



NINE HEARTHES

Sometime during the year 1765, a tract of land was purchased from Nathan Botsford by John Sturdevant, Sr. In later years he deeded a portion of this land to his son, John Sturdevant.

The principal point in this survey seems to have been his pantry windows. The old Saltbox house, that owned this historical window, stood twenty-five feet northeast of the house that was later built by John Sturdevant, Jr., in the year 1812.

John Sturdevant repeatedly confided to his friends that he was anticipating the building of a house which would be a lasting monument to his memory after he had passed along, and it has stood the frosts, the winds, and the weathering for one hundred and twenty-four years. The same hand-split, chestnut shingles that covered the sides of the house in 1812 are in fine condition and are still denoting the sagacity and skill of the builder, who was a young man of twenty-seven years. If John Sturdevant had misgivings over the youth of the architect and builder, he had only to refer to the Congregational Meeting House which this young man, Benjamine Beach, had built at the age of twenty-two.

The straightest trees available were cut and hauled to be hand-hewn for the frame of this house—a frame with its timbers unspliced, with no wain, for the tips cannot be distinguished from the base: one beam measuring 42 feet in length. The foundation is built of large stones with an outer parallel wall making a double enclosure around the cellar. The foundations for the three great chimneys are massively built of huge stones. The chimneys are divided, making a separate flue for each of the nine fireplaces. Also there are pits in the chimneys for relieving the hearths of the ashes. The great chimneys and the partitions between the six rooms in the cellar are built of bricks that were made and fired in the lot east of the house.

Tradition says that the raising of Nine Hearths was accomplished amidst a crowd of men. Also that the older heads were often shaken prophesying there would be trouble when it came to the raising. Still when every tenon and every mortice slid into place and the wooden pegs pinned the great beams, shout after shout went up, "Hurrah! Hurrah! for Benjamine Beach!"

The cellar seems vastly important sometimes, when one thinks about the British soldiers being imprisoned there. Then there is the great barn up in the field they helped our own soldiers to build when they were stationed there during a portion of the winter of 1812.

All the outer walls of the house and the partitions are interlined with planks two inches in thickness. The floors in the two attics are broad oaken boards. In the rest of the house, the floors are hard Southern pine and oak, only narrower boards. A hearthstone, three by nine feet, flanks the great fireplace and the historic house oven, and in this fireplace the smoke-blackened crane still swings and on it rests the smoky pot hooks. The chimney extends eighteen feet above the ridge pole. The windows are colonial, with twenty-four panes to a window. Eight cupboards have been enclosed although they are still as they were built and could be easily restored. It seems strange when one thinks of all the people who have passed through these many witch doors that open and close the twenty-two rooms, including the two attics. The cupboard that came in from the old house with the Franklin fireplace, and the charred smoke-house door, with the cut-out hearts and the violet tinted window glass and the old time doors in the cellar with the once splendid wrought iron latches, all bring a message from the old home of the Sturdevants.

The Methodists, not having a place to hold their service, came to John Sturdevant's house and passed up the long flight of stairs into the ballroom which extended across the front of the house, making a room forty-two feet in length by fifteen and one-half in width. Candles on the two mantles shone through the eleven windows, while the fire on the two hearths roared up the chimneys.

Across the street from the house stood the spinning wheel factory. The name John Sturdevant was burned on every spinning wheel, every flax-wheel and every reel before completion.

South of the house there is an underground passage that extends to the stone work where it once had an opening. John Sturdevant, Jr., built it for his hogs to enable them to pass from the field east of the house to the street without going through his door yard. It is still in good condition.

After John Sturdevant's death, the place was sold to Mr. Camp, a silversmith. Many of the spoons our grandmothers had for their "setting out," were made in this house. Later it received a new owner, a Mr. Birch, who was interested principally in farming. The next owner was Quaker Bronson. Mr. Bronson had his way of doing many things to lighten labor. He often drove his horse into the long kitchen, dragging a back log for the huge fireplace. Colonel Hiram Keeler purchased the farm of Mr. Bronson in 1856. Some of the rooms in this house, during the winter of 1856, were occupied by men who were more or less transients. Hiram Mead is the only one whose name can be recalled.

Darwin Keeler came to live at Nine Hearths in 1857, the property passing into his possession in the year 1877, having purchased it of his father, Hiram Keeler. Darwin owned the farm until his death in 1915. Reuben Judson Keeler has been the owner since 1916.

After one hundred and twenty-four years this house is still a monument to the man who built and owned it and to the ones who have cared for it down through the years.

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