

Dendroarchaeological Investigation of the Morris Building, Halifax, Nova Scotia



André Robichaud^{1,2}, Jonathan Fowler³ and Colin P. Laroque²

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¹ Géographie, Secteur des Arts et Sciences Humaines, Université de Moncton,
Campus de Shippagan

² Mount Allison Dendrochronology Laboratory, Department of Geography and
Environment, Mount Allison University

³ Anthropology Department, Saint Mary's University

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Abstract

In 2009, a group of concerned citizens gathered under the auspices of The Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia and The Ecology Action Centre to save an 18th century building from demolition. Known as 'the Morris Building' for its association with Charles Morris, Nova Scotia's first Chief Surveyor, the structure was moved from 1273 Hollis street in Halifax to a temporary location at the end of the block. A new apartment building – The Vic Suites – was built in its place. Although researchers had believed the Morris Building pre-dated 1781, its precise age was unknown at the time of the move. Through a combination of dendrochronological and historical research, this report suggests a construction date for the Morris Building of 1764 or shortly thereafter, making it the oldest wooden house in Halifax. Moreover, it concludes that the house was not built by Charles Morris but rather by a cooper named Dennis Heffernan, and was purchased by Charles Morris Junior in 1777.

Sommaire

En 2009, un groupe de citoyen s'est réuni sous les auspices de *The Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia* et *The Ecology Action Centre* concerné par la sauvegarde d'un bâtiment du 18^e siècle menacé de démolition. Connu sous le nom de *Morris Building* en raison de liens possibles avec Charles Morris (père), premier chef arpenteur géomètre de la Nouvelle-Écosse, le bâtiment a été déplacé de sa position initiale du 1273 de la rue Hollis de Halifax à un site temporaire à proximité, car un bloc appartement – *The Vic Suites* - devait y être construit. Bien que les spécialistes croyaient que le *Morris Building* datait d'avant 1781, son âge exact restait inconnu. Avec la combinaison de recherches dendroarchéologiques et historiques, ce rapport suggère une date de construction en 1764 ou peu après, faisant de ce bâtiment la plus vieille maison en bois de Halifax. De plus, le rapport conclut que la maison n'a pas été construite par Charles Morris (père), mais par un tonnelier du nom de Dennis Heffernan, puis acheté par Charles Morris (fils) en 1777.

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Introduction

In December 2009, The Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia, The Ecology Action Centre, and an alliance of concerned citizens succeeded in moving the Charles Morris Building in advance of a construction project that would have spelled its ruin. Convinced that the building predated 1781 (Pacey 1987, 95), heritage advocates were loath to see yet another piece of colonial Nova Scotian heritage laid low by development, while environmentalists felt motivated to save a perfectly serviceable building from being carted off to a landfill. In the months following the scramble to save the building, attention turned to better understanding the structure. Perhaps most importantly, its date of construction had yet to be determined. With this goal in mind, a program of dendrochronological and archival research was launched in May of 2010 with the support of the Anthropology Department at Saint Mary's University and the MAD Lab at Mount Allison University.

Charles Morris

As the building at the center of this investigation (Figure 1) has been associated with Charles Morris and bears his name (Pacey 1987, 95), his life is a fitting place to begin our discussion. According to his most accomplished biographer, Charles Morris' career in Nova Scotia can be summarized with deceptive speed: he was, it is true, an "army officer, office-holder, and judge" (Blakeley 1979, 559). He was also a figure of singular importance in Nova Scotia's colonial history, playing a pivotal – if poorly acknowledged – role in securing the province to the British Empire.

Morris was born in Boston on 8 June 1711 to a prosperous and well-connected family. His father, also Charles, was a sail maker who reportedly hailed from

Bristol, England (Eaton 1913, 228).¹ Young Charles' marriage to Mary Read, daughter of the attorney general of Massachusetts, speaks to his family's social standing in colonial Massachusetts. As Blakeley laments, however, very little is known about Morris' early career. He was a school teacher in Hopkinton, Massachusetts in 1734, but this essentially completes our picture of him prior to his arrival in Nova Scotia (Blakeley 1979, 559).



Figure 1: A view of the Morris Building as it stood in May 2010. The building was temporarily relocated to this site in December 2009.

¹ The fact that the elder Morris bore the name Charles makes a bit of a muddle of the practice of Canadian historians to identify the son as Charles Morris I. The affection for the name 'Charles' ran deep among the Morrises, who employ it for their sons for the next two generations.

Charles Morris appears to have first come to Nova Scotia in late 1746 as a captain of a company of 100 troops sent by Governor William Shirley to protect Annapolis Royal. Prior to leaving Massachusetts, he sold a large parcel of land at Hopkinton on which stood an unfinished house, but Morris seems to have retained another house and farm there, which he did not sell until October of 1755 (Eaton 1913, 288). The first sale took place during King George's War, and shortly after the property changed hands Morris found himself on the front lines of the imperial struggle for North America. His first exposure to his future home is detailed with some care in his "A Breif Survey of Nova Scotia [sic.]," likely penned in 1748 as a lengthy intelligence report for Shirley and his staff.² In it, Morris describes arriving at Annapolis Royal in late 1746 to reinforce the garrison against an impending French attack. His orders subsequently took his detachment, in December, to Grand-Pré, where he was later reinforced by troops under the command of Col. Arthur Noble. Two months later, a combined French and Aboriginal force attacked and defeated the New Englanders at Grand-Pré and Morris narrowly escaped with his life. His account of the engagement laid the blame directly at the feet of the Acadians, giving evidence of a grudge against the "Neutral French" that he would retain until the end of his days.³

We do not yet possess the historical evidence to properly assess Morris' motives at this juncture in his career, but his decision to remain in Nova Scotia despite this very hard introduction certainly reveals a steely character. Following a brief return to Massachusetts, he appears again in Nova Scotia in the role of cartographer, executing maps of Acadian settlements in the upper Bay of Fundy (cf. Plank 2001, 118).⁴ It is symptomatic of the anemia afflicting Britain's government in the province that as late as the 1740s the centers of Acadian

² Library and Archives Canada (LAC) MG 18 F.4 – F.10.

³ Charles Morris [1748] "A Breif Survey of Nova Scotia" LAC MG 18 F.4 – F.10, pp. 38-39.

⁴ These maps appear to have been drawn in very late 1747 or early 1748. See "Captain Morris's observations upon his survey of the upper part of the bay of Fundy, and plan for English settlements. Transmitted in Gov.r Shirleys letter of Feb.r 18th 1748," in Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections and Archives, Papers of Professor Andrew Brown (1763-1834): Gen 156 Bundle 1.

population 'up the bay' had yet to be adequately mapped, but Morris now saw to that.⁵ The story of Morris' cartographical training has not yet been revealed. Writing in reference to what may have been Morris' first assignment as a cartographer in Nova Scotia, Paul Mascarene describes him simply as a gentleman "well Skill'd in taking Drafts of Coasts, Harbours & land."⁶ Whatever their source, these skills underwrote his subsequent career.

The conclusion of King George's War saw Britain adopt a much more assertive stance in Nova Scotia, and the intelligence Morris was gathering on the ground increasingly came to inform a new policy oriented toward Protestant settlement and formal integration with the empire. Morris' contributions during the 1749 policy pivot are noteworthy for their breadth of impact. A manuscript map at the National Archives of the United Kingdom testifies to his input in the European context: it is a rendering of New England and New France that likely saw service during boundary negotiations between the French and British governments following the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (Figure 2).⁷ But he also remained very active on the ground in the colony. Working with the assistance of military engineer John Brewse, Charles Morris laid out the street grid for the newly founded town of Halifax in the summer of 1749 (Blakeley 1979, 559; Sutherland 1979, 92-93), and on September 25th, in an act that signified the government's satisfaction with his conduct to date, Morris was appointed Chief Surveyor of Nova Scotia.⁸ Shortly thereafter, he surveyed the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia to the north and south of Halifax, choosing abandoned or mostly abandoned Acadian settlements for the abortive township of Lawrencetown and Lunenburg respectively (cf. Blakeley 1979, 560).⁹

⁵ The resulting map can be found in the National Archives of the United Kingdom (NAUK), CO700 Nova Scotia 13.

⁶ Paul Mascarene to Capt. Askens of His Majesty's Shipp The Port Mahon, Annapolis Royal, 31 May 1748, British Library, Andrew Brown Papers, Add. 19,071 p. 115.

⁷ Charles Morris 1749 "Draught of the Northern English Colonies together with the French neighbouring settlements..." NAUK CO700/North American Colonies 8.

⁸ Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management (NSARM) RG 1 vol. 164, p. 33.

⁹ One of his maps from this period have been published in Dawson 1988, 119-120. The original manuscript maps are at NAUK, e.g. "Chart of part of the Bay of Muscadoboit" CO 700/Nova



Figure 2: Detail of Draught of the Northern English Colonies, together with the French neighbouring settlements, 1755. National Archives of the United Kingdom (NAUK) CO700/NorthAmericanColoniesGeneral 8.

The mid-18th century was a turbulent time for the inhabitants of northeastern North America. The founding of Halifax took place in the short lull between two world wars, and Charles Morris was soon caught up again in the struggle. Prior to the founding of Halifax, he had conducted background research in order to facilitate plans to settle Protestants among the Acadians in Nova Scotia. Plank (2001) has outlined the process by which these plans miscarried. After setting up Halifax, the British began to militarize the province. Forts appeared in the Acadian settlements (*Vieux Logis* at Grand-Pré in 1749, Fort Edward at Pisiquid, and Fort Lawrence at Beaubassin in 1750), and ranger companies patrolled the rough roads and trails (Grenier 2008). Geographical knowledge was central to this endeavour, and no one in the British camp was better situated to make this

Scotia 21; "A Draught of part of the Sea Coast of Nova Scotia from Port Senior to Shillingcook" CO 700/Nova Scotia 22.

contribution than Charles Morris. Where he had gone previously, the military now followed.

The increased militarization of Nova Scotia reached a crescendo in 1755 with the British capture of Fort Beauséjour and the decision to deport the Acadians (Hand 2004; Faragher 2005). Here, too, Morris played a key role, despite not being appointed to the Executive Council until after this momentous step had been taken.¹⁰ As noted above, his writings indicate that he had long been suspicious of Acadian loyalties, a fact that emerges early and with some energy in his “Breif Survey,” and which reappears in subsequent work.¹¹ Although it may be inferred that Morris’s opinions on this matter would have been known to his superiors, it is difficult to measure his impact on the eventual decision to deport the Acadians. What can now be discerned, however, is that Morris seems to have been drawing up plans for this eventuality as early as 1754 (Faragher 2005, 520-21 n.18).

The Deportation of the Acadians fundamentally changed the ethnic character of Nova Scotia, significantly hastening the province’s formal integration into the British Empire. As the Seven Years’ War began to wind down in the region, particularly after the fall of Louisbourg (1758) and Quebec (1759), Governor Charles Lawrence turned his attention to the long-postponed aim of Protestant immigration. This seems to have been a particularly busy time for Charles Morris, who oversaw the establishment of new townships all over the province, often on lands formerly developed by the Acadians. We see him early in this process with the Connecticut Planters among the ruins of Acadian Grand-Pré, for instance, informing Governor Lawrence that the new settlers are “in gen.^l are extreme busy in taking down ye old houses, digging Cellars & plowing up their lots for

¹⁰ NSARM RG 1 vol. 210, p. 221.

¹¹ E.g. Charles Morris n.d. “Judge Morris’ Paper on the Causes of the War in 1755: and the History of the Acadians,” British Library, Andrew Brown Papers, Add. 19,072 no. 32, but especially Charles Morris 22 Dec. 1748 “A Plan humbly offerr’d for the Settlement of Nova Scotia,” in Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections and Archives, Papers of Professor Andrew Brown (1763-1834): Gen. 157 Bundle 1.

gardens”¹² (again, he likely knew these lands as well as anyone). Evidence of his work can also be found at Liverpool, Granville, Cornwallis, Falmouth, Barrington, and Yarmouth (Blakeley 1979, 560-61). As he had done in 1749 at Halifax, he laid out the town grids for several of these new communities. He also produced regional maps at smaller scale plotting the positions of the new townships (Figure 3). Local surveyors seem to have later filled in the detailed cadastral work (e.g. McNabb 1986, 28), although Morris sometimes produced surveys of smaller areas, particularly in those cases involving his peers and colleagues in the colonial elite.¹³ In the later 1760s he moved on to map Cape Breton and Canso, the Saint John River (then part of Nova Scotia), and was later active on Saint John’s Island (PEI), laying out the street grid for Charlottetown in 1768 (Blakeley 1979, 561).

Judging by his attendance records at Executive Council meetings in Halifax, Morris’ last major surveying job may have been in 1769-70, when he was ordered to help “settle the Limits and boundaries of the Governments of New York and the New Jerseys” (Blakeley 1979, 561). By this point the wave of pre-Loyalist colonization of the Maritimes Provinces had crested. Morris would not live to see the Loyalist wave, but he did find himself implicated in the political currents set in motion by the American Revolution. In his later career in Halifax he served as an assistant judge on Nova Scotia’s Supreme Court, briefly serving as Chief Justice (1776-1778), where he presided over the trials of those involved in the Eddy Rebellion, as well as the sedition trial of Malachy Salter (Blakeley 1979, 652).

¹² Charles Morris to Charles Lawrence, 20 July 1760, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections and Archives, Papers of Professor Andrew Brown (1763-1834): Gen. 156 Bundle 2.

¹³ E.g. Ste-Croix River: Charles Morris 1760 “A Survey of a Tract of Land on the River Saint Croix...” NSARM PANS O/S 136 - 1760; Noel: Charles Morris n.d. Department of Natural Resources Hants. Co. Portfolio no. 52.



Figure 3: A Plan of Minas Bason and Cobequid Bay with the Several Towns Granted Thereon, 1761. NAUK CO 700/Nova Scotia 35.

Like many of his contemporaries in the Halifax elite, Morris owned farm land in Windsor, where he seems to have spent time. According to Eaton, Morris may have passed away while visiting this rural retreat in late 1781 (Eaton 1913, 289). Morris set his obviously enfeebled hand to a codicil to his last will and testament at Windsor on 11 November, 1781, and legal documents associated with his estate indicate that he was dead by the 13th.¹⁴

¹⁴ RG 48 vol. 414 no. M154.

Methods

The research program combined dendrochronology and historical investigations in order to determine the construction date of the Morris Building. These methods are described here in sequence.

Dendrochronology

Dendroarchaeology is the application of tree ring analysis to the dating of old wooden structures and has a few advantages over other methods; namely, it causes little damage to the structure, and it yields a reliable date with a precision of one year. The technique is well known and has been employed only recently in the Atlantic provinces of Canada, almost exclusively by the Mount Allison Dendrochronology Laboratory.

Sampling of the Morris House was carried out the 15th of May 2010. Core samples were taken using a manual increment borer on eleven floor beams (Figure 4 and Appendix). They were placed in plastic straws, then labelled and taken back to the lab. The cores were glued on grooved wooden mounting canes and progressively sanded with sandpaper of increasingly fine grain to expose the annual ring-growth patterns. The annual rings were measured at the MAD Lab using a 24 inch movable Velmex stage hooked up to a digital encoder to an accuracy of a 1/1000 mm. Raw data were captured by J2X software and put into standard tree-ring decadal format and then standardized with the use of ARSTAN software (Holmes *et al.*, 1986).



Figure 4: The floor beams were excellent material for sampling and dendroarcheological analysis.

Ring-width data can also be crossdated with regional reference chronologies developed from earlier work in the region using the software COFECHA (Holmes *et al.*, 1986; Grissino-Mayer, 2001). Routinely, we also visually test pattern matching of line graphs of all series with the graphic software DeltaGraph®.

It is important to note that the dendroarchaeological dates correspond to the felling of trees (cutting dates) and not a construction date. The date of the construction of a building can possibly be the same year as the cutting date or a year or two later, depending on construction procedures (for example, drying of wood, wood bought at a mill that was cut some years before purchase, etc.). The samples that didn't have the last growth ring (i.e., wood was deteriorated, beam was completely squared, etc.) do not represent a cutting date. However, they are

valuable because they help corroborate the entire dendrochronological assessment.

Additionally, excess portions of selected core samples were used for wood identification using a scanning electron microscope (SEM) available at the Mount Allison Digital Microscopy Facility. The procedure allows precise wood identification through the recognition of species-specific cell features and structures. This is important because different species can have different growing reactions to the same environmental variables. When the species of a wood artifact is known, it then enables us to crossdate the samples with the proper reference chronology with more accurate and reliable results.

Historical research

Primary and secondary sources were consulted in order to shed light on Charles Morris' life and activities. Much of the broader context has been presented in the introduction above, but an additional body of research pertaining specifically to the Hollis Street property requires special mention here.

Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management houses microfilm copies of land grant and transaction records pertaining to colonial Halifax, and these records were consulted in order to better understand the early history of the property on which the Morris Building formerly stood. The research began by consulting Jackson's index map of Halifax properties and then tracing the grants and land transactions.¹⁵ Maps and surveys held by the Department of Natural Resources, the National Archives of the United Kingdom and the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, England, were also consulted. These lines of inquiry – and particularly the land records – revealed a great deal of valuable information that substantially revises previous understandings of the Morris Building's history.

¹⁵ H. Jackson Town of Halifax – South Suburbs, 1945 [1749]. Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management (NSARM) V6/240-1749.

Results

Dendrochronology

Wood identification revealed that out of eleven samples, six were white pine (*Pinus strobus*) (001, 003, 006, 007, 010, and 011), four were spruce (*Picea sp.*) (002, 004, 005, and 009), and one was larch (*Larix laricina*) (008) (Figures 5 and 6; see also Table 1 at the end of the results section).

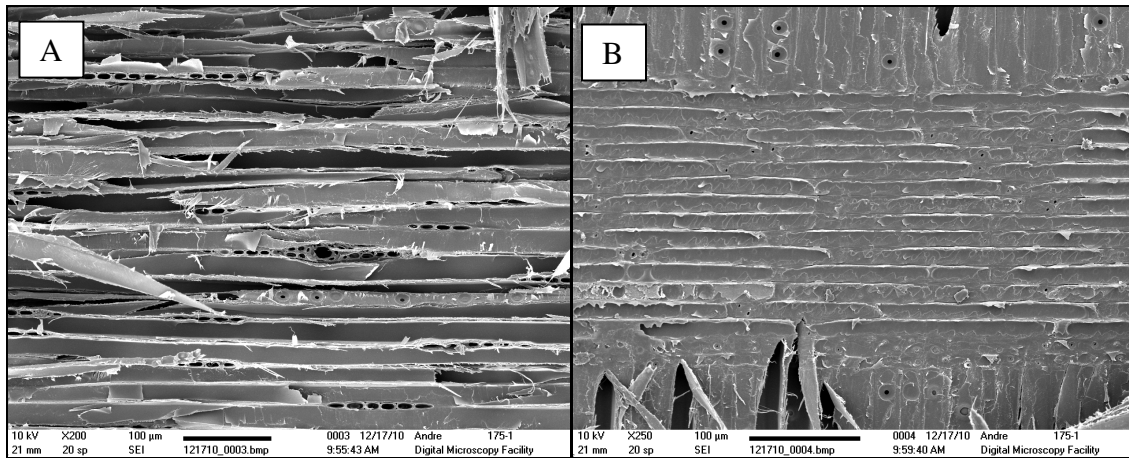


Figure 5: Micrographs of sample 10CS002. A) A tangential view showing rays and a resin duct. B) A Radial view showing a ray. Features are typical of spruce.

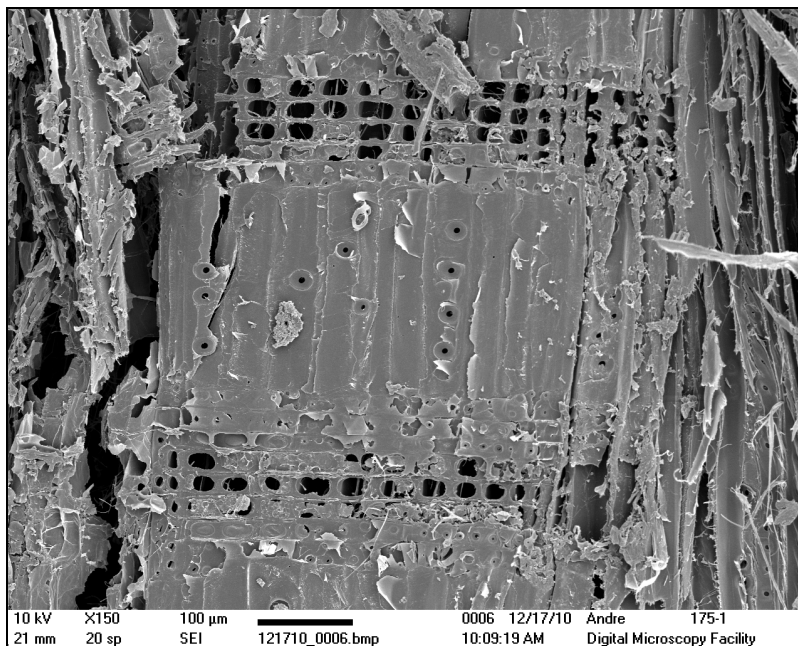


Figure 6: Micrograph of sample 10CS007 with a radial view of rays typical of white pine.

The six series from the Morris House white pine samples were crossdated with each other to determine their position in time relative to each other. Out of those six samples, five (we omitted 001 and 003) were used to build an averaged standardized curve to produce a chronology. It was compared to a white pine master chronology developed from the Government House in Halifax. (Pickard *et al.*, 2008). We attempted various visual pattern matching and Figure 7 illustrates the best fit that was found. The Morris House chronology dated the wood to 1758.

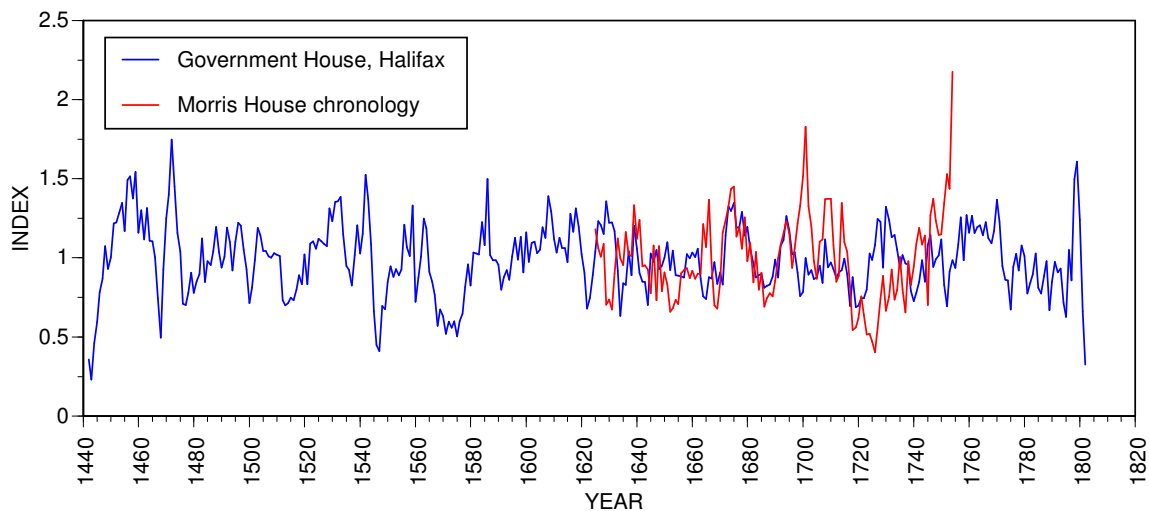


Figure 7: The Government House white pine master chronology compared to the Morris house chronology.

We also conducted a similar procedure for each individual series of white pine from the Morris House to further assess this result. Four of the series (006, 007, 010 and 011) illustrated a good pattern match to the Government House, but only two (010 and 011) had terminal rings at 1745 and 1758 respectively. Although series 001 and 003 were crossdated, they had low correlations and visual matches to the Government House time series, as well as with the other Morris House white pine series. Their terminal rings were found to be at 1761 and 1764, which is slightly later than the cut dates for sample 010 and 011's terminal rings. However, they both illustrated very good pattern matches with 006 (Figures 8 and 9). Although there is a possibility this is their position in time, they are listed

in brackets in Table 1 to help distinguish them as being problematic due to their low correlations.

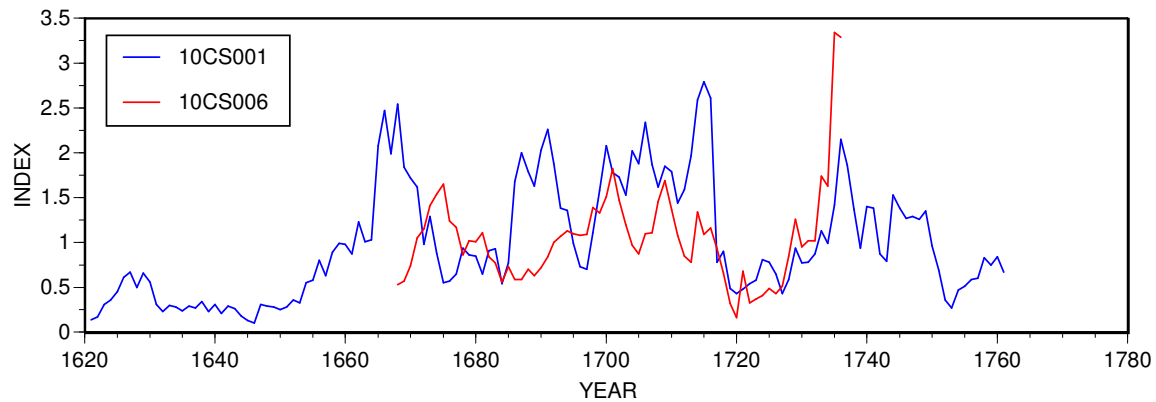


Figure 8: Most probable position of 10CS001 relative to 10CS006. The terminal date of 001 would be 1761.

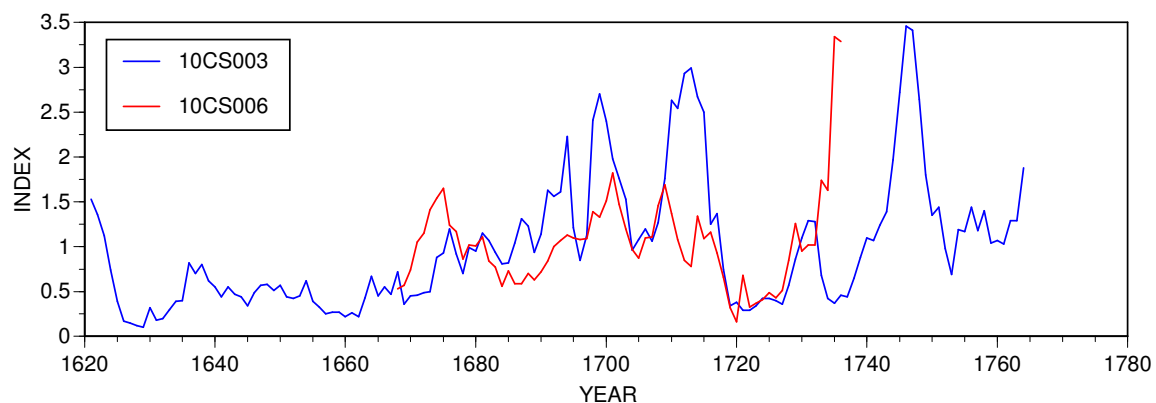


Figure 9: Most probable position of 10CS003 relative to 10CS006. The terminal date of 003 would be 1764.

The four spruce series from Morris House were crossdated relative to each other and then compared to various spruce master chronologies from Nova Scotia and southeastern New Brunswick with little success. Attempts were also made between the Morris House spruce and pine series, and visual matches and chronology correlations were good in most cases. Figures 10 and 11 illustrate some of the inter-species comparisons. This is not surprising because spruce (especially red spruce) and white pine chronologies often (but not always) correlate well in the Maritimes. Therefore, spruce series 002, 005 and 009 are

dated respectively at 1754, 1755 and 1741. Series 004 has one to three missing rings and would be dated at approximately 1752-55.

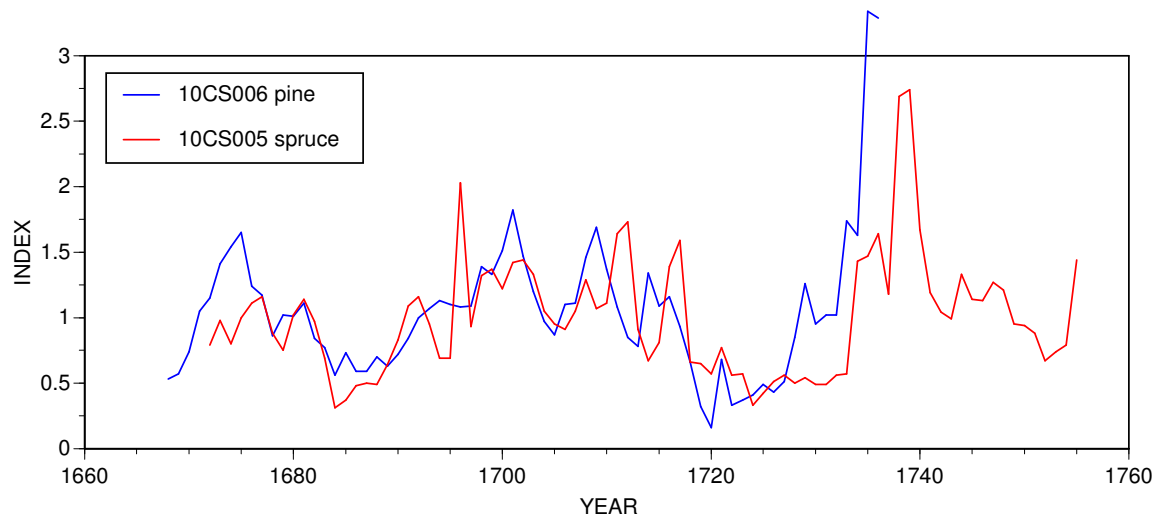


Figure 10: Visual pattern matching of 10CS005 (spruce) relative to 10CS006 (white pine). The spruce series terminal date would be 1755.

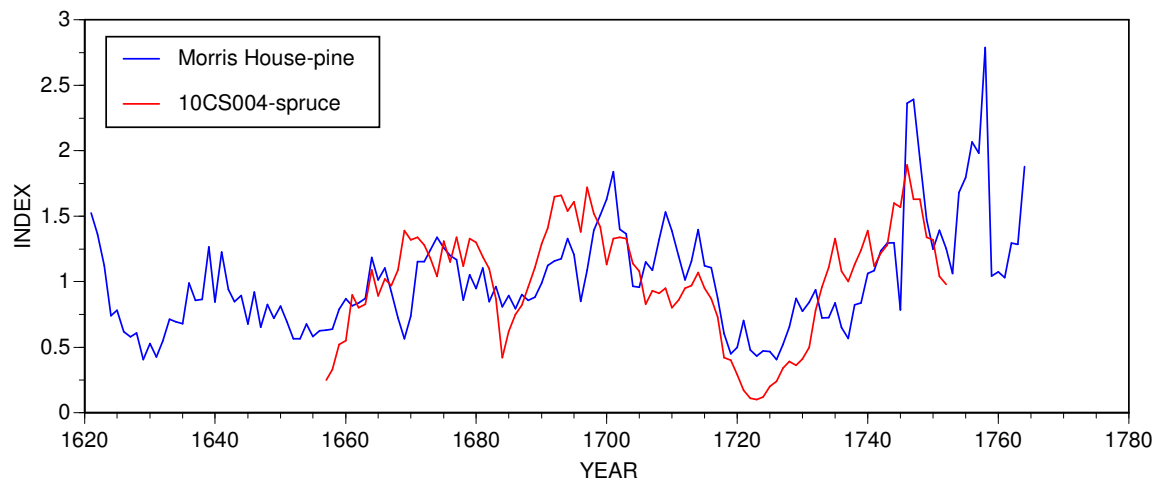


Figure 11: Pattern matching of 10CS004 (spruce) relative to the Morris House white pine chronology. The spruce series terminal date would be 1753-5 (an estimated one to three rings were missing on the degrading periphery of the sample).

Unfortunately, the larch sample could not be crossdated. It didn't match with the few suitable master chronologies available, mostly from southeast New Brunswick, or with the other Morris House series.

Results are compiled in Table 1 below. Two populations of reliable cutting dates are observed: two samples are at 1741-45 and four are at 1754-58. Two other samples have less reliable and slightly later dates (1761 and 1764).

Table 1: Morris House samples information and crossdating results.

Number	Position	Outermost ring status*	Notes	Species	Crossdated interval	Cutting date
001	small floor joist	terminal ring	low correlation; damaged sample	<i>Pinus strobus</i>	1631-1761	(1761?)
002	big cross beam; floor joist	terminal ring		<i>Picea sp.</i>	1626-1754	1754
003	small floor joist	terminal ring	low correlation; damaged sample	<i>Pinus strobus</i>	1621-1764	(1764?)
004	sole	1-3 missing rings		<i>Picea sp.</i>	1657-1752	1753-5
005	small floor joist	terminal ring		<i>Picea sp.</i>	1672-1755	1755
006	floor joist	missing rings		<i>Pinus strobus</i>	1668-1736	
007A	sole	missing rings		<i>Pinus strobus</i>	1625-1698	
007B	sole	missing rings	not measured	<i>Pinus strobus</i>		
008	floor joist	terminal ring		<i>Larix laricina</i>	not crossdated	
009	small floor joist	terminal ring		<i>Picea sp.</i>	1697-1741	1741
010	floor joist	terminal ring		<i>Pinus strobus</i>	1646-1745	1745
011	small floor joist	terminal ring		<i>Pinus strobus</i>	1637-1758	1758

*Outermost ring: last visible growth ring of a sample. Terminal ring: in this report, means that the last growth ring when the tree was cut is present in the sample. Cutting date: year that the tree was cut.

Historical Research

Prior to this research effort, our understanding of the age of the Morris Building was limited. Pacey observes that Charles Morris refers to “the office and Store on the North part of my House Lot in Halifax” in a 1781 codicil to his last will and testament, inferring that the structure at 1273 Hollis Street was the building in question (1987, 95).¹⁶ The codicil expresses the elder Morris’ desire to leave his ‘office and store’ to his son, Charles Jr., who likewise inherited the father’s role as Chief Surveyor, which duties he had already begun to assume in earnest by 1776 (Chard 1983). Charles Morris II clearly came into possession of the south suburbs property and ultimately built a substantial house of his own here (Shutlak 2002). The mansion is depicted in an early 19th century painting (Figure 12).¹⁷

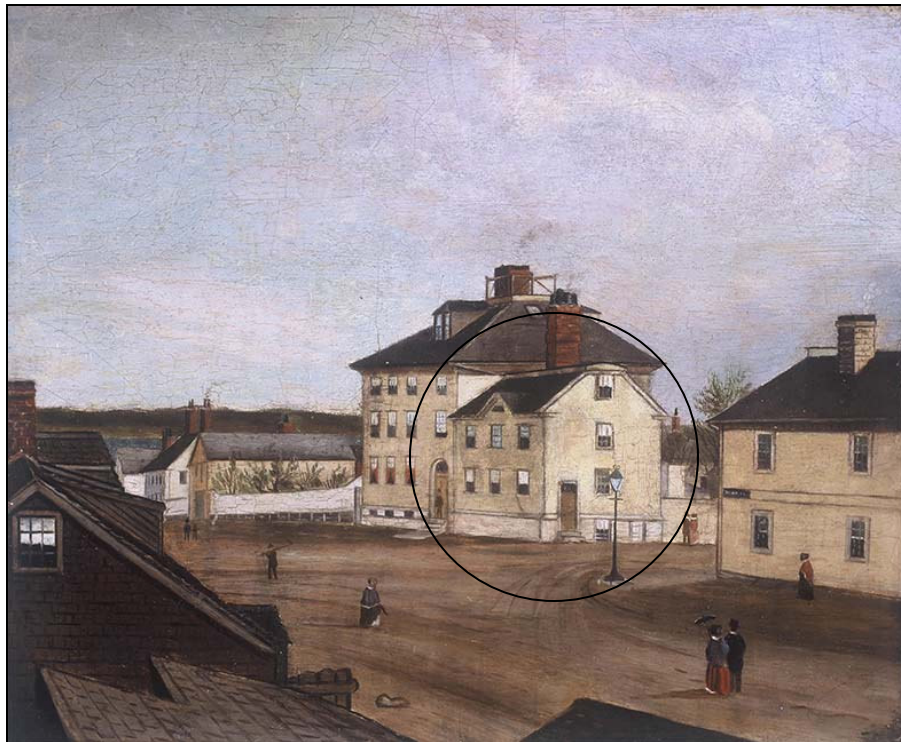


Figure 12: R.D. Wilkie’s watercolour depicting the Morris mansion (centre) and office (at the corner, circled) at the intersection of Hollis and Morris streets. Image source: http://www.htns.ca/projects/proj_morris.html (original at NSARM)

¹⁶ The original document is at NSARM RG 48 vol. 414 no. M154.

¹⁷ As Shutlak (2002, 5) and Pacey (1987, 95-96) observe, this mansion was ‘absorbed’ into the New Victoria Hotel at the end of the 19th century, while the office building was moved a short distance down the block to the 1273 Hollis Street location.

That the mansion post-dates the office building is clear from late 18th century maps, which depict the smaller structure standing alone on the property (lot F18 to be precise) (Figure 13). At least one large scale plan from the pre-mansion era identifies the land in question as “Mr. Morris’s Field and Office” (Figure 14), confirming the association with this prominent family. But which Morris was it?



Figure 13: Details of two late 18th century maps of Halifax’s south suburbs depicting the Morris Building as the sole occupant of the lot at the NW corner of Hollis and Morris streets (circled). North at top. L: J.F.W. DesBarres, *The Harbour of Halifax, Atlantic Neptune*, 1777. HNS 46/K0118 © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London. R: Charles Blaskowitz, *A Plan of the Peninsula, upon which the Town of Halifax is situated, shewing; the Harbour, the Naval Yard, and the several Works constructed for their Defence*, 1784. NAUK CO 700/Nova Scotia 49B.

Archival land records (grants and deeds) offer the best evidence for reconstructing land tenure histories, and we are fortunate that documents pertaining to this case are intact. However, what they reveal is surprising. The property in question was granted not to Charles Morris but to John Baragon, who received it from the Crown in March of 1750.¹⁸ These were early days for Halifax, which had been established as a British naval base only the previous summer. By 1751 the entire Halifax peninsula had been divided into lots for the settlers – most of them 5-acre farm lots – but the outbreak of hostilities with the Mi’kmaq

¹⁸ NSARM RG 47 Halifax deeds (Halifax allotment book) vol. 1 p. 57.

seems to have limited the development of land beyond the town plot's pickets (Akins 1895, 30; Grenier 2008). It may be a reflection of these constraints that Baragon earned only £2 10s. when he sold the property to Dennis Heffernan, a cooper, three years later.¹⁹

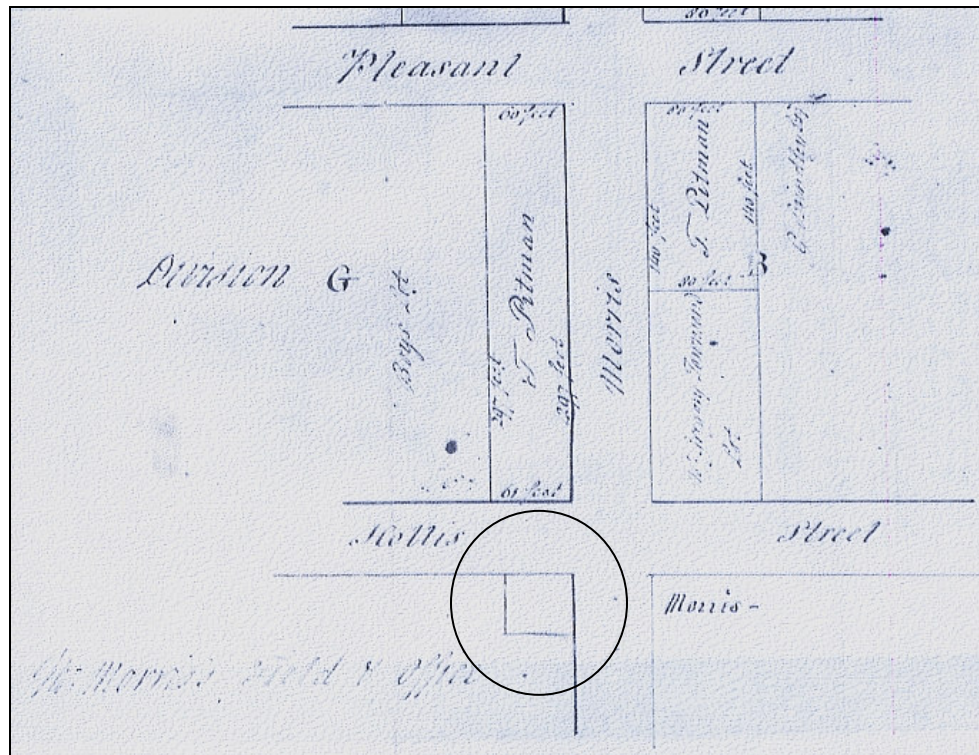


Figure 14: Undated plan of blocks in the south suburbs of Halifax depicting “Mr. Morris’s Field & Office.” North at right. Anonymous, Department of Natural Resources, Town of Halifax Portfolio no. 25.

Land records indicate the property remains in Heffernan’s hands for the next twenty-four years, a time span that encompasses most recent tree-ring dates, thus far obtained from the Morris Building. In 1777 Heffernan sold this and the adjacent lot to Charles Morris for £65, and the jump in price likely reflects the construction of the building at the northwest corner of the block that we see by this date on DesBarres’ plan (Figure 13, L).²⁰ Interestingly, but probably not coincidentally, Heffernan registered his deed of purchase from Baragon in 1764: the same year as our most recent tree-ring date. This may be interpreted as a

¹⁹ NSARM RG 47 Halifax deeds vol. 6 p. 164.

²⁰ NSARM RG 47 Halifax deeds vol. 15 p. 164.

sign that Heffernan was planning to construct a house on the lot, and wanted to ensure that the legal groundwork was in place.

Clarifying and redefining the ownership of the Morris Building can be taken one step further via the land records, for the Charles Morris who purchased the property from Heffernan turns out not to be our man, Charles Morris I, who was by this date nearing the end of his life, but rather his son, Charles Morris Junior. This fact is demonstrated by the Heffernan to Morris deed, which twice appends the word "Junior" to the purchaser's name (Figure 15).

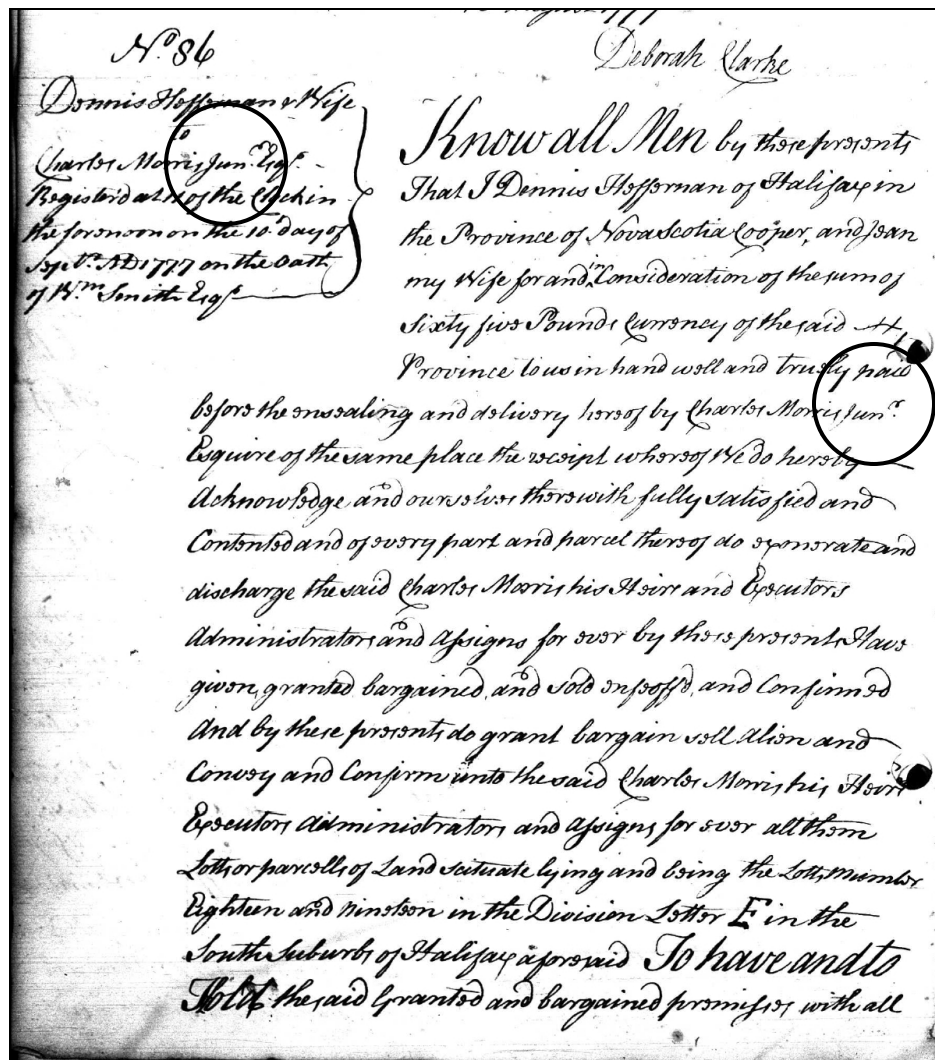


Figure 15: The first page of the deed by which Dennis Heffernan sold lot F18 in the south suburbs to Charles Morris Junior (circled). NSARM RG 47 Halifax deeds vol. 15 p. 164.

If this information is correct, then the “office and Store” to which the elder Morris refers in his will could not have been the building that has been the subject of our research. And this appears to be the case. Looking again at the will, we observe that he describes the ‘office and store’ as being on his “House Lot” in Halifax.”²¹ The allotment book for Halifax identifies Charles Morris Sr.’s Halifax house lot as H7 in Forman’s Division, which is at the north end of the town.²² Charles Morris Sr. does not appear to have ever owned lot F18 in the south suburbs, and as we have already observed, there is no evidence of a house accompanying the office here until after the elder Morris’ death in 1781.

²¹ NSARM RG 48 vol. 414 no. M154.

²² NSARM RG 47 Halifax deeds (Halifax allotment book) vol. 1 p. 12.

Conclusion

According to the dendroarchaeological analysis of the Morris Building floor beams, cutting dates range from 1741 to 1764. The use of timbers with a variety of cutting dates (some pre-dating the founding of Halifax) suggests the builder may have gathered materials from a range of sources in advance of construction, and the relatively low correlations between the ring width series may indicate that some of these materials were not sourced locally. Ordinarily, the inference to be drawn from these data would place the construction date in 1764 or a year or two later. However, the most reliable cutting dates in our sample place the Morris Building's construction slightly earlier, in 1758. Given this incertitude, dendrochronology suggests the house was built no earlier than 1758 and no later than 1764. Additional sampling may refine this picture further.

Historical evidence indicates that the land on which the Morris Building originally stood was owned by a cooper named Dennis Heffernan during the suggested construction period. The fact that Heffernan registered his deed in January of 1764 lends additional support to the interpretation that construction occurred in that year, presumably after a period of preparation. Perhaps Heffernan was waiting for the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, which brought peace to the region and with it some measure of security for those dwelling in Halifax's suburbs. Charles Morris I appears to have played no direct role in the story of this building, although his son purchased it from Heffernan in 1777 and subsequently used it as an office. On the basis of this evidence, perhaps a more fitting name for what is now Halifax's oldest wooden dwelling would be 'The Heffernan House.'

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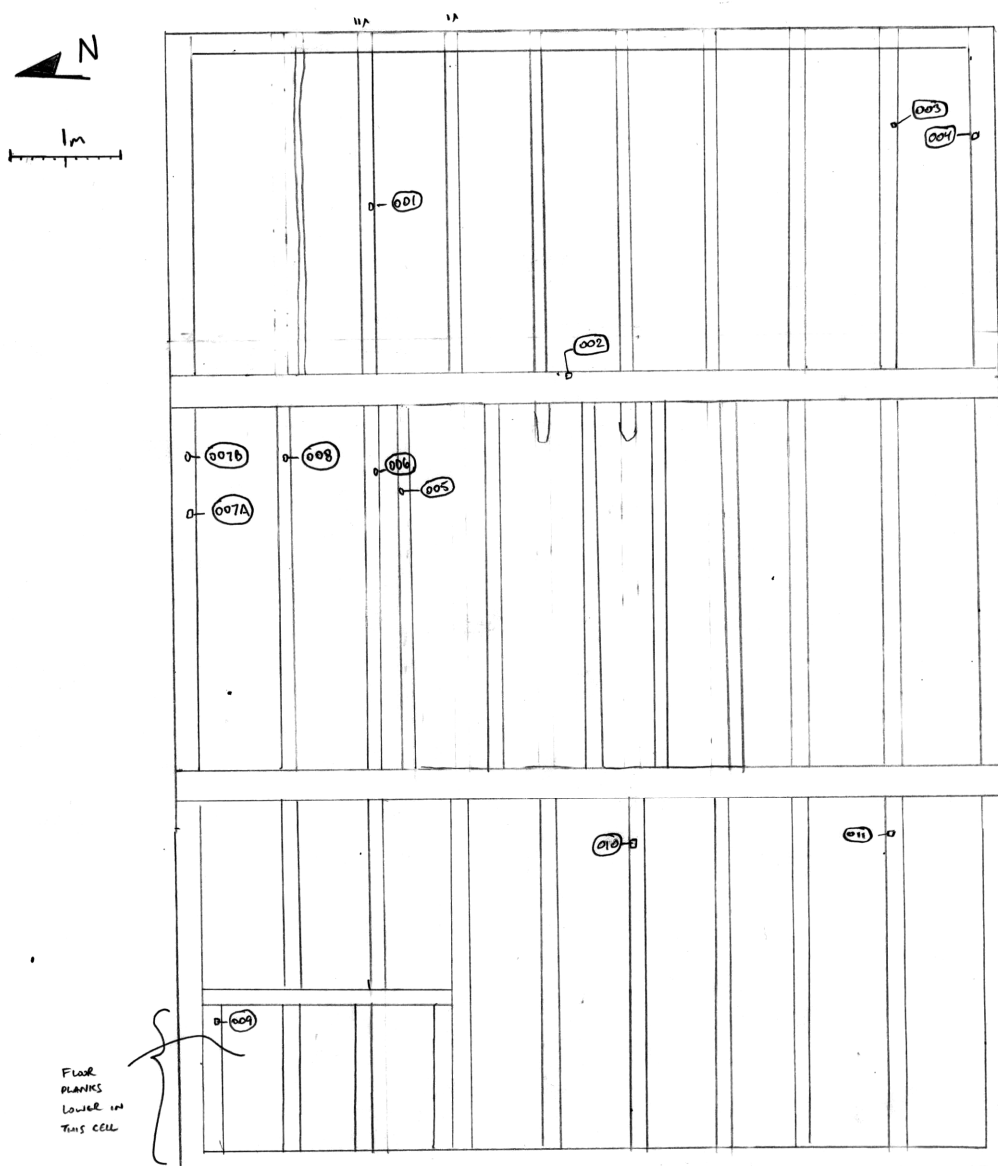
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APPENDIX

Floor plan of the Morris House showing the position of the samples.

Date	15 MAY 2010	Site	MORRIS BUILDING	Diagram #	1
		Name	J. Fowler		
Drawing n°	area				
___ of ___	10m x 7.3m				



Drawing by J. Fowler