

**In the Attic (Part 1)****From :** Steven Pavlos Holmes <sjholmes@rcn.com>

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**Subject :** In the Attic (Part 1)

5 attachments

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**In the Attic (Part 1)**

I know you've been waiting for the first installment of my promised report on current construction projects, "What's Going On? (In the Attic)" - but alas, I'm afraid you'll have to wait a little longer for that - I've ended up doing yard work and stuff in the basement, so my attention drifted thither. But as a little precursor, I thought you might be interested in some background on former inhabitants:

As you may or may not recall, our house was built in 1927, originally owned and occupied by one Alexander Cataldo, an upholsterer, who plied his trade in a basement workshop and raised a family in the structure overhead. I know nothing of his wife, but do know they had at least one daughter, whose name is written on some document somewhere, and who married a Boston police officer, one Ryan, with whom I think she had at least one daughter, whose name I think was Rose. The names Cataldo, Ryan, and Brady (who may have been Rose's husband, or maybe Rose herself [after a short, unhappy marriage], or may have been a tenant at one time, I forget) are still etched on the unused mail slot at our front door. A glimpse into the daily life of that former household comes when we ascend into the attic, and see the notes that Cataldo wrote on the rafters and walls, on the successive occasions of what seems to have been for him a notable household event: painting the much-valued screened-in windows that he hung around the back porches, at a time when the immediate neighborhood was much closer to its wetland roots, and the Boston environment as a whole less polluted and paved over, resulting in a lot more mosquitoes than we have now. Hence, the wise and conscientious Painting of the Screened-In Windows - first memorialized for 1937, then 1946 (when he seems to have used 5 qts. of paint), then 1952.



Then, at the other end of the attic, jump ahead to 1977, when an aging Cataldo acknowledges that he's no longer up to the task, hiring one Bob Montana to paint them at \$5 each - or maybe Cataldo just didn't want to do it any more, maybe never enjoyed it really, and has made enough money upholstering that he can pay somebody else \$40 to do it!



The house was sold by Cataldo's granddaughter in 2000, to Brendan and Ellen Hoey, the former telling us that he grew up just down the street and knew Cataldo and always liked the house. Brendan is an electrician, and a brother was a carpenter, and Ellen apparently adept in those realms as well (I think she worked in the electrical union), so they made some changes to the place, but were only here a few years so didn't make a whole lot of changes. In the attic, when they installed the laundry facilities, they perhaps emulated Cataldo in memorializing their presence on the studs of the new wooden frame, writing "Framed by Brendan" down one stud and "And Ellen was his helper" up the next. I just filled the space up with little shelves, though, so all that's now visible of the writing is "framed by ..." and "... Ellen ... -s h-...".



Brendan and Ellen and their kids eventually moved to the suburbs, to Milton, a nearby affluent, proper, hoity-toity place, to which Brendan never referred without a gibe and a sneer.

Some of the traces in the attic are more enigmatic. I have absolutely no idea what this inscription "A.M. 1901" means. Maybe the joist was originally from a previous house, whose owner, one A.M., died in 1901? Or maybe the wood is much older than that - maybe the joist was originally from the stout hull of an English ship that crossed the Atlantic in 1690, which carried to America the descendants of an ancient sect of matrilineal Christianity who referred not to Anno Domini, the year of the Lord, but to Anno Matria, the year of the mother, and who founded their Jamaica Plain church in AM 1901? I really don't know.



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The place where I live was formerly inhabited by a succession of non-Western societies, most recently the Massachusett, whose name as well as land were taken by the current Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Descendants of the Massachusett - as well as descendants and tribal members of other local peoples such as the Wampanoag and the Nipmuc - still live throughout Boston, the surrounding counties, and the world.

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