



# The OLDEST HOUSE In Town

With construction dates of 1753, ca. 1700, and ca. 1645, the Thomas Riggs House can lay claim to being the oldest dwelling on Cape Ann. It was an overlooked treasure when this dedicated and savvy owner took on restoration. by Regina Cole and Barbara Lambert | photographs by Sandy Agrafiotis

THE CONTEST WINNER for our Early Homes edition is a house beautifully preserved, thanks to creative ownership.

Even in New England, where old houses are often taken for granted, the Thomas Riggs House is something special. Its current steward, owner Barbara Lambert, reconstructs the history this way: In 1661, Thomas Riggs bought "an old house" comprising one sixteen-by-sixteen-foot room—and brought up seven children in it. That original room was the log house constructed perhaps ca. 1645 on land very near the ocean in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Around 1700, Thomas Riggs' youngest son, Andrew, married and built a Cape onto the log house. Later, when the original house was already a hundred years old, in 1753, a gam-

The mid-18th-century gambrelled Cape reflects two add-ons to a mid-1600s log dwelling. (Such has since been restored to 9/6.) **BELOW:** Preserved as artifact: early lath and plaster over the log wall. This fireplace suggests 1920s Arts and Crafts taste.



"Why such a very old house?" is the question put to Barbara Lambert. But it's apparent she was headed here all along. "Starting at the age of three, my favorite place was the public library, which was located on the site of a Shawnee encampment and later Fort Defiance [Ohio]. I devoured biographies and histories of America. From there it was Boston . . . my longest stint was at the Museum of Fine Arts, where I was Keeper of Musical Instruments." Barbara went on to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, and was executive vice-president of the colonial-era Shirley-Eustis House in Roxbury. She continues work as an archivist and museum consultant.

