "of particular historic significance to the Township of Maplewood by reflecting or exemplifying the broad cultural, political, economic, or social history of the community." (Criteria 1) The first settlers who came to the area established farms to sustain themselves and their families. The Aaron Ball house was typical of these farmhouses constructed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the area was first being settled by those families who came out from Newark. Simple, one or two-story, wood-framed houses with a side or center hall served the early families of the area. This house provided shelter for Aaron Brown and his family as they worked the sixty acres of land that was his farm.

It is "associated with an historic personage(s) important in local history." (Criteria 2) This house was constructed by Aaron Brown and his wife Dorcas Ball. The Brown and the Ball families were among the earliest settlers in the area that was to become Maplewood. Their ancestors, John Brown and Edward Ball had moved with Robert Treat from Connecticut to Newark in the seventeenth century. According to old maps, numerous Brown and Ball descendants lived in this area, farming and building homes, several of which survive to this day. Two local streets, Ball Place and Ball Terrace recognize the importance of this family to the Township.

It is "an embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of architecture." (Criteria 4) The two-story frame house, with a large, central stair hall flanked by double parlors on one side and a dining room on the other is a typical building style of eastern farmhouses in the eighteenth century. The main public rooms are larger, for entertaining, and the broad wooden floor boards still extant in the hallway are

indicative of the period. The kitchen was originally in a separate building to protect the house from possible fire as well as overheating in summer. Low-ceilinged bedrooms (to help keep them warm in the winter) are located on the second story. Although some changes have been made to the house through the years, the basic type is typical of farmhouse construction and can be found in numerous surviving eighteenth century farmhouses in New Jersey and in similar areas settled by those of English, Scotch - Irish heritage.

It is “able or likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.”
(Criteria 7) Because this house dates from the earliest period of Maplewood’s development and was owned by the same family for several generations, the property is likely to yield important information about changes in the life and economy of Maplewood through archeological investigation.

Report prepared by Gary Nelson and Virginia Kurshan
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