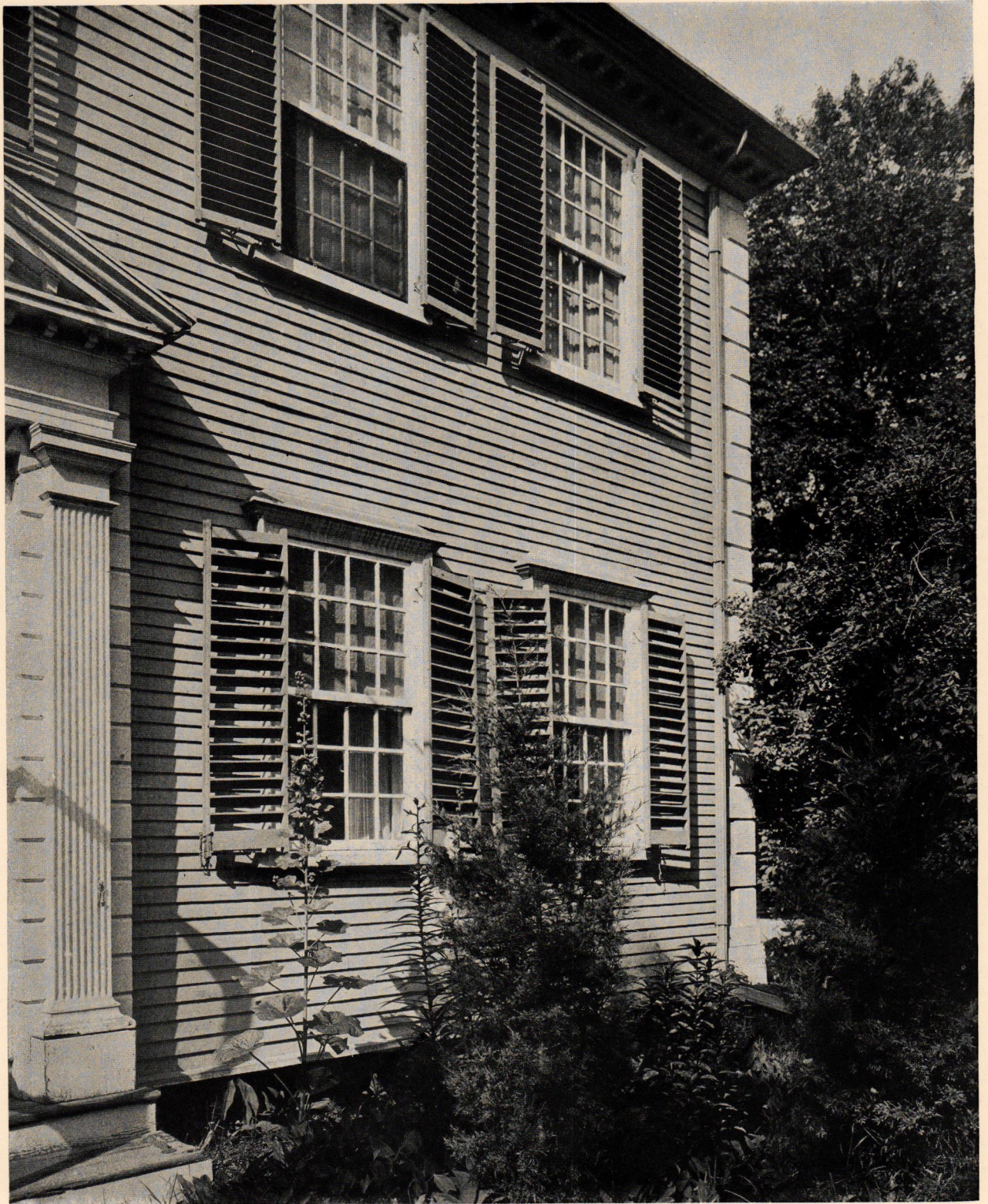


SOME RECORDS OF OLD CONCORD
THE FIRST INLAND TOWNSHIP OF
MASSACHUSETTS
BY FRANK CHOUTEAU BROWN

THE MONOGRAPH SERIES
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FOUR NINETEEN FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK



THE PENNIMAN-STEARN'S HOUSE, BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

Reuben Duren, Architect

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OLD CONCORD

THE Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620. Nine years later Charles the First signed the Charter of Massachusetts, and a year after, in 1630, nearly fifteen hundred men and women arrived under Winthrop and Dudley to settle upon its eastern shores. In that year, the City of Boston was settled and Watertown and Cambridge also founded.

The first inland settlement in Massachusetts was made in 1635, although it is said that it had been planned in England two years earlier; and this seems plausible from the fact that all the earliest people to settle on the site of Concord village came directly from England, and originally its only neighbors for years were "New Towne"—later Cambridge—and Watertown.

The General Court of Massachusetts issued an act of incorporation on September 2nd, 1635, for the area then known as "Musketaquid," from its Indian name, proclaiming that it "shall hereafter be called Concord." And Gov. Winthrop stated his grant was made to "Mr. Buckley and . . . , merchant, and about twelve more families, to begin a town." The two principal incorporators were undoubtedly the Rev. Peter Bulkeley and Maj. Simon Willard; and it was placed to include the Great Fields or Great Meadows, along the banks of the Concord River, located to the north of the Boston Road, which were immediately realized as being especially fertile.

The original area was increased by other grants. In November, 1637, the Court gave to Gov. Winthrop and his lieutenant deputy, Mr. Thomas Dudley, large additional lands bounding on the Concord River. In June, 1641, "Shawshen" was granted to Cambridge; and on Sept. 23rd, 1729, Bedford, with its sister town of Westford, were incorporated as the 25th and 26th of the fifty-nine townships finally set up in Middlesex County; Bedford's area being largely taken from Concord and Billerica—also including the whole of the area granted to Winthrop and part of the "Shawshen" or "Shawshine" grant, upon which the first dwelling had been built in 1642, and called "Shawshen House." Subsequently, both Lincoln, 1754, and Carlisle, 1757, were set off from Concord; while from Bedford, Acton was "set off" in 1684, and incorporated in 1735, Stow in 1670, and Littleton in 1715, these various townships being made up out of sections of the earliest inland townland, and new sections adjoining it.

John Duren, of the first generation in this country, settled in Billerica, possibly as early as 1659, and Reuben Duren or Durrant (the name being also

spelled in other ways) was of the fourth generation. He married Mary Gould of Chelmsford on Jan. 11th, 1770, and died on Jan. 4th, 1821. He was known as "an architect and builder of first-class dwelling houses of the town" and those for Col. Timothy Jones and Rev. Mr. Penniman (now the Stearns house), pages 182 and 193, are examples—the latter being perhaps his second house in that vicinity. The Rev. Samuel Stearns was ordained on April 27th, 1796, at which time the house for his predecessor, the third minister, was not entirely finished.

In 1792 Reuben Duren purchased a tavern in Billerica, which he kept till he removed to New Ipswich, New Hampshire, where he later became famed as a builder of meetinghouses. His reputation as bridge builder, earned in Bedford, was enhanced by his model for a bridge over the Merrimac at Pawtucket Falls, which was given precedence over many competitors.

The Hildreth House at Concord, set off from all present main traveled roads, and facing out upon a quiet little triangle of green, preserves something of its original flavor of quiet dignity and comparative isolation. It would appear of about the same date as the Stearns house at Bedford from similarities of detail; the almost direct repetition of idea shown in the two doorways; the general proportions and composition of both façades indicating, with other internal evidence, that the legend that the Hildreth house had been produced by the same designer as the Stearns dwelling is probably correct. The interiors, shown upon the measured drawing of the section, express something of the restraint, almost the inarticulateness, of many of the early New Englanders when attempting to work in the more sumptuous, freely flowing manner that seems to have come so easily to many of their contemporaries—or even to designers of somewhat earlier times—in the southern Colonies.

Deane Winthrop, a son of the Governor, was among those who signed the petition for the setting up of a part of the inland area as the township of Groton. In 1655 two new townships were authorized, Shawshin and Groton. The date of "Groton plantations" is fairly well established as between May 23 or 29, 1655.

When the line between New Hampshire and Massachusetts was surveyed and located in 1741, it was disclosed that Groton had lost to New Hampshire a large part of its area, so that there was a Groton in each state up to January 1st, 1837, when the name of Nashua was given to that portion in New Hampshire.

Other portions of Groton went to make the new Pepperell, set off Nov. 26th, 1742, but not signed by Gov. Shirley until April 12th, 1753. This new township was named after Sir William Pepperell. Shirley was set off as a district January 5th, 1753, but did not become a separate township until August 23rd, 1775. Ayer was incorporated from portions of Groton and Shirley; about half of the town of Dunstable came from Groton lands, and the full tale is told with the mention that smaller parts of Groton were taken for Harvard, Littleton, and Westwood in Massachusetts, and Nashua and Hollis in New Hampshire. These several partitions left Groton finally with an area of less than half of its original forty thousand acres.

One of the older small schools in Massachusetts was in Groton, known as the "Academy," and later as Lawrence Academy, in honor of the several benefits conferred upon it by both Amos and William Lawrence of Medford, Mass. Amos Lawrence had been born and educated in Groton, and had besides served an apprenticeship for seven years in the old store of James Brazer in Groton, up to April 22nd, 1807. James Brazer was originally one of the founders of the Academy, subscribing £15 to the building fund in 1792; and so it was rather appropriate for Amos Lawrence to purchase James Brazer's house, built about 1802, and situated immediately south of and adjacent to the Academy property, and give it to the Academy in 1848. The estate of Judge Samuel Dana had been added to the Academy property in 1836; and so these two representative New England dwellings have been fortunately preserved until today, side by side upon the main road, facing out across the Meadows, being used as dormitories for the Academy scholars. During his later lifetime Samuel Dana served his district as representative in Congress, he had been president of the Massachusetts Senate, and had also served the town of Groton as its first postmaster (1801-1804).

The visitor driving through the main street of Groton today can still capture something of the village charm, from its few principal dwellings grouped closely together, with the two most imposing mansions side by side upon the higher ground that formerly looked off over the meadow farms and fields. Another fact of interest, but of no particular architectural value, except that it keys into the family record of another beautiful Colonial mansion located nearby in Woburn, relates to Loammi Baldwin, Jr., a son of the distinguished engineer of that name, who was studying law in Groton in January, 1802, when the predecessor of the Brazer House burned. Young Baldwin was boarding with Dr. Oliver Prescott, Sr., of the same family as William Prescott, who came from Groton and commanded the American forces at the Battle of Bunker Hill. He witnessed this fire and was so im-

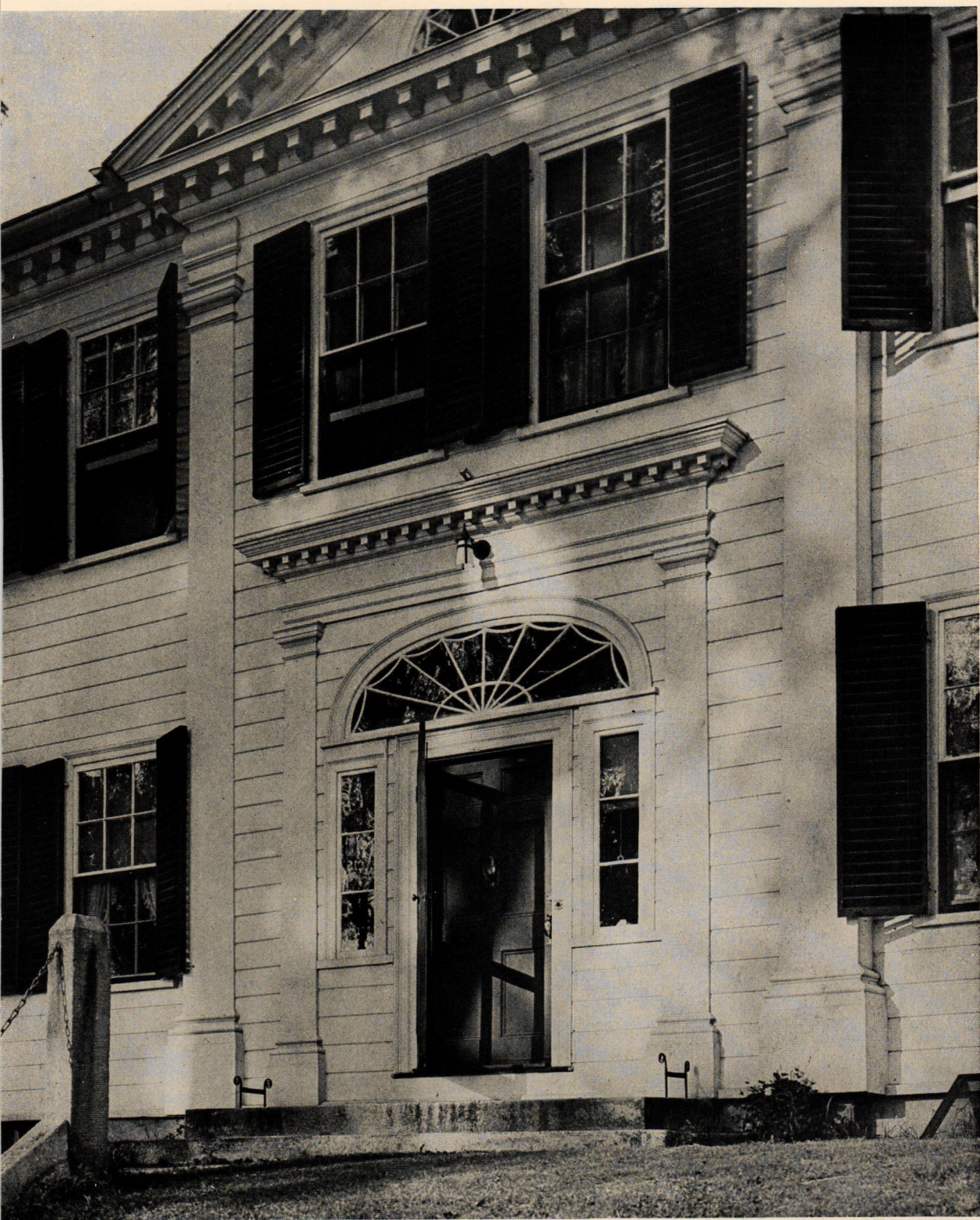
pressed by it, and the inefficiency of the methods then employed to fight it, that he undertook to construct an "engine" in an old shop located where the William Bruce drugstore was toward the end of the last century. This engine, known as "Torrent No. 1," was used for years in Groton, and was working in West Groton, as late as 1890, the only piece of apparatus then available in that village for the fighting of fire.

Shirley Center, the oldest section of the present township of that name, remains still largely undisturbed, partly because of its isolated position, having been left at one side when the newer automobile highway was routed through that area. It is undoubtedly for that reason that it is still possible to get much the effect of that little center of Colonial life when visiting the dwelling of Thomas Whitney, son of the Rev. Phineas Whitney, the first minister of Shirley, after its being set apart as a separate township. This occurred in 1753, on Jan. 5th; the first meetinghouse having been built in 1754. It was replaced by a second and larger structure in 1773. The cupola, shown on page 196, was probably a part of this original building. Unfortunately, porches were added in 1804, along with other changes, and the structure was again remodeled in 1839; so that it is no longer possible to get an interesting photograph of the entire building.

Mr. Thomas Whitney, whose house remains the most important of the small group around the village, was born March 19th, 1771, and died on January 14th, 1844. We have the date of his marriage to Henrietta Parker, which was July 7th, 1799; and it is probable that his hospitable farmhouse was rebuilt a little while after that date. Standing a little back from the main street, behind its guardian elms, it is an able representative of the four-square New England type that came into being shortly before the Revolution and persisted until the more daintily graceful structures of the 1815 to 1830 period succeeded it, just before the turn to the heavy dignity of the Neo-Greek influence was to flow over the country; replacing these gracious homes with Greek temples, somewhat arbitrarily and awkwardly made to serve the purposes of a family dwelling.

The front of the house facing the Common still shows the old type shutters, lacking the middle cross style. The detail of the front porch indicates a period preceding the date of Thomas Whitney's marriage, to which some of the enlargement and additions might easily belong. The generous spacing of the front entrance porch columns, their slight, almost crude, entasis, the heavy molding of necking and base, all point to workmanship of a time much nearer the Revolution, or even somewhat preceding.

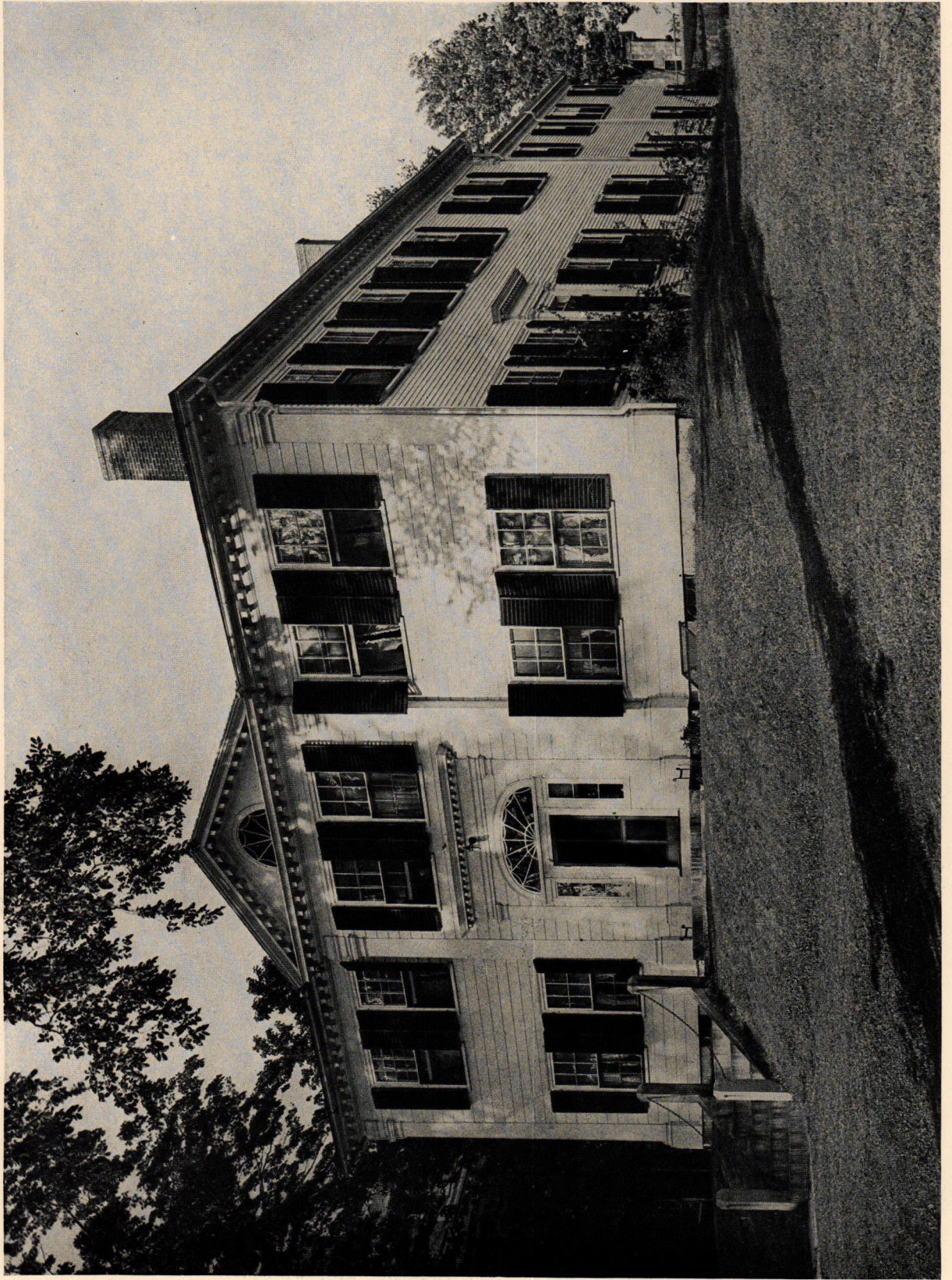
FRANK CHOUTEAU BROWN.



Detail of Façade

THE JAMES BRAZER HOUSE, GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS

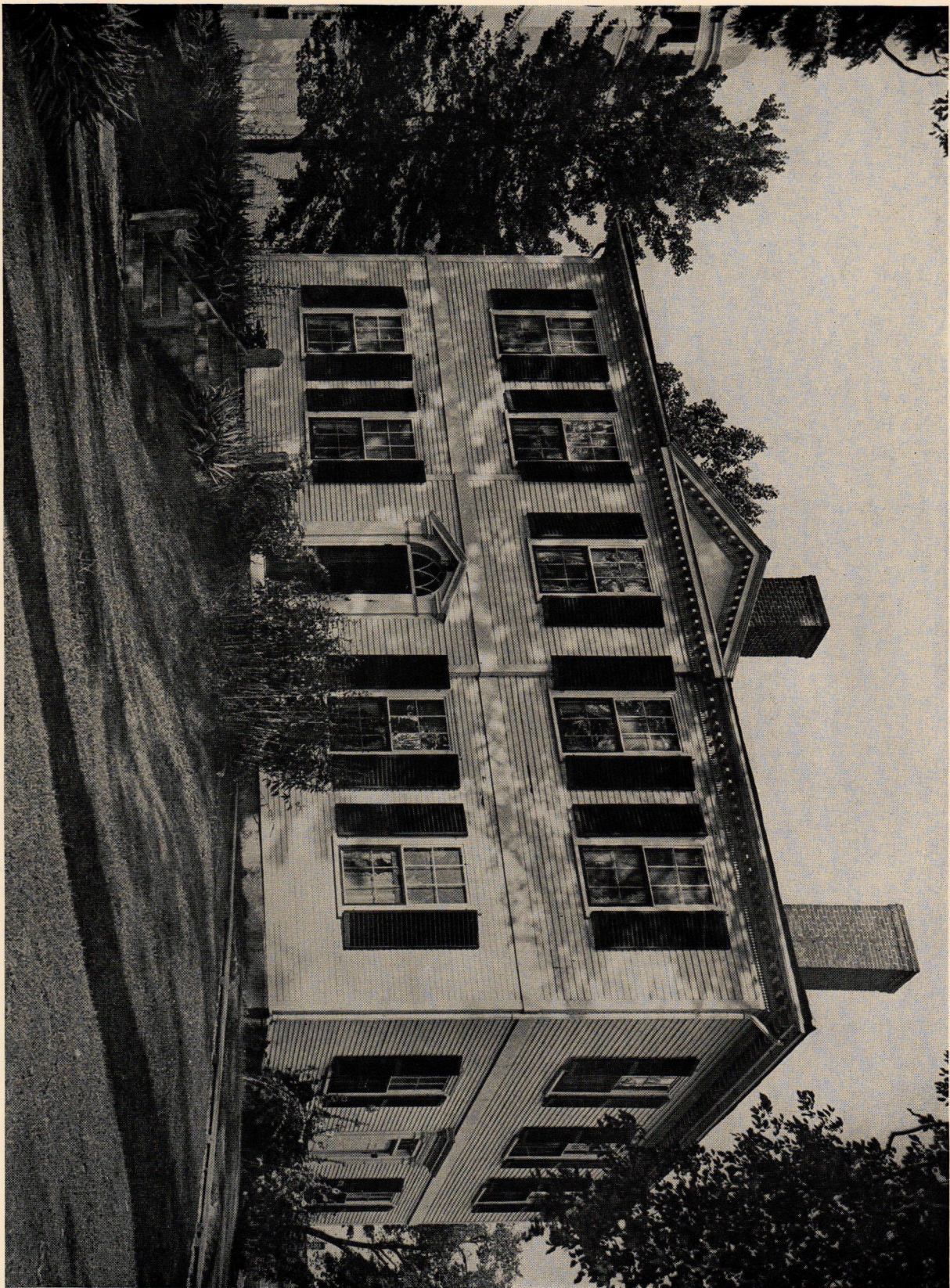
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THE JAMES BRAZER HOUSE, GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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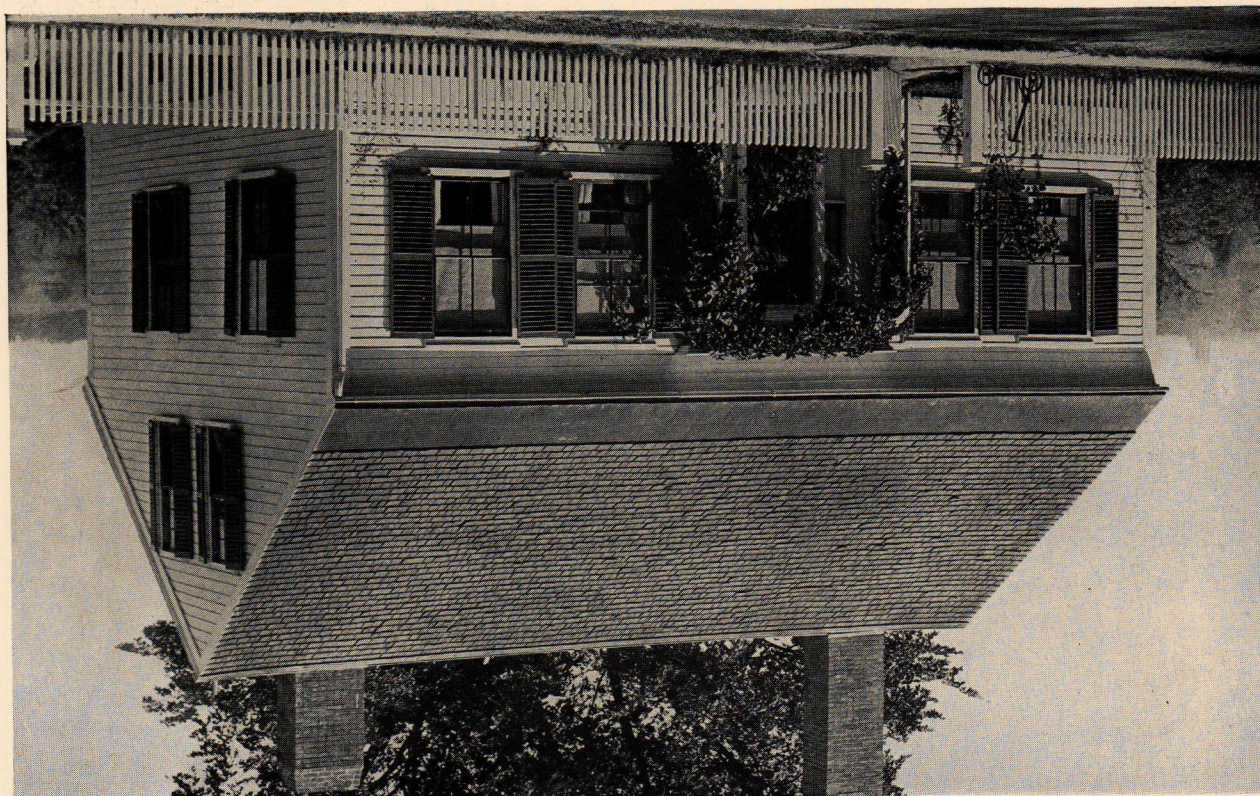
THE SAMUEL DANA HOUSE, GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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THE SAMUEL DANA HOUSE, GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS
Side Entrance

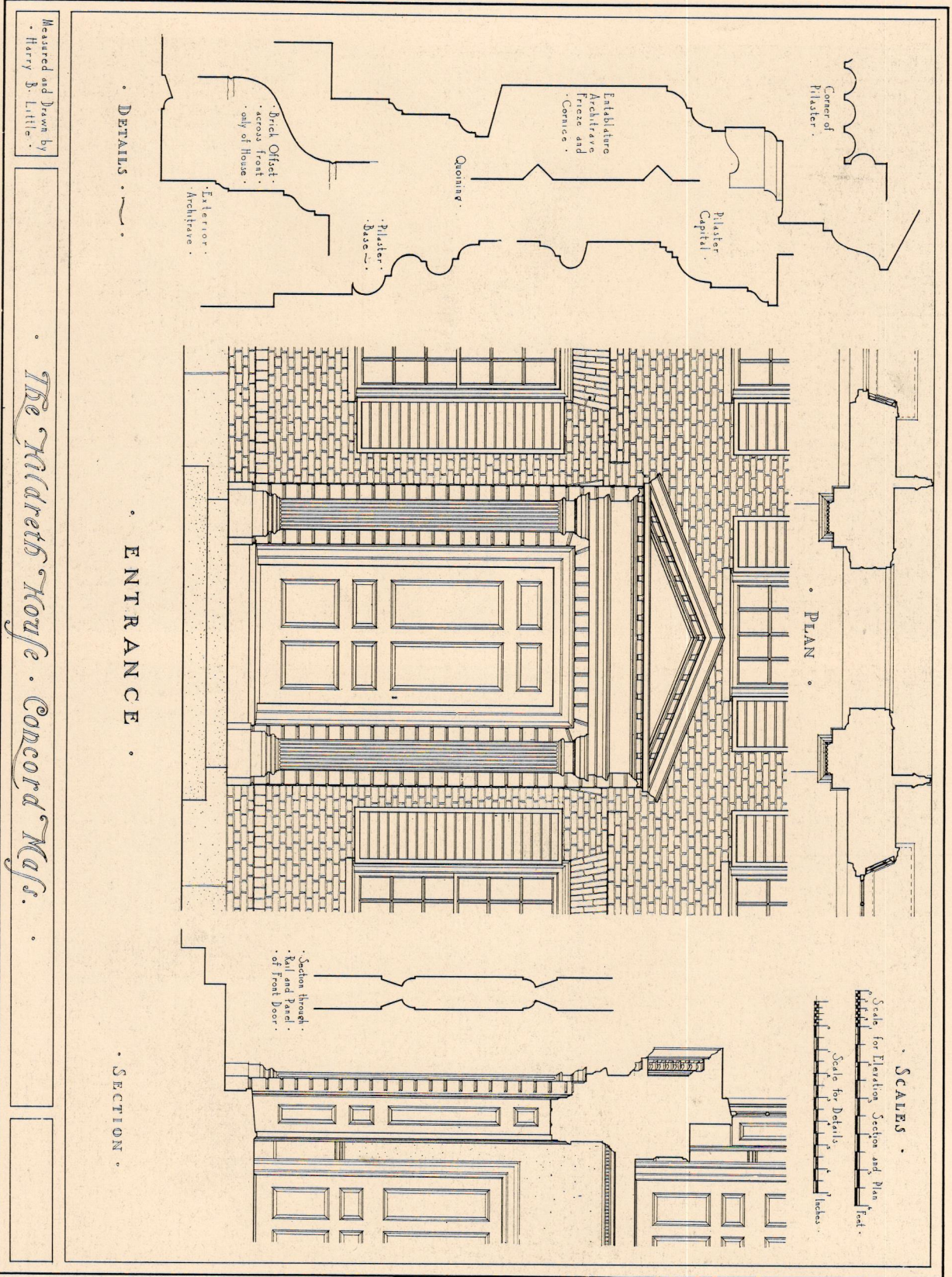


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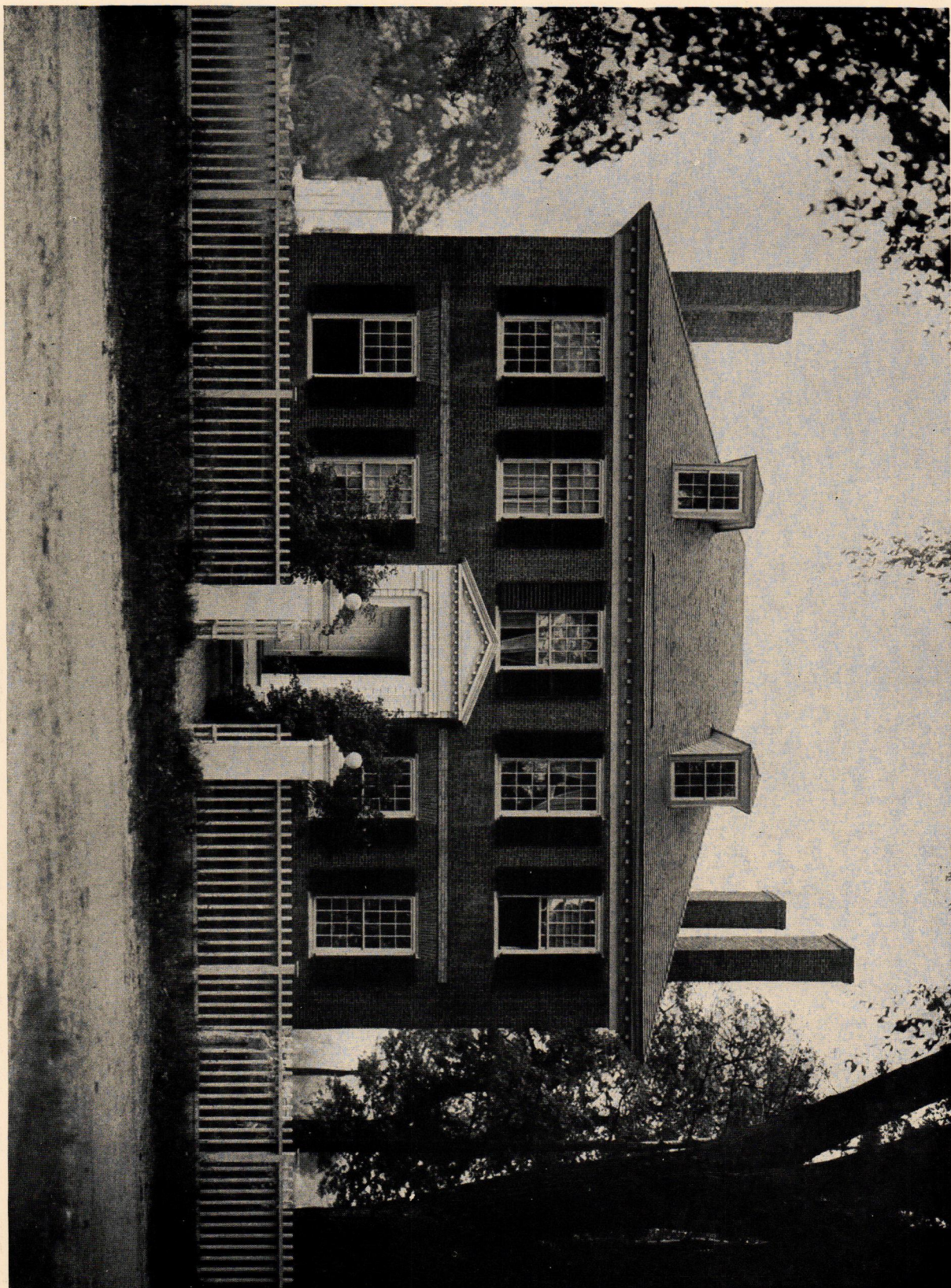
TYPICAL HOUSES ALONG MAIN STREET, GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS



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THE HILDRETH HOUSE, CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS

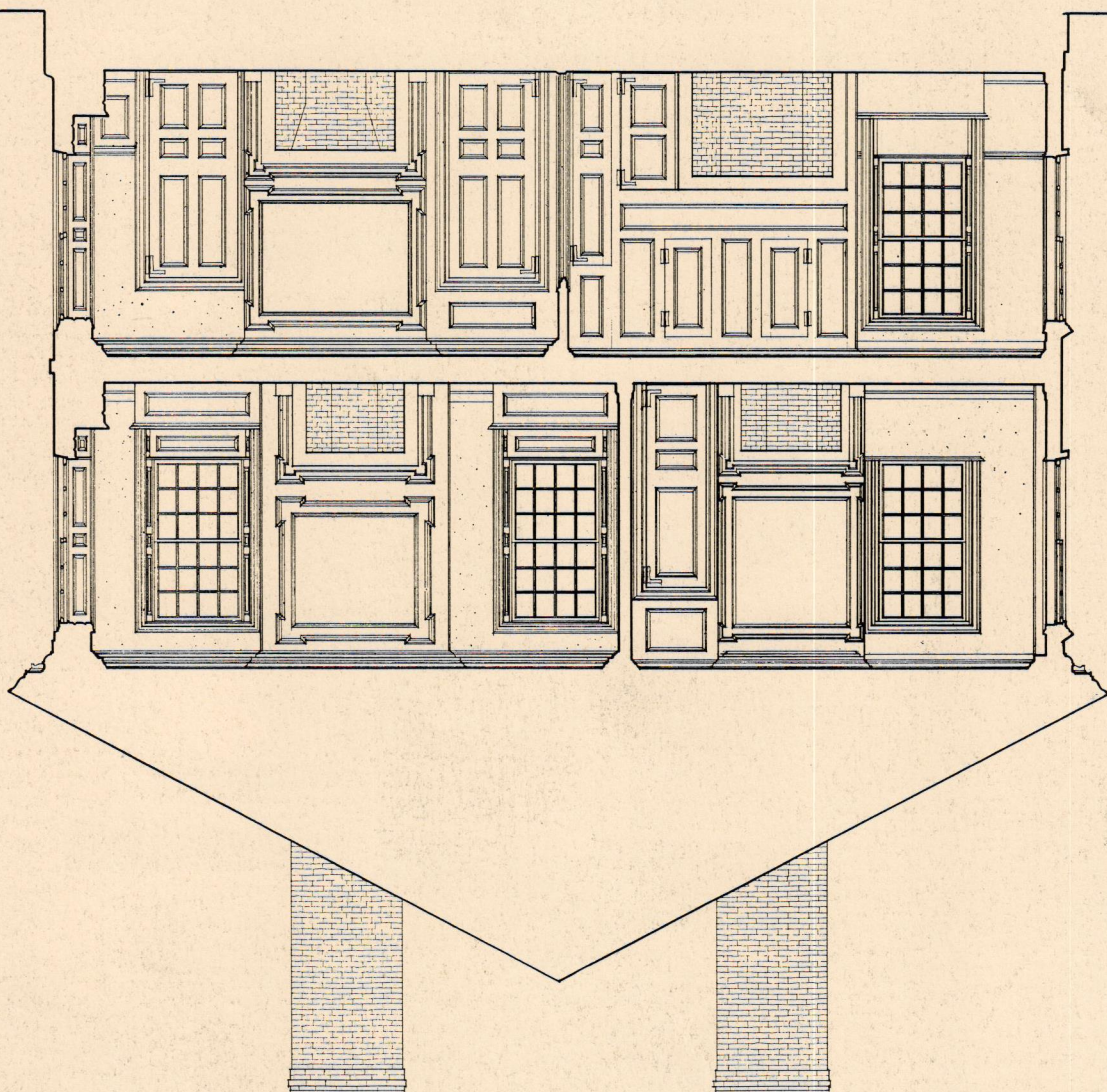
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Measured and drawn by Harry B. Little

The Hildreth House · Concord Mass ·



SECTION A B





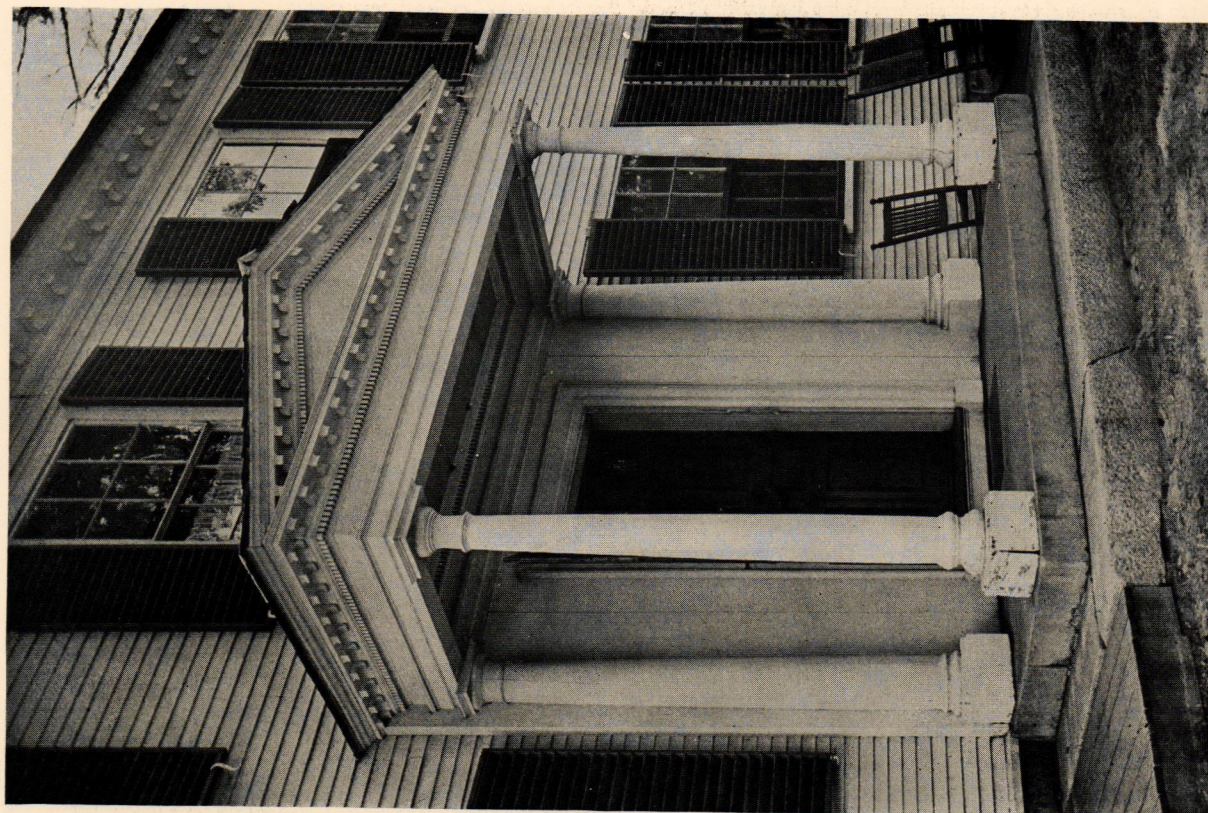
CUPOLA—MEETING HOUSE, SHIRLEY CENTER, MASSACHUSETTS

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THE THOMAS WHITNEY HOUSE, SHIRLEY CENTER, MASSACHUSETTS

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SIDE AND FRONT DOORWAYS—THE THOMAS WHITNEY HOUSE, SHIRLEY CENTER, MASSACHUSETTS

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DOORWAY, THE PENNIMAN-STEARN'S HOUSE, BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

Reuben Duren, Architect

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