



THE MONOGRAPH SERIES

RECORDS OF EARLY AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE
AS SOURCE MATERIAL

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VOLUME XXI

MONOGRAPH ONE

Some Early "Single Room Houses" of Lincoln, Rhode Island

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Research and Measured Drawings by Frank Chouteau Brown

Photographs by Arthur C. Haskell

Despite the fact that the stimulus actuating most of the early settlers of New England in emigrating to this country was based upon their desire to secure Religious as well as Civil Liberty; immediately they became established in the new land, they themselves began to set up forms of government no less rigid than those they had escaped. And they further appeared to feel no conscientious qualms in imposing their ideas and forms upon all those who came to live in their newly settled communities. And this was one of the several factors—and certainly not the least important among them—that soon caused the removal of individuals or groups from the first settlements, to seek out other locations for themselves—and so brought about the establishment of a number of what were, at first, the most remote colonies.

Among the earliest groups to detach themselves from the first settlements in the Massachusetts Bay Colony were a number of families from Newtown (now Cambridge, Mass.) who settled in Hartford, under the Rev. Thomas Hooker; while another group of people from Watertown settled Weathersfield, under John Talcot as leader—and still a third group, from Dorchester, established themselves at Windsor, also in what is now the State of Connecticut.

Meanwhile, Roger Williams had been forced to make his escape from Salem, Massachusetts, in the winter of 1635-1636, settling first in Seekonk (at East Providence, but still within the Massachusetts control, as that area was claimed by Plymouth), and then later—in order to avoid all possible controversy—moving

across to the west side of the river, establishing himself where now is the city of Providence. The first houses there built were located near the present Baptist Church, which was built in 1775 on the site of the first Meeting House of Roger Williams.

Portsmouth (Rhode Island) was settled by Anne Hutchinson and others; following Coddington and Clarke, who had first settled there and then removed further to the south, to Newport—at a still safer distance from the militant Bay Colonies! As usual, these first settlements were established either along the sea coast, especially where sheltered harbors or river mouths gave propitious locations; or along the larger rivers inland from the coast; or upon the shores of the many estuaries or deepcut bays and inlets with which the coast of Rhode Island, particularly, is lavishly indented.

Many of these early settlements were made in the southern portion of the State. In 1639 a trading post was set up at Cocumscussic (now Wickford), just after the outbreak of the Pequot War, in 1637. The "King's Province," or Narragansett County, was also established, at the southwestern present border of Rhode Island; while the State itself secured its charter in 1663, and Williams died in 1683, after having firmly established a system of government that—unlike the Massachusetts settlements—made a definite division between Church and State.

With all this uncertainty of permanence, it can readily be seen that the early types of dwelling architecture were likely to have been of the simplest. And

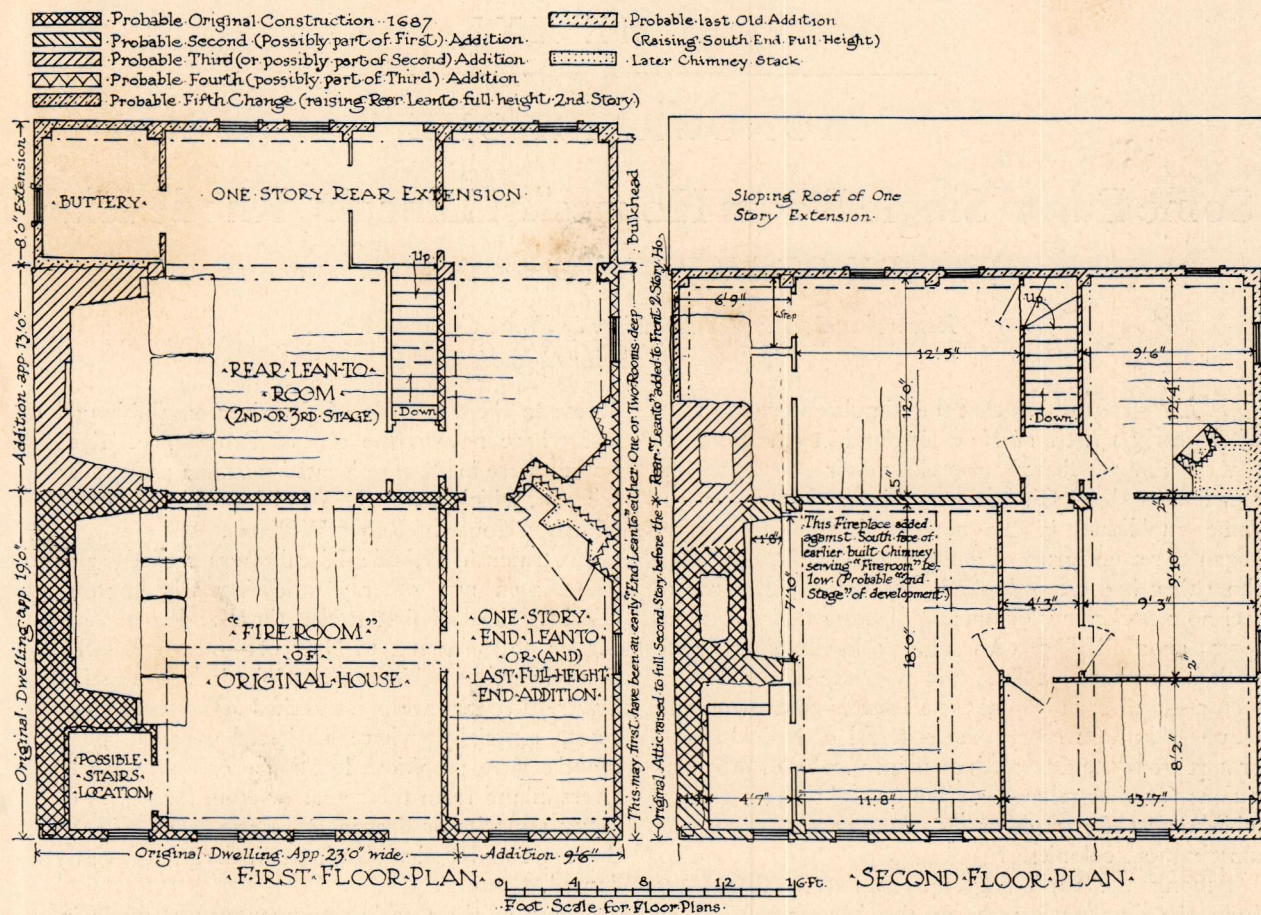
[1]

so it was that a "one-room house" plan became most characteristic of the first houses built in the woods and meadows of this country, that was to grow into a separate State, but had passed all its early years in an uncertain state of suspension between the colonies of Massachusetts Bay on the north, and the closely affiliated branch settlements to the west and south, that had been set up along the valley of the Connecticut by groups of people largely from the Massachusetts area.

The "one-room house" had usually one room only upon its first floor; and was a story and a half high,

even better known locally as the "Stone Chimney House."

Within a comparatively small area upon the old road that still twists its way along the stream that widens into pond after pond—themselves the remains of old power sites, held in by old stone dams, in many instances now so overgrown with trees as hardly to be noted as artificial to the landscape—may still be found nearly a dozen old dwellings that once belonged to some member of the old Arnold family. In recent years some have become so changed that their old values and

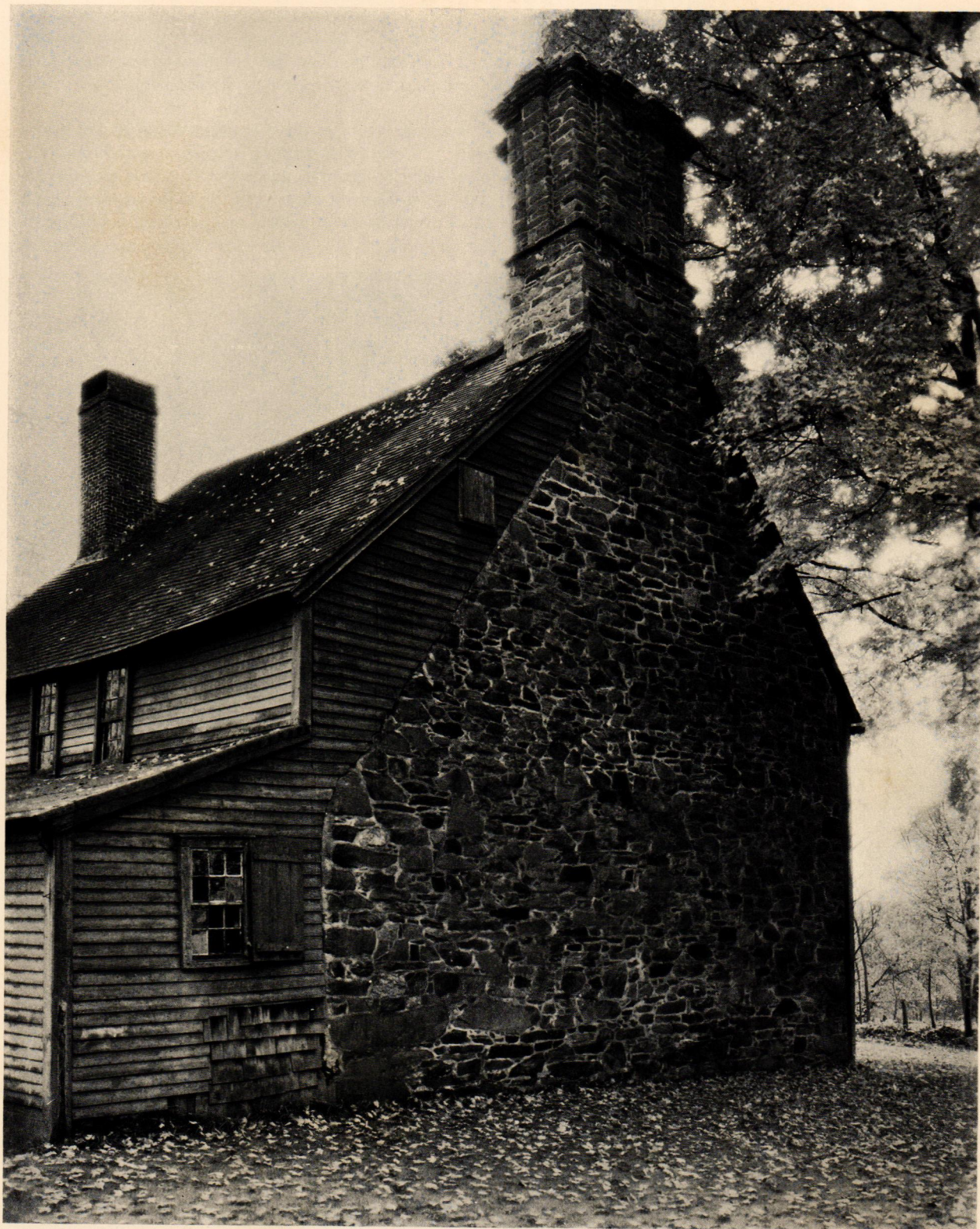


ELEAZER ARNOLD HOUSE ("THE STONE CHIMNEY HOUSE"), LINCOLN, RHODE ISLAND

with a "one-room attic" above. Some of the simplest dwellings had so low a roofridge that the area above the ceiling could only be used for storage. Sometimes, by aid of a ladder, it could be used as a sort of barracks for the children of a family. And then it might often be reached by a real stairway—and even perhaps boast of a small fireplace, all its own! Finally, a few examples probably may have had two full-height rooms, one over the other, with an attic above both. One of the most interesting and puzzling examples of this type is the Eleazer Arnold House at Lincoln, perhaps

interest have been lost; but the Eleazer Arnold house; although changed in many ways from its simple original, yet remains among the most picturesque survivals of the late Seventeenth Century structures to be seen in the region of the "Providence Plantations."

An endeavor has been made to plot at least the most important changes that evidence themselves in the existing fabric of this old structure—as there are contradictory theories as to its origins and evolution into its present form. It now stands as it was restored a dozen or so years ago, through both local and New



"One-room House" Part Built About 1687
ELEAZER ARNOLD HOUSE ("THE STONE CHIMNEY HOUSE"), LINCOLN, RHODE ISLAND

[3]

England interest. In the attic, the framing of a steep front gable still shows plainly, though it was not replaced when the last restoration was made. At that time, a number of smaller fireplaces and several old ovens were removed from the northeast corners of the two first-floor chimneys. The southern end of the present house was probably part of the last additions made in olden times; with the comparatively new brick chimney stack, that shows only in the rear views of the building. All the other changes must have been of very early date; made soon after the original por-

story fireplace, that occurs only in the room over the front section of the dwelling—and was unquestionably built against the south face of the already completed stone chimney serving the large fireplace of the room below.

That the room at the rear was built after the stonework of the westernmost fireplace was completed would appear probable from the fact that its chimney stonework does not align with the earlier chimney, and exhibits obvious adjustments made to fit it to the framing lines established by the older corner posts and the



East Elevation

THE ELEAZER ARNOLD HOUSE, LINCOLN, RHODE ISLAND

tion of the house, dating from about 1687, was erected.

This may have been one of the characteristic local "one-room houses"; of which the older Ell portion of the Israel Arnold house nearby furnishes an indubitable example. In that event, the present small closet at the northeast corner of the building may have contained a steep staircase to the attic above. (It is of just about the size and proportions of the staircase space in the Israel Arnold House Ell nearby.) Another contributory piece of evidence may be found in the second-

newer chimney girder framing into them at the second-floor level. On the other hand, it may be that the "one-room plan" of the original section was two stories high, either in its original, or in nearly as early a second state—and that the rear room on the first floor was built to come within a rear "leanto," whose possible outlines have been dotted across the northwest corner in the Cross Section drawing.

In that event, the oddly framed eight-foot-wide addition made across the entire back of the building—with its northeast corner closet, probably the "buttery"

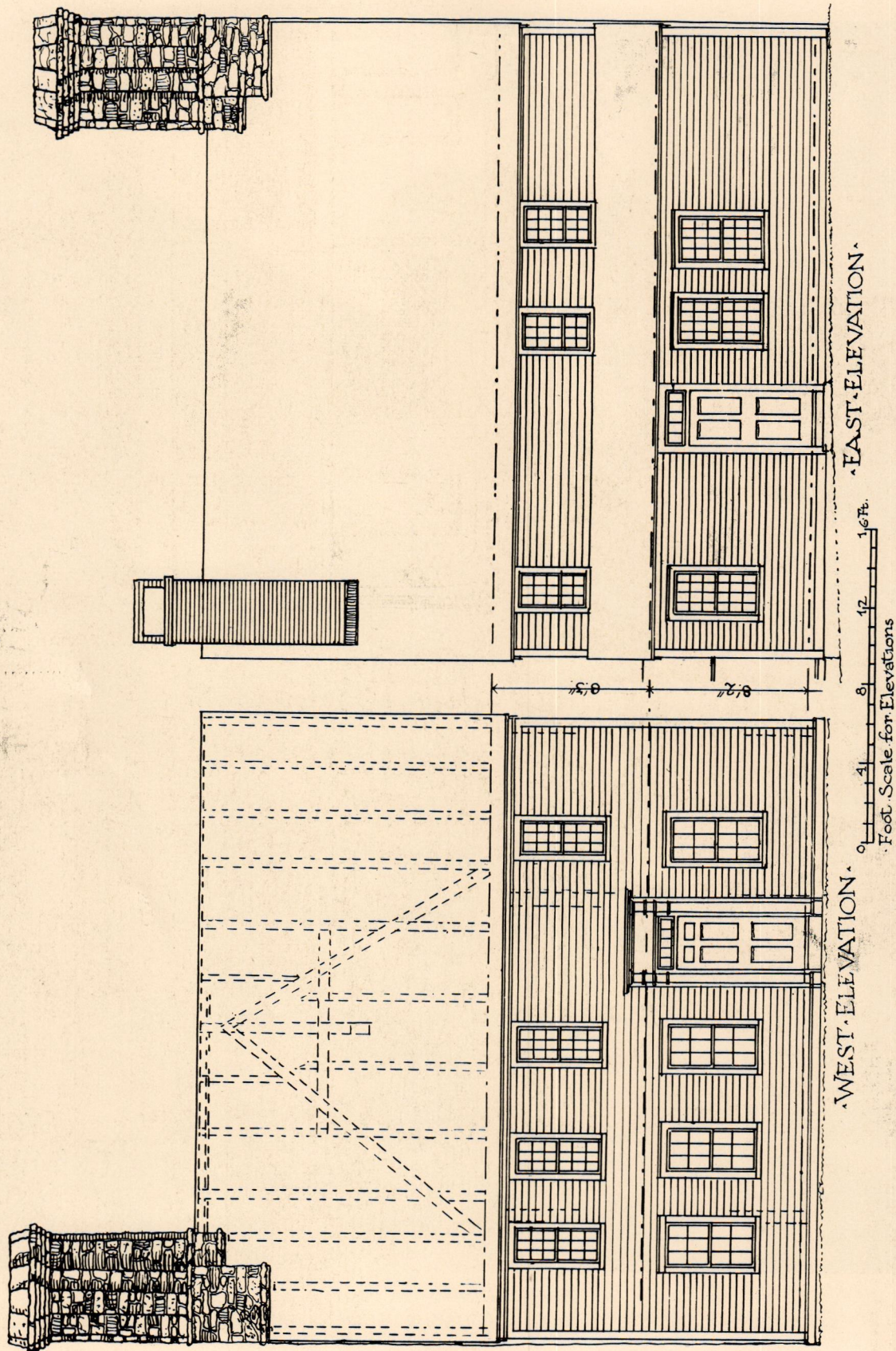
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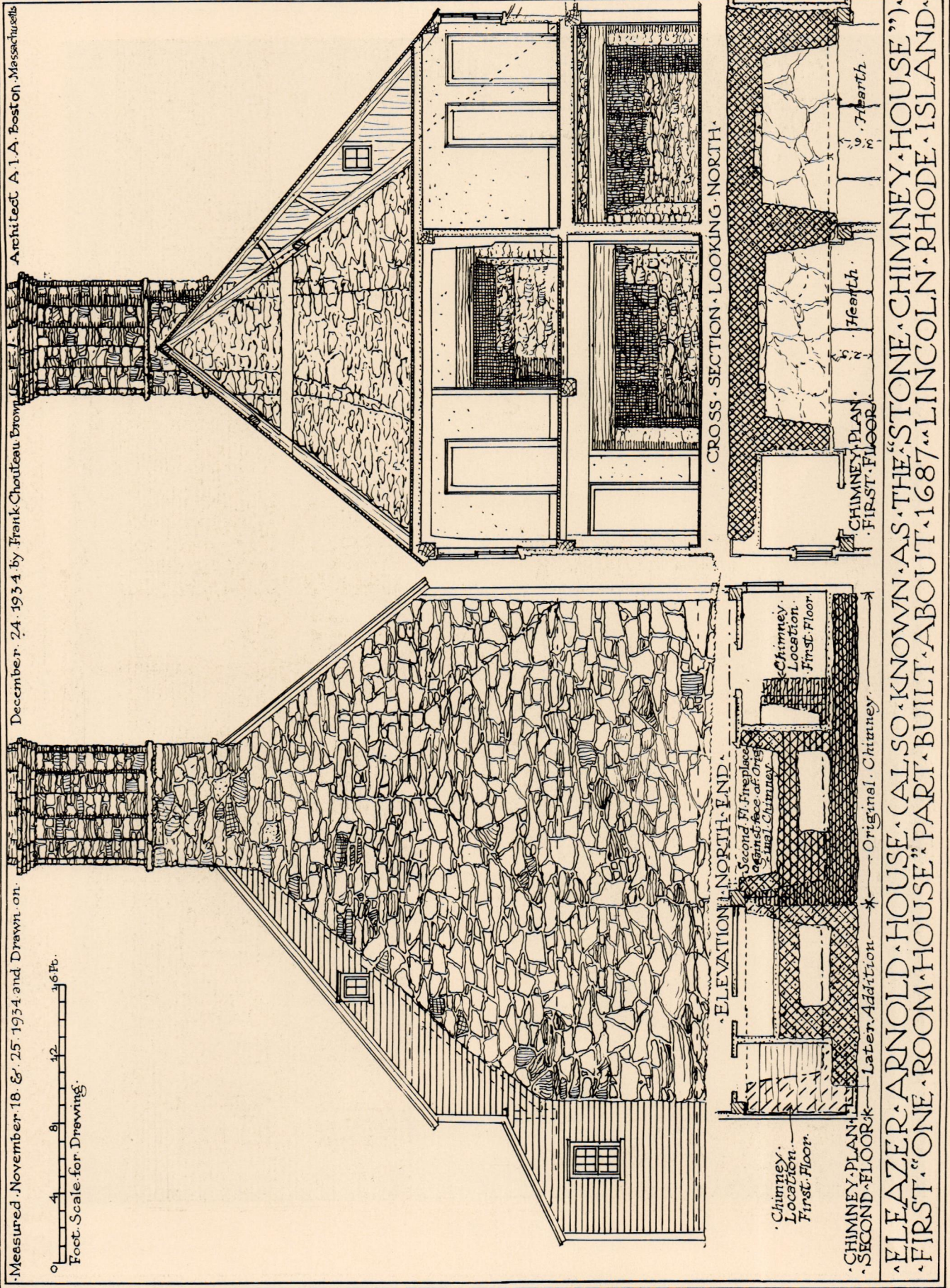
(Measured Drawings on Page 6)
THE ELEAZER ARNOLD HOUSE, LINCOLN, RHODE ISLAND

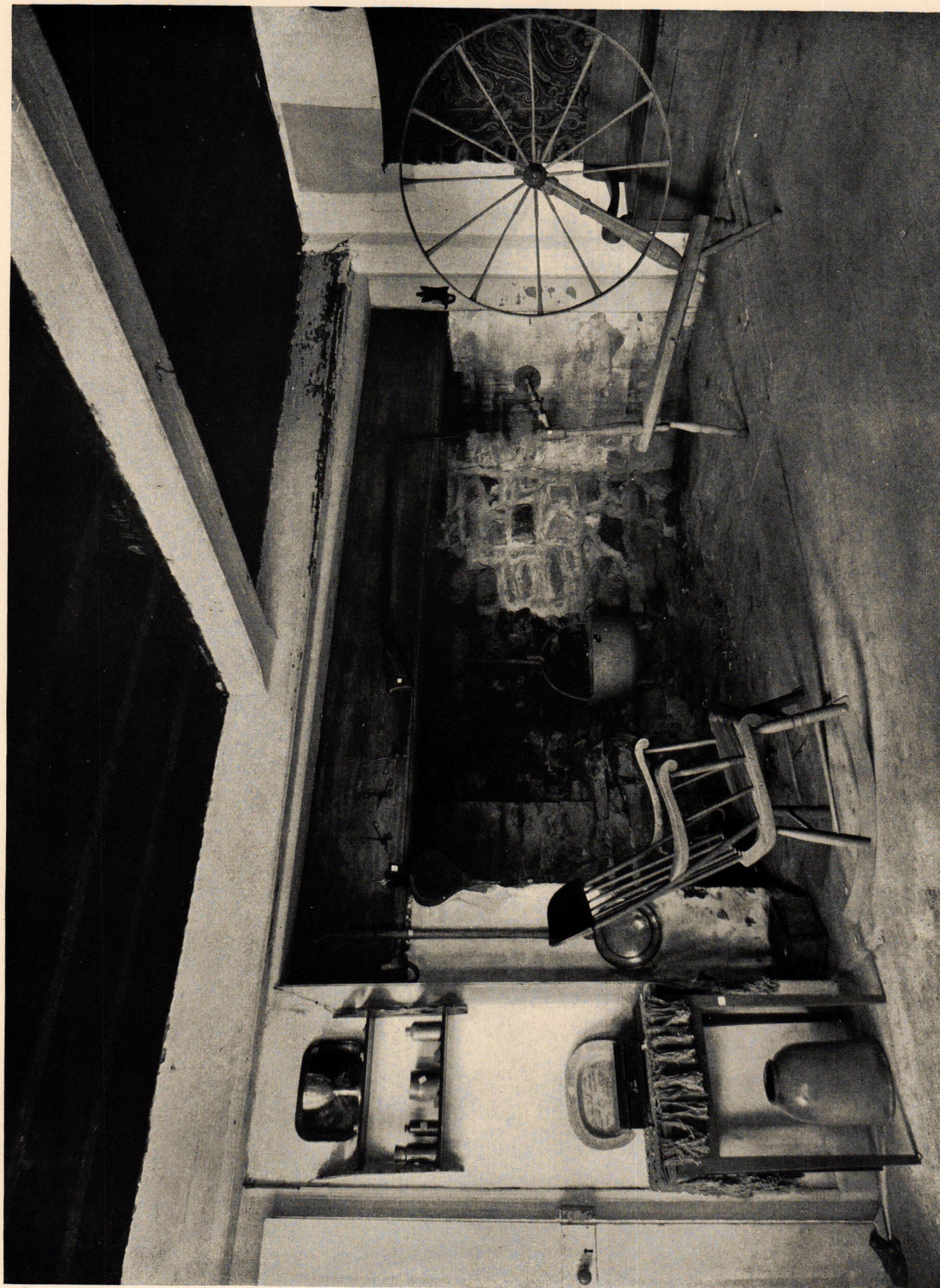
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Measured November 25 1934. & Drawn December 23 1934. by Frank Chouteau Brown Architect.



ELEAZER ARNOLD HOUSE, ALSO KNOWN AS "STONE CHIMNEY HOUSE" ***
FIRST "ONE ROOM HOUSE" PART BUILT ABOUT 1687 LINCOLN RHODE ISLAND





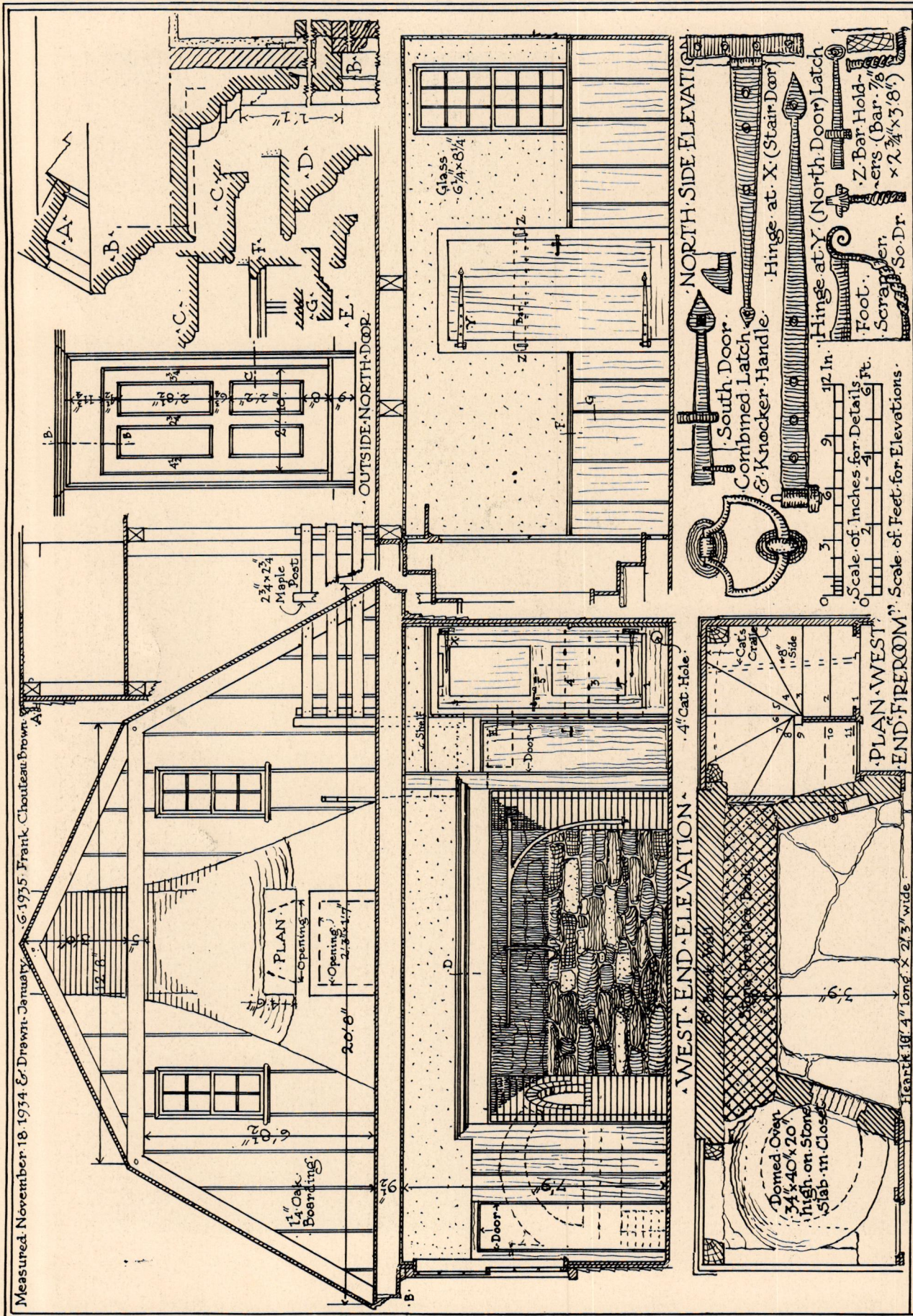
(Measured Drawings on Page 7)
THE ELEAZER ARNOLD HOUSE ("THE STONE CHIMNEY HOUSE")—1687—LINCOLN, RHODE ISLAND

[8]



West End Elevation—"One-room House" Portion
 THE ISRAEL ARNOLD HOUSE—c. 1700—LINCOLN, RHODE ISLAND

[9]



SECTION ACROSS ELL ISRAEL ARNOLD HOUSE c. 1700 LINCOLN RHODE ISLAND
ORIGINAL ONE ROOM HOUSE PORTION SHOWING NORTH SIDE & WEST END OF FIRE ROOM



ANOTHER ARNOLD HOUSE, LINCOLN, RHODE ISLAND

[II]

—may have been put on at the time the present deeper second story, and newer “leanto” rafters, now appearing in the attic leaning against the older roof timbers from the ridge eastward, were put in place; or it may have been a widening added at quite another period; perhaps at about the time the house was made longer on its street face by the newer southern end; which was apparently erected before—or at the same time—that the front gable was framed into the old roof timbering on the west front. Some of the windows are old, and some of later date also appear. The front entrance and doorway belong to the early Nineteenth

western side still remains much as it was originally built. This fortunately contains the huge fireplace with brick wings and stone back that shows in photograph and drawing; flanked on the north by the old staircase to the attic space above and on the south by a closet space, most of which is taken up by the huge three-foot-long domed oven, that has been built within it, upon a stone slab set 16 inches above the floor. The stone fireplace back has been backed again by a wall of brick that shows outside; and the gambrel roof given the old house indicates both its (comparatively) late date and a probable need or desire for larger capacity



ANOTHER ARNOLD HOUSE, LINCOLN, RHODE ISLAND

Century; and may not mark the location of the first doorway. The more one studies the arrangement of this building in its present state, the more possible variants in the various stages of its development appear; most of which will probably always remain in the realm of conjecture!

Whatever the original “Stone Chimney House” plan may have been, there can be no doubt but that the present “Ell” of the Israel Arnold house nearby still stands in almost the identical condition in which it existed from before 1700 up to the time the larger present house was added to it, some years later. The closing of windows and opening of doors in its eastern wall must have been occasioned by the addition of the later house at that side of the original structure; but its

of the second-floor space. The chimney tops of both houses have been changed and the chimneys stuccoed; but the old “Fireroom” remains in its identical original condition, with the staircase and closets, and even the old “cat’s cradle” with its four-inch circular entrance, appears in the first step riser showing below the door at the right of the fireplace.

The larger house has simple finish, and a characteristic stairway, along with a type of mantel treatment that is representative of some of the local traditions, including even the cupboard or set of open shelves—usually with a sloping back—that often appears hereabouts, in the space over the fire opening—whereas northern New England more frequently supplies instead a large panel in the over-mantel.

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In the same general neighborhood are to be found two other existing records of this early type of structure. One, just off a newly widened thoroughfare, extending toward the north from Providence, is now no more than a store shed in a farmyard group. But little of its old framework remains, only one or two of the rafters, a corner post or so; a bit of old shingled wall, a few small areas of old split laths and plaster—and the chimney, with its stone back showing through the old end-wall of the building! The old brick domed oven and stonework of the fireplace show clearly its age;

type. Nevertheless, a considerable part of its existing structure—including the odd fireplace and chimney—must be original enough to permit its inclusion within this group of a fast-vanishing type of local early dwelling, for what evidence and interest it may still supply. Little is known about its history. It would appear that there may have been an upper floor across the building at one time, from the single piece that still remains along each side plate, under the ends of the sloping rafters. No trace of staircase may now be found. It may have been merely either a permanent



THE CAPTAIN JOHN JENCKS HOUSE, LINCOLN, RHODE ISLAND

while the upper portion, built of brick above the fire opening, may now be seen above the cross ceiling pieces to the under side of the roof boarding. About all the old finish, and wall boarding, have disappeared; and the rest may vanish almost any day—unless means soon may be taken to preserve it! This is a type where the attic space could only have been used for storage, as it is barely five feet high under the roof peak.

In the old "Fireplace House," in Lincoln Woods, which stands in the shadow of another Arnold House, dating from before 1750; the interior also lies open to view. But this house has been in some part "restored," as appears obvious from any close study of its framework and enclosing walls, and therefore it is not to be entirely accepted as an authentic example of its

wall ladder, or a removable central one. The very small and low brick fireplace in the side of the left stone cheek of the larger one, is supposed to have been used for the drying of spinning flax, in which case a small room may have been partitioned off at the end of the present space, to have been used for that purpose.

No oven now remains; but quite a large hole in the stonework at the rear of the fireplace back shows where either a domed oven outside the fireplace corner may have been made—or it may have been, as some believe, an *outside* door into an inner corner oven—in which case there may at one time have been an outer "summer kitchen" against that end wall of the present building.

HENRY W. GARDNER

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(Measured Drawings in Following Monograph)
THE ISRAEL ARNOLD HOUSE—c. 1700—LINCOLN, RHODE ISLAND

[15]



Original "One-room House" Portion
THE ISRAEL ARNOLD HOUSE—c. 1700—LINCOLN, RHODE ISLAND

[16]