

4. THIS OLD HOUSE

As we've seen, both Evan Roberts and Bill Tibbits told of the original Aldrich house (dating from about 1882) being knocked off its foundation by the 1904 flood and subsequently moved to higher ground. The location of the original house was easy to spot, so I buy in to the story.

The original photograph of the Aldrich house (opposite page) was given to me by Bill and Olive¹ Tibbits. The view, from south east of the house in its pre-1904 flood location looks NNE. The nearly treeless landscape combined with the fish-eye distortion of the photographer's camera lens makes the scene momentarily difficult to identify. A distant barn, barely visible to the left of the middle chimney, is at the Morgan homestead to the north across Stonewall Creek.

The pre-1904 flood Aldrich house in the picture bears almost no resemblance to any portion of the current house ~ an ongoing mystery. The only clue is that the three 12-pane, double-hung windows in the picture of the original Aldrich house look like three very old-fashioned windows that were on the east side of the house when we bought the place (one still in use).

It took me nearly forty years of living in, repairing, remodeling and adding on to the house before reconciling the old picture and the legend of the flood with the current house.

Here's my best guess: In the process of wrenching the house off its foundation, the 1904 flood must have left only part of the structure sufficiently intact to be moved ~ maybe the low center section. After being moved, its roof was taken off and that portion of the old house was entombed by the construction of the new two-story house around and above it (see floor plan).

This would have allowed the Aldrich family to continue to occupy at least a portion of their ac-

customized quarters while constructing the new, larger house. Whatever part of the house couldn't be moved would have been salvaged and the materials reused in the new house.

It was a 2015 laundry/bath project in the southeast corner of the oldest part of the house that uncovered the evidence of an even older structure. In this corner, unlike the rest of the house, I found log floor joists in an area beneath the floor previously inaccessible (except by random varmints).

That, in combination with the old-fashioned windows matching those in the photograph solved the mystery ~ also goes a long way to explain why the upstairs bathroom floor slopes about three inches east to west.

At least three subsequent additions were added before we bought the place. On the north, a kitchen and pantry were added, a portion of which is log construction.² On the south, a sunny parlor with a screened in porch and formal front door was added in 1914 according to Olive Tibbits. In the 50s or 60s a mudroom was added on the north end of the kitchen. This addition enclosed and covered over a hand-dug, stone-lined well that was used with a hand pump for domestic water until 1973 when a modern well was drilled.

The inside of the house was in pretty iffy shape when we bought it in 1977. After pondering how best to approach renovations, we took a minimalist tack to preserve what we could ~ and save money.

It was evident that the stained and faded wallpaper that covered most of the walls was practically structural. That is, the wallpaper was frequently the last vestige of support preventing the old homemade plaster from losing its grip on the ancient lath beneath.

Gutting and sheetrocking the place was beyond our time, energy and budget. We settled for spraying the wallpaper with shellac, which penetrated and stiffened it (making it even more structural) and wa-

terproofing it so we could paint without softening the old flour-paste glue.

I then used sheetrock tape to cover any cracks (of which there were aplenty) and we painted everything white. The effect was quite satisfying. For little cost (Jeanne and I had done much of the work) we had an interior with the pleasing irregularity of the original lath and plaster. Forty years later it is serving quite nicely, for the most part. The original *Christian* doors and hand-hewn woodwork in the upstairs is a point of particular pride.³

We devoted the large, unheated room off the kitchen for a laundry and pantry with ample shelves for all the canned goods our new garden would produce.

Jeanne and I undertook a considerable addition to the house in 1983 with some misgivings. By then, the project that became Phantom Canyon Ranch was requiring a substantial office. On one hand, our beautiful old house was really perfect and didn't deserve to be changed. On the other, we didn't like the idea of having the children alone in the house after school.

So, we decided to add onto the house instead of building a separate office. I console myself with the thought that what the original house lost in historic character, it gained in idiosyncrasy...and homemade tiles.

¹ Olive (1902-2001), widowed, was Bill's mother. Bill never married and lived with his mother until her death.

² The date of this addition is unclear and its structural history is pretty opaque. There are some indications that it may actually be two separate additions. Subject to pending renovation, the north end of the house is poised to divulge its secrets soon. Stay tuned.

³ Bill and Olive Tibbits had renovated the living room in the 1960s and (unfortunately) replaced the original hand-hewn molding and *Christian* doors, with panels in the form of a cross.



Aldrich Place, pre-1904



1982

