



# 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 FOUR

## Some Old Houses of Pigeon Cove, Massachusetts

BY THOMAS WILLIAMS

*Photographs by Arthur C. Haskell*

Thirty miles northeast of Boston, Cape Ann juts out into the ocean, a rocky island of many rocks and ledges. Rather barren inland, with bouldered pastures, swamps, and tangled thickets, its perimeter is settled almost continuously with a series of attractive villages which cluster around the harbors and coves, straggling out along the highway and shore.

Originally the whole cape was in the town of Gloucester, although from early days there were two nuclei of settlement. One was built around the "harbor," Gloucester, and the "cut" through the marshes which from early days made the cape an island and gave the fishing boats a short and easy passage to Annisquam behind the shelter of the cape. "Sandy Bay," on the ocean side of the cape, settled later, became the second and less important center of population, numbering by the time of the Revolution about 400 people.

Sandy Bay organized a separate parish in 1754, and finally in 1840 incorporated as the town of Rockport. Pigeon Cove, whose old houses form the subject of this monograph, is the "North Village" of Rockport, and includes the ocean shore of the extreme tip of Cape Ann. The cove itself, whose sandy beach was formerly partially sheltered by a dyke of rocks called "The Pillions," is now protected by a breakwater which affords complete shelter for many small fishing boats and an occasional coal barge, while the beach has disappeared under the highway and the forge of the Cape Ann Tool Company.

At the opening of the seventeenth century, Sandy Bay and Pigeon Cove presented an appearance far different from that of today. Champlain in 1605 described Rockport and its three islands (later named by Capt. John Smith the "Turks' Heads") as heavily wooded. The shore probably closely resembled the wooded portions of the Maine coast today. Many residents remember the last stands of primeval pines in Annisquam, along Goose Cove and around the "Old Dennison House" (described in *The Monograph Series*, Volume XIX, Number 1) which used to bring visitors from miles around until at last they succumbed to the lumberman. Such forests, so convenient to water transportation, from early times attracted the woodcutters, who, toward the end of the seventeenth century, found considerable profit in cutting and selling timber which was transported to Boston, and thence perhaps to England, in sloops loaded at Gap Head and Pigeon Cove.

The town early realized the importance of the timber on the Common land and took steps to conserve it, and at the same time to encourage the development of the infant local shipbuilding and shipping industries. Thus, in 1669, "It was agreed that there should be no cordwood sold out of town under three shillings and sixpence per cord." For several successive years, each family was permitted to cut twenty cords on the town's Common for its own use. In 1698, "Liberty is given to the gentlemen of Boston that is concerned in building a ship heare in the towne of Gloucester to get what



timber is needful upon the towne's common land, provided they employ such men of the towne as are capable of working upon the ship." Again, in 1702, certain persons were granted timber from Common land for shipbuilding, but "the said personses is to pay to the towne three shillings pr tunn in case the said S<sup>d</sup> Sloop be sold or disposed of out of towne before six years be expired x x ." By 1706, in spite of all restrictions, thirty sloops were employed in the timber trade on the inside portion of the Cape alone, a number reduced to eighteen by 1710.

A second important attraction to the early settlers of Cape Ann was the abundance of fish in its surrounding waters. One of the earliest enterprises of the Plymouth Colony was the establishing at Gloucester Harbor in 1624 of a landing stage and the founding of a small settlement to serve as a base for the pursuit of the fishing industry. This effort was doomed to failure, but the settlement of Gloucester remained permanent and was destined to develop the very prosperous fishing industry which is still carried on today.

Of course, trade early became an important occupation in this maritime settlement, whose remoteness also, perhaps, encouraged smuggling. In 1700, the Earl of Bellamont wrote to the Lords of Trade of the unlawful trade of the Colony, "If the merchants of Boston be minded to run their goods there is nothing to hinder them," and "'tis a common thing, as I have heard, to unload their ships at Cape Ann, and bring their goods to Boston in wood-boats."

Records are entirely lacking as to the details of the early settlement of Sandy Bay; although we know that Richard Tarr, who during the last quarter of the seventeenth century built his cabin near what is now Rockport Harbor, was the first permanent settler. It is certain, however, that prior to that time fishermen from Chebacco (now Essex) and Ipswich, towns on the mainland to the northwest, had established posts at Gap Head and Pigeon Cove, built huts, and made these points their temporary abode.

Champlain had found the Indians at "Cap des Isles," as he called Cape Ann, very amiable, although he was much on his guard against them; and later visitors and settlers seem to have had no serious trouble with them. The whole district, however, was terrified of the Indians during King Philip's War, and the Indian attacks came alarmingly close to the towns of Chebacco and Ipswich, whose fishermen were using Gap Head and Pigeon Cove as bases. In March of 1676, spurred on by the peril, a committee of the General Court reported that Cape Ann "had made two garrison houses, besides several particular fortifications."

Back from Pigeon Cove, on the top of a low hill, to the north, stands the "Old Garrison House," in

more recent years known as the "Witch House." Although documentary evidence is lacking, it seems a reasonable assumption that this was built for the protection of woodcutters and fishermen, whose temporary huts offered scant security against Indian raids, and that it was one of the two garrison houses referred to by the Committee of the General Court in 1676. This assumption is borne out by the character of the building, whose exterior walls are of square-hewn logs of hard pine or tamarack, 7 inches thick and strongly dovetailed at the corners; with a second story overhang of about a foot which originally existed on all four sides.

The log construction below this overhang shows such careful workmanship on the very hard wood that the cracks between logs are in many places very difficult to find. Above the second floor level, however, the chinks are quite wide in places, suggesting that the builders may have been hurried by approaching Winter.

The framing of the first floor ceiling, which cantilevers out to support the overhang, is very unusual with hard pine beams about five inches by seventeen inches moulded at the edges and laid flat, three on each side of the chimney. The spaces between these beams, about thirty inches, are spanned by the single thickness of 1½-inch floor planks without the aid of joists. The oak end girts and chimney girts, about seven inches wide by twelve inches deep, also cantilever through the walls and help support the overhangs.

The cellar and second floor ceilings are constructed in the usual seventeenth century manner, with "summer" beam supporting floor joists. The roof is of purlin construction, with vertical boarding.

How crude the original house must have been! With no outside sheathing, unplastered, not even chinked, its occupants were at the mercy of every wind. The primitive character of the original finish is indicated by the fact that, with the possible exception of the plank partition which supports the stair, all of the original interior work has disappeared in the course of many alterations, the first of which must have been begun as soon as the building was permanently occupied. The original chimney also succumbed to some eighteenth century alteration, probably because of inferior construction of underburned bricks and clay mortar.

The restored "Fire Room" is probably a fairly accurate representation of its original appearance. The hard pine sheathing, though not original, is of the period, and the fireplace and hearth have been rebuilt on their old foundation on the model of a nearby original. The walls have been stripped of later plaster to what was undoubtedly their original state. The addition of the furniture, which is American of the



general period of the room, completes the picture, giving us a very unusual opportunity to see how these primitive early rooms really did look.

The living room, the fireplace end of which is illustrated, exhibits simple arrangement of a fireplace and pine doors and trim, which were installed in the early portion of the house in the late eighteenth century.

pedimented doorway (saved from the wreckage of an old Essex mansion) to take the place of the original, which had disappeared. In this eighteenth century ell are the dining room, with its unusual gouge-work over the fireplace, and the chamber with the deep chimney breast.

A series of nineteenth century additions, including the Victorian bay windows, make the house a mixture



THE THOMAS KNUTSFORD (STOCKBRIDGE) HOUSE—BUILT IN 1753—  
PIGEON COVE, CAPE ANN, MASSACHUSETTS

The exterior of the house shows many additions to the original blockhouse; the first one was the ell to the north, which was probably built shortly after a transfer of the property in 1778, and is two and a half stories high with a stair hall and one room on each floor. The east end of the house was brought up to date during this alteration by the removal of the overhang at that end. The present owners installed the

of styles but give to it a picturesque outline and a feeling of having been lived in, which makes it very unusual among old houses.

In August, 1692, in the course of the witchcraft trials at Salem, John Procter and his wife, Elizabeth, were convicted and sentenced to be executed. He was hanged, but she, on account of pregnancy, was released on condition that she leave Salem. It is the tradition

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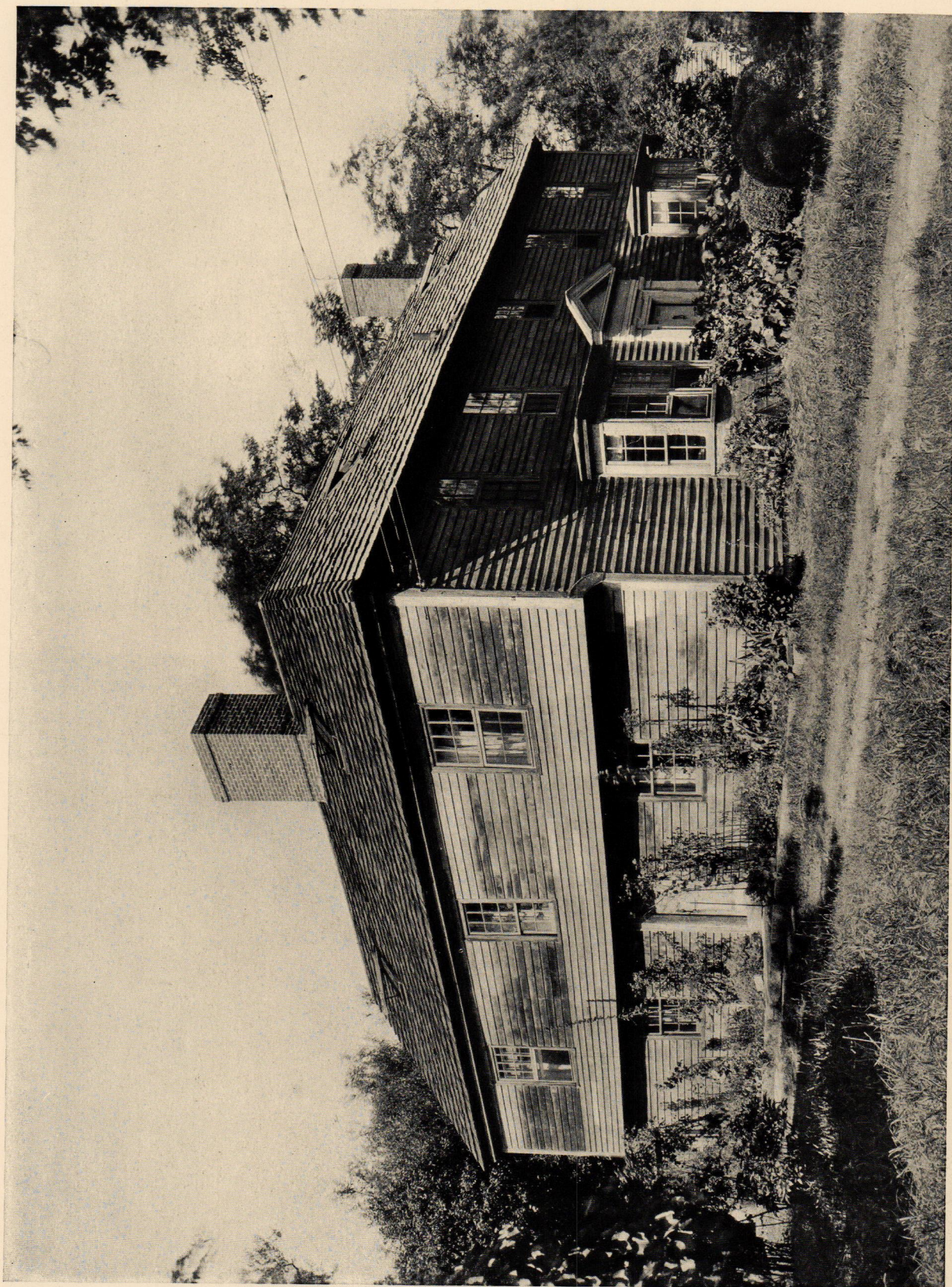
*Bay Window Added in Nineteenth Century*

OLD GARRISON HOUSE—"WITCH HOUSE"—PIGEON COVE, CAPE ANN, MASSACHUSETTS



*Doorway—Garrison House Portion*





OLD GARRISON HOUSE—"WITCH HOUSE"—PIGEON COVE, CAPE ANN, MASSACHUSETTS

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*Dining Room End in North Wing Added in 1778*

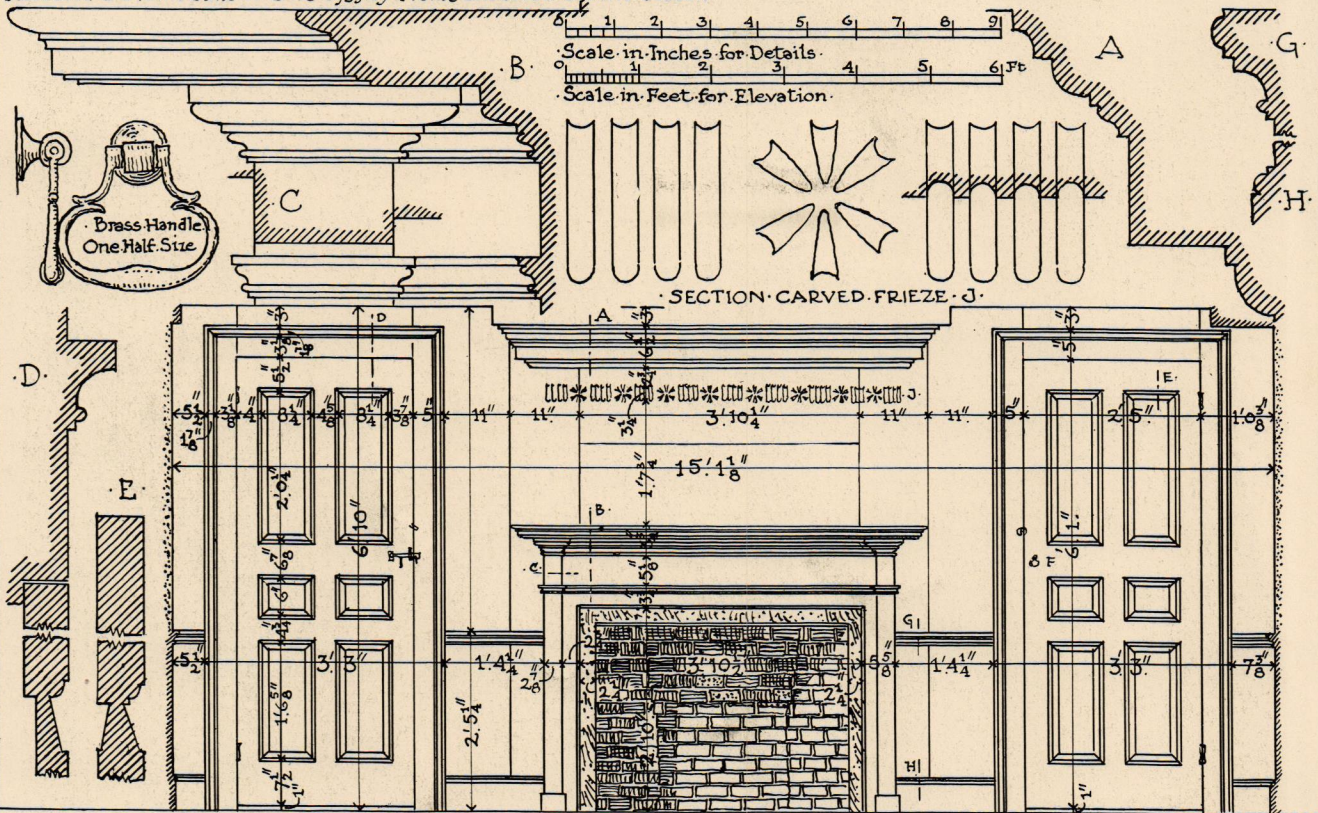


*Southeast Living Room—Garrison House Part*  
 THE "WITCH HOUSE," PIGEON COVE, CAPE ANN, MASSACHUSETTS

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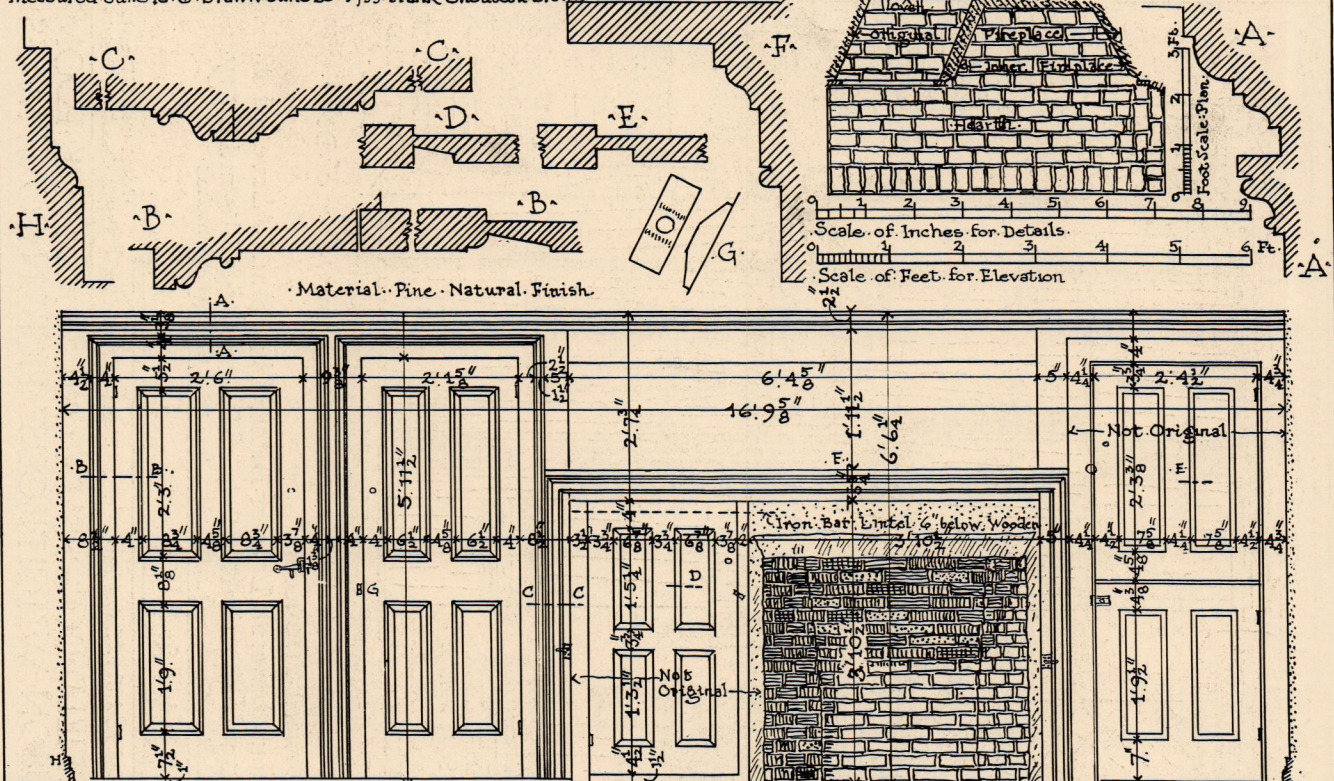


Measured & Drawn June 16 & 18 1933 by Frank Chouteau Brown Boston.



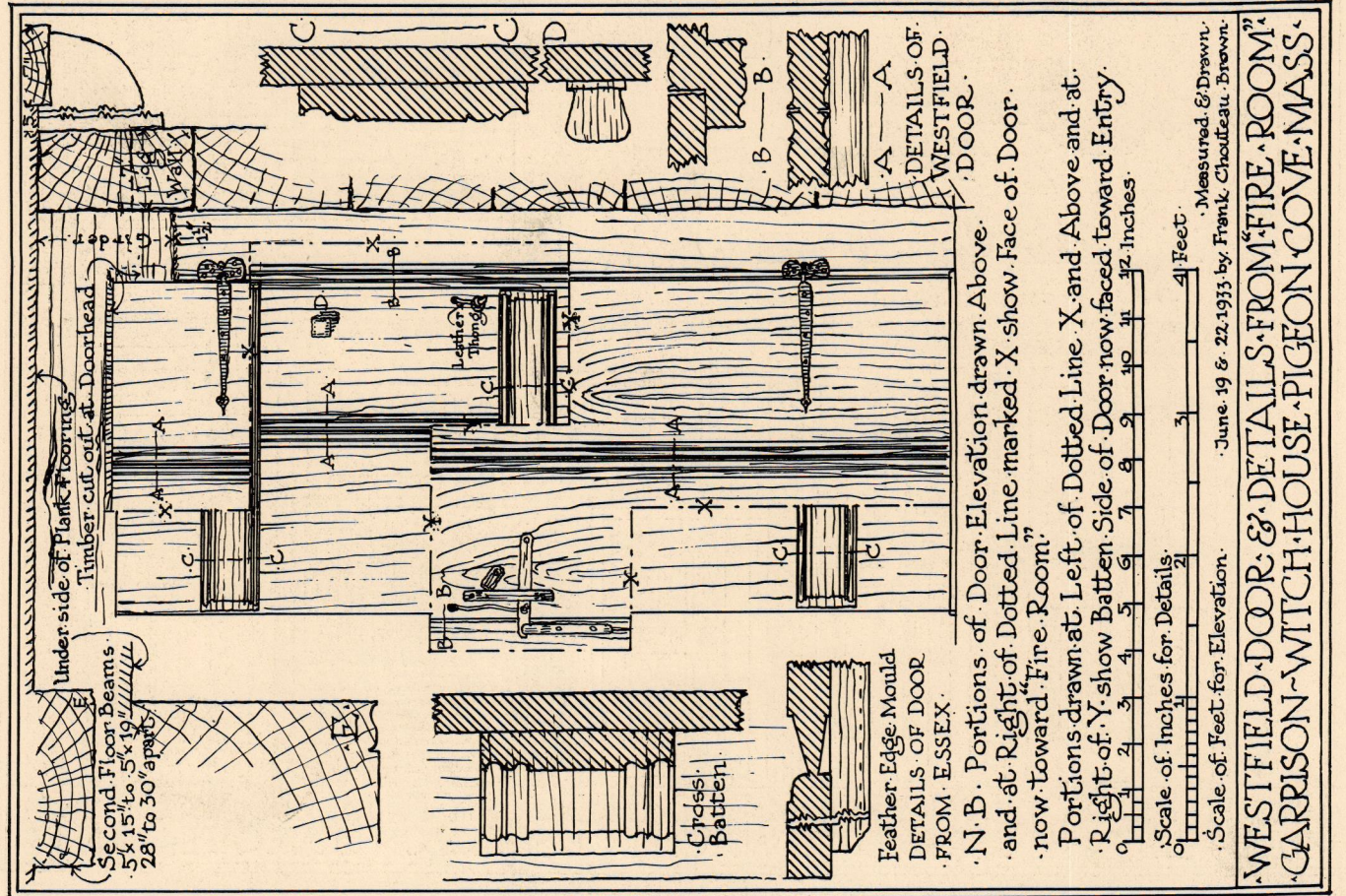
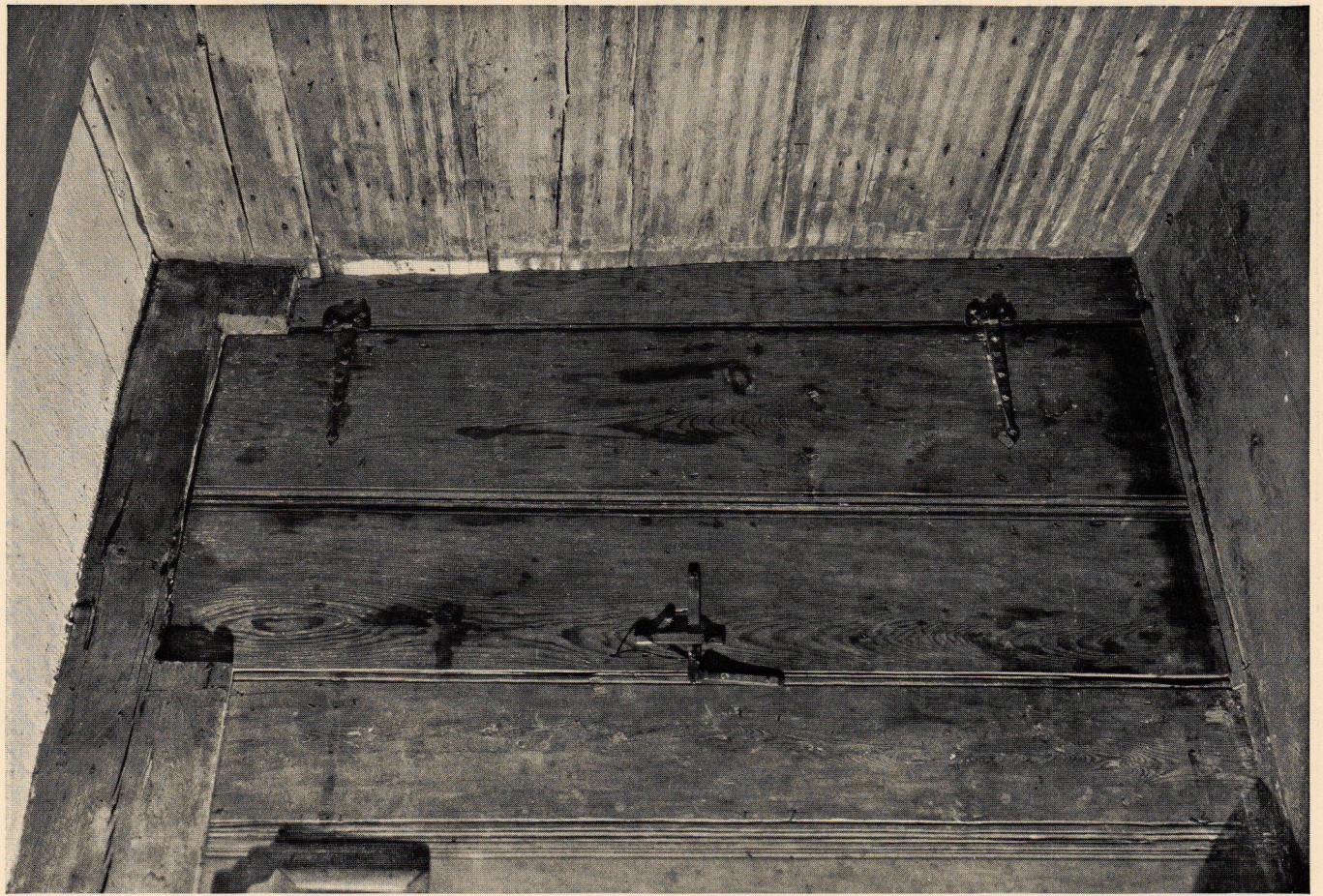
Dining Room End in North Wing Added in 1778 to Old Garrison House. Usually known as "The Witch House" Pigeon Cove Cape Ann Mass.

Measured June 16 & Drawn June 20 1933 Frank Chouteau Brown A.1.A.



South East Living Room End (Probably paneled about 1780) in Garrison House Part of Witch House Pigeon Cove Cape Ann Mass.

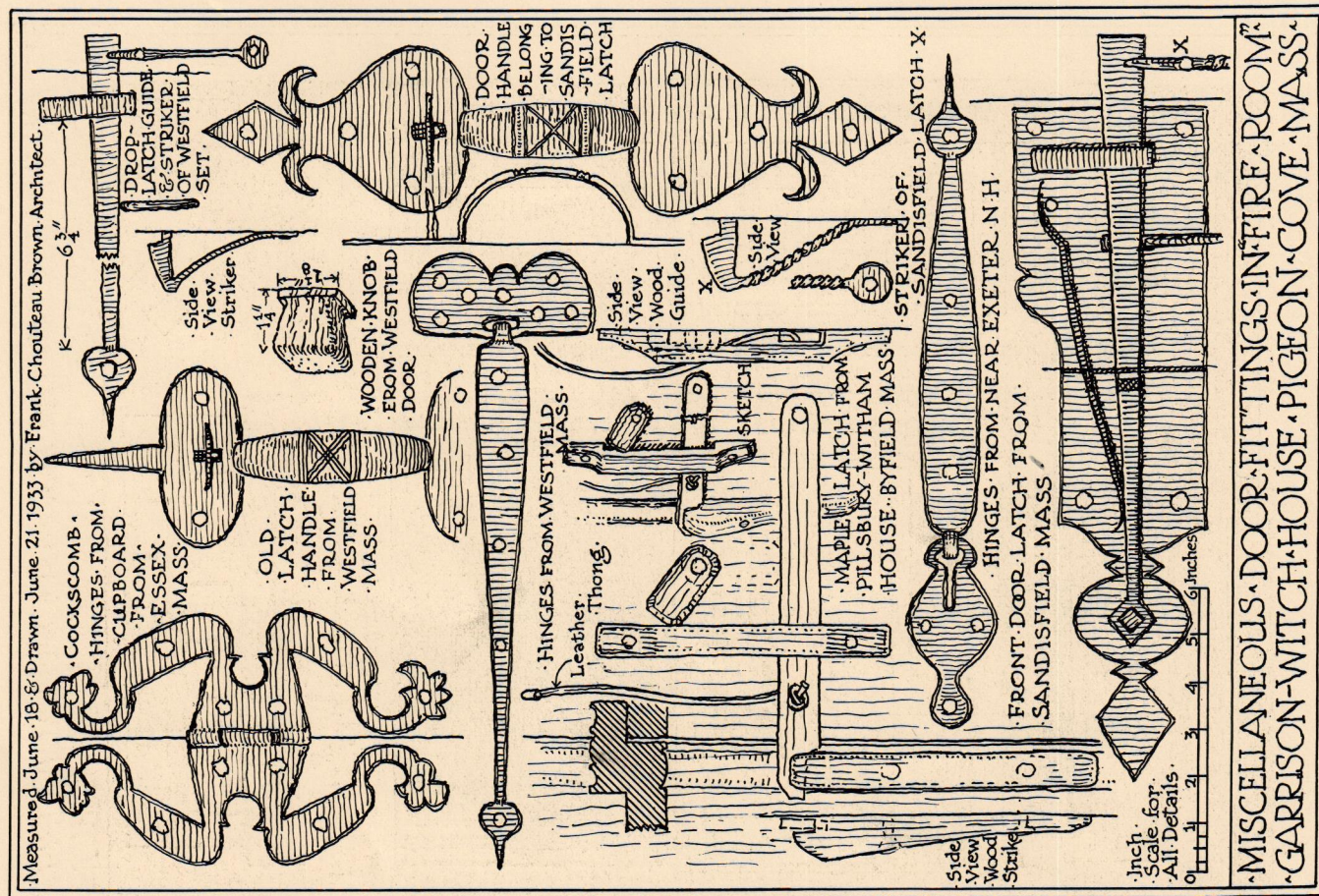




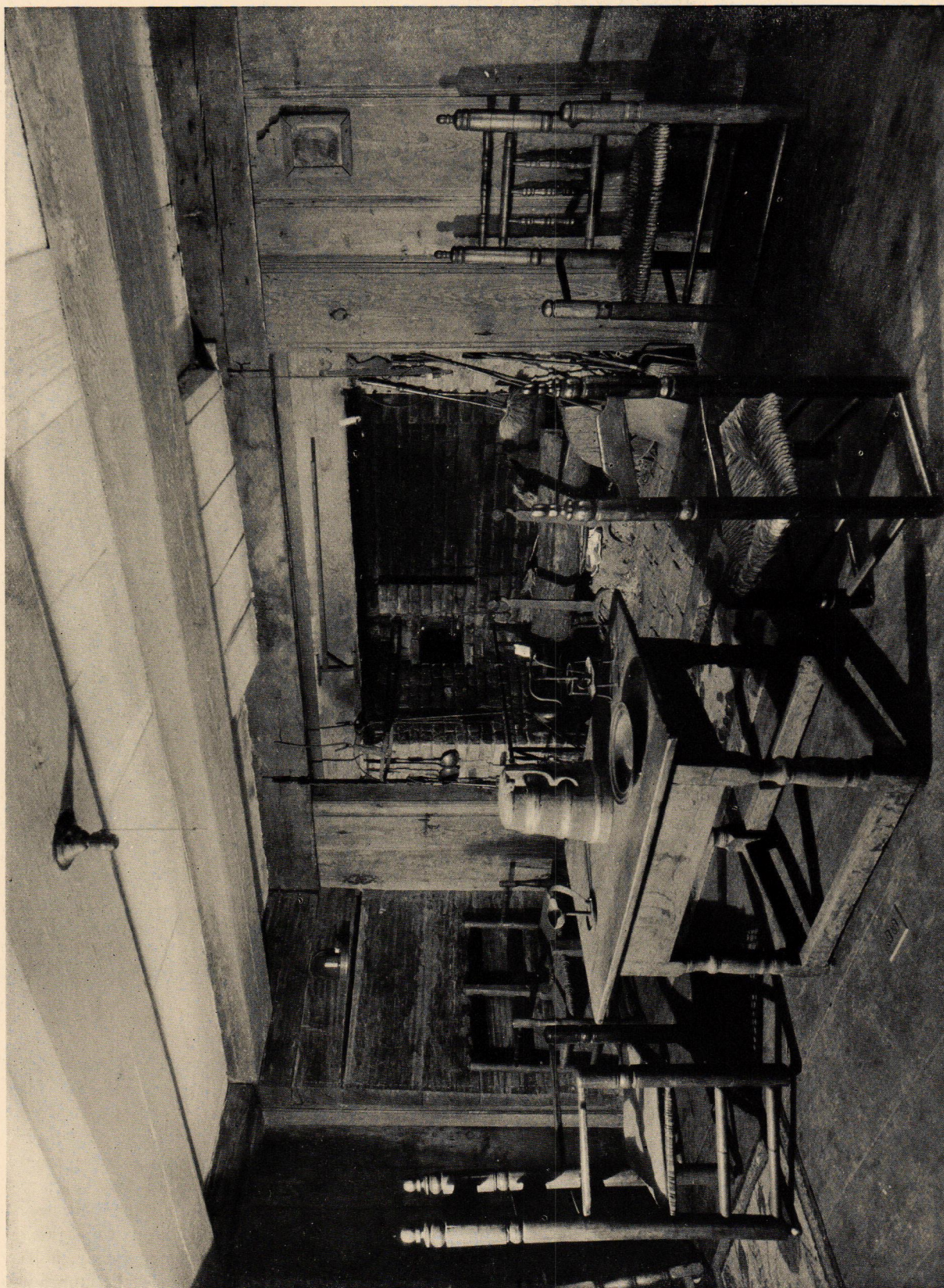












LIVING ROOM—"WITCH HOUSE"—PIGEON COVE, CAPE ANN, MASSACHUSETTS

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"THE CASTLE"—1678—PIGEON COVE, MASSACHUSETTS

that her children gave her refuge in this house, hence the name "Witch House" which in recent years has been applied to it rather than the older and more appropriate one of "The Garrison House."

Overlooking the south side of Pigeon Cove is "The Castle," another weatherbeaten survivor of the earliest settlement of the "North Village." Tradition ascribes to this house the date 1678, which is borne out by many details of its construction; the "hewn" overhang, the steep pitch and purlin construction of the

roof, the heavy framing with deeply chamfered "summer" beams and "gunstock" posts, and the low ceilings.

This house, too, has changed with the times. Its chimney was rebuilt in the eighteenth century; rooms were plastered and paneled; a leanto was built, removed and rebuilt; all according to the changing tastes and fortunes of successive owners. Now, through the generosity of its last owners, the Story family, it has been presented to the Pigeon Cove Village Improve-

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*Fireplace in East Room*



*Fireplace in Living Hall*

"THE CASTLE"—1678—PIGEON COVE, MASSACHUSETTS

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ment Society, who have preserved and repaired it and hope eventually to furnish it appropriately. The kitchen has been restored to an approximation of what must have been its original appearance, while the parlor shows paneling and cased beams of the early eighteenth century, with a dado apparently made of moulded boards used originally for vertical sheathing.

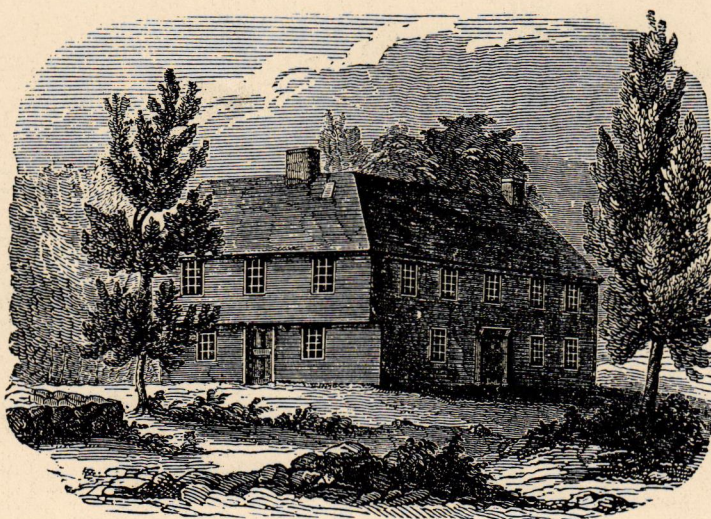
The "Gott House," on Halibut Point, the extreme point of the Cape, was built by Samuel Gott, who came from Wenham in 1702, and by whose descendants it is still owned and occupied. Probably the oldest gambrel-roofed house on the Cape, it offers an amusing example of a "jutby," that New England way of cutting a corner out of a house in the manner of a piece of cheese! The interior boasts two simple corner cupboards, but aside from that is unelaborated; one room-end sheathed, another paneled simply, the stair enclosed in a sheathed partition.

The Thomas Knutsford House was built in 1753 by Benjamin Stockbridge by whose name it is sometimes called. It faces south in the manner of early houses, away from the road, and is very attractive with its steep gambrel roof and tiny ell. It derives its name from Thomas Knutsford, Jr., a grandson of Stephen Knutsford and Mary Andrews, whose romance it recalls. (*Illustrated on page 51.*)

Mary Andrews was a beautiful and romantic girl who grew up in Pigeon Cove, and at the time of the Revolution was living, with her parents, in the woods near the shore. Given to day dreams, she fell in love with one of her visions, of whom she often dreamed; a handsome young man in uniform, who came from

over the sea to be her husband. Sometimes in her dreams she conversed with him; they plighted their troth; then she would seem to see him lying injured on Andrews Point. She used to wander often to the spot, in hopes of finding him. But the years passed, and Mary Andrews seemed destined to remain a spinster. 'Till one day in 1778, wandering on Andrews Point she did find him there exhausted, lying with his head on his arm; young, handsome, in a British uniform! She revived him and brought him to her home; eventually he became her husband. A man of education and breeding, his origin was always clothed in mystery; whether because he was an escaped prisoner, a deserter, or whatever the reason, he never disclosed his story to his neighbors or communicated with his family. Their marriage was very happy, they had eight children and he taught school in the community until his death in 1807.

This community was poor and remote. These houses and many others of later date which still remain possess little elaboration either of plan or of architectural detail. Their scale, however, is almost invariably consistent and unbelievably small, with very low ceilings, doors of reduced size, and tiny details by which these small houses achieve a great measure of spaciousness and dignity. Built altogether of wood by men who had learned its qualities in building ships as well as houses, they show throughout a right use of this material. As we prepare to study the problem of the small house in the light of new materials and modern methods of production, let us learn what we can from these early solutions of a similar problem.

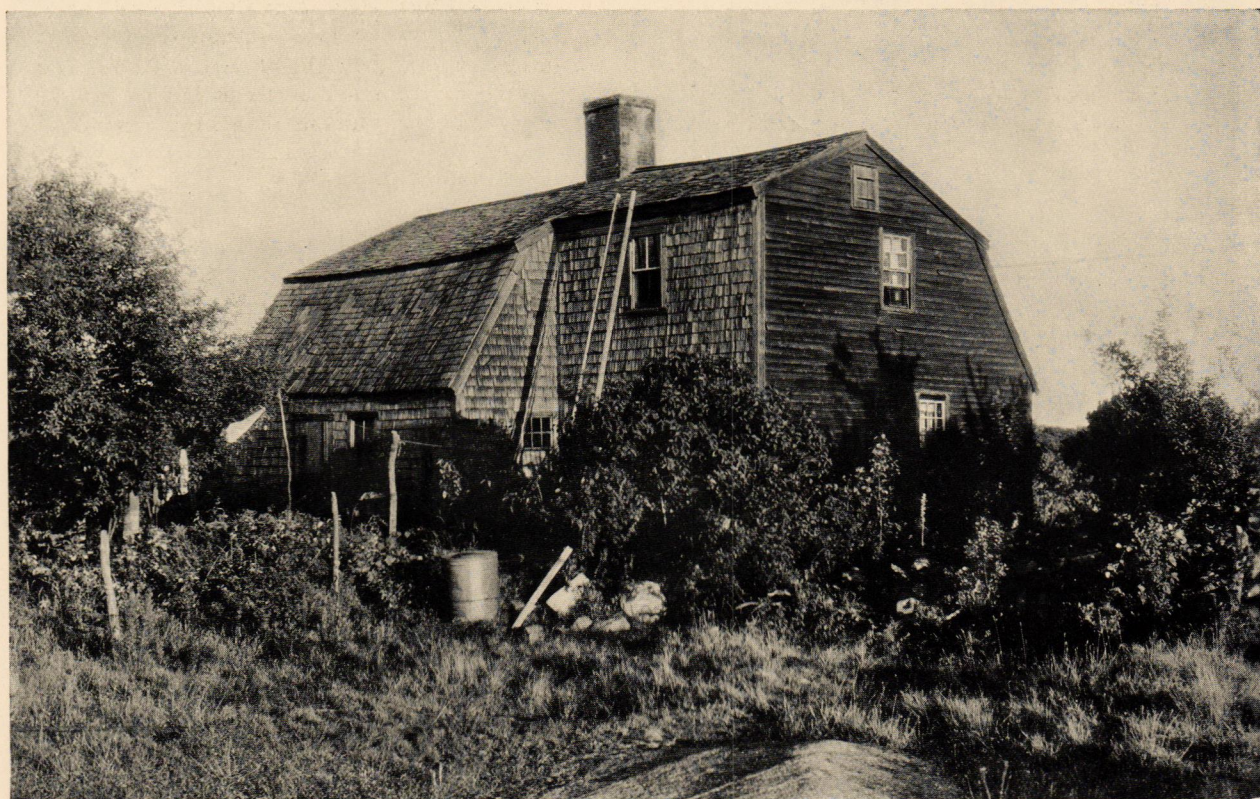


(Courtesy of Oliver E. Williams)

THE "WITCH HOUSE," PIGEON COVE, MASSACHUSETTS

Picture from *Pictorial National Library (Magazine)* for 1849





THE "GOTT HOUSE"—1702—HALIBUT POINT, PIGEON COVE, MASSACHUSETTS

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STAIR HALL—THE LEE MANSION—MARBLEHEAD, MASSACHUSETTS

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Monograph Five—Volume XIX—"New England Stairways"