

A flax meadow in the yard

is Barbara Lambert's historically appropriate answer for her aversion to grass. "The amount of grassy area around an early house was minimal; occupants had neither the time nor easy-to-use tools to tend a lawn," she states. Her one-time farm house is centered on a peninsula, rather than close to the street, and has river and harbor views. Early photos show fields surrounding the house. "Furthermore, left in the house was a 17th-century flax wheel. Clearly what was needed was a meadow of flax, which is knee-high and, for over a month, is daily covered with a flush of fresh, pale blue flowers." Leaves are a pleasing blue-grey. Barbara advises casting seeds thickly, as plants are thin and allow sunlight to penetrate, encouraging weeds. She planted cosmos seeds with the flax; cosmos blossoms after the flax turns brown.



A new wing is one solution to many of the snags encountered in restoring (and living in) a very early house. Building a great room off the back allowed Ms. Lambert to update systems, install a new heating system, and add bathrooms and a usable kitchen, while hardly disturbing the historic house. Since 1998, Ms. Lambert's home has also been a small-scale inn, providing income that allowed her to pay for conservation of the highest quality. Guests attest that the house is fascinating, a lovely antique, and very livable.

Gloucester and the sea." [Kipling wrote *Captain Courageous*, about a schooner out of Gloucester. —ed.]

By then Barbara had had dreams about owning this house, but she breathed a sigh of relief, thinking that it would be in good hands without her.

"Then I heard the Trust people describe their plans for the house," she continues. "They planned to remove the dormers added in the 1890s, remove a fine fieldstone fireplace from the 1920s—and put heated towel bars in the as-yet nonexistent multiple bathrooms.

"I heard myself exclaim, 'But I saw it first!'. And it was all over." Like many lovers of old houses, Barbara Lambert became caretaker of an important piece of New England history, despite her other priorities.

Barbara Lambert now says she feels lucky to have acquired a house in such original condition. But "I would never [again] try to do two things at once: write a book and serve as my own contractor. I had, in fact, to stop work on the house, finish the book, and then finish the house."

Conservation of the house taught her skills and honed her convictions. She advises others to do the research and take their time, then hold con-

DON'T RUSH TO RESTORE, cautions the owner. "To me, the Riggs House is a living entity. It requires me to listen . . . Live in it, and an old house tells you what it wants."

stant to their wishes during restoration. "Before deciding on a house detail, especially on the exterior, drive around your local area and study other houses that retain details—look at the crown moulding, how the clapboards were put up (—I redid my façade because of mistakes the first time—), the trim around windows."

And "I wish I hadn't been so shy about asking for consultations from local experts," she says.

She's since discovered that she lives in the oldest house still standing on Cape Ann—and that the original 1645 house (now a room inside) is one of only three 17th-century log houses in the area. She's learned skills she never thought she would need, and taken on causes that never interested her before—the things one does in the service of an early house. •

The post-and-beam addition was built with 18th-century, hand-hewn barn beams from Maine. It steps in vertically from the plane of the side of the house, and its roof is slightly lower, so that it cannot be seen from the front of the old house. Interior access to it is through the existing back door (in the dining room); a back hall was extended to provide access upstairs.