WHAT A HOUSE CAN TELL US ABOUT THE PAST:
HOUSEHOLD SUCCESSION AND CHANGE AT THE RANDOLPH MITCHELL HOUSE

As a new set of owners takes up residence in a home they are apt to make renovations to the interior décor, construct additions and remodeling episodes have been detected, making a chronology of activity at the house difficult to establish.

Upon Randolph Mitchell’s death in May of 1847 his son in law, William Wright “W.W.” Arnold, becomes the head of the household and moves in with his mother in law Lydia and wife Caroline. In 1848 W.W. graduates from Cleveland Medical College and begins practicing medicine in New Reading. During this time a series of renovations to the home are believed to have occurred.

It has long been rumored that W.W. Arnold operated his medical practice out of the Randolph Mitchell House. Some evidence of this has been detected. One example of remodeling appears to have occurred in the dining room. It seems that the foyer door to the dining room was removed, filled and relocated further down the hall and furthermore that a partition was installed thus separating the medical office from the rest of the house (see figures 5 and 6). Close examination of the exterior windows to the dining room revealed that one of the front windows had not always served as a window (figure 1). It appears that while W.W. was head of household he had the southwestern most front window turned into a door for patients to enter his home without disturbing his family, and vice versa. The brick laid beneath the current window is of a different color and possibly of a different era, postdating the remainder of the house. The sandstone foundation of the house was chiseled away beneath the window to create a threshold and signs of wear from foot traffic are evident in the western half of the doorway, indicating that the added door probably swung from the eastern doorjamb.

The interior window trim also differs slightly from any other window in the home (see figure 4). Another useful piece of evidence lies in the presence of not one, but two stove pipe holes in the dining room chimney, one in the front east face and one in the left south face (figure 3). The location of these two stove pipe holes rest on either side of where we believe the partition wall to have been installed.

Upon Randolph Mitchell’s death in May of 1847 his son in law, William Wright “W.W.” Arnold, becomes the head of the household and moves in with his mother in law Lydia and wife Caroline. In 1848 W.W. graduates from Cleveland Medical College and begins practicing medicine in New Reading. During this time a series of renovations to the home are believed to have occurred.

It has long been rumored that W.W. Arnold operated his medical practice out of the Randolph Mitchell House. Some evidence of this has been detected. One example of remodeling appears to have occurred in the dining room. It seems that the foyer door to the dining room was removed, filled and relocated further down the hall and furthermore that a partition was installed thus separating the medical office from the rest of the house (see figures 5 and 6). Close examination of the exterior windows to the dining room revealed that one of the front windows had not always served as a window (figure 1). It appears that while W.W. was head of household he had the southwestern most front window turned into a door for patients to enter his home without disturbing his family, and vice versa. The brick laid beneath the current window is of a different color and possibly of a different era, postdating the remainder of the house. The sandstone foundation of the house was chiseled away beneath the window to create a threshold and signs of wear from foot traffic are evident in the western half of the doorway, indicating that the added door probably swung from the eastern doorjamb.

The interior window trim also differs slightly from any other window in the home (see figure 4). Another useful piece of evidence lies in the presence of not one, but two stove pipe holes in the dining room chimney, one in the front east face and one in the left south face (figure 3). The location of these two stove pipe holes rest on either side of where we believe the partition wall to have been installed.

Figure 1. Exterior of Arnold door. Later fill brick enclosed in yellow, projected door jams in blue dashes, red line indicates sub-cutting on foundation stone turned threshold and green line shows laid brick patio surface. Scale in feet.

Figure 2. South face, front of, Randolph Mitchell House with Arnold door outlined in red. A stain from a late 17th century A-frame porch roof is clearly visible on brickwork above doorway.

Figure 3. Dining room fireplace and chimney. Stove pipe holes 1, on east face, and 2, on south face, indicated by yellow circles. Removed medical room partition wall highlighted in red.

Figure 4. View of Arnold medical room facing south. Position of added partition highlighted in red and jams of Arnold door in blue dashed lines.

Figure 5. Pre-Arnold (pre-1847) Randolph Mitchell House first story floorplan.

Figure 6. Post-Arnold (post-1847) Randolph Mitchell House first story floorplan. Arnold installs dividing wall in dining room, relocates foyer door and turns the southwestern window into a doorway to create his medical office.

Acknowledgements:
Special thanks to Douglas J. Preisse for his commitment to the preservation of the Randolph Mitchell House and his support of the above research and investigations yet to come and the Perry County Historical and Cultural Art Society.

References:

Poster prepared by Joseph E.B. Snider 2015, all rights reserved.