



# THE MONOGRAPH SERIES

RECORDS OF EARLY AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE  
AS SOURCE MATERIAL

EDITED BY RUSSELL F. WHITEHEAD, A.I.A.

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## VOLUME XIX

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### MONOGRAPH ONE

Cape Ann: Some Earlier Colonial Dwellings in and about  
Annisquam, Massachusetts

BY FRANK CHOUTEAU BROWN

*Photographs by Arthur C. Haskell*

Among the visual difficulties confronting anyone trying to reconstruct in his imagination a picture of the conditions under which the first settlers in the colonies were compelled to live—conditions that were instrumental in shaping the character and form of the early dwellings first built along its shores—are the false ideas obtained, all too unconsciously, from viewing houses given early dates that are still to be seen in certain localities, particularly in New England.

Therefore the "Pioneer Village," reconstructed upon the margin of Salem Harbor two years ago for the celebration of the Massachusetts Bay Tercentenary, which not only showed several full size examples of the various types of dwellings built during the first few years; but also illustrated the means employed in fashioning lumber, making bricks, obtaining salt, and otherwise securing a precarious livelihood under the most primitive conditions, supplied for the first time a clear and definitely visualized background, against which it was possible for almost anyone to project a self-convincing picture of the lives and customs of the early settlers.

There one can see not only the crude makeshifts of the first winter shelters, but also the first fully constructed or fashioned buildings; as well as the more completely framed and carpentered houses of one and even two stories, which it is quite impossible to find in their original unadorned simplicity in any of the very earliest structures remaining today. Always they carry the date, based upon that portion earliest built,

and now incorporated indistinguishably into a form much enlarged and developed from the aspect that the earliest portion alone had first assumed. And this holds true, even in those rare instances when the existing structure has been properly and authoritatively refit of its increment of generations of minor changes, and restrainedly "restored"!

Considering three hundred years of wear and tear, accompanied by the early and continued dangers of fire, the many Indian wars, the perishable and often hastily and inexpertly prepared materials of which the houses were compounded; and the primitive and sometimes unskilled manner in which materials were early employed, it is certainly not surprising that so few very early buildings exist to show the true type of primitive Colonial dwelling, but rather the surprising part is that we can still point to any examples at all!

Perhaps the Peak House in Medfield still provides us with one of the best pictures of the early dwelling, with the Blake House in Dorchester (1648) for an illustration of its immediately succeeding type. But certainly in the older portion of the Riggs House, in Riverdale, on Cape Ann, we can today secure the best idea that is possible of one of these earliest type houses. The Alexander Standish house (Duxbury, 1666) and the William Harlow house (Plymouth, 1677) are both gambrel roofed; and, as such, are undoubtedly in the second manner—quite similar to the "newer part" of the Riggs house, as it appears herewith. The first built Riggs dwelling was a two-room house of roughly

[ 1 ]



squared logs, laid horizontally one on top of the other, making a wall about 15 inches thick. A roof of rather steep pitch was added, unbroken by any windows until about twenty years ago, when a dormer was cut into the roof on the side toward the water. The gambrel portion was added at the west end of the earlier house about forty years later.

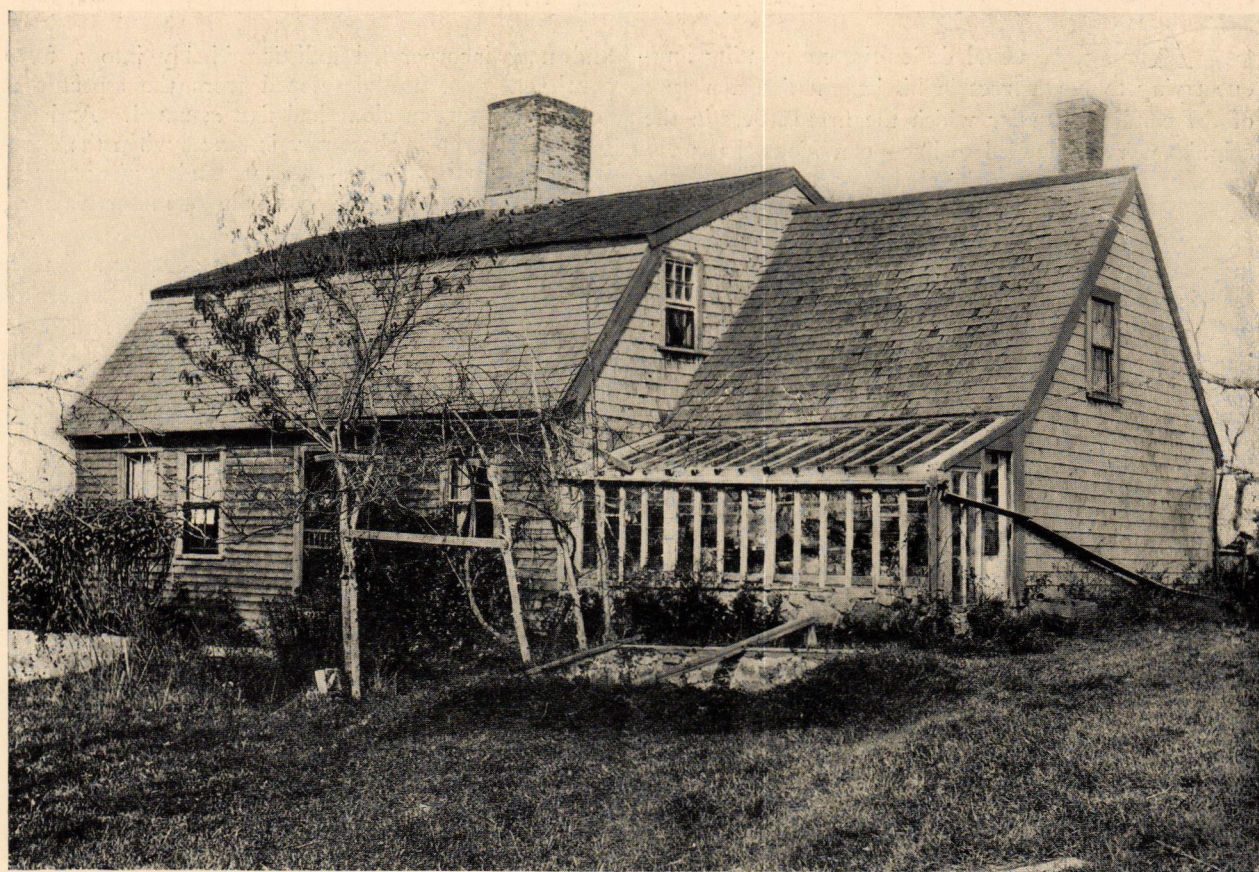
As soon as a fully framed structure was attempted it was natural that the New England settlers should turn to the mediæval type of timber-framed dwelling, with which they had been familiar at home, as a model for their construction in this new country. Consequently, the heavy sill-and-cornerpost frame, with plate and girt mortised and held with oak pins, came naturally into use. When, as at first, beaten earth was used as the floor, the sill was merely laid upon this base, or a few flat stones were placed at the corners or along the length for better support. The "raised sills" showing above the floor levels in a few houses (no less than four such may still be seen about Cape Ann) are a survival from this very time.

These framed structural outlines were then boarded upon the outside, usually with inch or inch-and-a-quarter thick boards, running perpendicularly from sill

to plate or gable rafter ends; and pinned or nailed to the larger horizontal timbers, with small studdings used only to frame around a door or window opening. Sometimes these boards were tongued and grooved and molded at the edges; sometimes they were merely set close together and the spaces between filled with mud or clay, lime mortar or plaster.

The one-story house has often only one or two rooms upon the lower floor with an attic overhead, frequently left undivided. (Indeed, it is usually still found in this latter condition in many cottages along the coast, or inland in the country, built from a hundred to a hundred and fifty years ago!) At first access to this attic was by scuttle and ladder; replaced a little later by a steep stair running sharply up from beside the "Hall," or in the front entry.

The chimney was the most important part of these early houses. Built of stone or brick, set in mud or lime shell mortar, it was usually located at one end of these simpler types of dwellings, which were then most naturally enlarged by adding another room or two beyond the chimney, thus at once obtaining access to it and doubling the house in length. The next enlargement usually took the form of a long rear



THE RIGGS HOUSE—1660-1700—RIVERDALE, CAPE ANN, MASSACHUSETTS

[ 2 ]





THE RIGGS HOUSE—1660-1700—RIVERDALE, CAPE ANN, MASSACHUSETTS

“leanto”; with possible other later additions developing as end “ells” or further “leantos” increasing the length of the structure, sometimes to a very considerable extent.

Possibly the favorite means of enlarging the early houses, however, was by leaving the older portion, nearly undisturbed, to serve as a kitchen ell; and adding a new—and very much larger house—usually at one or the other end. Sometimes this was done, as in the Riggs house here shown, by continuing the new part in length along the same frontage as the old, which almost invariably faced to the south. Sometimes it was added either at an angle, or quite at right angles to the older structure, the new front then often being to the east or west. This later method was perhaps often adopted from the fact that it was by this means possible to face the house anew upon the road; which had probably been built long after the original cottage had been informally placed facing south across some pleasant pasture, or looking out upon some livelier water view.

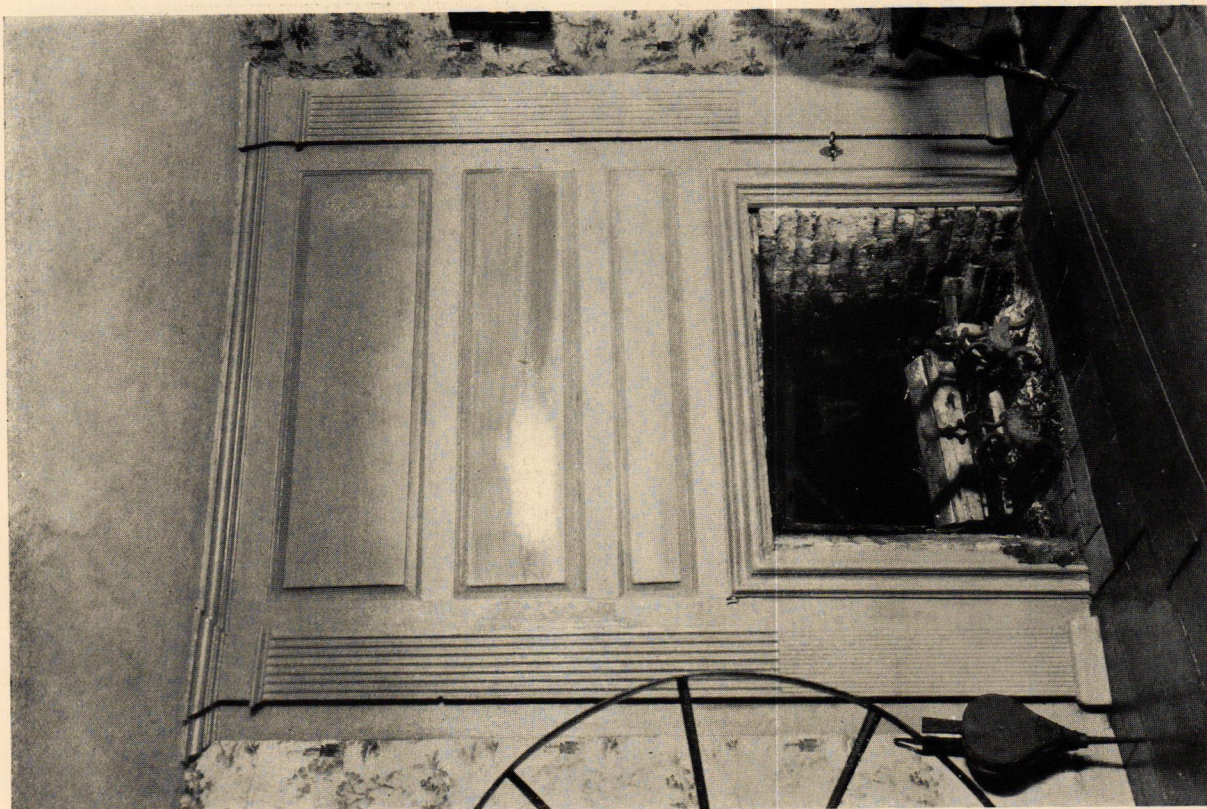
Thomas Riggs, “scrivener,” the second Town Clerk of Gloucester and its first Schoolmaster, settled on

Cape Ann at “Goose Cove,” in 1658, and built the pitch-roof portion of the present dwelling of squared pine logs 15 inches thick, probably shortly previous to the year 1660. The “gambrel” part was added by a grandson, George Riggs, about 1700. This dwelling still stands in Vine Street, near the Riverdale Willows, only a short distance beyond “Church Green,” which is just north and at the back of the well known White-Ellery House, generally dated as 1703 or 4, but probably built nearer 1710. This was the parsonage of the first minister, Rev. John White, of the Parish Church that stood across the Green. From 1738 onward it was used as a Tavern, or Ordinary, by James Stevens and his successors. One of the first houses in the Massachusetts Bay Colony (though not actually erected on Cape Ann) was the Community House, the materials for which were brought over from England. It stood just across on the mainland, in that part of Gloucester known as “Stage Fort Park”; and was afterwards removed and re-erected in Naumkeag, now Salem.

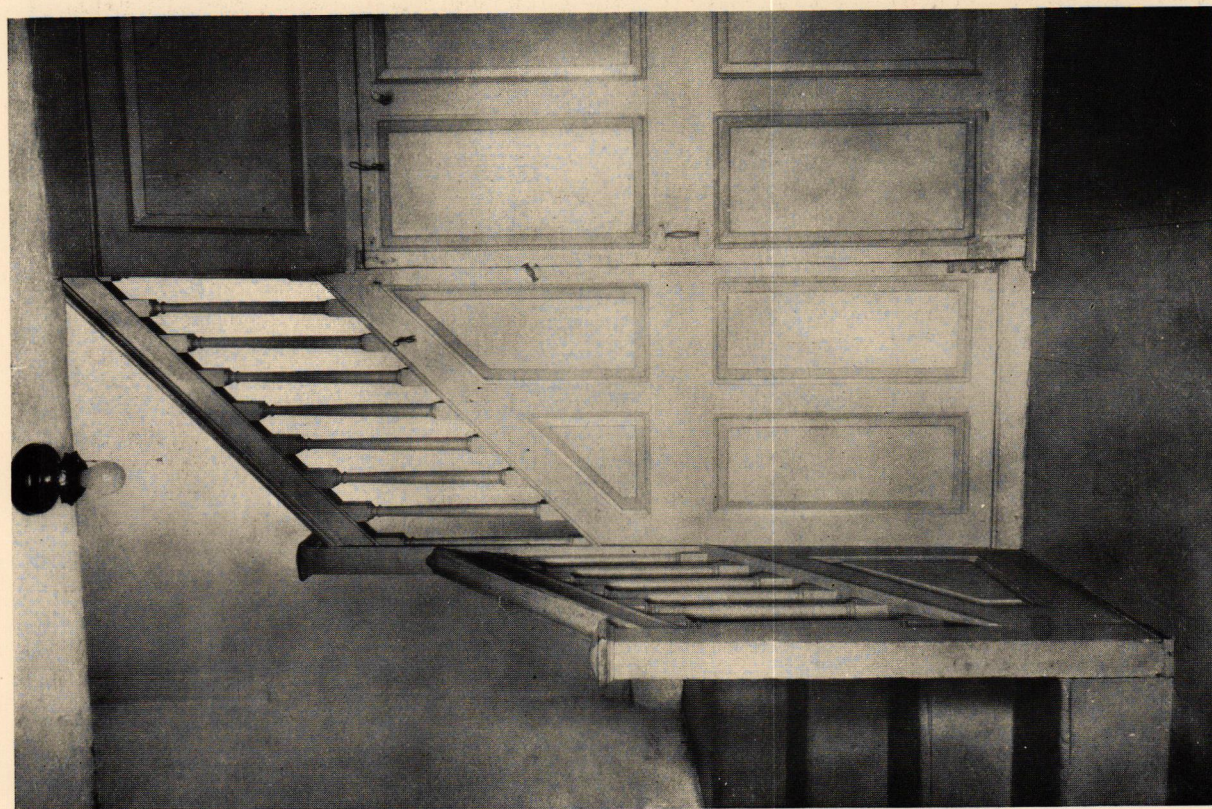
Another early house nearby was built for the home of Richard Dike or Dyke. A date as early as 1643

[ 3 ]





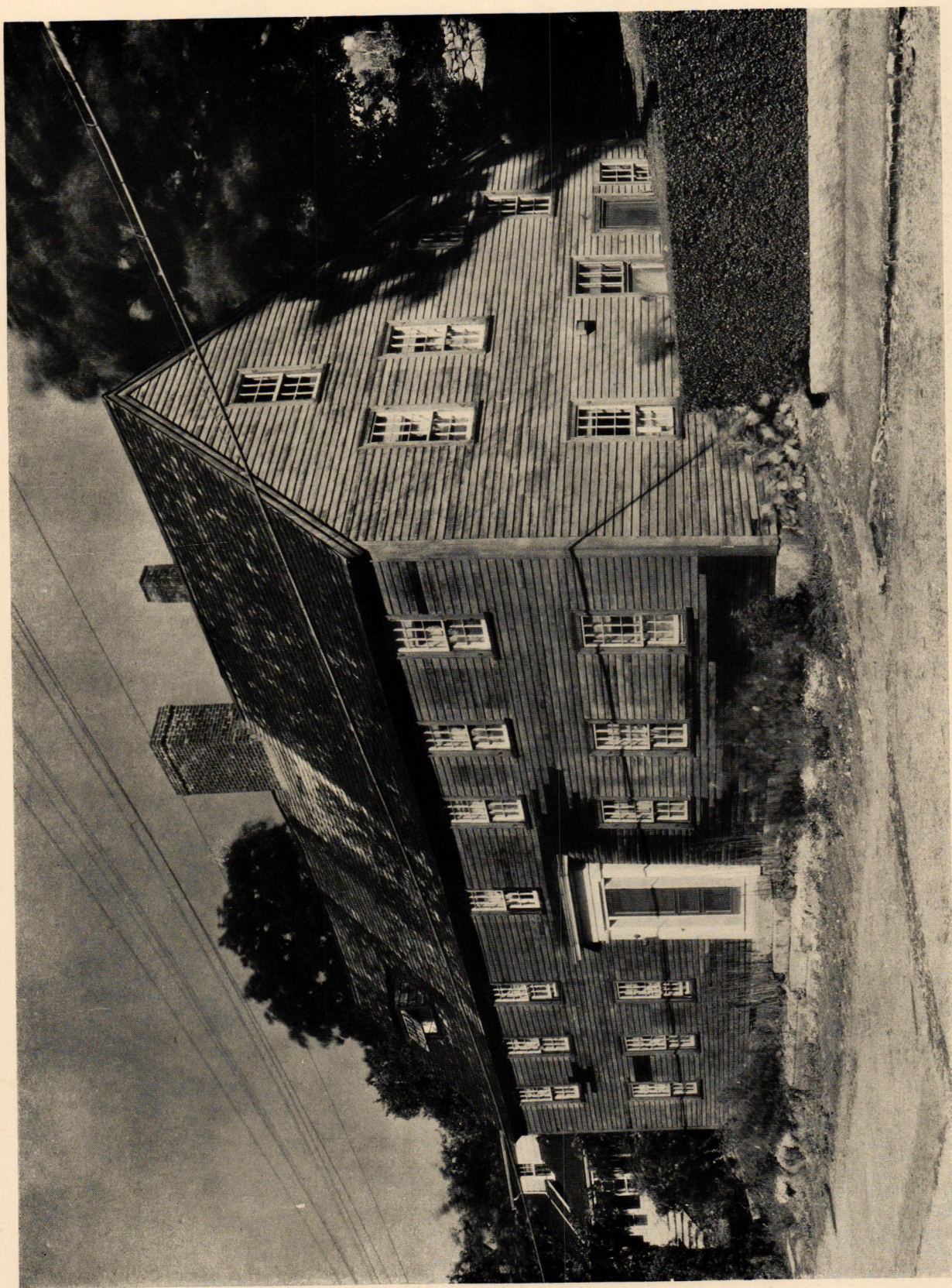
*Fireplace*  
THE RIGGS HOUSE—1660-1700—RIVERDALE, MASS.



*Staircase—First Floor*  
THE DYKE-WHEELER HOUSE—1668—GLOUCESTER, MASS.

[ 4 ]





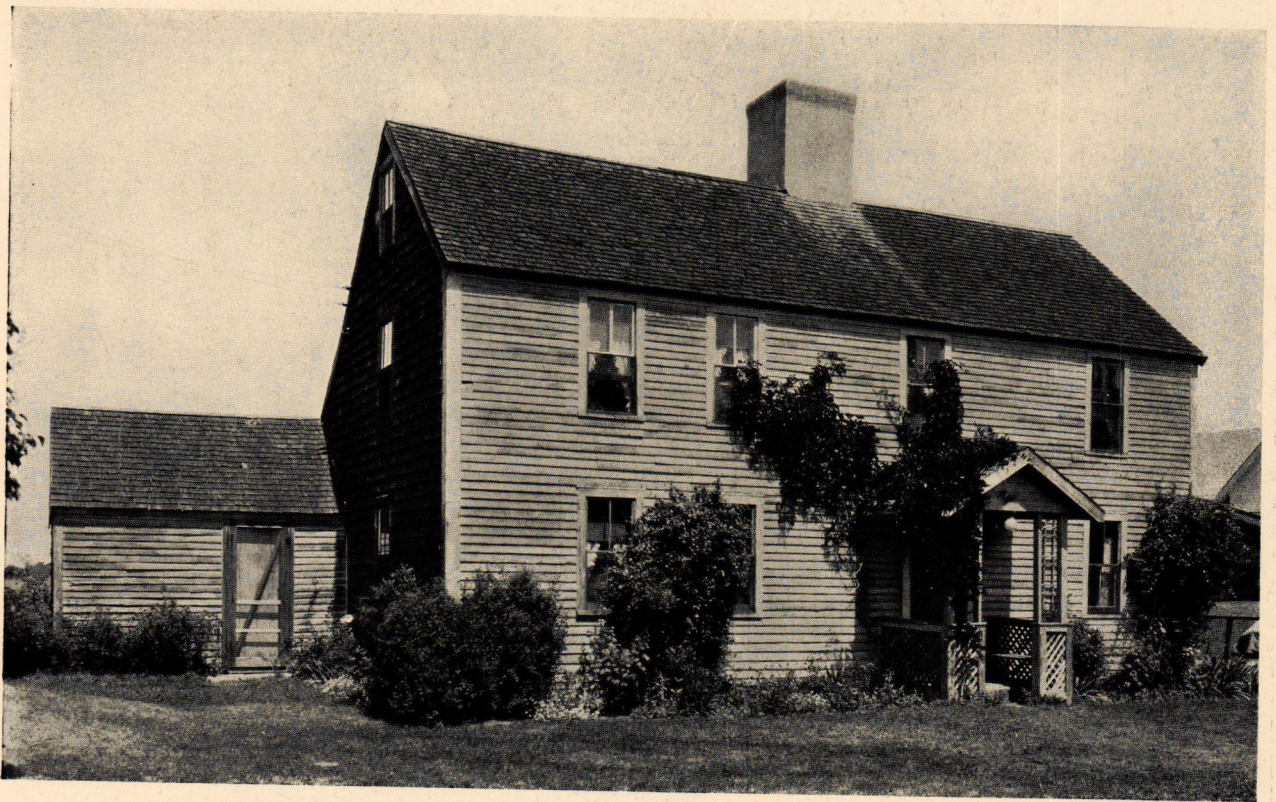
THE HARRADEN HOUSE—1657—ANNISQUAM, MASSACHUSETTS

[ 5 ]





*Paneled Room End*



THE DYKE-WHEELER HOUSE—ABOUT 1668—GLOUCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

[ 6 ]



has been claimed for this dwelling; but it was more probably built much nearer 1668, at which time this property—with a dwelling upon it—was transferred to John Fitch. It was again sold in 1714 to John Colt; and the pleasantly proportioned paneling of the principal room, and the stairway, are probably both from this or an even later date. Bought by Finson Wheeler in 1834, it has been known by that name ever since; and has now been somewhat modified to serve the purposes of a summer cottage, which it does excellently well.

Most of the historical background of the early years of Cape Ann best relate to the history of its largest city, Gloucester. But those who know it only for that picturesque, overbuilt area surrounding the irregular shores of its busy Harbor; or for the summer reaches of its rocky moorlands from Eastern Point through Bass Rocks to Land's End; or even the teeming artist colonies of Rockport and Bearskin Neck, can know little or nothing of old Annisquam, oldest settlement of all the Cape. And indeed, few do know much about this sleepy little settlement, stretched out along the landlocked waters of "the Cove." The casual sight-seer, touring around the Cape, passes it entirely by; as does also the usual summer sojourner, going back and forth between the summer colonies fronting westerly across Ipswich Bay and the stations at Gloucester or Rockport. To feel its old-world charm one must turn aside from the main highway, down a narrow lane coming out upon the "floating bridge" that crosses the mouth of the Cove, or if coming from Bay View, swing sharply right back of the church at its innermost tip, so continuing along the narrow winding Leonard Street, from which circuitous lanes lead backward and forward, bending around rock outcrops, old stone benches and huge butternut trees to connect with backyards of places fronting the waterway, or reach the much-used side doors of houses whose fronts overhang other inner yards, or overlook low-lying roofs to the far wind-blown stretches of Winnegoeschieke—formerly Coffin's—Beach.

Embowered in the long untrimmed verdure of thick hedges, or heavily limbed low-hanging trees, many an old house lies quietly sleeping and hidden, a mere gravel-toss from a practicable street; that may nevertheless end unexpectedly—and somewhat suddenly—at the water's edge; or against a heavy sea wall; or merely die out of existence between two or three old fenced yards and as many angularly sloping cottages, helter-skelterly faced to any and all points of the boxable compass.

On this limited, and irregular area, between 1631 and 1633, a few men and families from Plymouth effected the first permanent settlement on Cape Ann. Meanwhile the fishing at Gloucester was being estab-

lished and that town was finally incorporated in 1642. The same year, according to early records, a building "boom" was the cause of setting up a sawmill at Riverdale, which was about midway between Annisquam and Gloucester. Aided by the output of this mill, the second generation of settlers covered their early squared log houses with clapboards, laid sawed board floors, and applied split shingles over end wall boarding and on roof scantlings.

The first permanent settlers at Annisquam were made into the Third Parish in 1728, while the third meeting house of the First Parish had been raised on "Meeting House Green" in May of 1700, being described as "a building 40 by 40, with 16-foot posts, plastered with lime and hair," and costing £253.

Meanwhile the early simpler square little houses, scattered about Riverdale and Annisquam, were being lengthened and enlarged, "raised" to an added story height; and soon—near the end of the Seventeenth Century—a few four-room, full two-story houses were being built. Along the shores of "the Cove" old single houses with huge chimney at one end were also being lengthened by building another dwelling upon the outer side of the chimney, originally perhaps to house a younger generation of the same family; later to pass by marriage into quite alien hands. A number of old examples of this stand about the Cape, one being what is now known as "The Castle," built shortly after 1700 upon the bank of the Cove, with a huge chimney top only to mark its age from the passing roadway, though from the water it may be seen to better advantage.

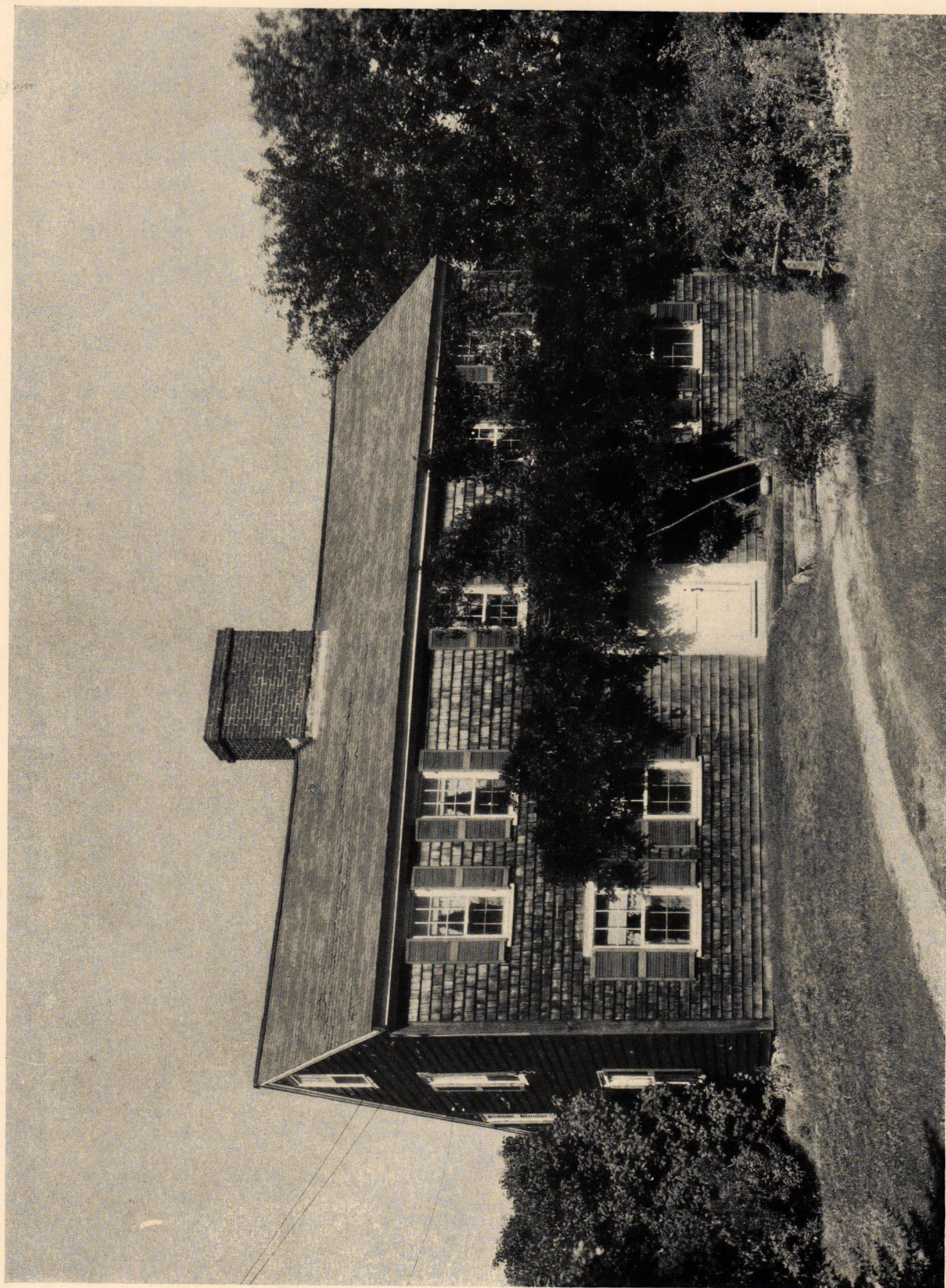
Nearby is the house built almost as early, the home of Madame Goss, used as officers' quarters in the War of 1812, but now hopelessly changed upon the outside; as is also the case with the Old Tavern, built just before 1700, and used as a soldiers' barracks in 1812. This still stands across the street from the Harraden house. The latter, with its earliest portion built about 1657 for Edward Harraden, one of the first settlers, has since been much changed about, added to, and built over, having now two "leantos," of different levels, a one- and a two-story section, at the rear.

Continuing along the main street, passing the village center store and post office, and many cottages of age and charm, the little house on the corner of Arlington Street that is reproduced may be seen—and, almost at the Cove's end, the little gambrel house, built probably soon after 1700, that is perhaps the most perfect of all the remaining cottages of modest appeal and venerable age now to be found upon the Cape.

At the "Head of the Cove" stands the old Church. Although the present building dates only from 1831,

*(Continued on page 15)*

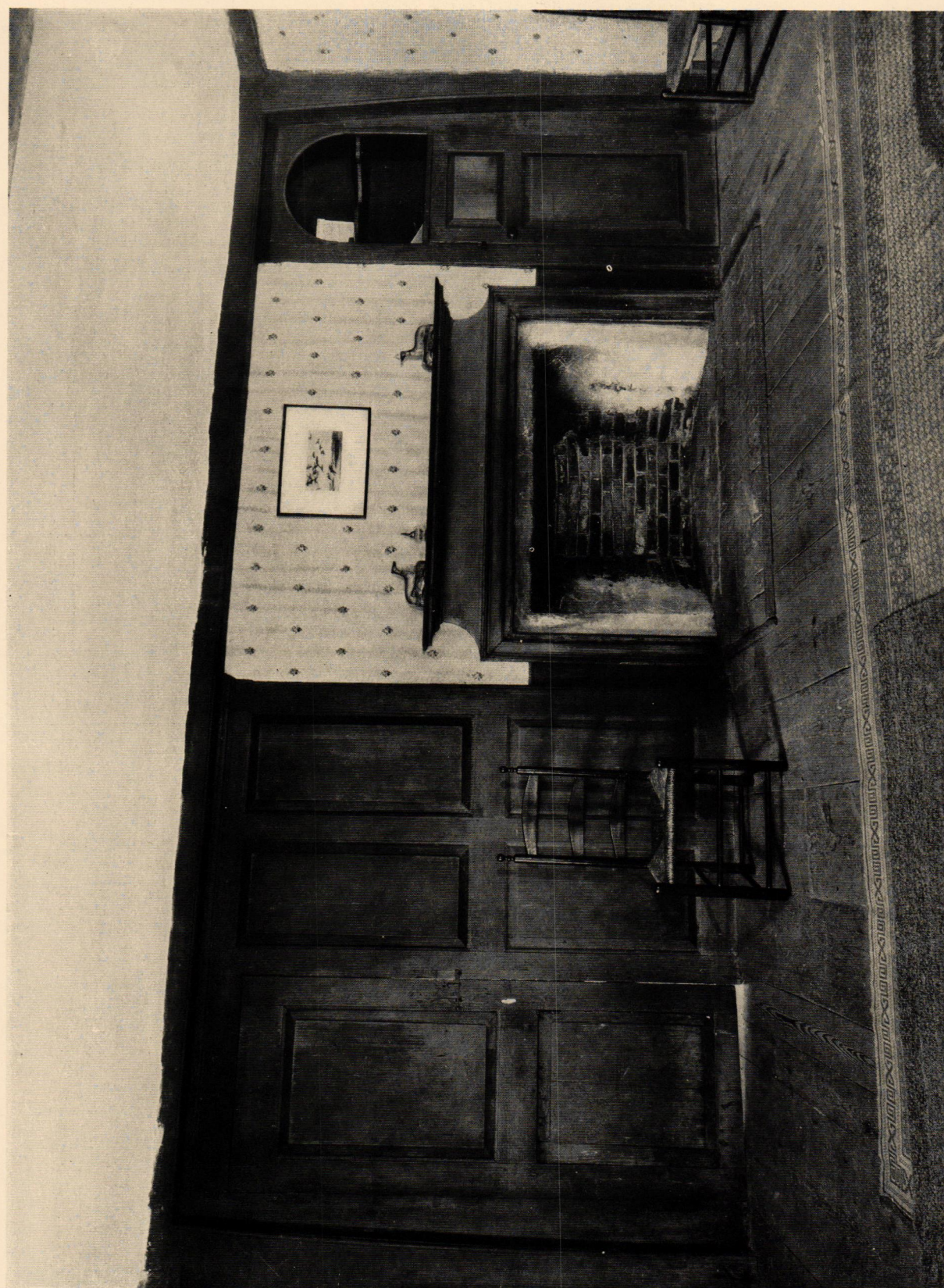




THE DENNISON HOUSE—1727—SANDY BAY ROAD, ANNISQUAM, MASSACHUSETTS

[ 8 ]

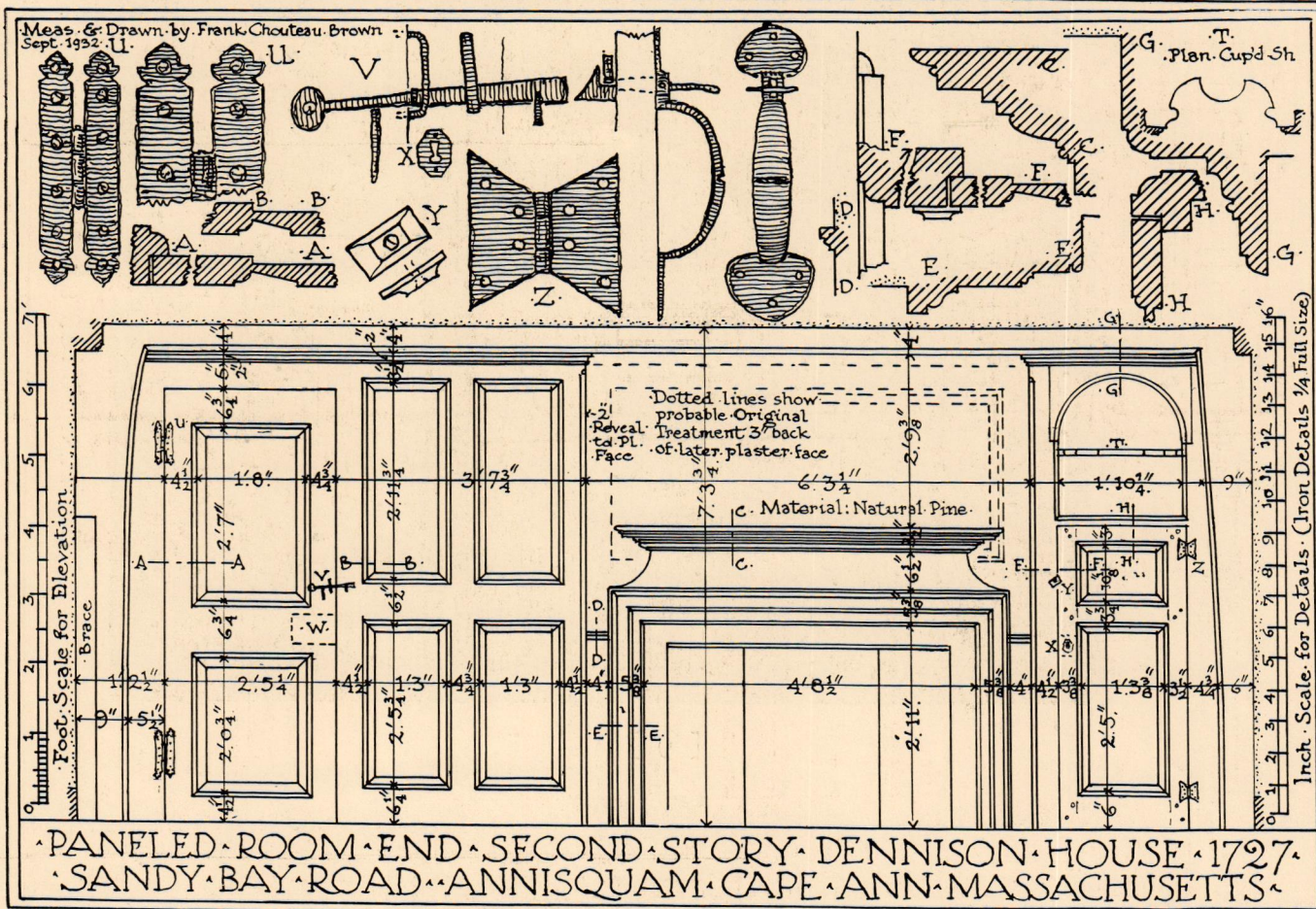
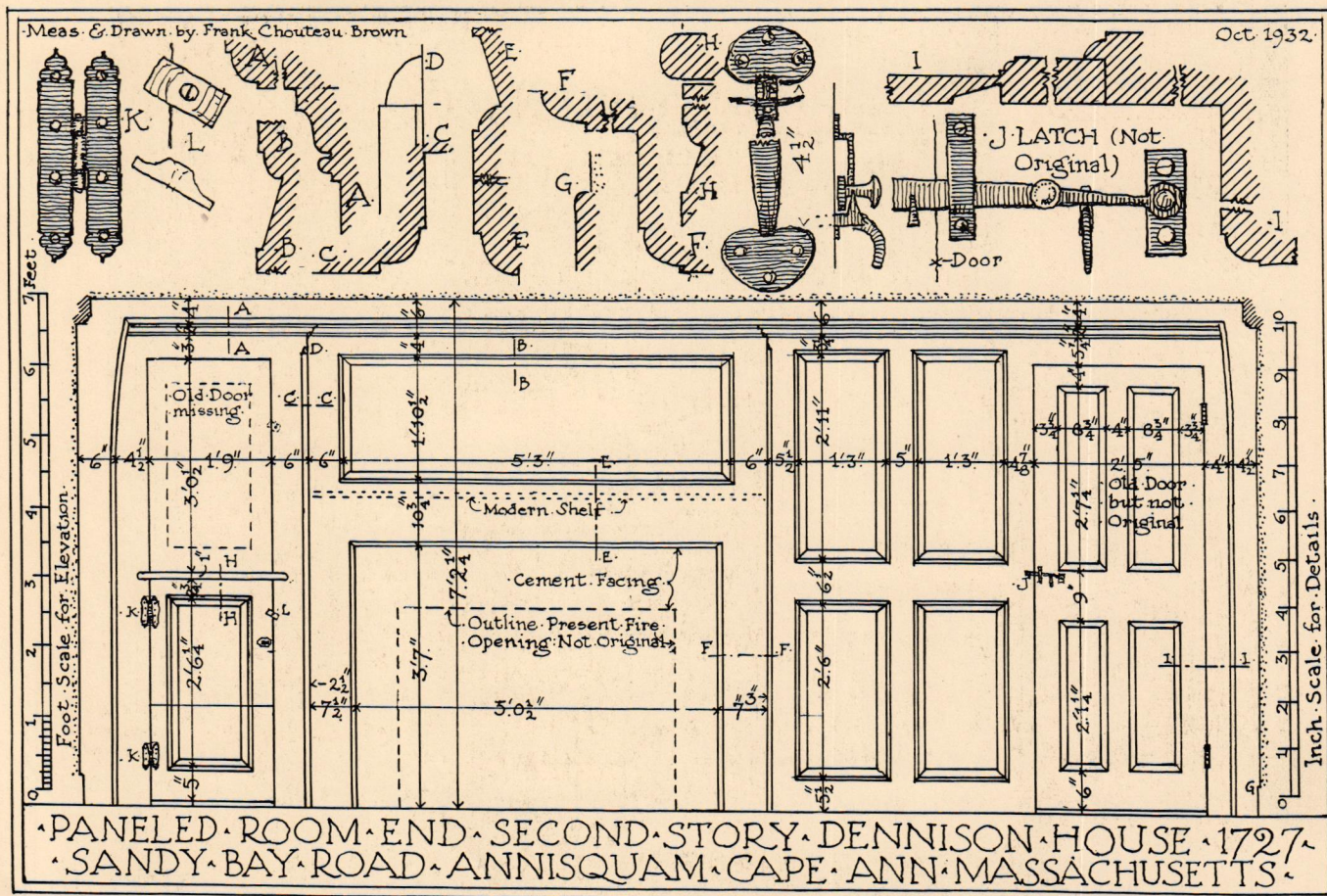




THE DENNISON HOUSE, PANELED ROOM END, SECOND STORY—1727—ANNISQUAM, MASSACHUSETTS

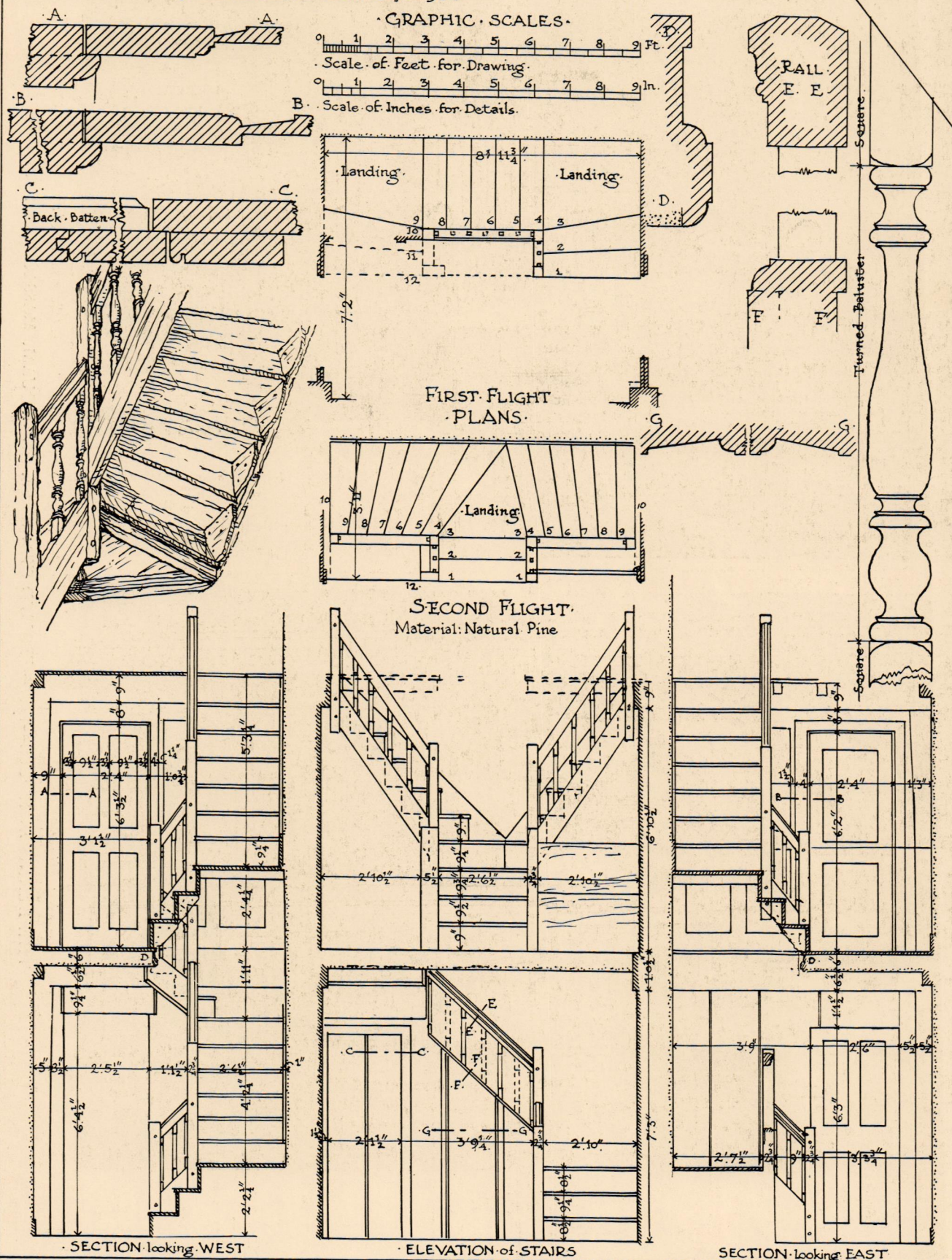
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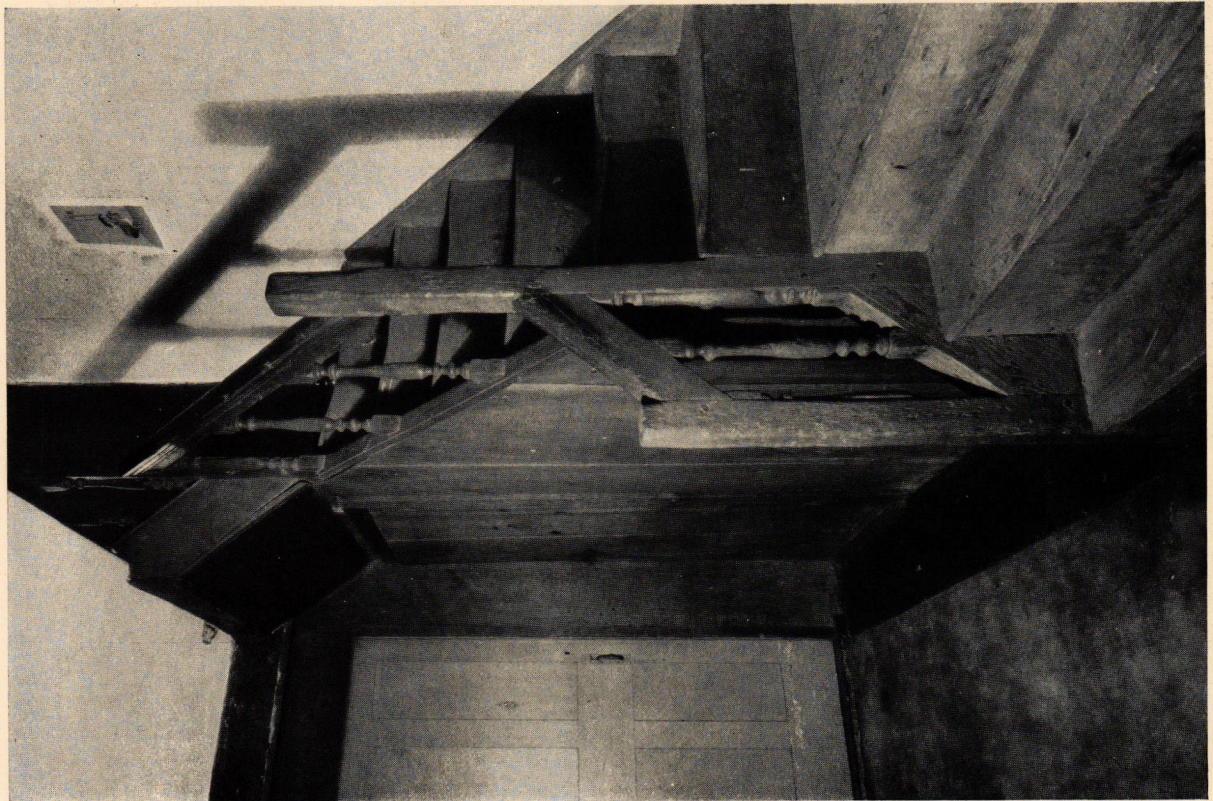


Measured & Drawn by Frank Chouteau Brown, Sept. 1932.

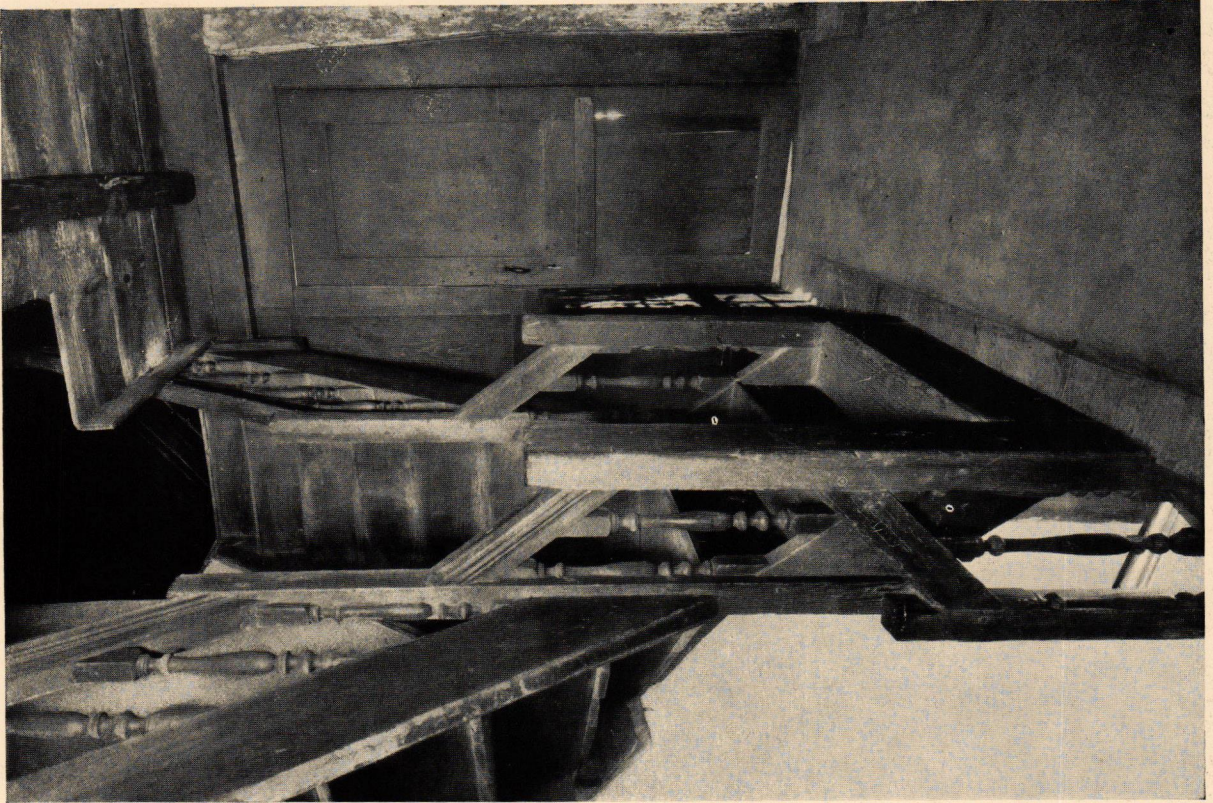


PINE-FRAMED STAIRCASE IN OLD DENNISON HOUSE 1727  
 SANDY BAY ROAD ANNISQUAM CAPE ANN MASSACHUSETTS



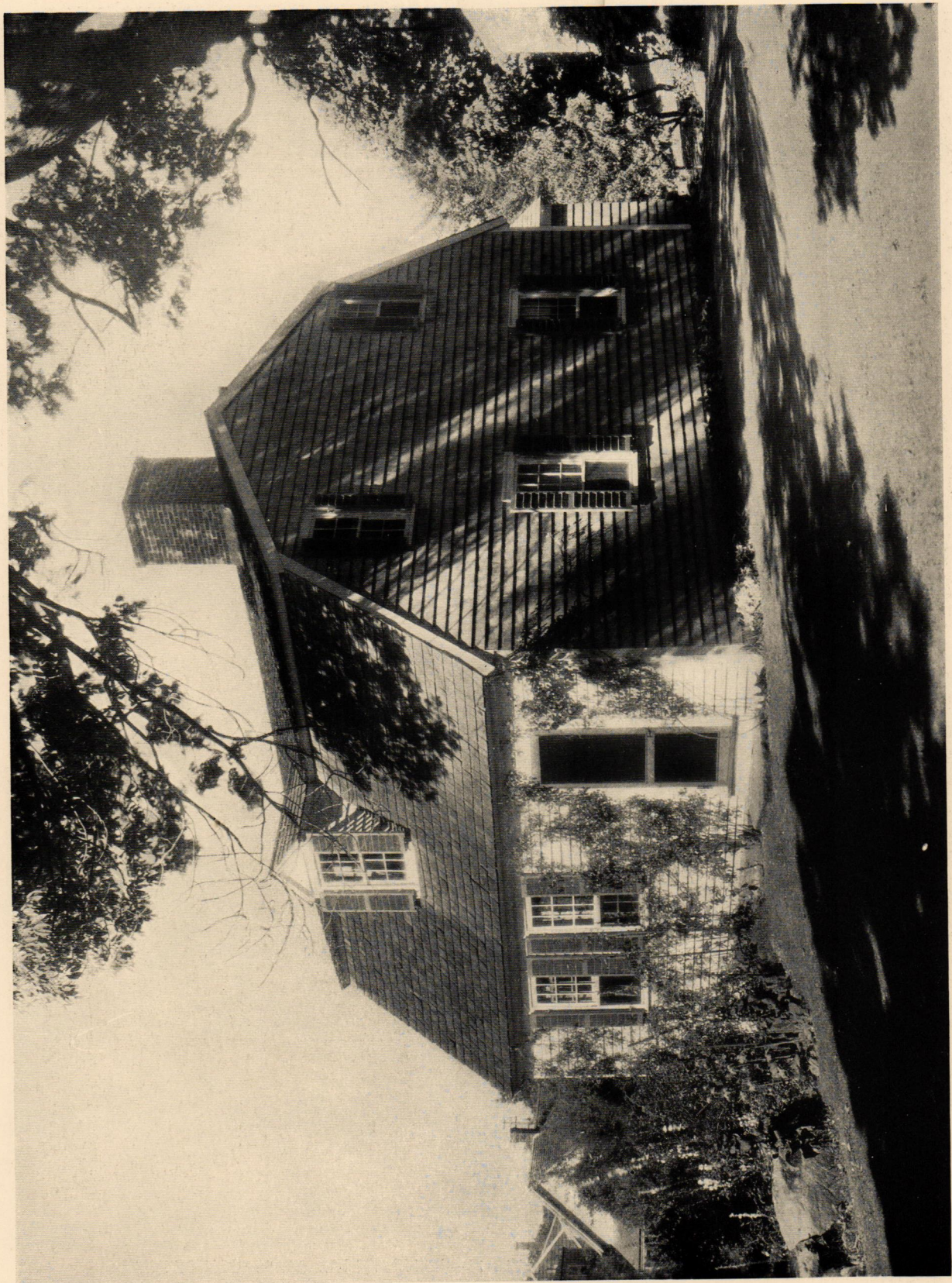


*First Flight*



*Second Flight*  
THE DENNISON HOUSE—1727—FRAMED STAIRCASE, ANNISQUAM, MASSACHUSETTS

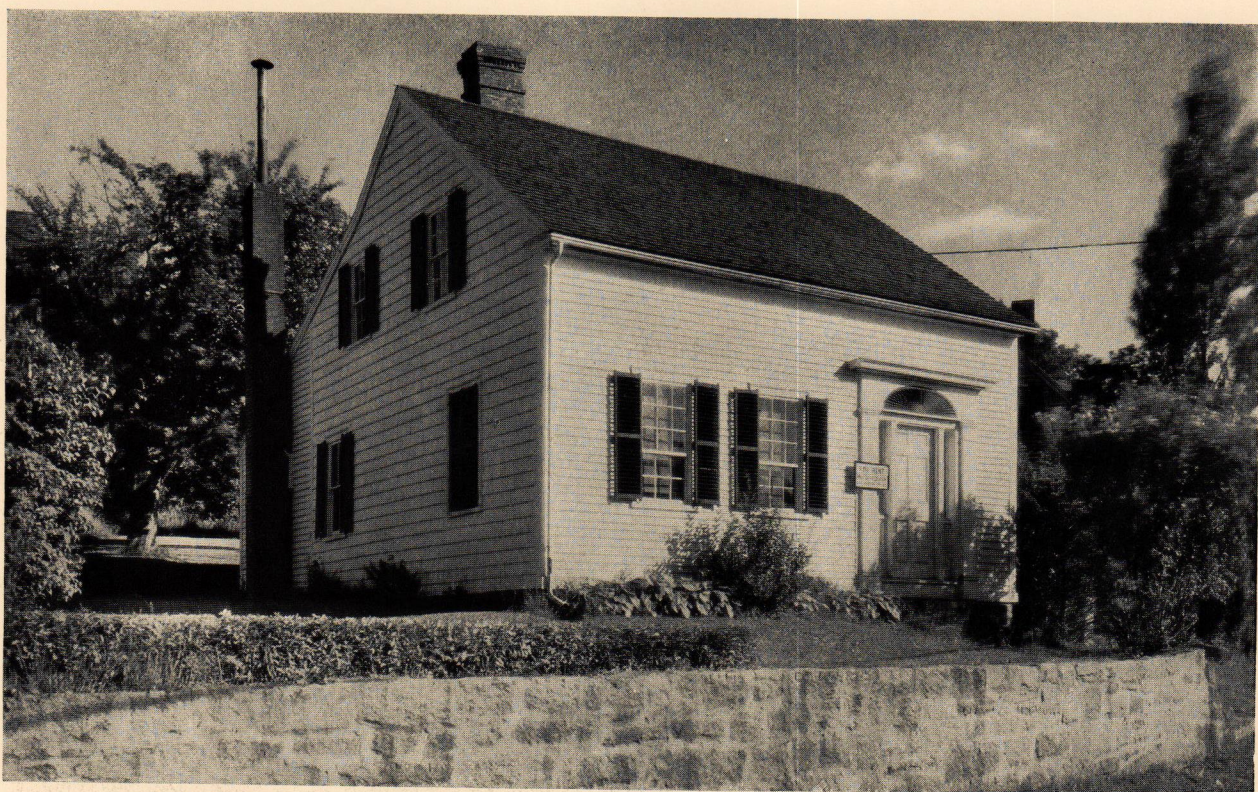




COTTAGE AT HEAD OF COVE—ABOUT 1700—ANNISQUAM, MASSACHUSETTS

[ 13 ]





HOUSE AT CORNER OF ARLINGTON STREET, ANNISQUAM, MASSACHUSETTS



THE ROBINSON HOMESTEAD—1710-15—LANESVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

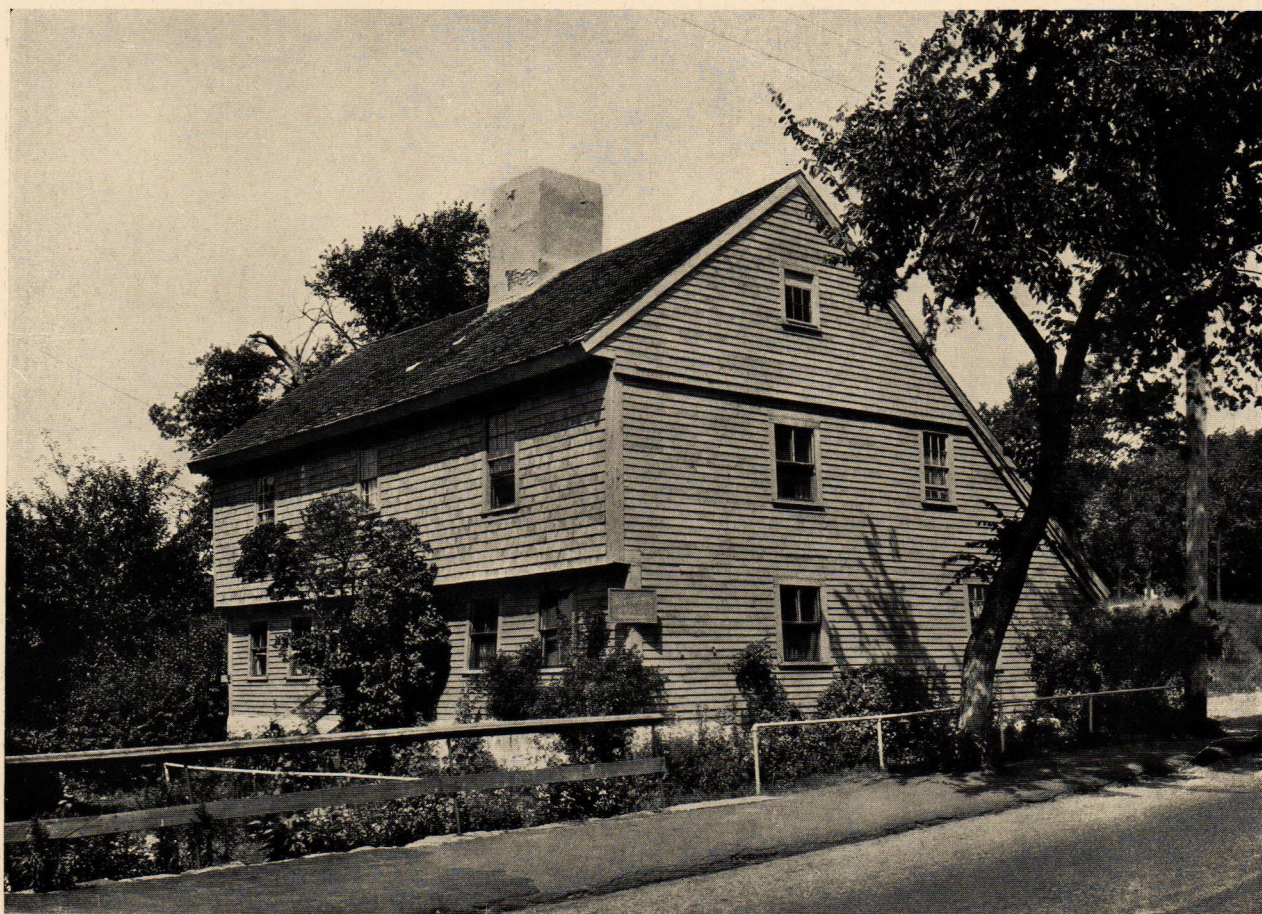
[ 14 ]



its predecessor was planted there in 1728!—surrounded with a pleasant group of little cottages and one more pretentious house of about 1800 (of all of which more will be heard anon), while nearly across the main roadway, leading up into the interior of the Cape, is the old “Sandy Bay Road,” now Revere St., leading up to the old quarries and one end of “Dog Town Common” (and that, too, is another story!).

In a pleasant valley among the woods, at what appears to be the very end of the road, lies the old Dennison House, dating from 1727, though follow-

individuality of some previous owner or tenant. Nevertheless, the views taken show a more than usually interesting staircase, carrying out in natural pine almost exactly the forms of its oak predecessors of fifty years before; the balusters alone, while still of even the earliest outlines, marking the difference. The details of this stairway, as well as its open support underneath, may be studied also in a measured drawing; another sheet shows some of the panelled ends remaining in the rooms. One of these, showing the natural pine, in a bedroom, has also been photo-



THE WHITE-ELLERY HOUSE—1703-10—GLOUCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

ing precisely a much earlier style. Although but little known, the place has very recently come into the possession of Mr. Earl Sanborn, who is transferring his Glass Studio to a new structure built in back of the old dwelling, where windows for the new Washington Cathedral are now taking shape.

As yet no attempt has been made to reconstruct or restore the original aspect of the house, or its interiors. Outside, its age is still disguised under a comparatively modern coating of shingles; and every here or there in the interior still appear evidences of the

graphed; with a later, but still finely appealing mantel; and a charming original cupboard. Other panelling has been painted over, and some of the fireplaces filled up, or reduced in size; while the old “Hall” contains an example of a mantelshelf that, if not “an original” in date, may have been added soon after, from its simple appropriateness and feeling for relation to the room and its panelling.

Despite its later date, this house is among the earliest in appearance of the few full two-story dwellings on the Cape; and has the earliest type of staircase.

[ 15 ]





*Entrance Detail*

THE SPENCER-PIERCE-LITTLE HOUSE—1650—NEWBURY, MASSACHUSETTS

[ 16 ]

Monograph Two—Volume XIX—"Newbury Old Town"