

The Adams/Kimberly/Potwin House  
20 Gray Street (formerly 7/23 Spring St.; Maple Ave./Amherst Common)

Brothers John Sidney and Charles Adams came to Amherst in 1825 with the first printing press in town and published the first newspaper. By February 1829 they bought a half acre lot on the West Amherst Common, “a certain tenement situated in the West Street in...Amherst near the Meeting House with a building thereupon, being the same which was formerly occupied by a Hatter’s Shop but now as a dwelling house, bounded west on the street or highway...” (apparently the front part of the present building.) The brothers divided the property, sold the parts, received the south portion again (with the buildings) and sold it to non-resident Rufus Greene in 1836. He had a local carpenter build a barn, noting in the indenture that Thompson Kimberly was in residence. In 1838 he sold the place to Henry R. Kimberly, Thompson Kimberly remaining at home there. Mortgage payment problems nearly sent the Kimberlys to “gaol” in 1844, and continued during the family’s ownership. The 1840 U.S. Census shows Thompson Kimberly with a household of ten; in 1850 with wife and child, and in 1860 with wife and another couple. He worked as a tailor and died Oct.1,1861, aged 76. The property was sold by Henry Kimberly’s family (of New Jersey) in 1869 to neighbor John H.M.Leland. (In the meantime, a house built on the Adamses north side lot was moved to make way for Grace Church, built in 1865.)

The Amherst Record picks up the story on July 1,1869: “Preparations are in progress for moving the Kimberly house, which stands south of the Episcopal church, back on to the new street soon to be opened by Mr. Leland, leading east from Maple Avenue. The street...will offer some very desirable building spots.” July 8: “The Kimberly house has begun to recede from its position on Maple Avenue...” Sept.16, 1869: “Rev. Mr. Leland has sold the Kimberly house...to Rev. Mr. Potwine for \$5,500.” – but the deed is dated Dec. 6, 1869, to Mrs. Harriet K. Potwine, wife of Thomas S. in her own right, for \$6,000. The Potwins (without the e) are listed in the 1870 census with a daughter, a servant and five students. In 1873, Thomas S. Potwin bought the lot next door to the east and later had the boundaries between the lots adjusted. By 1877 the Potwins had moved to Hartford, and then retired to Florida when they sold the Amherst house to Harry P. Stearns, also of Hartford. Stearns was renting to Elsie L. Saunders, a dressmaker in 1903 (by which time the house was numbered 7). She bought the place in 1905 and took on roomers, one of whom she married in 1909, watchmaker George H.W.Smith. (The present ell of the house was put on in 1908-09, enlarging

an earlier extension.) Through administration of of Elsie L. Smith's will in 1929 the property went to the Amherst Inn Company for \$10,000, and was used until W.W.II to house Lord Jeffery Inn staff, the company's hotel having replaced Leland's house on the corner in 1926. After the war, Amherst College professors and their families were the usual inhabitants, in two apartments. The Trustees of Amherst College took over the property officially on 6/3/1980. It was left empty after 2002. The house was moved to Gray Street on April 15, 2008, for the present owners, and the Spring Street lot was cleared for expansion of the Lord Jeffery Inn.

Research by Ed Wilfert, Nov. 2008