

# THE MONOGRAPH SERIES

## Records of Early American Architecture

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*Volume XXV · Number 2*



ENTRANCE HALL AND STAIRWAY  
JABEZ WILDER COTTAGE—1690—HINGHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

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ENTRANCE HALL AND STAIRCASE  
SARAH ORNE JEWETT HOUSE—SOUTH BERWICK, MAINE  
BUILT BY JOHN HAGGINS IN 1774

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# ENTRANCE HALLS *and* STAIRWAYS

## ILLUSTRATED *by* EXAMPLES *from* MASSACHUSETTS *and* CENTRAL NEW ENGLAND

Photographs by Arthur C. Haskell

**T**HE ENTRANCE hallway was a refinement in living to which most of the early emigrants to the New World had been unaccustomed in their own homeland. Those leaving the south of England had previously been living in survivals from mediæval culture, principally in the farmsteads and village cottages, of which many picturesque examples have survived to the present day. Their picturesqueness, however, did not provide even the elemental comforts and conveniences to which every individual believes himself entitled today. Even the smaller Manor House plan did not always provide any Hall, and when it did it took then the form rather of a general living space than any area intended only for circulation and privacy in connecting the various residential elements of the family menage. In Louis XIV's palace at Versailles, the further bedrooms could only be reached by passing through all those between.

In 1600 the mass of English architecture was of Tudor or earlier date. It was to be a dozen or more years before Inigo Jones returned from Italy, with his 1601 edition of Palladio crowded with his own marginal annotations; and a good many more years were to elapse before the newer style of open plan was to become familiar, even to the wealthier and more sycophantic courtiers of Henry VIII and Elizabeth; and more years still before it began to affect in the slightest the types of common dwellings with which those who first settled the Massachusetts Bay Colony were familiar. Along our southern coast, to be sure, the plans and appearance of the larger houses began much earlier to disclose that they were in some small part expressive of the new fashions in the amenities of living that were permeating the newer and better dwellings of England, especially those of early Georgian date.

Neither did the English climate require much shelter for these cottage dwellers, save from the rain; conse-

quently, the outer entrance door usually opened directly into one end of the general living, eating, and cooking room of the small cottage. It was this one general room that the earliest homes in New England first reproduced, with a large fireplace for cooking and heating. A large scullery opening off this room and another space to provide warm sleeping quarters for the family were the first additions. The space under the roof long remained an undivided attic for the sleeping quarters of children or servants, almost to the present century, and many examples are still to be found in outer New England.

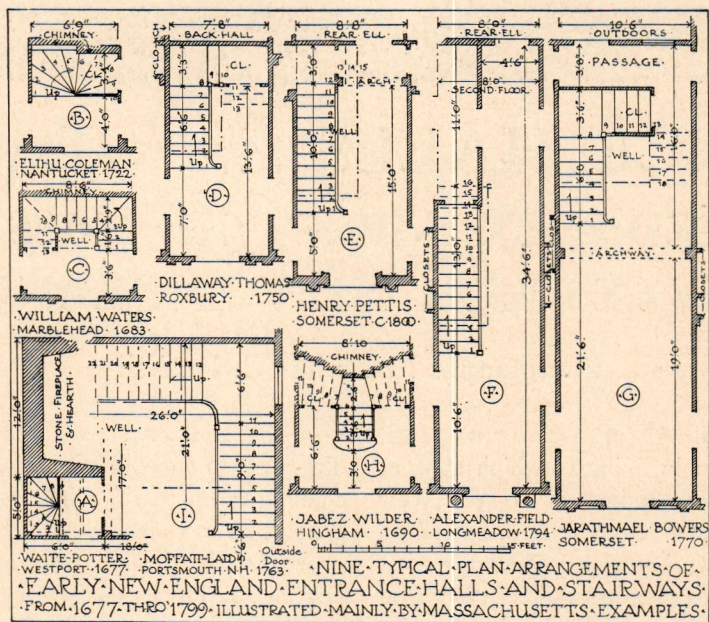
But the rigorous climate of the northern colonies soon forced the settlers to adopt different details of arrangement than they had found livable in the Tudor dwellings of old England. So, to protect the occupants of the "Hall" or "Fire Room" from drafts when the entrance door was opened, this was removed behind the corner of the large fireplace (A, page 20), with an inner partition and door to make a "vestibule," out of the other side of which a ladder or steep winding stair—which otherwise might be placed in one corner of the "Fire Room"—might rise to the low attic story above. When the house was enlarged by adding another room beyond the fireplace, as at B, page 20 (or in the Haskell House, Volume XXV, Number 1), we have the typical early "two-room" house plan. A more fully developed Entry-Hall may be seen at C (and on Page 68, Volume XIX, Number 5). The very restricted floor area of this Entry-Hall was often later enlarged, generally in the early years of the Nineteenth Century, by moving the front door and Hall wall forward, outside the main wall of the dwelling, as in the Judge Holten House, page 21 (and Volume XXIV, Number 5).

As the houses became more definitely two-story-and-attic structures, the Hall and stairway increased in size and importance; a development that became even more definite when the plan increased to four rooms upon each floor. Then such arrangements as at D and



E, page 20 (and page 78, Volume XIX, Number 5) came in to general use, but were soon superseded by the more spacious types F and G, page 20, and the decorative forms that they assume in the photographs on other pages in this issue. Among the earlier examples of plan D, is the Joseph Peaslee Hall at Rock Village, 1675 (page 78, Volume XIX, Number 5); from which simplicity an advance was shortly made to some of the more spacious and pretentious treatments shown in this issue.

The staircase now had usually two instead of the earlier three runs, and the first was made much the longer, in order to obtain headroom, usually for passage purposes to other parts of the house plan, under the cross landing or last run at the rear end of the open Hall. Among the most dignified of these presentations was the Entrance Hall with under-arch, and main cross landing with its Palladian window-door opening at that level onto the rear staircase, which was the one that then continued to the third story, leaving the main staircase to end



Courtesy Halliday Historic Collection  
ENTRANCE HALL, ARCHWAY, AND STAIRCASE  
COL. ISAAC ROYALL HOUSE—c.1733—MEDFORD

[ 20 ]

upon the second story level and so connect only with the principal front second story rooms. A fine example of this arrangement was in the Benjamin Hall, Jr., House, at Medford: one of three Hall family houses existing since 1785, side by side, until the summer of 1938, when this particular building succumbed to commercial pressure and was unfortunately demolished! (Page 20)

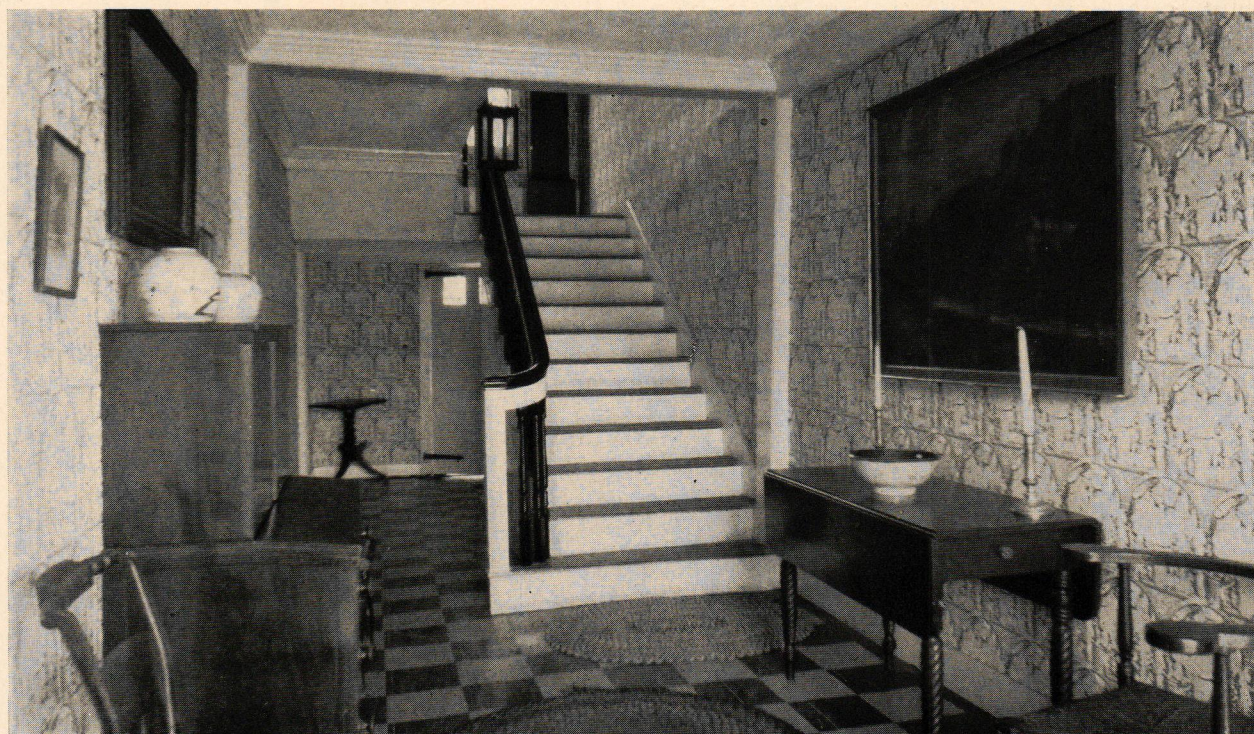
That varied decorative treatments of this landing doorway connecting the front and rear halls were frequently found in Massachusetts, is indicated by the two other examples, both from Salem, that appear side by side on page 25. Of course, this is merely another expression of the graceful and impressive arched window motive, that often appears in the rear house wall, to open on the main staircase hall landing, as in the Jeremiah Lee Mansion, 1768, in Marblehead (pages 64 and 72, Volume XIX, Number 5), and elsewhere.

With the fully-developed two-room-deep long Entrance Hallway, G, page 20, a large archway





SIDE VIEW OF ENTRANCE VESTIBULE  
JUDGE SAMUEL HOLTEN HOUSE—1670—DANVERS, MASSACHUSETTS



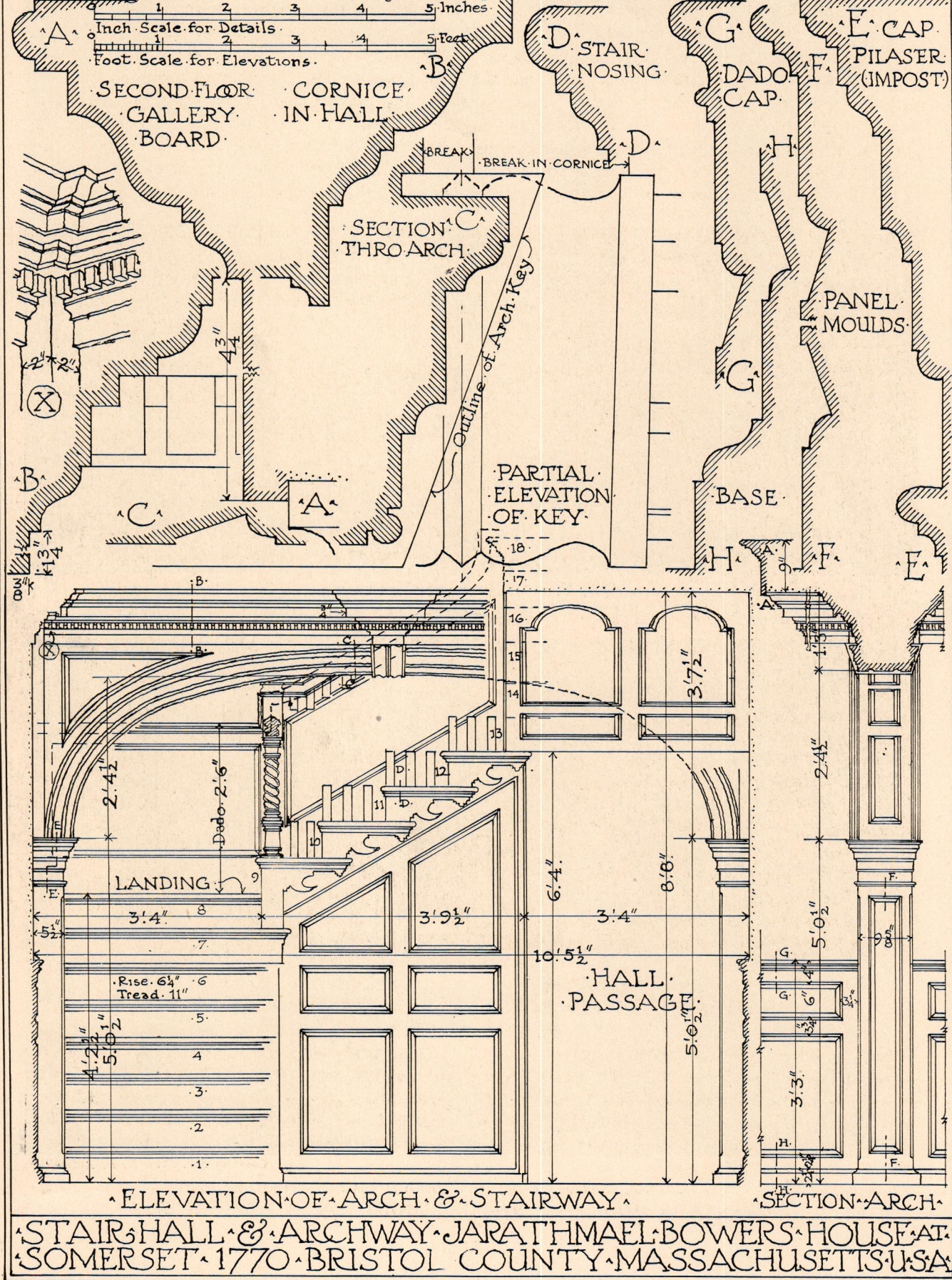
*Courtesy Soc. Pres. N. E. Antiquities*

ENTRANCE HALL—SHOWING CROSSBEAM AND STAIRCASE  
TOBIAS LEAR HOUSE—c.1740—PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

[ 21 ]



Measured August 12, 1935 & Drawn February 4, 1939, by A. L. A. Frank, Chouteau Brown Architect, Boston





crossing the Hall near the center of its length, and recessing the staircase within a further Hallway, makes its appearance. In its earliest form, it may be seen as a simple exposed structural girder, crossing the ceiling of the hall at this location, in the Tobias Lear House, c.1740, at Portsmouth, N. H. This is its simplest manifestation. In the region round about Portsmouth there are at least a dozen varied examples of the large Hall cross-archway, with a few others in

Vassall, in 1746, to the earlier house, built before 1686, by John Vassall in Cambridge (page 68, Volume XXIII, Number 5), with its individual use of an outlined bracket form, in place of a capital, over a very flat wall pilaster from above which the elliptical arch springs; and the somewhat similar arrangement in the Entrance Hallway of the Col. Isaac Royall House, c.1733, at Medford, where the bracket is more elaborate and the pilaster is given a bolder projection.



*Courtesy His. Am. Bldgs. Survey*

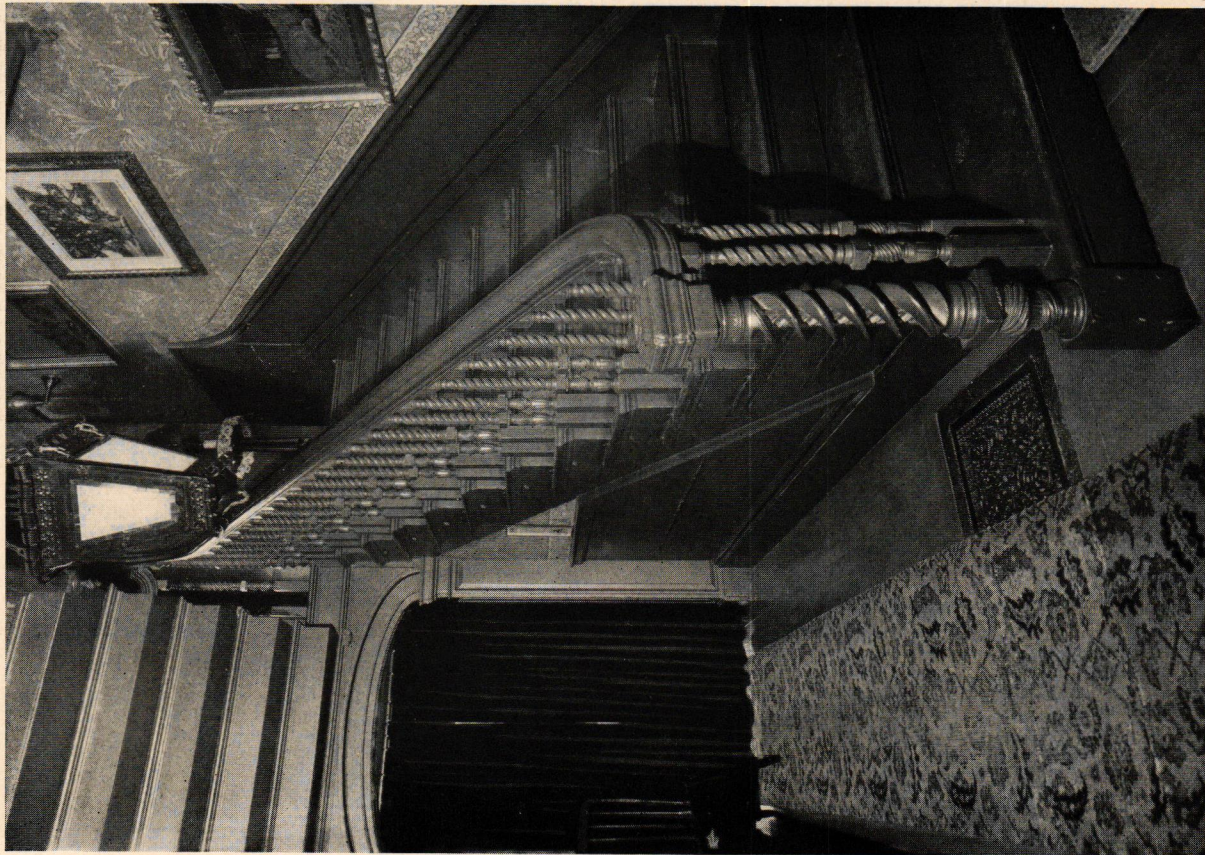
VIEW THROUGH ENTRANCE HALL ARCHWAY TOWARD STAIRCASE  
JARATHMAEL BOWERS HOUSE—1770—SOMERSET, MASSACHUSETTS

Maine, in Massachusetts, and also in Rhode Island.

Accompanying examples are the Jewett House, 1774, in South Berwick, Me.; the Bowers House, 1770, in Somerset; the Captain Gregory Purcell ("John Paul Jones") House, 1757-59, in Portsmouth, N. H.; and the Nickels-Sortwell House, 1807-8, in Wiscasset, Maine. Two other examples near Boston are the cross-Hall arch in the portion added by Maj. Henry

A radically different and unusual plan is shown at H, page 20, from the Jabez Wilder Cottage, at Hingham, 1690. Here the staircase starts upward from just inside the entrance door and in the middle of the Hallway, with a flight which divides and rises at right and left against the receding face of the chimney, to end at the very doorways of the two rooms under its "rainbow" roof. Finally, at I, page 20, is the plan

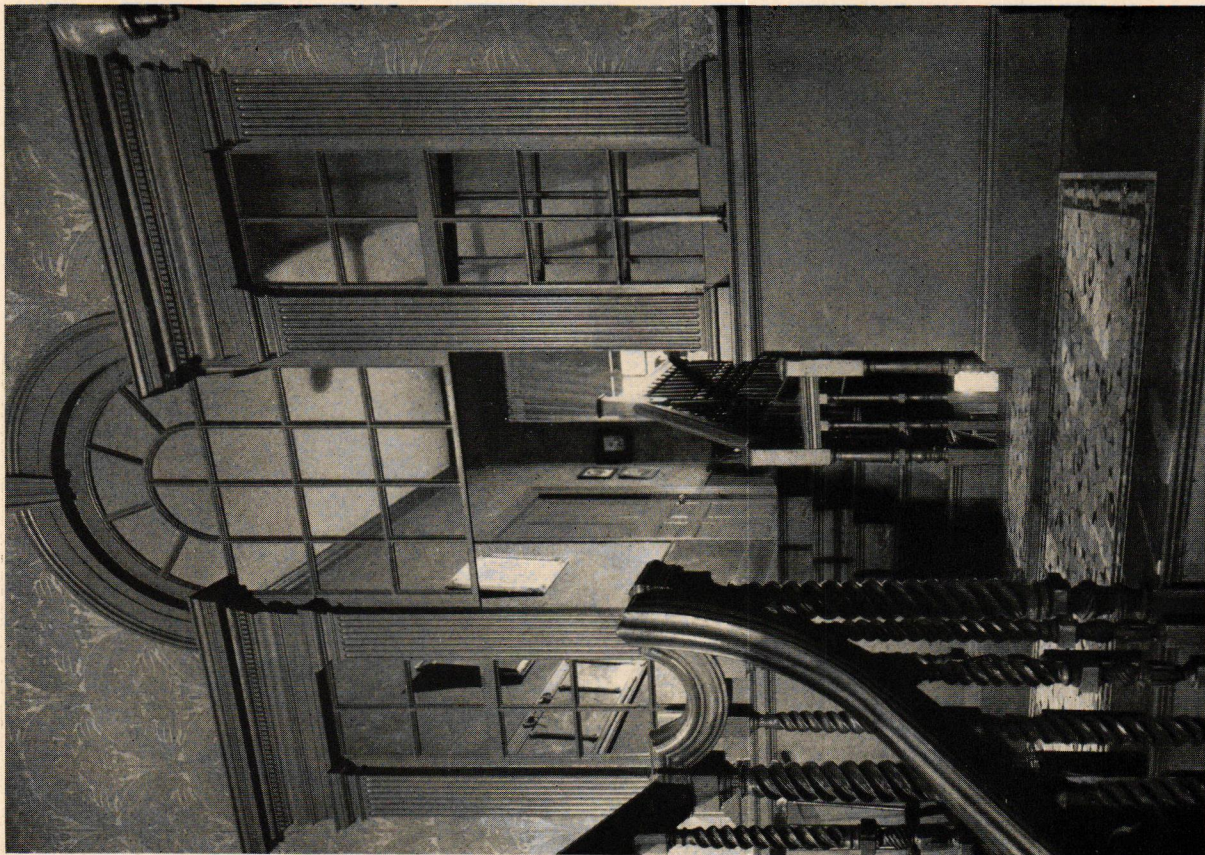




*Courtesy His. Am. Bldgs. Survey*

FIRST STORY HALL, UNDER-ARCH, AND STAIR

BENJAMIN HALL, JR., HOUSE—1785—MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS



*Courtesy His. Am. Bldgs. Survey*

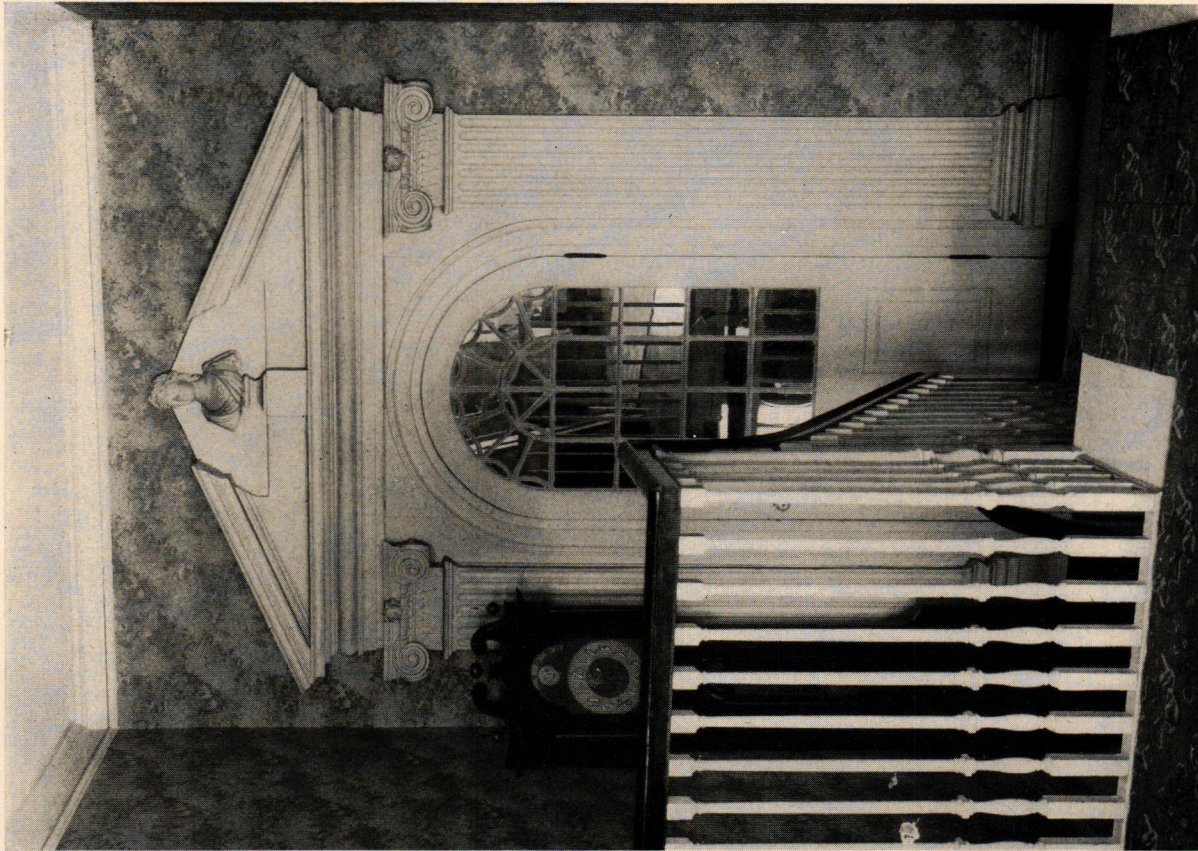
PALLADIAN DOOR-WINDOW TO REAR HALL ON LANDING

BENJAMIN HALL, JR., HOUSE—1785—MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS





DOORWAY TO REAR HALL—FIRST LANDING  
JOSHUA WARD HOUSE—c.1765—SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

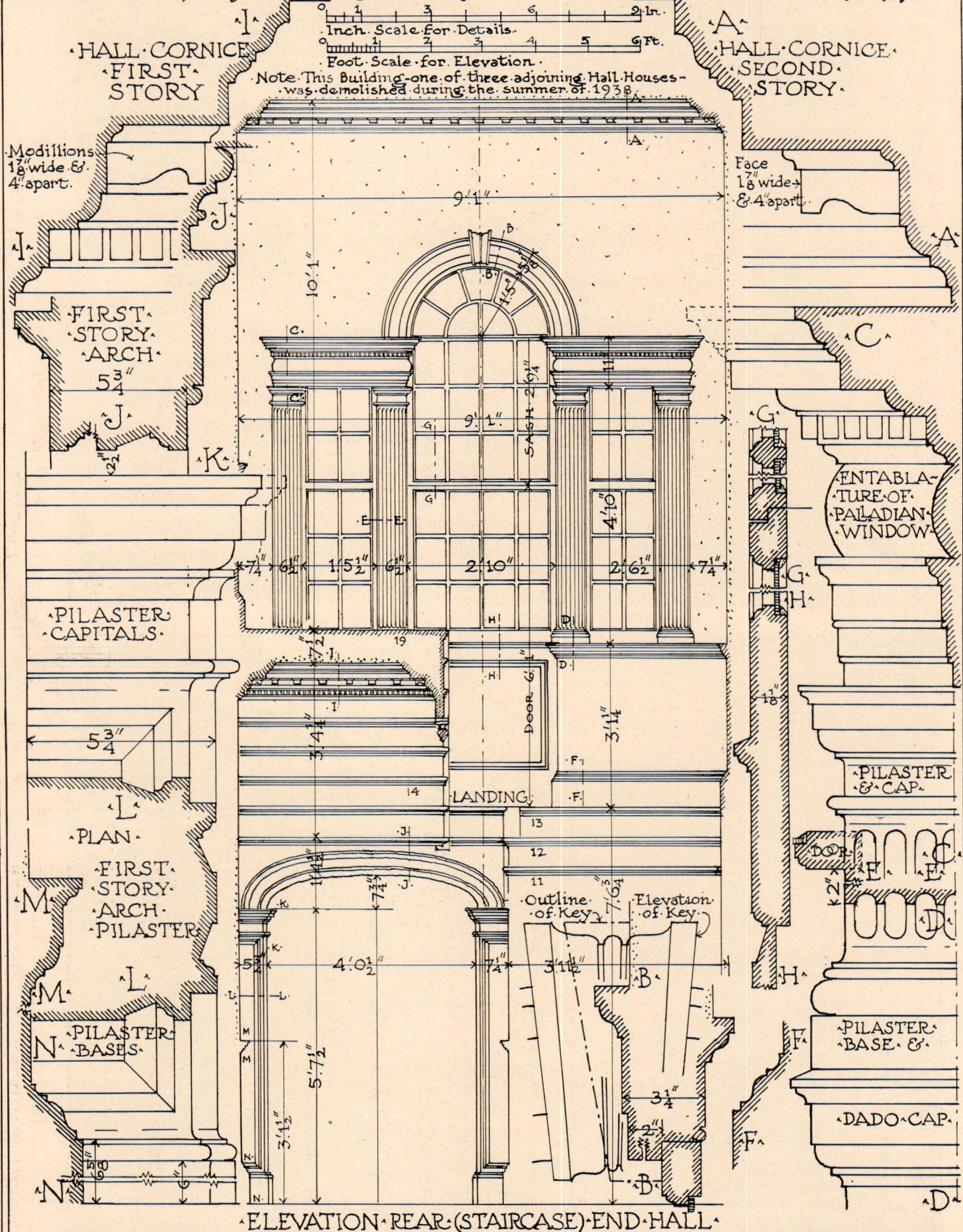


DOORWAY TO REAR HALL—INTERMEDIATE LANDING  
ASSEMBLY HOUSE—1782—SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

*Courtesy Halliday Historic Collection*



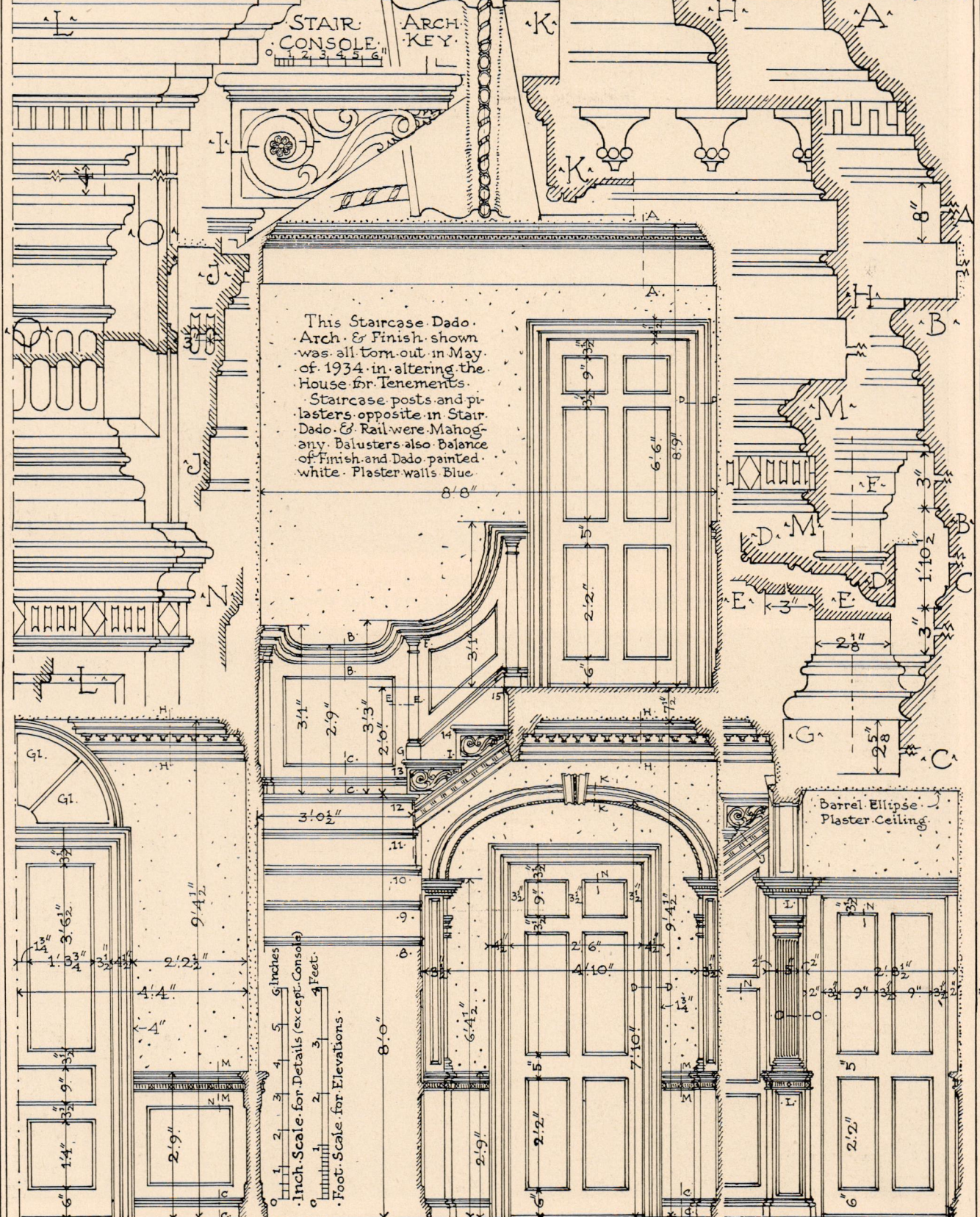
Measured in March, 1934, by J.S. Crytzer & Drawn by Frank Chouteau Brown A.I.A. on February 5, 1939, Boston



STAIR HALL & LANDING BENJAMIN HALL JR. HOUSE BUILT 1785. FORMERLY ON MAIN STREET MEDFORD MASSACHUSETTS U.S.A.

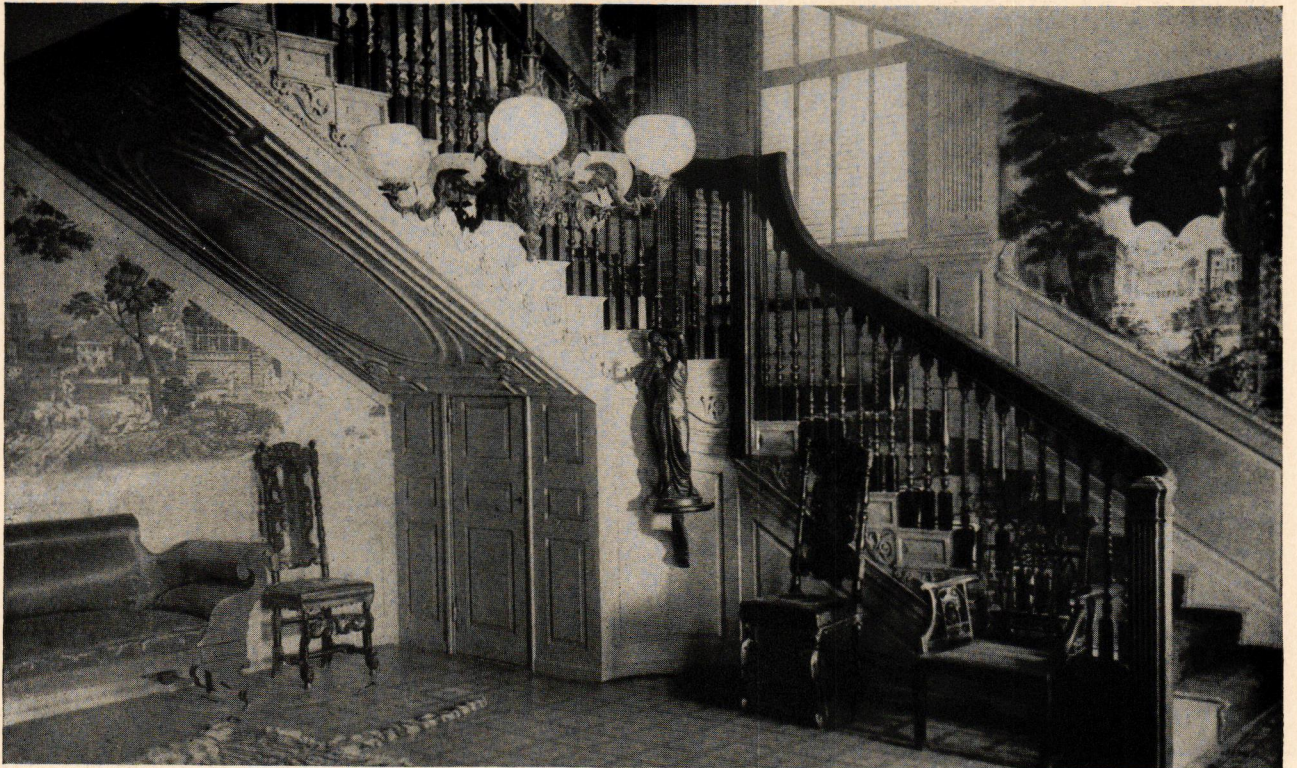


Measured in May 1934 by M.D. Parlin & F.C.B. & Drawn by Frank Chouteau Brown A.I.A. Boston February 12 1939



HALF ENTRANCE END ELEVATION REAR OF HALL SECTION THRO ARCH STAIR HALLWAY & UNDERARCH HENRY PETTIS HOUSE AT SOMERSET C. 1800 BRISTOL COUNTY MASSACHUSETTS U.S.A





*from "Colonial Architecture in New England"*

ENTRANCE HALL AND STAIRCASE  
MOFFATT-LADD HOUSE—1763—PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE



HALLWAY LOOKING TOWARD FRONT ENTRANCE  
COLEMAN-HOLLISTER HOUSE—1796—GREENFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

[ 28 ]

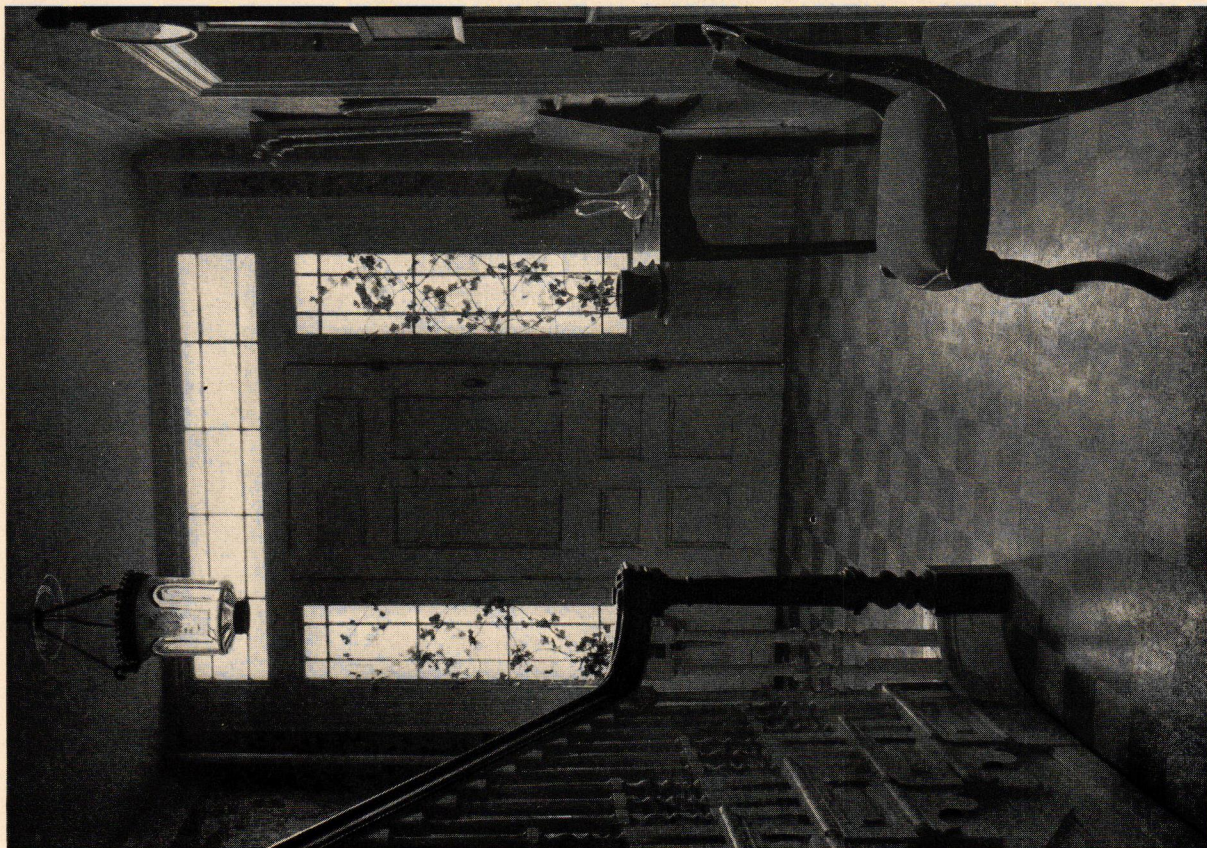




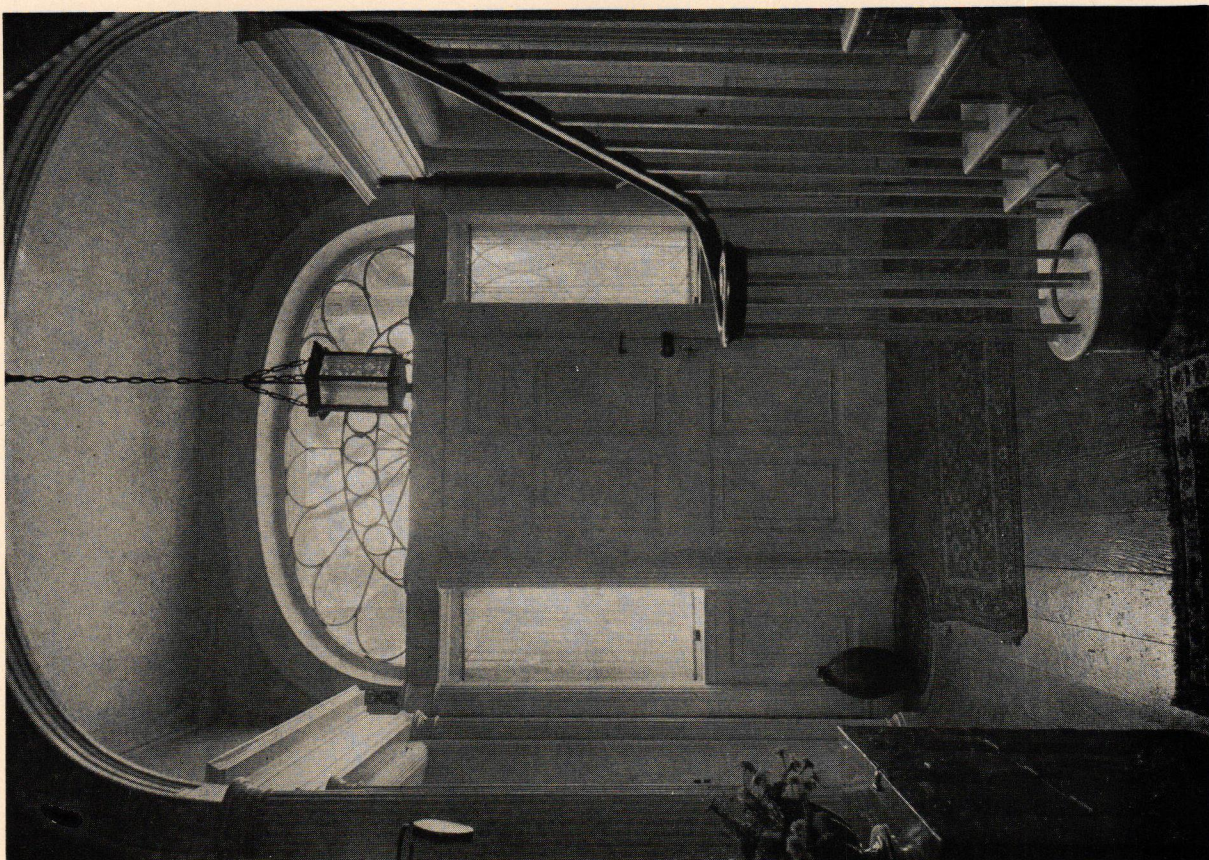
SEMI-CIRCULAR STAIRCASE IN RECESS OFF ENTRANCE HALL  
 COLEMAN-HOLLISTER HOUSE—1796—GREENFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS  
 ASHER BENJAMIN, ARCHITECT

[ 29 ]



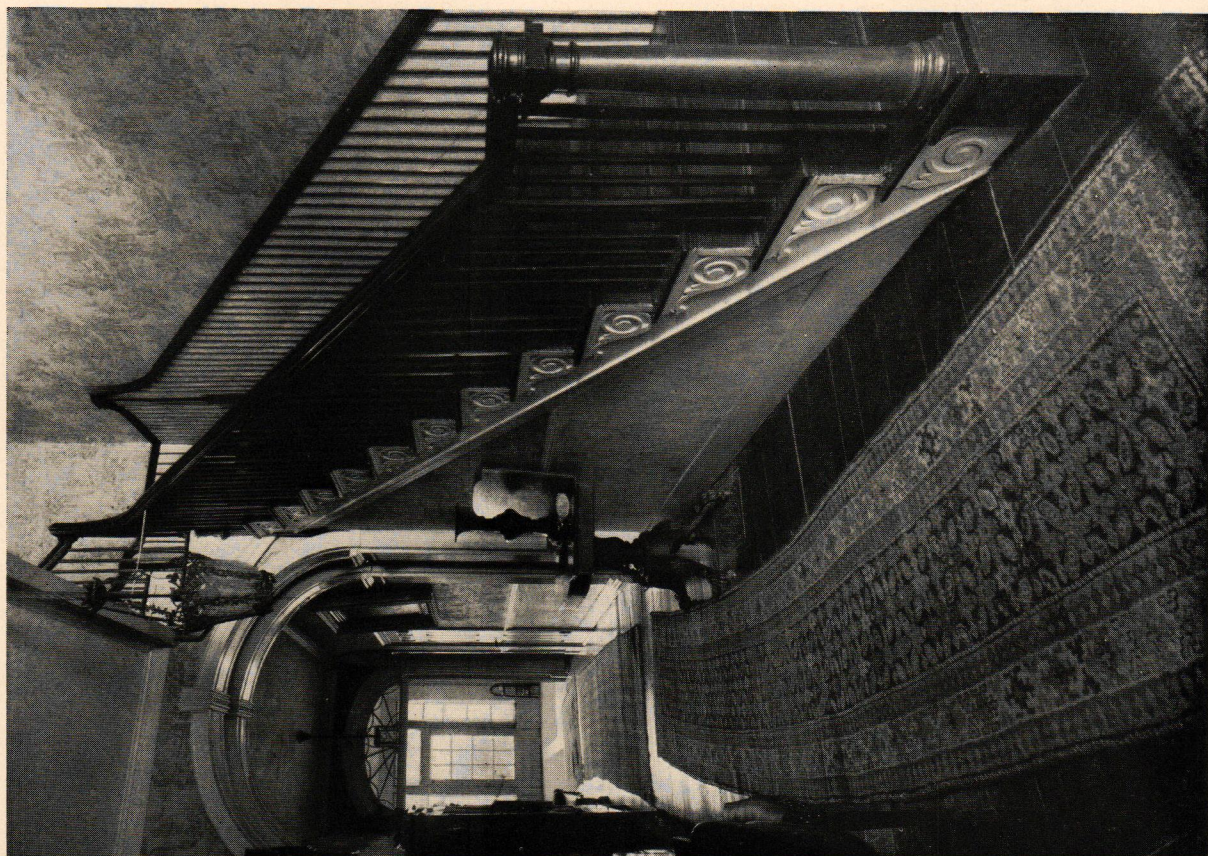


ENTRANCE HALL, LOOKING TOWARD FRONT DOOR  
AZOR ORNE HOUSE—c.1765—MARBLEHEAD, MASS.



ENTRANCE HALL, LOOKING TOWARD FRONT DOOR  
NICKELS-SORTWELL HOUSE—1807-08—WISCASSET, MAINE





HALL AND ARCHWAY, LOOKING TOWARD GARDEN DOOR  
MERRIMAN HOUSE—c.1820—BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND



VIEW ALONG ENTRANCE HALL TOWARD REAR DOOR  
SQUIRE WILLIAM SEVER HOUSE—1760—KINGSTON, MASS.



of a quite unusual *corner* Entrance Hall, as it appears in the Moffatt-Ladd House, 1763, at Portsmouth, N. H. The same plan is repeated, upon a somewhat smaller scale, in at least two other Portsmouth houses.

Despite the apparently elaborate layout of several of these Hall plans, all (with the possible exception of the one last named) nevertheless conform within a reasonably economical floor area, in relation to the space covered by the whole house. In the case of the

toward each other, to meet on a short landing near the center of the Hall's length, with a final short run of two or three steps at right angle, to the floor above.

Although this Monograph is given to the Entrance Hall, rather than the staircase; yet the two are so closely associated in early New England house plans, that it is not possible to picture one without the other. That much more might be made of the Hallway is proven by the Azor Orne and Nickels-Sortwell en-



*Courtesy Soc. Pres. N. E. Antiquities*

#### ENTRANCE HALL, ARCHWAY, AND STAIRCASE

#### CAPTAIN GREGORY PURCELL HOUSE—1757-59—PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Nickels-Sortwell Hall, the effect of Entrance Hallway, cross arch, and staircase are all secured within the one-room house depth, as appears more plainly, perhaps, by referring to other illustrations of this hall, in Volume XII, Number 6.

Finally, mention should be made of another arrangement of staircases, each starting from near the doors at front and back house walls, and running

trances; while in the Coleman-Hollister Hallway, no staircase appears until the center of the Hall is passed, when this charmingly delicate stairway comes into full view. With the exception of this example, and the stairway of the Nickels-Sortwell House, the elliptical or semi-circular stair plan—usually a later and more sophisticated development—is not presented in this issue.

FRANK CHOUTEAU BROWN, A.I.A.