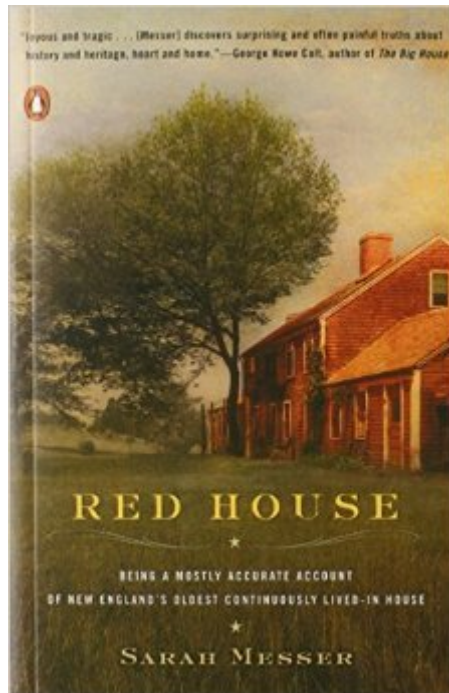


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# Red House: Being A Mostly Accurate Account Of New England's Oldest Continuously Lived-in House



## Synopsis

In her critically acclaimed, ingenious memoir, Sarah Messer explores America's fascination with history, family, and Great Houses. Her Massachusetts childhood home had sheltered the Hatch family for 325 years when her parents bought it in 1965. The will of the house's original owner, Walter Hatch "which stipulated Red House was to be passed down, "never to be sold or mortgaged from my children and grandchildren forever" is still hung in the living room. In Red House, Messer explores the strange and enriching consequences of growing up with another family's birthright. Answering the riddle of when shelter becomes first a home and then an identity, Messer has created a classic exploration of heritage, community, and the role architecture plays in our national identity.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

...and the Red House in Marshfield, Massachusetts, is fortunate enough to have one-time resident Sarah Messer as its storyteller. Englishman Walter Hatch built the original structure in 1647. Ownership passed through 9 or 10 generations of Hatches until 1965, when it left Hatch hands and Messer's parents bought the house. Thus is the author linked to her subject. She alternates between her own family's history and that of the Hatches, tracing both the fate of the individuals and the imprint each left on the house. There are additions, renovations, fires and restorations. Relatives move away and others come back. Time passes, and the Red House outlives all of its inhabitants. And all along the underlying question is: Whose house is it, really? "The house contains both the living and the dead, and there are always traces, because the house is not separate, has not one

owner but many, has many beams, many different panes of glass, the way a body might have many lovers, the way each owner might look at the house as if at the body of a lover. If the window is removed, is it still a part of the house? If the fireplace swing-arm is taken and put in a museum, is it no longer a part of the house? Can the house be removed from itself? The owner, the past, the parts of the house. I thought: Who can steal a house? Who owns the lover but the loved?" (p. 234) This reader cannot help but be reminded of a farmhouse in her own past: one that's been in her family since 1915 and might not survive the decade with that surname on the mailbox. But that's a story for another day.

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