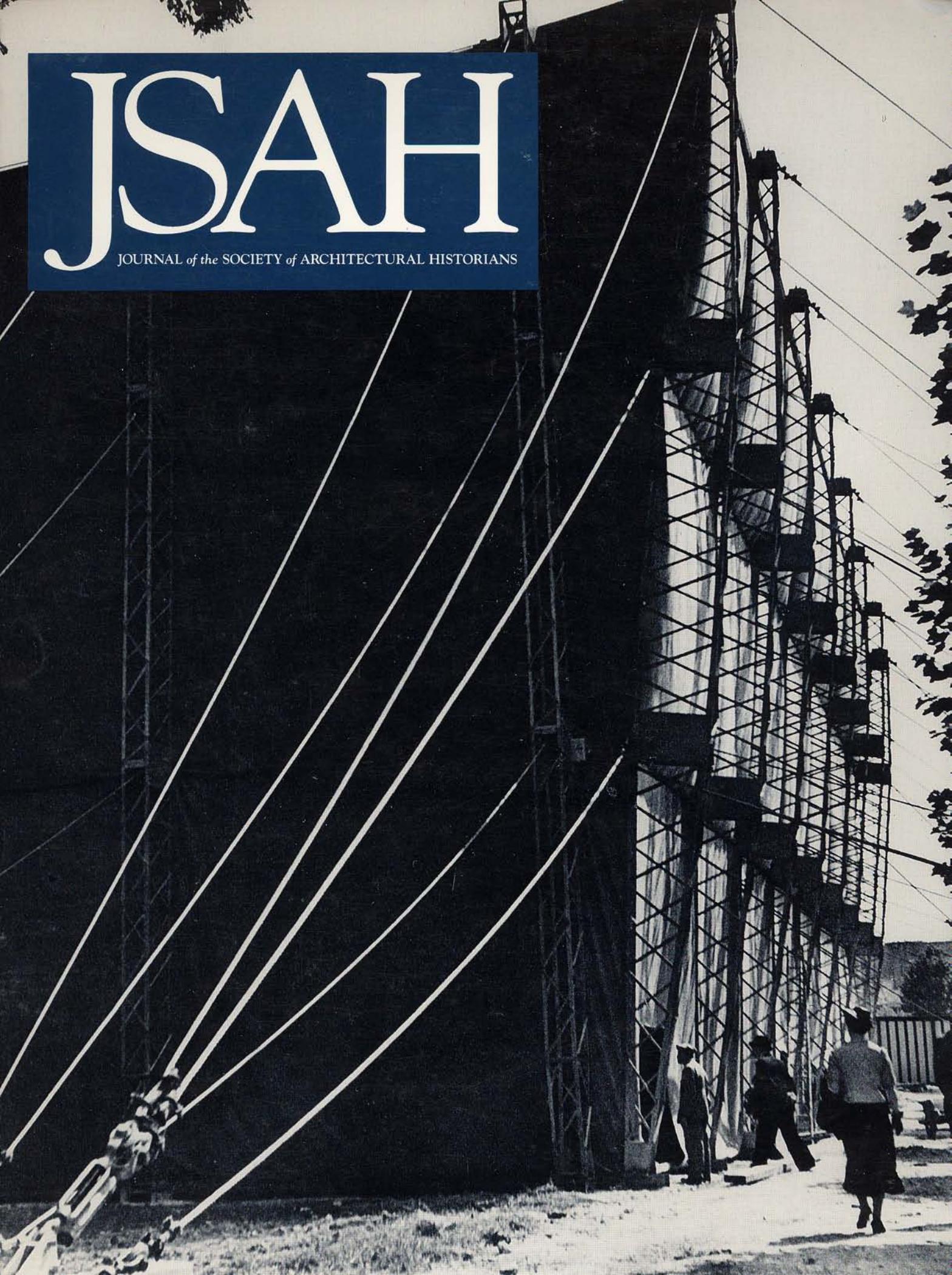


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# Housing Ideologies in the New England and Chesapeake Bay Colonies, c. 1650–1700

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Most of the early settlers in New England and the Chesapeake Bay colonies came from the growing ranks of the English middle class of the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> They came to different parts of the New World from similar cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and a shared architectural heritage. In spite of all that the early settlers had in common, however, the architecture of the New England and Chesapeake colonies followed two significantly different paths.

Scholars traditionally attribute the material and formal differences between the domestic architecture of the two colonies to ecological and climatic differences between the two regions. In this paper, my aim is to explore the inconsistencies that render the ecological and climatic explanations implausible. What I focus on instead are the ideological roots of these architectural differences. The specific formal and material preferences in the domestic architecture of each colony were not, I believe, so much pragmatic responses to ecological and climatic conditions in the New England and Chesapeake Bay regions, as they were attempts to give tangible physical expression to two very different world views: the Puritan and the Anglican.

Although the domestic architecture of New England and of the Chesapeake colonies followed separate paths of development, it is important to note that each, in its developed form, was a variation on the postmedieval three-cell English house.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, an English precedent can be found for virtually every domestic architectural form we encounter in either region of settlement.

After experimentation with various English house forms, by 1650–1700 the preferred house form in the New England colonies was a two-room rectangular-plan house with a double back-to-back fireplace forming a single mass in the center of the house.<sup>3</sup> The typical house was one or two stories, plus an attic, with steep roofs and gable ends, accompanied occasionally by a lean-to, either added or built as part of the original plan. The Parson Capen House, Topsfield, Massachusetts, 1683 [*Figure 1*], and the Whipple House, Ipswich, Massachusetts, 1683 (see *Figure 5*) are good examples. An important

feature of these houses is that they employ wood-frame construction, covered on the exterior by clapboards. In fact an overwhelming majority of New England dwellings were clapboarded, wood-frame structures.<sup>4</sup>

The preferred house form in the Chesapeake colonies was similar to that used in New England, with one major difference. Whereas in New England the fireplaces were placed back to back in the center of the house, in the Chesapeake colonies the fireplaces were placed at the opposite ends of the house. The chimney stacks were either engaged in the end walls or projected out from them. The preponderance of this form in the Chesapeake colonies from the last quarter of the seventeenth century on does not mean that examples of the central-chimney house cannot be found before or even after this period. Archaeological and documentary evidence suggest not only that the central chimney house was prevalent in the first half of the seventeenth century, but also that the early settlers experimented with virtually every known English house form before settling on the peripheral chimney house.<sup>5</sup> In time, we are told, “the dozens of house types characteristic of the English inheritance were pared down to a few well-considered options” and “by the second half of the seventeenth century . . . the central chimney was eliminated in most new buildings” until it “disappeared from the architectural repertoire” of the Virginia gentry “in the eighteenth century.”<sup>6</sup>

Bacon’s Castle, Surry County, Virginia, c. 1665 [*Figure 2*], exemplifies this type of house. It is, however, a misleading example in that throughout the seventeenth century, as much of recent scholarship on the subject documents, an overwhelming majority of domestic structures in the Chesapeake colonies were wood-frame or plank structures.<sup>7</sup> There were altogether, William Rasmussen surmises, “roughly two dozen brick houses” built in the Chesapeake colonies during the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>8</sup> Advertisers in the *Virginia Gazette*, as late as the first half of eighteenth century, made a point of specifying in their advertisements every brick structure on the property. They were far less diligent, on the other hand, in reporting or specifying wood frame construction.<sup>9</sup> This is in part, as Camille Wells argues, “because brick and stone were



FIGURE 1: Parson Capen House, Topsfield, Massachusetts, 1683



FIGURE 2: Bacon's Castle, Surry County, Virginia, c. 1665

exceptional materials worthy of emphasis while framed, plank, and log structures were so commonplace that their construction hardly invited comment.”<sup>10</sup>

Although brick houses were rare in the Chesapeake colonies before the eighteenth century, the Chesapeake colonists appear to have held brick in greater esteem than wood as a building material.<sup>11</sup> A reason may be the common belief around the turn of the eighteenth century that brick structures were better with respect to “uniformity and substance,” and an “improvement” over wood-frame structures.<sup>12</sup> This sentiment was perhaps best expressed by Robert Beverley, who noted in 1705: “The private buildings are also in time very much improved, several gentlemen there having built them-

selves large brick houses of many rooms on a floor.”<sup>13</sup> We should not be surprised to learn that brick was thought more dignified and an “improvement” over wood-frame buildings in the Chesapeake colonies; the sentiment echoes contemporary English preferences and building practices.<sup>14</sup> Spreading from East Anglia to the South and West of England, in the period between the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII and the Civil War, brick became the building material of choice, first among the English gentry and eventually trickling down the socioeconomic ladder with the increased prosperity of the nation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>15</sup> By the second half of the seventeenth century, brick was the building material of choice for even small vernacular houses, similar in form and size to many of the wooden houses being built in the American colonies.<sup>16</sup>

Although it is not surprising to find esteem for brick in the Chesapeake Bay colonies, it is quite surprising to find no indication of a similar sentiment in the New England colonies, considering that the New England settlers were familiar with the same architectural vocabulary and knew of the same material preferences and building practices as their Chesapeake counterparts. We find, for instance, no equivalent in New England for Virginia governor John Harvey’s bustling about to collect money from “the ablest planters” and “masters of ships” for a “brick church” or the Lynnhaven congregation in Virginia taking pride in building, in 1691, a “good, substantial brick church,” with a brick porch and “good and sufficient lights of brick, well glazed, with good glass.”<sup>17</sup> The practice in New England was, in fact, quite different. Throughout the seventeenth century, the meetinghouses of New England remained wood-frame, clapboarded buildings, even when the builder was an accomplished bricklayer, as was Thomas Eames, who was hired to build a meetinghouse in Sherborn, Massachusetts, in 1674–1675.

A number of brick houses were built before the eighteenth century in Boston and nearby Medford by wealthy merchants and land speculators, but these do not appear to have excited the imagination of New England colonists as particularly dignified. They were not thought to have denoted an improvement over wood-frame construction worthy of imitation and the

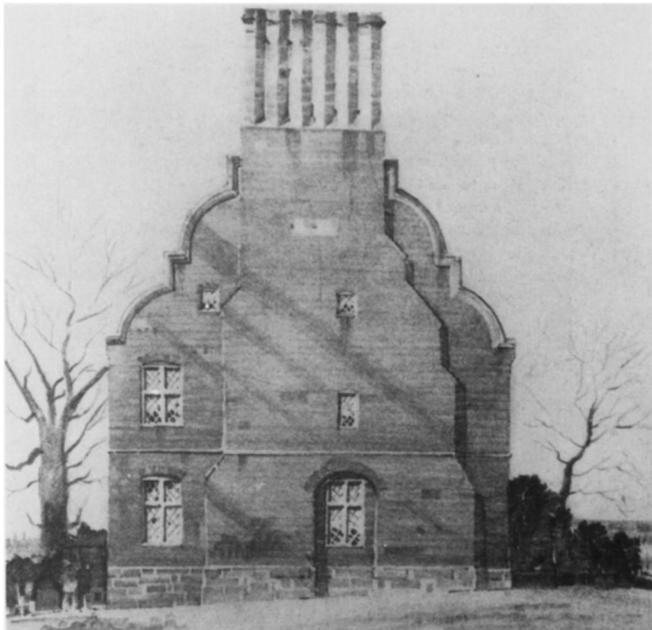


FIGURE 3: Peter Sergeant House, Boston, Massachusetts, 1676

documentary record is silent about them. It is, nevertheless, important to note that when we encounter brick houses in the New England colonies, as in the Peter Sergeant House, Boston, Massachusetts, 1676 [Figure 3], or the Peter Tufts House, Medford, Massachusetts, 1675 [Figure 4], they display characteristics, such as the peripheral placement of chimneys, that are close or identical to those of the Chesapeake house. They are, in other words, unlike the typical wood-frame house in New England with its central chimney. At the same time, when we find descriptions of the wood frame houses in the Chesapeake colonies, most appear to have the same formal features as the brick houses in that region. In short, in both North and South the gabled brick house generally was flanked with tall chimney stacks.<sup>18</sup> Generally speaking, wood-frame houses had central chimneys in New England and peripheral chimneys in the Chesapeake colonies.<sup>19</sup>

The use of wood-frame construction in New England and the admiration for brick in the Chesapeake colonies, and the preference for double, back-to-back fireplaces at the center of the house in New England as opposed to the prevalent practice of placing protruding fireplaces at the opposite ends of the house in the Chesapeake colonies, have been explained by scholars as the result of differences in the English regional origins of the early settlers in each colony and the ecological differences between the two regions of the New World. Though ecological explanations do not play a central role in current scholarship on early American architecture, the explanation forms a deep pattern in scholarship on the topic and has been readily reiterated. In one of the most commonly used surveys of architecture, for example, it is argued that seventeenth-century houses in the American colonies “were based on the

late medieval vernacular of the homeland, but took on different forms in the North and South depending on the point of origin of the settlers and local conditions. . . . In the west of England where Virginia and Maryland colonists had their origin external gable-end chimneys were the rule. And the arrangement also made good sense in the hot humid weather of the Chesapeake Tidewater, since end chimneys can dissipate the heat generated by summer cooking. The central chimney, on the other hand, was characteristic of the east of England, and so it seemed natural to the homesteaders of Massachusetts and Connecticut who originated there.”<sup>20</sup> These explanations are well rooted in scholarship. Climate, the unavailability of material for mortar, even the persistence of old folk customs have been used to explain the taste for timber-framed houses in the New England colonies.<sup>21</sup> Although these explanations appear empirically grounded to a greater or a lesser extent, numerous anomalies render them implausible.

To begin with, the adoption of either house form could not reflect the regional origins of the early settlers, as the various regions in England were well represented in each colony. The original settlers of each colony came from many different regions in England, and within each region, from rural as well as urban areas.<sup>22</sup> For instance, one sample of 2,885 emigrants to New England between 1620 and 1650 shows them to have come from 1,194 English parishes.<sup>23</sup> Some counties, of course, contributed more emigrants than others, nearly 60 percent of immigrants to Massachusetts came from nine counties in the East and South of England and of these a majority came from the three counties of Suffolk, Essex, and Norfolk.<sup>24</sup> Of the remaining 40 percent, a majority came from the western counties of Dorset, Somerset, and Wiltshire. The emigrant population was equally diverse in the Chesapeake Bay region, with a simple majority from southern and western counties of England.<sup>25</sup>

Given the percentages and the level of diversity in the regional origins of the early settlers, one would expect to find a commensurate level of diversity in material preference and house forms of each colony. Instead, we find this diversity only in the initial phase of settlement when, as archaeological evidence suggests, the early settlers in both colonies reconstructed virtually every known English house form before collectively settling on their respective choices. We find the same initial diversity and eventual consensus in building technology. For instance, the brickwork in Virginia, as Daniel Reiff notes, does not “reflect any one area of England . . . since Virginia settlers, and probably the bricklayers too, came from a variety of English counties” and “the type and the generally consistent method of bricklaying became standardized in the colony and established its own traditions.”<sup>26</sup>

In short, in the second half of seventeenth century, what we find in either colony is not diversity, but a level of uniformity in

material preferences and house forms that is unprecedented in any one of the many regions of England from which the colonial settlers originated. For instance, the placement of fireplaces is far from uniform in the domestic architecture of Suffolk, Essex, and Norfolk, from which a good number of New England settlers came. Among the surviving East Anglian small houses and cottages of the seventeenth century, we find examples of both peripheral and central chimney house forms and an overall level of diversity that is curiously absent in the domestic architecture of the New England colonies.<sup>27</sup> Also, even though there are more timber-framed buildings in East Anglia than in other regions of England, East Anglia has a longstanding tradition of building in brick. Essex is known for its elaborate seventeenth-century chimney designs and brickwork, while Norfolk and Suffolk had a good number of brick domestic buildings.<sup>28</sup> The first small houses built entirely of brick date from the late 1630s, and after 1660 brick houses in the “Flemish manner” became a significant feature of the villages of East Anglia.<sup>29</sup>

This is all to say that given the diverse regional background of the early settlers as well as the diverse architectural practices within each region of origin, it is not plausible that English regional variations could have played a significant role in the selection of one or another mode of spatial arrangement in either colony.

It is also problematic to account for the adoption of different house forms in the New England and the Chesapeake colonies in terms of climatic differences between the two regions. Both forms have precedents in regional practices in England. Both types were imported, but neither the formation nor the development of either type in England can be traced to ecological or climatic conditions similar to those in the New

England or the Chesapeake Bay region. In origin, the types do not reveal any particular adaptation to climatic difference, and certainly not to any climatic variations similar to those between Massachusetts and Virginia.

The prevalent explanation for the preference for peripheral chimneys in the Chesapeake colonies as a direct and determined response to the hot and humid summer climate of the Tidewater region—that end chimneys effectively “dissipate the heat generated by summer cooking”—is also fundamentally problematic. The Virginia gentry who adopted the type had relegated cooking to outbuildings as early as the 1620s.<sup>30</sup> In the New England colonies, the move was less dramatic, as cooking was often relegated to the lean-to addition, and generally given a separate fireplace. Considering that in the Chesapeake colonies the fireplace would have been used only when needed to generate heat, any design serving to dissipate that heat to the outside makes little sense. The added expense of peripheral chimneys is hard to justify or account for in climatic terms, since the separation offered no climatic relief from any heat that might have been generated by cooking in summer, or for that matter, during the other seasons.<sup>31</sup>

Marcus Whiffen argues that “the key” to the success of the peripheral chimney house type in the Chesapeake colonies was “central cooling,” since the cross current in the central “passage” created “an air draft in summer.”<sup>32</sup> However, the central passage did not appear in Virginia before the first quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, it could not have played a role in the adoption of the peripheral chimney house type in the second half of the seventeenth century. Also, it is not clear what relief the air draft in the passage, when it was added, may have afforded the two rooms

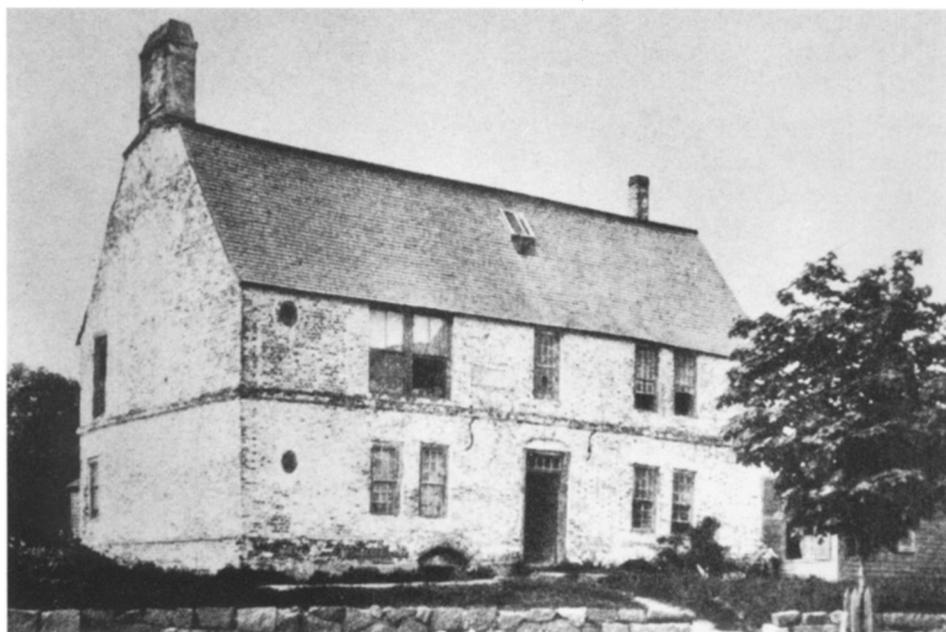


FIGURE 4: Peter Tufts House, Medford, Massachusetts, 1675

that were placed, cross axial to the air current, on the opposite sides of the passage and separated from it by walls and doors. Considering that both rooms had ample cross ventilation provided by casement windows on opposite sides, the passage probably had as much to do with the social courtship practices of Virginia planters as climatic determinants, as has been argued by Mark Wenger.<sup>34</sup>

Of course climatic factors and ecological conditions are always influential factors in the design process. They do not, however, always adequately account for the formal and material choices of the builders. The preference for peripheral chimneys in the Chesapeake colonies and central chimneys in the New England colonies cannot be adequately explained by climatic differences between the two regions. The reason must be sought elsewhere.

Since bricklayers and bricks were available in New England from the very early days, the relative absence of brick houses in the New England colonies is often attributed to lack of lime in that region.<sup>35</sup> Lime was indeed scarce in New England. Yet it could have been obtained, as it was in New London and New Haven, Connecticut, by burning oyster shells.<sup>36</sup> Also, we know that Rhode Island was well supplied with deposits of lime near Providence, worked from 1662.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, if the New England settlers of the coastal regions wanted to build brick buildings, it was not wholly beyond their reach. They did not. This is particularly significant considering that lime was scarce also in the Chesapeake colonies and what was available was obtained by burning oyster shells, as it was in Connecticut. As late as 1751, we find Carter Burwell having to advertise in the *Virginia Gazette* for “any quantity” of “Oyster shells” that “can be delivered at his landing by the last of March” for the construction of Carter’s Grove, James City County, Virginia, 1745–1755. In short, the difficulty of obtaining lime translated into an economic challenge for anyone wishing to build a brick structure in either area.<sup>38</sup>

The expense of a brick house in the seventeenth century may well account for the small number of brick houses built in the Chesapeake colonies during this time period. In fact, the rise in the number of brick houses in the Chesapeake colonies appears to be in direct proportion to the rise in the economic power of the colonial gentry. Fraser Neiman argues that “when [Virginia] gentlemen became interested in displaying their social eminence before the world at large, brick became a handy tool to that end.”<sup>39</sup> It did in part because of the expense of the material, and in part because brick, in the architectural vocabulary of the early settlers, denoted not only “improvement,” but also social status.

Masonry was the construction material of choice for the English gentry.<sup>40</sup> English architectural treatises of the seventeenth century almost exclusively assume brick or stone construction.<sup>41</sup> Brick was particularly popular in the east and

south of England for the mansions and manor houses of the landed gentry from the fifteenth century onward. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, brick became the building material of choice among an increasingly prosperous English middle class as an indicator of wealth and prosperity.<sup>42</sup> It is not coincidental, therefore, that it was also the building material of choice for those who crossed the ocean in search of greater wealth and prosperity.<sup>43</sup>

A prominent feature of the masonry manor houses of the English gentry in the seventeenth century was a conspicuous display of chimneys in multitudes, rising prominently above the roofline as signs of the wealth and the social status of the owner. Fireplaces were adopted late in the development of English domestic architecture. They first appeared in the mansions and manor houses of the English gentry in the late fifteenth century, and slowly moved down the socioeconomic ladder by the second half of the sixteenth century.<sup>44</sup> William Harrison, writing in 1577, informs us:

... [T]here are older men yet dwelling in the village where I remain [Radwinter, Essex] which have noted... things to be marvelously altered in England within their sound remembrance. One is the multitude of chimneys lately erected, whereas in their young days there were not above two or three if so many in most uplandish towns of the realm (religious houses and manor places of their Lords always excepted, and peradventure some great personages).<sup>45</sup>

Chimneys retained their association with the “religious houses and manor places” of “their Lords” and “great personages” and their status as an indicator of wealth and social status throughout the seventeenth century. This may well explain why in both manor houses and middle-class dwellings of the seventeenth century “the number of shafts,” as Cook reminds us, “by no means always corresponded to the number of fireplaces.”<sup>46</sup> We should also note here that the “popularity of ornamental brick chimney-stacks” in England “coincides with a general increase in the use of brick for building.”<sup>47</sup> The two were intimately related as indices of wealth and social status.

Given its social significance in England, it is indeed not surprising to learn that Chesapeake Bay colonists thought brick was “more dignified than frame building” or that “in the second half of the seventeenth century, more and more successful planters chose to build brick chimneys” and that “it was during this period that chimney placement became standardized.”<sup>48</sup> The choice of brick as construction material, when it could be afforded, and the standardized use of two peripheral chimneys as opposed to a central chimney may well have been part and parcel of gathering up the known architectural expressions of gentility that would allow a William Hugh Grove readily to decode the message in 1732, when he wrote that a traveler was more likely to find “spare bed and lodging



FIGURE 5: Whipple House, Ipswich, Massachusetts, 1683

and welcome” at houses where “brick chimbles shew.”<sup>49</sup> The brick chimneys, separated and pushed to and beyond the outer envelope of the house, were not unlike coats of arms that in this instance were prominently displayed on both ends of the house to announce the polite hospitality of a genteel household within.

Insofar as the status of the peripheral chimneys are concerned, it is also important to note the amusing, though often neglected, fact that in the Chesapeake colonies, contrary to common practice in the dwellings of gentry, “most poor-houses took the two-room, central chimney form commonly used for slave houses, kitchen-laundries, and other agricultural outbuildings.”<sup>50</sup> The central chimney, so prevalent in New England, had, in other words, not only a place in the architectural repertoire of the Chesapeake colonies, but also a clear association and significance.

Therefore, if the Anglican planters of the Chesapeake colonies preferred houses prominently adorned by more than one chimney, it was not simply because multiplication of chimneys made good climatic sense; or if they wanted brick buildings and built them when they could, it was not because lime was readily available. Rather, these tangible forms and materials had an intangible reward. They, among other means, allowed these Anglican colonist to reproduce the signs and live through them the dreams and aspirations that had compelled them to take the arduous journey across the ocean and into the “wilderness.” Furthermore, if the peripheral placement of chimneys coincided—when economically feasible—with the use of brick as a construction material, it was because the two were parts of a known syntax in the architectural vocabulary of the early settlers, conveying wealth and social status by associations that have their root in the seventeenth-century

English middle-class emulation of the manor houses of English gentry.

This latter point is best illustrated by the architectural practices of colonists in New England, where the economic challenge of a brick house was met in time only by a few wealthy Anglican merchants and land speculators. Although initially the cost of a brick house may well have been prohibitive to many New Englanders, in contrast to the Chesapeake example, we do not find a rise in the number of brick houses as economic conditions improved among the Puritan settlers of New England in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>51</sup>

This is not to say that the houses of the Puritans in the New England colonies remained modest and inexpensive. On the contrary, a number of wood-frame buildings in New England compare well with or even surpass many Chesapeake brick houses in terms of size, elaboration, and expense. For instance, the simple one-room house built c. 1655 by John Whipple, Sr., who was well to do and served as deputy to the General Court, was considerably enlarged by his son sometime before 1683, and it is one of the larger surviving seventeenth-century houses in North America [Figure 5].<sup>52</sup>

Evidenced by the elaborate and expensive houses of the wealthier Puritan colonists, the Puritans of New England had no ideological quarrel with wealth or its enjoyment. The land holdings and wealth of individuals played a decisive role in determining their social rank in the stratified and hierarchically structured Puritan community. Class distinctions and social hierarchies in Puritan communities were carefully observed and ceremoniously enforced in the interest, Puritans believed, of communal harmony and social cohesion.<sup>53</sup> In the words of William Hubbard, writing in 1676, “nothing can be imagined more remote either from right reason or true reli-

gion than to think that because we were all once equal at our birth, and shall be again at our death, therefore we should be so in the whole course of our lives.”<sup>54</sup>

With respect to questions of wealth, class, and social hierarchy the Puritan beliefs were not fundamentally different from Anglican beliefs, though the Puritans made an effort to alleviate extremes at top and bottom of their social hierarchy. Where the Puritans and the Anglicans differed fundamentally was in matters pertaining to the expression of wealth as distinct from wealth itself. Puritans took strong exception to what they considered to be the inappropriate and boastful display of wealth, depicting “luxury” as “a knife in the hands of a child, likely to hurt, if not taken away.”<sup>55</sup> The sumptuary laws of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the seventeenth century demonstrate that the Puritans of New England discouraged the outward signs of wealth and prosperity as they were understood at the time. Forbidden were “immoderate great sleeves,” “great rayles,” “long wings,” and “slashed clothes,” both popular in Stuart England and the Chesapeake colonies and intended to reveal extravagant undergarments and make a show of wealth and rank.<sup>56</sup>

Puritans were convinced that wealth and the pursuit of worldly goods would interfere with religious convictions and devotion to God. They criticized, as did Robert Cushman, the Chesapeake Bay colonists for their love of riches and the ensuing moral corruption, assuming that wealth is likely to incite a person to “deny God, and to say in pride, and contempt of him . . . who is the Lord.”<sup>57</sup> To avoid the appearance of ungodliness, Puritans shunned boastful expressions of wealth and luxury. These prohibitions applied to all members of the community.

In the Chesapeake colonies expressions of wealth were also subject to control and, where necessary, enforced by law. There, in contrast to New England, however, these concerns were rank- and class-based. For instance, the sumptuary laws of the Chesapeake colonies were enacted not to enforce moderation, but to prevent members of the community from dressing above their rank and social status.<sup>58</sup> The preoccupation of the Chesapeake gentry with the outward display of wealth and rank, expressing refinement, authority, and freedom from manual labor, was not merely a reflection of their worldly interests. The preoccupation had distinct religious undertones.<sup>59</sup> Supported and promoted by the Church of England, gentility represented a social as well as a religious ideal in the seventeenth century. It designated a different order of being, embodying all that was good and virtuous. On the other hand, it was in part the realization of this ideal in form rather than deed, as well as the religious and social institutions that sustained and promoted it as such, that the Puritans of New England found objectionable.

If the Puritans wanted to build brick houses, they could

have built a good number of brick buildings, if not throughout New England, at least in the coastal regions. The cost was well within the means of the wealthier settlers on the coast and in most inland communities. They chose not to. Their lack of reverence for brick as a building material was not shared, of course, by those wealthy Anglicans in the New England colonies who built stately houses, similar to the Chesapeake examples, not only in brick, but also with prominent peripheral chimneys that stood out as telling oddities in a landscape dominated by wood-frame, central-chimney houses. The syntactical connection between peripheral chimneys and brick construction as denotators of gentility and wealth was as apparent to these New England gentlemen as it was to their Chesapeake counterparts. It was equally apparent to the English governor of Massachusetts, who, on his appointment, purchased and moved into the Peter Sergeant House (a brick building with peripheral chimneys) as the only fit house in Boston.<sup>60</sup>

Considering that the significance of the peripheral chimneys and brick construction were not established independently in the Chesapeake colonies, but were a part of the English architectural vocabulary that the settlers brought with them to the New World, as evidenced by the contextual peculiarities of brick houses in New England, as well as the poorhouses, slave quarters, and utilitarian buildings of the Chesapeake colonies, we may well conclude that the particular significance of brick and peripheral chimneys was equally apparent to those Puritans of means who chose not to build brick houses. Their choice may well have had everything to do with this significance. In other words, if the Puritans of New England chose not to build in brick or place their chimneys peripherally, it was because both the material and the form were directly associated with the very social and religious institutions that drove these otherwise typical English men and women across the ocean in search of “Zion in the wilderness.”<sup>61</sup>

We find this abstinence not only in the domestic architecture of New England, but also in its ecclesiastical architecture. Contrary to common practice in the many regions of England from which the New England settlers came, the ecclesiastical buildings of Puritan communities in New England were not masonry structures—as small Anglican parish churches by and large were in England—but wood-frame, clapboarded structures that differed from the domestic buildings of their communities only in plan and size.<sup>62</sup> Conceived as a deliberate liturgical counterstatement to the Anglican parish church, the meetinghouses of New England communities expressed their ideational difference in form as well as building material. Whereas the Anglican parish churches of England, which were carefully emulated and reproduced in the Chesapeake Bay colonies, had long rectangular plans, steep roofs, and gable ends, executed in brick or stone, the meetinghouses of New



FIGURE 6: Old Ship Meetinghouse, Hingham, Massachusetts, 1681

England communities had centralized plans, hipped roofs, wood frames, and clapboards [Figure 6]. Considering the central and emblematic role of these buildings in the life and faith of the community, why the Puritans of New England chose not to build their ecclesiastical buildings, when they could, in customary brick or stone is a question the answer to which takes us back to their beliefs and outlooks.<sup>63</sup>

If, as Edmund Pendleton put it in late 1760s, to build a building “of wood” meant to “be humble” in the architectural vocabulary of the colonists, and brick meant a dignified “improvement,” then the Puritans’ selection of wood as the building material of choice was well in keeping with their views and practices and their disdain for the display of wealth and status for its own sake.<sup>64</sup> Brick and peripheral chimneys, given their significance, would indeed have been inappropriate because of their formal and material association with all that the builders had rejected and left behind.

Although there surely was an element of choice in the selection of building forms and building materials in each colony, and these selections are significant and meaningful, neither central nor peripheral chimneys, neither brick nor wood, are inherently meaningful, inherently simple or com-

plex, aristocratic or plebeian, humble or exalted. These material and formal differences are only potentially and contextually meaningful. They present differences in terms of which and with recourse to which we can conceive and express other, less tangible differences. If the Puritans chose wood instead of brick, and central instead of peripheral chimneys, it was to express a conception of the world whose vision was as opposed to the Anglican vision as wood is to brick, and as the central is to the peripheral.

If the selection of one house type and building material over the other is significant, it is because wood or brick and central or peripheral chimneys formed linguistic paradigms in the shared architectural vocabulary of the early settlers. As such, they allowed the colonists to think, express, and live their differences in material form through the selection of one house form or material instead of and in opposition to the other.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed* (Oxford, 1989), 27–31, 226–232; David Grayson Allen, *In English Ways* (Chapel Hill, 1981), 19–30.

<sup>2</sup> For a description of the postmedieval three-cell English house see J. T. Smith, *English Houses 1200–1800* (London, 1992), 31–111; Oliver Cook, *The English House through Seven Centuries* (Woodstock, Ver., 1983), 137–190.

<sup>3</sup> For archaeological evidence on early houses in New England see James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (Garden City, N.Y., 1977).

<sup>4</sup> See Abbott Lowell Cummings, *The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay, 1625–1725* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979) and Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture* (New York, 1952), 49–95.

<sup>5</sup> For archaeological evidence on early houses in Chesapeake colonies see Ivor Noël Hume, *Martin’s Hundred* (Charlottesville, 1979). Also see Fraser D. Neiman, “Domestic Architecture at the Clifts Plantation: The Social Context of Early Virginia Building,” in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, ed. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens, Ga., 1986), 292–314, and Cary Carson, “Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 16 (1981): 135–196.

<sup>6</sup> Carl R. Lounsbury, ed., *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape* (New York, 1994) x; William Rasmussen, “Drafting the Plans: Pride and Practicality in Virginia’s Colonial Architecture, 1643–1770,” in *The Making of Virginia Architecture*, ed. Charles E. Brownell (Richmond, 1992), 3; Neiman, “Domestic Architecture” (see n. 5), 311.

<sup>7</sup> See Carson, “Impermanent Architecture,” 135–196; Neiman, “Domestic Architecture,” 292–314; Camille Wells, “The Planter’s Prospect,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 28 (1993): 1–31; Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> Rasmussen, “Drafting the Plans,” 1–33.

<sup>9</sup> Wells, “The Planter’s Prospect,” 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> See Morrison, *Early American Architecture*, 134–175.

<sup>12</sup> The house of secretary Richard Kemp, erected in 1639, and described as “the fairest that ever was known in this country for substance and uniformity” was perhaps the first house in Virginia to be built entirely of brick. Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *The Old South* (New York, 1942).

<sup>13</sup> Parke Rouse, *Planters and Pioneers* (New York, 1968), 81. Also, Dell Upton notes: “Virginians maintained a clear hierarchy of preferences. Some choices were better than others for reasons other than cost: they served as distinguishing markers. Certain of these preferences are not surprising. We are not startled to learn, on the whole, brick was thought more dignified than frame building.” Upton, *Holy Things* (see n. 7), 110.

<sup>14</sup> See Timothy Mowl, *Elizabethan and Jacobean Style* (London, 1993), 67; Fischer, *Albion’s Seed* (see n. 1), 269–271. Hugh Braun notes that James I,

shocked by the appearance of his new capital, vowed to change the face of London from sticks to bricks. Hugh Braun, *Old English Houses* (London, 1962), 69. (This is a more modest echo of the classical saying about Augustus, who found Rome a city of brick and left it marble.)

<sup>15</sup> See P. H. Ditchfield, *The Manor Houses of England* (London, 1910), 86; Smith, *English Houses* (see n. 2), 46.

<sup>16</sup> See M. W. Barley, *The English Farmhouse and Cottage* (London, 1961), 199–200; Martin S. Briggs, *The Homes of the Pilgrim Fathers in England and America* (London, 1932), 52–53.

<sup>17</sup> Noted in Wertenbaker, *Old South* (see n. 12), 87, 89.

<sup>18</sup> Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic* (New York, 1922), 47.

<sup>19</sup> The Virginians' preference for peripheral chimneys is perhaps best demonstrated by accounts of original central chimneys being dismantled in time and replaced with peripheral chimneys. See Neiman, "Domestic Architecture" (see n. 6), 311.

<sup>20</sup> Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals* (New York, 1985), 609.

<sup>21</sup> On the importance of climate, see William F. Pierson, Jr., *American Buildings and Their Architects*, 4 vols. (Garden City, N.Y., 1976), 1:54, or Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture, Vol. 1: 1607–1860*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 6; on the scarcity of lime in the Massachusetts Bay colonies, see Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture* (see n. 4), 69. For similar opinions, see also Cummings, *Framed Houses* (see n. 4), 118–125, and Kimball, *Domestic Architecture* (see n. 18), 35–52. On the folk customs and their continuity, see Fischer, *Albion's Seed* (see n. 1), 63.

<sup>22</sup> For instance: "Of intense interest is the fact that the early Sudbury leaders (Massachusetts) represented the three types of English local background, seven of them having lived in open-field villages, six having lived in five English boroughs, and several others having been inhabitants of East Anglian villages." Sumner C. Powell, *Puritan Village* (Middletown, Conn., 1963), xix.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Banks, *Topographic Dictionary of 2885 English Emigrants to New England, 1620–1650* (Philadelphia, 1937).

<sup>24</sup> Fischer, *Albion's Seed* (see n. 1), 31–33.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 236–246.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel D. Reiff, *Small Georgian Houses in England and Virginia* (Cranbury, N.J., 1986), 215.

<sup>27</sup> See Barley, *English Farmhouse* (see n. 16); Cook, *English Cottages* (see n. 2); Clive Aslet and Alan Powers, *The English House* (London, 1985), and Basil Oliver, *Old Houses and Village Buildings in East Anglia* (London, 1912).

<sup>28</sup> Oliver, *Old Houses* (see n. 27), 3.

<sup>29</sup> See Barley, *English Farmhouse*, 199–200.

<sup>30</sup> See Donald W. Linebaugh, "All the Annoyances and Inconveniences of the Country," *Winterthur Portfolio* 29 (1994): 1–18.

<sup>31</sup> According to Lounsbury, "by the beginning of the 18th century, Southerners had completely rethought the configuration of the English house, consigning many service spaces such as kitchen, pantry, and buttery to detached structures or outhouses." (Lounsbury, *Southern Architecture* [see n. 6]). See also Carson, "Impermanent Architecture," 57; Neiman, "Domestic Architecture" (see n. 5), 314; Wells, "Planter's Prospect" (see n. 7), 15–16.

<sup>32</sup> Whiffen, *American Architecture* (n. 2), 7.

<sup>33</sup> Mark R. Wenger, "The Central Passage in Virginia: Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Living Space," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, II*, ed. Camille Wells (Columbia, Mo., 1986), 137–149.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> See Frederick J. Kelly, *Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut* (New Haven, 1933), 20.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. William Wood noted that "Some say there is Lime, but I must confess I never saw any Limestone, but I have tried the Shells of Fish, and I find them to be good Lime." William Wood, *New Englands Prospect* (London, 1634), 17–18 (quoted in Briggs, *Pilgrim Fathers* [see n. 17], 128).

<sup>37</sup> Kimball, *Domestic Architecture* (see n. 18), 36.

<sup>38</sup> For instance, the attempt to build a brick church in Jamestown in the 1630s appears to have strained the resources of the colony, according to a report of Governor John Harvey to the Privy Council, and consequently the church was not completed before 1647. Wertenbaker, *Old South* (see n. 12), 87. Also noted by Upton, *Holy Things* (see n. 7), 60.

<sup>39</sup> Neiman, "Domestic Architecture" (see n. 5), 307.

<sup>40</sup> See Mowl, *Elizabethan Style* (see n. 14), 67; Brian Baily, *English Manor Houses* (London, 1983), 97; Smith, *English Houses* (see n. 2), 46; and Ditchfield, *Manor Houses* (see n. 15), 86.

<sup>41</sup> A case in point is Henry Wotton, *The Elements of Architecture* (London, 1624), 12–28. When we encounter descriptions of timber-frame houses, they are small and modest dwellings. A case in point is Joseph Moxon's *Mechanic Exercises* (London, 1678), which, in a chapter on carpentry, offers a description of a 50-by-20-foot timber-frame house. Noted in Briggs, *Pilgrim Fathers*, 70–71.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, *English Houses*, 111; Fischer, *Albion's Seed* (see n. 1), 269; Aslet and Powers, *English House* (see n. 27), 52–53.

<sup>43</sup> For a formal genealogy of the Virginia brick house and its origins in the manor houses of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, see Daniel D. Reiff, *Georgian Houses* (see n. 26).

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *English Houses*, 45.

<sup>45</sup> William Harrison, *Description of England* (London, 1577), quoted in Oliver, *Old Houses*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Cook, *English Cottages* (see n. 2), 97.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, *English Houses*, 111.

<sup>48</sup> Upton, *Holy Things* (see n. 7), 110; Lounsbury, *Illustrated Glossary* (see n. 6), 74.

<sup>49</sup> Noted in Wells, "Planter's Prospect" (see n. 7), 9.

<sup>50</sup> Upton, *Holy Things* (see n. 7), 221.

<sup>51</sup> Signs of change in the dwelling type, the meetinghouse, and the settlement pattern of the New England colony began to appear not as soon as the economic lot of the settlers improved, but as soon as the Puritan religious fervor lost its intensity in the first half of the eighteenth century.

<sup>52</sup> See David Larkin, June Sprigg and James Johnson, *Colonial Design in the New World* (New York, 1988), 48.

<sup>53</sup> Allen Carden, *Puritan Christianity in America* (Grand Rapids, 1990), 133–157.

<sup>54</sup> William Hubbard, *The Happiness of a People in the Wisdome of their Rulers Directing And in the Obedience of their Brethren Attending Unto what Israel ought to do* (Boston, 1676), 10 (quoted in Carden, *Puritan Christianity*, 137).

<sup>55</sup> William Perkins, quoted in Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1986), 65.

<sup>56</sup> Fischer, *Albion's Seed* (see n. 1), 140–143, 357.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Cushman, *The Sin and Danger of Self-Love Described* (Boston, 1724), 24 (quoted in Carden, *Puritan Christianity*, 152). John Robinson, quoted in Ryken, *Worldly Saints* (Grand Rapids, 1986), 62.

<sup>58</sup> Fischer, *Albion's Seed* (see n. 1), 354–360.

<sup>59</sup> The gentleman was, Talpalar explains, "the symbol of quality, of what was considered the *best* among men . . . ; he was associated per se with the universal desiderata—family, culture, virtue, freedom, talent, wealth, wisdom, . . . he was the personification of the life to be emulated—of the ideal to be achieved, if not exactly of the real." M. Talpalar, *The Sociology of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1968), 247.

<sup>60</sup> See Morrison, *Early American Architecture* (see n. 4), 74.

<sup>61</sup> In this respect, it is important to note a difference between the Puritans of England and those who crossed the ocean to escape "out of the pollutions of the world." The Puritans of New England had the intent and the opportunity to build a new society based on Puritan beliefs and ideals. They left precisely because social and political pressures in England would not allow them to realize the dream of a Puritan utopia. Those who remained in England, on the other hand, did not develop a distinct style of their own, in part because they had to temper and modify their behavior, if not their beliefs. Puritans in England had to play "a double game: outwardly in communion with the Church," and they expressed their faith covertly by employing nonconformist chaplains or attending private nonconformist meetings. Many felt obliged to adjust their manner of behavior, dress, and building to the dictates of the prevailing social structure and norms of the dominant culture. This conformity is best described by an aristocratic Puritan whose minister, at her funeral, tried to explain why a devout Puritan had felt obliged to heed the call of fashion. He stated: "Not that she proudly set herself against the innocent Customs of her Country, or the indifferent fashions of her Age and Quality, which in modesty and civility she complied with, lest she should be too justly censur'd as more Proud and Conceited by her fond Opposition; but yet even her compliance seem'd to be with such indifference and unconcernedness, as to the manner of her Dress, and outward Ornament, as could not but discover that she never

valued any the least respect or esteem upon such poor and pitiful accounts.” (Humphrey Whyte, A Sermon Preach’d at the Funeral of Anne Lady Burgoyne; quoted in J. T. Cliffe, *The Puritan Gentry Besieged 1650–1700* [London, 1993], 172). Lady Burgoyne’s manner of dress would have been subject to a fine in New England. This is not to imply that she would have dressed the same way in New England, rather that in New England, Puritans were free to exercise and to enforce the values, beliefs, and conduct that they were forced to compromise in England.

<sup>62</sup> See Marian Card Donnelly, *New England Meeting Houses of the Seventeenth Century* (Middletown, Conn., 1968).

<sup>63</sup> The Puritan adoption of the English rural folk tradition in New England is a peculiar and significant choice if we consider that the Puritan migration was primarily an urban migration. For instance, two-thirds of the founders of Massachusetts came from urban centers. A third were from large towns and a third from small market towns (Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*, 30). Their counterparts in England should have been far more likely to build houses in brick, than look for inspiration to the rural folk tradition. Also significant is the Puritan choice of clapboards, which gave a distinct appearance to their dwellings. Clapboarding was not a common exterior finish in English domestic architecture of the seventeenth century. When clapboards were used, it was in barns, mills, and similar utilitarian buildings. See Aslet and Powers, *English House* (see n. 31), 58, and Cummings, *Framed Houses* (see n. 4), 130.

Cummings argues that “faced with an immediate problem in a new and

more severe climate,” the early settlers of Massachusetts Bay Colony turned to clapboarding for the protection of their houses “in light of abundant timber reserves,” and “certain that the common practice of plastering or roughcasting, with which the first generation were by then thoroughly familiar, would have been expensive in the New World, where at the outset proper lime had to be imported” (Cummings, *Framed Houses*, 130). It is interesting that where the settlers of New England colonies could follow the familiar and common English practice of plastering or roughcasting, they did not. The choice is significant, considering that plastering in England was developed “as a means of defeating the draughts which found their way through the timber frame as both the wood and the wattle shrank with age.” (Cook, *English Cottages* [see n. 2], 111.)

<sup>64</sup> Noted in Upton, *Holy Things* (see n. 7), 110.

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