

Three Hearths:

A Socioarchitectural Study of Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts Bay Probate Inventories

In New World dwellings, the appearance on the ground floor of a third hearth built exclusively for cooking is the strongest architectural signal of the change from a late medieval world view to a mentality oriented more to comfort and the display of status. Scholars have long thought that the addition of a lean-to, creating the familiar saltbox of the early New England landscape, implied the existence of this cooking hearth. But a new analysis of household inventories suggests otherwise.

During the many years of research that preceded the publication in 1979 of *The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay, 1625–1725*, the author turned often to the recorded probate inventories of the period. These contemporary documents have provided continuing and valuable insights, particularly with respect to the organization of space within the seventeenth-century house. The information is so useful, in fact, that an effort was made to quantify the data for the earliest period at least (1630–60) in a sequence of inventory abstracts that appear as table 3 of the appendix to *Framed Houses*.

Not until the 1980s, however, did the author have time (in the form of a sabbati-

cal leave from Yale University) to make a much more thorough, in-depth study of seventeenth-century room-by-room inventories at Massachusetts Bay. The results were highly illuminating, especially as they can be interpreted to provide further understanding of the house as an architectural organism as opposed to a visually perceived object. On the basis of this subsequent research, it is clear that certain conclusions published in 1979 as a part of chapter 3, "The House Plan," must be modified to some extent. The most important of these is the question of when the rank and file (as opposed to the elite) in early New England began to introduce a third hearth for food preparation into a house plan that had traditionally employed but two hearths on the ground floor—one

for the “best room” and a cooking fireplace for the principal living area. This essay seeks to provide a more precise record of that process.

THE SAMPLE

The sample on which this study is based represents a corpus of probate inventories that wholly or in part categorize household possessions according to the individual rooms of the house in which they were presumably located.¹ The period covered is the seventeenth century, up to and including the year 1700, and the geographic spread embraces the original Massachusetts Bay counties of Suffolk, Essex, and Middlesex, which represented a largely homogeneous cultural area. Metropolitan Boston alone has been excluded because it presents a specific urban situation for which there is very little surviving physical evidence, although even here a certain category of inventories has been analyzed for purposes of comparison. The centers of Salem and Charlestown, included in the sample, can be described in some respects as having taken on an urban complexion before the end of the seventeenth century, but these communities embraced also extensive rural hinterlands reflective of the basically nonurban character of seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay. Table 1 and the appendix detail the specific character and limitations of the inventories consulted for this study.

The primary purpose of the inventory was to identify a man’s worldly goods and to place a value upon them, and in the latter concern for value alone certain distinctive practices can easily be distin-

guished. The longstanding convention among appraisers to separate out the decedent’s clothing and such valuables as “plate” and place them at the beginning or at the conclusion of an inventory is, for example, readily apparent. At the other end of the spectrum, by contrast, one cannot know the exact nature of items that appraisers considered trivial, or at least of lesser value, and that they accordingly lumped under the generic classification “lumber,” an archaic term for odds and ends.

Another problem emerges when one seeks to extrapolate important information from total estate values, which for the current study have been rounded out to the nearest pound. Clearly, one cannot compare totals that consist of real estate and movable possessions with those that represent the movables only. In addition, comparing real estate totals may have more serious hidden pitfalls. It is not easy to determine from the inventory alone whether or not the decedent had already made partial distribution of real estate to his children through deed of gift. One can only suggest, given this possibility, that estate totals taken in the aggregate do at least provide some indication of the relative differences in worth of the individuals appraised.

This study is directed fundamentally toward the investigation of the inventory as a means of amplifying knowledge of the seventeenth-century house. These non-graphic documents cannot unfailingly conjure up precise tectonic shapes, but they can assist in conceptualizing, for example, the differences between the “hall” and “parlor” and the “service” rooms in socio-

TABLE 1. MASSACHUSETTS BAY HOUSEHOLD INVENTORIES, 1636-1700

<i>Sample Numbers</i>	<i>Number of Inventories</i>	<i>Date Range of Inventories</i>	<i>Median Estate Value</i>	<i>Description of Sample</i>
<i>Main Samples</i>				
A	434	1636-1700		Essex, Middlesex, and Suffolk county inventories including complete room-by-room listings
A-1	67		£188	houses of one-room plan
A-2	275		£380	houses of two-room plan with or without other unheated spaces
A-3	18		£380	houses of two-room plan including kitchen without hearth
A-4	56		£591	houses of three-room plan including kitchen with cooking hearth
A-5	18		£965	houses of complex plan
B	102			inventories locating only bedding by room; all other household goods lumped together
C	88			household contents partly lumped or room assignment unclear; key rooms omitted or unlocated
D	133			one or two references to contents by room in largely undifferentiated inventory
<i>Comparative Samples</i>				
E	409	1639-1680		Essex County itemized inventories with no reference to rooms
F	44	1637-1700	£1,450	Boston inventories indicating three or more hearths on ground floor or on ground floor and in cellar kitchen
G	69	1701-1775		Suffolk County rural inventories

cultural rather than in purely physical terms. Conclusions drawn from the inventories with respect to seventeenth-century American attitudes towards the functional organization of domestic space contribute to one's knowledge of the period in much more explicit ways than can the surviving houses themselves, and, indeed, furnish specific insights that do not exist in any

other form.

One must, however, be wary of trying to second-guess the seventeenth-century appraiser or to interpret these documents according to twentieth-century logic. A principal concern of this study is the hearth as an indicator of social change. The samples have in one sense been developed with reference to the incidence and

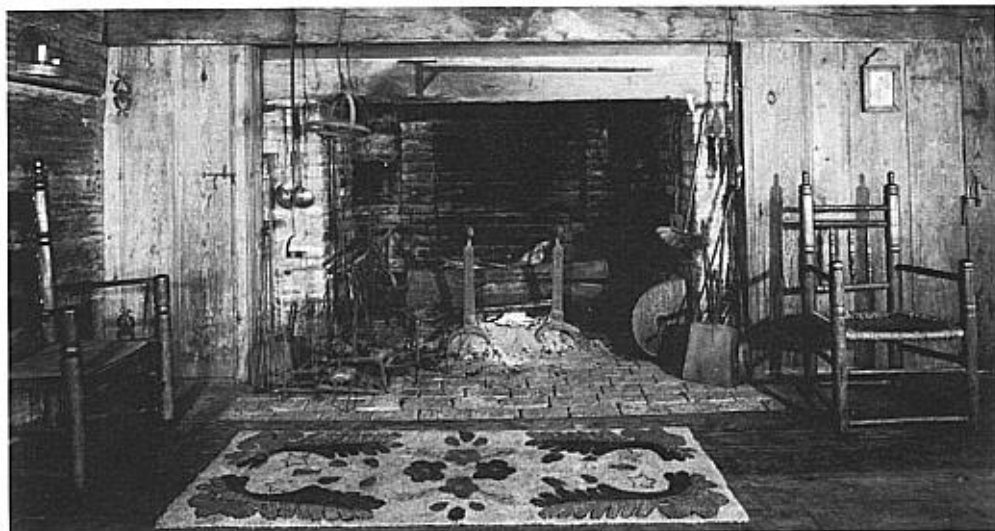


Fig. 1. *The fireplace in the hall, or left-hand room, Witch House, or Old Garrison House, Rockport, Massachusetts, ca. 1700. Photograph by Arthur Haskell, ca. 1930s; courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.*

distribution of hearths throughout the ground story, in particular the location of the all-important cooking hearth (fig. 1). The existence of a hearth is normally identified through the enumeration of fireplace equipment within the various rooms of the house. Depending upon the fire irons described, one can determine the basic character of the fireplace (cooking or noncooking), but the absence of fire irons raises two crucial questions.

On the one hand, inventory references to fireplace tools are inconsistent, as the statistics make amply clear. For the whole Sample A-2 (275 inventories)—houses of two-room plan with or without subsidiary unheated spaces—seventy-nine describe fireplace equipment in both the parlor and hall (or its equivalent). A significantly larger number, 140 inventories, list the fire irons of the cooking hearth only, in contrast to no more than thirteen of the total that list only the parlor hearth equip-

ment. In an additional forty-three cases the appraisers have failed to identify fire irons in any of the ground-floor rooms, although their presence is implied often enough in such characteristic entries as that which itemizes “Brasse, pewter Iron & other things” in the kitchen of Joshua Kent’s house in Dedham, inventoried in 1664.² The pattern of erratic reference to fire irons in houses of more than a single room may be explained, perhaps, on the grounds that the appraisers quite consistently recognized the importance and value of paraphernalia associated with the cooking hearth but were not always particular in their recording when it came to fireplace openings in other rooms of the house that contained no more than a pair of blackened andirons.

On the other hand, and at the risk of second-guessing, the inventories here may be revealing something critical—namely, that the failure to mention fireplace equipment in a principal room does

not necessarily raise questions as to the presence of a hearth but may only attest to the frequency of its use. According to those few important seventeenth-century inventories in the sample for which the structure itself survives—for example, Boardman House, Saugus, built ca. 1687 (inventory 1696); Gedney House, Salem, built ca. 1664 (inventory 1683); and “Narbonne House,” Salem, built ca. 1672 (inventory 1695)—not all of the principal rooms throughout the house were furnished with hearth irons.

An examination of that small number of inventories for the upper echelons in society may explain this omission. The 1693 inventory of the surviving Turner House in Salem (House of the Seven Gables), built about 1668 with later additions, shows that nearly all of the fireplaces as then constituted were equipped with the proper hardware, and this limited category of inventories consistently includes items that indicate a fairly complete outfitting of fireplaces, up and down, in houses of the well-to-do. One infers that the comforts associated with affluence are reflected here, in contrast to the far more practical life of rural farmers and artisans, where a “best room” fireplace, to say nothing of those in its chambers, may have seen fairly infrequent use, even to the extent, perhaps, of lacking fireplace equipment altogether. The 1696 inventory of the Boardman House, for example, lists no irons at all in the best room or the chambers.

This study assumes that appraisers employed the same room nomenclature that occupants used and that they for the most part listed furnishings and goods in

the rooms in which they found them.³ Still, one of the more perplexing aspects of the inventories rests in those occasional examples in which the contents of a room in an otherwise fully comprehensible inventory simply do not seem to make sense according to the familiar logic either of the seventeenth century or the present day. Encountering such anomalous objects as, for example, a currycomb and a Bible as the only contents of a principal room is far from common, but it occurs just often enough to create dismay. One can only assume perfectly logical reasons for such seeming anomalies, situations for which the appraisers saw no need to supply further explanation.

THE INVENTORIES

There are acknowledged dangers in trying to erect houses over foundations imagined from room-by-room inventories. Yet the prevalence of the familiar New England “saltbox” or lean-to house throughout the colonial period—to the extent that it has become almost an architectural cliché—invites a compelling question: can these documents at large be seen to bear any significant relationship to the model of the lean-to house? To what extent do the inventories and the existing buildings complement one another? The present study seeks to address the inquiry through quantitative analysis of 757 room-by-room inventories of seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay. Before proceeding, however, the background and development of the seventeenth-century lean-to house form in England needs to be briefly examined.

Among a number of modern English

historians, M. W. Barley has most clearly related the development of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century vernacular housing in England to radical changes in life-style.⁴ At the middle of the sixteenth century, the English peasant's house consisted basically of a single-cell, multipurpose living area called the hall, with a fire burning in the center of the floor on an unenclosed hearth, its smoke escaping through a hole in the roof. Two smaller service rooms, a buttery and a dairy, were ranged along one side of the hall. Among the more important modifications of the house as a result of the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century cultural revolution in England were the introduction into the more modest houses of the English village yeomanry of a chimney stack and the addition of a new room called a parlor for more polite uses than had been possible in the very public hall space.

Particularly in the more easterly, "metropolitan" areas of seventeenth-century England, service accommodations increasingly came to occupy an inferior position in the plan. The resulting house form, consisting of hall and parlor ranged on either side of a central chimney stack with subsidiary ground-story service rooms very often located at the rear, was fully developed in East Anglia when the first New England settlers set sail for the New World in the 1620s and 1630s.⁵ The form defined in this way was transplanted quite literally to America, as can be seen to best advantage in New England's earliest surviving framed house, the Fairbanks House in Dedham, built about 1637 (figs. 2 and 3).

An inventory taken in 1668 at the death of the first Jonathan Fairbanks reveals through the contents of the rooms and their implied domestic functions that little change had occurred in the English yeoman's attitudes about the organization and outfitting of his house as a result of the Atlantic transmigration. The hall was clearly the living center with cooking hearth and all necessary implements for preparation and consumption of food, along with tables, a chair and "form" (or bench), and four spinning wheels. The parlor contained the best and more formal furniture as well as the best bed for the head of the household and his important military arms. In the "parlor chamber" (directly above the parlor) there was more bedding, a chest and box, and household storage. The "hall chamber" (which never had a hearth and remains unfinished to the present day) was furnished with "many small tooles for turning & other the like worke," wool and yarn, hops in a bag, and other containers for the storage of vital household necessities. The lean-to at the rear had been added by the time the inventory was taken and consisted then, as it does today, of two spaces. The larger area was distinguished as the "Roome called the new house" and was given over to the storage of husbandry tools and dairy equipment, while the smaller room next to it was called the "Chamber in the new house." It contained only grain, peas, hemp, flax, and hops.⁶ A tax levied in 1648 upon some eighty houses that then comprised the village of Dedham (all but seven of which were valued) reveals that Jonathan Fairbanks occupied a place among the



Fig. 2. *The Fairbanks House, Dedham, ca. 1637, photograph taken ca. 1880. Courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.*

upper third of his fellow townsmen. The minister's house was ranked highest, at £45, with one other person's at £40. The houses of twenty persons were valued between £18 and £33, including that of Jonathan Fairbanks at £28. The balance, fifty in number, were appraised at from £2 to £16.⁷ These figures make plain that the substantial lean-to house which we have come to accept as a seventeenth-century norm was undoubtedly but one form among a larger, more representative group that included single-room "cottages" as well as impermanent housing. Just as importantly, the Dedham tax rate, when compared with the probate records for the same community, would suggest that significant numbers of the colonial populace at a lower socioeco-

nomie level were less apt to have their estate inventories recorded on a room-by-room basis. Fourteen room-by-room inventories are on file for the twenty-two persons in Dedham whose houses were valued at £18 and higher, while no more than thirteen room-by-room inventories were recorded for the larger balance of fifty persons with houses rated between £2 and £16. This latter statistic represents a critical limitation in terms of underrepresentation. This study, however, acknowledges inherent bias in that room-by-room inventories, coinciding in broad socioeconomic terms with the surviving houses themselves, relate to only a portion of colonial society.

The analysis at large has revealed, through nomenclature and domestic func-

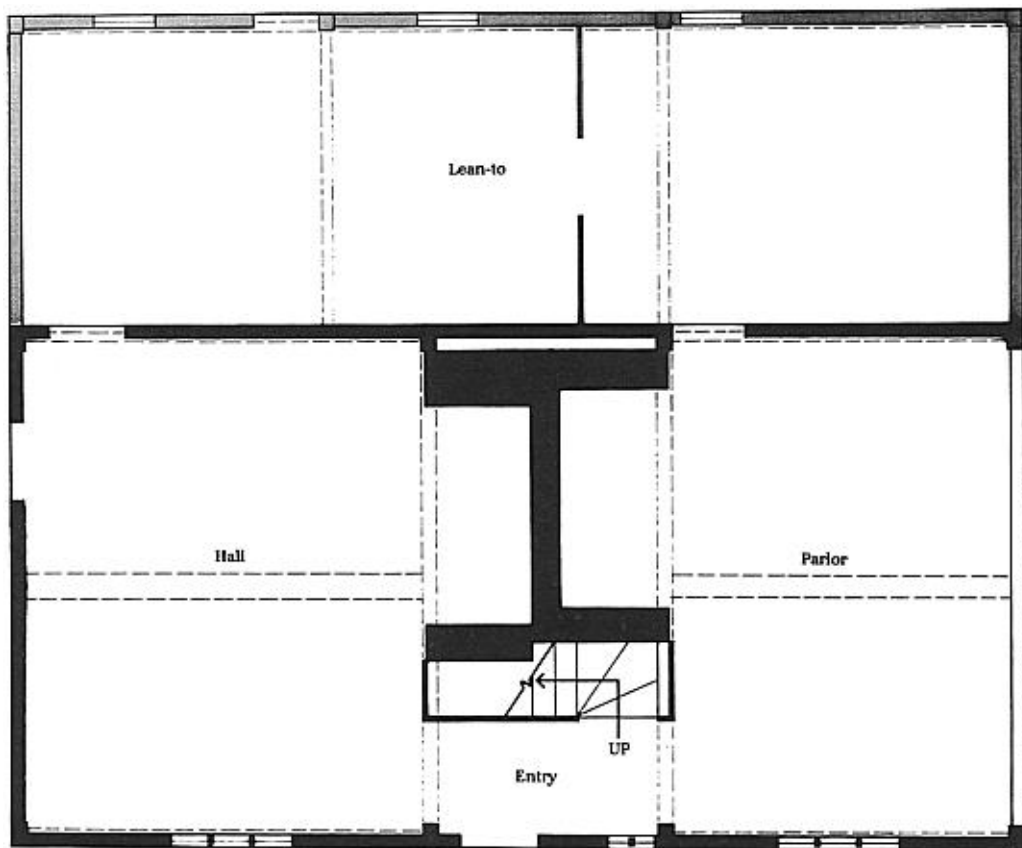


Fig. 3. *The ground-floor plan of the Fairbanks House. Drawn by John S. Garner; courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.*

tions as indicated by the contents of individual rooms, that a surprisingly large number of recorded room-by-room inventories seem to define the characteristic lean-to house that has survived. In the inventories, service functions are almost always accompanied by room terminology that implies a subsidiary relationship to the mass of the house. Consequently, there is ready identification with the traditional lean-to, which after 1680 began to be an integral part of the house in purely structural terms (see fig. 6). At the heart of this seemingly simple observation, however, is a much more complex question: at just

what point did the main auxiliary service room, which came to be known as the kitchen, receive a cooking hearth of its own? The answer to this question is critical if, as this study contends, the number and diversity of hearths in the seventeenth-century house serve as a leading indicator of social status and progressive developments.

SAMPLE A-1: HOUSES OF SINGLE-ROOM PLAN

This first class of inventories can be defined as suggesting a house of no more than a single principal room having a loft

or overhead chamber, with or without subsidiary service appendages. No more than sixty-seven of the 434 inventories in Sample A indicate a house of this type, thought to represent the large majority in seventeenth-century settlements both in economic and practical terms: a single-room house was less expensive and made more sense in the beginning stages of any “frontier” society. In twenty-six cases, appraisers labeled the single principal room the “lower room”; in as many as fourteen instances, however, the same space is referred to as the parlor. Given the multipurpose nature of this room, one would more readily expect “hall” (found in nine of the inventories), “kitchen” (two inventories), “fireroom” (four inventories), or “house,” in the archaic sense of that word meaning hall (four inventories). The single room above is almost invariably described as “the chamber.”

The very low statistical incidence among the inventories for the house of single-room plan can be explained in several ways. At the outset, and in light of common sense alone, one might expect fewer room-by-room inventories for houses that consisted only of a single principal room rather than several rooms needing differentiation. At a somewhat more complex level, however, structural analysis has determined that of the many surviving houses at Massachusetts Bay built during the first period, more than half began as houses of single-room plan and were added to within a relatively short time (fig. 4).⁸ This situation can sometimes be determined from the inventory when appraisers have specified “old” and “new”

rooms, but the far greater part of Sample A at large contains no such helpful language. One assumes, nevertheless, that many of these documents reflect houses that had achieved their two-room status through a pattern of growth.

The situation becomes immediately clearer in an analysis of Sample E, consisting of 409 inventories for Essex County between 1639 and 1680 that do not enumerate household contents on a room-by-room basis. The majority of these inventories (349) can be categorized quite simply as reflecting very modest houses with barely enough furnishings for a single room (and loft) and (when mentioned) with fireplace equipment for only a single cooking hearth. Only the balance (sixty inventories) can be defined—by the amount of contents, reference to fireplace equipment for two hearths (one cooking), or by language in the accompanying will—as houses that quite clearly were composed of two (or more) principal rooms.

More than one-half of the estates in Sample E were valued at less than the relatively low figure of £200, and no more than eleven were worth more than £1,000. Clearly, these data correct the bias inherent in the very limited number of single-room or “one-over-one” inventories in Sample A-1 and suggest, as the 1648 Dedham tax rate also implies, that single-room lofted “cottages” may well have dominated the New England landscape throughout much of the seventeenth century.

**SAMPLE A-2: HOUSES OF
TWO-ROOM PLAN**

By far the largest number of room-by-room inventories in Sample A define houses containing two or more principal rooms. By the second quarter of the seventeenth century, the “improvements” in English vernacular housing had brought about, among a number of developed house forms, one particular plan consisting of two principal rooms, a parlor or “best” room and a hall that served as the main living room, both with chambers overhead and often with additional subsidiary service space on the ground floor. A majority of the seventeenth-century inventories at Massachusetts Bay reflects this English model. A total of 275 invento-

ries define houses consisting of two principal rooms, one with cooking hearth, with or without any mention of subsidiary service rooms.

Within this total are twenty-three problematical inventories, twenty of which create uncertainties of interpretation through the presence of a “shop.” It is not entirely certain whether this space constituted a third principal room in the house plan, a subsidiary room, or an independent structure, although evidence would suggest that the nondomestic seventeenth-century shop was certainly at times an integral part of the house. The other three inventories in this group include reference to a “study,” which architectural historians have come to assume was located in the second story. It

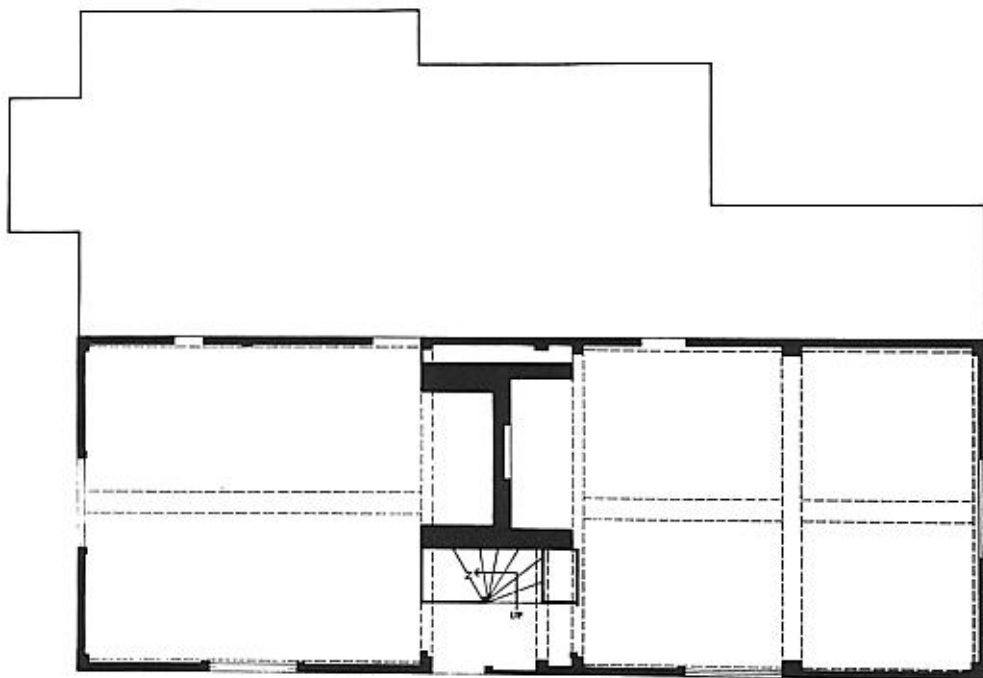


Fig. 4. Ground-floor plan of the Whipple House, Ipswich, ca. 1655; the house began as a dwelling of single-room plan and received the right-hand addition (probably with lean-to) by 1683; extensions at rear are later. Drawn by John S. Garner; courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.

cannot be proved, however, that such was invariably the case. The twenty-three inventories that mention a shop or study have been included in the totals because the house plans of which they were (or were not) an integral part are otherwise organized in terms of two principal heated rooms.

When examined in detail, the twenty inventories that include a shop reveal a good deal of illuminating information. Ten, or one-half, of the examples can be identified as urban or within the Boston orbit (Charlestown, Salem, Cambridge, and Roxbury), while the remaining half are clearly rural (Dedham, Watertown, and "New Cambridge," one of several early designations for present-day Newton). Each group maintains a distinctive professional and estate value profile: within the urban group the shop or its chamber contained merchandise in five cases and medicines in two. Only two shops contained artisanal equipment—that of Faithful Rouse, a Charlestown saddler whose 1664 inventory locates "sadler's ware in house & shop," and that of David Mattox of Roxbury, whose 1654 inventory does not state his trade but whose shop contained "workeing tooles."¹⁰ If the estate values for Rouse (£443), Mattox (£54), and the Salem shoemaker John Kitchin (1676, £398), whose shop contained only stored grain, are excluded, the remaining seven individuals with presumed mercantile or professional associations left an average estate of £871.

The rural group picture is quite the reverse. Seven of the ten shops were given over to artisanal equipment, in six cases to weavers' looms and tackling and in the sev-

enth to saddlers' wares. The remaining three shops contained a miscellany of items not easily categorized, although that of Lieutenant Joshua Fisher of Dedham (1672) contained also a steel scale and beam and a "Counter."¹¹ With the exception of the Fisher estate, valued at £1,145, the balance here averaged £299.

Although it is seldom advisable to argue for specific architectural shapes from the language of the inventory, these twenty shop inventories can be interpreted as providing some information at least about the physical relationship of house and shop. More or less as normal procedure throughout the seventeenth century, the inventories, in detailing real estate, distinguish between houses and barns, or, more generally, "out housing." It is probably quite significant that, in following this convention, nineteen of the twenty inventories fail to mention a shop in any way that might suggest a separate structure. The single exception is Joshua Fisher's inventory in 1672, which itemizes the "dwelling-house & Leantoes adjoining the brewhouse the Shop & barne." The Mattox inventory of 1654 refers specifically to saddlers' wares in "house & shop," but the real estate listing does not include the shop as a separate item.

Eighteenth-century documents and the buildings as well would indicate that the shop was increasingly conceived as a separate structure or was included in the complex of "out housing." This tradition, once established, lingered throughout the nineteenth century. The seventeenth-century inventories, on the other hand, tend

to indicate that only rarely, as in the case of Joshua Fisher, was the shop apparently an entirely separate structure.

Further proof that the shop was more often than not a part of the house can be found in the enumeration of contents of the “shop chamber.” Within the twenty shop inventories, only four include a shop chamber, three of which contained domestic furnishings as though the room were part of the house. The evidence is not as impressive here as it is for shops associated with more ambitious house plans. However, two in particular feature rather precise language. The inventory for Deacon Thomas Linde of Charlestown (1672) identifies a shop chamber (which contained merchandise) but, more importantly, a chamber “next [the] shop,” the contents of which, including a bed, were completely domestic.¹² And in that same year, the appraisers of the estate of John Witherell in Watertown included reference among the named spaces within the house to the “roome called the shop.” Its contents were drink barrels and other containers, a churn, powdering tub, chest, and a form.¹³ Both entries suggest that these shops were indeed a part of the house.

Based on an analysis of all 275 basically two-room inventories in Sample A-2, the most common designation of the principal ground-floor rooms was as follows:

parlor and kitchen	89
parlor and hall	86
hall and kitchen	29
lodging room and fireroom	10

All of these terms and a few others appear at rare intervals in combinations that also define the best room and main living area—for example, lodging room and fireroom; parlor and dwelling room; parlor and fireroom; bedroom and kitchen; and lodging room and kitchen. In addition, the inventories use some twenty non-generic terms, such as “outward room” (associated usually with the hall or kitchen), old or new room, or east and/or west room, together with references to at least ten other clearly differentiated spaces that are nevertheless unnamed.

These data raise interesting questions at once concerning nomenclature. The term parlor for the best room has the highest incidence of use, a total of 189 examples. Because this room almost invariably contained the parents’ best bed, it is not surprising to find the alternative terms chamber, lodging room, or bedroom. The term chamber is the most interesting inasmuch as ambiguity existed in seventeenth-century England and New England over the precise location (upstairs or down) of the room identified terminologically as a chamber. In seven examples, the further qualification of chamber as a “bed chamber” or “lodging chamber” clearly underscores the parlor’s auxiliary function as site of the parents’ best bed, and such terminology as “lower chamber” (Robert Mason, Dedham, 1667)¹⁴ and “chamber over the bedd chamber” (Michael Bacon, Dedham, 1649, in which the two principal ground-floor rooms were designated respectively as hall and “Bedchamber”)¹⁵ is of particular interest in linking the term chamber with a major ground-floor space.

More startling, and not easily explained, are the twenty-nine instances in which the term hall replaces that of parlor for what is clearly the best room. This nomenclature may reflect English regional differences or another logic altogether. It is probably significant that the twenty-nine hall and kitchen estates included two ministers and fifteen persons from the Charlestown/Cambridge/Salem urban block and that the median estate value for this small group was £489, compared with the median of £380 for the entire 275-estate sample of houses of basically two-room plan. Terminology here, in other words, appears to have some direct link to socio-economic status. One interesting example is the extant Eleazer Gedney House in Salem, ca. 1664 (Sample A-4), which consisted originally of a two-and-one-half-story hall block with lean-tos at the right end and at the rear. Ground-floor rooms in the resulting central-chimney house plan are identified in the 1683 inventory for the estate of upwardly mobile shipwright Gedney as the "hall" (with best bed and finest furnishings), the "parlour or lento" at the right (with bedding, but by no means a "best" room), and "kitchen" with cooking hearth in the rear lean-to.¹⁶

The most interesting feature of the whole Sample A-2, however, is the very real ambivalence that appears to have accompanied the term kitchen, as opposed to hall, as the preferred name for the main living room. The principal ground-floor room containing the cooking hearth is called the kitchen in 126 instances and the hall in ninety-five cases. This same uncertainty of nomenclature can be found in English

inventories as well, a circumstance that Barley has associated with the ongoing changes that accompanied late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English housing developments. As first found in houses of all classes, Barley has stated, the kitchen took the form of a separate outbuilding, a situation that persisted into the late sixteenth century. After 1625, the kitchen became more and more commonly a part of the house, though not invariably so. By the 1630s in County Norfolk, replacement of the term hall with kitchen had become a "new habit," and Barley found similar inventory language in Sussex as well. "These are the earliest instances," he has written, "of what later became a widespread [English] practice, to downgrade the hall to a kitchen where it continued to be used for cooking."¹⁷ These changes in the making were clearly a part of the New Englander's cultural baggage, and ongoing ambivalence existed as late as the 1670s; the 1679 inventory for the estate of Paul White of Newbury, for example, refers to the "Hauill or great kittchin,"¹⁸ and a year earlier the will of Samuel Symonds of Ipswich refers to the east end of his dwelling house as the "kitchin or hall."¹⁹

Massachusetts Bay terminology for the house of basically two-room disposition, then, was overwhelmingly parlor and kitchen or parlor and hall throughout the seventeenth century, and it is not surprising to discover that the inventories make virtually no distinction between the contents or working functions of the "kitchen" or "hall." The fundamental uses for rooms throughout the house in the 275 Sample A-2 inventories are those with which his-

torians have come to be thoroughly familiar. The parents' best bed was located in the parlor or its equivalent in 183 unequivocal instances. In thirty-eight certain cases, however, the best bed was located in the second story, a progressive trend. Normally, these inventories indicate, the upper chambers were given over to additional bedding for other members of the household and to the storage of domestic implements and tools, grain, wool, cheese, and other provisions.

The kitchen or hall, as traditionally conceived, remained the multipurpose center of all domestic activities throughout the seventeenth century, including, importantly, food preparation in its various stages and food consumption. Hearth irons here invariably included such implements as spits, trammels, hooks, and an occasional jack, while pots, kettles, skillets, and pans are the more common among a wide range of cooking utensils. In some thirty-eight of the 275 inventories showing the cooking hearth in the kitchen or hall (or equivalent), however, the cooking gear was stored in a subsidiary service room.

This fact introduces the highly significant consideration of service appendages, which points again to comparisons with contemporary English practices. At least 125 of the 275 inventories in Sample A-2 mention only the two lower principal rooms and do not refer to any subsidiary spaces. Other documentary evidence and the surviving buildings themselves corroborate this statistical finding. Seventeenth-century building contracts, for example, more often than not specify

dimensions for a house of two-room disposition without subsidiary appendages.²⁰ A few rare examples, such as the Capen House in Topsfield, completed in 1683 upon the model of a two-room, central-chimney plan without appendages, have remained in that state to the present day (fig. 5). A far larger number of seventeenth-century structures survive that were clearly built in this form but have been subsequently enlarged through the addition of lean-tos or other elements subsidiary to the mass of the whole house.

Taken with surviving physical evidence, the documents imply a progression (though not a strictly chronological one) from a plan consisting of two principal ground-floor rooms, more often than not with a cellar that served such basic service functions as those associated with the dairy and storage of drink and foodstuffs, to a two-room plan that incorporated additional subsidiary ground-floor space in response to a developing demand for increased and/or improved accommodations, or, simply, to family growth. The house frame that incorporated an integral rear lean-to from the outset had evolved by about 1680 at Massachusetts Bay (fig. 6), although earlier physical evidence exists for lean-tos that were appended as an original part of construction.²¹

Within the 275 inventories comprising Sample A-2, 150 reflect a plan of two principal ground-story rooms and additional rooms whose contents and/or nomenclature indicate that they are subsidiary. In function the additional rooms were given over almost entirely to service and auxiliary sleeping. The service room

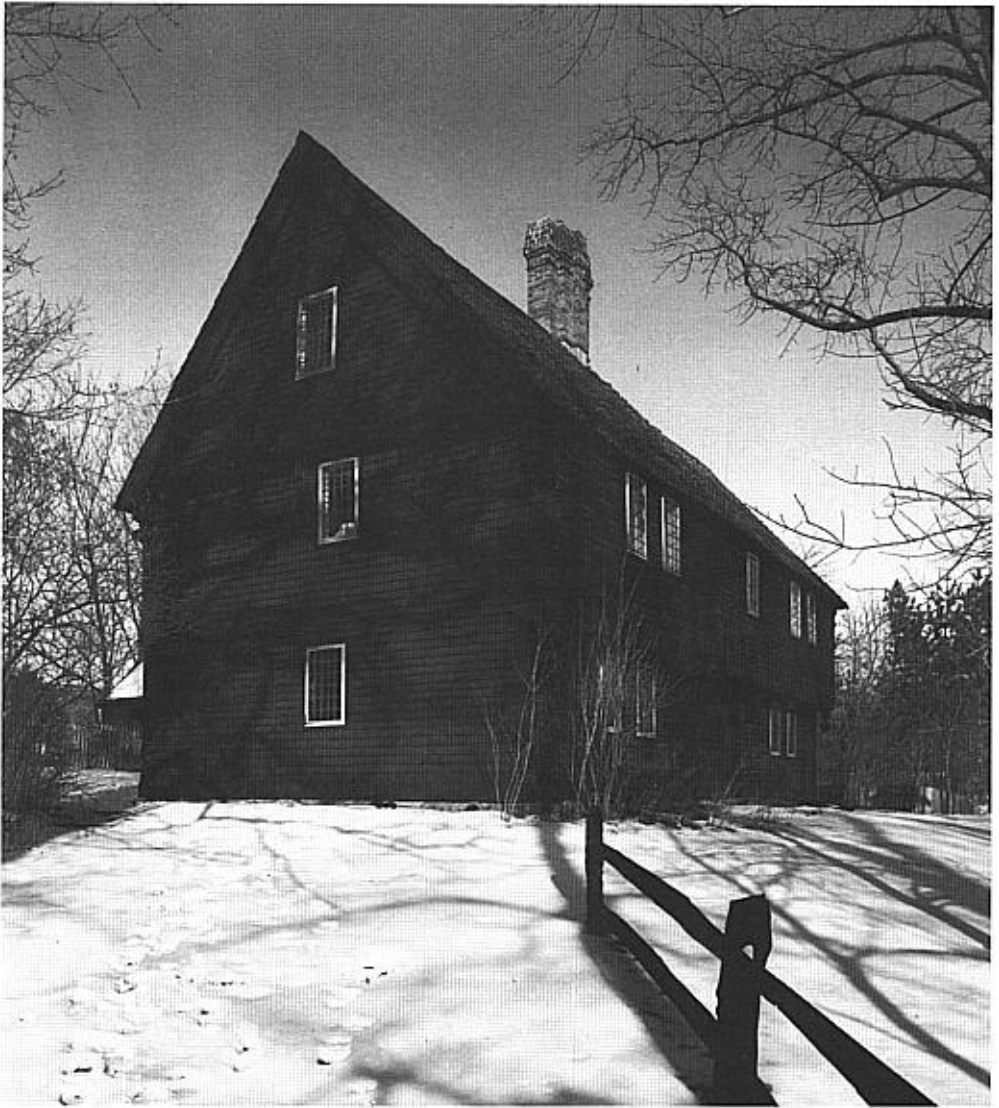


Fig. 5. *The Parson Capen House, Topsfield, 1683, as restored. As this view shows, the house was only one room deep, built without a lean-to. The chimney top is a conjectural restoration. Photograph by David Bohl, 1989; courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.*

included varying amounts of paraphernalia associated with dairying, bolting, brewing, and spinning together with the storage of food and drink, cooking implements, and tools. In these 150 inventories, auxiliary rooms for sleeping seldom if ever contained more than a single bed and perhaps a chest or chair, which hints at limited and

hence, presumably, subsidiary size.

Among this subgroup of 150 inventories, the single most common designation of subsidiary space is “leanto” (fifty-one examples), to which may be added thirteen “leanto chambers.” The physical evidence once again makes it possible almost certainly to assume a lean-to at the rear or,

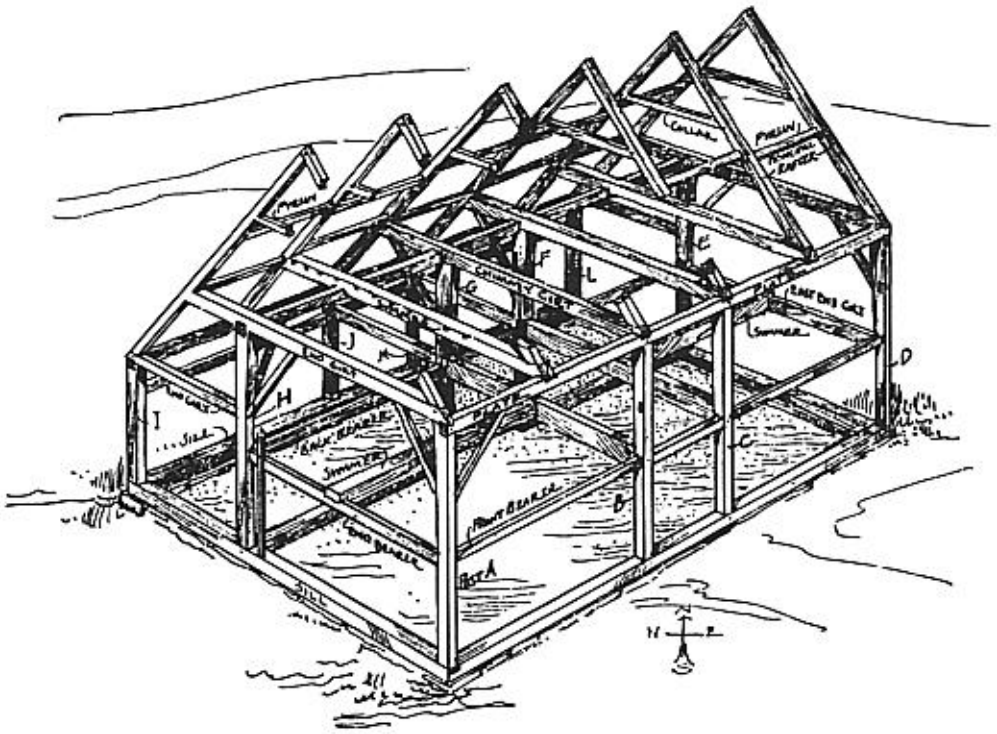


Fig. 6. "Frame of an original leanto house, Whipple-Matthews House, Hamilton," 1680-83; the dwelling's lean-to was integral to its initial construction. Drawing in Norman Morrison Isham, *Early American Houses* (The Walpole Society, 1928); courtesy Dover Publications, Inc.

occasionally, at the end of the house. Not infrequently the language of the inventory is more explicit, as, for example, a "Kitchin Lento" in the parlor and kitchen house of Thomas Bird, Sr., of Dorchester (1667)²² or the "Litle chamber in the Leanetoo" in the house of Edward Clapp, also of Dorchester (1665).²³ Such inventory terms as "back room," "little back room," "back-side," "room backside ye chimney," "room next kitchen," or "room by parlor" also imply in varying degrees of certainty a subsidiary space.

Here the question arises whether the appearance of a room "next" the kitchen or parlor coincides with the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century house plan of

County Suffolk in England, in which service accommodations extended beyond the hall in a lateral two-story block and created thereby a three-cell arrangement.²⁴ Early archaeological evidence for houses disposed upon a plan longer than that normally found in standing houses of New England has been found in Plymouth Colony and in Maine.²⁵ The bulk of the inventories at Massachusetts Bay, however, dates to the second half of the seventeenth century and, significantly, rarely records the presence of space above the rooms described as "next" the kitchen or parlor. If indeed ranged in a lateral direction, therefore, it could be argued that these rooms were located in a single-story subsidiary extension.

Of the named service rooms in this subgroup, “buttery” remains the most common throughout the century. Thirty-six listings of buttery occur (in two cases the inventories indicate two butteries), in contrast to only three dairies, one “milkhouse,” and no more than one or two references each to such additional specialized service areas as “cheese room,” “wash house,” “brewhouse,” “mault house,” “quarne house,” and “corn house.” At least five inventories refer to “meal houses.” For the all-important drink and dairy functions within the service complex, the inventories reveal an interesting contrast: for the thirty-six recorded butteries, drink is found in only four and dairy implements in only thirteen cases, whereas thirty of the ninety-nine cellars in the subgroup of 150 inventories contained drink, and twenty-two contained dairy equipment. The cellar was clearly important, also, for the storage of food. Fruit, vegetables, dairy products, and meat were listed there in thirty-six cases, and seven of these listed meat contained in powdering tubs. The cellar inventories list an additional eighteen of these powdering tubs, the primary function of which was the salting down of meat.

If not used principally for drink and dairy functions, what, then, was the more common use for the seventeenth-century “buttery” at Massachusetts Bay? Of the thirty-six inventories recording butteries before 1700, nineteen, or roughly half, mention specifically the storage of cooking and/or eating gear for use in the kitchen or hall. This fact also reflects the upgrading of the kitchen or hall to the status of a “sitting room” and casts the buttery very clearly

into a role as ancestor of the later pantry, used to store pots and pans. While English parallels can be found, it is tempting to suggest that the increasingly altered role of the buttery on this side of the Atlantic is to be associated with the American innovation, especially noteworthy in New England, of the underground cellar, which almost from the start assumed the functions of the traditional above-ground English dairy and provided a place for the storage of drink and other foodstuffs. The underground cellar was both early and widespread in New England, in contrast to its marked infrequency in England at the time, and data from Sample A support these uses for the space: in 240 examples—the balance of inventories in Sample A and all inventories including references to cellars in Samples B, C, and D—drink or drink vessels are listed in eighty-three and dairy equipment in fifty-three cases, while food including dairy products, fruit, vegetables, and meat are listed in as many as 117 examples, to which may be added some forty powdering tubs. No effort has been made to count the numerous barrels and hogsheads found in cellars for which contents are not mentioned, but these almost certainly were also associated with either drink or the storage of food.

The terminology for auxiliary ground-floor sleeping rooms within the subgroup of 150 inventories makes clear that the long-assumed differentiation between the designation “chamber” as an upper room and “bedroom” as a lower-story sleeping room does not hold up. Barley has suggested that East Anglians (who represented the majority among English

immigrants at Massachusetts Bay) seemed to identify the term chamber with second-story rooms,²⁶ but settlers were, after all, subject to other English regional influences as well. In those subsidiary sleeping rooms with little more than a single bed, the inventories use a varied litany of terms—"leanto chamber," "little chamber," "bed chamber," "lodging chamber," "little room," "back room," "little back room," "room by the parlor" (or by the kitchen); "lodging room," "lower lodging room," or "little lodging room" (when not doubling as a term for parlor), and "little parlor," "inner parlor," or simply "inner room" and, indeed, "farther room." More explicit are such terms as "Little chamber in the Leanetoo" in the Clapp inventory of 1665 and references to bedding only "at ye end of the leanto" and "in ye other end of ye leanto" in the inventory for Samuel Richardson of Woburn (1658).²⁷ To these may be added the significant terminology used in connection with two surviving houses. For the William Boardman House, Saugus, of ca. 1687, the 1696 inventory refers to the northwest room in the lean-to as the "kitchen chamber,"²⁸ while at the Fairbanks House in Dedham, ca. 1637, the 1668 inventory calls the smaller of the two rooms in the then-existing lean-to the "Chamber in the new house."²⁹

At least forty-six examples of these varied terms occur in the subgroup of 150 inventories, in contrast to only ten examples described as "bedroom," "little bedroom," or "lower bedroom." The context of the inventories leads one to assume that the appraisers referred to ground-floor rooms in all these cases rather than to the

cramped space, with its severely limited headroom, in the lean-to attic above. And just as clearly, use of the term "chamber" and "bedroom" to identify location up or down had become blurred to some extent during the course of the seventeenth century at Massachusetts Bay.

For the fundamentally two-room parlor and kitchen or parlor and hall house, then, 150 examples within Sample A-2 included additional ground-floor space devoted primarily to service, the storage of service paraphernalia, and auxiliary sleeping. Some of these spaces were undoubtedly associated with the first build (as physical evidence has revealed on occasion), and in light of terminology and positioning within the context of the inventory itself it can be argued that the majority of them were subsidiary to the mass of the house—located in all likelihood in an added lean-to. For the most part, as in the surviving rear lean-to of the Fairbanks House in Dedham, in place by 1668 (see fig. 3), the inventories indicate no more than two primary spaces—a service room that was occasionally used for the traditional dairy and drink functions but more often for the storage of cooking and eating gear and other service equipment, and also a small bedroom adjacent to one of the lower-story heated rooms, increasingly important as the family grew in size and the first generation passed into old age.

The revelation of overwhelming importance in these 150 inventories, however, is that the major auxiliary service space was without a hearth, and at the Fairbanks House the larger of the two rooms in the lean-to has remained without an added

hearth to the present day. One more actual example for which explicit documentary and physical evidence exists may be cited. In about 1690, Samuel Cooper, yeoman, erected the original portion of the Cooper-Frost-Austin House in Cambridge, which as first built consisted of a single principal ground-floor room with cooking hearth and chamber overhead and two subsidiary rooms in a lean-to integral with original construction. Like the Fairbanks House, one of the lean-to rooms was larger than the other, and both were unheated. By the time of Cooper's death, however, the larger room contained a cooking hearth, as the inventory of his estate taken in 1718 indicates. While no record of room nomenclature for the house as first built exists, the various rooms of the lower story were described in 1718 as the "Low Room" (the principal ground-story room, clearly, from the furnishings, a sitting room only), a "Little Room" (the smaller of the two lean-to rooms and furnished with a bed and two chests), and the "Kitchin" (containing cooking implements for the hearth and all the equipment for both cooking and eating) (fig. 7).

The physical evidence discloses that the flue for the cooking hearth in the "Kitchin" of the Cooper-Frost-Austin House was an addition to the chimney stack as originally built, a condition found often in surviving seventeenth-century houses at Massachusetts Bay. That the building sequence invariably took the form of an unheated lean-to first and a cooking hearth added later, as at the Cooper-Frost-Austin House, is not certain. However, it can easily be shown that the fireplace appears to

be rather late, often post-Revolutionary, in many first-period houses with early lean-to frames. Certain it is that the inventories strongly suggest the necessity to revise the long-accepted assumption that the addition of a lean-to to a seventeenth-century house inevitably implied the addition of a cooking hearth at the same time.

SAMPLE A-3: TWO-ROOM HOUSES WITH SUBSIDIARY "KITCHEN"

LACKING A HEARTH

It is a matter of no little interest that within the subgroup of 150 inventories, none refer to a subsidiary service room called kitchen, especially inasmuch as scholars have become accustomed to think of the traditional rear lean-to in early New England as composed of three distinct spaces in a lateral spread, the larger of which was a "kitchen." The next group of inventories involves a small but highly significant new set, eighteen in number, that reveal the presence of a parlor (or equivalent), a hall (or equivalent) with cooking hearth, and a subsidiary service room now called kitchen for which no evidence of a third, cooking hearth exists. The contents of the "kitchen" in these inventories do not differ markedly from those of the subsidiary service rooms in Sample A-2 and include, importantly, such cooking gear as pots, pans, and kettles stored here for use in the adjoining hall in which the cooking fireplace was still to be found.

The numbers here are small indeed, hardly enough to warrant the creation of a separate subsample. These few inventories, nevertheless, form a link—at least terminologically—between the widespread two-

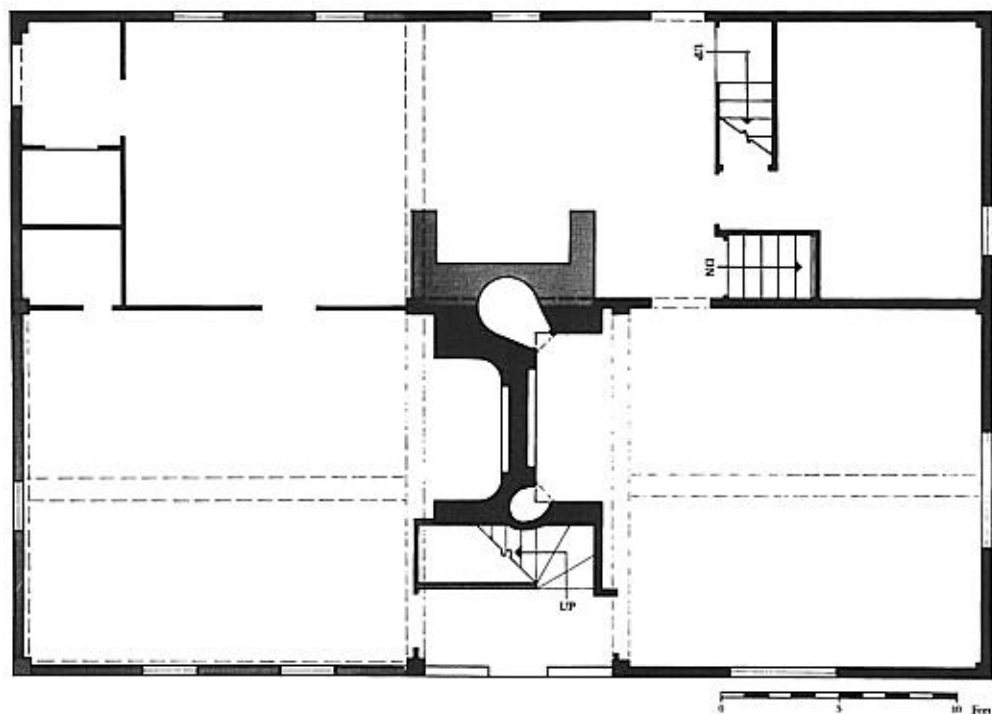


Fig. 7. Ground-floor plan, Cooper-Frost-Austin House, Cambridge, ca. 1689; rooms to the left of the chimney were added after 1718. Drawn by John S. Garner; courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.

room plan with subsidiary spaces and the more ambitious hall/parlor/kitchen house plans with three hearths (Sample A-4). Certainly in terms of nomenclature, these limited data underscore the early hesitant steps in the ultimate transfer of the term “kitchen” to a third room at the rear of the house provided with a hearth of its own for cooking and to which the important service function of food preparation was relegated. Yet in the early stage represented by the eighteen inventories in Sample A-3, the term “kitchen” without a hearth is scarcely to be differentiated from the auxiliary service rooms with varying nomenclature in Sample A-2. Indeed, by coincidence, the median estate value of both Sample A-2 and Sample A-3 are the same figure, £380.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Within Sample A (434 inventories for the three-county Massachusetts Bay area up to and including the year 1700), more than two-thirds of the total (293) reflect a house plan of two principal rooms, with or without subsidiary spaces, but in any event with only two ground-story fireplaces, one a cooking hearth. While the balance of this study will be devoted to the question of when and for what reasons the picture begins to change, especially at upper levels of society, it is perfectly clear that for the rank and file the developed postmedieval concept of two major spaces with hearths, one a “best” room and the other an all-purpose

room in which functions of food preparation and consumption were combined with many other service-oriented activities, lingered as the norm throughout the seventeenth century at Massachusetts Bay.

Just when the three-hearth house plan began to become commonplace among the yeomanry of New England requires additional quantitative study of inventories well into the eighteenth century. Analysis of Sample F (sixty-nine inventories from rural Suffolk County between 1701 and 1775) sheds some light upon the subject. Thirty inventories, somewhat less than half of the sample, date from 1701 to 1750; of these, fourteen are for houses of two-room disposition, with or without unheated subsidiary rooms. Of the balance, four describe houses of single-room plan, five are problematical in one way or another but do not in any event reveal the presence of more than two hearths, and only seven clearly define houses with three or more hearths on the ground floor.

Statistics in Sample F for the final quarter century of the colonial period (1751-75) are even more startling in their revelation of ongoing conservatism with respect to the organization of the house plan. Of the thirty-nine inventories for this later period, eighteen, or roughly half, not unexpectedly reveal an increase in houses having three or more hearths on the ground floor, especially among the more well-to-do and in a mere handful of central-passage houses of the mercantile gentry. However, disregarding three problematical examples, the remaining half of this group (eighteen) define the familiar seventeenth-century

house plan composed of no more than two principal rooms, one with cooking hearth, with or without auxiliary subsidiary spaces.

SAMPLE A-4: HALL/PARLOR/KITCHEN HOUSES WITH THREE HEARTHS

By the middle of the seventeenth century, though only at upper levels in society, important changes had occurred in the organization of domestic space. Planning concepts moved from a thoroughly utilitarian two-room plan, with or without subsidiary rooms, to one in which the major service function involving the preparation of food was separated out from the ritual of food consumption and relegated to the nether realms of domestic chores at the rear of the house, whereupon the front rooms were given over to more polite uses.

Within Sample A (434 inventories), fifty-six can be described as parlor/hall/kitchen inventories, the distinguishing characteristic being the presence of a third, cooking hearth in the kitchen. In only six cases do the inventories replace the term "kitchen" with alternative nomenclature ("new room," "middle room," "another room," etc.), and only very occasionally do they use equivalent terms for parlor and hall. Within these fifty-six examples, nineteen list hearth irons in all three rooms. In thirty-seven inventories the appraisers failed to record fire irons in the parlor or hall (occasionally in both) while nevertheless indicating clearly the presence of a cooking hearth in the kitchen.

Analysis of this category of inventories requires fine tuning at several levels. Chronology, for example, now becomes an important factor. Twenty-one of them date

between 1644 and 1675, while the balance (thirty-five) falls into the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Within these thirty-five inventories, eighteen date to the 1690s alone. Geographic distribution is also important. Twenty-nine, or more than half, are identified with Charlestown, Salem, Cambridge, and Roxbury, which constituted the Boston urban orbit.

The professional or occupational composition of Sample A-4 includes at least five merchants and one “gentleman,” two men who had served as deputy governor, nine yeomen or husbandmen, and eleven artisans, including among others two weavers, two vintners, a shipwright, a joiner, a slaughterer, and a shoemaker. Inventories of the homes of ten ministers are a significant part of the total and are scattered town by town throughout the entire Massachusetts Bay area. In many cases, in fact, the minister’s inventory represents a high-water mark for one small community after another in terms of advancing social conventions, worldly goods, and creature comforts.

Wealth distribution is thoroughly predictable. No more than four estate totals among the fifty-six inventories fall below £200. The majority range between £200 and £1,000, while a smaller but significant group of estates (ten in number) range between £1,012 and £2,787. Two estates were appraised respectively at £3,505 and £4,050. These estate totals, with a median value of £591 for the fifty-six hall/parlor/kitchen inventories, stand in marked contrast to the much larger group of 275 inventories in Sample A-2; the median value of these estates, repre-

sented houses of basically two-room plan, is £380, and no more than twenty-five of them were valued at more than £1,000. Nineteen of these ranged modestly from £1,000 to £2,000, and only two exceptional estates were appraised as high as £5,000 and £8,080 respectively.

It has not been fully realized that when clear physical evidence can be found for a ground-story plan containing three hearths at seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay—as, for example, at the Appleton-Taylor-Mansfield (so-called Ironworks) House in Saugus of the early 1680s (fig. 8)—they were almost invariably the houses of persons who were progressive and/or well-to-do. A particularly interesting example at the artisanal level exists in the William Boardman House in Saugus (fig. 9). Built about 1687 by a young and upwardly mobile joiner from the Cambridge area whose estate totaled £500, the house was originally of two rooms only, with cooking hearth in the hall at the right. Before Boardman’s premature death in 1696, however, physical evidence and the 1696 inventory reveal that the lean-to at the rear had been added (fig. 10). The nomenclature of the inventory reflects clearly the growing aspirations of the young Boardman family and the accompanying changes in their life-style. The appraisers began with the old hall at the right, which had been upgraded soon after the house’s construction to a formal sitting room and was in 1696 called the “best room.” Opposite, at the west end of the house, was the parlor, and in the story above the chambers were identified respectively as parlor and hall chambers. Clearly, nothing had



Fig. 8. *The Appleton-Taylor-Mansfield (Ironworks) House, Saugus, ca. 1680, as restored by Wallace Nutting in ca. 1915; photograph by Halliday Historic Photograph Company, October 12, 1923. Courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.*

occurred in second-story accommodations to render any change in the term “hall chamber.” Returning to the first story, the appraisers called the bedroom at the north-west corner of the house in the added lean-to (which contained only a bed) the “Kitchen Chamber,” and the small service room at the other end of the lean-to they called the “Milkhouse.” The space between, while unnamed, contained fire irons for the cooking hearth (the flue for which had been added to the original central stack when the lean-to was built), together with all the cooking and eating paraphernalia.³⁰

The Boardman inventory does not indicate decisively which of several beds, upstairs and down, was considered the best

bed. The inventories on the whole, however, make this distinction perfectly clear, and it is a matter of some interest, therefore, to see how the location of the best bed in this group of parlor/hall/kitchen houses (Sample A-4) compares with the larger, rank-and-file sample of houses of two-room disposition. Among the smaller group of fifty-six inventories in Sample A-4, the best bed has levitated upstairs to a formally appointed “master bedroom” in twenty-six certain and five probable cases, as opposed to no more than thirty-seven cases for the 293 inventories in Samples A-2 and A-3 combined. Thus it is quite clear that advancing social concepts, especially as they reflect changes in living habits,



Fig. 9. *The William Boardman House, Saugus, ca. 1687; photograph by Halliday Historic Photograph Company, about 1900. Courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.*

were confined to ministers and to the more wealthy, leisured, and status-conscious classes of colonial society. With these changes (and despite the conflicting evidence of the Boardman inventory), the earlier hall (or “kitchen”) was at the same time upgraded to a more formal sitting room, while a major service room, newly equipped with a cooking hearth of its own, was now in turn identified as the “kitchen.” The parlor retained its character as a best room, often minus the parents’ best bed.

In Sample B, 102 inventories with a median estate value of £314, appraisers located little more than the bedding within specifically named rooms. Among seventy-seven clearly identified best beds, ten were credited to unlocated chambers, while a

majority of sixty-five were located in ground-story rooms; in thirty-seven of these sixty-five examples appraisers identified this room as the parlor. (Appraisers described an additional eighteen best beds among the sixty-five as being in “the lower room,” almost certainly implying houses of single-room disposition.) In no more than two of the seventy-seven Sample B inventories listing best beds was this bed found in the second story. Values for these two estates were £463 and £384, the latter being that of a minister.

SAMPLE A-5: HOUSES OF COMPLEX PLAN

The final group of inventories in Sample A is very small but highly revealing. No

more than eighteen out of the 434 documents in Sample A describe houses with a ground-floor plan composed of four or more principal rooms, and these relate almost entirely to that limited number of individuals at seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay who through accumulated wealth and/or social status clearly aspired to living accommodations and a display of worldly position substantially beyond the rank and file. Two among them were ministers, two ranked as “Gentlemen” or “Esquire,” and of the ten whose interests were largely mercantile John Turner and Capt. George Corwin of Salem were among the richest merchants in the province. Because the numbers are severely limited and the persons involved were for the

most part prominent members of the community, their inventories are analyzed here more on an individual than on an aggregate level. A number of the inventories suggest complicated and not easily visualized plans, pointing once again to the danger of inferring house shapes from these documents. Some of them probably evolved as the result of a very personal program of growth and enlargement. Turner House in Salem (House of the Seven Gables) is the classic example (fig. 11). As first built in the late 1660s, the house consisted prosaically of two rooms on either side of a central chimney, one quite a bit narrower than the other. Before the end of the century, a two-and-a-half-story parlor wing with its chamber and a two-story porch (an

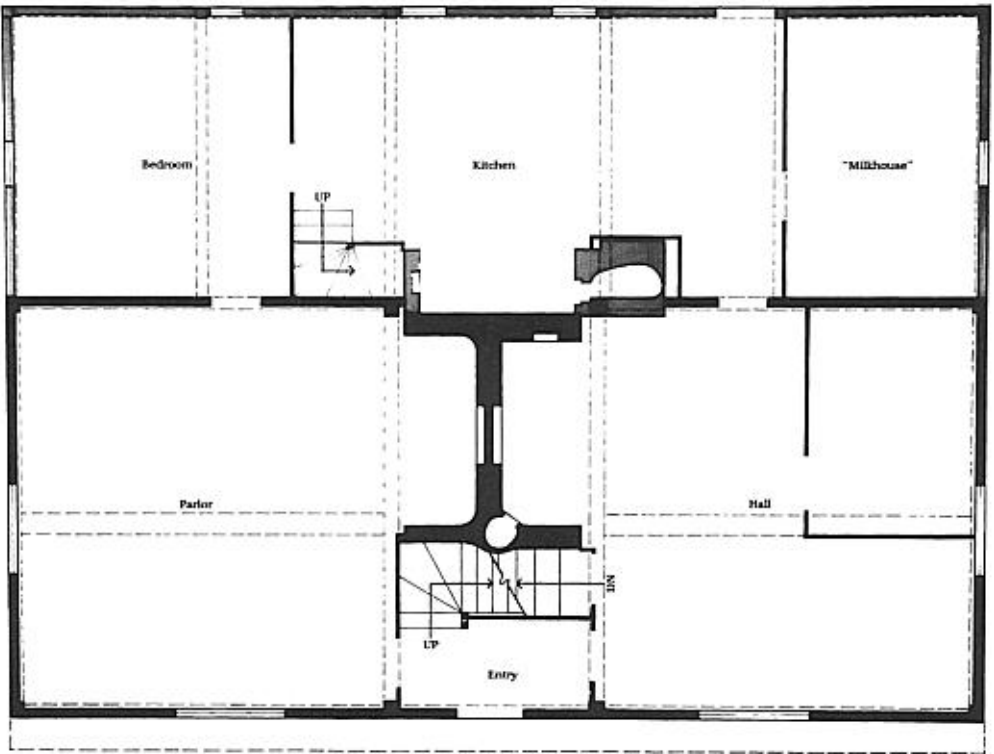


Fig. 10. Ground-floor plan of the William Boardman House. Drawn by John S. Garner; courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.



Fig. 11. *The Turner House (House of the Seven Gables) in Salem, ca. 1668 (with additions), as restored; photograph by Mary Northend, after 1908. Courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.*

enclosed spatial extension of the chimney bay beyond the front plane of the house) had been added, covering one-half of the front of the existing house. A centered kitchen wing at the rear was also in place by the 1690s (fig. 12). The resulting asymmetrical plan provided four principal rooms, at least three of them heated, in the ground story with chambers over each.

The 1693 inventory of John Turner's estate names nearly all of these rooms. The "parlor" with its seventeen turkey-work chairs,³¹ two tables and (table) carpet, and one large looking glass, together with the "parlor chambr." above, constituted the new wing at the front. The "Hall" was at

the left of the chimney in the original house and included twelve leather chairs, a large table, and, again, a large looking glass. The "Hall Chambr" above was furnished with the best bed, eight turkey-work chairs, a cupboard with its cushion and cloth, and a round table. The "New Kitchen" at the rear contained the cooking hearth with spits, hooks, and a "Jack," together with 148 pounds of brass cooking equipment and twenty pounds of pewter. Importantly, too, the inventory suggests that the narrower room of the original house, to the right of the central chimney, was a shop, for the space above, extending into the attic, is designated as the "Shop chambr." and "Shop

of Salem merchant Lieutenant Thomas Gardner locates the best bed and finest furnishings in the shop chamber.³⁴ And the problematical 1699 inventory for Roger Darby, shopkeeper of Salem (excluded from Sample A-5 but a part of Sample C), nevertheless refers to a “shop” which contained merchandise, to a “lower room next shop” with cooking fireplace and seating furniture, and to a “shop chamber” located among the domestic apartments.³⁵

For roughly one-half of Sample A-5 the presence of a shop in the inventory introduces again a question about the physical nature of that space, but these documents clearly imply, as the evidence of Turner House also indicates, that the shop was a principal room. For the eleven inventories that include shops and (in nine cases) their shop chambers, six are straight-forward parlor/hall/kitchen houses, with or without subsidiary spaces, and four are of the same disposition but use alternative nomenclature for one or more of the principal rooms. There is only one exception to the pattern. The inventory for Captain Andrew Craty of Marblehead (1695), appraised at £1,779, describes a house composed of a great hall and its chamber, both with fireplaces, the hall furnished with seating furniture and the chamber containing the best bed; a chamber with fireplace over the little parlor, implying the presence of a little parlor which is nevertheless unnamed in the inventory; a chamber with fireplace and a garret over the shop and also another heated room called “Little Room behind the shop,” all in addition to the kitchen with cooking hearth and subsidiary service spaces. The inventory refers also to the

“Garrot over the Entry.” Taken together, these terms may suggest a house of central-passage plan that contained more than a single chimney.³⁶ At least two chimneys existed at the Turner House, but firm evidence for the central passage plan, which had put in an appearance in Boston during the last quarter of the seventeenth century, is almost nonexistent among the total corpus of inventories in Sample A.

For the balance of the inventories in Sample A-5, the primary indicator of an advanced or ambitious plan, as at the Craty House, is the presence of multiple hearths and of rooms that could scarcely be described as subsidiary. The estate inventory, totaling £1,498, for the celebrated Puritan divine Nathaniel Rogers of Ipswich is important for its early date (1655) and clearly defines a house with progressive accommodations. One cannot be entirely certain, however, of room dispositions on the ground floor and second story. The appraisers began with the hall, a sitting room with hearth, and proceeded to the heated parlor. In addition to tables, chairs, and stools, it was furnished with a number of fine items, including a “livery cupboard,” two pictures, a clock, and two window curtains with their rods, together with a “canopy bedstead” and bedding (not, however, the best bed). The kitchen with cooking hearth came next, with both cooking and eating gear, and was followed by an enumeration of the contents of the cellar. Then comes a heated room of major distinction, described only as a chamber. It contained the best bed with hangings and polite furnishings, including among other items a chest of drawers—which, next to

the clock, was the single most valuable piece of furniture in the house—a gilt looking glass, and, again, window curtains with rods as well as two window cushions. Judging from the balance of the inventory, this may well have been a ground-story room. The appraisers recorded next in order the hall chamber; the garret over the parlor; the study (with hearth), which contained the minister's "cabinet deske" and library valued at £100; and, finally, the chamber over the kitchen. Whether or not the parlor was of one story only, with "garret" over, the unlocated chamber and study, each with a hearth, constitute one too many rooms for a careful reckoning in the second story.³⁷

The inventory for the Rev. Edmund Browne of Sudbury (1678) is more explicit. "His Mansion house & lands at Brunswick with ye lands called Horsecroft" were appraised at no more than £30, but the inventory describes a substantial house. The "lower westermost roome" contained six high leather chairs and a bed that was not the best. The hearth was equipped with "Andirons, with broad brass Eschucheons." The parlor furnishings included "a side board," long table and carpet, four chairs, and a large chest, and the room contained a hearth. No fire irons are indicated for the "middle room," though its furnishings, including a long table with form and a great leather chair, together with the deceased's military weapons and a "Greene Plush Sadle," suggest a principal room. The "room next the kitchen," on the other hand, was given over to cooking and eating gear and was presumably auxiliary to the kitchen with its cooking hearth. A "little roome by the Kitchine"

contained a bed as its primary furniture and was presumably another subsidiary space. The parlor chamber contained the best bed with its "Hangings," together with chests and a cupboard.³⁸

The 1681 inventory for the estate of Mr. Edward Jackson of "Camb Village" (Newton), valued at £2,478, also makes use of familiar and nonspecific nomenclature, but it almost certainly defines a house of more than three principal rooms on the ground floor. There was a hall with hearth, furnished as a sitting room; a "Great parlor" with only a limited number of furnishings (perhaps because he had specifically willed to his wife "her virginals and one Cubard"); a "Kitchin and Back Roome" which included the cooking hearth with "1 Jack and waits;" and there was also a south-east parlor which contained a curtained bed and trundle bed, together with three chests and a trunk, and a southwest parlor as well, furnished with the best, curtained bed. Its only other contents, however, according to the inventory, were a close stool, an old chest, and an old box.³⁹

The two richest and most detailed inventories for houses of ambitious plan at seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay (outside of Boston) are those of "Col Bartholomew Gedney Esq," a Salem physician who had been elected a member of the Massachusetts Bay Council in 1693, and of the Salem merchant Captain George Corwin. Gedney's 1698 inventory reveals an extensive array of fine possessions, in addition to "Drugs Instrumts. and other Utinsels belonging to Phisick and Chirurgery." His inventory is also among the very few encountered that describes a

separate shop in connection with his wharf. The parlor was the most finely appointed room on the ground floor, with both a square and a round table; a dozen turkey-work chairs and six cane chairs; two (table) carpets, one "Turkey" and the other, more expensive, a "Tapestry" carpet; a large looking glass with its "brases;" and maps of the world and of "Canan." The hearth was equipped with brass andirons.

The hall was furnished as a sitting room with two tables and eight leather chairs, all less expensive than their parlor counterparts. There were also "3 painted Chars," a great chair and joined stool, as well as a clock and "Map of ship." The hearth here was equipped with "Cast [i.e., iron] dogs." There were 252 pounds of pewter and 174 pounds of brass in the kitchen, and its cooking hearth was fitted out with a "Jack and Chain." Additional rooms on the ground floor included a "Counting house" which contained Colonel Gedney's extensive library of books on subjects ranging from divinity through law, history, and the military to "Physick"; and also an "Inward Room" with a hearth which contained a curtained bed, a table, two chairs, two joined stools, and a chest. There was a well-appointed chamber above the kitchen with its own hearth, and there were garrets over the hall, kitchen, and parlor chambers. The latter was furnished with turkey-work chairs, a chest of drawers, and "black looking Glase," among other items, and the best bedstead with its "Rods" was hung with a "Sute Serge Curtains" and a pair of "White Curtains . . . Tester & head Cloth." Here and not infrequently in other inventories are glimpses of the seasonal

rhythms of life. The inventory is dated June 8, 1698, clearly late enough in the season for lighter and more refreshing linen curtains to have been hung up within the outer hangings of heavy woolen serge.⁴⁰

By far the most interesting—and perplexing—inventory within this limited sample is that taken (in stages) beginning January 30, 1685, for Corwin's Salem estate. Of the entire seventeenth-century sample, incidentally, Corwin was the only person for whom a known portrait exists, now owned by the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem (fig. 13). While his Salem contemporary, John Turner, possessed houses, lands, vessels, goods, and personal estate in the amount of £6,789, in contrast to Corwin's somewhat lesser estate evaluation of £5,965, Turner's "dwelling house and ground belonging to it with out houseing 2 warehouses and wharff" were appraised at £500. What would seem to be more or less the equivalent entry in Corwin's inventory—"Dwelling house & land wheron it stands & adjoyneing to it wth. the out houseing & fence, &c.," together with the "lower warhouse & wharfe" and "upper warhouse & land adjoyning"—were valued at the slightly higher figure of £560.

George Francis Dow published in full the inventory for Corwin's dwelling house with its opulent furnishings.⁴¹ The room nomenclature, with its extensive use of the term "chamber" qualified in ways other than through reference to rooms situated directly above or below, does not suggest anything approaching a comprehensible house plan. In addition, the appraisers, in their various sessions, appear to have progressed through the house in

an erratic fashion, jumping back and forth between upper and lower rooms and, in one or two instances, returning to a room already appraised in order to record items apparently overlooked. This study can do little more than follow the order of the major spaces as they occur in the inventory in an effort to identify at least the heated rooms and their primary functions throughout the house.

The appraisal begins with one of the most extensive catalogues of merchandise, located in a shop and its accompanying shop chamber, that survives from seventeenth-century New England. The inven-

tory does not include a separate shop among the real estate listings, although the shop goods are separated from the household items by the carefully enumerated contents of lower and upper warehouses. The appraisers then embarked upon their examination of household goods in the following order:

- “Old Hall,” a heated sitting room with “3 Curtaine rods & Curtains for windows”;
- “Red Chamber,” a heated sitting room with more expensive furniture and “2 Curtaine rods & win-



Fig. 13. *Captain George Corwin, Salem, portrait painted perhaps by Captain Thomas Smith, ca. 1680. Courtesy Peabody Essex Museum, Salem.*

- dow Curtaines”;
- “Glase Chamber,” a heated room that contained a curtained bed and polite furnishings characteristic of a parlor; there were three curtain rods and window curtains here, and the room presumably took its name from the “Glase frame for Glase worke” valued at £1;
 - “Corner Chamber,” a bedroom with no reference to hearth irons, furnished only with a less expensive curtained bed than that in the Glass chamber, a table, two old chairs, and a wainscot chest;
 - “Counting House & Entery,” the contents of which were entered here with additions later in the inventory and include for the most part those items one would expect to find handily placed in an entry, including spurs, canes, arms, and equipage;
 - “Hall chamber” with no reference to hearth irons and furnished with a curtained bed and trundle bed, a table, a chest of drawers, and four trunks; there were also a curtain rod and window curtain;
 - Additions to the counting house and entry, enumerating such furniture items as table, chair, “desk & Cuberd,” and an ironbound chest, presumably in the counting house;
 - “Hall” (elsewhere called the new hall), a heated sitting room less expensively fitted out than the old hall; there was a single window curtain with its rod;
 - “Maides Chamber,” furnished with bedding, a wainscot chest, and another chest, and including such items as “Starch & a bage,” and “Cotten Ironning Clothes”;
 - “Entry Below,” furnished as a sitting room with a round table and green carpet, two great and four high chairs, and a cupboard with its cloth;
 - “Peuter Room,” a service room containing some cooking equipment, earthenware, and woodenware—but no pewter!⁴²
 - “Kitchin” with cooking hearth, including a “Jack & waite,” and a full complement of cooking and eating gear;
 - “Kitchin Chamber” with hearth, eight window curtains, and four rods, furnished with a “large Scritore” (or writing desk which, appraised at £5, was the most valuable piece of furniture in the house), and other polite furnishings; clearly one of the most important rooms, it contained no less than two curtained beds and a pallet bedstead with tester, head piece, and hangings. Each of the two furnished beds exceeded in value any other bed in the house, and the first, itemized at £15-12-0, was clearly the best bed.⁴³

In summary, it can be seen only that the ground floor of Corwin’s house contained at least three principal heated rooms—an old and new hall (indicating clearly that the house had achieved its existing size through enlargement) and a

kitchen—together with a counting house and two entries, one of the latter furnished as a sitting room. Of the chambers, only two were located above rooms in the ground story, and there were seemingly too many other chambers to have been second-story apartments exclusively. The two entries, if indeed the inventory describes two separate spaces, may provide a hint at least that a house of conventional central-chimney disposition with restricted entry space had been enlarged by an addition containing a more progressive through passage. But in the last analysis, in terms of nomenclature the inventory is one of the least helpful in the entire sample, and without the building itself one simply becomes lost in a maze of conjecture.

Among the eighteen inventories in Sample A-5, it is not surprising to find ten certain cases in which the best bed was now located in a well-appointed upstairs chamber. Only three of the inventories, on the other hand, reveal the presence of a porch (including that at the John Turner House). In affording a more amply dimensioned entry and small but separate front chamber above, the two-story enclosed porch appears to have been a distinct indicator of worldly status throughout the seventeenth century. It is mentioned in building documents by the middle of the century. On the other hand, reference to contents of the porch alone in the inventories is extremely rare—no more than two cases in all of Sample A—presumably because the entry, even enlarged to the proportions of a porch, contained so little in the way of furnishings. The only indication that a porch existed, in fact, is normally to be found in

an enumeration of the contents of the porch chamber (in most cases bedding).

Only limited data related to the porch can be drawn from Sample A. For Samples A-2 and A-3, a total of 293 inventories, no more than twelve list porch chambers, the earliest reference being 1662 and the majority (eight) dating to the last quarter of the century. Only three estate values among these twelve inventories fall below £450, and five at least were more than £1,000. In the samples representing the most elaborate house plans, another twelve inventories (nine in A-4 and three in A-5) mention a porch chamber. None of these latter twelve estates were valued lower than £495, and fully one-half of the valuations are in four figures. Of the twenty-four inventories that mention porch chambers in Samples A-2 through A-5, seventeen are for dwellings in the Charlestown/Salem/Cambridge/Roxbury area.

COMPLEX BOSTON HOUSES OF THE LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Sample F, consisting of all those inventories for in-town Boston filed through 1700 that indicate the presence of three or more lower-story hearths, has been introduced in order to compare and corroborate the data contained in Samples A-4 and A-5. The whole number of Sample F (forty-four) seems small, yet the contemporary estimate, recorded in England in 1676, that there was “no house in New England with more than 20 rooms, [and] not 20 in Boston with more than 10” suggests that the sample size reflects the historical reality.⁴⁴ The breakdown within Sample F does not

seem contradictory: of the forty-four documents, the greater majority, thirty-two, represent houses for which the inventories reveal no more than three principal rooms with hearths, with or without subsidiary rooms. Fully in keeping with progressive trends, however, in twenty-nine of the forty-four inventories the best bed was quite consistently located in a finely appointed chamber on the second floor. The nomenclature is normally hall/parlor/kitchen. In at least seven cases, the cooking hearth was in the cellar, a location not to be wondered at in a strictly urban situation. Only five of the thirty-two present any question as to the number of principal ground-story rooms through the presence of a shop or, as in the inventory of the Honorable William Phips, Knight (taken in 1696 with an estate total of £3,378) of a space called "my Ladies Room."⁴⁵

In professional or occupational terms, Sample F includes two governors; two gentlemen (including one knight); twenty-two merchants (including mariners engaged in mercantile pursuits); four ministers (including one ruling elder); one physician; nine artisans (a carpenter, chandler, cooper, cordwainer, currier, shipwright, silversmith, tanner, and vintner); and one yeomen.

The large number of persons engaged in mercantile activities in this most important capital port city would explain the exceptionally high median estate value of £1,450 for Sample F. The highest estate value in the entire study is that for the distinguished merchant Henry Shrimpton. Amounting to £15,292, it is associated nevertheless with an inventory that almost

certainly describes a house of no more than three-hearth plan, in contrast to a few Boston plans of more ambitious disposition.

Over and beyond the thirty-two inventories in Sample F that reflect houses of three-hearth disposition, the inventories of only twelve houses suggest more ambitious plans. Ten of these are for houses of at least four principal ground-story rooms, seven of which are furnished with hearths in all four rooms. In two cases only is there a fifth principal room with no mention of fireplace equipment. One assumes that the presence of four ground-story hearths on a single level would imply the existence of a second chimney stack—but not necessarily a central passage. This advanced planning concept was present in Boston as early as 1679 in the Peter Sergeant House (otherwise known as the Province House, destroyed in 1922), for which no seventeenth-century inventory exists.⁴⁶

Room nomenclature is probably the most significant element in these inventories (table 2), ten of which represent houses of at least four- and five-room plan and only two of which indicate the presence of five ground-story hearths. The presence of more than a single parlor foretells a common eighteenth-century development in more formally appointed houses—the central-passage plan of the gentry and more substantial elements of society. The appearance here of six dining rooms, together with two additional examples among the houses of three-hearth disposition, is noteworthy, although it is only an assumption that they were located in the ground story. Contents of the dining room invariably

TABLE 2. ROOM NOMENCLATURE IN COMPLEX BOSTON HOMES, 1653–1696

<i>Name</i>	<i>Profession</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Estate value</i>	<i>Ground-story accommodations (with hearths, unless indicated otherwise)</i>
<i>Three hearths indicated:</i>				
Capt. Samuel Scarlet	mariner	1675	£2,586	hall/lodging room/kitchen/"Bachelor's Hall" (no hearth equipment)
Freegrace Bendall	merchant	1676	731	hall/"middle room"/kitchen/dining room (no hearth equipment)
Hope Allen	currier	1677	661	hall/parlor/kitchen/"lodging roome next the Street" (no hearth equipment)
<i>Four hearths indicated:</i>				
John Cotton	minister	1653	1,038	hall/little parlor/great parlor/kitchen/"leanto parlor" (no hearth equipment)
Antipas Boyse	merchant	1669	1,709	hall/little parlor/dining room/kitchen
Richard Bellingham	governor	1672	3,244	hall/parlor/"little kitchen"/kitchen
Benjamin Gibbs	mariner	1678	2,241	great hall/[unnamed space]/dining room [unnamed space with cooking hearth]
Humphrey Warren	merchant	1680	1,451	"Green parlor"/great parlor/dining room/kitchen/hall (no hearth equipment)
Richard Wharton	merchant	1691	[]	hall/parlor/dining room/kitchen
Henry Allen	carpenter	1696	1,145	hall/small lodging room/parlor [unnamed space with cooking hearth]
<i>Five hearths indicated:</i>				
Edmund Downes	merchant	1669	3,613	hall/little parlor/great parlor/dining room/kitchen
Thomas Kellond	merchant	1683	6,685	hall/little parlor/great parlor/lower bedroom/"Cellars" (with cooking hearth)

coincide with its nomenclature—that is, tables and chairs as the almost exclusive items of furniture. The introduction of this very specialized space in the latter part of the seventeenth century at Massachusetts

Bay would seem to reflect a coming of age in provincial Boston of planning conventions present at much more advanced levels of society in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. And once introduced, the dining

room was slow indeed to spread to the nonurban population. No more than two examples have been noted among the inventories comprising Sample G, filed between 1701 and 1775, from the rural Suffolk County environs of Boston—those of Colonel Robert Oliver, Esq., of Dorchester (1763) and of the Honorable Andrew Belcher, Esq., of Milton (1771).⁴⁷ Both men were members of wealthy and conspicuous Loyalist families.

A correlation exists between the probate sample and the Boston tax rate of 1687 in which separate evaluations were entered for “Housing & Whar[ves].” The majority of Bostonians were assessed at less than £10 in this category. Twenty-eight persons were assessed in the range of £20 to £50, and only two entries, one of them for the Shrimptons, were valued at the upper figure of £50.⁴⁸ Clearly, as these figures and the inventories in Sample F would suggest, the elite of seventeenth-century Boston were indeed a finite group. Some of them represented families who had arrived early and prospered at trade during the seventeenth century. Others had come more recently, including Anglican Crown officials in the wake of late-century political developments in the colonies. Thomas Kellond, whose 1683 inventory is one of only two that reveal a plan of five lower-story hearths, had been dispatched to New England in the 1660s by Charles II to ferret out the Regicides in hiding here. A staunch royalist, Kellond’s marriage in Boston to Abigail, daughter of Captain Thomas Hawkins, brought him into the inner circles of the richest and most powerful families in the

city. Hawkins’s widow married Henry Shrimpton as her third husband, while one of Abigail’s sisters, Elizabeth, married Adam Winthrop, and another, Hannah, married Elisha Hutchinson, becoming thereby the grandmother of future governor Thomas Hutchinson. Following Hannah (Hawkins) Hutchinson’s death, Elisha Hutchinson was remarried to Elizabeth, the widow of merchant John Freake and subject of one of America’s most celebrated seventeenth-century portraits (fig. 14). The inventory taken at Thomas Kellond’s death in 1683 reveals one of the most opulently furnished houses in the province. The best bed in the hall chamber with its silk mohair curtains and silk quilt was appraised at no less than £50, and the “Tapestry hangings” in the same chamber were appraised at £20.⁴⁹ Four years later, when the 1687 tax was levied, Abigail (Hawkins), then “Widow Kellond,” was among only seven Bostonians whose “Housing & Whar[ves].” were appraised as high as £40 (and exceeded by only two others at £50). The “Widow Kellond” was shortly to become the wife of John Foster, an English merchant who had arrived not many years earlier, and it was they who, about 1690, erected the Foster-Hutchinson House in Boston, recognized today as the earliest known Renaissance house in New England.

CONCLUSIONS

Probate inventories are very human documents and yet legal instruments as well. At a moment of critical loss and dislocation within the family structure, they seek, nevertheless, to determine as dispassion-



Fig. 14. Mrs. Freake and Baby Mary, Boston, portrait by unknown artist, 1671(?)–74. Dressed richly and fashionably, Mrs. Freake sits upon a chair upholstered with red, yellow, green, and black turkey work. Courtesy Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert W. Rice.

ately as possible the deceased person's worldly worth. The appraisers were usually friends or fellow townsmen caught up in a process both formulaic and, as the inventories show, more or less unvarying. In purely quantitative terms these docu-

ments reveal a remarkable consistency and are vastly illuminating for that reason alone. It is the underlying consistency, in fact, that comes to the rescue when one faces the realization that the house as a material object is in many respects a living organ-

ism as well, continually responsive to physical and social change. The probate inventory reflects but a single moment in the life of any given building, and because these evaluations of household possessions coincide with the conclusion of a life span they reveal to us, more often than not, a house that has grown and altered with consequent changes in spatial use.

The issue is one of critical importance, for this study of seventeenth-century inventories at Massachusetts Bay has been primarily concerned with the nomenclature and uses of the principal and subsidiary ground-floor rooms in an effort to determine basic plan types, not so much in precise architectural as in more broadly sociocultural terms. This analysis has consistently argued that inventories cannot always conjure up exact building types. For Sample A-4 of the inventories, for example, houses of parlor/hall/kitchen disposition, the latter with cooking hearth, it is difficult to know from the documents whether the structure was a central-chimney house with an ell at right angles or was furnished with a rear lean-to. The latter, of course, defines the familiar saltbox house that has survived in such significant numbers from the seventeenth century at Massachusetts Bay, and when the accompanying subsidiary spaces in the inventory are considered, it can often be argued that they do indeed seem to fit the picture of the typical lean-to house.

The statistics reveal in overwhelming measure that the rural population at Massachusetts Bay remained noticeably conservative throughout the century. A basically agrarian society, the majority

farmed and were part of an economic system that depended primarily upon an exchange network of goods and services and only secondarily upon income derived from the sale of surplus goods. Thought patterns and beliefs linked them to the late medieval world of Europe from which they had emigrated, a fact that is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the persistence of a two-hearth mentality in the organization of their ground-story living spaces, although single-room lofted cottages (with a single hearth) may well have dominated the New England landscape throughout much of the seventeenth century.

Among the ministerial and mercantile elite, as well as among those upwardly mobile members of the yeomanry and artisanal class, cultural change was surely at work and can be found at times at a surprisingly early date. Particularly in the communities with closer ties to Boston and where the mercantile bias is in any sense marked, the inventories reflect the presence of wealthier members of society whose homes were distinguished by an appreciable increase in consumers' goods and more comfortable living accommodations. The single most important architectural fact to emerge from this much smaller sample of the inventories, however, is the radical change from a house plan of two-hearth to one of three-hearth disposition, which reflects the repositioning of certain domestic functions, especially food preparation, at the rear of the house.

The primary message, nevertheless, is one of conservatism, and the structures themselves corroborate the documentary

evidence, suggesting a disinclination towards change in the planning and organization of domestic space within the colonial home. This fact has not emerged succinctly because, whether a part of the original build or a subsequent addition, the vitally important service appendages, especially when located in a lean-to, are unarguably the least-studied features of the early New England house. In the restoration of historic house museums the spaces in which the colonial woman spent so much of her time have seemed peripheral and of low aesthetic priority and more often than not have been transformed for custodial or institutional purposes. Within the private sector there has been an even more callous disregard for the historic importance of service rooms. Here, too, while the "principal" rooms of the house have been carefully restored, butteries and downstairs bedrooms at the rear have unsparingly been converted to bathrooms, while the kitchen has undergone successive waves of profound change in the name of efficiency and "modernization" or has often been entirely altered to serve as a "dining room."

When the buildings are examined more closely, it becomes clear that a third, cooking hearth in the rear kitchen in many of those extant New England houses built before 1775 on a basically two-room plan with subsidiary service accommodations was introduced rather late. Upon careful analysis, in fact, more and more houses in this category will disclose the same evidence as that found in the 1950s, for example, when the Boardman-Howard House on Main Street in Saugus was taken

apart and removed to another community (fig. 15). Built during the 1740s on a two-room plan with cooking fireplace in the "hall" at the right of the entrance, the physical evidence indicates that the house did not gain its lean-to and cooking fireplace (with oven located on the face of the chimney) until about 1800.

Thus, when both the documentary and material evidence for the entire colonial period at Massachusetts Bay have been evaluated, it will in all likelihood appear that the fundamental value of seventeenth-century inventory data is in the revelation of a marked conservatism in living habits among the agrarian population. And it may indeed develop that the early national wave of building and rebuilding of houses, which took place beginning in the 1790s, was the period when, as a general rule, the concept of a three-hearth house plan took root firmly among the rural rank and file in New England. ❁

APPENDIX

THE SAMPLES

In purely mechanical terms, procedural variations among the probate courts of the individual counties should be noted.⁵⁰ From the very outset, both Suffolk and Middlesex counties established a recording system whereby the various documents relating to a given estate were copied in rough chronological order into bound volumes, which constituted "court copies." For these two counties, this study used the "court copies" exclusively, both for their completeness (occasionally an original inventory will have disappeared from its



Fig. 15. *The Boardman-Howard House, Main Street, Saugus, built in the 1740s; photograph probably taken in about 1900. Photograph copied 1956 from the collection of Ralph Howard, Saugus.*

docket) and ease of manipulation. For Middlesex County a nineteenth-century transcription of the seventeenth-century “court copy” has long served as the official record, and for Suffolk County a group of unprocessed probate records from the earliest years was copied into bound volumes early in the present century. Inventories found in this so-called “New Series” of numbered volumes were also, quite naturally, included in the sample.

Essex County presents a somewhat different situation. Here, for whatever reason, the probate court did not initiate a system of bound “court copies” until the 1670s, and without the fortuitous letterpress transcription by George Francis Dow in 1916-20 of Essex County probate records from the earliest years to the mid-

1680s the labor of examining the contents of each successive docket in turn would have rendered a survey of Essex County almost impossible. The author has used the bound “court copies” from the period of their inception until 1700, but at least one hundred scattered inventories have been identified through the index to the probate dockets that, unexplainedly, were never entered in the “court copies.” Where this problem exists, the original documents were examined and the requisite inventories recorded as part of the sample.

For all three counties (and excluding that portion of Boston which occupied the ancient Shawmut peninsula) 789 inventories before and including the year 1700 are on file that wholly or to some degree, at least, record household furnishings according to

the rooms of the house in which they were located. Thirty-two of these were eliminated from the sample, including two inventories for those taverns (among several) that were clearly more public than domestic in function and nine inventories that named rooms but did not itemize their contents, referring to these simply as “goods.” In addition, fifteen inventories for the estates of widows, a category of considerable interest but concerned with the widow’s dower third interest in household effects and therefore unrepresentative of the whole body of furnishings, were also excluded from the analysis. Dower rights, whether specified by will or stipulated by the probate court, represented under normal circumstances the widow’s right to the use of one-third of her deceased husband’s estate during the period of her widowhood. With respect to any study of inventories, this meant the use of one-third of the household furnishings. In actual fact, women’s inventories form only a very small fraction of the total because colonial probate law, in firmly and consistently recognizing dower rights, nevertheless saw little necessity for recording in detail their lapse at the widow’s remarriage or death. The very few women’s inventories on file deal either with specific exceptions governed by the husband’s will or occur as a result of property held in her own name—an infrequent situation. Included in the sample are three widow’s inventories that, for whatever reason, appear to represent a full household rather than a dower situation. Finally, six inventories have been excluded as being sufficiently incomprehensible to be of much service to the textual discussion.

The balance of 757 inventories were

grouped in four categories identified as Samples A through D:

- *Sample A* (434 inventories): This largest group, representing complete room-by-room inventories, has been divided into five separate subgroups (Samples A-1 through A-5) that form the core evidence of this discussion. Of these 434 inventories, only thirty-two date before 1650. An additional forty-nine are from the 1650s. In sum, eighty-one inventories date before 1660 and are thus associated to a large extent with the first, immigrant generation.

- *Sample B* (102 inventories): Given the fact that bedding was one of the most valuable household possessions during the colonial period, it is not surprising to find a fairly large group of inventories in which bedding only is located by room and the balance of household possessions for the most part lumped. The value of this group for interpretive purposes is understandably limited.

- *Sample C* (eighty-eight inventories): This group contains much important information used in various ways in the course of this discussion. For any one of several reasons, however, these inventories could not be made to fit the readily comprehensible models represented by most of the tabulated data. More than half (fifty-four) can be described as “defective” in that certain key rooms seem to have been omitted, or only some of the household goods are located by room and the balance lumped, or the appraisers have failed to distinguish precisely between the contents of one room and those of another. Included also in Sample C are at least twenty-six inventories in which unlocated “chambers”

present significant uncertainties.

- *Sample D* (133 inventories): These inventories contain no more than one or two passing references to objects located by room—for example, “meat tubs in cellar”—in an otherwise undifferentiated inventory. These data have been utilized on occasion when they amplify the conclusions put forward in the text.

Three additional groups of entirely separate inventories have been tabulated for purposes of further comparison or contrast:

- *Sample E* (409 inventories): Over and beyond the room-by-room inventories in Dow’s transcription of Essex County probate records, more than five hundred straightforward inventories dating between 1639 and 1680 exist that contain no reference to rooms in the itemization of household goods but can nevertheless be interpreted in limited ways. Sample E represents a residual total after excluding inventories for widows, single men (seamen, for example, with only their clothes and a chest), and inventories with household goods lumped under that heading or otherwise undeterminable.

- *Sample F* (forty-four inventories): This figure represents the total of all in-town Boston room-by-room inventories before and including 1700 that indicate the presence of three or more hearths on the ground floor or a combination of ground-floor rooms and cellar kitchen.

- *Sample G* (sixty-nine inventories): Included here are all room-by-room inventories for rural Suffolk County for the period 1701–75, as transcribed and published by the author in *Rural Household Inventories* (1964).

THE PROBATE INVENTORY AS A WORKING TOOL

Increasing scrutiny of early probate inventories throughout the twentieth century has produced a number of cautionary restraints. Omissions can occur, we are warned, when appraisers have excluded household objects owned by others than the decedent, which raises a question also as to the precise status of bequests. On January 10, 1682, John Livermore, Sr., of Watertown, for example, willed to his wife “my livery Cupboard in the Parlor . . . & all that is in it: and not to be brought or put into the Inventory of my Estate.”⁵¹ In another rare example of recorded explanation, the inventory of the estate of Captain Andrew Gardner of Muddy River, now Brookline (1694), states that £22 worth of goods had been “Disbursed out of the Estate for Esther Gardner [presumably a daughter] at Marriage, before taking the Inventory.”⁵² A somewhat less clear situation emerges from a comparison of the 1681 will and inventory for the estate of Mr. Edward Jackson, Sr., of “Camb Village” (now Newton). Mr. Jackson bequeathed to his wife a “silver bowle[,] one gilded Silver Cup [and] one Guilded silver salt wch were given unto her by her honored father Mr John Newgate,” and also “her virginals and one Cubard.” There were bequests of well-described silver items to the children as well. The silver bowl and virginals do not appear in the inventory, but the document does mention a gilded silver salt and wine cup that seem to match the items in the will, and all of the silver objects bequeathed to the children can also be found in the inventory.⁵³ It is clear, therefore, that the student must be prepared for

the omission of items or, indeed, the contents of whole rooms, most often as a result of the deceased's having by various means conveyed certain goods or spaces within the house to another member of the family. And normally the inventory itself makes little or no reference to such arrangements.

Abbott Lowell Cummings, former SPNEA executive director and editor of Old-Time New England, is the author of The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay, 1625–1725 (1979) and Rural Household Inventories: Establishing the Names, Uses and Furnishings of Rooms in the Colonial New England Home, 1675–1725 (1964), both seminal volumes in the study of American material culture and architectural history. He is the former Charles F. Montgomery Professor of American Decorative Arts at Yale University and currently serves on the editorial advisory board of this journal.

NOTES

1. It is difficult to determine whether, as some historians have suggested, items were moved about from room to room for ease of appraisal or for some other reason. This may have occurred on occasion, and, indeed, the appraisers not infrequently presented their findings (on paper at least) by specific categories—wearing apparel, brassware, woodenware, provisions, etc. In the overwhelming majority of probate inventories, however, it seems clear from quantitative similarities that the appraisers for the most part took things pretty much as they found them. There is, in fact, an unusually high rate of predictability among these documents with respect to distribution patterns of individual objects throughout the house.
2. Suffolk County Probate Records, 4:208, Massachusetts Archives, Columbia Point, Boston, Mass., hereafter cited as *Suf. Co. Prob. Recs.*
3. See note 1.
4. M. W. Barley, *The English Farmhouse and Cottage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961). For more recent studies see Robert Machin, "The Great Rebuilding: A Reassessment," *Past and Present* 77 (November 1977): 33–56, and Matthew Johnson, *Housing Culture: Traditional Architecture in an English Landscape* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).
5. Abbott Lowell Cummings, *The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay, 1625–1725* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 6.
6. *Suf. Co. Prob. Recs.*, 5:112.
7. Don Gleason Hill, ed., *The Early Records of the Town of Dedham, Massachusetts. . .* (Dedham, Mass., 1892–99), vol. for 1636–59, 153–54.
8. Cummings, *Framed Houses*, 23.
9. Middlesex County Probate Records, 2:190, Massachusetts Archives, hereafter cited as *Mid. Co. Prob. Recs.*
10. *Suf. Co. Prob. Recs.*, 2:195.
11. *Suf. Co. Prob. Recs.*, 7:239.
12. *Mid. Co. Prob. Recs.*, 4:83.
13. *Mid. Co. Prob. Recs.*, 3:39.
14. *Suf. Co. Prob. Recs.*, 5:77.
15. *Ibid.*, new ser., 1:51.

16. Essex County Probate Records, 302:125, Essex County Registry of Probate, Salem, Mass., hereafter cited as Es. Co. Prob. Recs.
17. Barley, *English Farmhouse and Cottage*, 135; see also 42, 45, 75, 76, 94, 143.
18. George Francis Dow, ed., *The Probate Records of Essex County, Massachusetts* (Salem, Mass.: The Essex Institute, 1916–20), 3:330.
19. Dow, *Probate Records*, 3:269.
20. Building contracts of this sort exist for parsonages at Beverly, 1657 (38 feet by 17 feet), Marlborough, 1661 (36 feet by 18 feet), and Danvers, 1681 (42 feet by 20 feet) and for a house in Haverhill, 1681 (48 feet by 20 feet). See Abbott Lowell Cummings, ed., *Architecture in Colonial Massachusetts*, vol. 51 of *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts* (Boston, Mass., 1979), 193–221.
21. Cummings, *Framed Houses*, 33.
22. Suf. Co. Prob. Recs., 5:45.
23. *Ibid.*, 4:225.
24. Cummings, *Framed Houses*, 7 and fig. 5.
25. James Deetz, "Plymouth Colony Architecture: Archaeological Evidence from the Seventeenth Century," in Cummings, ed., *Architecture in Colonial Massachusetts*, 54–57; Leon E. Cranmer, *Cushman: The History and Archaeology of Plymouth Colony Traders on the Kennebec*, Occasional Publications in Maine Archaeology, no. 7 (Augusta: Maine Historic Preservation Commission, 1990), chap. 3.
26. Barley, *English Farmhouse and Cottage*, 74.
27. Mid. Co. Prob. Recs., 1:142.
28. Suf. Co. Prob. Recs., 11:90.
29. *Ibid.*, 5:112.
30. Suf. Co. Prob. Recs., 11:190.
31. Turkey work was a brightly colored woolen pile fabric made in imitation of Turkish carpets for use as upholstery and table and floor carpets, especially during the seventeenth century. The covering of the chair in which Mrs. John Freake is seated (fig. 14) is turkey work.
32. Es. Co. Prob. Recs., 303:98.
33. Suf. Co. Prob. Recs., 3:130.
34. Es. Co. Prob. Recs., 305:189.
35. Es. Co. Prob. Recs., 306:190.
36. *Ibid.*, 305:86.
37. Dow, *Probate Records*, 1:223.
38. Mid. Co. Prob. Recs., 5:88. "Brunswick" does not appear among the list of "Extinct Places" published by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts under the title of *Historical Data Relating to Counties, Cities and Towns in Massachusetts* (Boston, 1966) and may have been out of state.
39. Mid. Co. Prob. Recs., 5:121.
40. Es. Co. Prob. Recs., 306:76.
41. George Francis Dow, *Every Day Life in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Boston, Mass.: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1935), 270–83.
42. The absence of pewter in the "Peuter Room," for which there is no ready explanation, nevertheless raises a further cautionary note with respect to inventory nomenclature. While almost always difficult to prove, the specialized contents—in this case pewter—of any given space can have been removed at some time though the former room designation lingers in use. Similarly, references to a "new kitchen" may not necessarily imply new construction but rather a recent change in function for a given existing space.

43. George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts* (Salem, Mass.: The Essex Institute, 1911-75), 9:492-503.
44. Document C.O. 1/36, no. 34, Public Record Office, London.
45. Suf. Co. Prob. Recs., 11:200.
46. William Sumner Appleton, "The Province House, 1922," *Old-Time New England* 62, 4 (April-June 1972): 87-92. See also the other articles in this special issue of *Old-Time New England* and Fay Campbell Kaynor, "The Province House and the Preservation Movement," *Old-Time New England* 74, 262 (Fall 1996): 5-32.
47. Abbott Lowell Cummings, ed., *Rural Household Inventories* (Boston, Mass.: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1964), 190, 243.
48. *First Report of the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston*, 2d ed. (Boston, Mass., 1881), 91-127.
49. Suf. Co. Prob. Recs., 9:156.
50. Within the sample at large two inventories only have been taken from sources other than the probate courts—1) the ca. 1636 room-by-room inventory of the household possessions of John Winthrop, Jr., of Ipswich, was apparently recorded for purposes other than probate and has been published in the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2d ser., 11 (1896-7): 4-6; 2) the 1694 room-by-room inventory of the extant house of John Pickering II of Salem was indeed taken at the time of his death but for whatever reason was never submitted to probate, and it survives among Pickering family papers that are preserved at the Pickering House in Salem.
51. Mid. Co. Prob. Recs., 6:226.
52. Suf. Co. Prob. Recs., 13:584.
53. Mid. Co. Prob. Recs., 5:121.