

History of the Swift House

*A compilation from the
Swift House Task Force
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The Swift family of Sandwich, Massachusetts came to Kent in 1743. Jabez Swift purchased one of the earliest lots sold on the “Grate Plain,” the flat land along the Housatonic River that today holds our village center. Town legend says that the Swift House is the oldest house on the “Grate Plain,” but that is probably not entirely true. The land records show that there was a building on this site in the early years, but it is more likely that parts of the original house were incorporated into the house that’s standing now. Ancient timbers in the cellar appear to have been retained from an earlier structure, and architectural features in the house suggest that the larger front portion of the house was rebuilt around the end of the 18th century. So perhaps the original structure was reconstructed, with some of its elements incorporated into the newer one. What is clear is that the house has three distinct parts to it. A very early unit is on the south side of the house, and features two existing fireplaces with a central chimney (*now removed*). An architectural survey affirms that two houses were conjoined early on, and reveals that the western wing is yet another entity, also dating to about 1800.



Western view from 1972 when it was the home of Mr. & Mrs. Hobie Pond

As one structure, the house passed from the Swift family to the Eatons, and then to the Templetons, who also owned a house across the street and had a large farm. Kent School purchased much of the Templeton farm in 1960, selling 125 acres of it to Henry Noble that same year. In 1972, Noble sold nine acres to the Town of Kent. The deed for those nine acres does not mention any buildings, but the boundary descriptions match, and there is no other deed to be found showing a purchase by the Town in that area.



Eastern view pre-restoration

By the early 1970s, the Swift House was in sad shape. The Town acquired it, thanks in large part to the generosity of Emily Hopson, and the townspeople voted to set up the “Town of Kent Swift House Fund” with \$2,000 in the 1974-75 budget, supplemented by three

months’ rent from Kent School. The Building Committee, chaired by Miss Hopson, worked hard to raise the necessary funds, with tag sales and other events, and also encouraged people to donate to the Swift House Fund and supply used furniture for the big room. By 1977, much of the restoration work was done. With Miss Hopson’s encouragement, it became a “center of interest and activity.” In addition to moving the Kent Historical Society into the western rooms, she invited the Kent Informal Club and other civic groups to use it.



Maple Street view post-restoration

Swift House has served that purpose ever since. As a gathering place, it has a more intimate atmosphere than our Community House or Town Hall. Its presence is also an important part of the New England town character that draws so many people to Kent, either as tourists or new residents. 🏠