



# 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 TWO

## The Dwellings of Newbury Old Town

BY FRANK CHOUTEAU BROWN

*Photographs by Arthur C. Haskell*

Continuing further to trace the gradual development of our early domestic architecture in the Eastern settlements during the Seventeenth Century, we may turn to the older section of Newbury, Massachusetts, to provide some pertinent and definite illustrations. The early small two-room story-and-a-half cottage, with chimney at one end, was soon supplanted by the full two-story house with end chimney—as in the original portions of the Coffin and Swett dwellings at “Ould Newbury,” dating from about 1653 and 1670, respectively.

Both types were soon enlarged, by adding other rooms beyond the chimneys; or in some of the ways particularly described herewith—or they were supplanted by the larger plan, with central chimney and staircase against its southern face, with living “Hall” at one side, and the principal family sleeping chamber at the other. This obvious and simple arrangement was soon supplemented by the separate kitchen at the back of the chimney—usually in a leanto at the rear.

Next, one or both of the end spaces might be divided into two rooms—the rear ones upon the second floor being reached by another stairway in the “leanto”; and then the plans’ final amplification might be made by substituting end chimneys for the large central one, thus allowing the central hallway to extend through the house to reach the rear as well as the front rooms, upon both upper and lower floors.

Among these Newbury Old Town dwellings, the Jackman-Willett house itself illustrates the next step

beyond the original Riggs house at Riverdale, Cape Ann (pages 2 and 3 of the preceding Monograph), in the story-and-a-half cottage—now with three rooms upon the ground floor; while the Tristram Coffin house shows—although with a difference, itself almost unique!—the favorite method of adding a new and fully developed plan upon one end of the earlier southern-fronted cottage, leaving it to function as a kitchen ell, and establishing a new frontage to either east or west, toward a main highway. And, finally, the Swett-Ilsey grouping shows a more extensive arrangement of an early house extension, as in the Riggs dwelling, but here that process has been extended over a period of fully a hundred and fifty years, while at the same time changing the direction of growth—all as will more fully appear in detail in the accompanying text.

It was in 1634 that the Rev. Thomas Parker, of Newbury in Old England, arrived in New England with Nicholas Noyes, John Spencer and nearly an hundred other followers, on the “Mary and John.” They made their “landing” on the shores of the Quascacunquen, now the Parker, River; very near where the “Old Bay Road” from Ipswich to Newburyport now crosses that stream—and the earliest settlement was upon the northern bank, although in 1642 most of the settlers removed to more fertile land a few miles further northward, where each freeholder was given a “house lot of 4 akers,” in the area still known as “Newbury Old Town.” And here the

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original Noyes home still stands, near the "Lower Green," although it has been so added to and changed—both within and without—that little remains to substantiate its early date (of about 1645 or '46) except its huge timbers and summers, themselves largely out of sight above the lowered plaster ceilings added in later years.

Along with the Spencer-Pierce house (illustrated on page 16 of the preceding chapter), now usually known as the Little House, nearby—but of an ancient character still apparent despite the changes and additions that were made some hundred or more years ago—it is probably the most ancient among the early dwellings of this old part of Newbury. But the latter's cross-shaped plan; its thick stone walls, and old kitchen chimney (at the end of what is the northern arm of the cross—the southern portion being the unusual brick gable or "Porch") make it unique among Massachusetts early house architecture—its nearest counterpart being probably the "Old Stone House" (1640) at Guilford, Conn. It, too, was probably built very near 1645 by either the original holder, John Spencer—or it may have been a few years later, by one Daniel Pierce, who bought the land of John Spencer's son in 1651.

Not only was the Coffin family prolific in the number of its human descendants, but also in its architectural products, as well. Tristram, the first of that name in the new world, was an old Royalist, who arrived in Haverhill, Massachusetts, from Brixton, Devonshire, in 1642, and first settled at Salisbury, near the mouth of the Merrimac. In December, 1647, he was granted the ferry privilege at "Newbury side," as well as keeping an "Ordinary," or Inn. But by 1653 the original part of the present Tristram Coffin structure, a two-story building with one room on the first floor and two on the second, with a chimney at its eastern end—now a part of the rear-most section of the house—was certainly in existence; as on March 2 of that year his son, Tristram, Jr., married Mrs. Somersby (née Judith Greenleaf) a widow, and was living there. It is even possible that this may have been a still earlier structure—belonging to the widow herself!

Meanwhile, his father, Tristram Coffin, Sr., removed to Nantucket in 1659 or 60; and there the name of the family has been perpetuated on what is now the oldest house on the Island, the Jethro Coffin house, built about 1686.

The original house had faced south, as was usual, with its doorway in front of the chimney near its eastern corner. Tristram, Jr., died Feb. 4, 1704, aged 72 years, and in his will left his "dwelling hous" to his son Nathaniel. About 1693 the frame of another building was moved up to within 13 or 14

feet of the easterly end of the older house, and what is the southeastern portion of the new front part of the dwelling was finished off, the old chimney rebuilt—or torn down and built anew—along with the intermediate portion necessary to connect the two sections. It is the fireplace in this chimney, and this room, that is shown in the measured drawing and accompanying photographs, though some of the finish may be of a still later date.

There seems to be some doubt whether the entire eastern front plan, as it appears now, was built at this time; or whether the central hallway and door in the middle of the street front, along with the rooms at the right or northern end of this new frontage were added at the time of the marriage of Nathaniel's son, Joseph, on July 15, 1725. In that event, the finish of the room shown here might have been renewed either then, or possibly shortly after Nathaniel's death, when 80 years old, on February 20, 1749.

Finally, either in 1725—or at some subsequent period before 1785—there was added a room at the back or northerly side of the original house to make a kitchen for the new front northerly portion; just as the rooms at the east and west of the oldest chimney were also in use as kitchens to serve the—at least!—three Coffin families that were simultaneously living in the old homestead!

The girt shown a few feet in front of the fireplace, shown in the drawing on page 21, is paralleled by another exposed a few feet beyond the western side of the same chimney, showing the portions that were added to these two rooms when the chimney was rebuilt and the two sections connected; while a slight bend in the southern length of the present building suggests to the careful observer that something a little out of the usual had probably here taken place. It is this intermediate section that is unusual—almost unique—in the records of enlarging early Colonial dwellings! While another unique feature is to be found in the old "Buttery" contained within the front portion of the dwelling, which has remained undisturbed from its original upfitting for almost two hundred years.

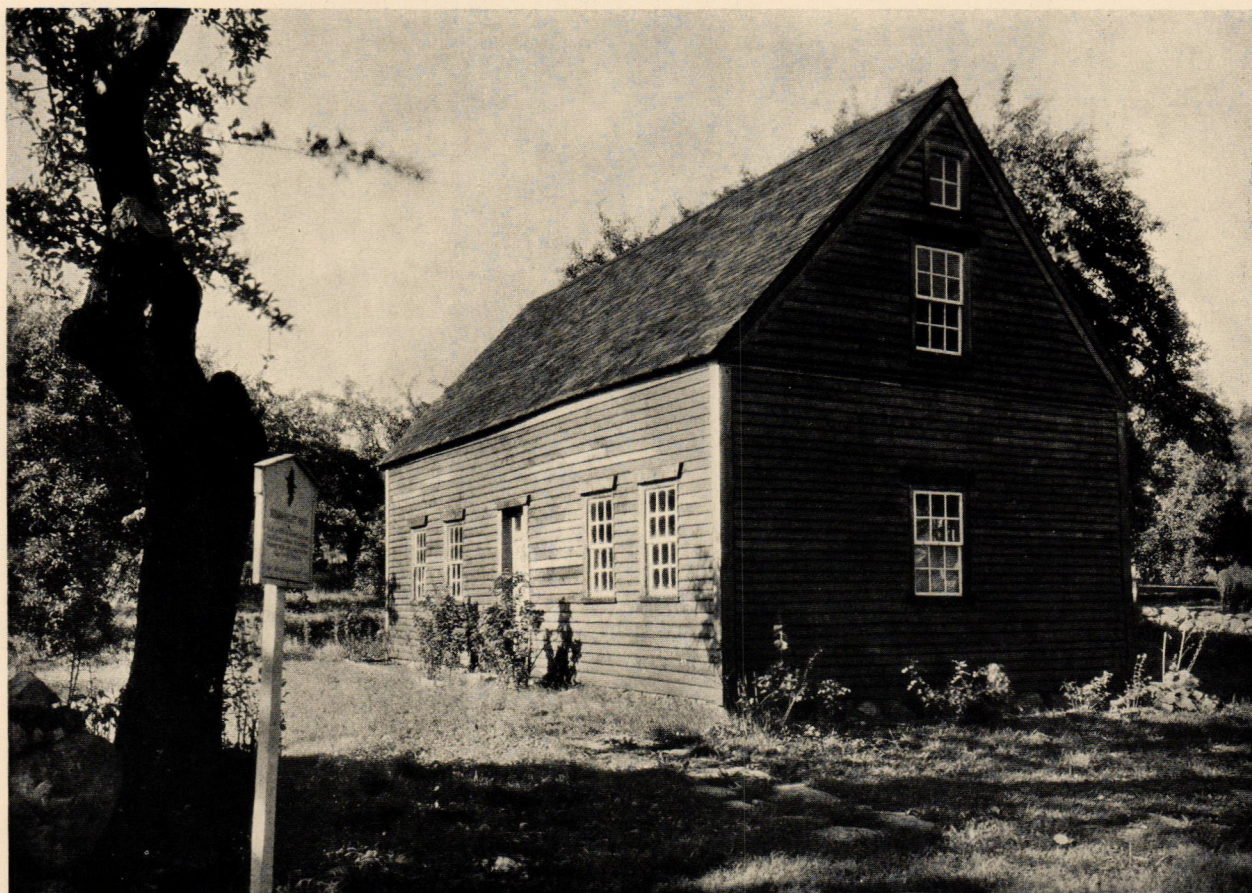
The other most interesting local dwelling is the Swett-Ilsley House—now again a hostelry!—which represents the changing backgrounds of over a hundred and fifty years in its various additions, without—as it fortunately happens—any of the later additions much obscuring or changing the work that had gone before. Along with the Tristram Coffin House, it is now owned by the "Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities," and therefore its preservation is assured—barring only the unfortunate accident of fire—for many years yet to come.

The building now faces east, fronting closely on the



"Old Bay Road," or High Street, only a few hundred feet beyond the more retired Coffin homestead. It has two front doorways, the one to the left admitting to the older portion. The two rooms on the first and second floors—at the left of and beyond this doorway—were the original house, then fronting south, with chimney at the west end and doorway and stairs to

old part and the addition. A new stairway was built against the eastern face of this chimney. The old west chimney was torn down; and a small corner fireplace built against the west side of the new chimney to heat the small room that occupied the space previously taken by chimney and staircase; and the ridgepole was changed to run from north to south instead of from



THE JACKMAN-WILLETT HOUSE—1696—NEWBURY OLD TOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

the south of it, in the southwest corner, with a slight front second-story overhang.

The ridgepole then ran from east to west; and this portion was built by Stephen Swett, at least as early as 1670. It may even have been several years older than that, as the chamfers on the timbers are very like those in the oldest part of the Coffin house. The frame shows where two and three mullion casement windows were set, one of these being about where the fireplace and chimney are now on the north side of the old "Hall."

The next and most important change was made previous to 1700, probably between 1690 and 1695, when what is now the middle room was built at the north of the older house, with a chimney between the

east to west, as it had originally. The rear (west) "leanto" was built on, probably between 1756 and 1760, to provide a new kitchen back of the large "Hall," with its enormous fireplace, one of the largest of the period now known in Massachusetts. And it is this room, or rather its south side with its unusual large fireplace, that is shown in detail in the measured drawing on page 27.

This middle room with its enormous fireplace has in its rear or western end a door and sashed opening that formerly connected with the serving "bar," during that portion of the structure's existence when it was in use as the Blue Anchor Tavern; this room then being the Tap Room, and the room in the leanto behind being the Kitchen—in substantiation of which

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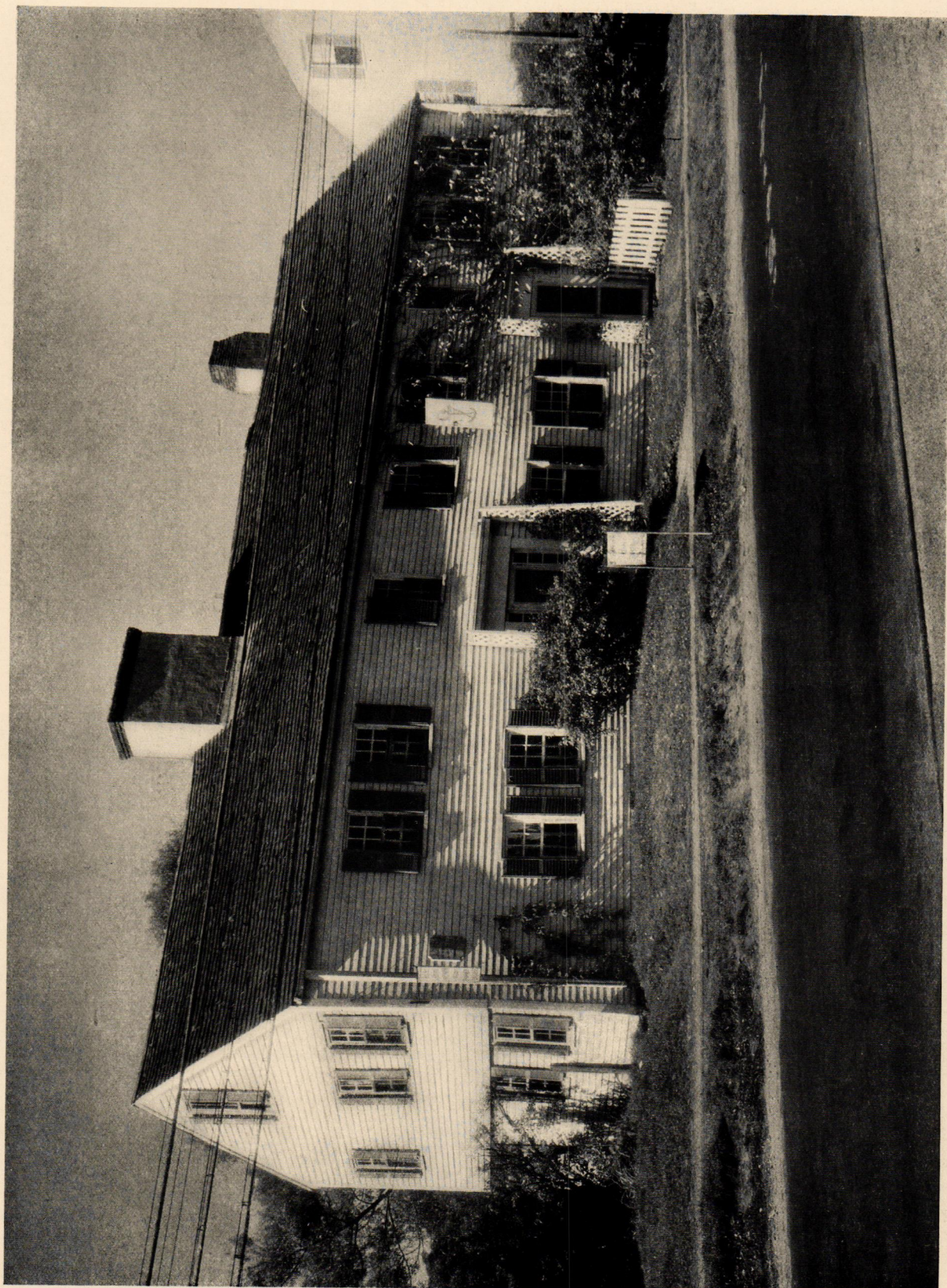




THE TRISTRAM COFFIN HOUSE—1651-1693-1725—NEWBURY OLD TOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

[ 20 ]

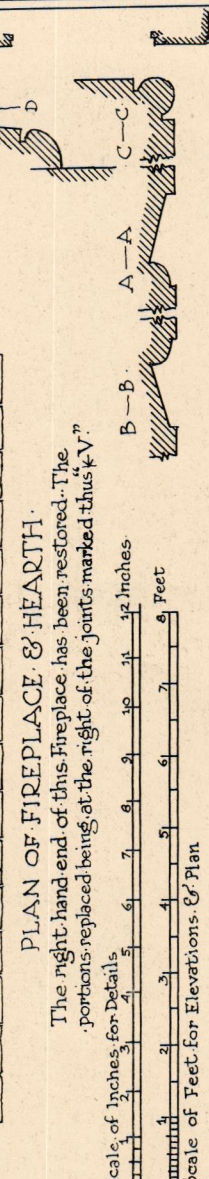




THE SWETT-ILSLEY HOUSE—1670-1700-1760—NEWBURY OLD TOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

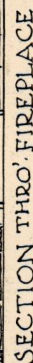
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PI AN OF FIDELI ACE & HEADTL.

The right-hand end of this Fireplace has been restored. The portions replaced being at the right of the joints marked thus "V."


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· FIREPLACE · IN · MIDDLE · ROOM · (1695 ~ 1700) · USED · AS · TAPROOM · WHEN · "THE · BLUE · ANCHOR · TAVERN" ·  
· SWETT ~ ILSLEY · HOUSE · 1670 ~ 1700 ~ 1760 · HIGH · STREET ~ NEWBURY · OLD · TOWN · MASSACHUSETTS ·



FIREPLACE & DRESSER SIDES OF NEWER (FRONT PORTION) HALL OR KITCHEN (ADDED ABOUT 1693)  
TRISTRAM COFFIN HOUSE 1651-1693-1725 NEWBURY OLD TOWN MASSACHUSETTS

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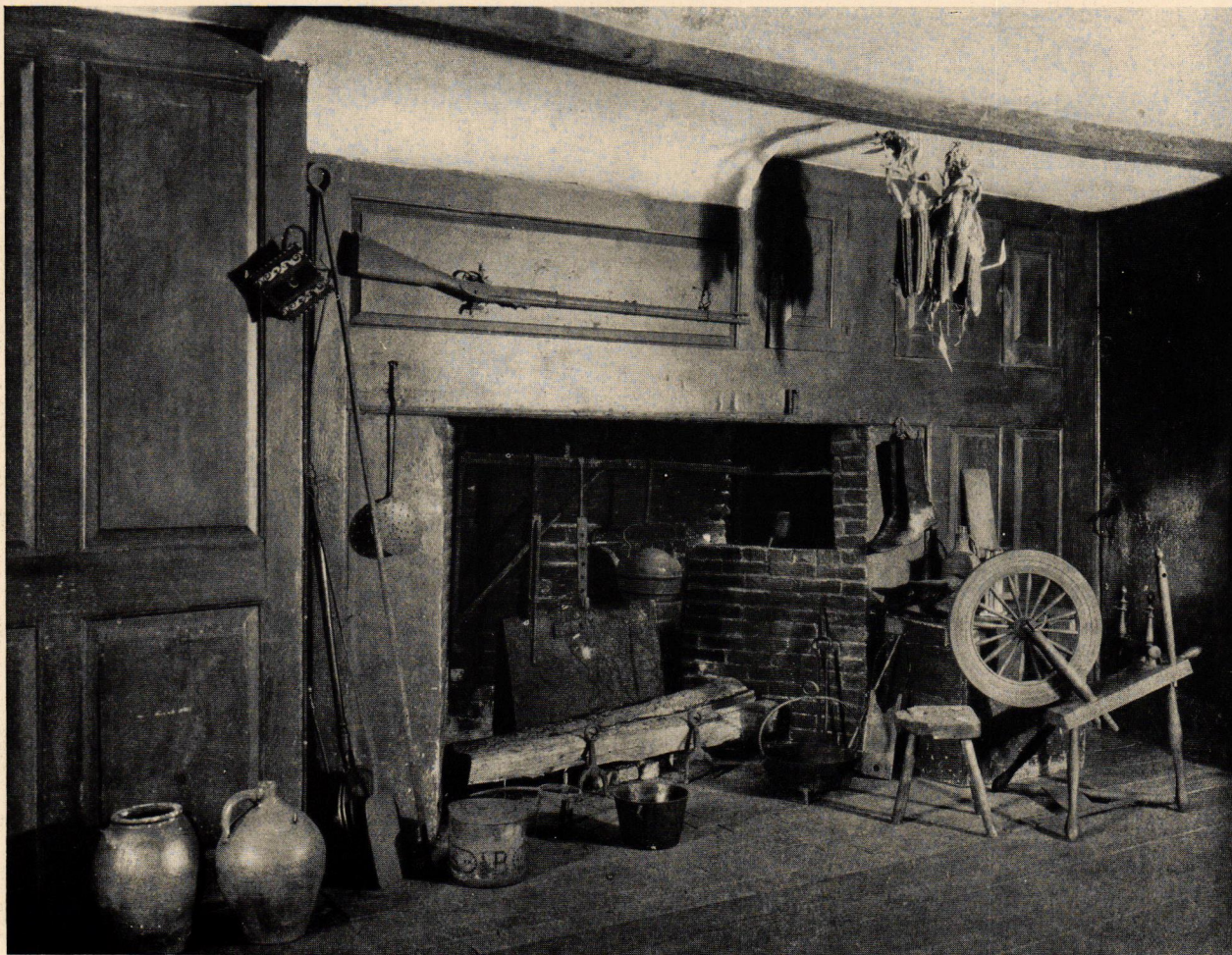


arrangement there still exists built into the front angle of this space, the remains of the old wall cupboard, of which the intermediate Kitchen of the Coffin House still shows so good an example, the invariable adjunct of the Seventeenth Century Kitchen!

The house did not come into the possession of the Ilsley family until 1797. Meanwhile, during, and for a while previous to, the Revolution, it had served as an Inn; seen the training of local companies of militia;

the old dwelling—probably shortly after 1800. Fortunately this was accomplished without any more disturbance than the closing of a few windows and the opening of a doorway into what then became the middle room, on both lower and upper floors.

While to the more curious, there is always in reserve the attic; that space that—in New England—has so often been kept inviolate, sacred to the housewives' desire for "order," to which proscribed pre-



*Fireplace Side of "Hall" or Kitchen (Added About 1693)*

THE TRISTRAM COFFIN HOUSE, NEWBURY OLD TOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

*(Measured Drawing on Page 21)*

watched the progress of the French and Indian wars (the Merrimac River being really the northern frontier of the New England settlements at that time) and had at least one owner, John March, who was a captain in the attack on Canada in 1700, and later helped defend the Casco Bay fort against the French.

Still further to the north, the door, hallway, and room at its right, is the last addition that was made to

cincts anything outmoded or otherwise cluttering up the daily wheels of progress may always be exiled. There, amid dust and these ancient family treasures, the timber framing and changes in the house's history usually lie plainly outspread before any interested or trained observer.

Down nearer the original "landing," on the Parker River, are two old structures also worthy attention.

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One, the Richard Dole-Little House, illustrated on page 29, is the simple long leanto dwelling, with its weathered ancient clapboarding, that still looks down toward the banks of the Parker River. Inside it has been much changed about to keep up with the progress and needs of its various families of occupants, but outside it certainly continues to look its years, from 1670, the date of its beginnings.

A little further north, at a sharp turn in the road,

Taproom at the left, from near the rear line of the house, though if even this record is to be much longer preserved, steps must soon be taken to maintain the old frame and make the roof tight.

About midway from this old Tavern to the center of Old Newbury, at the left side of the Old Post Road, is the location of the original Burying Ground, and beside it now is the Jackman-Willett house.

Richard Jackman was the youngest son of James



*Dresser Side of "Hall" or Kitchen (Added About 1693)*

THE TRISTRAM COFFIN HOUSE, NEWBURY OLD TOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

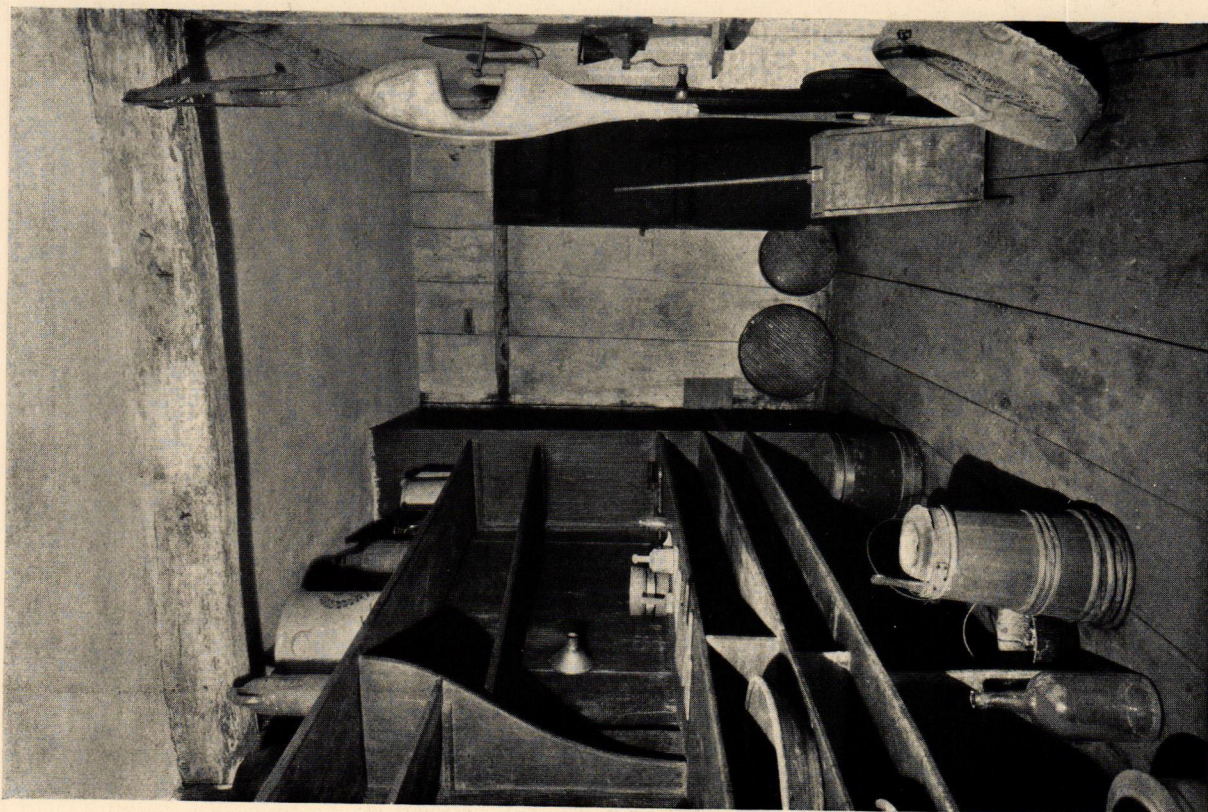
*(Measured Drawing on Page 21)*

is the Samuel Seddon house; once another "Ordinary" on the highroad out of Boston. Built in 1728, its windows are now shuttered; its old central chimney has been taken out and replaced by two smaller ones, in order to gain the room for a central hallway upon the second floor; and its floors are gradually settling and sagging out of true. But, inside, it is still possible to trace the location of the "bar," opening into the

Jackman, the immigrant, who died in 1694, when Richard had been married thirteen years. When his father's estate was settled the following year, he built his new house, which was finished in 1696. He had married Elizabeth Plummer, and when her father—who had the ferry at the Parker River—died in 1702, Corporal Richard Jackman was appointed, on Septem-

*(Continued on page 30)*

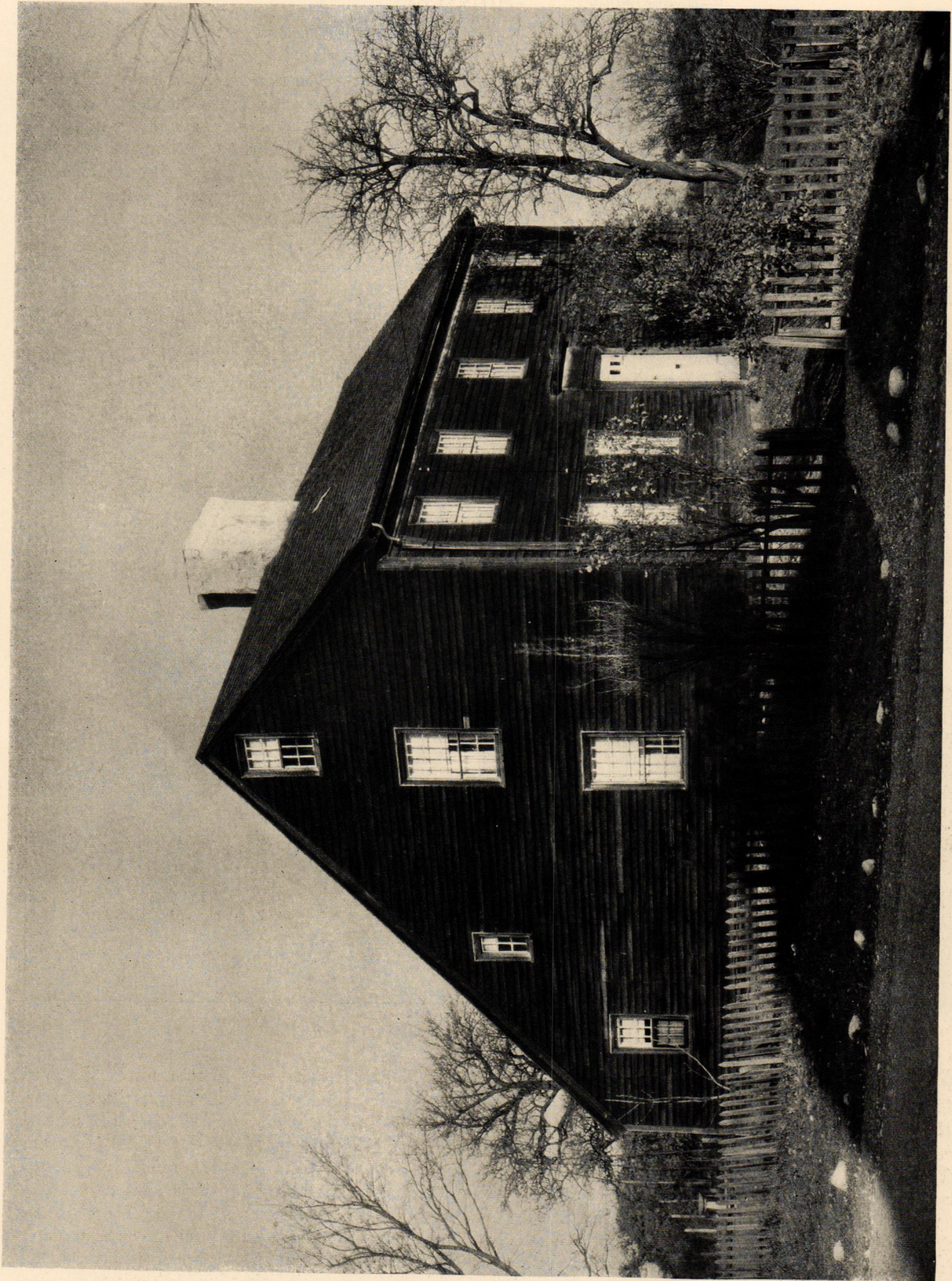




THE TRISTRAM COFFIN HOUSE, NEWBURY OLD TOWN, MASSACHUSETTS—BUTTERY AND BEDROOM

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THE RICHARD DOLE-LITTLE HOUSE—1670—NEWBURY OLD TOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

[ 29 ]

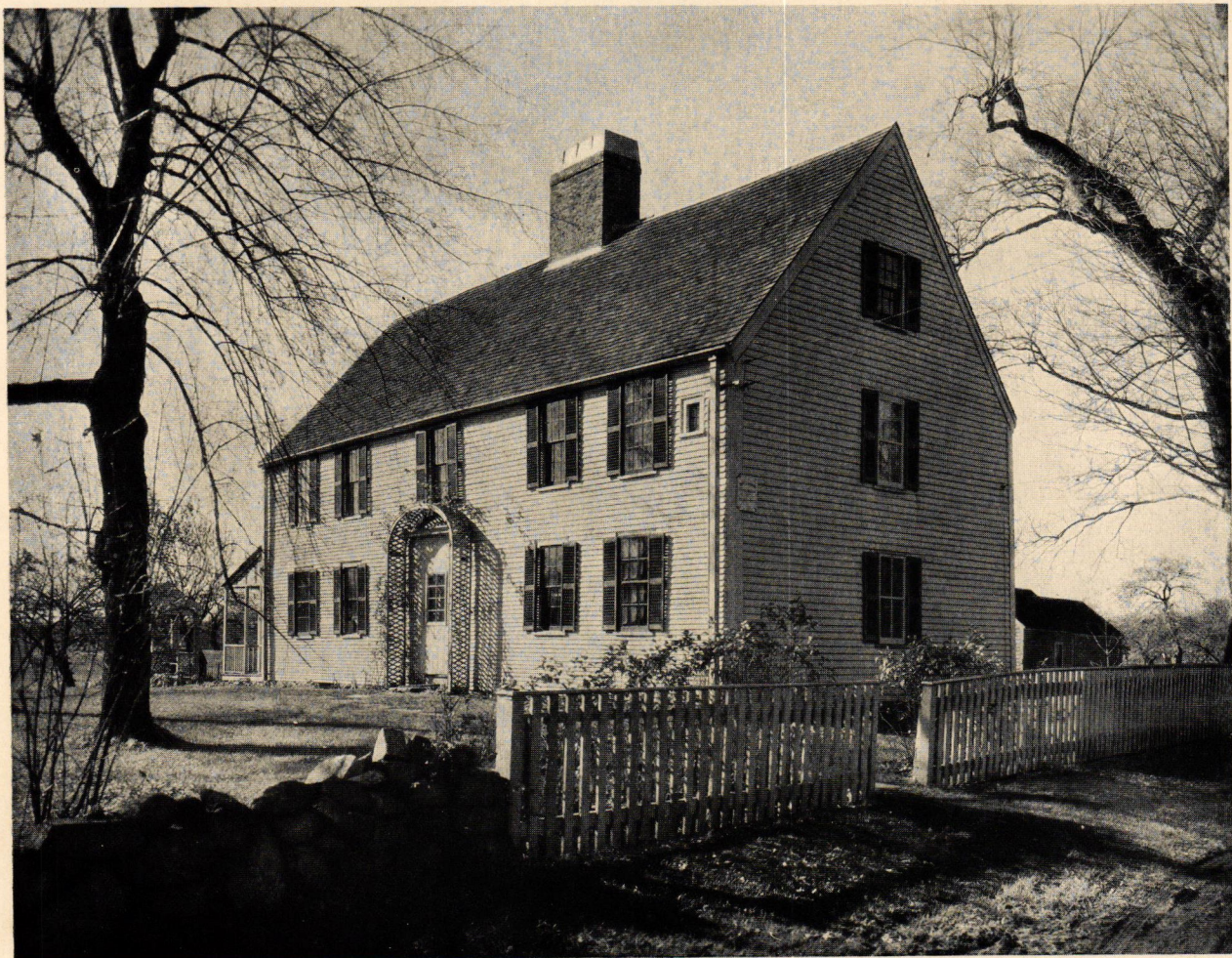


ber 16, 1702, to "keep the ferry over Oldtown river, alias ye River Parker." At that time he was living in his new house, on a lot on the "Ferry Road," across the street from the Seddon place.

By the summer of 1930 the little house had become so dilapidated that, when the "Sons and Daughters of the First Settlers of Newbury" undertook to put it into repair, as the oldest surviving primitive cottage then available, it was decided to move it a mile or so up

tage-houses of this locality is there to be obtained.

Again continuing north toward the "Lower Green" and "the Port," the Dr. Peter Toppan house, of 1697, may be seen almost directly across the Highway from the Swett-Ilsley place. It displays one of the most imposing "gambrels" of the locality, although the walls have been covered with new shingles, and the dwelling—for some time housing two families—has but recently been brought back to its single family ap-



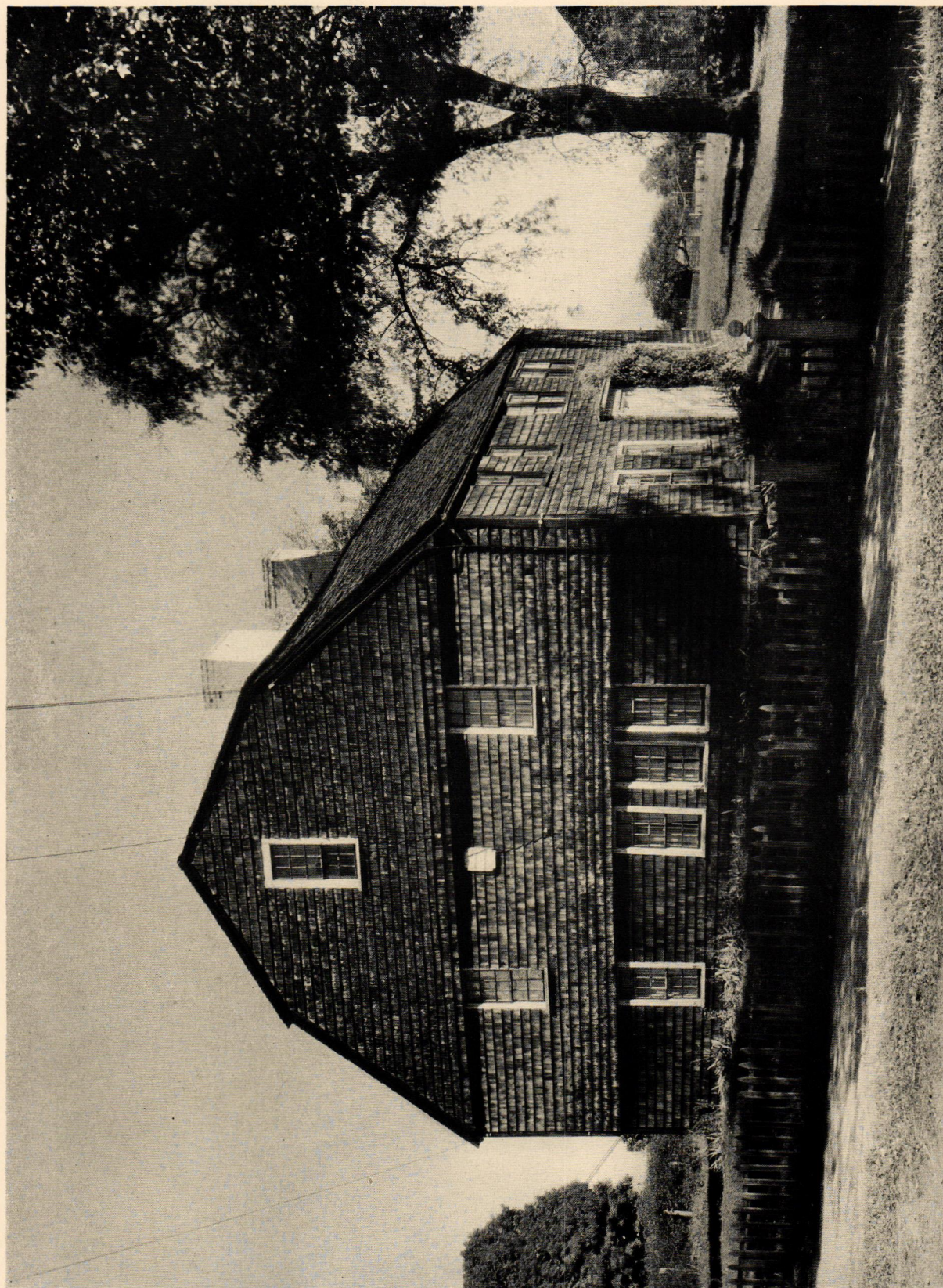
THE NOYES HOUSE—ABOUT 1645—NEWBURY OLD TOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

the Post road to a position beside the original Burying Ground, about midway between the "Landing" and the "Lower Green." The cottage probably still shows its original outlines, though the work on the interior had not been completed at the time these pictures were taken. The old chimney had not then been rebuilt, but the quaint window trim and heads, the clapboarding and "jet" finish had been carried out along the old lines, so that a very good idea of the appearance of one of the simpler types of early cot-

pearance. Probably it could assume a well deserved place in a sequential record illustrating the development of the New England gambrel roof; but, located so closely adjacent to the Swett-Ilsley and Tristram Coffin houses, it cannot but be preferably grouped with them; leaving only the better known and distinctively different architecture of the Short House waiting for some later—and fuller—presentation; which, perhaps along with the Spencer-Pierce-Little house, its beauty and individuality entitle it to receive.

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THE DR. PETER TOPPAN HOUSE—1697—NEWBURY OLD TOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

[ 31 ]

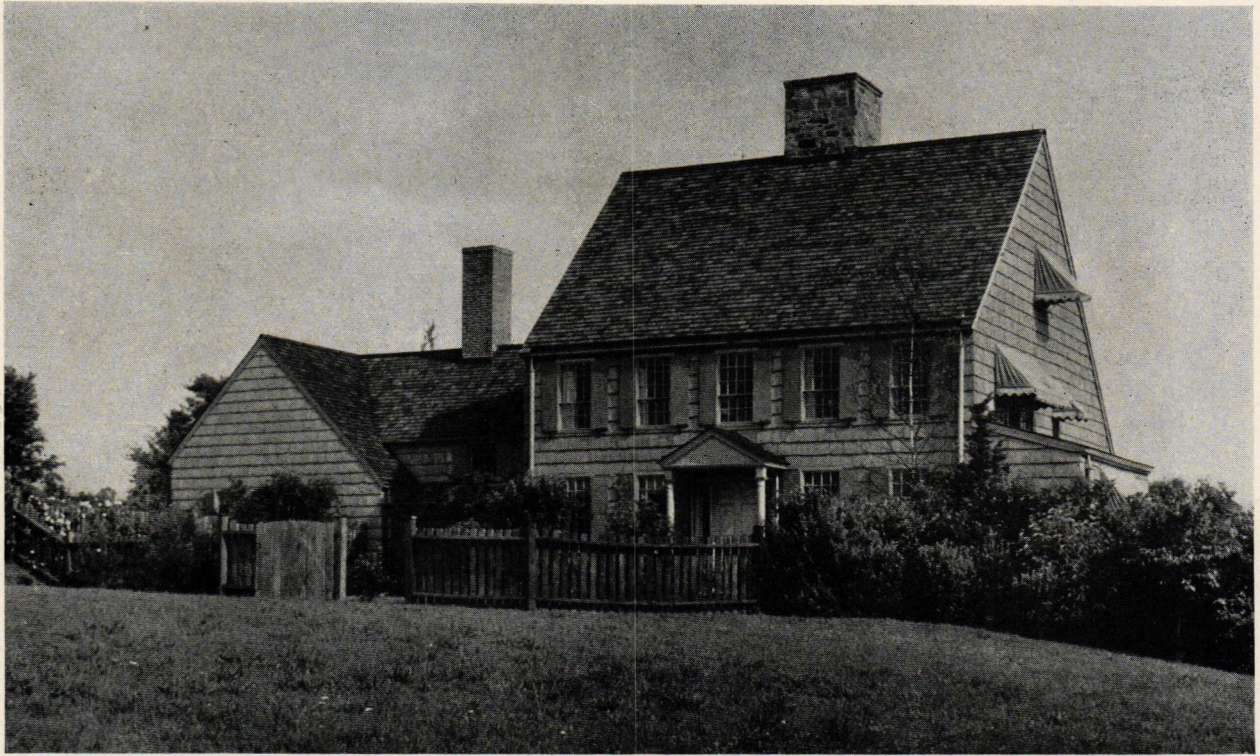




GARRISON HOUSE—DR. PEASLEE—ROCK VILLAGE, MASSACHUSETTS

[ 32 ]

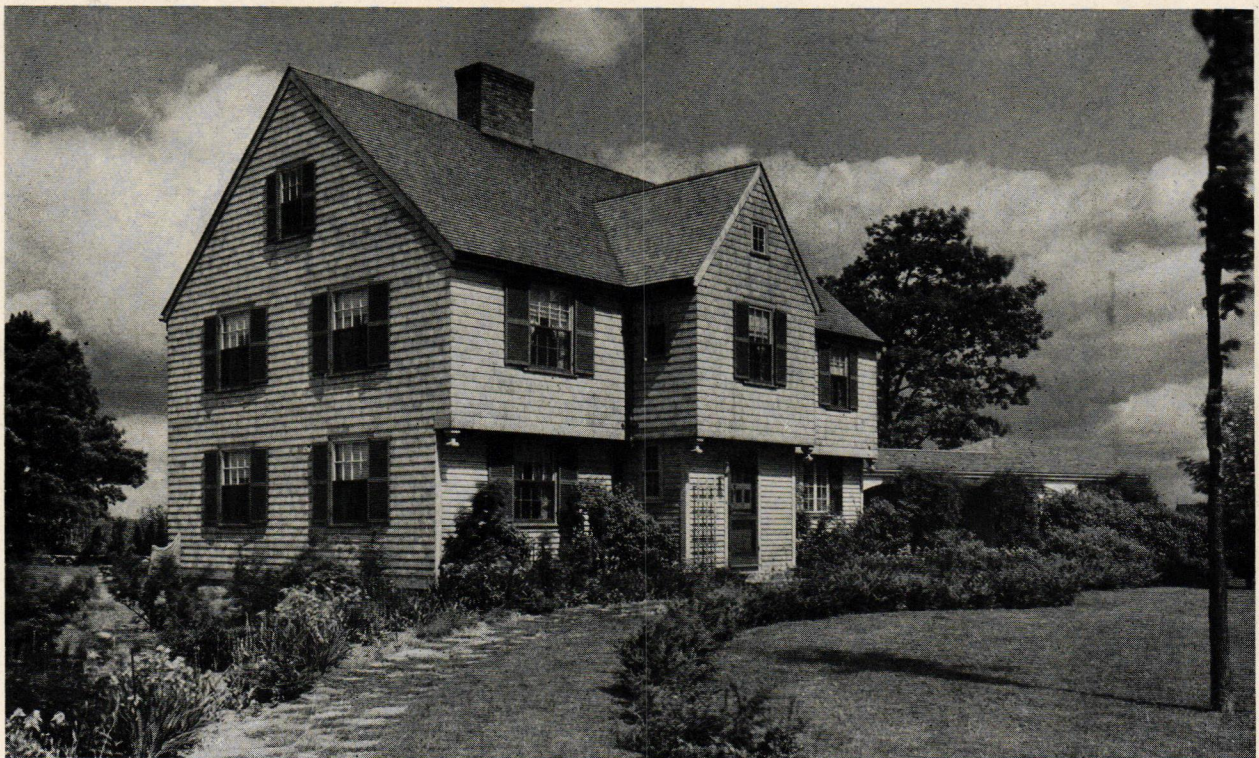




THE SPERRY HOUSE, SOUTHBURY, CONNECTICUT

*Cameron Clark, Architect*

## Early American Forms as Precedent for Present-day Small House Architecture



RESIDENCE OF MRS. FRANK VAUGHN, SOUTHBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

*Mrs. Mason M. Condict, Landscape Architect*





PONTE PIETRA, VERONA

FROM A CRAYON DRAWING BY W. J. HUCHTHAUSEN

*Size of original, 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 14"*