

What Makes a House a Home?

By Mason Wang

When I think of a house, I instantly picture walls, a roof, and windows. A home, though, is more than a building. It holds value to its occupants; it is where memories are made, traditions are kept alive, and people feel safe and loved. Thinking about the Mather Homestead built in 1778, I realize how history and human connection can turn an ordinary house into something much more — a home.

The Mather Homestead conveys that a home is not about how fancy it is or how much furniture it has. When I visited, I was surprised that the staircases were claustrophobic and steep and that the kitchen consisted of pots above a fire inside the hearth. However, the stories that must have unfolded within those walls, especially during the Revolutionary War, surely created vivid memories. I could still sense the fear in the house when the Tories invaded and stole the hidden silver. I can also imagine the small triumph when the family realized the Tories missed the silver in the dining cabinet. It was a place where people lived through hard times but found ways to stay together.

Traditions also make a house more than just a structure. In the Mather Homestead, the handmade furniture and the way it was built reflects the colonial time period and the family's way of life. These traditions are a reminder of our origins. Daily life was centered around the hearth, gathering there for warmth, cooking, and storytelling. In my home, we likewise have a tradition of convening in the kitchen for food and discussion. Additionally, we have traditions such as stringing our backyard tree with holiday lights, baking cookies from scratch, and even the dreaded cleaning of our house every Sunday. These traditions make our home feel alive.

For me, what ultimately makes a house a home is the people who share it. A home is incomplete without the laughter and love of family and friends. The Mather Homestead must have been full of those moments. I can imagine the family gathered around the hearth, telling stories or helping each other with chores, and smiling at the cat in its high chair at dinner. Even today, when people visit, it brings them together to learn and connect. I recall when walking through its rooms, I felt a sense of calm and connection to the past. For me, when I'm home alone, it feels more like a house. When my family is around, that is what truly makes it feel like a home. I am sure that is the same way the residents of the Mather Homestead felt.

Visiting the Mather Homestead taught me how important it is to take care of the places we live and the memories we create there. A house becomes a home when it is filled with memories, traditions, and loved ones. The Mather family demonstrated how to make a home, even in the hardest times, and their story reminds us to cherish the homes we have today.