

EARLY INTERIOR DOORWAYS  
IN NEW ENGLAND  
PART ONE  
BY ARTHUR C. HASKELL

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*Batten Doors to Kitchen Closet and Entry*  
HASKELL HOUSE, WEST GLOUCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS, 1652

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# EARLY INTERIOR DOORWAYS

## IN NEW ENGLAND

The simplest form of early door was made of one or two wide wooden boards, fastened to cross battens or ledger boards placed across the back, usually six or seven inches down from the top and about eight to ten inches up from the bottom of the door, and generally nailed with old hand-forged iron nails, which were driven through from the face and clinched by having the pointed end hammered over upon the back of the batten. As the earliest houses were enclosed by nailing or pinning upright boards against the frame outside from sill to plate, it was natural at first to build interior partitions in the same way; cutting doors through wherever they were wanted and making the door from the pieces cut out of the upright boarding, by fitting them against battens placed across the back, usually coming on either the closet, kitchen or hall side of the opening. This sort of a door was strengthened by the use of long flat wrought-iron hinges, known as "strap" hinges, often extending almost entirely across the door, and always for about two-thirds of its width. These were usually nailed with handmade nails clinched on the back, and placed over the batten, so that the boards were held firmly between the wooden batten on the back and the flat iron strap upon the face; and every board carried two or more of the nails to help brace and stiffen the door's construction. Sometimes the battens were moulded along the edge, with a quarter round or mould like the one shown in the drawing; sometimes the crosspieces were connected by upright members along each edge, making almost a frame or panel upon the back; sometimes they were braced by a diagonal brace or strut starting on the hinged side at the top of the bottom crosspiece, to correct or prevent any tendency to sag along the outer edge of the door.

From these back-framed doors it was an easy step to the paneled door, with two or more panels, usually moulded upon only one face, with the moulding always worked along the inner edge of the stile; and therefore a part of it—in all old work. Two paneled doors were among the earlier framed types, but doors with a middle upright stile were evidently soon added; and from then on the arrangement and variety of the panels, and their varied proportions and shapes, become a fascinating study for those interested or concerned with the art of building.

There are many six paneled doors, with small cross panels placed either just below the middle of the door's height, or across the top. Sometimes one cross panel runs entirely across the door, although there may be two panels in its width elsewhere. Some early doors have the lower panel cross-braced, making four triangular panels. Sometimes both the upper and lower part of the door is framed in this way. Occasionally the lower part of the top cross stile has a circular segment taken out of it, giving the effect of an arch or curve to the outline of the upper panel; and this treatment is sometimes taken across an entire paneled end of a room—or again it is merely confined to the doors, or perhaps to a set of panels arranged across the space over the fireplace.

An eight paneled door, like that from the old Dillaway House, is rather a favorite in nicely built dwellings, and the panels are sometimes raised upon both faces, and the stiles also moulded, so that there is really no "back" to the door, but both sides are "faces." There are also ten paneled doors, with a small panel top and bottom, and one in the middle of its height—while still another entirely new grouping of panels becomes available when the door is given three panels in width, making a six, nine, or twelve paneled door—as in the case of the entrance to the old Governor Hancock House—depending upon the number of panels into which its height was divided.

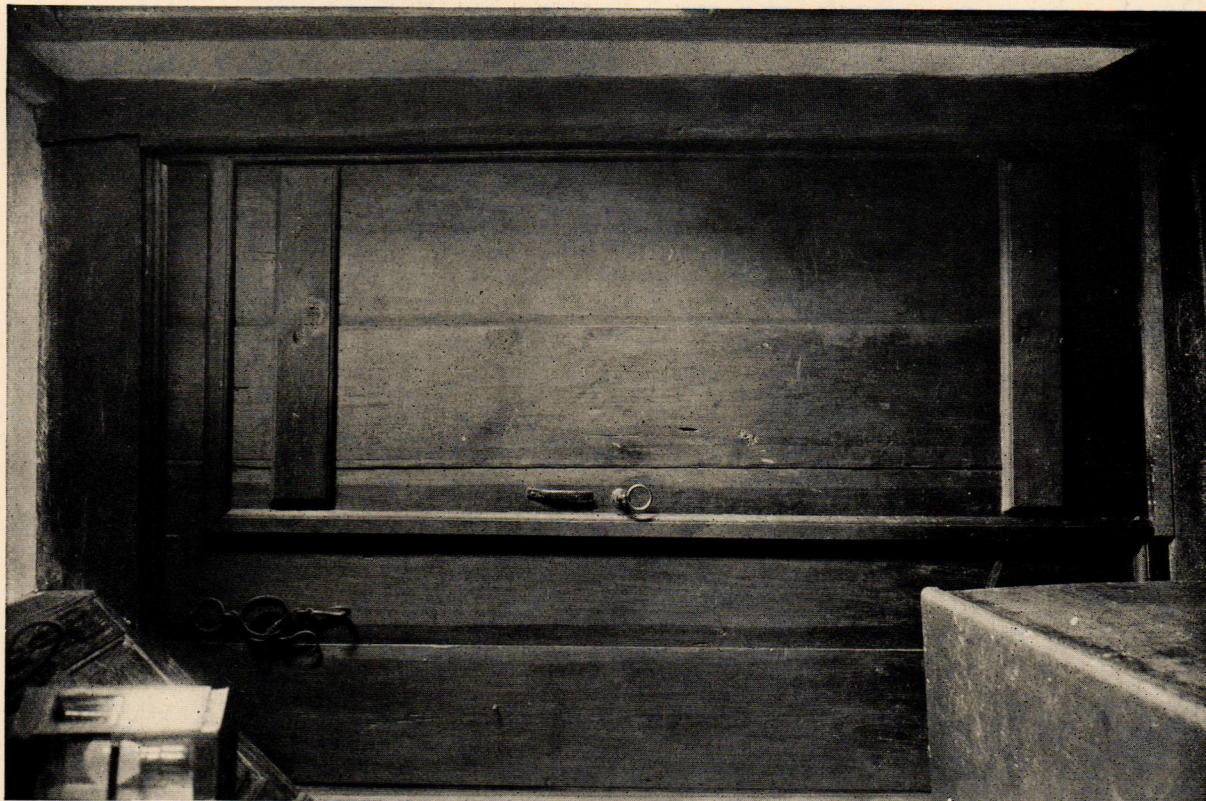
In this section, dealing with early doors and their enframing, only the more usual types have been selected from these early examples. Once we turn into the Eighteenth Century, a few of the best houses provide us with instances of the fine craftsmanship and beautiful finish that the skill and pains taken by the workmen of that time together made possible. They present models that the most costly houses of today can hardly undertake to better, although examples of this kind increase in number and beauty of treatment as the Century nears its end and turns the corner into the first twenty-five years of the Nineteenth Century.

The gradual progress in the methods and means by which doors were hung and fitted with hardware is almost as interesting as the gradual changes made in their design and construction. The earliest swinging valves were probably roughly fitted, and hung by  
(Continued on page 244)

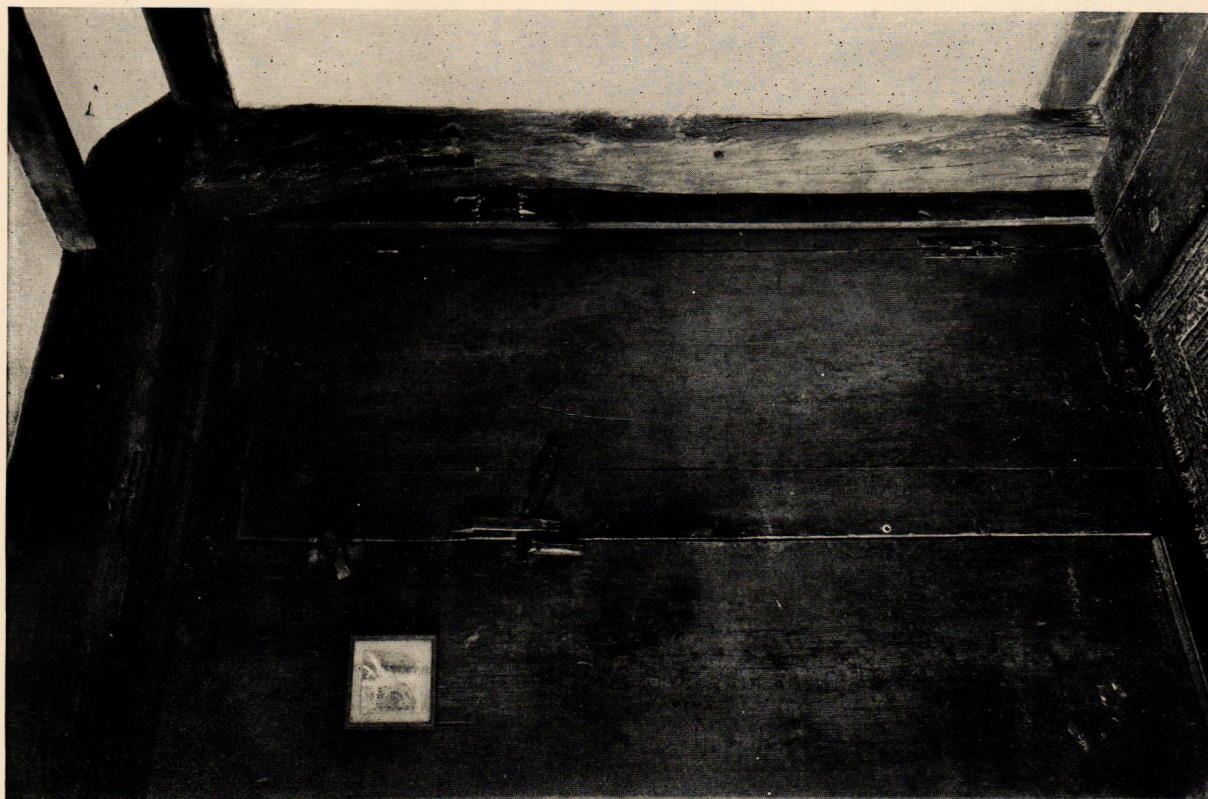








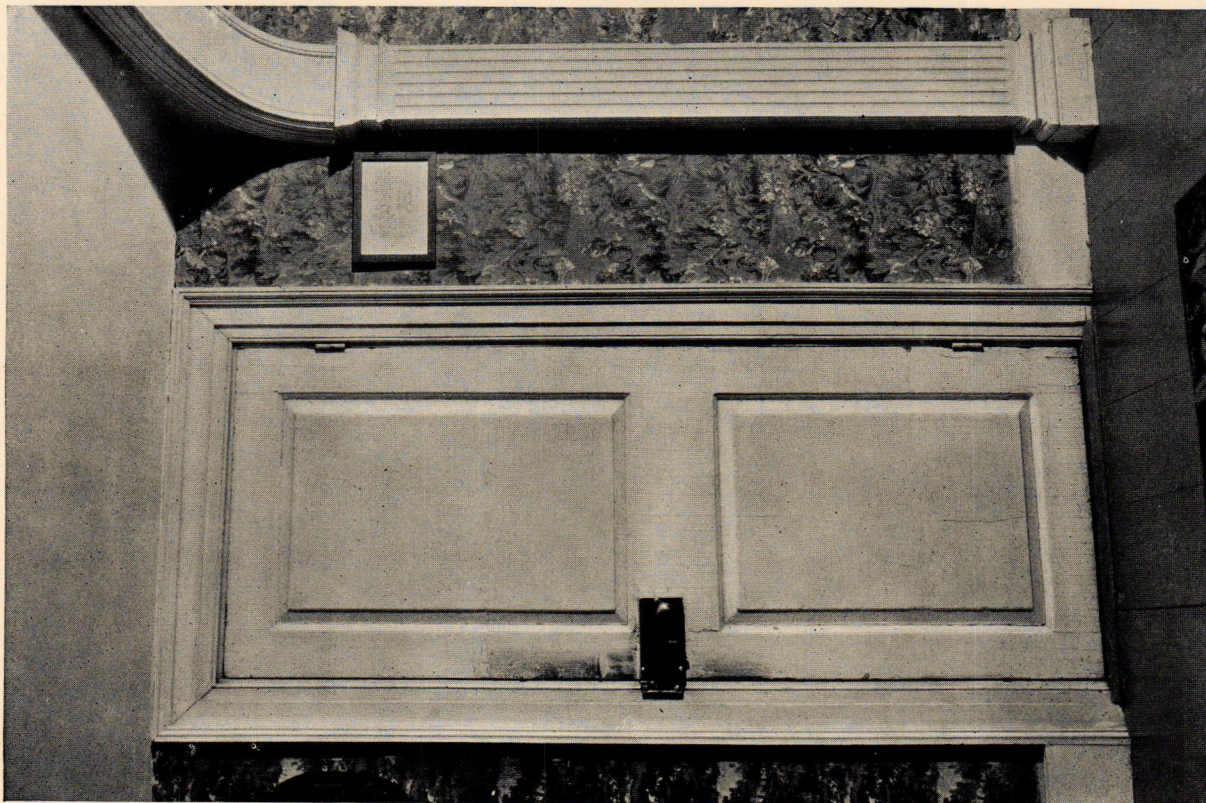
*Back of Batten (Staircase Entry Side) Door to Hall*  
TYPICAL BATTEN DOORS FROM OLD EMERY HOUSE, 1675, WEST NEWBURY, MASSACHUSETTS



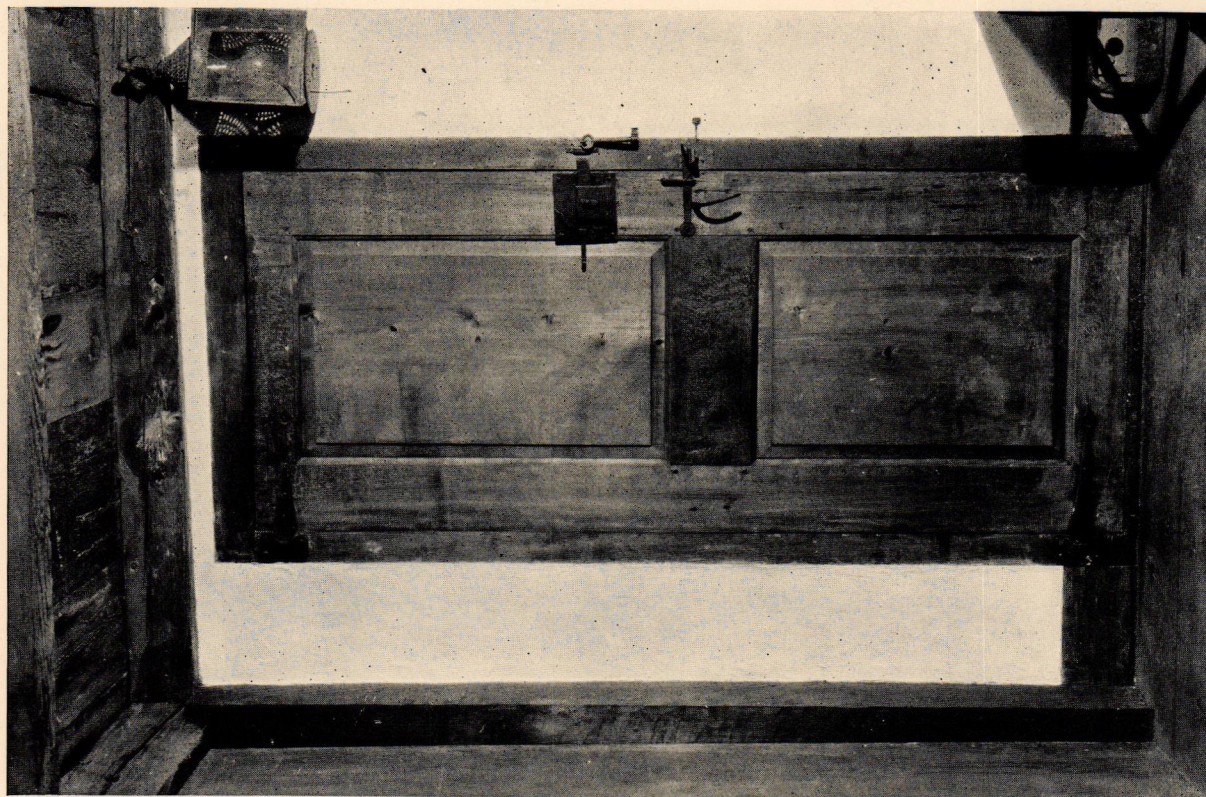
*Board Door with Wooden Latch; Second Floor*

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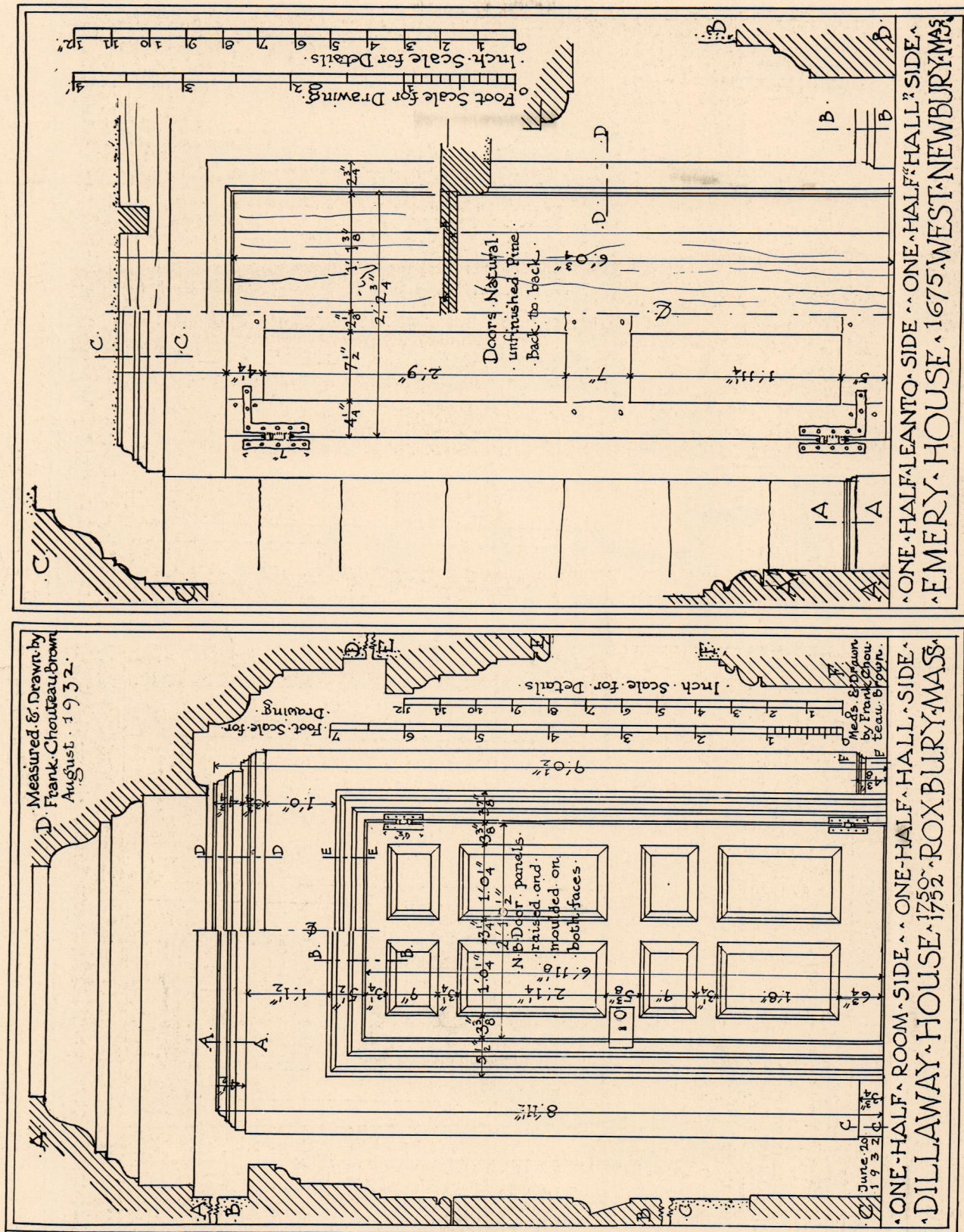
*Door in Second Hall—1686*  
WAYSIDE INN, SUDBURY, MASSACHUSETTS



*Door from Lane House, Essex, Mass.—About 1700*  
HASKELL HOUSE, WEST GLOUCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

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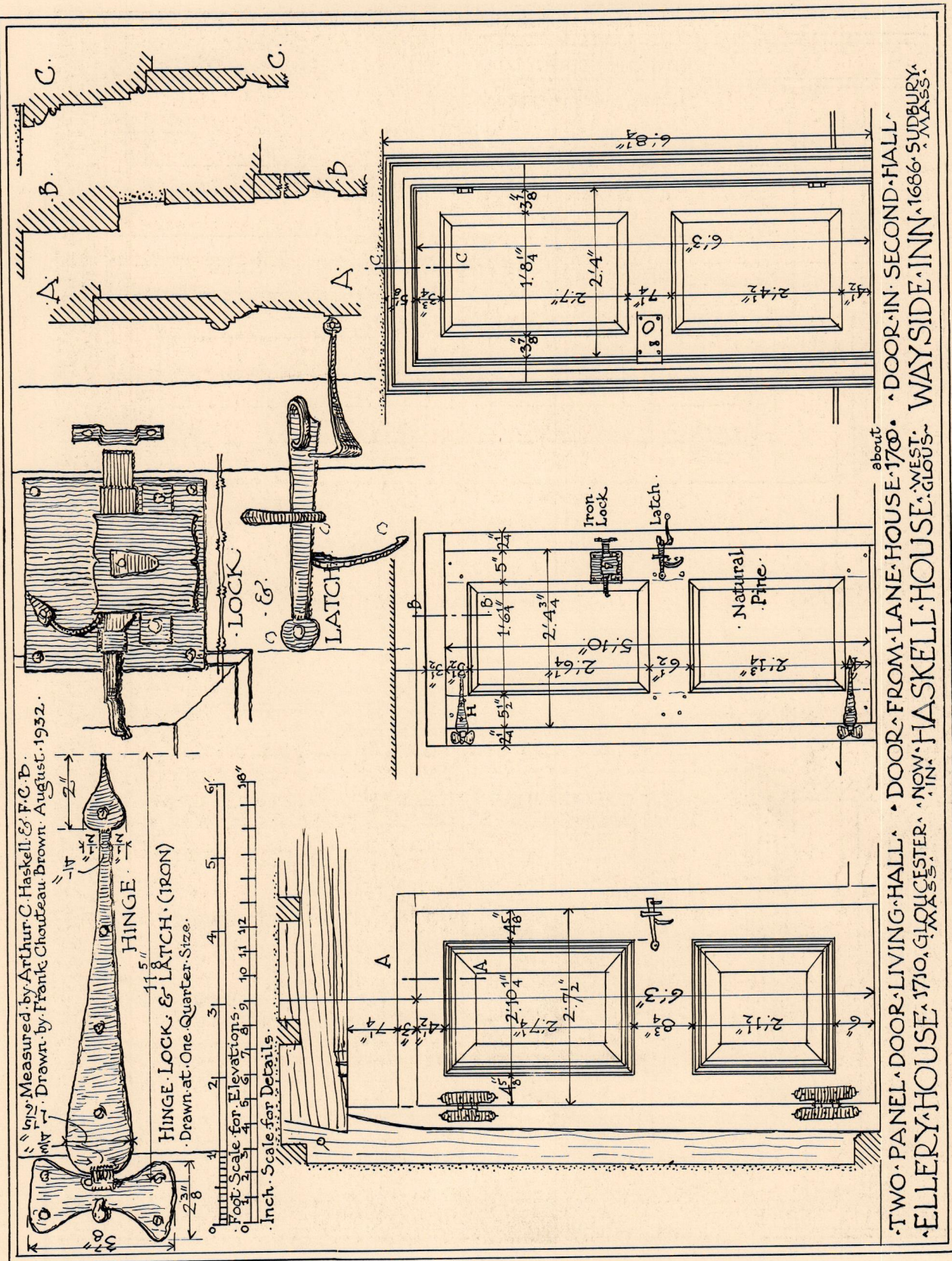




[ 236 ]

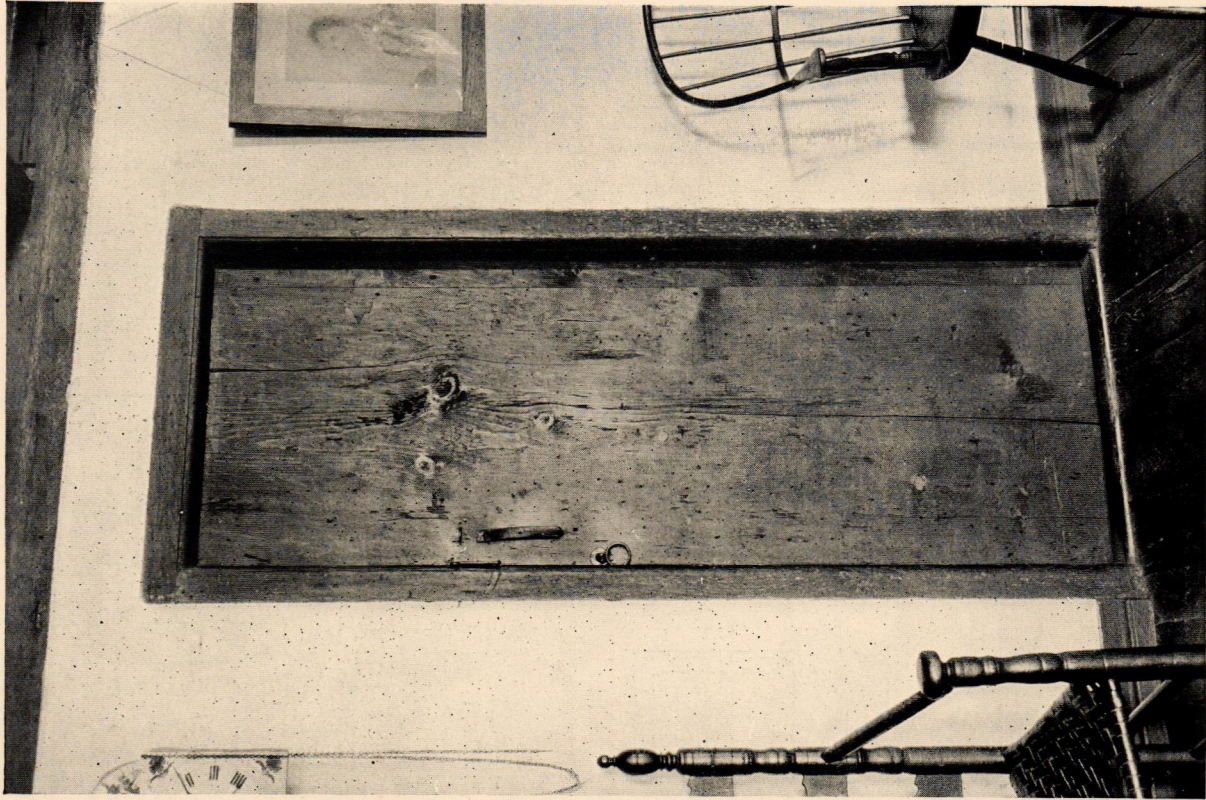
Drawing reproduced exactly at scale marked.



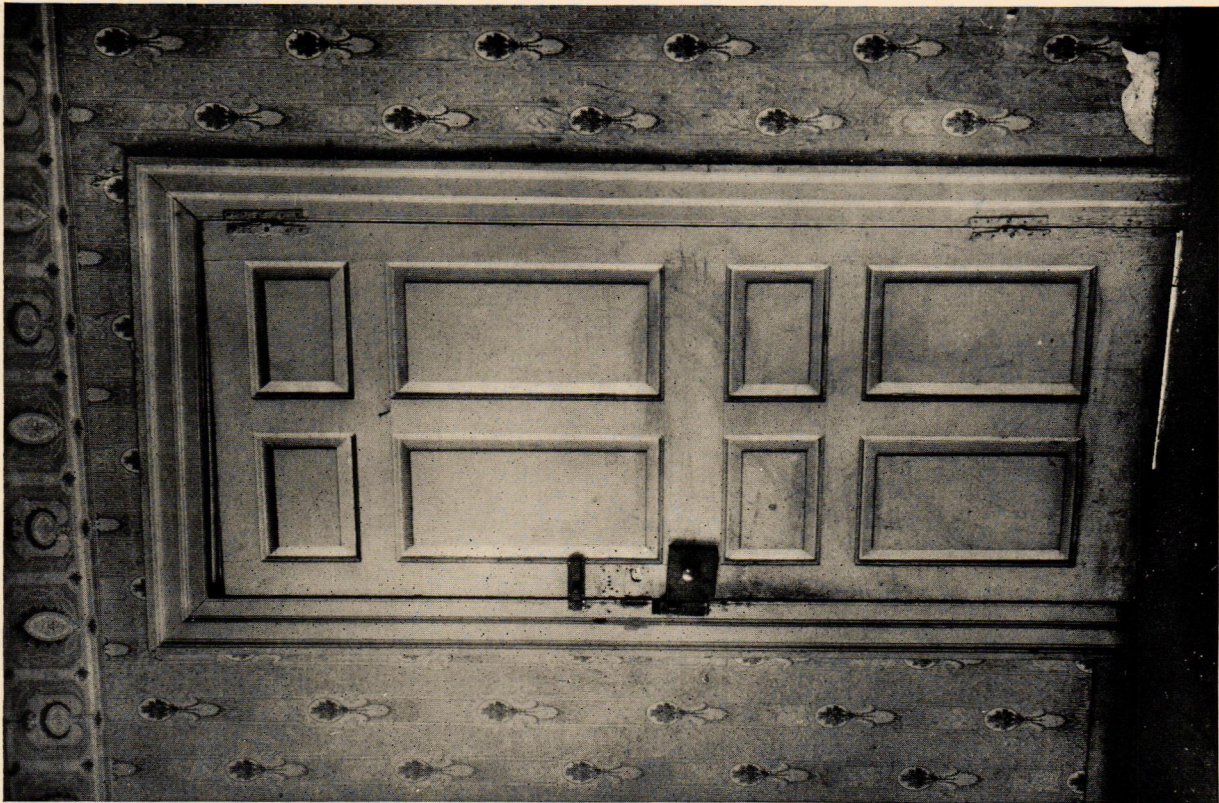


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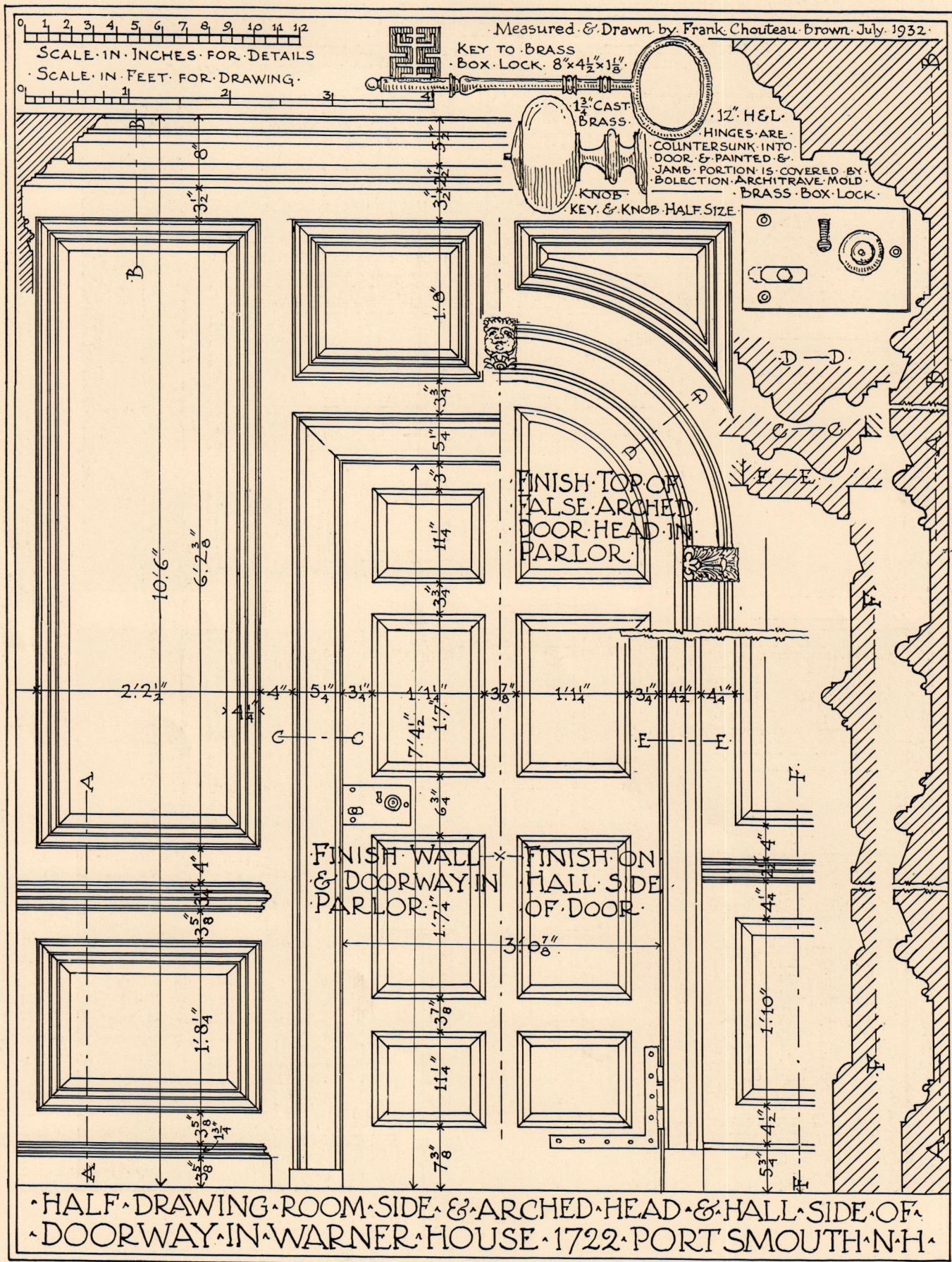
*Single Board Door, "Half" to Leanto*  
EMERY HOUSE, WEST NEWBURY, MASSACHUSETTS, 1675



*Eight Paneled Door, Second Floor*  
DILLAWAY HOUSE, ROXBURY, MASSACHUSETTS, 1750

[ 237 ]



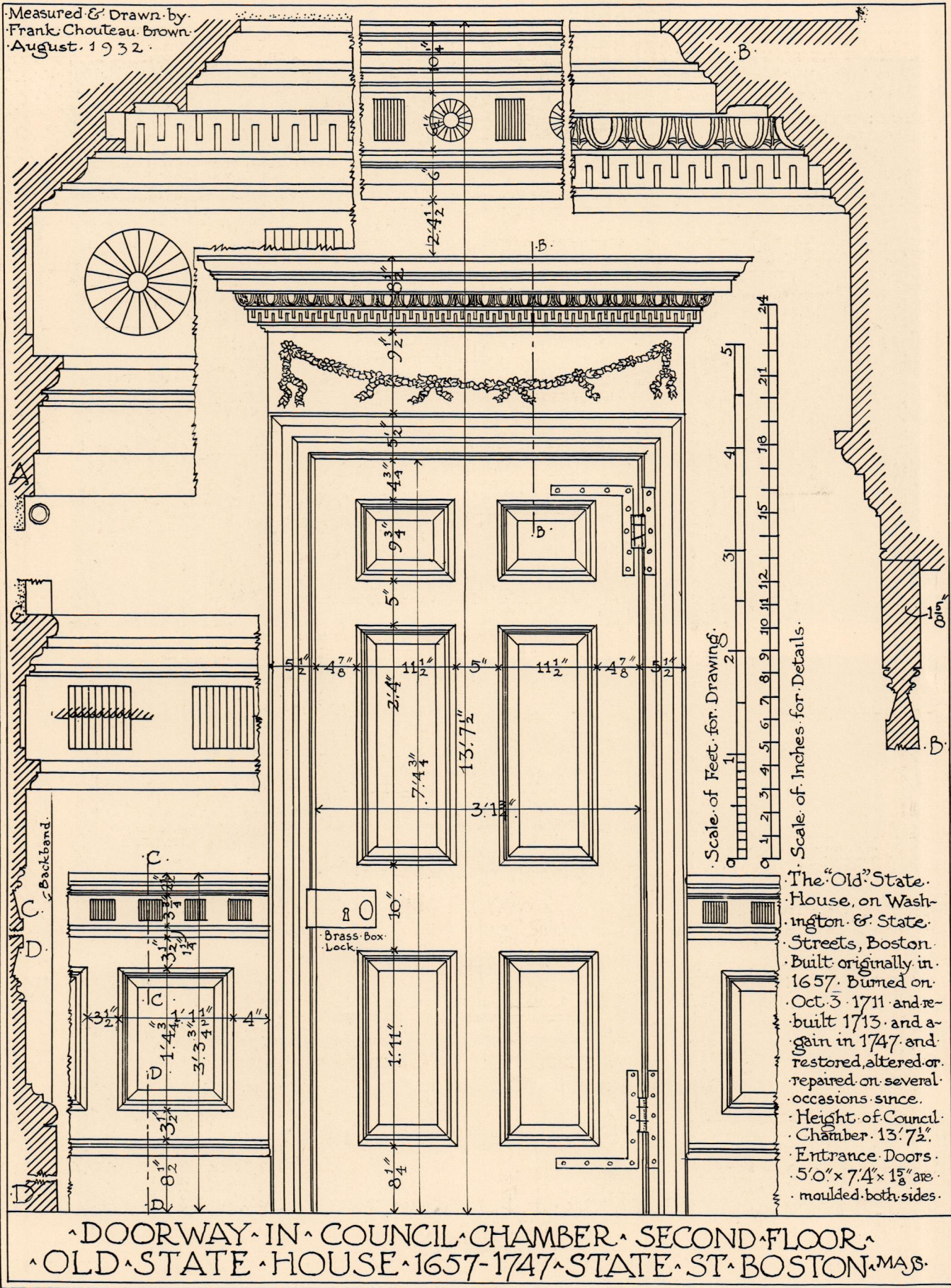


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[ 238 ]



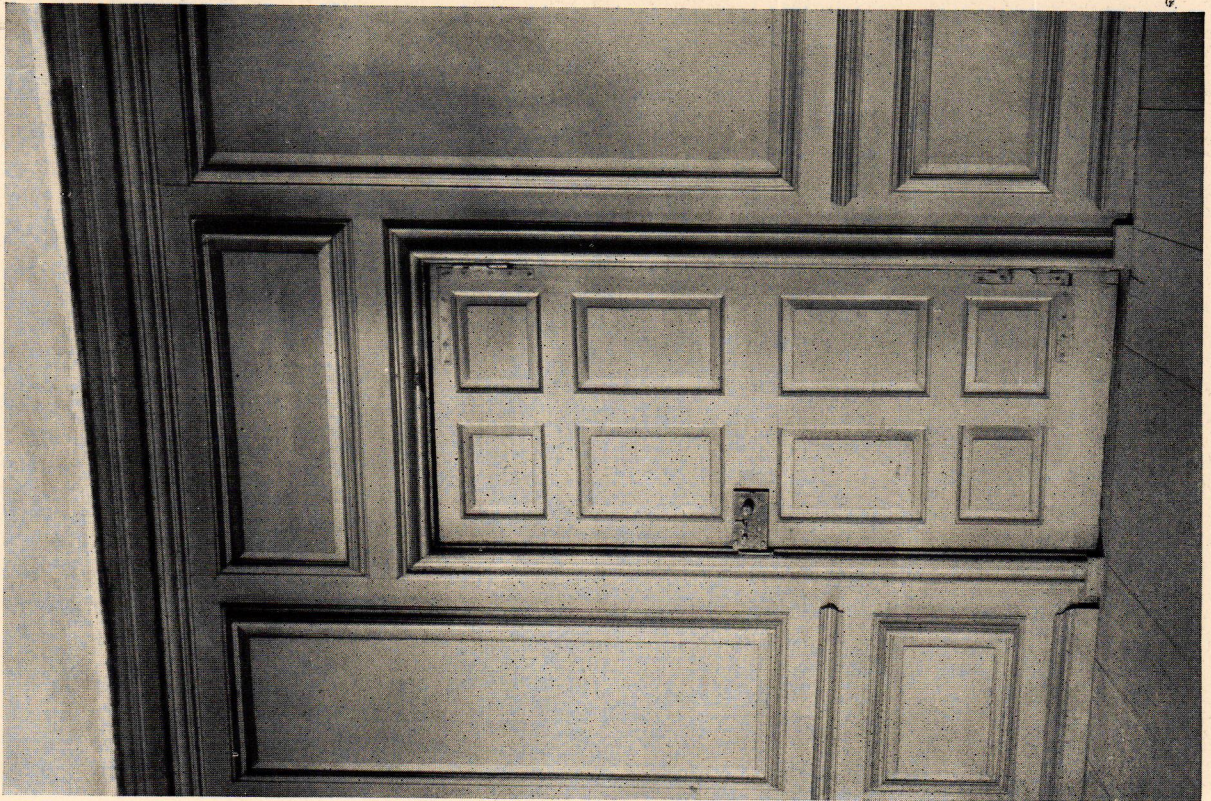
Measured & Drawn by  
Frank Chouteau Brown  
August, 1932.



Drawing reproduced exactly at scale marked.

[ 239 ]

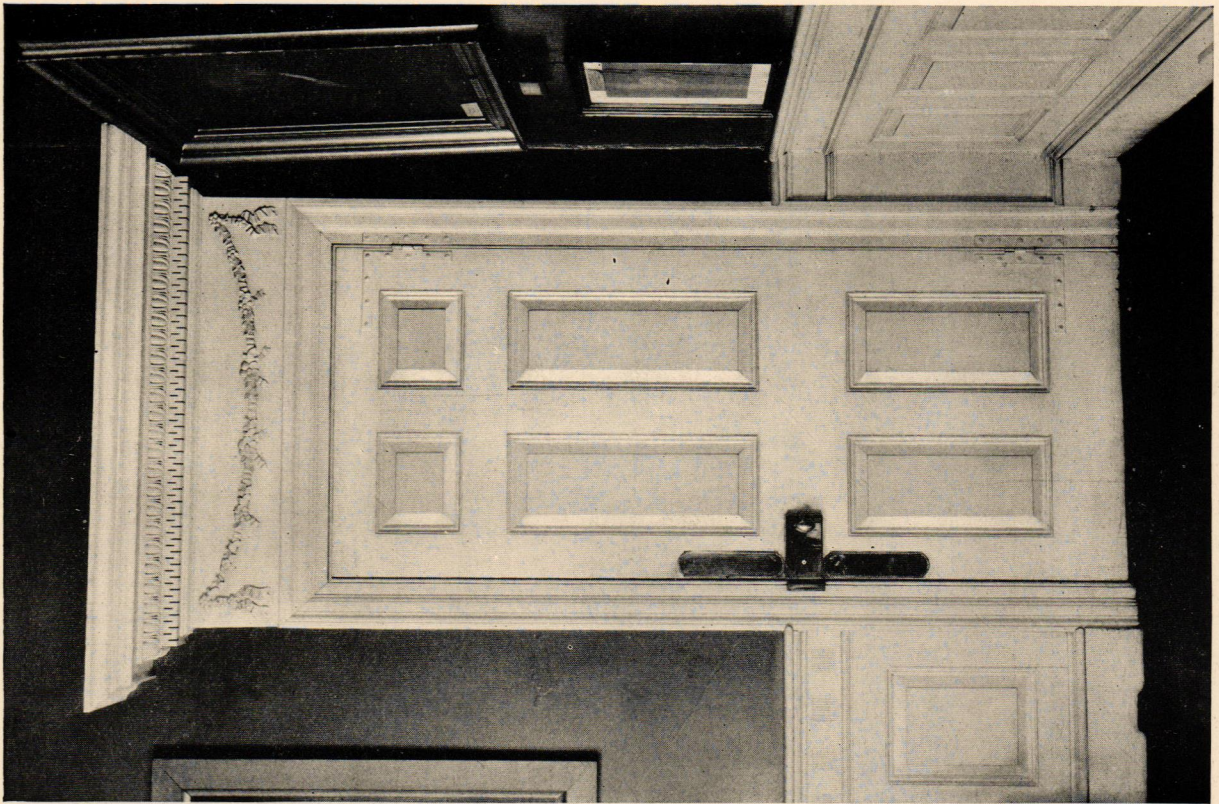
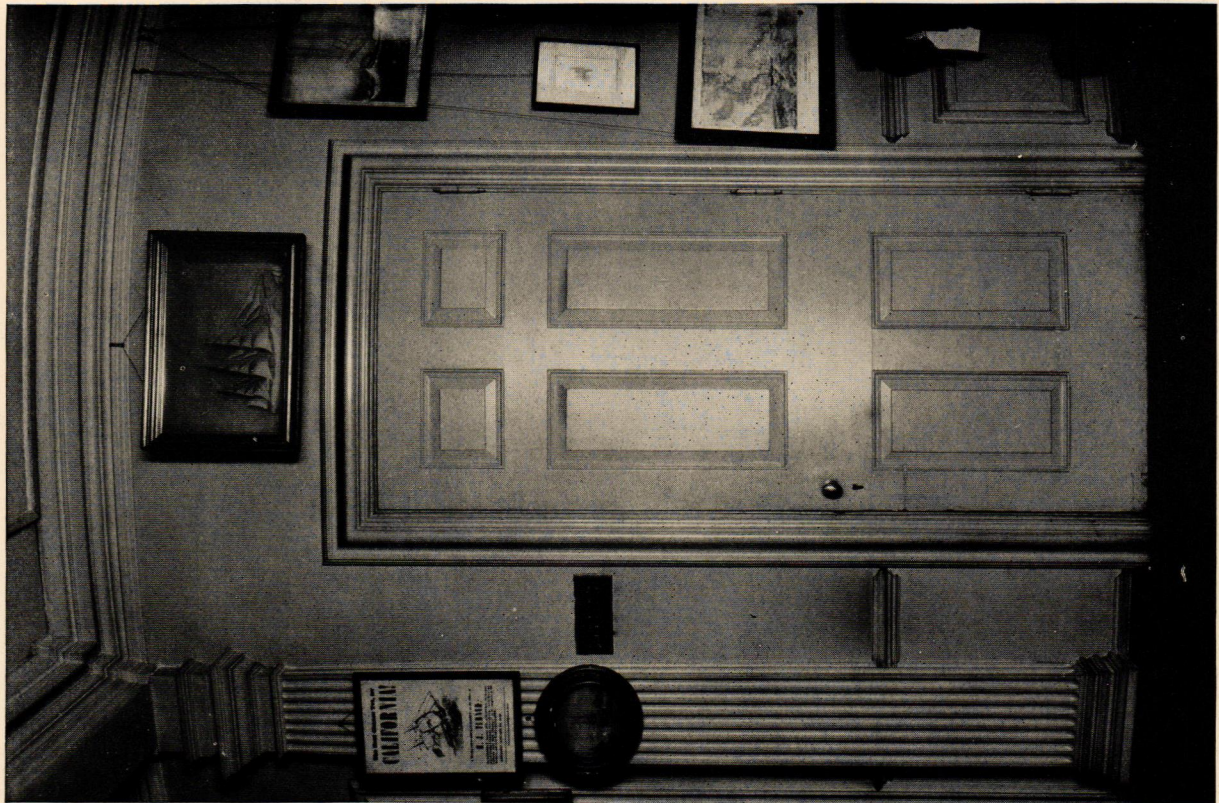




TWO EIGHT PANELED DOORS FROM THE WARNER HOUSE, PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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TWO SIX PANELED DOORS FROM THE OLD STATE HOUSE, STATE STREET, BOSTON

[ 241 ]

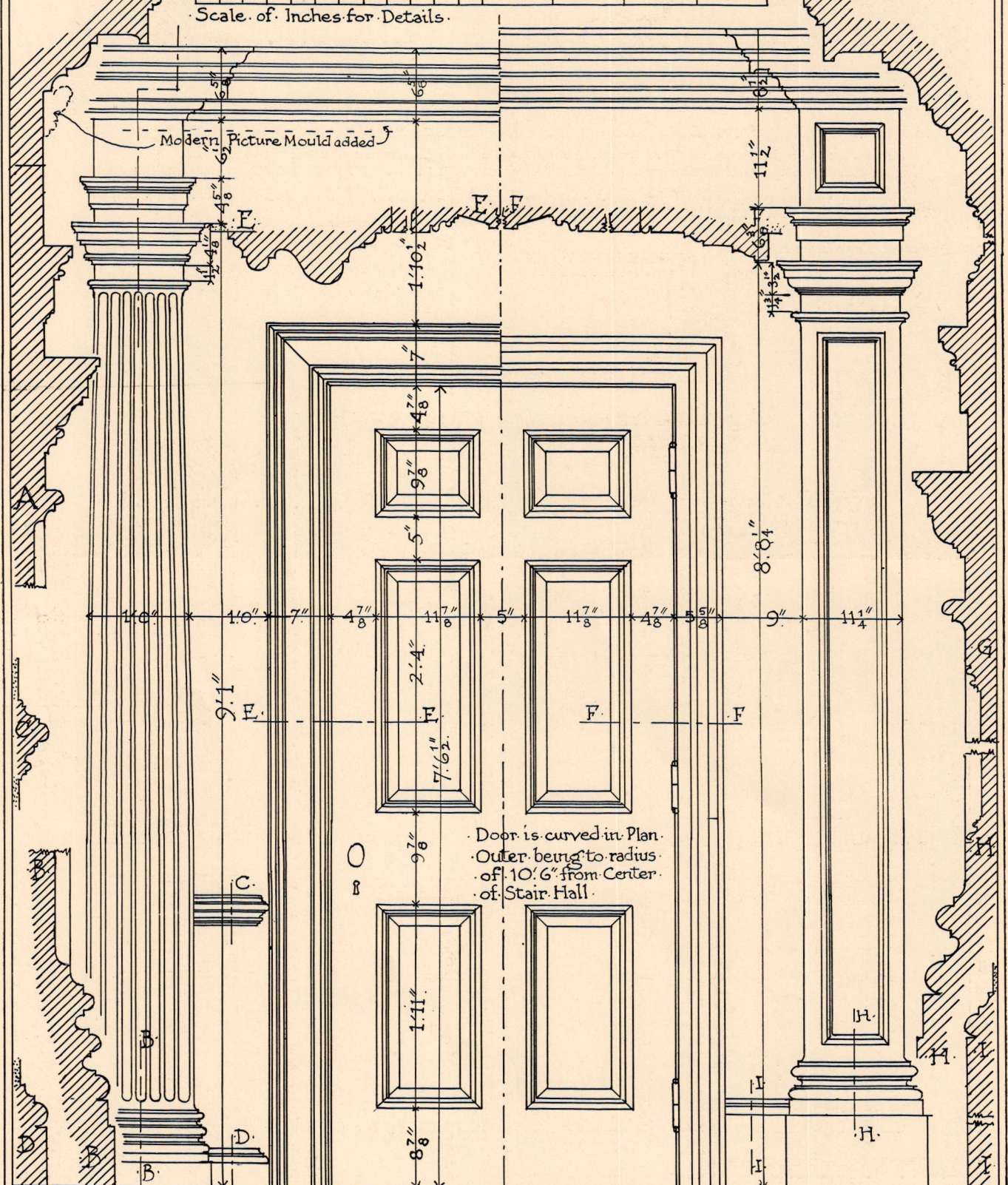


Measured & Drawn by  
Frank Chouteau  
Brown August  
1 9 3 2

Scale of Feet for Elevation.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|

Scale of Inches for Details.

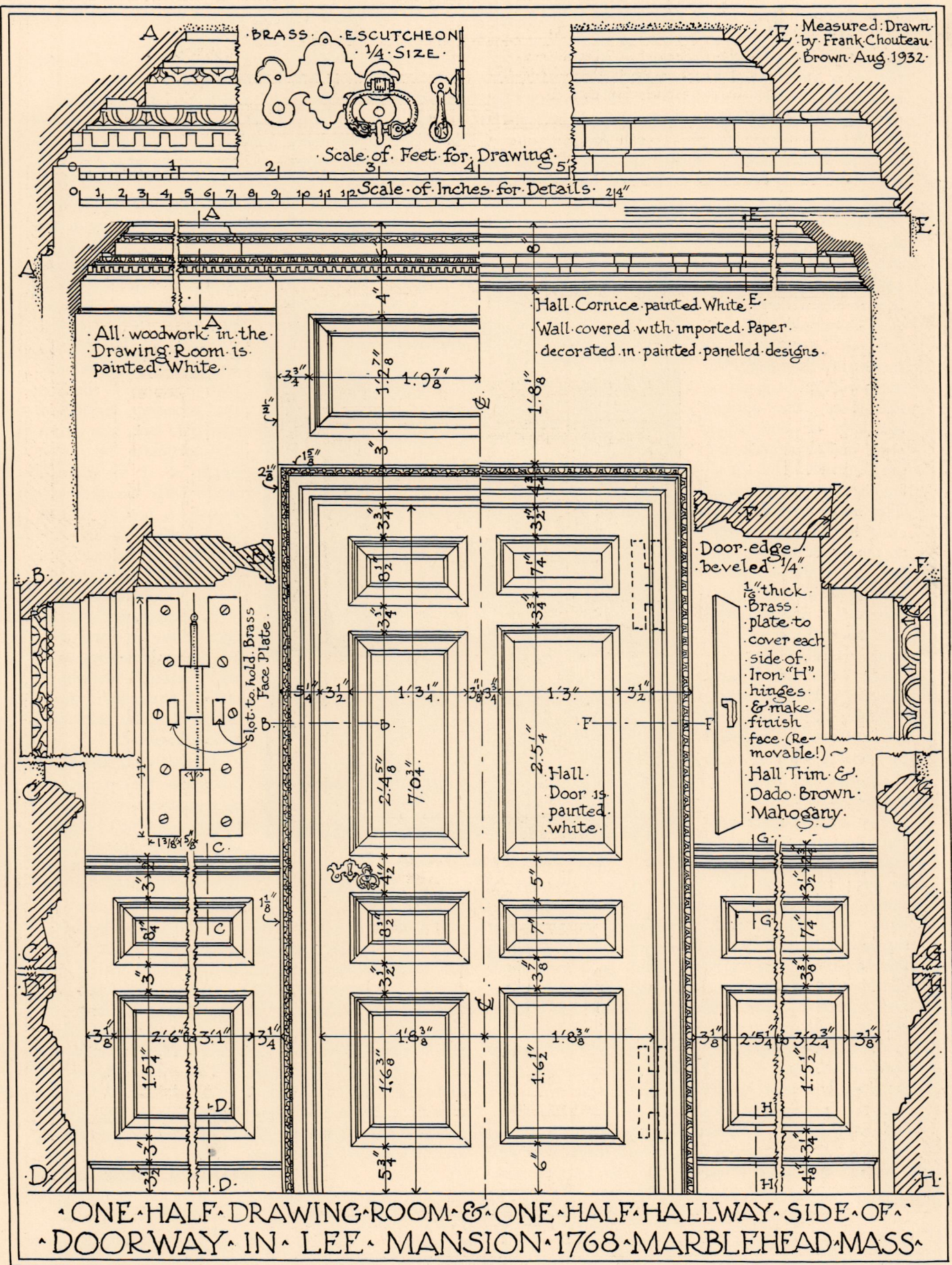


ONE HALF SIDE ROBT KEAYNES HALL & HALF SIDE IN CIRCULAR HALL  
OLD STATE HOUSE 1657-1747 STATE ST BOSTON MASS

*Drawing reproduced exactly at scale marked.*

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Drawing reproduced exactly at scale marked.

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leather "hinges," or the inter-locked staples or "eyes" that were often found in English cabinets and American chests of a contemporary or earlier time. The rough boarded doors to the two attic entrances of the old West Newbury house are still hung by heavy pieces of leather about 5" square by a full  $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick—with four nails driven and clinched into door and board adjoining.

Probably the simplest "strap" hinge forms succeeded these two cruder means of hinging or swinging the door; which was still a "battened" affair, usually cut and formed from the feather-edged "boarding" that comprised the first type of "paneled" wall treatment. Sometimes the doors were made up of two thicknesses, the upright boarding of one room being nailed against the simple paneled face showing in the one adjoining. This made the use of the cross batten unnecessary, as the boards were held by the framed panels backing them. "H" and "H & L" hinges were soon adopted for light interior paneled doors—which were rarely more than an inch in thickness!—while long strap hinges continued to be employed for heavy, outside, and all unusually wide or boarded doors.

For latches, there was the early wooden latch, with its leather or string to open from the outer side. The simple iron latch, with handle and thumbpiece, probably soon supplanted this; on inner doors, at any rate—though the simple wooden "button," held by a screw, still continued to be sufficient for many years for closet and cupboard doors. Then the small brass latch, cut in, with a ring handle upon both sides, as in the West Newbury house, was found employed in some of the better class dwellings—just as the brass box lock was used in more elegant houses when the iron box lock came into use for simpler habitations; and both, of course, succeeding the earlier wooden, iron bound, box covered lock. And there were also a varied number of "open face" iron latches, some

with cast brass knobs or handles, made by Colonial smiths for use on inside house doors, in place of the earlier simple iron handle and latch with thumbpiece.

Several types of the earliest door treatments have been included—along with a careful delineation of such original hardware as they still exhibit—not only in order to record the varying manner in which their proportions are kept always appealing and interesting; but also to meet the demand that is increasingly manifest for the most exact and detailed information about work of these more informal and picturesque early

American periods. A number of the illustrations have been selected from a little known house at West Newbury, partly because it contains the necessary variety of material, but also from the fortunate fact that much of it is original, while what has been repaired—a process that is as yet only partially carried out—or restored has been done most carefully by the present owner, Mr. J. B. Shearer, under guidance of the architect who has made the accompanying measured drawings, and is therefore thoroughly familiar with the work illustrated.

Several two paneled doors have been portrayed as representative of many examples which exhibit wide variety, particularly in the panel moulding, and the location of the cross stile.

To include some representation of other than residential doorways, two examples now found in the Old State House, at the head of State Street, in Boston, are employed; although the many vicissitudes and changes through which this historic building has passed make it extremely uncertain as to exactly what period these doors and their surrounding framework may properly be attributed. They will illustrate a somewhat heavier and more "public building" type of treatment, as well as many suggestions of their probable derivation from the finish and records remaining after the several early fires.

ARTHUR C. HASKELL.



*Door to Hall from Drawing Room*  
LEE MANSION, MARBLEHEAD, MASS.