

BY MARK LUZIO

## True Divided Lights

I **partially restored a historical tavern** in the 1990s, and I recently had the opportunity to complete the project for new owners. The original structure was built circa 1750 on the Plainfield Pike—Rhode Island’s first western road—and in 1798, it was purchased by Elihu Fish, a joiner and cabinetmaker from Newport. He added three large rooms, including a 16-by-30-foot ballroom on the top floor. The first floor was a dining room, which he trimmed in the new Federal style. Below this was a walk-in summer kitchen built into a sloping grade with stone foundation walls on two sides.

Earlier in Elihu’s life, in the spring of 1776, he had signed an apprentice agreement with Edmond Townsend of the famous Goddard Townsend Quaker furniture makers of Newport, widely considered by historians, antique dealers, and collectors as some of the finest furniture makers ever to work in America. Elihu worked with them for 20 years, though his tenure was interrupted for several years after the British occupied Newport. Choosing to side with the Colonists, Elihu had signed on to a ship, the “Providence,” that had a letter of marque—a license issued by the Colonial government—to attack British merchant ships. His ship was captured and the crew imprisoned. When he was eventually let go, he walked back to Rhode Island to complete his apprentice contract and worked as a journeyman until 1798, when he purchased the tavern.

Back in 1998, one final hurdle in my work on the tavern was to make new sash for the entire house. I had found eight of the original 12-light sash in the attic. Still dead-square after 200 years, these served as a template. There were 50 windows and almost 100 sash with 882 lights, or panes of glass. I finished all the 12-over-12 units, but the tavern was sold before I could make eight remaining sash for the summer kitchen. These were four small, 8-over-8 sash that

fit openings in the stone walls, plus four extra-wide sash that were an unusual 15-over-10 **(1)**.

This year, the present owner contacted me and with his help, we restored the entire kitchen to its original condition. This included making new reproduction doors, paneling, and flooring, as well as the eight remaining windows.

To make reproduction 18th century sash, I now use machines to speed up the process, and the only handwork is at the very end. If Elihu walked into my shop, I would have loved to show him my 16-inch joiner, planer, shaper, and square-chisel mortise machines. I think he would have smiled when I flipped on the three-phase, though he might have been surprised that the half-laps and miters can be done on a sliding table saw. These repetitive and very precise cuts took about four hours for each group of inner mullions **(2)**. If you do the math on the eight sash for the summer kitchen, there are 82 lights, which required 176 miters, 142 copes, and 108 through-tenons. The pencil layout of all the joinery had to be precise. I cut exact spacer blocks for the inner grid and used them in the glue up, which took over an hour for each sash. The important cross-corner check with the tape measure was always dead on because the sash squared itself with all the half-laps and through-tenons. Elihu could not trust his glue to last and pinned the tenons, so I pinned all 108 tenons with  $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch dowels to match his work.

With the summer kitchen done, the tavern is now exactly as it was 220 years ago in 1803 after Elihu planed the last sash. I was glad to take up the project again to give my final namaste to this master joiner and veteran who died in 1840 at the age of 84.

*Mark Luzio owns Post Pattern Woodworking in Brooklyn, Conn.*



Photos: Mark Luzio