

DESIGN UP



CAROLINA DWELLING

er·nac' u·lar (vē·nāk' ū·lēr), adj. 1. Belonging to, developed and spoken or used by, the people of a particular place, region, or country; native; indigenous

as, English is our vernacular language, the native or indigenous language of the South, as opposed to the literary language; vernacular expression



2. Of persons, that use the

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language of a place; as vernacular poets; vernacular interpretation

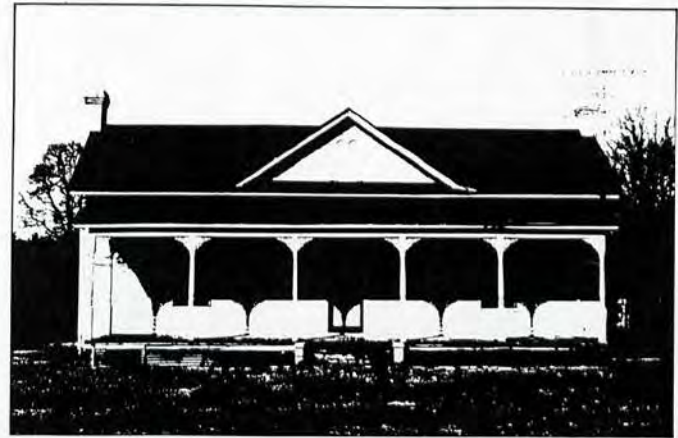
3. Characteristic of a locality; local; as, a house of vernacular architecture



CAROLINA DWELLING

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Claude McKinney, Dean
Shun Kanda, Project Director

**Towards Preservation of Place:
In Celebration of the
North Carolina Vernacular Landscape**



Edited by Doug Swaim

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The nature of building is letting dwell. . . .
Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build. Let us think for a while of a farmhouse in the Black Forest, which was built some two hundred years ago by the dwelling of peasants. Here the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and heaven, divinities and mortals enter *in simple oneness* into things, ordered the house. It placed the farm on the wind-sheltered mountain slope looking south, among the meadows close to the spring. It gave it the wide overhanging shingle roof whose proper slope bears up under the burden of snow, and which, reaching deep down, shields the chambers against the storms of the long winter nights. It did not forget the altar corner behind the community table; it made room in its chamber for the hallowed places of childbed and the 'tree of the dead' . . . and in this way it designed for the different generations under one roof the character of their journey through time. . . .

. . . Our reference to the Black Forest farm in no way means that we should or could go back to building such houses; rather it illustrates by a dwelling that *has been* how it was able to build. . . .

. . . The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell. . . .



—Martin Heidegger
"Building Dwelling Thinking"

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The Conservation of Place



Eastern North Carolina: the
tenacious landscape's own
eloquent memorial.

This book's ultimate goal is the conservation of things and buildings and places. It seems appropriate at the beginning of such a book to inquire *why* we should be interested in the conservation of buildings and things and places, especially in an age so characteristically devoted to growth and change and bigness that an urge to conserve anything would seem to be both ethically and intellectually irrational.

The conservation and preservation of buildings and artifacts have always seemed to those in charge of our political and economic life to be an irrelevancy; at best a frill to be pursued and enjoyed by individuals of means, good education, and exquisite tastes. Concern about the conservation of place is a relatively new phenomenon lying principally in the domain of theorists and academicians—not yet even of general concern or interest to those groups and individuals who labor in the traditional “preservation” vineyard. A shared characteristic of both groups, however, is a pervasive defensiveness and self-consciousness in speaking about why they even bother. Generally they can do no better than to speak vaguely about motivations having to do with patriotism, the importance of recreation or tourism, “economic benefits to the community,” and the like.

To the contrary, I believe that the aggressive pursuit of a firm public commitment to a new conservation ethic is no longer a matter of luxury or self-indulgence. In these closing years of the twentieth century, it has become a matter of urgent social necessity which is essential to the survival of the human spirit and personality.

For most of us, there are obvious justifications for conservation that cannot be denied. The threshold level of understanding would be that no civilized person, educated or not, would wish that any object or place of beauty or significance should be destroyed for any reasons other than compelling ones—whether the thing be a painting, a beautiful landscape, or a bit of architecture. But we have arrived at a time when the need for

Robert Stipe

conservation has passed beyond mere civility or appreciation. The basic need springs from a fundamental human requirement to be able to reach out and to be able to touch and feel and see those things that provide hard physical evidence of our passage in the stream of tradition. It is a need that transcends social organization or geography.

All old things and places, and some new ones, give meaning to our daily lives in ways we rarely consider except when they are gone. It is the shock of experiencing the voids they leave behind that raises the fact of their disappearance to a conscious level. In this day and age, it is a new kind of human shock, one more shattering than ever before in its impact because the pace of change has accelerated and the scale of new things and places has grown vastly larger, ever more domineering and threatening. For most of us, it is no longer merely a matter of adapting to new images and experiences. It is a matter of hiding, for safety's sake, from places and environments that somehow seem to continually threaten us and which make us feel more vulnerable and naked.

We must accept, of course, that change is inevitable, even good for us; for without change, as a British friend of mine has put it, there is no tradition. Tradition, it is asserted, is essentially the result of an evolutionary process in which new customs, ideas, artifacts and places are grafted onto accepted life-styles. And it is, at heart, the feeling of being a part of the *continuum* of tradition that gives us our psychological sense of security and well-being—of “knowing our place” in more than the accustomed social sense. Of course we must lead our lives in our own time and place as individuals. But in doing so we require the security of knowing that in acting out our lives we may be able to perform on a stage that maintains the links with those who lived and acted out their lives before us. We also require, like all others of our species, that the configuration, boundaries and props which constitute that stage be not so altered in

mid-play that we drop our lines. Remove the buildings, artifacts, landscapes and places that provide the memory of our earlier lives and we pay a price. Sometimes it is a small price and the inconvenience is a fleeting one. At other times, the price is high and the results are permanent and scarring.

Often we are confronted with the challenge: Why save a townscape, a landscape, or even a building when the book, the photograph, or the film will do? It is not the same. As my friend puts it, there are certain experiences in our lives which we cannot recall except by keeping the surroundings and circumstances in which those memories were grounded. The shadow does not capture the substance. It is both physically impossible and psychologically undesirable that we should attempt to return to the womb of time, but “choosing a past,” as Kevin Lynch has said, “helps us to construct a future.”



Wilmington: a fragile island.



Chapel Hill: contending urges.

In his biography, Carl Jung wrote of a difficult time in his life when he was at the mercy of his unconscious self and in a psychotic state. What kept him together was that which remained of his conscious being, telling him that he was indeed an individual, that he had a family, and that he occupied a particular house in a city that was recognizable to him. Because he was able to hang onto these reassuring thoughts that gave meaning and continuity to his life, he was able to resist going completely to pieces.

The same equation may be put with respect to a larger society of individuals: we have not a mere whimsical, exquisite need, but a compellingly human and, more likely, a biological need to have around us some of the places and environments and artifacts to which we can cling, if for no more than measuring sticks against which the calculus of our humanity can be subconsciously figured.

I believe, when all is said and done, that the central problem of conservation may be stated rather simply. That is that a gigantic, increasingly depersonalized industrial society, operating for more than a century to serve the requirements of growth, change, and profit has produced an ethic grounded in both economics and law that places the burden of proof for conservation on the wrong parties. Those who would conserve a place or a thing, our social institutions tell us, must provide compelling reasons why a thing or a place should be saved. To the contrary, it seems to me that the life-stage of our environment has intrinsic value for us *by virtue of the simple fact of its existence*. Social health—even survival—requires that this burden of proof should one day shift, and that the change, redevelopment, or destruction of existing environments should be tolerated only when there are urgent reasons for such change.

Such a bold assertion raises more questions than it answers, of course. What artifacts and places are important, and to whom? When resources for conservation are scarce, what choices are evaluated, and how should re-

sources be allocated? Who should pay?

Other contemporary issues important to the conservation of place are more difficult to define. One serious problem stems from a human tendency toward intellectual partisanship on the part of individuals and bureaucracies in the conservation movement itself. For example, some of the custodians of the existing protective machinery would insist that the "lessons of history" must always be manifest in the object to be preserved. Others tend to be specially preoccupied with styles in architecture or building—*notwithstanding* that "fashion" in anything is an intrinsically impermanent value. Recently, in some circles, there is an insistence on the recognition of "link-ages" and "ethnicity" as essential determinants of what is important.

The net result of disparate philosophies concerning what is important to preserve has in many instances been legislation that throws a protective cloak around period buildings and history to the comparative neglect of other aspects of milieu which are equally important to the accomplishment of a humane existence, such as urban and rural landscapes. This is not to suggest that one or another approach to "value" is more or less important than another—merely to indicate that pluralism in conservation and the raising of many voices has tended to divert attention from the more basic problem, which is that the need for conservation springs more fundamentally from biological urges than cultural ones.

To date the conservation effort overall has placed a premium on three criteria of value: age, scarcity, and quality. "The oldest . . ." "The best example . . ." "The only surviving . . ." Perhaps at this moment in time these crude judgments about what should survive are the best we can do. But the contemporary resurgent interest in place, the human stage, as a thing having value and meaning in itself, and giving emphasis to biological necessity, genetic memories, and a wider variety of human motivations and experiences, seems to me to

point a way out and a way forward. It recognizes man's animal nature as well as his cultural needs. The next step will be to begin to discern the outer limits of individual and social tolerances for the accommodation and assimilation of change.

My British friend has said that conservation, in and of itself, will not insure the survival of societies or individuals. It cannot promise anything. But to emphasize the conservation of place as well as things, at least returns our attention to the fundamental importance of retaining that larger stage on which we act out our lives. That is why it seems important to me to begin this book in an optimistic and even aggressive way, for there is, as we instinctively understand, a universal and deep-rooted urge to know "where we are." To be lost is to forsake one's place in the structure of the environment.



Raleigh: the eclipse of the past.

My British friend is Graham W. Ashworth, former President of the Royal Town Planning Institute and presently Professor in the Department of Civil Engineering at the University of Salford. Following upon a decade of friendship and overseas collaboration on a variety of environmental conservation endeavors, we are by now mutually indebted to one another for the essence of some of the ideas and examples mentioned in this Introduction. Professor Ashworth lectures at the School of Design on his occasional visits to America.

Editor's Introduction

Carolina Dwelling is a collection of essays that describe, analyze, trace the history and suggest the possible meanings of various features of the North Carolina vernacular landscape. The book's purpose is to provide a basis for collective reflection upon both the particularity and the process recorded in that landscape. The book was *incited* by a felt need to tend to what is here.

All along we have said that our purpose is ultimately the *conservation* of the qualities that our environment exhibits as a special place—"special" not in the sense of exceptional or surpassing, although it is certainly that in ways both good and bad, but rather in the sense of unique. Not better—just different. As I sit down to write this introduction, though, I am struck—particularly today, October 30th—by the carry of our *natural* setting in pro-



Cedar-lined Piedmont pasture.

viding that particularity. Once again the autumn color in this forested land is incredible. Sure, the oaks, those that have turned at all, are going straight to brown to remind us of a bone-dry summer, but the dogwood and red maple have been stark against the pine, and the yellow maple outside my window has passed from bright rain-slicker to a modest apricot glow. With these amazing signs to remind me how nature always turns around *this* place—and with my friends making the ritual journey to the mountains to see it full tilt reminding me of our cultural embeddedness in the natural cycle—how can I long remain upset that the peculiarity of this place is about to fade!

But then I also remember the discouragement of a flight over the Piedmont in a small plane with Project Director Shun Kanda. Looking for patterns in the spread of the small towns we chose to fly above, we were struck instead by their *formlessness* and, especially—and this is what I am reminded of now—by how few real forests actually remained below. From two thousand feet a good portion of the North Carolina Piedmont landscape appears—and I hate to say it—rather like the coat of a mangy hound. Scatterization has all but erased our woodlands. The "forests" that appear so deceptively pervasive from the ground are actually ragged strips between what is truly rampant, the small clearing. "Entropy upon the land," I remember thinking at the time.

Those who have flown to Virginia at low altitude tell me that a change in this pattern in the landscape is obvious once you cross the border. And a little research shows that in contrast to North Carolina, early Virginia had a stable government that encouraged aristocratic planters to assemble vast estates. In North Carolina, under the Lords Proprietors, not only was the future uncertain but also early law prohibited the "taking up of tracts larger than 660 acres without special permission. . . ." ¹ What a discouragement that law must have been to those seeking to secure aristocratic dreams upon the soil of the "new discovered Summer Country" to the south. And thus the

land and its climatic delights were left largely to “the dregs and gleanings of all other English Colonies,” who were quite content to become solidly middle class claiming it piece by piece.²

So history is read on the land at two thousand feet and in the statistics that tell of a large rural population still. And the descendants of non-aristocrats continue to carve upon their small holdings. In fact, most of our land has been cleared, or at least “harvested,” several times during the relatively brief history of settlement here. From the air, again, the vestigial geometries of property line and abandoned field show clearly in the patterning of our young woods. What’s more, whereas our ancestors found mixed pine and hardwood forests predominating in the Piedmont, our continual trading of clearing and growth has allowed the faster growing pine to gain ascendancy—so much so that the stability of much of our woodlands is called into question.

Every given natural region has a potential top situation where all of the plants that will grow there have grown up now and all of those that will push out something else have pushed out something else, and it reaches a point of stability. If you cut all the forests and you wait many hundreds of years, it’ll come to something again. . . .

This condition, called “climax,” is an optimum condition of diversity—optimum stability. When a system reaches climax, it levels out for centuries or millennia. By virtue of its diversity it has the capacity to absorb all sorts of impacts. Insects, fungi, weather conditions come and go; it’s the opposite of monoculture. If you plant a forest back into all white pine, one of these days the white pine blister comes along and kills all the white pine. If you have a natural mixed forest, the white pine will be hit a little by blister rust but they won’t be in a solid stand, they’ll be broken up. . . .³

This train of thought began with my celebrating the contribution our natural setting makes towards establishing the particularity of this place. What I have arrived at is a realization that our manner of dwelling has not only



The Piedmont south of Raleigh.

significantly changed that setting—that is to be expected—but also that the alteration commonly threatens the continued existence of an important element of that setting as a sustaining and place-making ground. Let those who doubt this conclusion check today's lumber yard prices on our once common hardwoods as well as the quality of the local pine that is available, and let him visit the remote Joyce Kilmer "tree museum" for a remembrance of what time is *capable* of gathering into wood. Of course it hardly needs mentioning that this is merely one local example of the dysfunction that pervades our contemporary way of life.

Ecology—the science of organism's relationship to environment—of necessity begins with the natural ground. In the case of man, however, if it is to consider all that significantly affects the organism's well-being, it must quickly expand to include the cultural setting. At once the human disease and glory, culture is inevitably our mediating context. Optimally our cultural extensions provide both the *why* and *how* of material progress. Through symbol systems we establish meaningful intentions; with tools we seek to execute our desires. The more tightly wound the dialectic of symbol and tool the more harmonious the dwelling that results. Furthermore, unless life is to be a careening exploration of simple material possibility—hardly dwelling—the symbol, the *why*, must always remain primary. Symbol systems provide direction and nourishment to the dwelling urge.

Of course compared to nature's massive stay, our symbolic cultural ballast is light—especially in America—and vulnerable to change. Or, put another way, our cultural topsoil is thin and vulnerable to the bulldozer's blade. Evidence suggests that human societies have the capacity to mature in much the same manner as forests—that their natural evolution flows in line with a tendency towards maximum diversity and stability. Our modern western civilization, however, is like a piece of ground that is annually scraped back so as to produce maximum

new growth of a few species—monoculture. The energy feeding this new growth, as we are so painfully aware at present, comes not from the rich humus of recycled culture past but from the recently discovered, soon to be exhausted, purely instrumental petroleum fix. And our present vulnerability to a whole range of existential assaults results largely from monoculture's consequent lack of diversity and resilience and especially from its lack of symbolic depth—its lack of a *why*. The tool has taken charge and knows only how to make more of the same. Like a scrawny pine overgrowth monoculture gathers little into it that can sustain the human spirit and it is highly susceptible to a variety of plagues. Continuous rapid growth and innovation give it—in contrast to the scrawny wood—the illusion of health, but when its crude oil "stash" is depleted or cut off, withdrawal will likely be cataclysmic, the illusion banished, and a paucity of real culture left behind to support corporate America's advertised meanings.

With neurotic attachment to a pioneer mentality, we continue to drive back—"expand"—the frontier of our economy. Our civilization has substituted a dreamy orientation towards future satiety for the primal dwelling experience of *being in place*. Ever inclined towards more, we scarcely notice the centered sufficiency of the present. And whenever growth's momentum flags, we "stagnate" in utter displacement. Furthermore, our abstract orientation is embarrassingly evident in the environments we build: in the bland or brutal instrumentality of what directly supports production; in the tacked-on image's appeal to our sham fantasies; in the destruction and neglect of existing cultural forms and spaces along the way to profits or an imagined better; and in most new form's complete ignorance of the history and the particularity of its place in time and space. For those of us who cannot muster connecting faith with this current flowing endlessly toward a receding future—as well as for the multitude of economic misfits the current has left behind—

these environments fail to *place* us meaningfully in the world. And for revolutionaries of all stripes (many of whom I must quickly disavow any sympathy for) the only meaningful posture is one that actively resists the flow.

One does not have to agree completely with this critique to share our concern for place conservation. That we need a coherent and stable setting upon which to act out our lives meaningfully, as Robert Stipe maintains in his essay on "The Conservation of Place," is realization aplenty. Nor does the critique deny the existence of a rich countercurrent doing a dance of opposites with mass production's monoculture. Indeed, a whole syndrome of movements now advocate the cultivation and preservation of local environments, natural and man-made. Hopefully our own effort will positively and significantly reinforce the public's already considerable agitation.

Initially I said that this book's purpose is to provide a basis for collective reflection upon both the particularity and the process recorded in North Carolina's vernacular landscape. Restated in terms of the organic analogy that purpose is to "compost" some of the cultural debris that is around us so that ultimately we can nourish new growth in "the rich humus of recycled culture past." Since our contributors were not asked to employ a standard definition in determining their subjects, we can also stand back and look at the variety of their approaches as an exploration of the meaning of the concept of "vernacular" itself. And because the affective character of our environment has historically been so grounded in the vernacular landscape, we can take the occasion of that landscape's discussion to reflect upon the concept of place-meaning. Both these related secondary themes are introduced here at the beginning of the book and carried throughout in brief editorial prefaces to each article.

Professional designers and design educators generally look upon the traditional design with unabashed admiration. In *Notes on the Synthesis of Form* Christopher

Alexander celebrated the ability of "unselfconscious" cultures to produce artifacts that harmonize with their environments. In *House Form and Culture* Amos Rapoport limited his search for meaningful form determinants to vernacular or folk houses. A slew of books tend toward celebration and admiration of what Rudofsky termed "architecture without architects." The common theme in much of this work is: modern self-conscious design is doing worse. We would do well to look to the more primitive designer for guidance and inspiration.

To a degree *Carolina Dwelling* follows in the tradition of these books. It could even be considered something of a test of the more romantic notions they have sponsored. In the following essays a picture of traditional design is collectively drawn that is at once less exotic, more subtle, and hopefully at least as informative as the usual model. Significantly, this book leaves the reader who is familiar with the territory covered in a position to evaluate for himself the relative "success" of the process and its products on this soil.

Yet we are also here trying to do something quite different. In calling for essays on the vernacular landscape the intention has been to highlight the *place-making* aspect of traditional design. In its usual sense, vernacular means the locally or regionally idiosyncratic speech of ordinary people—place-rooted speech. The term has often been applied to architecture but seldom in a precise way and consequently seldom making good use of the opportunity to clearly name something new.

Architectural historians often call unsophisticated translations of high style form and ornament vernacular. In their view vernacular form always exists in relation to higher culture which it apes—usually clumsily, sometimes wittily, but never with *intended* irony. For them the individual example is the vernacularization; it does not have to be one case of a local or regional practice.

Vernacular is also commonly used rather interchangeable with "folk," as in Rapoport's *House Form and*

Culture, to name "the direct and unselfconscious translation into physical form of a culture. . . ." Rapoport does go slightly further in distinguishing vernacular building *within* the larger domain of folk tradition by stating that it is the product of tradesmen as opposed to nonspecialized folk.⁴ This is about the extent of the term's specificity as it is employed by those architectural historians who specialize in astylistic buildings.

Obviously the concept could stand clarification. Returning to the original meaning of vernacular we recall that there is the sense that something widespread—a language—has become local, has become *vernacularized*. There is the sense that a vernacular is not a whole thing that appears in one place and no place else, but a local hue or coloration given to something that exists, or has



Duplin County "coastal cottage" type hall-and-parlor house.

existed, elsewhere as well. If we intend this sense when applying the term to the built environment, we find that we are not naming something as complete and tangible as an object, but rather the peculiar shift that culture takes when it becomes rooted in a place. Vernacular can best be understood, then, as the *place-related inflection of culture*. It has both its conservative aspect—as when a folk survival contributes to the sense of a place—and its progressive aspect—as when adaptation of a folk tradition produces a locally idiosyncratic building vocabulary. A hall-and-parlor type "coastal cottage" in eastern North Carolina exhibits both aspects: its basic two-room plan is continuous with a seventeenth century (or older) English folk tradition, while its porch and raised open foundation are adaptations to its New World context.

Vernacular as local inflection also encompasses the architectural historian's usage that I first mentioned—unsophisticated interpretation of high style. However, whereas the local adaptation of folk form often became local *practice*, the carpenter's rendering of high style ornament was likely a one-of-a-kind attempt. Because it constituted a place-making act of *possession*, I would still consider it essentially vernacular.

Historically the great majority of houses built in this state have been neither purely folk nor purely high style. Most typically the basic plan of a house conforms to local folk tradition while any ornament, inside or out, at least pretends to fashionable style. The ideas for these traditional house plans persisted through time and were rather fixed in *space*—in their region. The changing current of fashion, on the other hand, fixed each architectural style in a "period" in *time*. Thus, considering both aspects, we can imagine our typical old house as frozen in a space-time grid which to a considerable extent determined the terms of its existence. I would propose that such a schema provides a vernacular matrix that can identify the particular intersections of atemporal traditions and historical styles upon this landscape. The matrix generates highly

vernacular forms because every intersection within it shows the inflection of its place in space and time. Reflecting this state's "middling" past, every formulation is *uniquely* oriented towards a current outside itself.

So, in brief summary, I would maintain that "vernacular" should frame the peculiar coloration, or inflection, given to culture in a place—and that such coloration can be given to any non-vernacular culture. Popular culture is even *potentially* vernacular. But if there is nothing identifiably unique about the culture of a locale, it is not vernacular and the locale could hardly hold much meaning as a place.

Robert Venturi speaks of the strip as the "current vernacular of the United States."⁵ He has framed America and asked what is particular about our national material culture. And he comes up with car culture's strip. True enough. But I find his statement laden with irony. The United States is not one big place, for we are too easily lost within it. The strip is, instead, monoculture and although it does serve a function, as well as provide a clear counterpoint against which to shore up the particularity of locale, it is by and large a blatant symptom of our civilization's tendency to disease.

All of the currents that flow through this book are united in the one river: dwelling. Most of the connections should be rather evident—one, however, may not. That is our desire to *celebrate* what we find here. The source of that desire is revealed in Heidegger's etymology:

... But in what does the nature of dwelling consist? Let us listen once more to what language says to us. The Old Saxon *wuon*, the Gothic *wunian*, like the old word *bauen*, mean to remain, to stay in a place. But the Gothic *wunian* says more distinctly how this remaining is experienced. *Wunian* means: To be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace. The word for peace, *Friede*, means the free, *das Frye*, and *fry* means: preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, safeguarded. To free really means to spare. The sparing itself consists not only in the fact that we do not harm the one whom

we spare. Real sparing is something *positive* and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own nature, when we return it specifically to its being, when we "free" it in the real sense of the word into a preserve of peace. To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. *The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving.*⁶

We celebrate, then, for two reasons: first, to memorialize the dwelling that has preceded us upon this land—then, we celebrate because, as dwellers ourselves, it is *we* who are freed into the same preserve that we have offered to safeguard what surrounds us. It is *we* who, as dwellers, are set at peace. Not that it needs any explanation or justification: *we are celebrating life*. And I admit no conflict between this jubilation and the all-too-necessary critique we have already unfurled. "That the world can be improved and yet must be celebrated as it is are contradictions. The beginning of maturity may be the recognition that both are true."⁷

Footnotes

1. *Historical and Architectural Resources of the Tar-Neuse River Basin* (Raleigh, N.C.: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Survey and Planning Branch, Feb. 1977), 10-11.

2. Harry Roy Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 34.

3. "The Original Mind of Gary Snyder," *East/West* June, 1977, 36.

4. Amos Rapoport, *House Form and Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 2.

5. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1977), 52.

6. Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 148-149.

7. William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 314.

Toward a Theory of Place Meaning

Most of us are vaguely aware that our physical surroundings affect our moods and actions in some way. Our continuous interaction with the environment is so commonplace, however, that we hardly stop to think about it. Once reflected upon, it is certainly obvious that some places may offer us greater or lesser comfort and enjoyment, that they may facilitate or obstruct the tasks we try to accomplish, and that they may be more or less visually appealing. Less obviously, they may remind us of places we have been before, for example the town or house in which we grew up. From a broader perspective—and less obviously still—because the built environment serves as the physical framework for our social existence, we can sometimes find in it a reflection of our cultural values, our collective view of the world and man's position in it.

If we are to understand the significance the built environment holds for us, we must begin to look at the process by which we interact with it. Above all we must address the question of how and to what extent the environment holds *meaning* for us. One approach to the subject of meaning has been to view it as the product of an interaction between our flow of present experience and things which act as symbols to signify and recall past experiences.¹ Experience may be viewed as the *medium* that grounds both our "inner" consciousness and our sensed contact with the "outer" world in one continuously changing, on-going organismic process. Within this process we become focally aware of certain phenomena and isolate them as objects (things, ideas, events) which come to stand for, and to an extent recall, some aspect of our experience. We call these reminders "symbols." It is only by means of symbols that we have access to experience in any kind of conceptual way. Through this interaction between symbols and experience we find and give meaning to the world.

The on-going dialectic of experience and symbolization of experience produces a cognitive residue, a lingering *image* of the world, which we take with us through

time and apply to new experiences and objects.² This image acts as a *lens* through which we focus on the world. Thus it may be said that we never deal with our physical environment directly "out there" but only through our image of it. This image as it relates to some specific part of the environment can be called the *sense of place*.

We participate in the process of symbolization and image-making not voluntarily but unavoidably at every moment. What is more, the physical environment does not play a passive role in the process. It can encourage us to associate and identify with it in particular ways, and similarly it can discourage us. The sense of place is simultaneously dependent upon both the individual with his own unique history and his surroundings. The sense of a *particular* place may differ between individuals, reflecting different images of the world, and it may vary through time for a given individual reflecting his constant cycling through different levels of awareness.

Beyond the variations in our individual perceptions there is also a shared sense of place circumscribed by cultural values. This shared image of our environment may be seen to operate on various levels and includes cultural, social, psychological, and functional as well as physical dimensions. In an abstract sense we might refer to a shared image that is a subset of each individual's whole image structure. On the basis of what is shared in any particular situation it becomes possible to talk about the place qualities of a physical setting as if it had an existence independent from us. With these shared values as criteria, places become good or bad, strong or weak, interesting or dull, appropriate or inappropriate. It is shared or collective values that are at the core of the idea of place.

Only certain values, however, are relevant to the idea of place. Here we shall attempt to define a strategy for getting at these values by first positing four basic aspects or categories of place meaning. Then, by investigating the relationships between these four categories, we shall try

Eric Rosenberg

to elaborate the nature of meaningful places in terms of the experiential qualities they might exhibit. By this means we can begin to establish a framework for evaluating particular places and for determining the particular values they may or may not reflect. In terms of environmental design, any particular building task might be approached and evaluated in light of this framework.

Aspects of Place Meaning

We would define four aspects or categories of meaning which the concept of place must respond to: possession, identification, wholeness, and orientation.³

Possession refers to the sense of belonging in or having some claim on a place. To possess a place is to make it your own, not simply in the sense of legal ownership, but in the sense of mutual empathy, whereby the place becomes part of you and you become part of it. In this there is a sense of indwelling. Possession has to do with the degree to which a place can personify (symbolize) our emotions and accommodate our feelings. Through possession we relate to places on a very personal level.

Identification refers to the sense that a place reflects the social milieu within which we share a common world. It is a process of recognizing the familiar symbols and settings within which we carry out our daily activities. To identify a place is in a sense to name it by reference to past experiences. It is identification of the physical world with an acculturated world view. In terms of identification, the built environment represents "an ethnic domain made visible, tangible, and sensible."⁴

Wholeness refers to the sense that a place is a discreet entity, complete in some respects in itself. Wholeness in a place refers to how we perceive its internal relations. It need not relate to us or the world in any direct way. Wholeness is dependent on a sense of completeness, uniqueness, balance, and legibility, and while it may refer to place qualities other than the physical, these must be

evidenced in the physical reality of a place.

Orientation refers to the sense that a place is related to and part of a larger whole, and also that it is itself a larger whole within which we relate its parts. As we participate in a place, this sense of its orientation gives rise to a locational sense of our own being in the world. There is the sense that a place is part of a continuum at a number of different levels of scale and resolution. Orientation within a place must always be perceived in relationship to something else either inside of it or outside of it. There is a sense of organization, structure, order, and connectedness.

In terms of a particular place, the distinction of any one of these aspects is a fragmented abstraction of the reality. And likewise, to fully realize its potential a place must manifest each of these four levels of meaning in a co-ordinated and integral fashion. Nevertheless, the attempt to make distinctions and to define a subject matter, and then build a theory upon that definition, is an essential step towards understanding in any field. It should be recognized that there is nothing absolute about these terms. It should also be recognized that the validity of such a theory is determined on the basis of utility (how useful is it to our understanding) rather than some notion of absolute truth. Underlying any such theory are assumptions, attitudes, and value judgements about what is important to consider and what is not that arise out of a subjective view of the world.

In order to further elaborate our definition of place meaning and to develop the relationships and distinctions between the four aspects, we will use the conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1. With this word diagram, concepts which distinguish these terms may be represented opposite each other, in respective quadrants. Concepts which tie these terms together may be placed between them, along the lines of division. In this way we will try to associate each pair of terms, somewhat metaphorically, to a pair of *polar concepts*, in order to

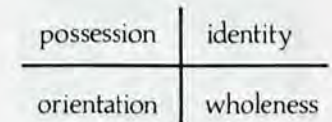
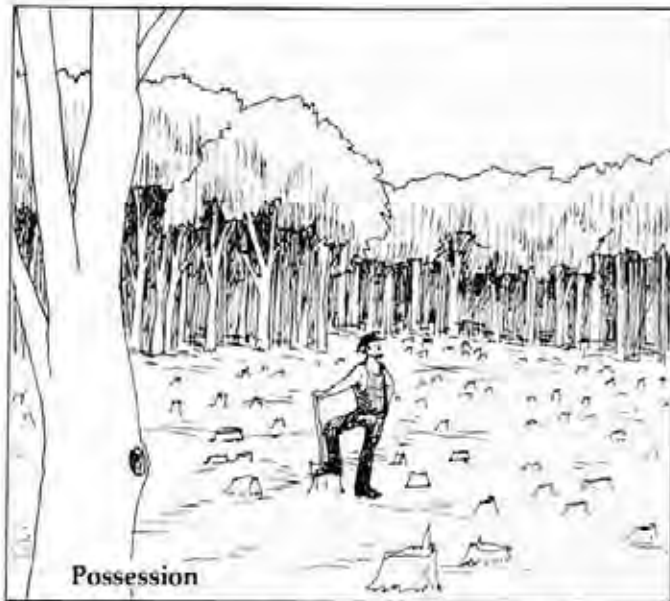


Figure 1. The four aspects of place meaning.



distinguish them, and to a *unifying concept* within which they may be seen to relate. The elaborated "place diagram" that results is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

With each pair of terms we will also try to describe the experiential qualities of "good" places through which these categories of place meaning may be reflected in the surrounding environment. By "good" places we simply mean places which are more meaningful—which provide us greater opportunity to find and give meaning to the environment.

Possession - Identification

Self - Persona

Human Interaction

The distinction between these two aspects may be seen metaphorically in terms of Jung's distinction between a *self*, which is our inner being, and a *persona*, which is the face we show to the world and which clothes

the self and protects it.⁵ Through possession we relate to places in terms of our inner self. Through identification we relate to places in terms of our persona. One is not better than the other, they are just different and places need to respond to both aspects. There is a dimension of everyday *human interaction* which seems to determine which way we relate to places. In response to this we alternate between self and persona. The same distinction is often made in terms of a private realm and a public realm. We are all involved in a community which sets the limits to and relates these two realms.

Good places are more meaningful in this sense because they allow us to relate to them as either self or persona as we need to or choose to. This suggests places that offer us an appropriate range of choice. We can possess and identify places more if we can change them or use them in accordance with our changing needs and moods and if we are allowed to participate at a variety of levels between the public and the private. This suggests a balance between designated spaces intended for specific purposes and undesignated spaces that may be used in a variety of ways as circumstances demand. This also suggests a balance between how familiar or strange a place may seem to us. There must be something common and familiar otherwise we cannot identify a place. If it is also strange or mysterious in some way it may challenge and stimulate us to get into it and lead to a sense of possession.

Possession - Wholeness

I - It

Archetypes

While possession has to do with place qualities that are perceived almost as an extension of our inner selves, wholeness refers to place qualities that are perceived as quite distinct and separate from us. The polar distinction between these might be expressed in terms of an *I-it*

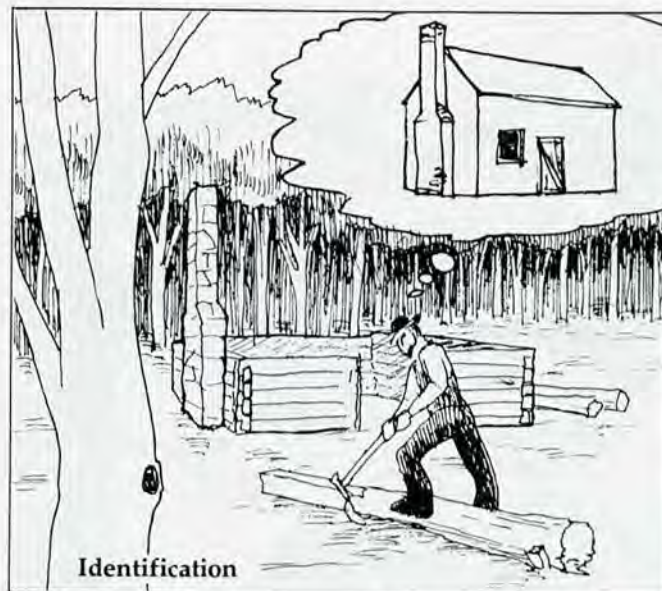
duality. One concept which seems to relate this distinction specifically to the subject of place meaning is the concept of *archetypes*.⁶ This is another of Jung's theories. Jung postulated that there is a collective unconscious shared by all members of a culture. Within this collective unconscious reside a set of timeless symbols, images, and meanings—archetypes—which are passed on tacitly through a culture, but which have great significance for us personally and collectively. When a place manifests these archetypal meanings to us there is a unity of the I-it duality. Possession and wholeness are brought together.

Good places are more meaningful in this respect because they express metaphorically a fundamental unity that each of us seeks between himself and the world. Such a sense of unity must be perceived through the suggestiveness of physical symbols that allows us to personify them and go beyond their physical existence as objects into the realm of archetypes. Examples of this are aediculated spaces which seem to center us in the universe, hearths which symbolize a life force, rooms which in their cave-like qualities symbolize the womb, and houses that may symbolize persona on the exterior and self on the interior.

Wholeness - Orientation

Figure - Ground
Systemic Behavior

Wholeness in a place has to do with qualities of uniqueness and completeness which set it apart as distinct from its surroundings. Orientation in a place has to do with qualities of connectedness and with the relationship of parts to each other and to the surrounding context. As polar concepts, wholeness and orientation might be made analogous to the idea of *figure* and *ground*. In terms of place qualities the relationship between these two can be associated to the idea of *systemic behavior*. A particular system may be defined by specifying a set of elements, the



specific relationships between these elements, an external environment or context, and lastly some wholistic behavior which is not predictable from examining the relationships of the parts and which distinguishes the system from its environment. Place qualities of wholeness and orientation might be brought together and examined as a system.

Good places are more meaningful because they suggest not only wholeness in themselves as physical entities but also wholeness in relationship to their external environment in as many ways as possible. Besides being whole in itself a place may suggest wholeness with respect to such things as its orientation to the sun and other natural energies, its respect for the site conditions, and its complimentary relationship to surrounding places. As our environment has become more urbanized these external relationships have become more complex and urban places must respond to more complicated relationships and constraints. In good places there is a sense





of coherence and order on the one hand, and of complexity and ambiguity on the other as it relates on a variety of levels simultaneously. Good places are also more meaningful in this respect because their wholeness emerges at an appropriate scale with respect to the environment.

Orientation - Identification

Space - Time

Determinism

Orientation has to do with a locational sense of the relationship of a place to an existant three-dimensional world. Identification has to do with a historical sense of the relationship of a place to a social milieu which has been carried on and constantly changed over time. As polar concepts these terms might be related metaphorically to the opposites of *space* and *time*. Through orientation we extend our understanding of a place laterally to other places and physical phenomena. Through identifi-

cation we extend our understanding of a place vertically through time in accordance with our beliefs about what has preceded us in this world. Orientation and identification might be looked at together in terms of the notion of *determinism*. Every place is locked into this space-time grid in which its meaning has largely preceded it; that is, its meaning for us has been predetermined by our collective values and world view.

Good places are more meaningful in this sense because they confirm, in a positive way, our existence in a culture and the continuity of our present condition with the past. They fix our position and show it to us and in doing this they distinguish our culture from other times and cultures. In this there is a sense of maintaining useful stereotypes and of revealing the values implied in them to us. There is also a sense of the historical connectedness of a place to the past. This can be related to the allusion to an historical or vernacular style that relates to the contextual circumstances of a place.

Identification - Wholeness

Function - Object

Activity Setting

We come to identify a place in large part by recognizing the *functions* it is intended to serve; that is, we recognize it only as a response to our needs and actions. In an opposite vein we may sense its wholeness simply in terms of its abstract form and spatial arrangement as an *object* apart from any worldly use or purpose. These two opposites, function and object, may be related in terms of the idea of *activity settings*. This simply expresses the idea that there needs to be a correspondence between human activities and the physical form of the environment.

Good places are more meaningful in this sense because the physical setting harmonizes with our activities. There is a sense of good fit between the two. However, while it is possible to specify and designate many ac-

tivities, there are also many activities and events that it is not possible to designate but which should be allowed to happen. Good places must provide for these undesignated activities and encourage people to participate. Similarly, there must be a balance between what is fixed and what is left changeable in our buildings so that they may respond to the many changes of use they must undergo.

Possession - Orientation

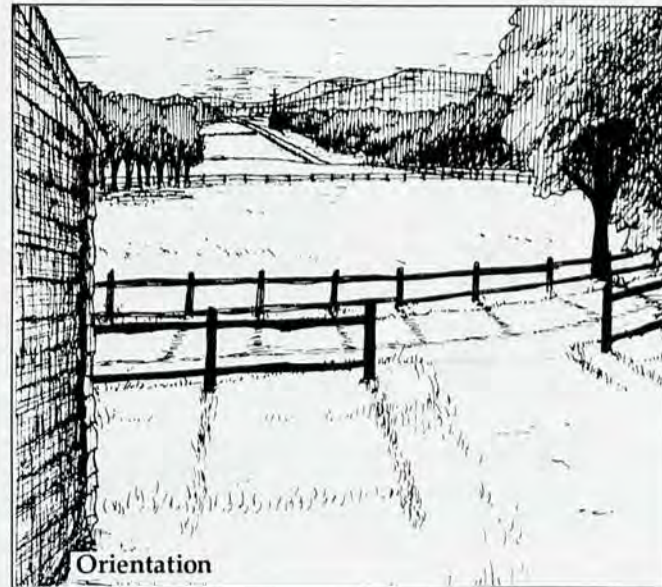
Inside - Outside

Bounding Framework

We possess places by being able to put ourselves *inside* of them in a metaphorical and actual sense. There is a sense of *indwelling* when we possess a place. We orient a place to ourselves and the world by putting ourselves *outside* of them in a metaphorical and actual sense. We understand them by circumscribing them with our knowledge of other places in the world. The relationship between these poles can be associated to the idea of a *bounding framework* which creates and mediates between inside and outside.

Good places are more meaningful in this sense because they convey where we are with clarity and strength. There is a sense that within a particular place we are encouraged to relate to the world in a particular way. We orient physically in a place by moving through it and by being in it. Good places suggest a sensitivity to the way we enter and leave them and to the selective views they allow us to, from, and within them. This has to do with the way a place bounds and frames our experience, and the more vivid and ambiguous this framework is in bounding our experience and showing us many different ways to orient and possess a place, the more meaningful the place becomes.

Figure 2 summarizes the constructs presented in the preceding discussion. The framework should be seen as a



beginning attempt to construct a theory of place meaning. It suggests that the relationship between the physical form of the environment and our shared values can only be drawn in certain ways. Some of these are described here in terms of the dimensions of place meaning that relate the four primary terms. A theory of place would seem to hold particular relevance for the fields of environmental design and architecture.

Architecture As Place-Making

By now it seems apparent that the Modern movement has failed to provide architects with an adequate theoretical base from which to practice. The attempt to deploy architecture as the flag bearer of a new age evaporated as the vision of that age failed to materialize. The slogans and manifestoes that announced the movement are now seen to conceal a very tenuous set of assumptions about the relationship of people to their environment.

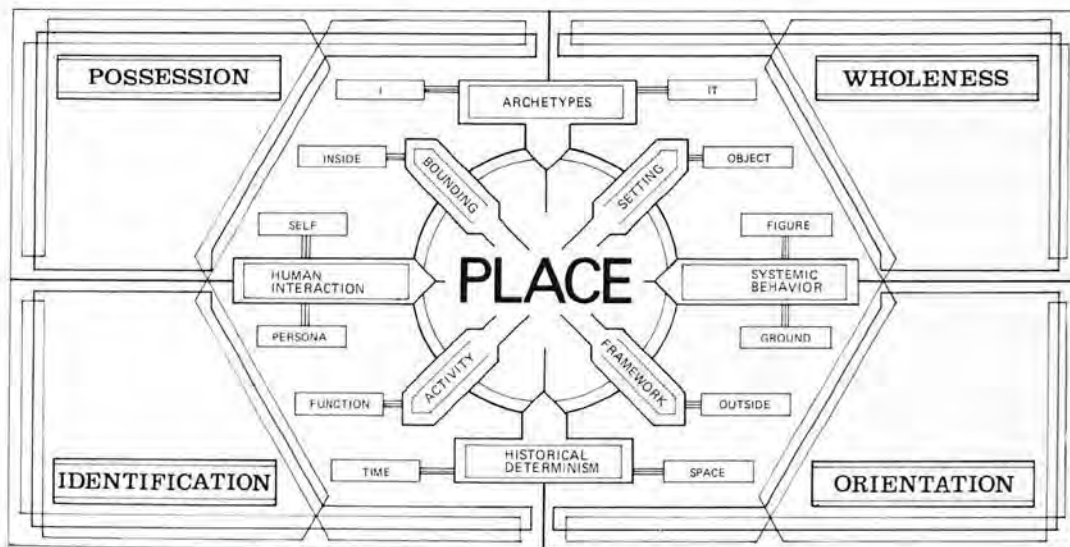


Figure 2. The elaborated place diagram.

The whole belief system and behavioral pattern of architectural practice has been called into question.

In the wake of this disintegration, various attempts have been made to construct a theory of architecture. As a rule such attempts have looked to other fields for their generative concepts in the hope that some new hybrid approach will rejuvenate the profession. The problem with each of these is that they seem only able to respond to the discipline of architecture in some partial way. On the one hand we find elaborate formalistic exercises that do not even pretend to relate to a building task; and on the other hand there are intricate strategies for setting out the building task which carry with them not the slightest formal implications. Nowhere is there a satisfactory attempt to address architecture in a direct and complete way.

The proponents of these approaches seem to have distorted the purpose of theory. As we said above, underlying any theory are assumptions, attitudes, and value

judgments about what is important to consider and what is not. In architecture, these attitudes should follow from a synthetic understanding of the architectural act that informs theory, and they need to be explicitly present in any discussion of theory. When they are not, as in the present situation, theory serves more to confuse rather than clarify the problems of the profession. In short, a theory needs to address what is unique and fundamental to architecture.

Perhaps the most obvious and distinguishing fact about architecture, whether it is approached as an art or a science, is that it is lived in by people. The built environment is the physical framework for our lives, and the purpose of architecture is to first abstract the meaningful relationships involved in this and then give them concrete form. Any theory, if it hopes to adequately address the architectural totality, must begin with this concern about how the environment frames our lives individually and collectively—how it places us. Place-making, then, is not the whole of architectural activity but the essence, that which makes it unique and separate from other disciplines. This attitude is seen as crucial in view of the trend toward a multi-disciplinary approach to design. There must be some special skill which architects contribute and that is the ability to define and create place in the environment.

The concept of place addresses the question of how the environment has meaning for us, and each culture has expressed in its architecture and city planning its own unique definition of place which reflected a collective view of the world and man's position in it. As each culture has evolved, this place-making aspect of architecture has been more or less a spontaneous process as the same world view was universally and tacitly held within the culture.

With the advent of our so-called "modern" culture this situation may no longer hold true. Today there is no universally accepted value structure to organize a collective experience of the world. In fact, it is strikingly charac-

teristic of our age that we are offered a host of schemes with which to organize our experience. When these are taken together, they confront us with a relative and contradictory picture. This has contributed to the increasing dissolution of our collective life and with it has gone the spontaneous quality of place-making. If architecture is to remain relevant, architects must begin to address this process of place-making explicitly by investigating how and by what process places have meaning for us.

Conclusion

As far as the theory goes it can provide us with a definition and a conceptual overview of the subject of place meaning and with a checklist of experiential considerations. Beyond theory there need to be techniques for place-definition and place-making. The purpose of such techniques would be to operationalize this theory so that it may be applied to particular situations. Implicit in such techniques are skills that can only be gained by doing—by analyzing existing places, by attempting to build *conserving* the place qualities that are found, and by attempting to make new places.

Vernacular studies hold particular relevance for the development of the ability to define and create places in the environment. The positive value of recognizing the vernacular context was mentioned in connection with the dimension of "historical determinism." The importance of vernacular studies may also be seen on a more general level. The degeneration of the spontaneous quality of place-making has engendered a sense of placelessness about our new environments: commercial strip development, urban sprawl, anonymous housing projects. More often than not it is difficult to find a strong sense of place in these environments. If we are to relearn the art of place-making we must be able to study examples. In America with its short history the only direct, generally accessible source of places generated spontaneously and unselfconsciously may be in our mixed vernacular traditions.

Footnotes

1. Eugene T. Gendlin, *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning* (Toronto, Ontario: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 32.
2. Kenneth E. Boulding, *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956), 3-18.
3. The terms "Possession" and "Orientation" seem to have been first associated to the idea of place in an article by Donlyn Lyndon, Charles W. Moore, Patrick J. Quinn, and Sim van Der Ryn, "Toward Making Places," *Landscape*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Autumn 1962, 38-39.
4. Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (New York: Scribner, 1953), 96.
5. Claire Cooper, "The House As Symbol of Self," in *Designing for Human Behavior: Architecture and the Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Land, Jon, et. al. (Strojosburg Pa.: Dowden Hutchinson and Ross, 1974), 131.
6. Cooper, 131.

North Carolina Folk Housing

Folk tradition was the major source of basic house form upon the historical vernacular landscape. The reason for this is quite simple: folk traditions evoked the same forms, or form-giving construction principles, in the same geographical locations continuously for many, many years. What is more, the vast majority of the thousands of houses constructed in this state during two hundred years of vernacular building can all be sorted into a mere handful of folk house types. Although most of these house types are not indigenous in the sense of having originated here, they can be said to constitute a domestic vernacular both because their distribution is geographically fixed and because locally standard modifications usually evolved which better fitted them to their North Carolina context. Through these houses generations of colonists and early Americans identified, no doubt prereflectively, with tradition and local precedent and oriented themselves with respect to their natural and social settings.



Figure 1. The development of the North Carolina frontier (adapted from the North Carolina Atlas, Chapel Hill, 1975).

This land called North Carolina has been lived upon now by Euro-Americans for more than three centuries in its eastern parts and for at least two in all but its remotest west. For most of that time—until around World War I—most of those who lived and died here chose their dwelling forms from a mere handful of alternatives presented them by conservative tradition and slow-moving Southern rural fashion. In many cases, perhaps the majority, even “chose” is too willful a term for what surely was an act largely predetermined by the accident of their passage in a certain space and time. Even the “finer” houses of North Carolina’s rural past seldom violated the narrow lexicon of traditional folk forms, as signs of wealth and sophistication were simply draped upon the more egalitarian frame.

The folk house is primarily a *mental* fact, the embodiment of a slowly and collectively wrought idea of houseness. Once that idea is performed it is also, though somewhat secondarily, a *geographic* fact. The dwelling that results is located for good, or at least until man or decay removes it. The folk house is thus a record of mind *in place*.

Most change in traditional house form is doggedly slow. The massive mental fact only slowly turns to acknowledge what can be a rather fast changing geographic context. Consequently, we can often trace the European roots of early Americans in the forms of their houses, and we can trace their settlement patterns in the distribution of these forms upon the landscape. The thorough vernacularization—making local—of transported European notions of dwelling form took generations. When major changes occurred in the folk repertoire—as occasionally they did—we can be certain they correlated with equally major, less visible alterations in the dwelling context, be it social, economic, or ultimately psychological.

Since an anthropological concept of culture first gained currency in America during the early decades of this century, a call has repeatedly gone out for scholars to

Doug Swaim

mine the rich bed of cultural data fixed in house form and deposited so conveniently—and tellingly—along the byways of past and present habitat. Despite a few truly seminal and genuinely important studies, however, the response to this call has been to date quantitatively meager.¹ Given the vast territory over which the pattern of American folk housing is spread—the hundreds of thousands of miles of country road along which data is strung—the few serious students of the subject have managed only to sample the field. Naturally they have sampled in some promising spots, so that they often appear as solitary prospectors making repeated, and suspiciously successful, sojourns into unknown parts mysteriously close at hand. That there has been no “rush” after them must be attributed to a pervasive, but no less curious, blindness for the ordinary. And the result, as one geographer put it, is that “the genetic study of America’s common architecture is currently [1971] in about the state that geology was in the early nineteenth century: 50 percent intelligent guesswork, 40 percent mythology, and the remaining 10 percent split between alchemy and hard facts.”²

North Carolina folk housing studies today stand on only slightly firmer ground. Though no one has yet completed a thorough inventory of what is here (unfortunately, since the older of these old houses are fast disappearing from the landscape), the state has been included in several broader studies, and a few counties have been painstakingly scrutinized.³ Still, any attempt to present an overview of folk housing in this region necessarily calls for considerable extrapolation from the known. For clarity’s sake—and because so many impressions remain untested and unassimilated—it also requires that much be ignored.

What have been the major folk building traditions to have given form to North Carolina’s domestic architecture in the state’s three hundred year history? The picture I shall offer in answer to this question will be broadly painted. In

the main, it will be a distillation and summary of the published works referred to above (the “broader studies” that include this region). Where possible and appropriate it will, of course, make use of information generated and held more locally.

There will be a measure of irony evoked in our approach to the task: the goal is to write the story of the *common* house; yet, as in most democratic ventures, the particular, even exceptional individual case must here be subordinated to the general current. Our discussion necessarily will rely heavily upon the convenience of *types*. According to Henry Glassie, the nation’s leading theorist on these matters, “the primary characteristics of a usual American folk house type . . . would be height and floor plan. . . .” Although construction (material) and use should be brought out in any complete description of a material folk object, typologies must be based on form, for form “is the most persistent, the least changing of an object’s components.”⁴ In general then, the methodology



Figure 3. The Wilkins Place, a square one-room house north of Rocky Mount.

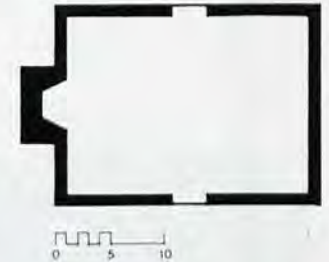
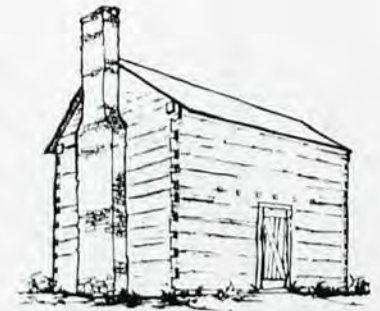


Figure 2. The one-room house type.

employed by students of folk housing has required that myriad dwelling forms discovered in the field be sorted into types based principally on floor plan and height—and then that those types be “read” as carriers of cultural information. Where we begin, the difficult task of determining types has already been addressed.

A measure of order can be brought to our typology of North Carolina folk houses by dividing it broadly into three categories based on a qualitative assessment of the forms involved: pioneer types, Old World types, and Georgian-plan types. These categories follow very roughly the order in which the various house types first appeared in this state. *It is important to remember, however, that once a type was introduced, it became a part of the local builder's repertoire and could—and often did—appear much later, after the rise and fall, so to speak, of other types.*



Figure 4. Rectangular one-room log cabin in Madison County.

Pioneer Types

The North Carolina frontier was first pushed ahead over three hundred years ago by Anglo-Virginians from the relatively populous Chesapeake Bay region who moved south looking for open land. Substantial numbers of these Virginia emigrants settled in the area north of the Albemarle Sound beginning around 1660. By 1700 colonists arriving directly at North Carolina ports—especially at the mouth of the Cape Fear River—had joined the Virginians in advancing the frontier inland some sixty miles. Around 1750 Hillsborough and Salisbury were founded as settlers from both Pennsylvania and South Carolina, as well as from the coastal east and Virginia, began to stake out the fertile soils of the central and western Piedmont. 1800 saw the frontier following ancient Indian trails upon the slopes and into the broad valleys of the Blue Ridge. Some of North Carolina's mountainous back country remained essentially frontier until after the Civil War (Fig. 1).

Of the various dwelling forms that housed these earliest settlers no doubt the elemental one-room structure was most common (Fig. 2). All along the frontier pioneers took shelter around its all-purpose hearth. In the typical cabin, a small second-story loft made headroom scarce below but added precious space and a dry floor for the older children to sleep upon. Either a ladder or a narrow, boxed-in stairway provided access to this second floor.

So primary and second-nature is the one-room enclosure that one might doubt it is form enough to carry—or be carried by—a building tradition. Yet in North Carolina two such traditions can be identified in these basic structures. In the east and Piedmont the English, who lacked a significant log building tradition, built square cabins out of sawn lumber⁵ (Fig. 3). The usual dimensions of sixteen by sixteen feet—which constitute the standard bay in so much traditional English architecture—are said to have possibly derived a millen-

nium ago from the "stabling requirements of oxen," or as the maximum size room comfortably warmed by a single fireplace.⁶

In the upland Piedmont and west settlers from Pennsylvania conformed to a Scotch-Irish form-giving tradition and constructed rectangular cabins approximately sixteen by twenty-two or twenty-four feet (Fig. 4). Although sometimes frame built, more often than not these rectangular cabins were constructed of logs using techniques brought to America by the Germans.⁷ These log building techniques had come to predominate in Pennsylvania—where the Germans were known as "Pennsylvania Dutch"—and were carried south from that area by both German and Scotch-Irish settlers and their descendants beginning in the second quarter or the eighteenth century.⁸ Spaces left between the logs were "chinked" with small bits of wood or stone and daubed with mud. Frequently the logs were covered with board siding.

The critical element in horizontal log construction is the corner joint. In North Carolina both major types of cornering techniques introduced by the Pennsylvania Dutch, V-notching and half-dovetailing, are well represented—as well as other related types including one, diamond notching, invented by English settlers after contact with the more traditional German methods⁹ (Fig. 5). Long after it was discontinued for homebuilding, log construction survived, especially in the west, as acceptable for barns and other outbuildings. (Whether the recent revival of traditional log building techniques in North Carolina, primarily in the vacation home industry, represents a *continuation of folk practices*, is a question I will leave to the experts.)

Following English precedent, exterior gable-end chimneys heated one-room houses across the state. In the east brick was the preferred material—in the west, "rock."¹⁰

Of course there were early settlers—many of them genuine "pioneers" at that—who built larger homes

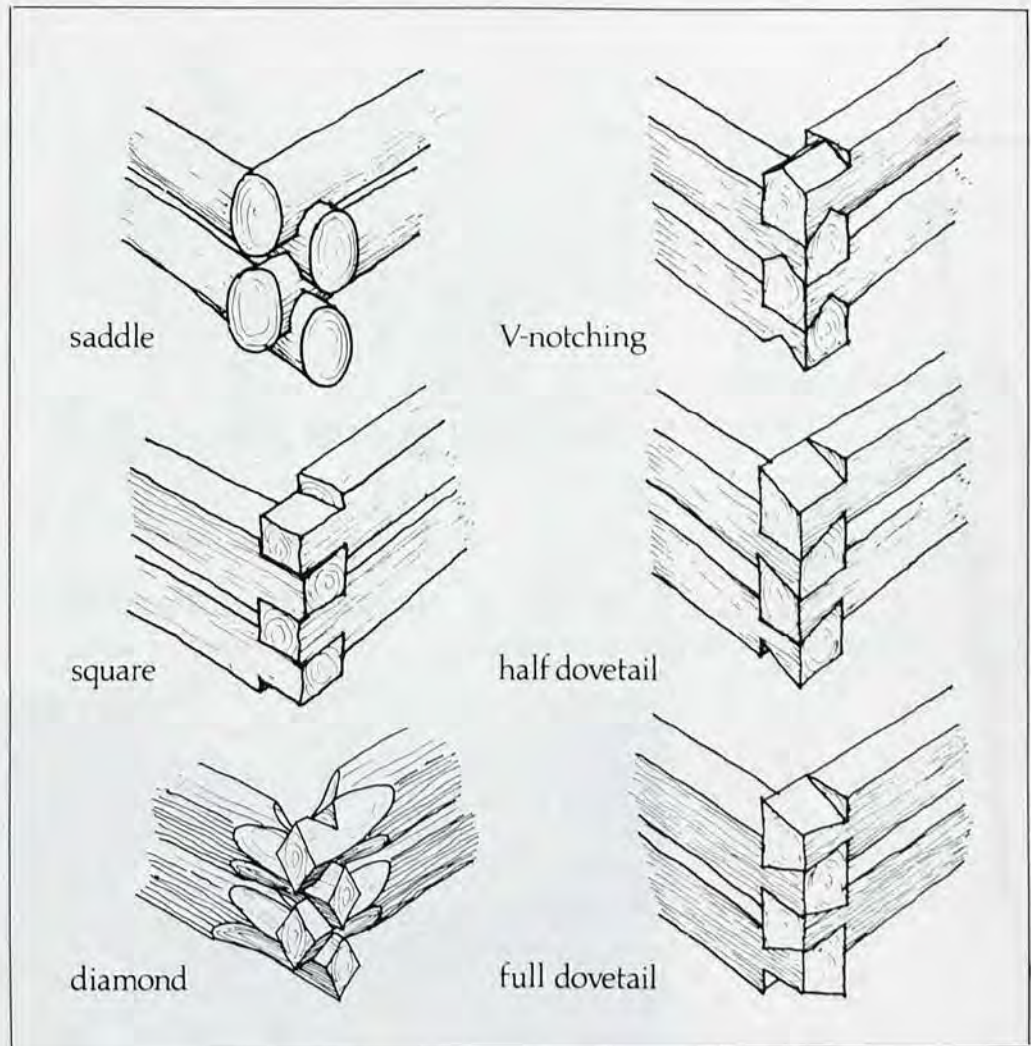


Figure 5. Corner timbering techniques found in North Carolina (adapted from Kniffen and Glassie, "Building in Wood in the Eastern United States: A Time-Place Perspective," 1966).

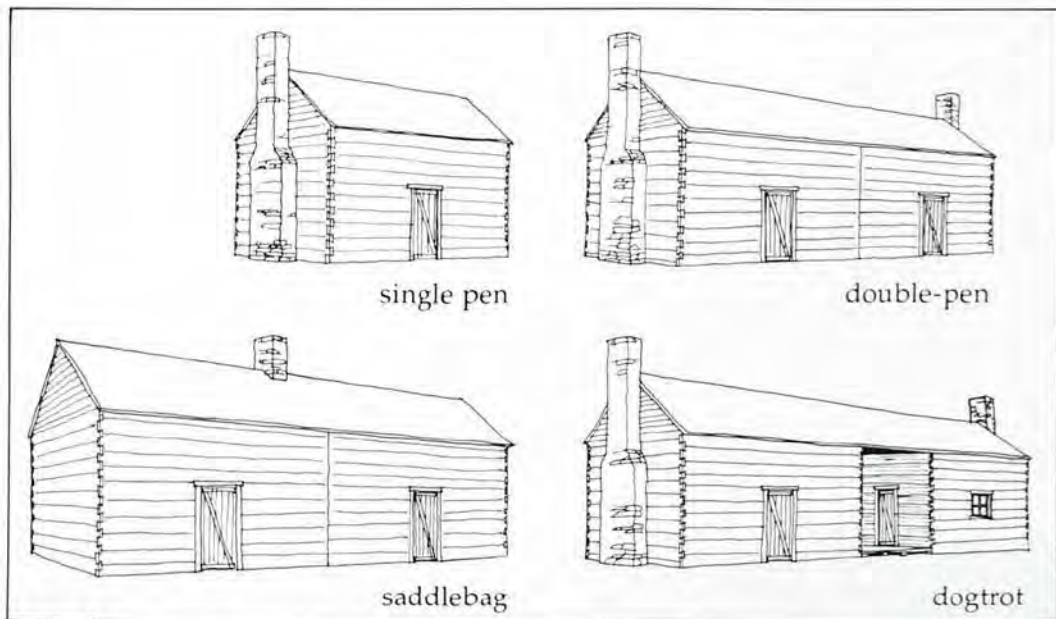


Figure 6. Standard methods of adding on to the single pen.



Figure 7. Saddlebag tenant house east of Raleigh.

straight away. Usually though, logically enough, the one-room cabin served as the settler's "first house," in the beginning sheltering all activities. Typically it was soon surrounded by a variety of outbuildings including a separate kitchen. And eventually it was either replaced outright, and often converted to an outbuilding itself, or integrated into a larger structure.

Given the simplicity of the situation, several standard methods evolved for adding onto the original single "pen," as it was called (Fig. 6). A saddlebag house was created by adding an equal room to the chimney end of the cabin. A double-pen house resulted when the addition was made to the chimney-free end. If a floored passageway was left between the two pens, then you had a dogtrot, or possum trot, house—so named by the writers of travel guides who thought the purpose of the passageway was to shelter various family beasts in inclement weather. Actually, it was used simply as a hallway.¹¹ All of these twice-as-large houses eventually became recognized as types in their own right and were commonly built all-at-once, of sawn lumber instead of logs, well into this century. Saddlebag and double-pen structures serve as standard tenant housing in much of eastern North Carolina to this day (Fig. 7).

Admittedly, calling all these structures "pioneer" begins to stretch the associative potential of that term, for they are by no means the exclusive property of that era of our history. Yet the connection remains appropriate, for they all share not only the single pen's legacy of frontier usage but also elemental qualities derived of the sheltering need directly confronted. Specialization of spaces is minimal; growth is simply additive. Although we do find culture and tradition in them, the veneer is relatively thin.

Undoubtedly this kind of structure is a strong presence in our rural landscape today. What it contributes is very much a part, for we have traditionally been not a culture source, but a culture fringe—a land of small acreage farmers who value the direct and expedient. Early

on, this bare instrumentality in dwelling form was passed on to the noncitizen slave who, severed from black history, embraced it as his own. To this day these dwelling forms are readily associated with tenancy upon the land or with what is often the same, rural poverty. Occasionally the classic intercourse of minimum need minimally met produces a dwelling of simple beauty. More often the offspring are grey, raw, and fragile. In either case the shelter provided marks the frontier of our economy.

Old World Types

Quite often the provisional single room cabin was replaced within a few years by a more spacious hall-and-parlor house (Fig. 8). The idea for the hall-and-parlor house was brought to North Carolina by both English and Scotch-Irish colonists. Hall-and-parlor plan dwellings were common in sixteenth and seventeenth century rural England and Ireland and represent the domestic architecture of those countries prior to the assimilation of Renaissance ideas. One source traces the plan as far back as thirteenth century England.¹²

Again, English settlers from Virginia spread into northeast North Carolina during the late 1600's. North Carolina continued to receive these second-hand colonists throughout the following century. In addition, substantial numbers of English entered the colony directly during the same period by way of North Carolina ports. Then, between 1750 and 1800, thousands of Scotch-Irish entered the central and western portions of the colony by traveling long distances overland from Charleston and, especially, Pennsylvania. Reflecting the domain of the English and Scotch-Irish, hall-and-parlor houses were eventually built over most of the state (Fig. 9).

The plan is basically two rooms: the square "hall," entered directly from outdoors with a fireplace centered in the end wall, was where most domestic activities occurred; sleeping, formal entertaining, or both took place



Figure 8. The hall-and-parlor house type.



Figure 9. Paths by which the hall-and-parlor type was introduced into North Carolina.



Figure 10. Boxed-in stairway in an eastern North Carolina tenant house.



Figure 11. Path by which the Continental plan type was introduced into North Carolina.

in the smaller "parlor." Usually a narrow, boxed-in stairway (Fig. 10)—of late medieval origin and spirit¹³—ascended in a tight, steep turn from the hall to either a sleeping loft or, especially in the region settled by Scotch-Irish from Pennsylvania, a full second story. In North Carolina, hall-and-parlor houses were regularly built with shed rooms appended to the rear and a large porch either appended to or "engaged" into the front of the structure.

The only non-English-speaking group that made a significant contribution to our domestic building vocabulary was the Germans. Beginning in the second quarter of the eighteenth century thousands of Germans—Lutheran, Moravian, and reformed Protestants of diverse European origins—began making the long journey overland from Philadelphia where they landed in America, or from the Pennsylvania countryside where their families had settled a generation or so before, down the Shenandoah Valley and the Great Valley of Virginia to the sparsely populated rolling hills of North Carolina's western Piedmont (Fig. 11). In 1753 the Moravians, a tightly-knit communal sect within this larger migration, founded the town of Salem. Most of the Germans, however, settled in more informal groups scattered farther west and south. It has been estimated that "in 1775, in the western counties of North Carolina, Germans probably constituted somewhere between 10 percent and 30 percent of the total white population."¹⁴

These German settlers—along with Scotch-Irish who lived beside them in Pennsylvania—brought to North Carolina the idea for a two-story three-room plan dwelling called the Continental plan house since it can be traced back to a medieval German building tradition¹⁵ (Fig. 12). This same house type has also been called the Quaker plan because it was thought that William Penn encouraged its use in Quaker Pennsylvania. Although variations on the Continental plan have turned up in scattered examples in North Carolina's northeast, the

type's primary distribution is limited to the central and western Piedmont.

The three-room plan farmhouse of medieval Germany had a large central chimney which by the time the idea reached North Carolina had been replaced by more fashionable exterior gable-end chimneys. Corner fireplaces, a traditional Pennsylvania Dutch feature, often allowed one chimney to service both smaller ground-floor rooms. The log building skills imported by German settlers were occasionally employed in North Carolina in the construction of the early Continental plan dwellings. A preference for stone and brick as well, rather than the sawn lumber used regularly by the English, reflects the persistence of traditional Continental notions concerning the character of dwelling places (Fig 13). Conserving a traditional German building element well-suited to the Piedmont terrain, some early Continental plan houses were sited on hillsides with semi-subterranean cellars entered through the exposed downhill foundation. A wide front porch and shed rooms—sometimes with another chimney and fireplace for cooking—were often added to the North Carolina versions of this traditional dwelling type.

Far removed from their widely separate origins these Old World house types came to *share* a particular New World context. What they came to share in terms of form is an index to the regional building vocabulary of the times.

Only a few of the very earliest hall-and-parlor houses built in North Carolina were porchless (Fig. 14). Porches were first consistently added to English dwellings when they were built by colonists in the British West Indies. The West Indies shed porch soon became a standard addition to hall-and-parlor houses constructed on the coastal mainland, including eastern North Carolina.¹⁶ Now and then a hall-and-parlor house was built with the porch structurally integrated—fully “engaged”—a solution which simultaneously allowed an increase in the size



Figure 12. The Continental plan house type in North Carolina.

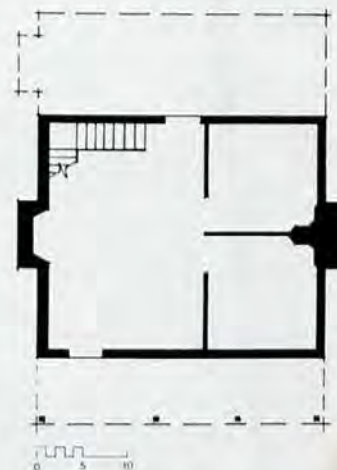


Figure 13. The Michael Braun House, or “Old Stone House,” in Rowan County, built around 1770.

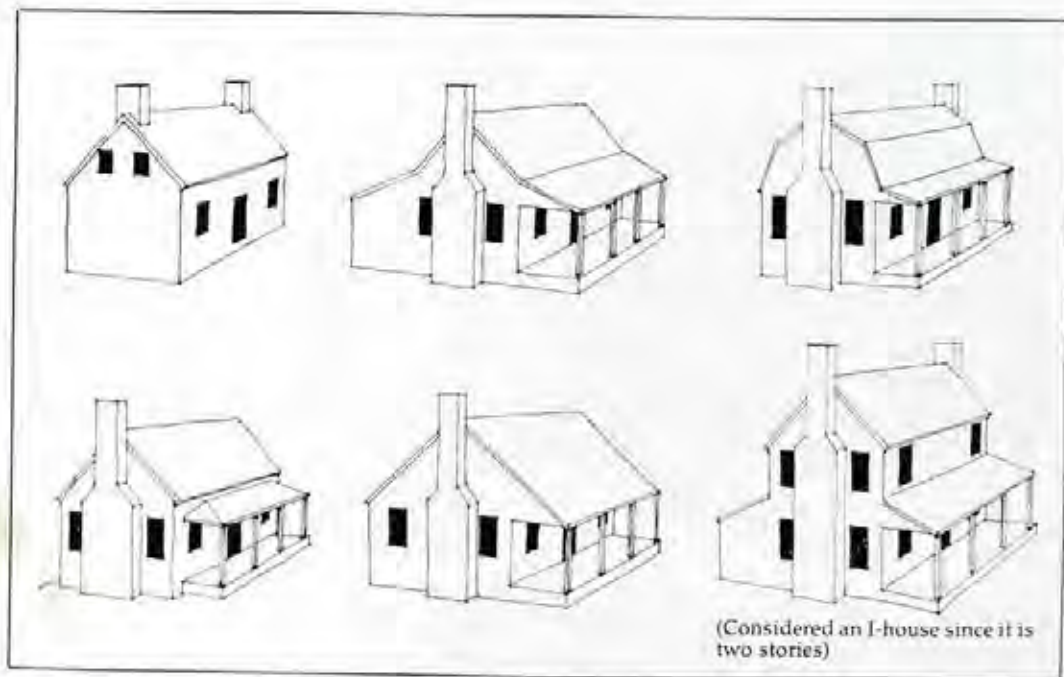


Figure 14. Variations on a theme: hall-and-parlor houses in North Carolina.



Figure 15. Duplin County "coastal cottage" type hall-and-parlor house.

of the second-story loft. More common, however, is the so-called "coastal cottage" whose picturesque double-pitched roof serves as a reminder of the amended status of that house form (Fig. 15). Occasionally an end bay of the shed porch was enclosed to form a "porch room." Of course porches were added to both Old World types wherever they were built in the state. The lineage of those added to structures in the Piedmont and west is, however, more difficult to trace. Inasmuch as they were derived from the shed appendage, likely they are distantly English.

A feature so elementary and pervasive as the shed room resists any attempt to identify its origin. According to one source, though, it is "distinctly English."¹⁷ Throughout the state, but particularly in the southeast, the shed stands out as a standard and often well-articulated component of the folk building vocabulary. In Duplin County, for instance, most nineteenth century dwellings were constructed with rear shed rooms harmoniously incorporated as a part of the original plans (Fig. 16). In Duplin these narrow spaces were typically used as sleeping chambers. Every house type mentioned in this essay, save one, was commonly constructed with a shed appendage.

The common context shared by hall-and-parlor and Continental building traditions in North Carolina held for them a common fate: to be superseded in the folk imagination by symmetrical forms born of the Georgian "revolution." Before they fell from favor these asymmetrical Old World plans were both given balancing face-lifts—through the treatment of fenestration, entrances, and chimney stacks—which extended their popular acceptance until about 1830. Except in the mountainous west where the hall-and-parlor plan remained a housing staple, they survived as less utilized dwelling options throughout the nineteenth century.

These Old World houses, the few of them that remain, add surprising depth to our cultural landscape—a dimension I am inclined, perhaps hastily, to call “a touchstone with medievalism.” I have been warned, however, that the hall-and-parlor plan, although definitely pre-Renaissance, is *not* medieval.¹⁸ Likely the stout Continental plan dwelling has only slightly more legitimate claim to that legacy. So be it. Nonetheless, what I am so inclined to name remains clearly present in these silent forms and, particularly, in their relationship to the world around them: the workings of mind both strange and deeply comforting—a manner of dwelling *long* forgotten.

The mind that found meaning in these building traditions generally took pains to site its house taking full advantage of terrain. Of course ample good sites were still available in the relatively open eighteenth century landscape. The significant fact, however, is that in strong contrast to the houses of the next century these dwellings were usually located away from the road with their porched facades facing south. They were *placed in relation* to the land and the sun. Although “society” had yet to turn the head of dwelling, it was by no means absent from the cultural landscape. Style cloaked many an Old World interior and managed to explode the single Continental chimney into “balanced” Georgian duality. But for awhile at least, the public was received only across the space of a robust New World in-between. Eventually, though, the new *American* society pressed its demand for a generalized “good form”—as well as for a formal presentation of that standard—and managed to upset towards symmetry the flawed geometry of the perfectly fitting, fragile Old World web.



Figure 16. Two-story hall-and-parlor plan house with shed rooms, in Duplin County (also considered an I-house since it is two stories).

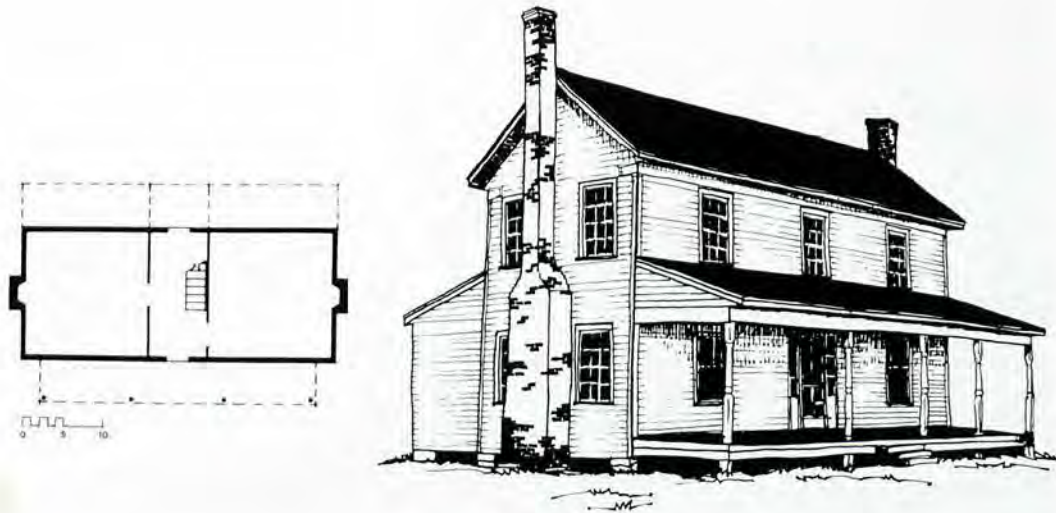


Figure 17. Central-hallway I-house type.



Figure 18. Classic colonial Georgian and central-hallway I-house comparison.

Georgian-Plan Types*

Renaissance ideas spread to England in the seventeenth century and were the inspiration for a new architectural style called Georgian after the three English King Georges. Following the classical aesthetic, Georgian architecture usually displayed, both in plan and elevation, a strong central feature around which other elements were balanced symmetrically. This style first appeared in the English colonies in the late seventeenth century and was popular until after the Revolution. Beginning about 1750, and for almost one hundred and fifty years afterwards, North Carolina folk architecture was strongly influenced by the Georgian model. By 1850 American folk Georgian had all but replaced the Old World building traditions that the earliest settlers had brought over from a Europe less affected by the Renaissance wave.

The central-hallway I-house (so named for rather obscure reasons¹⁹ although it does appear rather tall and thin from the side) is perhaps the most common folk house type in the eastern United States (Fig. 17). When compared with a classic Georgian dwelling, it is easy to see it as a simplification of the Georgian idea (Fig. 18). Its central hallway, symmetrical plan, and paired chimneys all echo the English Renaissance spirit, here greatly reduced in the alembic of the folk mind. Whether the fully resolved plan first appeared in the English or American folk repertoire is not clearly known. Likely it emerged more or less simultaneously upon the two continents. If any trade of ideas did occur within the folk domain,

*The term "Georgian" has been used variously to name either the decorative and stylistic features of eighteenth century English and English colonial architecture or the basic formal grammar—ultimately classical—introduced in England and America via that style and evidenced in building plans and facades even after its decorative vocabulary was abandoned. In order to clarify my usage, which is the latter, I have generally employed the rather ungainly compound descriptor "Georgian-plan."

however, it doubtless flowed principally from England to the colonies.

The house's one room depth, a reduction of the classic Georgian "double pile," allowed for ample ventilation and well suited the form to this region's summers. In North Carolina central hallway I-houses were commonly built with shed rooms or, later, with ells added to the rear. Of course they almost always had a full front porch, sometimes two stories high. The addition of a rear ell allowed another—"back"—porch which usually faced east or south (Fig. 19).

This Georgian-plan folk type was first built in North Carolina around 1790 and is today common across the state. For most of the century and a-half of its popularity it symbolized agrarian prosperity and respectability.²⁰ No doubt it was the strength of the form as a symbol that brought its remarkable success.

The essence of the I-house is its facade (Fig. 20). With rare exception, it was built facing a roadway regardless of solar orientation. And its four rooms could not have been arranged to create a larger looking structure. Compared with a four-room "shotgun" house, for instance, the form is maximized profile. Like the defensive cat presenting the dog with an arched and exaggerated broadside, the I-house sits commanding its surrounding acreage. By the beginning of the nineteenth century an elaborated social order was emerging over much of the state's rural countryside. No doubt this newly arrived formality to life made welcome both the Georgian facade and the central hallway with its implications for reception and separation.



Figure 19. Duplin County central-hallway I-house with back porch and shed rooms.



Figure 20. Front view of the same Duplin County central-hallway I-house.

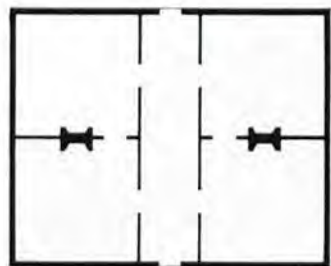


Figure 21. One-story Georgian-plan house type.



Figure 22. One-story Georgian-plan house in Franklin County on a raised foundation and with Italianate and Greek Revival decorative elements.

A second North Carolina type that speaks its vernacular with a formal Georgian accent is the one-story Georgian-plan house (Fig 21). Its plan is classic: central hallway, two rooms deep with embedded chimneys. Its one room height and three-bay facade, however, leave it a reduced version of the finer Georgian mansions. This is a later, more urban type than the central hallway I-house, first appearing in the state around 1850 and strongly associated with the Italianate style current about that time. Although occasionally constructed with a gable roof, the hip roof was much more common. A shallow hip and brackets were employed when the Italianate image was desired (Fig 22). In later examples, especially turn-of-the-century, the hip was so steep as to become pyramidal, the enlarged attic perhaps helping to make up for the loss of ventilation suffered in the two-room deep plan. Porches often wrap around two or more sides of these later structures. One-story Georgian-plan houses were eventually built in most parts of the state but early on were more common in the southeastern Piedmont and Coastal Plain.

The most popular house type in much of eastern North Carolina during the post-Civil War nineteenth century was a one-story structure with the same basic plan as the central-hallway I-house (Fig. 23). It seems quite telling that when reconstruction economies dictated a reduced building program, instead of reverting to the tidy hall-and-parlor idea, the folk builder generally chose to stay within the vocabulary of his more recently acquired competence. Apparently the needs that first drew elements of Georgian formality through the native sieve were still at large in rural North Carolina society. Either that or the house simply makes pretense—which it does anyway—to being the same *kind* of dwelling as the I-house of the more prosperous farms. Regardless, this, the quarter Georgian-plan house, is the most reined-in version of the Georgian idea to be found in our landscape (Fig. 24).

Quarter Georgian-plan houses commonly received shed or ell appendages. When “living rooms” became fashionable early in this century, the owners of many of these houses removed one of the interior partitions, destroying the hallway and creating a hall-and-parlor plan with an oversized hall. Apparently an elongated space better squared with the “living room” image.

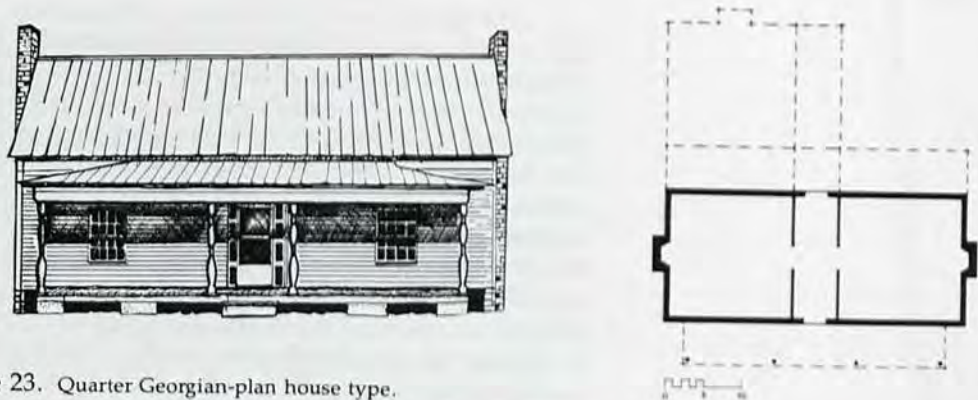


Figure 23. Quarter Georgian-plan house type.



Figure 24. Quarter Georgian-plan house in Duplin County.

The deployment of balanced symmetrical forms upon the nineteenth century rural North Carolina landscape constitutes regional evidence of a more extensive revolution that influenced American domestic architecture for over a century. In the cultural backwaters (of the folk landscape) this revolution rode a wave of rediscovered classicism initiated long before in the Italian Renaissance and first encountered in colonial Georgian forms. Ironically this primary wave was eventually reinforced by the classical *revivals* of the nineteenth century cultural mainstream. The buildings created in its wake go a long way towards establishing the character of our rural landscape today.

Considering the folk designer's keen appetite for certain elements of classical building's grammar, one must wonder at the nature and cause of his hunger. It was as if, as Henry Glassie maintains, the Georgian model's "perfect symmetry . . . crystalized an old wish. . . ." ²¹ According to Glassie, "this bilaterally symmetrical, tripartite design [which the folk mind distilled from Georgian composition] was the perfect end to the builder's search for architectural order." ²² Hence, the "old wish" was to *control* reality. In his *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, Glassie correlates this desire for control to a whole gamut of threats upon the late eighteenth century Southerner's security. Beyond practicality (the central-hallway I-house's suitability to the climate of the Upland South) and fashion (the utility of its image in gaining and maintaining status), he posits fear and insecurity—and thus, it seems, a rather desperate desire for control—as factors critical to the form's success. "Bilaterally symmetrical, tripartite structures mark western quests for control." ²³ Perhaps. As dwellings upon the middle *North Carolina* landscape, however, these structures exhibit other dimensions as well.

Glassie, especially, would see a great gulf separating these "anonymous masks," set so "repetitiously" and "artificially" upon the land, from the humanistic Renaissance traditions that ultimately bore them. As they were

manifested upon the North Carolina landscape for over one hundred years, I would not. Granted, the facade is the essence of all three Georgian-plan types discussed here. As Glassie notes, "the mask is a face, bilaterally symmetrical, with its entrance at the lower center . . . It is a projection of the human shape—the ultimate paradigm—but it is a negation of self." ²⁴ Here, I believe, Glassie misses the point. Facade as face is less "paradigmatic" than "archetypical"—and, consequently, in it there is potential for accessing, rather than negating, the difficult self. Admittedly, for that potential to be exploited, the *relation* of persona to archetype must be drawn out—"individuation," to stay within a Jungian vocabulary, must occur. And no doubt this is where Mr. Glassie found his middle Virginia landscape wanting.

If I were to narrow my vision to a small sample of what is here, I might be likewise discouraged. However, looking at the performances of the central-hallway I-house that span its popularity across the time and space occupied by this state's cultural landscape, I see ample variation and elaboration upon its basic form (Fig. 25). Paradoxically, in this land so very middling between the centers of fashion, the rendering of a standard house in a *popular* style—and most examples encountered at least suggest style—likely resulted in a uniquely personal interpretation. At such a remove from sophistication—lacking *savoir-faire*—the risk involved in every "stylish" performance was maximized. And the "highly vernacular" products that resulted were keenly personal presentations, if not expressions.

Every art, especially the building art, claimed Geoffrey Scott in *The Architecture of Humanism*, "needs a theme to vary, a resisting substance to work upon, a form to alter and preserve, a base upon which, when inspiration flags, it may retire." ²⁵ As archetypical form—or even simply as projected human form—the central-hallway I-house provided such a theme in a very special way. Fledgling American society may have at first demanded a mask—that is society's best role—but in doing so, thanks



Figure 25. Three North Carolina central-hallway I-houses, (from top down) in Ashe, Duplin, and Granville Counties.

to the presence of the classical model, it called up the difficult self and so initiated the process of individuation which, after all, is what dwelling is all about.

We saw how the typical Old World house was oriented so that the winter sun reached deeply upon its front porch. By contrast, the typical Georgian-plan house was oriented with its proto-human face to the public road. Once called up, the mask naturally assumed its function of meeting the unknown passer-by. The folk dweller was not long—if at all—satisfied with this disassociation with the sun. By 1840, in these parts, a feature had been fully incorporated into the central-hallway I-house that renewed the dwelling's solar connection. That feature was the "ell." Even with the house's primary orientation to the road, there was always a choice of where to locate the "back porch," and most often it was placed so as to welcome the eastern or southern sun.

The "ell" has been slighted by students of folk housing. To them it is an "appendage," a "secondary characteristic" not considered in the definition of the type. And understandably so, for it is, often in combination with shed rooms, where the variation—again, the individuation—within the plan occurs. The neat typology necessarily overlooks it. The back porch, then, is where the family performed winter chores *in the sun*, and the ell, after the Civil War when kitchen and dining spaces were generally incorporated into it, was where the family gathered for mealtime sustenance. If the bilaterally symmetrical tripartite facade locates the dwelling's formal ordering intellect, then the ell locates its heart. Significantly, it also often locates its deep-seated *cultural* memory, for the ell was commonly the oldest part of the house—a recycled Old World hall-and-parlor structure or even, beneath accumulated layers of siding, a one-room log family seat. And thus the most common of our common traditional dwellings reveals itself as a richly dual, public and private kind of place—a not so unfit legatee of its trace of Renaissance born humanism.

If we were to identify and frame "the *typical* folk dwelling" constructed in North Carolina each year of the nineteenth century, and then view all one hundred frames in sequence cinematically, we would likely see the following scene unfold: a hall-and-parlor house set in the landscape would turn from the south and face a distant roadway, soon to be replaced by a central-hallway I-house which over the years would slowly move toward that roadway; for awhile after the Civil War a quarter Georgian-plan house would take the I-house's place, still facing the road now not so far away; and late in the century the central-hallway I-house, again, would march up to the roadside as if to catch a glimpse of the noisy carriages making their way curiously, horselessly along it a few years later. All along the roadway the scene would be repeated—houses lining the roadway, many of them by 1900 nontraditional or asymmetrical variations and combinations of traditional forms. Thus the scattered society became the linear society.²⁶ And down the roadway and down the railroad tracks criss-crossing the countryside came the printed page—the farmers' magazines, carpenters' guides, and plan books that put an end to the age of traditional dwelling. The transformations wrought on the carpenter's stock of ideas—transformations that proceeded slowly enough during the nineteenth century for the homeostatic fixing of practices and products that we have referred to as "types"—were soon to accelerate and make utterly fluid that stock.

The record of man's traditional dwelling is not easily analyzed. Despite dwelling's conservative inclination and artifactual expression, it is in the long run as organic as the play of mind can be. The simple picture I have painted here—dividing our regional folk traditions into pioneer, Old World, and Georgian-plan types—slights the complexity and subtlety of both the process and its formal products. Try to fit the house forms you see along any country road into the simple typology I have presented and its shortcomings will quickly become obvious.

Although the picture is crude, one hopes its outlines hold true. The three broad categories represent unmistakable landmarks in our cultural space: the imprint of the frontier experience, the surviving elements of traditional European culture, and the synthetic tide of a new American order somehow culminating a culture drift—or "wave"—that began in the Renaissance. Whether the individual types belong where I have put them or whether I could have selected more representative types are both points that warrant contention. If the debate has been initiated, we are making progress.

Footnotes

1. In 1936 Fred Kniffen inaugurated American "culturogeographic" studies with "Louisiana House Types," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, XXVI (1936), 179-193; also see Kniffen's "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 55:4 (Dec. 1965), 549-577. In Kniffen's footsteps and eventually outgrowing his shoes, Henry Glassie is undoubtedly the nation's leading fieldworker and theorist in folk housing studies—see his *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968) for the "state of the art" as well as an overview of findings up to 1968; for Glassie's reaching attempt to progress the art, see *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1975); both Glassie's books have extensive bibliographies.
2. Pierce F. Lewis, "Common Houses, Cultural Spoor," *Landscape* Vol. 19, No. 2, Jan. 1975.
3. Both Glassie's books mentioned above are relevant to North Carolina studies; see also his "The Types of the Southern Mountain Cabin," in *The Study of American Folklore*, ed. Jan H. Brunvand (New York: Norton, 1968), 338-370. Thomas Tileston Waterman and Frances Benjamin Johnson, *The Early Architecture of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941); once acquainted with the field, facts about folk traditions can be sifted from this resilient foundation work. The more recent survey work done by the Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section, Division of Archives and History, has encompassed older folk buildings; useful surveys include the counties of the Tar-Neuse River Basin, the New River Valley, Rowan County, and Guilford County. Carl Lounsbury has surveyed the Albemarle region. I have surveyed along one road through Duplin County; see my "North Carolina Vernacular," *The North Carolina Architect* (Jan.-Feb. 1977).
4. Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture*, 8. In *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* Glassie has, *a la* Noam Chomsky and structuralism, attempted to define the rules (the competence) employed by the folk designer when executing his design (the performance); once the rules are known, then individual houses (performances) can be related through their application rather than simply sorted into types; the attempt is highly suggestive, yet problematic; we will stick to the "convenience" of types.
5. Glassie, "The Types of the Southern Mountain Cabin," 353.
6. Glassie, "The Types of the Southern Mountain Cabin," 351; Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, 118.
7. Glassie, "The Types of the Southern Mountain Cabin," 355.
8. Fred Kniffen and Henry Glassie, "Building in Wood in the Eastern United States: A Time-Place Perspective," *The Geographical Review*, LVI:1 (Jan. 1966), 40-66.
9. Kniffen, "Building in Wood in the Eastern United States."
10. Glassie, "Types of the Southern Mountain Cabin," 343.
11. Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture*, 78-79, 89-98; Glassie provides a more elaborate derivation of the dog-trot type. See also Waterman, 7.
12. Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, 75; Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture*, 64-66.
13. Glassie, "Types of the Southern Mountain Cabin," 342.
14. Harry Roy Merrens, *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 61.
15. See Bernard Herman's "Continuity and Change in Folk Housing: The Continental Plan Farmhouse in Middle North Carolina" in this volume; for the attribution of the "Quaker" plan's usage to William Penn's directive, see Waterman, 173.
16. Waterman, 41-42.
17. Glassie, "Types of the Southern Mountain Cabin," 349.
18. Personal correspondence with Carl Lounsbury, June 1977.
19. Kniffen, "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," where the central-hallway I-house is viewed as an I-house subtype; Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*.
20. Kniffen, "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," 555.
21. Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture*, 109-112; Lewis, 20.
22. In *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture*, 96, Glassie classifies this form as a Georgian-influenced hall-and-parlor subtype; in *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, 101, it stands out as a type in its own right related more closely to the central-hallway I-house (of course in this later work Glassie is using "type" designations in a less ultimate way).
23. Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, 163.
24. Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, 170.
25. Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, 171.
26. Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, 168.
27. Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1974), 145.
28. Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, 141.

The Development of Domestic Architecture in the Albemarle Region

While conducting the field studies upon which this article is based, Carl Lounsbury sought out and recorded some of the oldest existing architecture in the state—architecture that reflects the earliest extension of Anglo-American domain south from Virginia during the second half of the seventeenth century. In sharp contrast to the preceding article's broadly painted picture of folk housing across the state, Mr. Lounsbury's description of the domestic vernacular of the Albemarle is rich with detail. Rather than focusing narrowly on "types" he manages to keep the continually emergent variety of house forms in the Albemarle in view and finds major building trends within it. Mr. Lounsbury considers all of the houses in his study "vernacular" based on architectural historian Cary Carson's definition of vernacular structures as those built "according to local custom to meet the requirements of the individuals for whom they were intended." The article is illustrated by an exceptional series of measured drawings executed during the course of Mr. Lounsbury's extensive fieldwork.

This is a revised version of an article that appeared in *The North Carolina Historical Review*, LIV (January, 1977).



Figure 1. The Albemarle.

The counties north of the Albemarle Sound and east of the Chowan River comprise a distinctive geographic region that has been known since the mid-seventeenth century as the Albemarle (Fig. 1). Historically, the movement of people, commerce, and culture into the region has come from the north, from the lower Chesapeake area of Virginia.

A traveler coming from Virginia to the northern shores of the Albemarle Sound in the early eighteenth century would have observed similarities between the farmhouses on the tobacco plantations he saw there and those he had seen along the banks of the James River in Virginia. These Albemarle houses had the familiar characteristics of the "Virginia house," a house type that developed in the Chesapeake tobacco-growing region in the latter half of the seventeenth century.¹ The Virginia house, a one-story dwelling with gable-end chimneys and either a one-room or a two-room, hall and parlor plan, was the first distinctively native style of domestic architecture to emerge in the English colonies.

The antecedents of the Virginia house are not clearly known. It has been suggested that the cross-passage house (Fig. 2, A.), a house type found primarily in the West Country and highland region of England and Wales may have been the progenitor.² By the late sixteenth century the configuration of a cross-passage house consisted of three rooms. The principal room, serving a variety of functions, was the hall, heated at one end by a massive fireplace. The hall was flanked on one side by an inner room which served as either a parlor or service room and at the other end by a kitchen or parlor. Chimneys were often inserted at the gable ends of the house, permitting all three rooms to be heated. A cross passage, providing the only access to the entire house, divided the hall and inner room from the third room.³

The cross-passage house was one of many vernacular architectural forms familiar to the first Chesapeake settlers in the seventeenth century. They were also ac-

Carl Lounsbury

quainted with house types popular in southeastern England. In this lowland region of England, the cross-passage house had been superseded by the beginning of the seventeenth century by house types organized around an interior fireplace (Fig. 2, B.). The fundamental feature of these lowland house types was the omission of the cross passage and the placing of the entrance on a long wall of the building opening onto a small lobby at the side of the axial fireplace. The elimination of the cross passage meant that lobby-entrance houses were not divided between an upper and lower end.⁴

Since Virginia's early population was a mixture of people from several different regions in England, the early architecture held to no one particular house type. Houses of both the lobby-entrance and cross-passage variety were erected by the first generation of colonists. Eventually, however, the variety of competing building traditions imported from all over England gave way in Virginia, as in New England, to standardized types of dwellings which answered local needs more exactly. By the second half of the seventeenth century a new climate, the seemingly unlimited supply of timber, and a scarcity of stone had begun to transform many of the traditional English building practices. Perhaps the greatest influence upon vernacular design, however, was the emerging pattern of plantation society.

When planters began growing tobacco, they needed a large labor force. Indentured servants from England and Ireland and, later, slaves provided that labor. The laborers who worked for the small planter no doubt often lived in the same cramped quarters as their owners. The large planters, seeking to segregate their laborers from their family, found that, architecturally, West Country and highland cross-passage houses, rather than lowland lobby-entrance houses, best suited this purpose. The living quarters of the servants and slaves could be placed beyond the cross passage in the loft over the kitchen. The domestic activities of non-family members of the house-

hold would then be confined mainly to one end of the house. In this manner the two rooms at the upper end of the cross passage became upgraded at the expense of the lower, kitchen end. Shortly after this social segregation was adopted in the South, the kitchen was detached altogether from the house. An open yard rather than the small space of a cross passage then separated the kitchen and its functions from the hall and parlor.⁵

By the fourth quarter of the seventeenth century the new farmhouse that had developed in the Chesapeake area was so different in constructional techniques from any English type that it became known as the Virginia house. Tobacco farmers universally accepted this house type.

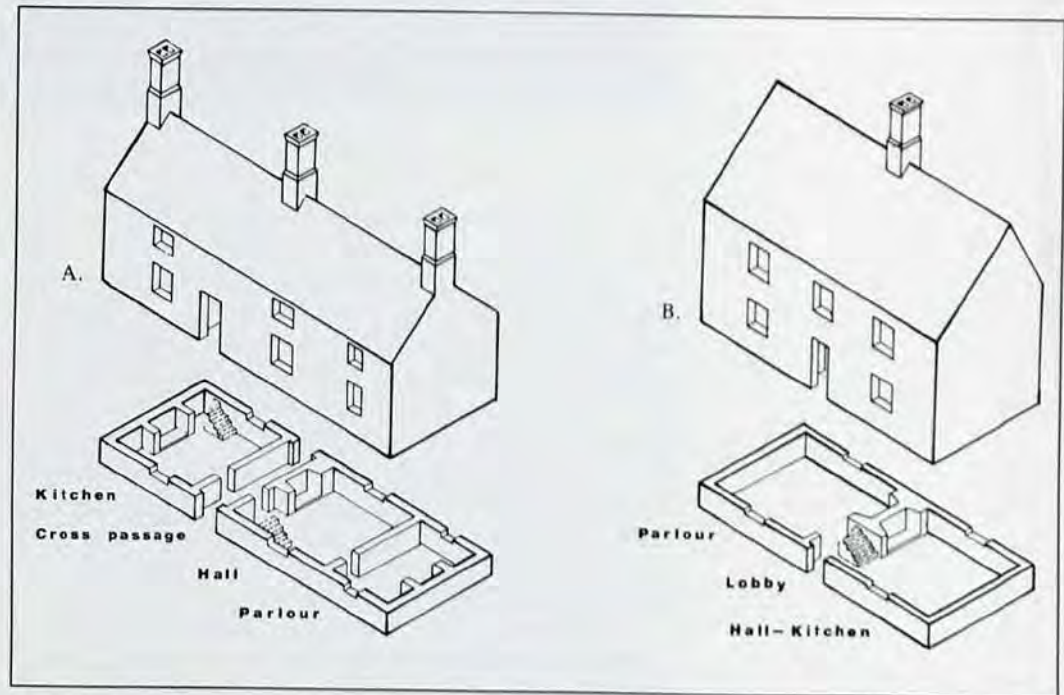


Figure 2. A. English cross-passage house. B. English lobby-entrance house.



Figure 3. Pear Valley, Northampton County, Virginia.

On the eastern shore of Virginia, in Northampton County, stands a rare surviving example of what should be regarded as the simplest form of the Virginia house, Pear Valley, a one-story frame house (Fig. 3). The exact date of its construction is unknown but is usually placed between 1660 and 1700.⁶ Characteristic seventeenth century features of this one-room house are the massive end chimney, chamfered tie beams exposed outside along the eaves and indoors across the ceiling, and the diagonally set false plates. The glazed header pattern in the chimney-end brick wall and a common rafter roof are features in this cottage which are associated with the development of the Virginia house.

Perhaps one of the earliest extant houses which has all the attributes of the larger two-room Virginia house is located in Charles County, Maryland. Sarum, before alterations, was a one-story frame dwelling which was co-

vered entirely with riven clapboards. Originally, there were two main rooms on the ground floor, a hall and parlor, with a small porch tower projecting forward from the center of the building. Each room was probably warmed by a large gable-end fireplace. The attic chambers were lighted by narrow dormers and were, perhaps, also heated with a fireplace at the gable ends. Sarum, like Pear Valley, has a common rafter roof, a characteristic feature of these house types.⁷

As the first substantial number of settlers were establishing themselves in the Albemarle region after 1660, the Virginia-style farmhouse was reaching full maturity in the Chesapeake area. It is unfortunate that no houses have survived from the first half century of settlement in the Albemarle. Since the majority of seventeenth century emigrants to the area came from Virginia, however, it is likely that they brought this new style with them, building dwellings similar to Pear Valley and Sarum. The early North Carolina written records offer only a tenuous guide to the housing standards and house types of this period.

The earliest Albemarle houses must have been of very modest proportions, seldom larger than two rooms and a loft. In the 1650's, Nathaniel Batts built a house "20 foote square with a lodging chamber, and a Buttery, and a chimney. . . ."⁸ Considering the size of this frame dwelling, the buttery, or storage room, must have been partitioned off from the main room, the lodging chamber. Batts probably not only slept in the chamber but carried out his trading activities and did his cooking in the same room.

Log houses or log cabins built in the Swedish or German style were not unknown to English settlements in the seventeenth century. There are some records which indicate the early existence of log houses in the Albemarle. During the 1677 disturbances known as Culpeper's Rebellion, Thomas Miller was taken to the northern part of Pasquotank precinct and there "enclosed in a Loghouse about 10 or 11 foot square purposely built

for him. . . ."⁹ It may have been constructed with hewn logs, a method similarly employed in the construction of blockhouses in several other English colonies. In 1683 Governor Sothel had a log house "such as the Swedes in America . . . make" constructed on his plantation.¹⁰ This log house was used as a storehouse and a trading post with the Indians. Log houses such as these, foreign to the English manner of building, seem to have emerged by the early eighteenth century as a prevalent dwelling type in the back regions of the colony along the Virginia border. Log houses were, however, a comparatively late arrival in the Albemarle region and never gained widespread popularity in the older coastal and river areas of settlement. Log construction was used there primarily for inferior out-buildings such as cornhouses, meathouses, kitchens, and in some instances for slave quarters. This general absence of log construction distinguishes the Albemarle from much of the rest of the North Carolina vernacular landscape.

Since a small but representative number of houses, some of them dating from the second quarter of the eighteenth century, have survived, it is possible to obtain a clearer picture of housing conditions in the eighteenth century in northeastern North Carolina than for the preceding period. Although some of the established seventeenth century floor plans—the one-room and the two-room, hall and parlor, plan—still suited many of the farmer's needs, several new ideas regarding the arrangement and function of rooms began to emerge in this agrarian society—ideas which slowly transformed the traditional patterns of domestic architecture. As we examine the remarkable developments that occurred in Albemarle farmhouses over the next 150 years, gradual changes in the domestic habits of the Albemarle family are noticeable. Two primary concerns that shaped the development of the new house types were the need for an expanded number of specialized rooms and the conscious desire for privacy. Such concerns reflected, in part, a

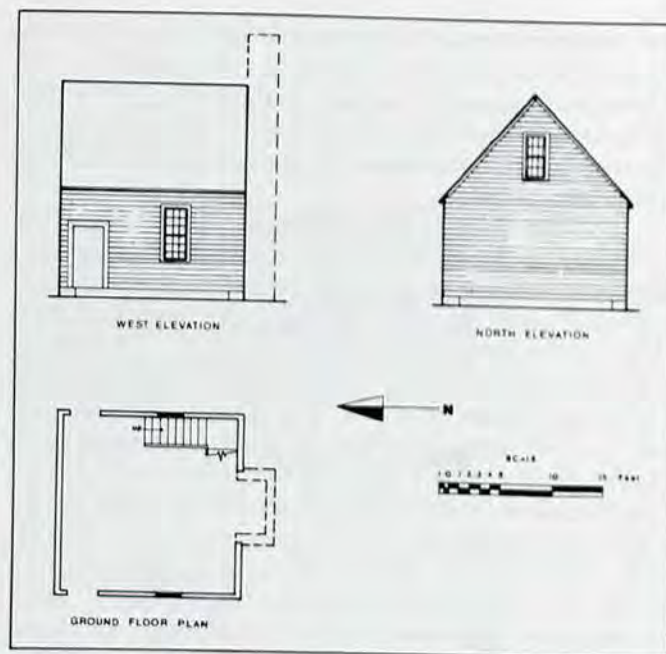


Figure 4. John Roberts House, Gatesville vicinity, Gates County.

growing sophistication of a society no longer on the fringe of civilization.

The simple one-room plan remained an important dwelling unit throughout the eighteenth century, especially in the sparsely settled interior. Until recent years three examples of the one-room house survived in Gates County. The Old Riddick House once stood north of the town of Gates near the Virginia border. Built in the early eighteenth century, it was a one-story and a loft frame house approximately eighteen feet by twelve feet. A large interior chimney was flanked by a small closet on one side and a ladder to the loft on the other. The dwelling, with its heavily battened doors, exposed ceiling beams, and small window openings, reflected characteristic seventeenth century features that survived long into the eighteenth century in this area.¹¹ The Freeman House and the John Roberts House (Fig. 4) show two distinctive plan im-

provements over the Old Riddick House. In both of these houses the chimney was placed on the outside of the gable-end wall, and a stairway instead of a ladder connected the loft with the room below. These two changes provided more space downstairs and upgraded the status of the loft above.

Houses with two rooms downstairs (usually a hall and a parlor) not only provided more space but allowed domestic activities to be divided between the rooms in a variety of ways. Isaac Ottwell's house consisted of a hall, closet, parlor, cellar, and a room above the stairs. Meals were prepared and eaten in the hall. Cooking utensils such as pot hooks, gridirons, frying pans, and an assortment of pots were located by the large fireplace. Ottwell and his family sat at a large table for their meals and ate from wooden bowls, earthenware dishes, and pewter plates. Also scattered about the room were several saddles, collars, chairs, a pair of scales, and three guns. The parlor was the entertaining and sitting room. Such amenities for social entertainment as glass tumblers, wine flasks, a sugar box, and a teapot and cups were located on a bureau in the room. Several chairs, a few books, a map, spectacles, cotton, calico, and other cloth attest to the fact that the parlor was used by the Ottwell family as the primary sitting room. The presence of a featherbed and a trundle bed indicates that the room, like the "room above stairs," was a sleeping chamber as well.¹²

The parlor, like the hall, was used for a variety of domestic activities. In Daniel Dupee's house it functioned as the principal eating room and the main sitting room. The parlor in John Clark's house was used for three purposes: as a dining, sitting, and sleeping room.¹³ Although the domestic functions of the parlor and hall often overlapped, it appears that some distinction was made in eighteenth century inventories between the two names. In estate inventories which mention two or more rooms downstairs, the term "parlor" was rarely applied to a room where cooking activities occurred.

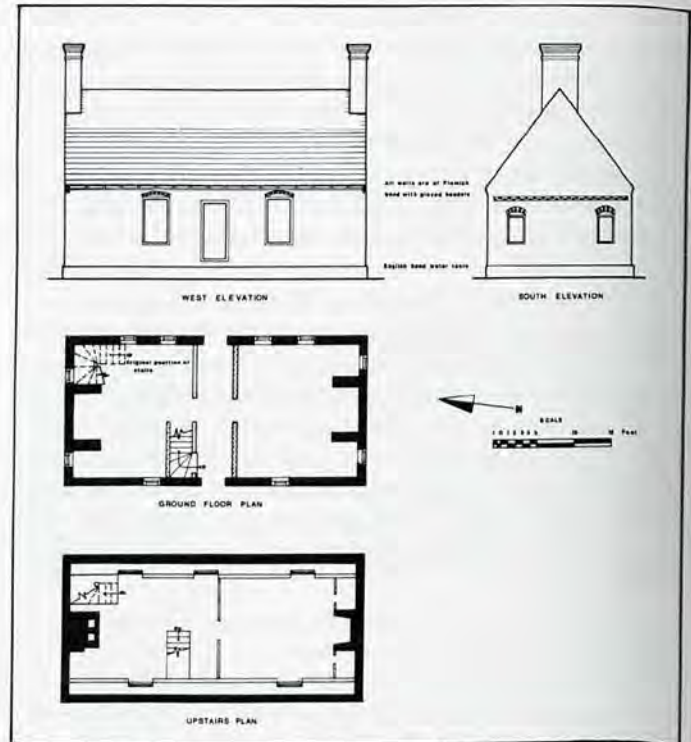


Figure 5. Newbold-White House, Hertford vicinity, Perquimans County.

In the early eighteenth century, meals could be prepared in the hall of a hall and parlor house, in a detached outbuilding, or, less frequently, in a room in the cellar. The Sumner-Winslow House, originally a one-story dwelling with a hall and parlor plan, has a large fireplace in the south room of the cellar which was probably used at one time for cooking. More often cooking activities were removed from the dwelling house to a separate outbuilding. This dependency was usually built of wood and was about twelve feet long and sixteen feet wide. The advantage of locating many of the service facilities away from the main dwelling was readily appreciated by many col-



Samuel Nixon House.

onists in the South. Robert Beverly wrote in 1705 that "All their Drudgeries of Cookery, Washing, Daries, etc. are performed in Offices detach from the Dwelling-House, which by this means are kept more cool and Sweet."¹⁴

A major change in the traditional house types occurred in the region in the early eighteenth century with the development of the hall-passage-parlor arrangement. The central passageway developed as the concern for privacy grew. For example, to modernize the floor plan of the Newbold-White House in Perquimans County (Fig. 5) one of the eighteenth century owners inserted a partition wall in the larger south room and thus created a narrow four and one-half foot center passageway. The old staircase in the corner of the north room was removed and a new stairway was built. It opened off the new center passage and rose through the north room. The flow of domestic traffic was then regulated between the two rooms rather than through one room to the other.

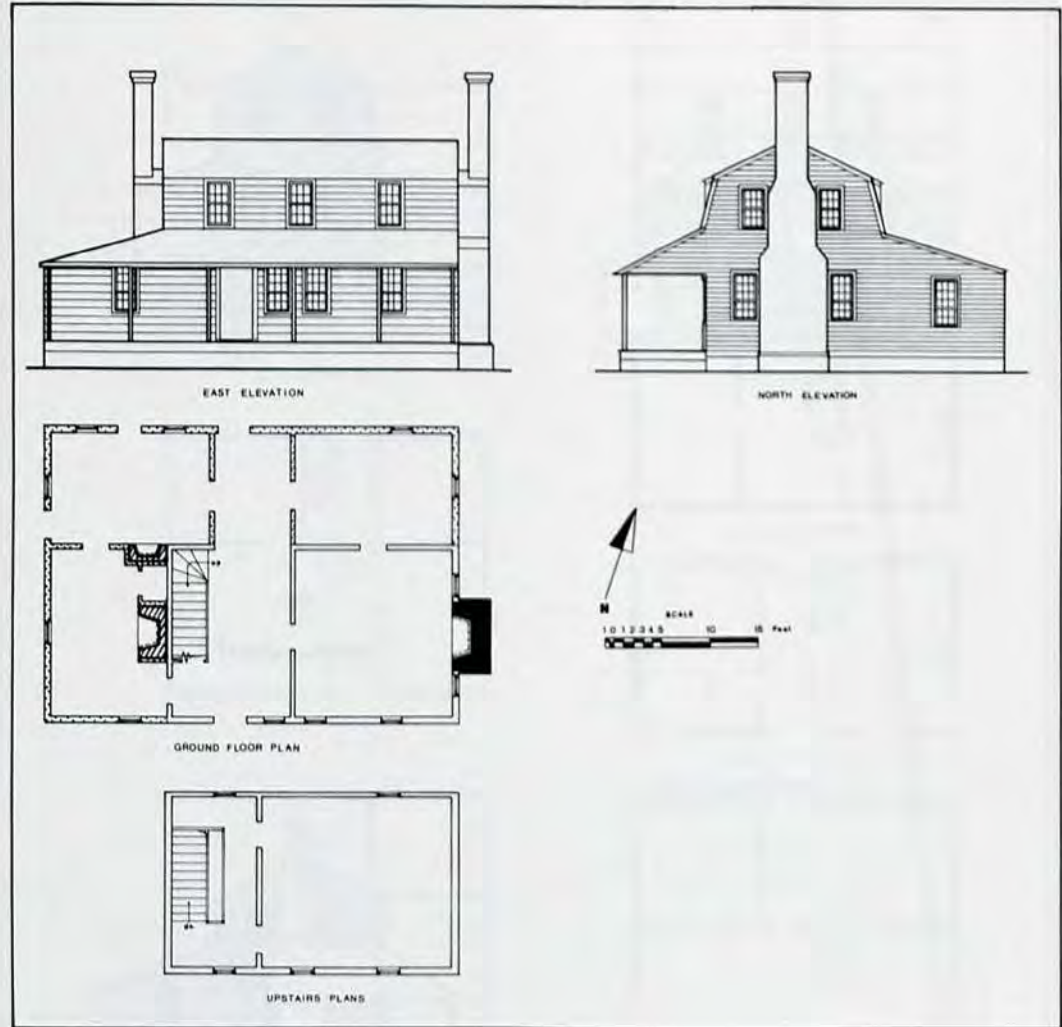


Figure 6. Samuel Nixon House, Winfall vicinity, Perquimans County.

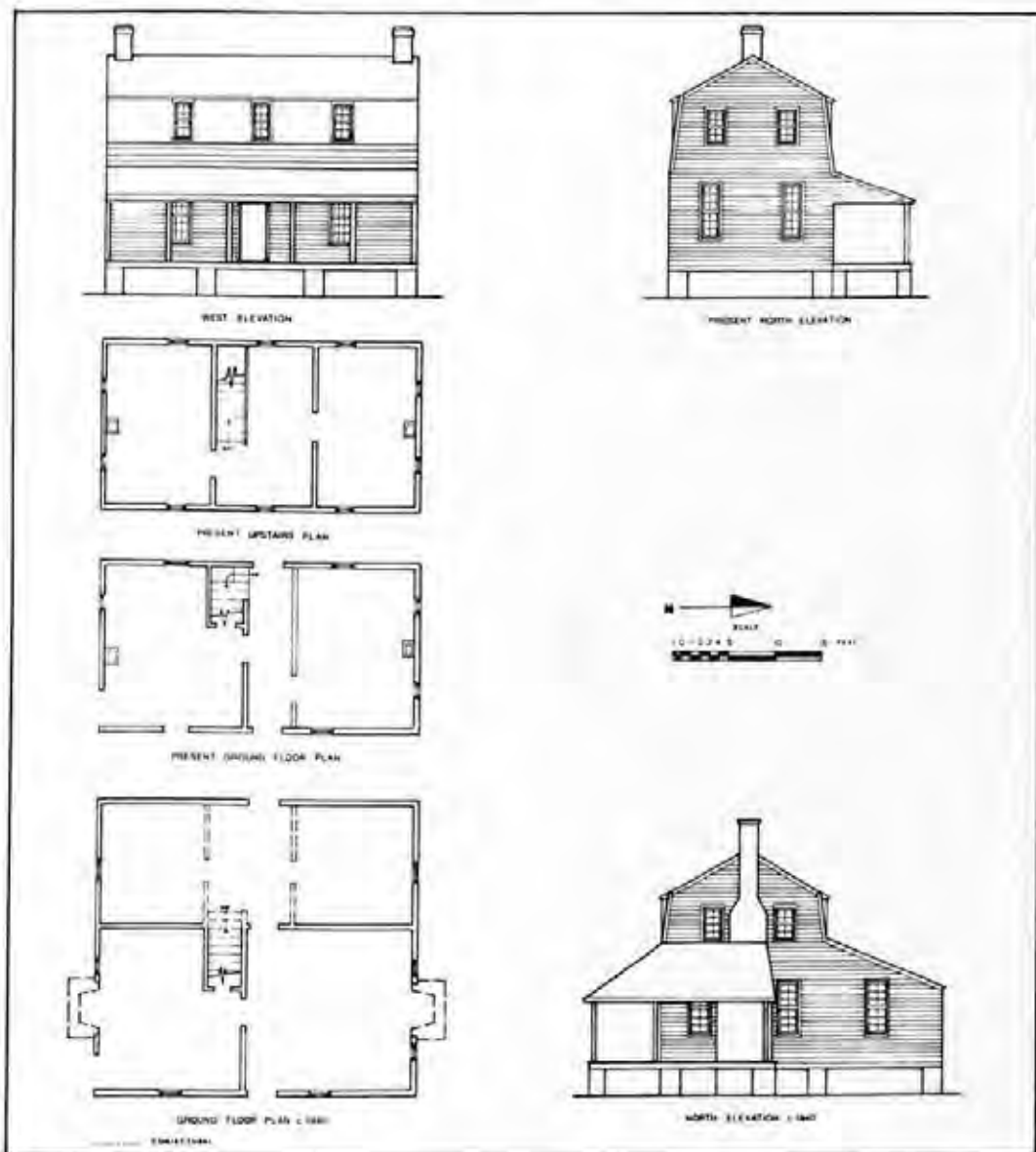


Figure 7. Riddick House, Gates vicinity, Gates County.

In some of the early center-passage house types the full measure of privacy the plan might have afforded was not entirely realized. The demolished Theophilus White House, a one-story frame house built in Perquimans County in the early eighteenth century, had a rudimentary center passageway, scarcely four feet in width, which was flanked by two rooms of unequal size. Since the stairway was not located in the center passage, but in the larger room, it was still necessary to pass through the room in order to gain access to the upstairs chambers. The next logical step in creating two entirely private rooms downstairs was to place the stairway in the center passageway. In the fully developed center-passage plan, the passageway was widened to incorporate the initial run of the stairs. In the Whedbee House, a late eighteenth century frame dwelling, two equal-sized rooms flank a center passage nine feet wide. A closed stringer stair ascends along the east wall of the passage.

A second significant change in the regional house plan came with the introduction of a double depth of rooms. The desire for more space led many farmers to add a lean-to or shed extension to the back or side of their houses. In many instances, the shed rooms provided an extra bed chamber or additional storage space. Samuel Nixon, a prominent merchant in Perquimans County in the late eighteenth century, had three shed rooms added to the west side and rear of his house (Fig. 6). In this altered frame dwelling fireplaces were built in two of the three shed rooms. The west shed room was used for dining.

The integration of shed rooms with the existing hall and parlor plan created a new unified double pile floor plan which became very popular among the more prosperous farmers in the second half of the eighteenth century. In plan, a center shed room opened onto the larger front room and served as a stair passage. The stairway ascended from this back room toward the front, projecting through the smaller front room. The shed

rooms usually opened onto the stair passage rather than the main rooms. Because a gambrel roof was an accompanying feature of this type, greater space was allotted in the second story level. The status of the upstairs rooms also improved with the provision of fireplaces. The earliest example of this house type is the Myers-White House in Perquimans County which was built shortly before 1730. The Riddick House (Fig. 7) in Gates County and the Sanderson-Sutton House, White-Nowell House, and Sumnerville in Perquimans County are later eighteenth century representatives of this house type.

The logical progression in the development of the double pile house was to enclose the back rooms with the front ones under one roof. The Albertson House (Fig. 8), built in the late eighteenth century, incorporates a double depth of rooms under a gambrel roof. The ground-floor plan of this frame dwelling, two uneven front rooms and three unheated back rooms, is the same as that of Sumnerville or the Sanderson-Sutton House. The improvement in the plan came upstairs where, taking advantage of the space created by the new roof alignment, five rooms were provided. The back chambers, like the rooms below, remained unheated.

From the existing evidence it is apparent that the back rooms did not attain equal status and size with the front ones until late in the eighteenth century. This development occurred, however, only in the largest houses. Buckland (Fig. 9), a two-story frame house in Gates County, is the only surviving late eighteenth century example of the mature double-pile center-passage plan in the three counties surveyed. Four equal-sized rooms flank a broad central passageway in which a closed stringer stair ascends from the front. Chimneys at each gable end serve each of the four rooms. On inspecting the plan it is difficult to discern a specific function for any of the ground floor rooms. The physical distinctions among hall, parlor, and inferior rooms have been erased by the imposition of this symmetrical arrangement. As

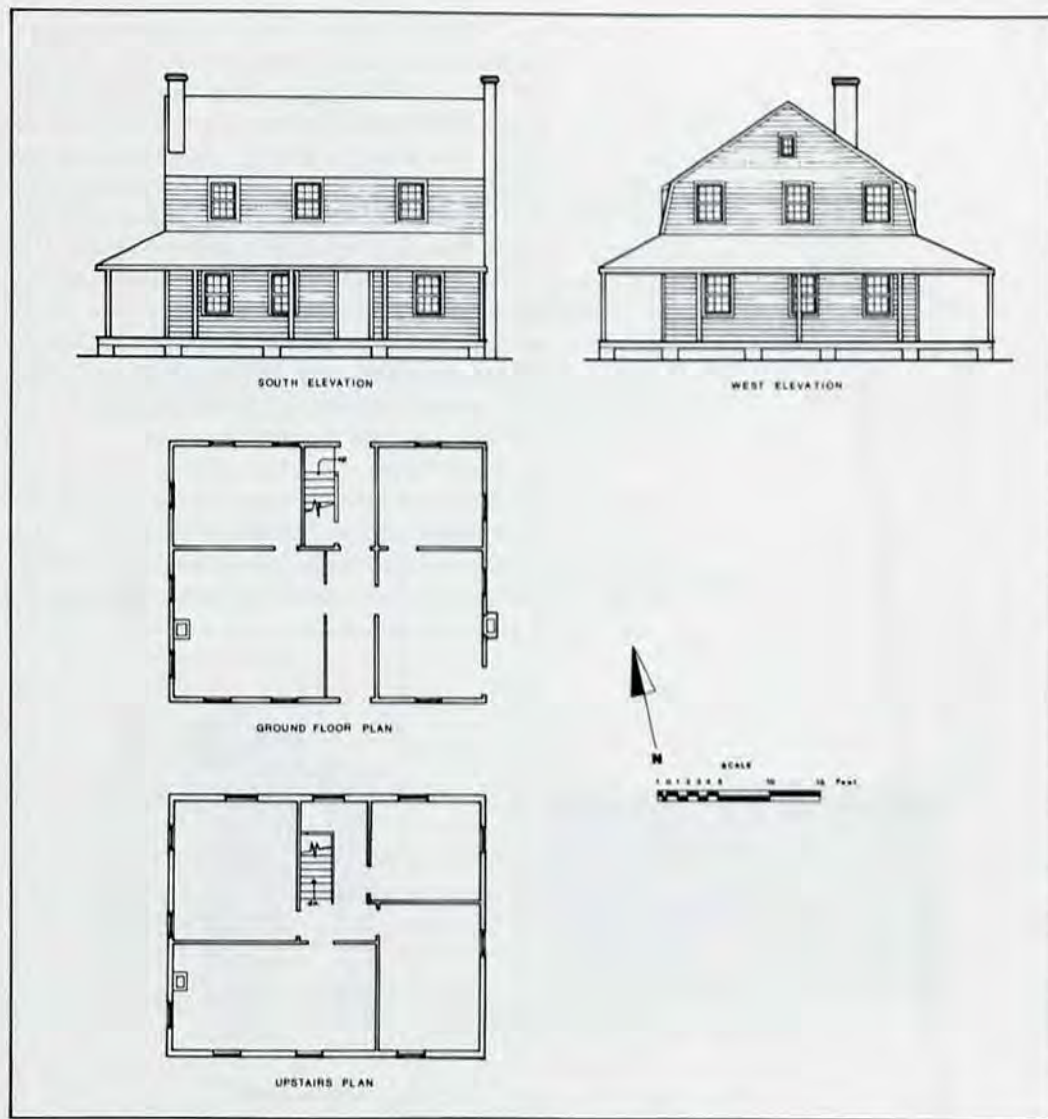


Figure 8. Albertson House, Suttons Creek vicinity, Perquimans County.

the structural differentiation between rooms disappeared, room functions also underwent change. The increased number of rooms meant that those domestic activities which had been confined to the old hall or parlor—eating, sleeping, reading, entertaining, or sitting—were dispersed to a number of rooms, each with a specific purpose: the dining room, master bedroom, library, formal parlor, or sitting room. When the downstairs rooms attained essentially the same size and appearance, such as those at Buckland, one room could as easily be designated a formal parlor or library as another. This development, confined to the larger house types in the eighteenth century, began to filter down into the smaller house types in the next century.

An unprecedented surge in building activity occurred during the first four decades of the nineteenth century and transformed the Albemarle landscape. The variety and scale of houses built during this period accentuated the discrepancies in wealth and status in this agrar-

ian society. The relative homogeneity of the earlier vernacular landscape disappeared. A number of wealthy planters who were ambitious to display their wealth most conspicuously built large houses along the banks of the Perquimans River. Many smaller planters adopted a more modest house type which afforded new comfort and space. Most small farmers continued to build in the vernacular traditions of the region.

The building boom produced a number of changes in the character of the regional farmhouse. A significant difference between the farmhouses of the early nineteenth century and their eighteenth century predecessors was the scale of building. Houses moved away from the old low and rectangular dimensions to squarer, box-like proportions. Rooms expanded in size as well as in number. The full two-story farmhouse, no longer associated with the large and wealthy plantations, became a standard size dwelling on many farms. The symmetrical arrangement of window and door openings in the facade developed not only from new aesthetic sensibilities but from practical considerations for light and ventilation. In the hot summer weather, the need for cross-ventilation in a house was of primary importance. Most of the new houses were built on pier foundations of from one to three feet in height. The space created beneath the house provided added ventilation. As settlement spread into the low-lying swamp areas, the digging of a full cellar proved to be impractical, and the practice was abandoned.

Several new plan types appeared in the early nineteenth century. The most popular type in the Albemarle area was the side passage plan. Unlike the narrow proportions of its city cousin, the rural version of the side passage plan was as broad as it was deep. In plan, two large rooms flanked a passageway running the length of one side of the house. The stair could be placed in various positions in the side passageway. There are over twenty examples of the side passage plan in Gates, Perquimans, and Pasquotank Counties dating from about 1810 to 1840.

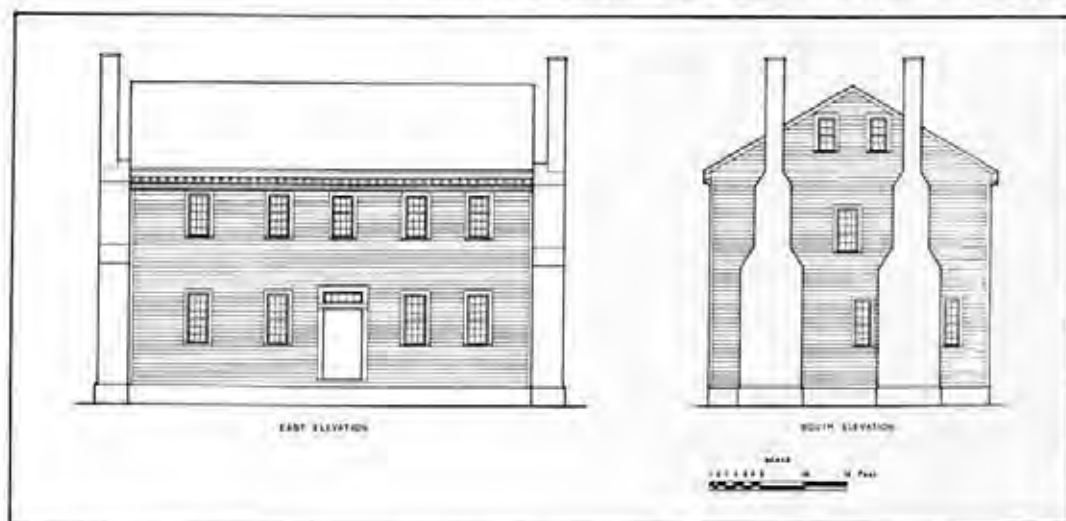


Figure 9. Buckland, Buckland vicinity, Gates County.

In lower Pasquotank County this type of house dominates the landscape. The side passage plan appears to have suited the domestic requirements of the small planter, the man who owned about two hundred and fifty to four hundred acres of land and from four to ten slaves.

By the second decade of the century the rural side passage house had reached full maturity. The plan of these houses presented a unified balance and coordination among the three main downstairs elements. The side passage extended the length of the house uninterrupted. In the Thomas Shannonhouse House in Pasquotank County and the Mitchell-Ward House in Perquimans County (Fig. 10), the side passage exceeds eleven feet in width. In most houses it ranged from nine to about thirteen feet in width.¹⁵ The two well-proportioned rooms were warmed by separate gable-end fireplaces. Both rooms communicated with the side passage by separate entrances and with each other by a door in their partition wall. The back room in many of these houses had an exit along the back wall. In these cases, the room probably functioned as a dining room, the door providing easier access to the kitchen dependency. The front room primarily served as a parlor. Upstairs, the side passage house had from three to five rooms which were used almost exclusively as bedrooms. In the Thomas Shannonhouse House there are four rooms upstairs. Only the two rooms on the chimney side were heated.

Since the side passage plan was conceived as a complete unit, it was rarely changed later to incorporate complementary rooms on the other side of the passageway. The Carter Farmhouse (Fig. 11) and the Hunter House in Gates County are the only extant rural examples of the expanded side passage plan in the three counties.

Two houses, the Morgan House in northern Pasquotank County and the Whit Stallings House in Gates County, are variations of the side passage house. In both houses the main entrance was shifted to the center of the gable end. This reorientation, however, did not disturb

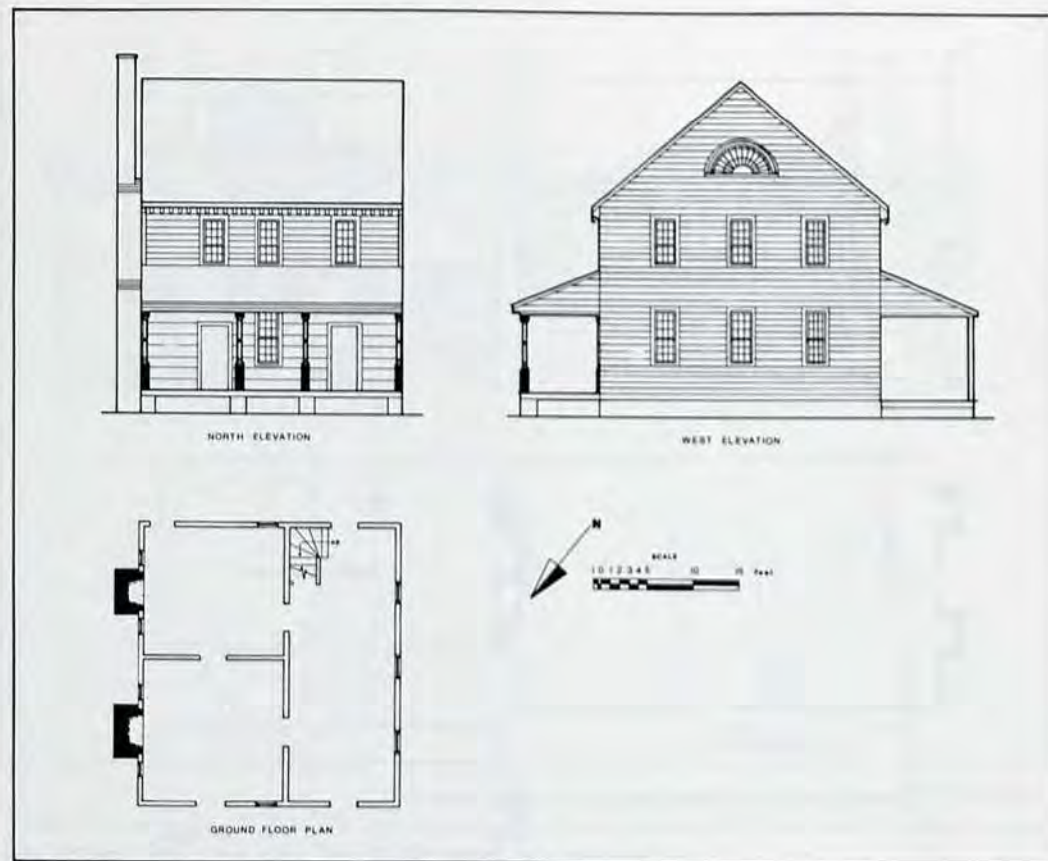


Figure 10. Mitchell-Ward House, Belvidere vicinity, Perquimans County.

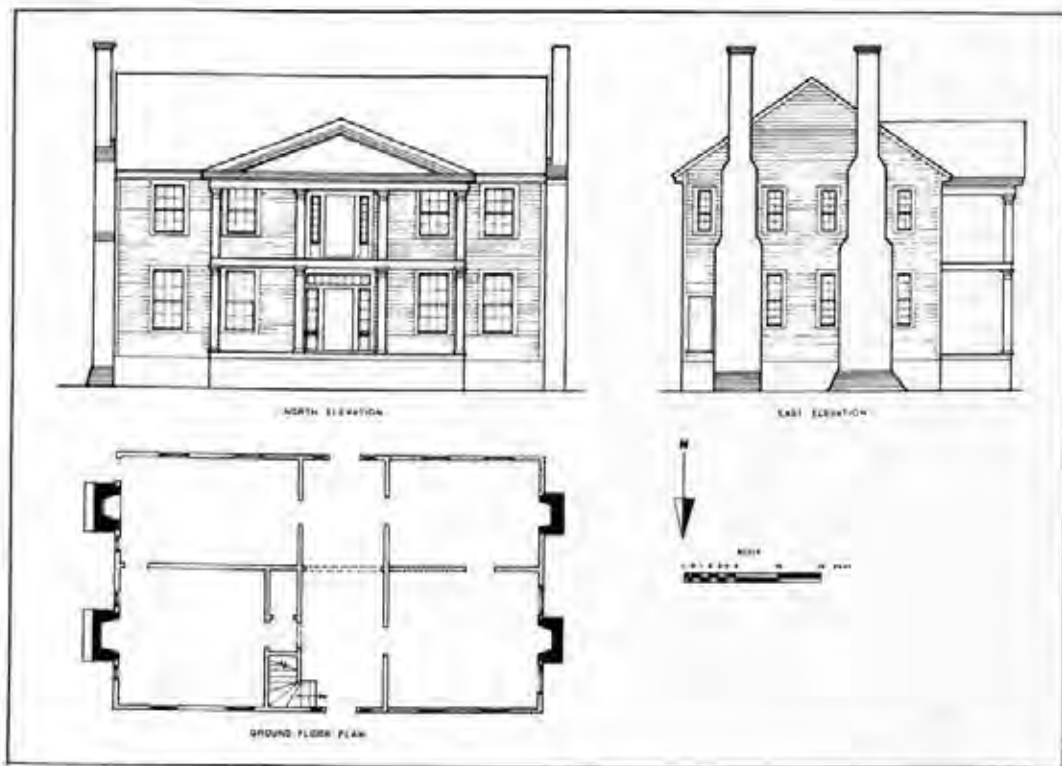


Figure 11. Carter Farmhouse, Gatesville vicinity, Gates County.

the essential elements of the old plan. Two rooms still opened onto a broad passageway which runs parallel to the front elevation rather than perpendicular. In the Stallings House, the heated downstairs room was the formal parlor, and the unheated room served as a dining room. There were four bedrooms and a sitting room located upstairs.¹⁶

If the first half of the nineteenth century was a period of innovative development in new building forms, it was also an era which saw the persistent continuation of traditional house types. In many areas plan types common to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries held on

with tenacity. The old house types, in many instances, could not offer the modern nineteenth century standards of comfort and privacy. In smaller houses a person seldom enjoyed the privacy of a separate bedroom. Often these houses were poorly constructed, providing inadequate protection from inclement weather. Slave houses, particularly, showed very little improvement over earlier one-room or two-room houses.¹⁷ Among the free population the plan of the one-room house expanded to include shed rooms in the rear or grew to a full two stories. The Jessup House in Perquimans County has one large room with two shed rooms in the rear. The shed rooms were probably used for sleeping since there was no stair to the tiny loft over the front room.

The traditional hall and parlor plan was still favored by many farmers in the nineteenth century despite its antiquated layout. The Billups-Delaney-Ward House (Fig. 12) in Perquimans County and the Norfleet and Elbert Riddick Houses in Gates County initially had a two-room arrangement. The inherent problem of the hall and parlor plan, the absence of a cross passage, led to the insertion of a partition wall in the larger room by the owners of the Norfleet and Billups-Delaney-Ward Houses. In both houses the improvement seems to have been made shortly after they were built.¹⁸

Despite their formal facades and architectural embellishments, most of the larger Albemarle houses retained traditional floor plans. A common type throughout the nineteenth century was the frame two-story dwelling with one room on either side of a center passageway. Although the size of the center-passage farmhouse grew to generous proportions, the number of rooms remained the same as in the eighteenth century prototype. In many instances additional rooms were made possible by the construction of a two-story wing perpendicular to the back of the house. When the rear wing was placed in the middle of the house at the end of the center passage, a "T" plan was formed. The Jones House in Perquimans County

had a two-story wing added in 1836, giving the house a "T" configuration. In the Savage and Thomas Nixon Houses, the rear wing was added to one side of each house, creating an "L" layout. After 1830, in some houses such as the Edmund Skinner House (Fig. 13), the rear wing was built as a part of the original plan.

The inspiration for the largest plantation houses did not come from traditional house types but derived from a conscious emulation of national tastes and styles. Two imposing mansions along the Perquimans River, Lands End and Cove Grove, accompanied by a sophisticated interpretation of Federal and Greek Revival details, are virtually outside the pattern of traditional domestic architecture in the Albemarle. These houses, with pattern-book designs and a double-pile center-passage floor plan, could have been found in many parts of the country.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the vernacular tradition in domestic architecture ended. It was supplanted by an architecture whose plans and ornamentation derived ultimately from sources outside the native tradition. The Civil War and Reconstruction proved to be important catalysts in this change, for these events disrupted the economic and social foundations of the region, which, in turn, altered the traditional building patterns. The Albemarle, building in a manner and scale which reflected the social and economic realities of the postwar South, became more receptive to imported tastes and new techniques.

Even before the war the demise in traditional domestic architecture had already begun. Technologically, innovations such as the invention of balloon framing in the 1830's and improvements in the manufacture of cut nails meant that houses could be built much faster and at a reduced cost. By taking advantage of these improvements more people could afford to build a house, although many of these houses were smaller in size and poorer in architectural quality than the traditional house types. The introduction of the stove just before the war modified

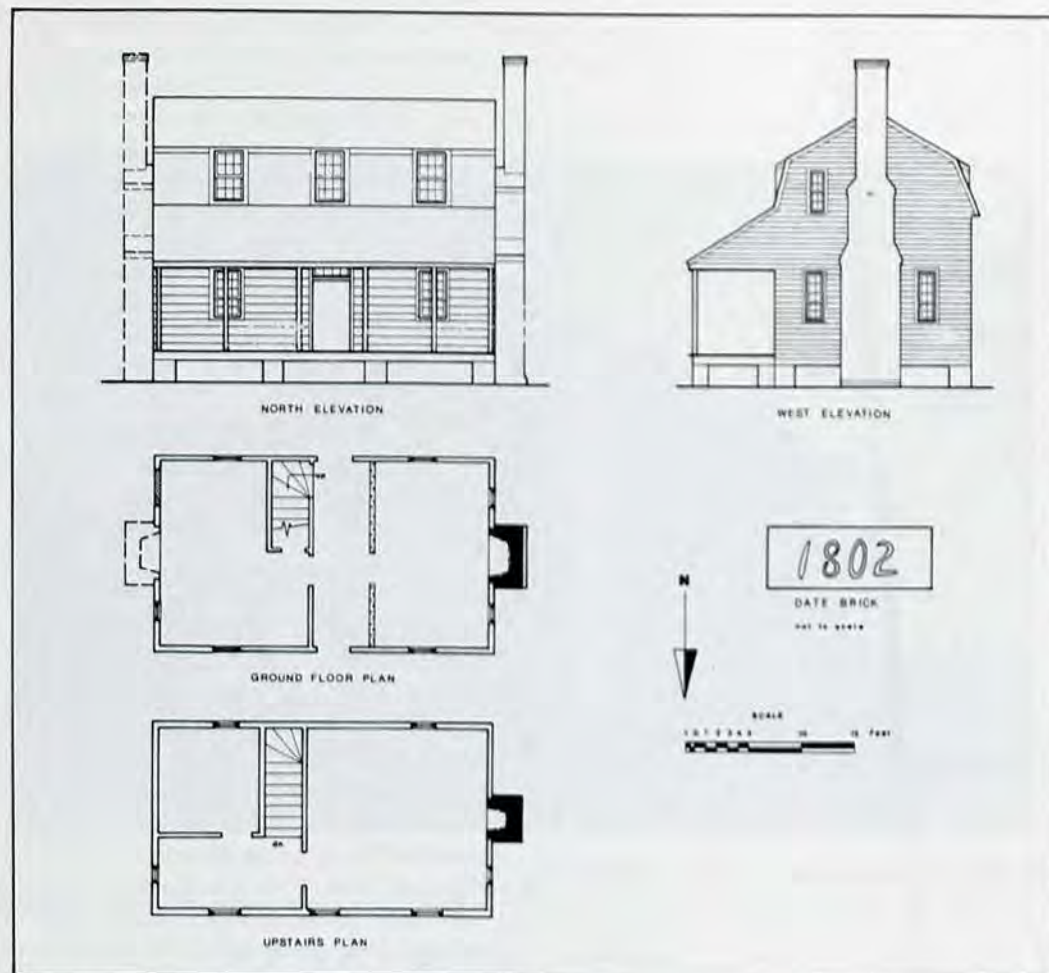


Figure 12. Billups-Delaney-Ward House, Winfall vicinity, Perquimans County.



Figure 13. Edmund Skinner House, Perquimans County.

traditional room functions. In later years the chimney gave way to the stove flue. To a few the consequence of this technological change appeared catastrophic. They believed that the "banishment" of the open fireplace signaled the end of domestic felicity. In a popular postwar journal, Paul H. Hayne lamented:

Where, in the absence of the frank-hearted flames, is a family to assemble in evenings, to exchange those charming confidences, which are the *soul* of household life and affection?

With no bright centre of domestic enjoyment and companionship, the ties of family are first loosened and then broken. People learn to depend upon outside excitement, to seek—each according to sex—the billiard table or ballroom. The juvenile community is neglected by its proper teachers and protectors, in a word, the entire household becomes disjointed and disorganized, and finally, for all we can tell, the "domesticities" will vanish altogether, and the idea of the "family" be ranked among the fossil conceptions of a long-forgotten age.¹⁹

Perhaps the greatest factor in the decline of vernacular architecture was the displacement in popular esteem of the traditional types of dwellings by ones taken from patterns in builders' handbooks. There was a popular feeling among some reformers at mid-century that the old architecture was inadequately meeting the requirements of the ordinary citizenry. The houses of most North Carolinians, many of them believed, were generally "plain and cheap" and that "sanity of mind and morals is almost impossible without suitable habitation."²⁰ Better architecture, it was assumed, would produce an improvement in the morality of the people. In a letter to a Raleigh newspaper in October, 1853, Professor William H. Owen of Wake Forest College, decrying the shortcomings in traditional domestic architecture, suggested that the styles in pattern books such as A. J. Downing's *The Architecture of Country Houses* and *Cottage Residences* (Fig. 14) were better suited to the needs of the people. He

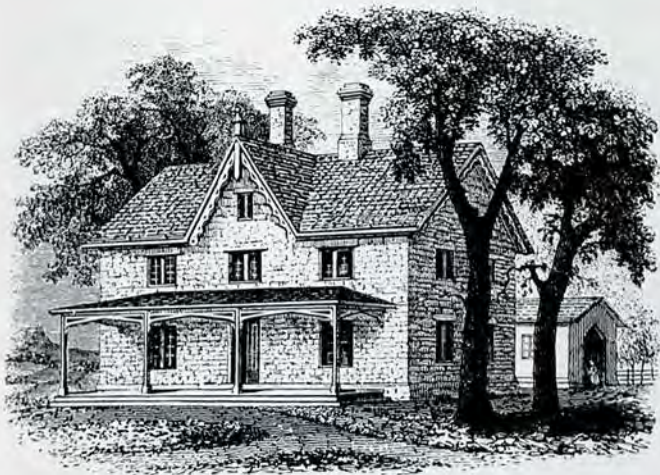


Figure 14. "An Ornamental Farmhouse" from A.J. Downing's *Cottage Residences*, published in 1847.

remarked that:

The cottage style of building is becoming fashionable, and deservedly so, as it combines more of the requirements of comfort, taste, beauty and variety than any other. It is also in less danger from storms, lightning and fires, particularly the last, which frequently breaks out in the second story. The cottage style, however, does not always reject the second story.²¹

As the nineteenth century progressed and communications improved, differences in regional styles tended to lessen. Traveling carpenters, working with pattern books under their arms, repeated popular designs wherever they went. Later in the century sawmills produced standard moldings, doors, and other woodwork. By the time mail-order catalogs advertising a complete

line of building materials arrived in the Albemarle region, the vernacular tradition in domestic architecture had been all but forgotten.

Changes in living conditions occur very slowly in traditional agricultural societies. Perhaps in domestic architecture more than anywhere else the strength of tradition makes itself felt. French historian Fernand Braudel remarked that "a 'house' . . . bears perpetual witness to the slowness of civilization, of cultures bent on preserving, maintaining and repeating."²² Yet, looking at Albemarle domestic architecture over a period of two hundred years, one sees significant changes up and down the social scale (Fig. 15). Primarily, the range in the architectural scale expanded, reflecting a growing disparity in wealth in the region. This distinction was more pronounced after 1775. Houses became more formal and specialized, permitting a greater variety of household activities. From the symmetrical mansion houses along the Perquimans River to neighboring, unadorned, one-room houses, the wide variation in housing conditions accentuated class distinctions.

The field survey provides an excellent opportunity for locating and recording the rich variety of local vernacular architecture. It also illustrates a gross neglect of North Carolina's architectural heritage. The decline in the number of farmhouses, mills, and other rural buildings continues at an accelerated pace. Of the more than seventy houses investigated in Gates, Perquimans, and Pasquotank Counties over one third of them have been demolished or are in the advanced stages of decay. A dozen more are unoccupied and may suffer a similar fate. In these three counties alone half a dozen important eighteenth century dwellings described by Thomas T. Waterman in *The Early Architecture of North Carolina* are now destroyed. With the disappearance of the vernacular farmhouse an opportunity to understand North Carolina's past culture is lost.

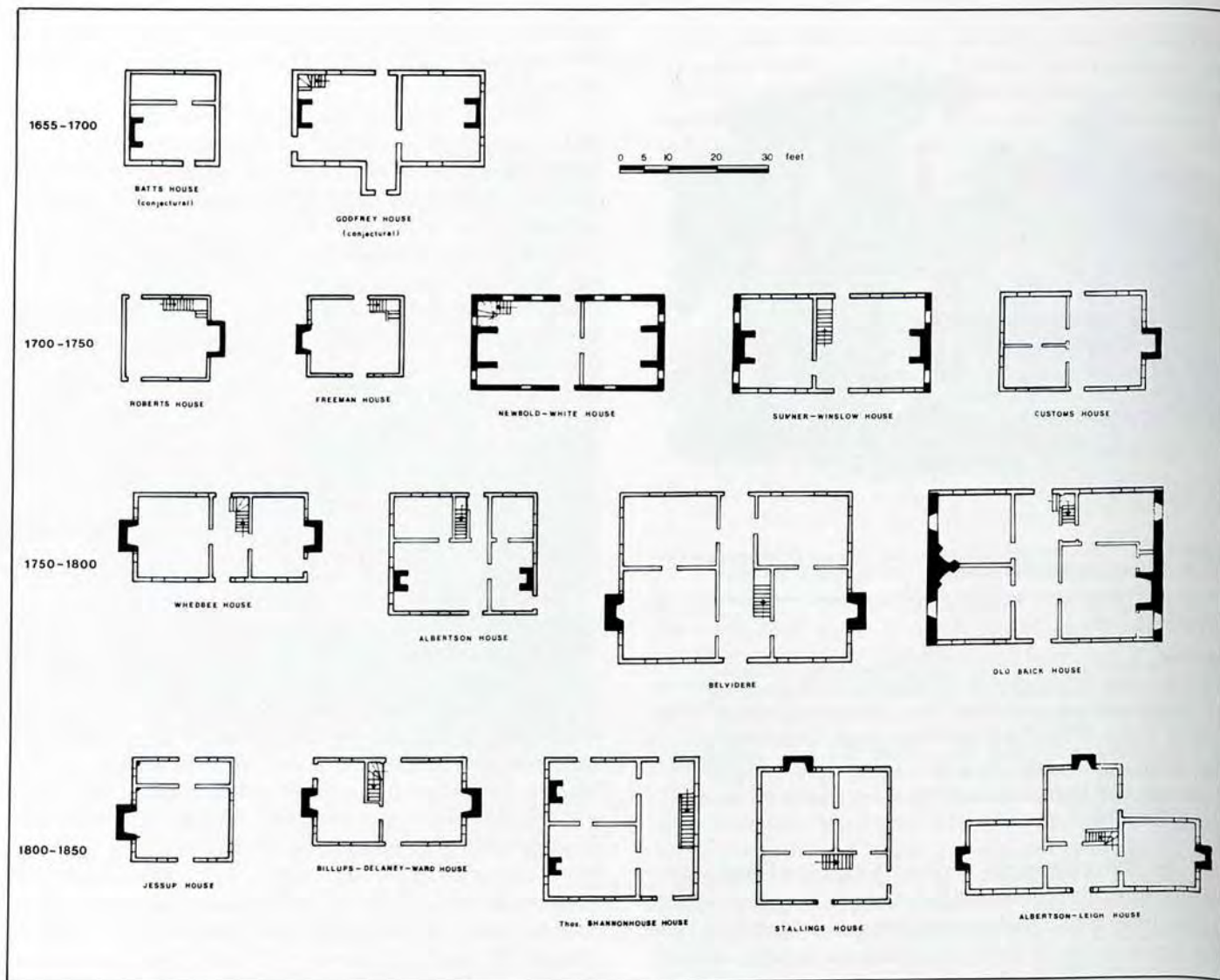


Figure 15. Comparative Albemarle house-types, ca. 1655-ca. 1850.

Footnotes

1. Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *The Founding of American Civilization: The Old South* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), 185-195.

2. Cary Carson, "Segregation in Vernacular Buildings," *Vernacular Architecture*, 7 (1976), 28.

3. Eric Mercer, *English Vernacular Houses* (London: HMSO, 1975), 37-39; J. T. Smith, "The Evolution of the English Peasant House to the Late Seventeenth Century," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, Third Series, XXXIII (1970), 139-143; Cary Carson, "The English Vernacular Houses Gone Native," paper presented at a meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians, Boston, Massachusetts, April 24, 1975.

4. M. W. Barley, *The English Farmhouse and Cottage* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 67-68; Mercer, *English Vernacular Houses*, 60.

5. Carson, "English Vernacular Houses Gone Native."

6. Bernard Herman and David Orr, "Pear Valley et al.: An Excursion into the Analysis of Southern Vernacular Architecture," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 39 (December, 1975), 316.

7. Sarum was constructed between 1662 and 1680. Cary Carson, "The 'Virginia House' in Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 69 (Summer, 1974), 181-195.

8. Norfolk County Deeds, Office of the Clerk of Court, Norfolk County Courthouse, Princess Anne, Virginia, Book C, 180.

9. William L. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina* (Raleigh: State of North Carolina, 10 volumes, 1886-1890), I, 300.

10. John Lawson, *A New Voyage to Carolina*, edited by Hugh T. Lefler (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 223-224; Parker, *Higher-Court Records*, II, 312.

11. U. S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, Historic American Buildings Survey, Washington, D. C., "Old Riddick House, Gates County, North Carolina, 1940."

12. Inventory of the Estate of Isaac Ottwell, in General Assembly Laws, 1715, Inventories of Estates, 1728-1741, Secretary of State Papers, State Archives, 19.

13. Copy of mortgage from Daniel Dupee to William Heritage, July, 1763, in "Book on North Carolina Furniture of the Coastal Plain," unpublished manuscript in the Alexander Crane Papers, State Archives, Chapter 5; Inventory of the Estate of John Clark, September 18, 1719, SS Wills, 1712-1722, Book 2, 258-259; Inventory of the Estate of James Leigh, October 28, 1728, SS Wills, 1722-1735, Book 3, 217-218.

14. Robert Beverly, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, edited by Louis B. Wright (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 290.

15. A question arises as to the purpose of such wide passageways. In the side-passage plan, almost one-third of the ground-floor space was occupied by the passageway. The stairway and the front and rear entrances were easily incorporated within the wide passage. Ventilation does not seem to have been a factor in the width. Why then, the extra space, and how was it utilized?

16. Inventory of the Estate of Whit Stallings, Gates County Estates Records, State Archives.

17. An accurate description of slave houses in the Albemarle is difficult because so few, if any, identifiable slave houses remain.

18. The Billups-Delaney-Ward House is one of the earliest houses in the area which used cut nails in its construction. Lath nails which were cut from the same side and which have hammered heads were employed for the lath work throughout the house.

19. Paul H. Hayne, "Firesides and Hearthstones," *Appleton's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Art*, January 21, 1871, 79-80.

20. Thomas Henderson Letter-Book, 1810-1811, State Archives, 35; *Southern Weekly Post*, October 15, 1853.

21. *Southern Weekly Post*, October 15, 1853.

22. Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800*, translated by Miriam Kochan (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 192-193.

North Carolina Coastal Vernacular

If vernacular culture is place-inflected culture, then one would naturally expect the most extreme places to produce the most striking of vernaculars. At Nags Head on North Carolina's Outer Banks—an extremity if ever there was one—such an expectation is confirmed by the structures of the Historic Cottage Row. At the same time, however, it is somewhat denied by traditional dwellings at Kitty Hawk Village. Here Steve Arnaudin offers his observations on this seeming paradox as he surveys these and other elements of the coastal vernacular mix.



Diverse dwelling forms rest on the sands of North Carolina's Outer Banks often in village-like clusters, each composed of dwellings of similar character and each cluster being dissimilar in character. Though different, each group seems to be at home on the Outer Banks. Each has its own reasons for its existence, location, and appearance.

I examined the dwellings in an area reaching from South Nags Head northward to Duck (Fig. 2). Though Nags Head existed as an active resort area over a century ago, no architectural traces of that era remain. The storms of the Banks have claimed them completely. What we are able to examine today includes a rich series of late nineteenth and early twentieth century resort homes, permanent resident dwellings, and an abundance of later resort development.

Much of the present development has gone to small, box-like structures with gable roofs and cut batten plywood siding. Larger vacation homes are also included in the present development although they appear less frequently than the smaller dwellings. In the late 1950's and early 60's a series of flat-roofed, white, concrete block and stucco houses were built predominantly in the Southern Shores area (Fig. 3). Kitty Hawk Village hosts a generous grouping of permanent residents' homes, the majority of which appear to date from the 1940's back to the late nineteenth century. They include common vernacular house types of mainland North Carolina and other stereotypical rural and small town forms of that period (Fig. 4).

The real gift to the Outer Banks beachscape is the row of weathered shingle cottages on the Nags Head shore. Most of them date from the early part of this century. I suppose I am biased in favor of these houses due to their visual appeal individually and as a group. My respect also rides with these structures for having withstood so many years of the wild storms that batter the Outer Banks. In 1976 the North Carolina Division of Archives

Steven Arnaudin



Figure 1. Nags Head's irregular row of traditional beach cottages.

and History nominated the Nags Head cottage row for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Catherine Bishir's nomination read:

The Nags Head Beach Cottage Row Historic District, located on North Carolina's Outer Banks, is one of the few areas of late nineteenth to early twentieth century resort development along the eastern seaboard that retains essentially its original character. Along the ocean front beach, facing the Atlantic, stands an irregular row of frame cottages whose shapes, texture, color, and detail are expressive of their function and the demands for survival on the weather-tortured Outer Banks. The regular rhythm of one and two-story units, the somber gray-brown colors, the rough texture of the wood shingled walls and roofs, and the repetition of sweeping gable roofs and expansive porches relate in an almost organic fashion to the slope of the beach, to the sea, and to the light sand and the gray and blue water of the changing ocean.

Within the unit of scale and shape, several variations occur. Probably the most common house type, dating from the 1910-1940 era, is the large bun-

galoid cottage, one and one-half stories high with nearly full-width dormers extending across the front and back slopes of the gable roof to create essentially a two-story house (Fig. 5). The house may be two, three, four, or five bays wide, and usually features porches on at least two and usually four sides, plus any number of wings, ells and additions. Also common and usually older is a simple gable-roof two-story cottage type, three to five bays wide (Fig. 6). Single-story porches on two to four sides soften the boxiness of this house type.

Closely related to the two-story gable-roof house is an even more boxy form, the two-story with hip or pyramidal roof, whose highly restrained geometric quality is a foil to the sweeping expansiveness of the bungalow cottages (Fig. 7). One-story cottages, too, are interspersed among the larger structures. Particularly appealing are the steep gable rooflines of some of these, which have the multi-slope gables sometimes called the "coastal cottage," with the lower shallower slope of one or both sides engaging a porch (Fig. 8).

Whatever the size or shape of the cottages, certain features of detail dictated by convenience, function, and custom recur; this repetition contri-

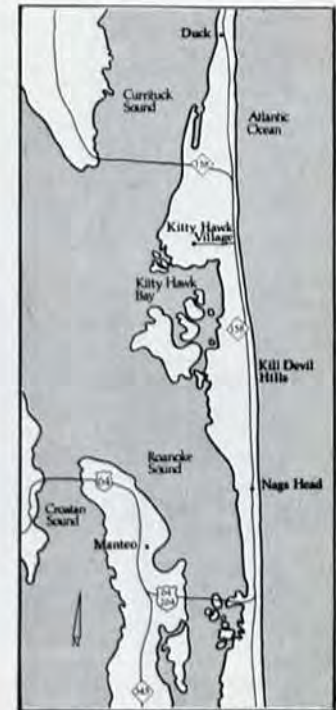


Figure 2. The North Carolina Outer Banks from South Nags Head northward to Duck.



Figure 3. A typical late 50's "cottage" in the Southern Shores area.



Figure 4. A familiar rural North Carolina house type at Kitty Hawk Village.

butes much to the architectural unity of the district—as well as to the comfort of the residences. Cottages are consistently placed high on open foundations of timber pilings. The pilings place the houses high enough to be above low waves in case of storms, as well as making the houses more accessible to breezes. The height of the foundation varies, but it is often high enough to sling hammocks for sleeping and to hang up wet gear. Some of these foundations are screened with latticework, originally meant to keep pigs and cows from straying under the cottages. Until the mid-1930's there was no fencing and the locally owned livestock roamed at will.

Intersecting angles of wooden members make up the porches of the cottages as well. Nearly always roofed and supported on simple posts, the porches also feature enclosing balustrades of different, simple kinds. A particularly handsome and functional feature of Nags Head cottages is the ubiquitous porch bench (Fig. 9). These are benches built into and extending out from the porch balustrade, with the base beginning flush with the balustrade and the back sloping outward from the porch. This catches breezes and provides adequate porch seating without cluttering the porch with furniture. These benches are seen in the early documentary photographs of the turn of the century or so and continue to be used on new construction. A comparatively new addition to these covered porches is the sun deck, usually appended to the protected southwest corner of the cottage porch and encircled by lean-out benches.

Heavy seas and strong winds that blow sand into the cottages are plagues during the off-season. To protect against this nearly all cottages feature similar door and window treatments. Most doors have normal inner doors and outer screen doors, useful during the season. Outside the screen door, though, is a sturdy wooden batten door which is kept open during most of the season, but which is secured when the cottages are closed up (Fig. 10.) Also of wooden batten construction are the window shutters. Each is a single leaf, hinged at the top and held open with a prop stick. Open, the diagonal awning-like angle of the shutter provides shade and closed, shelter from storms. In winter, the boarded-up look of the windows and doors emphasizes the stern dignity of the waiting cottages—which look, as one visitor remarked, "like

a bunch of haughty old ladies."

In the early cottages, the kitchen was separated from the living area by a porch and often the ice box stood on the porch. Many of these porches have been enclosed. With few exceptions, the rear ell of the cottage projects from the north portion of the rear elevation. Many houses have porches on all four sides. If, however, porches occur on but three sides, it is generally the north side that lacks a porch. This arrangement takes advantage of prevailing breezes.

The interiors of the beach houses are finished as simply as the exteriors. Generally, there were no fireplaces originally, although some have been added. Walls are either covered with simple sheathing or, in most cases, left unfinished, with the studs and exterior covering visible. Partition walls are typically of a single thickness of wood sheathing. Doors are of whatever type was popular at the time of construction. Interior wood is generally left unpainted. Floor plans vary, but all are simple and functional. The typical 1910-1940 floor plan is a variation on the center-hall plan two rooms deep, except that the chief front room, the living room, is not partitioned from the hall but includes space normally allotted to the hall; this produces a plan with two rooms across the front and two rooms divided by a hall at the rear. To the rear of the main block is the ell, often separated from the main block by a breezeway. This space usually contains servants' quarters, children's rooms and/or kitchen.

It should be noted that nearly all the cottages are virtually without the usual trappings of architectural "style" inside and out, but rely on the simple expression of functional forms, materials, and plan for their character. This is particularly interesting since many of those for whom these houses were built either built or lived in some of the grandest and most fashionable houses of the Albemarle. (*References to illustrations added.*)

Increasing ease in transportation has played a key role in the rate and type of development on the Outer Banks. In the beginning and continuing to the early 1930's, the Outer Banks was "waterlocked." The only way to get there was by boat. Practically the only people who had their feet on the sands were the permanent residents and the wealthy folk who could afford to boat over and



Figure 5. A large bungalow cottage with nearly full-width dormers, the most common house type in the Nags Head Beach Cottage Row Historic District.



Figure 6. A simple gable-roof two-story cottage at Nags Head Beach.



Figure 7. A two-story, two-room deep house with hip roof at Nags Head.



Figure 8. A "coastal cottage" at Nags Head, showing its characteristic multi-slope gable.

stay for extended holidays. The majority of these affluent vacationers were eastern North Carolinians. They were the people who owned the houses of the Nags Head row. The entire household including domestic servants would venture on these vacation trips to Nags Head and stay for months at a time. These old houses (new then) were large enough to accommodate everyone.

Nags Head remained this type of geographically exclusive summer resort community until the early 1930's when the Wright Memorial Bridge on Highway 158 was completed making the Outer Banks accessible by car. Now a different class of people could enjoy the Banks. Automobiles were becoming plentiful and practically any middle-class man could take his family on a trip to the beach and stay for a day or so. Slowly more houses appeared, scattered along the coast, and hotels increased in popularity. I would imagine a vacation in a cottage or hotel at that time would have been an enjoyable, leisurely experience in a quality environment—architecturally and in terms of landscape. Later, in the early fifties, the bridges connecting the mainland with Roanoke Island and Roanoke Island with the Outer Banks were erected. About this time the rate of construction of vacation homes accelerated considerably. Almost every family had at least one car and if their values included love of the Outer Banks, they could purchase a plot of sand, have a cottage built or buy one already built, and visit periodically throughout the year. Others desiring to make a less permanent investment could rent a cottage or be accommodated in a hotel. The concrete block and stucco structures at Southern Shores were probably the first products of large scale modern-type development. What the Outer Banks building trade has finally become is a speculative operation catering to the dreams of almost any man.

As could be expected, sea-related occupations traditionally provided the income of the folks who lived on the Banks throughout the year. Their homes are congregated primarily around Kitty Hawk Village, which was first

settled before 1790 and takes its name from an Indian place name. Today some of these year-round residents still live off the sea while others profit from serving the locals and the tourists. Transportation has changed the permanent residents' communities little. Some growth has occurred, but rapid growth has not. And the newer structures generally merge fairly well with the community settings.

The Nags Head historic cottage row made its home directly on the beach front—an appropriate location since the owners of these dwellings came to the Banks to be with the ocean (Fig. 11). On the ridge of the incline leading into the Atlantic these homes have the sight of sky and water, the sound of surf, the breeze, and immediate accessibility to the bathing pleasures of the beach. Much of the pre-1950 development also claimed prime spots immediately behind the primary dune. Only a few bashful cottages found their hosting spots further off the beach front.

In contrast to the ocean sites of the vacationers, the prime location for the permanent dwellings is on the sound side such as at Kitty Hawk Village or Duck. The ones who live on the Outer Banks choose these spots because the destructive forces of storms are not as serious, the ocean does not pose such a threat, and the vegetation is different. Trees grow here (Fig. 12). Accessibility to the water is maintained but for occupational more than recreational reasons. The sound side provides an excellent community environment. One could hardly guess that the Atlantic is only a few miles east when he is in Kitty Hawk Village or Duck proper.

Those white concrete block buildings (hardly cottages) have chosen an appropriate siting, also. The mass of them lie a considerable distance off the beach in the Southern Shores area. At the time these structures were built Southern Shores was fairly wide open to new development. Since they are not situated on raised pilings, it was probably wise to locate farther from the possibility of a wave straying too far west. The white block structures sit generously spaced. They appear as strange forms on the



Figure 9. The porch bench, a common feature of Nags Head cottages.



Figure 10. Wooden batten window shutters function as shades as well.

sand after seeing hundreds of pitched-roof houses. The only explanation for them I have come by is that they are derived from a Floridian house and construction is inexpensive. They introduce a totally different vocabulary on the Banks; material, color, and roof form are all in contrast to practically everything else (Fig. 13).

The recent development has taken much of the land that is left. The newest houses are usually built several rows off the beach where the land is cheaper. Actually it is the only place they could afford to be. I am sure most of them would rather be sitting on the front row. This contemporary development appears almost as a line of dog kennels when viewed down its roads. One house is barely distinguishable from the next. Only the group has character. The frailty of construction on some of these is in character with the cluster's image as a whole.

Together as well as individually the old Nags Head cottages are a fine sight. Though they have all been moved several times to escape receding beaches, and some were moved from the sound side, I think they remain in a group for my visual pleasure. The row appears as a very humble and harmonious environment.

Kitty Hawk Village and Duck present themselves as fairly typical community settings in that homes are clustered for common interest and neighborliness. There is, however, a distinct difference in the place as compared with an inland town. I suppose it has to do with one's unforgettable awareness that this is all connected with the sea.

A great contrast in form and character existed between the Nags Head historic cottages and their original owners' fashionable homes on the mainland. Another



Figure 11. Early Nags Head cottages sited directly on the beach front.

contrast still exists between the vacation homes and the village homes only several miles apart. The village homes and the mainland homes must represent "home" and life as it is. Cottage forms represent a symbolic dissociation with homelife. If the village homes were subject to the same mistreatment of storms as the cottages, it is possible they would have taken on quite different forms and materials. But the milder weather of the sound side allows them to conform to traditional standards.

The success of the Nags Head Row cottages as beach structures is demonstrated by the fact that many of the newer cottages borrow elements from them (Fig. 14). Their roofs, full-length dormers, and shingle siding have been repeated in scattered cottages, but the comfort feature of the porch has appeared almost everywhere.



Figure 12. Trees shelter the permanent dwellings at Kitty Hawk Village.



Figure 13. Southern Shores cottage sited away from the beach.



Figure 14. A new cottage incorporating many of the traditional cottage features.

The I-House as a Carrier of Style in Three Counties of the Northeastern Piedmont

The basic form of the typical eighteenth and nineteenth century vernacular house—its plan and height—was determined by local folk tradition. Its proportions and decorative features, however, generally depended upon the latest popular architectural style to arrive in the countryside. Thus we can today read in these houses inflections towards both time and location. And thus they placed their original inhabitants in a present made more meaningful by its identification with a known past and by its orientation towards admired, though perhaps distant, contemporary culture. In this article Michael Southern describes the modifications wrought upon a single folk house type during the century of its popularity in the northeastern Piedmont.

There appear to be two distinct schools of observers of old houses. One might be called the folkloristic or "culturogeographic" school, which was born in the 1930's with the work of Fred Kniffen and his studies of American folk housing types and their geographic distribution.¹ This approach is focused largely on traditional building forms and plans, their ethnic points of origin, their persistence through time, and their distribution through space. The second approach is that of academic architectural history, with an emphasis on the aesthetics of architectural style and its changes through time. Until recently the paths of the two groups rarely crossed. The objects of the architectural historian's study have generally been the finest, most prominent buildings—those produced to a great extent by wealth and power—considered to give expression to society's highest ideals, aspirations, and abilities at a given point in history. Lesser buildings such as the apparently numberless farmhouses, when noticed at all, have been seriously interpreted by architectural historians only insofar as they have some recognizable stylistic treatment, are interesting vernacular interpretations of academic architecture, or are extremely old. The folkloristic approach sees the great monuments as exceptions, even aberrations, and looks to the ordinary as expressive of the muscle of society, its character, its movement, and its subtle changes through history.

At times these two schools observe the same house and describe it with different vocabularies, each emphasizing its own angle of approach. In a poke at those accustomed to seeing a house only in terms of its style, Henry Glassie speaks of style as "the plastic projections of a bourgeois identity crisis."² Meanwhile the architectural historian may consider the folk house typologies misleading groupings of buildings that do not belong together in any meaningful way—in terms of their historical setting or architectural sophistication.

Actually, both groups could probably stand to gain at least a little from an open look at the work of the other.



Michael Southern

Most houses were built neither purely in a folk tradition nor purely in a fashionable style. There was communication, however tenuous, between the rural hinterlands and the coastal towns from the earliest times, and changes in architectural fashion taking place in the nerve centers of popular culture—Philadelphia, Boston, New York, and Charleston—were eventually carried, in modified form, to more remote areas where building traditions were firmly entrenched. In the North Carolina historic built environment we find a few houses of a totally traditional form, such as the one-room log house, fashioned again and again over a long period of time, and utterly without stylistic considerations. And we find an occasional academic building, such as the State Capitol, fully rendered in a specific historical style. Most older houses in North Carolina lie between the two, reflecting the pull of both traditional and popular culture.

Here we shall attempt a combination of both approaches with a simple exercise of looking at one “folkloristic” house type in a particular region in terms of its various stylistic manifestations. The house type under scrutiny will be Fred Kniffen’s “I-house”³—the two-story house at least two rooms wide but only one room deep, with the main entrance on the long side (Fig. 1). This house type originated in the English folk culture. It has been identified as the dominant folk house type throughout the Upland South from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, and as the symbol of economic achievement and social respectability in a democratic agrarian society. Its popularity has been attributed to the fact that it presents to the viewer on the road the largest, most impressive facade possible for a house of only four rooms. In addition, its good ventilation properties make it especially suitable for a hot, humid Southern climate.

The region we shall examine is the Granville, Franklin, and Vance County area in North Carolina’s northeastern Piedmont, a region rich in houses of this

type bearing a variety of stylistic expressions. We shall interpret the houses in terms of basic style groups identified by architectural historians: Georgian, Federal, the mid-nineteenth century romantic revival styles, and Victorian eclecticism.



Figure 1. Floyd-Morris House, Granville County. This I-house has the center gable, here with shingle ornament, typical of many houses built in the region in the late nineteenth century. The chimney is dated 1896.

THE I-HOUSE IN THE GRANVILLE-FRANKLIN-VANCE REGION

The Granville-Franklin-Vance region was settled in the first half of the eighteenth century largely by Virginians of English descent. The economy has always been based on agriculture, chiefly tobacco. While nowhere in North Carolina did the plantation system develop to the level of opulence that it did in parts of Virginia, in this region there were a number of planters and farmers of moderate means—with sizeable holdings of land and at least a few slaves—who built solid and comfortable, if rarely extravagant, dwellings for themselves and their families. Though the I-house was apparently not the first type of dwelling in the area, it appeared by the late eighteenth century and became dominant in the early nineteenth century. The earliest permanent houses were probably one- or one-and-a-half-story hall-and-parlor plans with gable or gambrel roofs. Among the earliest two-story houses were other forms besides the I-house, including a small number of double-pile (two room deep) plans, and occasional plans that appear to be complete anomalies for this region, including one Quaker plan. The first I-houses appear to be simple upward extensions of the one-story hall-and-parlor plan. The center-hall plan appeared before 1800 in I-houses as well as other types, but was not common until after 1820. By the mid-nineteenth century the symmetrical center-hall arrangement was the strongly favored plan for houses of both one and two stories, both single and double pile. Wealthier planters in the decades before the Civil War built large, double-pile houses, though the single-pile I-house form was the more common. After the Civil War the center-hall I-house dominated at least until the turn of the century.⁴

Almost all of the I-houses of every period received rear additions at some time, and unlike the rear shed additions commonly found farther east, these were usually in the form of a one- or two-story ell. In some cases these ells appear original to the house, and perhaps such houses should be given a separate typological designation or be considered an I-house subtype. For the purposes of this discussion, however, all will be considered I-houses.

THE STYLES

It should be noted here that remote areas experienced a kind of culture lag in the appearance of every architectural style. Forms that were common in urban centers became popular much later elsewhere, and once popular in the countryside, they tended to linger long after they had been superseded in the centers of fashion. Thus many of North Carolina's Georgian style buildings are considered *retarditaire*; they were "out of style" before they were built. At times certain elements, such as the Georgian raised panel door, remained in use so long as to appear to be part of the folk building tradition. As a result of this durability of accepted forms, many houses contain elements of two or more styles, and others are said to be "transitional," as if the builder was giving recognition to a new fashion that had come to his attention while simultaneously working within the bounds of a stylistic, or traditional, vocabulary familiar to him.

Georgian* (before ca. 1810)

The Georgian style acquires its name from the English kings George I, II, and III, who ruled during its ascendancy in the eighteenth century. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, English architecture changed dramatically under the influence of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque. During this period medieval forms gave way to a new formality and an interest in features of ancient classical architecture. This was the beginning of a trend that would affect Western architecture for over two centuries.

The features of the new English architectural fashion found their way to the colonies by way of pattern books, English-born craftsmen, and, in some cases, English-trained architects. In the larger urban centers and on the wealthier plantations, efforts were made to closely reproduce the characteristics of the English models. The most spectacular example of such an effort in North Carolina is New Bern's Tryon Palace (reconstructed in the 1950's), the design of English architect John Hawks. The grandest of these buildings display a strong, formal symmetry, and interiors that are lavishly paneled and molded. In most areas, however, the pattern book models were adapted to suit local tastes, needs, finances, and craftsmen's abilities. Often, simplified Georgian motifs were applied to houses of ancient, traditional English form.

The I-houses built in this region before about 1810 reflect, in varying degrees, the character of the Georgian



Figure 2. Foster House, Franklin County, late eighteenth century. This house has the symmetrical five-bay facade associated with formal Georgian architecture. Note the tall, narrow windows with nine-over-nine double-hung sash (the first floor sash has been replaced). The roof is flush with the gable ends. The porch here is not original; early porches have rarely survived.



Christ Church, Philadelphia, 1727-1744, the stylish Georgian masterpiece of architect James Porteus.

*A problem arises over the application of the term "Georgian." Some writers use the term to refer to a particular house plan—the symmetrical, two-room deep, center-hall plan—that appeared as a feature of the formal Georgian architecture of England and the colonies. In the vernacular landscape of North Carolina, this plan did not find broad acceptance until well into the nineteenth century, long after the Georgian era, as a historical and even stylistic period, was past. As a result the same term is being applied by different writers to houses that have no relation in form, plan, period, or style. Here the term will be used in the stylistic and historical sense, that is, in reference to houses built before about 1810 that have Georgian stylistic elements regardless of plan.



Figure 3. McLemore-Canady House, Franklin County, late eighteenth century. With the raised foundation and steeply pitched roof, the facade of this house is so vertical in proportion as to be a rectangle set on end. Here the builder showed no concern for the symmetrical placement of windows and doors. Each room of the hall-and-parlor first floor has a separate entrance. Note the massive, double-shoulder chimney; the shoulders are paved smooth. The roof has been rebuilt to extend over the gable ends.



Figure 5. Georgian-type window. Nine-over-nine sash, three-part molded and mitred frame, and molded window sill. Note beaded weatherboard.



Figure 4. Young House, Vance County, early nineteenth century. This is probably the largest early I-house surviving in the region. In the mid-nineteenth century it received a two-story rear shed addition, making it a double-pile house. The exterior is in the Georgian tradition and has the "Georgian symmetry" except for the placement of the second-story central window. The interior is a curious blend of Georgian and Federal elements with Greek Revival touches dating from the time of the rear addition.

models, both in their specific features and general "spirit." These Georgian I-houses vary in some respects. Facades may be three, four, or five bays wide, and while the symmetrical five-bay, center-hall plan often associated with the Georgian is represented (Fig. 2), other examples show less regard for symmetry (Fig. 3; Fig. 4), and those of the hall-and-parlor plan sometimes have separate front entrances for each of the two rooms (Fig. 3). Among the common features are proportions that emphasize the vertical dimension, so much so that the facade appears almost as a square or even a rectangle-on-end where the house is only three bays wide. Windows are tall and narrow with small panes, always nine-over-nine sash on the first story and nine-over-nine, nine-over-six (or vice-versa), or six-over-six on the second. Window sills are usually molded (Fig. 5). Chimneys are massive, most often with double, paved shoulders and free-standing stacks (Fig. 3; Fig. 6), usually built of brick laid in Flemish bond, though cut stone blocks were also used in the early period. On the gable end the roof is flush with the wall (except where later rebuilt). The cornice is boxed with pattern boards applied to the ends; sometimes the cornice is treated with modillion blocks or rows of dentils (Fig. 6). All these houses are of heavy timber, using mortise and tenon frame construction. Where the original weatherboard survives, it is molded or beaded (Fig. 5).

Interiors have a robust, simple finish. A common feature is the raised panel, found on doors, wainscots, mantels, and overmantels. Doors are six-panel hung on HL hinges and set in three-part molded frames (Fig. 7). There is always a wainscot of sheathing or of flat or raised panels. Most have enclosed stairways. Sections of Chinese Chippendale balustrade are found on the stairs of two of these houses (other examples appear in the region in non-I-houses). Only one house has an open stair; it is a superb closed-stringer stair with heavy turned newel, balusters, and handrail. Mantels are either versions of pattern book models or are simple compositions



Figure 6. Georgian-type cornice. The cornice is boxed, and here treated with ornamental modillion blocks. The sawn pattern board at the end is a cross-section of the cornice and its moldings. The roof is flush with the gable end. Note the free-standing stack of the chimney.

of raised or flat panels (Fig. 8), sometimes with a heavy molded shelf. These are solid, well-crafted houses, built with a sense of permanence. Most of these Georgian I-houses are still inhabited.

As noted earlier, there was a good deal of experimentation in two-story house forms in the Granville-Franklin-Vance region before 1810. Of the fifty-odd known early houses with Georgian-related features, most are one or one-and-a-half stories. As planters began to build larger houses, a variety of new forms were attempted. Only about a dozen or so of these fit the I-house definition, and even these show the variation mentioned above. But the form was born in this period, and in the early decades on the nineteenth century began to dominate.

Federal (ca. 1800 - ca. 1840)

The major changes brought by the Federal style were a lightness of form, greater variation of motifs, and a delicacy of ornamentation that contrasted strongly with the heavier, more robust Georgian. The style acquires its name from its broad acceptance in the early years of the new American republic. It is sometimes called the Adamesque style after the brothers Robert and James Adam, whose flourishing architectural practice in England in the late eighteenth century was a primary source of the new ideas. The models for the Federal decorative vocabulary can be traced to mid-eighteenth century discoveries of archaeological excavations in Pompeii, Herculaneum, and other ancient cities; Robert Adam himself contributed an important study of the ruins of the palace of the Emperor Diocletian in Spalato, now Yugoslavia. Popularized by architectural books and builders' guides, these ideas found their way across the Atlantic.

In this country the style was employed with considerable sophistication in major cities of the East Coast from the late eighteenth century into the first decades of the nineteenth. In North Carolina major groups of Federal buildings are found in New Bern and in Warren and Halifax counties, and important individual examples are widely scattered throughout the Piedmont. In the Granville-Franklin-Vance region over sixty houses are known to exhibit something of Federal influences. The most elegant of these, such as Burnside Plantation House and the now ruinous Nine Oaks, both near Williamsboro, are double-pile in plan. Of the sixty, however, nearly half are I-houses, indicating the greatly increased acceptance of that house type in the early nineteenth century.

Few of these Federal I-houses display the studied elegance of academic Federal architecture in the more cosmopolitan settings. One will occasionally muster a special flourish—such as the fanlights over the doors at the John Wilson House, Franklin County—but most are



Figure 7. Georgian-type door. Six raised panels in a three-part surround.



Figure 8. Georgian mantel. Bold composition of raised panels over an arched fire opening.



Figure 9. Mitchell House, Franklin County, ca. 1820. The exterior form of this house differs little from its predecessors. It originally had a two-tiered porch. Window sills are unmolded. Note the mass of the chimney and its concave shoulders; compare with the chimney of Figure 3.



Figure 10. Federal mantel. Flat surfaces and delicate reeding and carving. This is the "three-part" format with a center plate here reeded in a herringbone pattern.

simple vernacular buildings that structurally vary little from the earlier houses. The hall-and-parlor is still often found, though the center-hall plan gained a wider acceptance, making a transom, and sometimes sidelights, necessary features for the front entrance to provide light in the hall. Facades are three or five bays and symmetrical. Windows retain nine-over-nine sash in the first story, though the molded window sill was usually abandoned for a plain one. Local builders began by this time to find the good native stone at least as acceptable as brick for chimney construction, and there are many examples of fine stone masonry. Brick was of course still used, though chimneys may be somewhat smaller in proportion and are often single-shouldered. The chimneys at the Mitchell House in Franklinton (Fig. 9), with their graceful concave shoulders, are a clear departure from the massive double-shoulder chimneys of earlier houses. Generally, however, the exterior appearance of the vernacular house changed very little from Georgian to Federal.

Major differences are seen inside. The robust, plastic moldings of the Georgian give way to flatter surfaces and thin moldings. A focal point for change is the mantel. The three-part mantel is a major feature of the Federal style, sometimes reeded or adorned with sunbursts at the center plate or end blocks, or given other carving (Fig. 10). Doors remain six-panel, though the raised panel disappears or is relegated to a secondary position on the unfinished back side of the door; the flat panels of the front are trimmed with a narrow applied molding. The wainscot is also of flat panels, sometimes with a touch of reeding or carving; sometimes it is simple sheathing. Where there is a center-hall stairway, it has open stringers, sometimes with sawn brackets, and the balusters are thin and stick-like.

The Romantic Revivals (Mid-nineteenth Century)

The second quarter of the nineteenth century saw major changes in architectural forms throughout the country. For one thing, those of the mature, ruling generation were born after the Revolution as American citizens, and the influences of the mother country were less and less in evidence. Builders and craftsmen trained in the English traditions were dead. The Industrial Revolution brought changes in the methods of building production that permanently altered construction techniques and subsequently the character of form and ornament.

Concurrent with the spread of industrialization came waves of romantic revivals in literature, art, and architecture. To some extent this romanticism was a reaction to the threat of dehumanization inherent in the machine age. In architecture, ironically, this romanticism was in turn encouraged by the presence of the machine and the new possibilities of form and ornament it brought.

The nation was self-consciously feeling its rise as a powerful democracy of international stature. Architects and builders began looking directly to Greece, Italy, and medieval Europe for formal vocabularies to give expression to the nation's emergent self-image and ideals. In some respects it was indeed a period of crisis in identity; through much of the nineteenth century popular builder's guides displayed plans and ornament for houses in Greek, Italianate, and Gothic styles, each touted as the form appropriate for the ideal American dwelling.



Figure 11. Terrell House, Franklin County. This is a good example of the Greek Revival in this region, showing the changes in proportions. The three-bay facade has large, squarish windows of six-over-six sash. The house is covered in a low-pitched hip roof. The facade is framed with wide corner posts, here fluted, and the wide frieze under the cornice is given a Greek key ornament. The porch, which is original, duplicates these ornamental features.



Figure 12. Marcus Carpenter House, Franklin County. A simpler gable-roof mid-nineteenth century house with Greek moldings. Compare facade with Figures 2,3,4, and 9. This house is now covered with asbestos siding.



Figure 13. Greek Revival-type door. Two long vertical panels. The door frame is symmetrically molded with square blocks set in the upper corners. This same type of frame also appears around exterior doors and windows.

The Greek Revival (ca. 1830 - 1865)

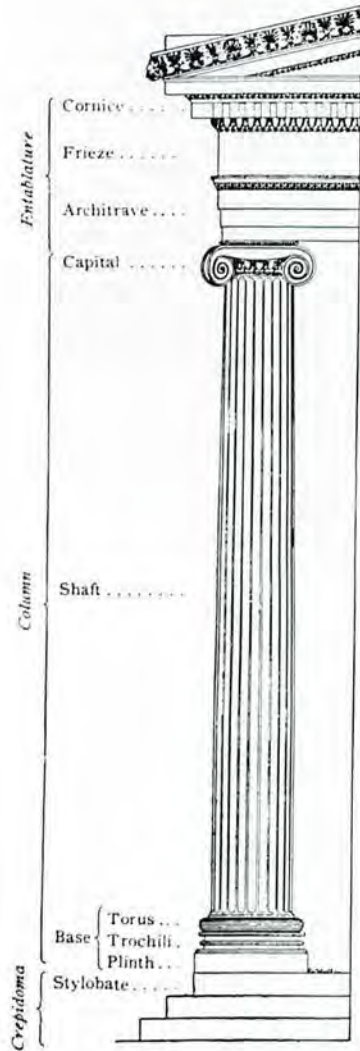
The most widespread and enduring of these revival styles was the Greek Revival. In North Carolina little was built after 1830 that was not at least touched by its influence, from the proud new State Capitol, completed in 1840, to the privy at Burleigh Plantation in Person County, adorned with Ionic pilasters. Vernacular housing was no exception. While in North Carolina there are few of the grand temple-form edifices common in the northeast, major Greek-influenced changes took place in the general conception and execution of houses throughout the state.

An examination of the mid-nineteenth century I-house in the Granville-Franklin-Vance region immediately shows this change. The form of the house almost melts, as it were; facades become lower and longer, now consistently with symmetrical three-bay divisions (Fig. 11; Fig. 12). Windows become squarish with larger panes of glass set in six-over-six sash. The low, flat hip roof becomes the norm. Weatherboard is plain, and sometimes the house is framed with wide corner boards and exterior baseboards. These elements only faintly suggest the form of a Greek temple; a much clearer reference to the Greek is seen in the hip roof or pedimented porches with classically-derived columns or square posts, sometimes fluted (Fig. 11).

Interiors follow a symmetrical, center-hall plan almost without exception, and the rooms are spacious and simply finished, again with moldings derived from popular pattern books. Front doors are generally double-leaf and flanked by sidelights and a transom to light the hall. Gone is the two- or three-part molded door frame; in its place is the symmetrically molded frame with square blocks set in the upper corners, sometimes treated with roundels. The doors themselves become two, or sometimes four, long vertical flat panels, trimmed with a wide applied molding (Fig. 13). Wainscot usually disappears, replaced with a wide baseboard. Occasionally the

baseboard and the risers of the steps are painted to resemble marble, sometimes expertly, sometimes crudely. Mantels take on a post and lintel form in a simple mimicry of Greek construction, occasionally with the flat pilasters fluted, supporting a wide lintel and a simple shelf. One of the most interesting mantels in the region is at the Marcus Carpenter House. Here the maker applied knob-like protrusions at the tops of the pilasters in a final vernacular abstraction of Ionic volutes (Fig 14). Its maker had a faint awareness of the distant Greek precedent and a feeling for its appropriateness for a Franklin County farmhouse.

A number of houses in the region are transitional from Federal to Greek Revival, retaining the older form but embellished with the Greek moldings; occasionally the reverse is true—Federal details are found in houses of the Greek form. There are many more of the variety described above, about ninety or so identified thus far, and again about half of I-house form. Others include a few more spacious double-pile houses and a large number of one-story Greek cottages.



Classic Ionic column.



Figure 14. Vernacular Greek mantel. A simple post-and-lintel composition, with knobs at the tops of the pilasters representing the volutes of the capitals of the Ionic order.

Italianate Revival (ca. 1850 - 1860)

The Italianate Revival enjoyed a popularity nationwide roughly corresponding to that of the Greek, and in variations persisted well into the Victorian era. In North Carolina the best known collection of buildings in this style is found at Wilmington. In the Granville-Franklin-Vance region it flourished briefly before the Civil War, with the only real difference between the Greek and Italianate Revival being in the application of ornament. Cornices are bracketed, and porches and mantels receive curvilinear ornamental detail. Most of the few Italianate houses in this region are the work of Jacob Holt, a Warrenton contractor who specialized in the style in the decade before the Civil War. Most of these are double-pile houses built for wealthier clients. One single-pile I-house exception⁵ is Pool Rock Plantation (Fig. 15), where an Italianate block has been attached with a hyphen to an earlier hall-and-parlor I-house. These two houses placed together graphically demonstrate the major differences between house construction of the early and mid-nineteenth century.



Figure 15. Pool Rock Plantation, Vance County. The mid-nineteenth century Italianate front block is probably the work of Jacob Holt, a contractor of neighboring Warren County. The two-story portion of the rear section is much older.

The Gothic Revival

A third great romantic revival, the Gothic, was born as a reaction to the formal austerity of the Greek. Elements of the Gothic were quickly accepted in North Carolina as appropriate for church architecture; even the simplest gable-front rural church constructed from the mid-nineteenth century on was likely to have triangular heads over the windows in the faintest possible reflection of the cathedrals of medieval Europe. But it only rarely reached full development here in domestic architecture. There are very few of the picturesque cottages inspired from Gothic plans offered by writers like A. J. Downing in his *Architecture of Country Houses*,⁶ which had considerable influence in other parts of the country. One rare example is in Vance County, the Thomas Capehart House near Kittrell. Rarely is so much as a Gothic window seen on other houses in the region; the irregular massing and steep, multiple gables were a radical departure from the building vocabu-



"An Ornamental Italian Villa" from A. J. Downing's *Cottage Residences*, published in 1847.



Figure 16. Benjamin Wyche House, Vance County, ca. 1870. An I-house with a specific reference to the Gothic Revival with the pointed-arch second story central window. The center gable, in various forms, becomes a common feature of later nineteenth century houses (Figures 1 and 17).

lary familiar both to conservative farmers and the locally-trained builders who tended to perpetuate traditional boxy forms established by the limitations of heavy timber frame construction. The absence of clear Gothic ideas in dwellings also reflects something of the way people distinguished between what was appropriate for secular as opposed to sacred space. One domestic example in our region, an I-house with a clear, if superficial, reference to the Gothic, is the Benjamin Wyche House in Vance County (Fig. 16). Here the builder placed a Gothic window at the central bay of the second story; a second, smaller window appears directly above in a steep gable set into the roof.

Late-nineteenth Century

With the Benjamin Wyche House we see a new element—the addition of a third gable placed centrally on the facade—which in one form or another became a regular feature of I-houses and related types constructed from the decade following the Civil War to the early twentieth century. Occasionally it was added to older houses as roofs needed replacement, or simply to make the house appear “up-to-date.” It occurs so frequently in the Granville-Franklin-Vance region that one Franklin County native with an interest in old houses coined the term “Triple-A” (derived from the three gables or A’s of the house) to distinguish the type from older houses having only the two end gables. Actually the feature was not unknown in the eighteenth century. One of the oldest houses in the state, the Cupola House at Edenton, has a small center gable, and the most academic of North Carolina’s Georgian buildings—the Chowan County Courthouse, Bellair Plantation House (Craven County), and the reconstructed Tryon Palace in New Bern—all have pedimented central pavillions that at first might seem related. But these buildings were certainly the exceptions; nothing comparable was ever built in the Granville-Franklin-Vance region. As the feature disappeared for nearly a century, the prototype for the central gable is not to be found in these early buildings. More likely, the idea was taken from the Gothic Revival.⁷ Another possibility is that it was derived from pattern book plans of Italianate or Tuscan villas, the best example of which in our region is the Foster House in Franklin County, a mid-nineteenth century house with a low pitched center gable that repeats the end gables precisely.

The center gable thus appears to have arisen out of pattern books and standardized plans displaying romantic Gothic cottages and Tuscan villas. The one feature that could be taken from these plans without disturbing the requirements of the accepted house form was the decora-

tive gable set at dead center on the facade. Tradition was maintained while a certain concession was made to fashion, and a balance was achieved between the two. Once the center gable was accepted in the local building vocabulary, it took a life of its own unrelated to the Gothic or Tuscan models. The gables vary widely in proportion and steepness of pitch, and often were given all sorts of machine-made, sawn, turned, and shingled ornament as the nineteenth century wore on (Fig. 17).

The I-house was built in great numbers in this region in the late nineteenth century, often in the "Triple-A" form. These houses vary from awkward, cheaply made versions to the proud, richly ornamented farmhouse that is now an American classic. Though the Triple-A I-house is a direct descendant of the early I-house down the road, it is not the same house. First there are the differences in proportion, craftsmanship, and stylistic orientation. The later house generally retains a more horizontal facade introduced in the mid-nineteenth century. Squarish windows are treated with fewer and larger panes per sash, reflecting changes in the technology of glass making. Windows and door frames are often plain boards, and weatherboards are plain. The roof overhangs at the gable ends. Chimneys are smaller and thinner, with brick laid in common bond with single, stepped shoulders, or else they are brought completely inside the gable end. Construction shifts from heavy mortise and tenon framing to light nailed frames. Components such as doors, mantels, stairs, and ornament are machine made at local mills, or shipped by rail from distant millworks specializing in architectural accessories, rather than prepared by the builder on the site or by craftsmen in the locality.

Besides these physical differences, later houses have a different social and historical meaning. The occupant of the early I-house in the Granville-Franklin-Vance region was, relatively speaking, a well-to-do man; though his lifestyle should not be falsely characterized as one of genteel antebellum elegance,⁸ he probably owned a few



Figure 17. Mangum House, Granville County. Late nineteenth century. One of the more richly decorated "Triple-A" I-houses in the region.

slaves, and his house was the best that could be produced for its time and place. The Triple-A I-house is a more democratic house. Its occupant, while no pauper, was more likely a smaller, independent farmer who with his family did much of his own labor in the fields. His house was by no means the vanguard of local architecture; as the later nineteenth century brought economic recovery to the region, successful merchants and professional people in Oxford, Henderson, Louisburg, and Franklinton were building large, fashionable houses in the Second Empire, Queen Anne, and later Neo-classical and Colonial Revival styles. For so long the mark of economic success and social respectability, the I-house receded to second rung status. By the First World War it generally died out as a viable building type, replaced by a variety of popular house forms that brought a permanent break with a long-lived building tradition.

Conclusion

The I-house was the principal domestic building form in the Granville-Franklin-Vance region for about a century-and-a-half. After initially sharing the landscape with a variety of experimental house forms, it eventually emerged, in symmetrical, center-hall plan, to dominate that landscape. One might wonder why builders did not take the same materials and come up with a greater variety of building types, and why this form was chosen again and again. The idea mentioned earlier, that it presents the most impressive facade possible for a house of its floor space, is a very attractive one. Independent farmers in an agrarian democracy thus gave expression to their social and economic standing with a two-story house proudly facing the road; its meaning was clearly understood by the community and its tradition was continually reinforced. Its interior spatial organization and its suitability for the Southern environment were also factors contributing to its popularity.

While the basic formula remained the same, through time the I-house went through a variety of transformations in proportions, construction methods, and stylistic treatment. Each generation of houses absorbed changes in the means of building production, and however faintly, the reverberations of changes in architectural fashion that were occurring in distant urban centers. The occupants of these houses were not living in a cultural vacuum. They read, they traveled, and they received travelers. The coming of the railroad in the mid-nineteenth century opened up cultural as well as economic and technical possibilities. These people and their houses were touched first by the English precedents, then the romantic classicism, the industrialization, and the eclecticism that pervaded the whole of American culture. All these changes and influences eventually found their way, in a locally interpreted form, down the dusty roads and into the traditional houses of this quiet tobacco country. These houses cannot be understood solely in terms of style, but neither should style be ignored as superficiality. It is one of the many subtle ways these houses speak to us about the culture that produced them.

Footnotes

1. Fred Kniffen, "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Dec., 1965), 549-577.

2. Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 158.

3. Kniffen, 553. Kniffen named the I-house after recognizing that Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana were the origins of many of the builders of the type in prairie Louisiana. He noted also that "I" was not an inappropriate designation considering the tall and narrow profile the type offers the viewer.

4. Data concerning houses, types, and distribution in this region is garnered from the files of the Survey and Planning Branch, N.C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, N.C.

5. There are several Holt versions of the I-house in Warren County and Mecklenburg County, Virginia. Holt's work also includes flourishes of Gothic character.

6. A. J. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (Reprint of work published in 1850 by D. Appleton and Co.) (New York: Dover Publications, 1969).

7. Glassie, 158, also attributes the appearance of the center gable to the Gothic Revival.

8. Glassie, Chapter VIII. Glassie's discussion of the quality of life of most Southerners of middle Virginia is also applicable to this region.

The Montmorenci-Prospect Hill School: A Study of High-Style Vernacular Architecture in the Roanoke Valley

Historical vernacular form had its sources in two widely divergent cultural streams: folk tradition and high style architectural fashion. The vernacular landscape drew from the high style stream in at least three different ways: first, that stream provided rather "correct" ornament for otherwise traditional structures; second, it provided the initial inspiration for more personalized, idiosyncratic—sometimes crudely unsophisticated—local experiments in ornament; and third, it provided the original model for a series of folk house forms widely used in North Carolina during the nineteenth century. In this article Catherine Bishir focuses exclusively on the second of these three branches of influence.

High style vernacular ornament begins with the identification of the fashion that is to be emulated. Usually the fashionable model remains the builder's orientation no matter how unsophisticated his actual performance of it. Occasionally, as in the case of the Montmorenci-Prospect Hill school, the desire and ability to express transcends the desire to possess and forms result that shade the distinction between a vernacular and an original art. One can well imagine how such "exuberant" decor could place those who commissioned it in their own splendidly exclusive version of a known and admired cultural domain.

The energy and variety of nineteenth century American vernacular architecture are expressed not only in the unpretentious, astylistic structures of indigenous and ethnic cultures, but also in the more ambitious buildings of the increasingly sophisticated but still provincial planters and merchants who grew in wealth and numbers in the early years of the century. The interaction of a regional clientele, local craftsmen, and traditional technology with current architectural fashions produced a high-style vernacular architecture of lively individuality intensely expressive of the culture that produced it.

In the period following the Revolution, American architectural fashion still followed English models. Classicism was still predominant, but the decorative innovations of the brothers Robert and James Adam had introduced a new lightness and delicacy and a greater variety of motifs, derived from discoveries in newly dug Roman ruins. Garlands, swags, sunbursts, flowers, urns, and wreaths applied in sprightly abundance, plus a general flattening and attenuation of forms, changed the aspect of English and hence American classicism. The Adamesque



Figure 1. Mantel design by the brothers Adam, from a pattern book published in London. Such compositions inspired the Federal, or "Adamesque," style in America.

mode was dominant during the Federal period in America (ca. 1780's-1820's) and hence often carries the name Federal.

In urban trade centers like Philadelphia, Boston, Charleston, and New York, the Federal style caught on quickly and was executed expertly. Pattern books were published by the brothers Adam and by other English and American architects and designers, which communicated new fashions to builders and clients (Fig. 1).

In rural areas and provincial towns, new styles found expression less quickly, and were usually interpreted to suit the tastes and resources of the locality. Pattern books were a major source of inspiration, but many local craftsmen produced their own versions of academic motifs. Departing from bookish Adamesque examples, these regional craftsmen created identifiable localized pockets of architecture that are as vernacular as they are Federal.

Outstanding among the examples of high-style vernacular architecture in North Carolina is a group of late Federal style plantation houses located in a small area of Warren and Halifax counties. This group of houses, while sharing many of the characteristics common to vernacular Federal architecture, is distinguished by certain highly personalized and unusually elaborate detail. Mantels, doorways, windows, stairs, and other elements are treated in a distinctive fashion whose individuality sets off these houses as an identifiable entity unique in the state.

The catalyst for their construction was evidently a single great seminal house, Montmorenci¹ (Fig. 2). Probably the most ambitious house of the region, Montmorenci was a spectacular blend of vernacular energy and Philadelphia elegance. It was built, probably about 1820, for William Williams, a Warren County planter of unusual wealth and urbanity. His house, grand and novel, was at once representative of the plantation culture of the region and foreign to it, bringing both a stimulus



Figure 2. Montmorenci, Warren County. The home of William Williams with its tall portico and Palladian doors and windows was the showplace of the county. It was stripped of its woodwork in the 1930's and the elements taken to the Henry DuPont Winterthur Museum in Winterthur, Delaware. The house was later dismantled, and nothing remains of it at the site.

for change and an affirmation of the society.

The body of architecture associated with Montmorenci is expressive of a broader culture, that of the prosperous plantation society of the Roanoke Valley; an understanding of this regional culture is vital to the study of the architecture it produced. Located in the northeastern Piedmont, the present counties of Warren and Halifax were settled chiefly from Virginia in the mid-eighteenth century. By the post-Revolutionary era the region was dominated by large planters, in marked contrast to most of North Carolina. By the early nineteenth century, ownership of two thousand acres or more, and more than fifty slaves, was not unusual for the planters of the Roanoke. In 1790 Warren County was the only county in the state with more slaves than free citizens, and as time passed and agricultural technology changed, planters accrued more acres and more slaves to till them. Socially and economically the region was oriented toward Virginia. Cash crops, not subsistence farming, was the basis of the economy, and tobacco was sold by the planters in Virginia markets, usually Petersburg. With wealth and established family came political power; in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the Roanoke planters provided the state with many of its most powerful political leaders.²

Prosperous as the region was, it was nevertheless shackled by the bonds that made North Carolina in the early nineteenth century the "Rip Van Winkle State" and the "Ireland of America." The Roanoke Valley was accessible only by miserable roads and inadequate waterways, so that contact with other areas was difficult. There were no large cities, for the profits of agriculture went not to local towns like Halifax and Warrenton, but out of state to Petersburg and Norfolk. The economy of the region was agrarian, with nearly every person engaged in some aspect of agriculture or related trade. There was little cross-fertilization of population: with few exceptions people came from families long established in the region, living near where they were born.³ Marriage for the upper

classes and the less affluent alike was usually with folk of similar standing within the region. For the proportionately small planter gentry, marriages were within a small population from the immediate vicinity or from compatible families from nearby areas. This pattern reinforced the sense of intimacy and insularity.

Within the isolated rural context, the planters of the early nineteenth century Roanoke Valley achieved a level of prosperity and sophistication seldom rivaled in the state, a lifestyle described as the "most refined type to be found in rural North Carolina."⁴ Building on the plantations and fortunes established by their grandparents' pioneer generation, these planters had the money and the desire to seek learning, pleasure, and fashion beyond that found in most of rural North Carolina.

The planters' wealth enabled them to provide their children with the classical education their cultural aspiration deemed necessary. Families sent children north to be educated, hired private tutors, or formed private classical academies. Warrenton, the county seat of Warren, was noted for its fine academies, one established as early as 1788 headed by an Irish scholar. Teachers from the north or from Europe provided instruction in Latin, Greek, composition, mathematics, and English literature, with music, painting, and the like added for girls. Many planters attended colleges and universities, with the University of North Carolina, William and Mary, and Princeton being favored. The result of this education was evident in the gracefully written letters containing frequent classical allusions and in the richly stocked libraries of the planter families.⁵

Despite bad roads, travel was a vital part of the planter life, private carriages providing some compensation for miserable roadways. Visits for weeks to plantations or town homes of friends and relatives were common. Planters seasonally met their fellow and their factors on business trips to the markets at Petersburg, Norfolk, and beyond. Occasional journeys were made to the great

northeastern commercial and cultural centers—Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. Here at the fountainhead of culture one could find fashionable goods, manufactured items, a fine education, and sparkling society, all of a quality impossible in rural North Carolina. The influence of these cities, particularly Philadelphia, upon the plantation culture of the Roanoke Valley is inestimable. Wrote one descendant, "There is no question that for antebellum Warrenton, the omphalos was in Philadelphia. Even after the war, with [the plantation] lost, my Grandmother somehow managed to make the trek to Philadelphia."⁶

Newspapers of the day in the Roanoke Valley demonstrate the attitudes about these cities as well. Advertisements of hotels, bookshops, and manufacturers from Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Norfolk appear regularly; beside them run the advertisements of local tradesmen who declare that their own local goods are as fine and as fashionable as those of northern cities. One Warrenton cabinetmaker advertised in 1811 that his locally made furniture was "executed a la mode New York or Philadelphia."⁷

The breeding and racing of thoroughbred horses was the focus of community social and recreational life. Many planters expended much time and money in maintaining fine stables which rivaled those of Virginia in the early nineteenth century. Seasonal races, cockfights, and card games were, along with taverns and hotels, among the entertainments of Warrenton and Halifax.

The social life of the region was widely known for occasioning elaborate balls and sumptuous dinners. Adding spice to this social life were the mineral springs resorts of Warren County, Jones's Springs, and Shocco Springs, which were established in the early nineteenth century and attracted throngs of the fashionable as well as the fevered each season. At resort and ball alike, fashion was perhaps as important as social intercourse: "At a dance or on a visiting party the dress of the gentry conformed to the

dictates of fashion from Charleston, Petersburg, Philadelphia, and New York. . . . The leaders of society . . . always had definite ideas as to what was the style and what old fashioned."⁸

As is always true, the character of the culture was expressed in the buildings it created. Most of the planters of the Roanoke Valley who came to maturity in the period 1810-1830 had grown up in the traditional Tidewater-type houses long characteristic of the region (see Fig. 14 below)—well-proportioned, handsomely crafted, but by the early nineteenth century old fashioned in a culture increasingly conscious of current fashion. Modishness was to be found in the Adamesque style which was gradually making itself felt in Piedmont North Carolina. Aware of the fine mercantile mansions of Philadelphia and Boston, yet far removed from the sophisticated designers and materials of these urban centers, the Roanoke planters of the early nineteenth century created an architecture that expressed with precision the character of their "opulent rural culture."

William Williams, for whom Montmorenci was built, seems to epitomize this opulent planter culture. He was the quintessential representative of his class, typical yet larger than life. As a member of the Alston-Williams family, a family of planters long rooted in the region, with connections entwined through the culture, he was very much the product of the provincial area. Yet, wealthy and well-traveled, he was able to make the journey to urban areas and enjoy the fruits of urbanity there and at home, bringing to his plantation the latest and finest fashions.

William, the son of Joseph John Williams II and Elizabeth Alston, was a colonel, then general, in the militia and was state senator from Warren County in 1814. Married to two women named Elizabeth Alston and twice widowed before 1814, he married Melissa Jane Burgess, daughter of a Halifax planter, and in 1820 the couple had a daughter, also Melissa. Widowed again, he married Delia Haywood of Raleigh in 1826 and fathered two children

before his death in 1832.⁹

"Pretty Billy," as General William Williams was known, either for his beauty or for his lack of it, possessed a fortune in land and slaves exceeded by few men in the prosperous Roanoke region. Much of his estate was inherited before 1820. Warren County tax lists of the 1820's show him with nearly six thousand acres in that county (valued at \$32,545 in 1828) and as many as sixty-six slaves. At his death in 1832 William Williams owned five far-flung plantations: the home plantation (Montmorenci) of 1,600 to 1,700 acres on Shocco Creek, the Gunter Creek plantation, the Union Hill plantation, and another plantation, all in Warren County, plus his father's plantation in Halifax County. More than ninety slaves, among them several craftsmen including a carpenter named Wiley, were also to be divided among his heirs.¹⁰

Williams's broad acres and scores of slaves supported a lifestyle that mirrored his milieu but on a grander scale. Hints of the way of life at the Shocco plantation (Montmorenci) are provided by the household goods Williams owned at his death. His "horse and carriage and chamber furniture" were left to his wife Delia, and the inventory of goods to be sold included quantities of furniture and a wide range of kitchen and farming equipment, stock, provisions (including nine hundred pounds of pork and many bushels of wheat), lot after lot of books, much silver, demijohns of wine and whiskey, and dozens of wineglasses and accompanying decanters. More personal possessions included a backgammon box, a writing desk, a spy glass, and "one old peacock." Two objects of special significance vividly define Williams's lifestyle as expressed at Montmorenci: the volume of Lafayette's *Travels* and, bequeathed in his will to his nephew and executor Joseph John Williams, the latter's "sister Betsey's portrait which was presented to me by her."¹¹

The Lafayette volume recalls an event singled out in family memory, the visit to Montmorenci in February, 1825, of "the Nation's Guest," the Marquis de Lafayette,



Figure 3. Montmorenci, drawing room mantel, *in situ*. The elaborate decoration, of molded composition material, is thought to be the work of Philadelphia ornament manufacturer Robert Wellford. The central panel is decorated with a scene of the Battle of Lake Erie (1814). The carved rosettes and garlands around the fire opening are similar to patterns found in other related houses.

savior of the American Revolution and the ultimate embodiment of aristocratic elegance.¹²

The portrait of William's niece Betsey, so carefully bequeathed in his will, is especially eloquent of Williams's lifestyle, for it is an icon not only of close family connections but also of the fine and fashionable goods Williams obtained during his visits to Philadelphia. Frequently in the city on business, Williams was well acquainted with its fashions, its shops, its craftsmen, its grand houses, and its prominent people. On a visit in 1822 he commissioned the portrait of Betsey to be painted by Charles Willson Peale, the eminent painter whose subjects had included George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and many others of the young nation's social and political leaders. On other visits, Williams ordered

fashionable gowns for his wife Melissa and other novelties of dress, and commissioned a gleaming yellow custom-made coach.¹³

William Williams's most impressive Philadelphia purchases, however, were no doubt those for his new plantation house which rose on an imposing site on the Shocco Creek plantation near the Shocco Springs resort. It is not known whether Williams employed a Philadelphia craftsman or designer for the planning and construction of Montmorenci, or whether (as seems likely) he used ideas gathered from grand houses he had seen, plus decorative elements obtained in Philadelphia, and worked with a local builder to create a mansion with all the grandeur local resources could muster.¹⁴

A Philadelphia origin for the elegant, academic composition ornament is generally accepted. One study has suggested as a source Robert Wellford's firm in Philadelphia which produced such ornament during the early nineteenth century. Comparison of Wellford's known work seems to confirm this.¹⁵

Surprisingly little is known with certainty of the date of construction of Montmorenci or of its local builder. The presence of a mantel decorated with a composition scene of the Battle of Lake Erie, which took place in 1814, suggests the earliest limit (Fig. 3). Enduring family tradition holds that Williams's daughter Melissa (1820-1902) was the first child born at Montmorenci and so indicates a later limit.¹⁶ Correspondence between Williams and his wife Melissa in 1814 and 1819 is to and from their home at the Union Hill plantation, implying that Montmorenci was not yet their home.¹⁷ Thus the years 1819-1820 seem to be the most likely for the construction of Montmorenci.

Tradition identifies a Mr. Burgess of Virginia as the builder of Montmorenci.¹⁸ Existing documentation, while not solidly confirming the tradition, is in harmony with this attribution. A James Burgess took an apprentice to the house carpenter's trade in 1824, and otherwise appears in Warren County records in the 1820's.¹⁹ More

telling are notes taken from a ledger recording the construction of Prospect Hill, a stylistically related house (see below). These notes, made by a descendant of William Williams Thorne (keeper of the ledger and first owner of Prospect Hill) state that "the architect for the house Prospect Hill was a Mr. Burgess and his fee according to the ledger was \$1800."²⁰ In addition, local tradition as recorded by a memoir written in the early twentieth century cites a connection between a Mr. Burgess and yet another house in the stylistically related group—the Coleman-White House (see below).²¹ No further clues have been found to identify the role of Mr. Burgess or any other craftsman in the many houses whose connections with Montmorenci and Prospect Hill suggest his inventive hand. As is so often true, the vernacular builder remains a mystery, the buildings themselves the chief document.

Montmorenci, faded as it was on the eve of its demolition, was an imposing mansion of late Adamesque grandeur evocative of the graciousness and aspirations of its owner and the culture from which it sprang. The facade of the T-plan frame structure was dominated by a full-height portico with slim columns carrying a garlanded entablature. The glory of the interior and no doubt the wonder of the county was a magnificent free-standing spiral stair.

At Montmorenci was found a lively counterpoint between the suave academic decoration and the lively vernacular woodwork. The Philadelphia elements, formally treated mantels, and door and window frames, are beautifully encrusted with graceful composition swags, garlands, rosettes, acanthus, urns, and classical scenes of academic propriety, and ceilings are enriched with an abundance of fine plaster ornament. In the local work, Adamesque motifs are the basis for a delightful series of inventions, reeded, gouged, and carved, which compliment the imported elements.

The stair seems most succinctly to express the con-