

THE MONOGRAPH SERIES

Records of Early American Architecture

RUSSELL F. WHITEHEAD, A. I. A., *Editor*
FRANK CHOUTEAU BROWN, A. I. A., *Associate Editor*

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OLD KITCHEN FIREPLACE, WITH CUPBOARDS AND OPEN RECESS
COL. THOMAS NIXON HOUSE—1785-88—FRAMINGHAM, MASS.

[33]



WALL CUPBOARD BESIDE FIREPLACE IN LIVING ROOM
EBENEZER WATERS HOUSE—1767—WEST SUTTON, MASSACHUSETTS

[34]



SOME COLONIAL WALL CABINETS *and* KITCHEN DRESSERS

PRINCIPALLY *from* EARLY MASSACHUSETTS SETTLEMENTS

Photographs by Arthur C. Haskell

DURING those first few years, when the tide of passage from England to the Massachusetts Bay settlements was running most strongly, space was at a premium in the vessels of diminutive tonnage that were available for the transportation of settlers and their belongings, on the two or three months' journey across the stormy Atlantic. Aside from their most necessary personal belongings, the settlers had to choose between essentials; those items most necessary for the first year's subsistence, at the very least. There was not much space available for livestock and furniture, and yet the former was needed for the permanent settlement of any farming community.

First were the fundamentals: farming tools, at least their metal parts, to which handles could be fitted after arrival; firearms; kitchen utensils, along with powder, shot, fishlines, knives; and a supply of clothing, or the woven material from which it easily could be fashioned. There were also the tools of the various trades—for the carpenter, blacksmith, the miller—not to forget the utensils, spinning and carding, hand looms, etc., needed by the women workers of the colony. Also cooking dishes, pots and pans, and a few precious pieces of furniture. Seeds for the first planting, shoots of fruit trees and shrubs, and the plants and simples for sickness, must not be forgotten.

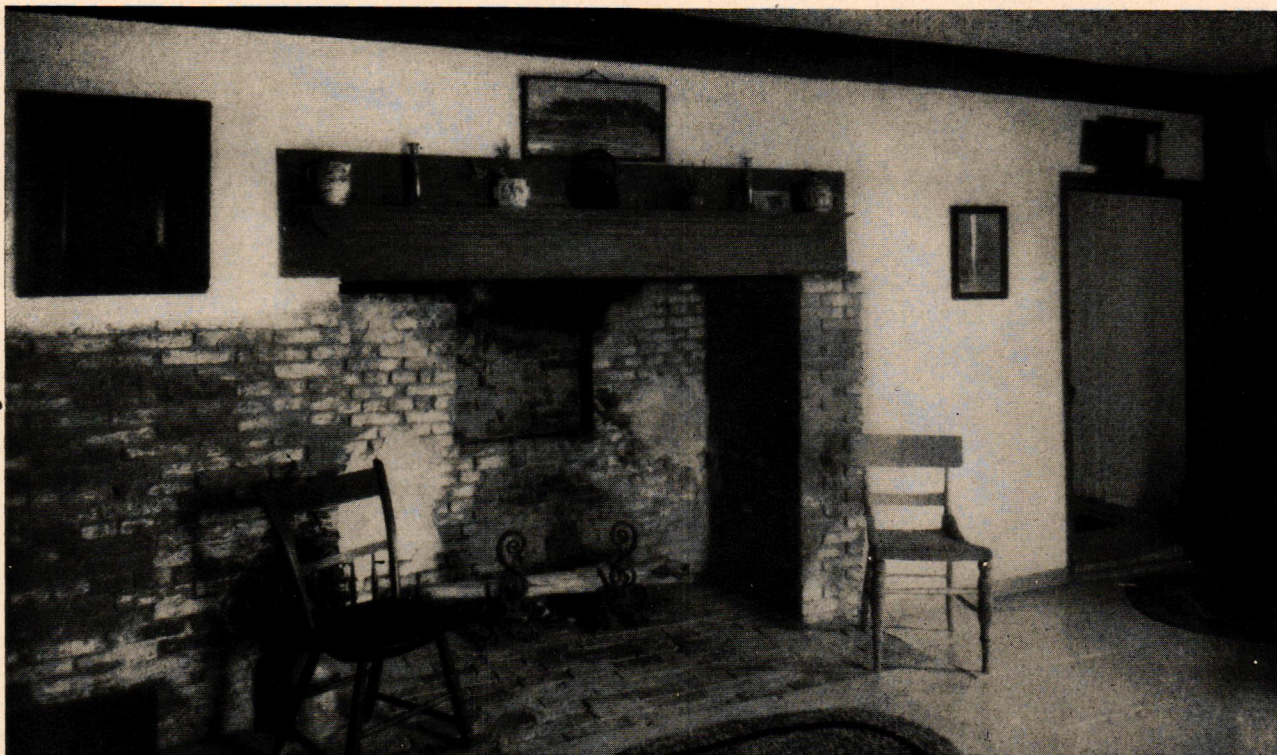
Fortunately, in the primitive living conditions of that time in England, furniture was a much simpler and more home-made factor in the family life than it is today. And for a journey such as this, with cubical space lacking, only the most prized heirlooms could be transported to the new continent. The family bible, and bible box; an arm chair or two; perhaps a cherished bedstead or table; and an oak dresser might suffice. Chests were, of course, the most widely used and easily transportable of all objects. Every family had more than one of these. Of oak or deal, sturdily framed, they could be stuffed with smaller possessions

—cloth, linen, clothing, and other minor personal belongings. And at the journey's end, they would go against the wall or under the window, and serve both as a seat and container for clothing, sometimes as a child's bed, until time had been found for the building of other and ampler furniture for the homestead.

The few bedrooms could be furnished sufficiently with a bed, a chair, and a couple of stools, and probably one or more chests, usually one being raised with an additional drawer or two beneath, to make a sort of primitive "bureau." The dining needs were met by a long table, or a short one with drop leaves, a chair or two, some stools or a couple of benches, and perhaps another raised chest, to keep the linen and serve as a sort of sideboard. For the kitchen, the same or another table, a dresser of shelves and cupboards, along with a storage entry or buttery, were all that could be desired. The same room at first served all the family purposes of general living—as kitchen, dining and sitting room, and, often, sleeping room.

The early New England houses provided little space for "closets" within their spare and rigid outlines. But as the settlers' families grew and prospered, as newer and larger houses were built, a considerable ingenuity was employed in providing extra spaces for storage. And, of course, there was always the attic! But in these early dwellings, the attic space was as much used and crowded as all the rest of the house. It was the dormitory for the children, and, a little later, for the slaves or indentured help. It was to be an hundred and more years, at least, before this highly-prized and useful space could deteriorate to become the catch-all and store-all of family *incunabula* that it has been for the last few generations of the fast vanishing breed of American house-dwellers!

In the more informal cottage homes, along the sea coast or in farming communities, there was great use for "cubby-holes" of all sorts, especially in the most used rooms of these dwellings. This would naturally trend toward the filling of all possible recesses with



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FIREPLACE AND WALL CABINET IN LIVING ROOM
ELIHU COLEMAN HOUSE—1722—NANTUCKET, MASSACHUSETTS



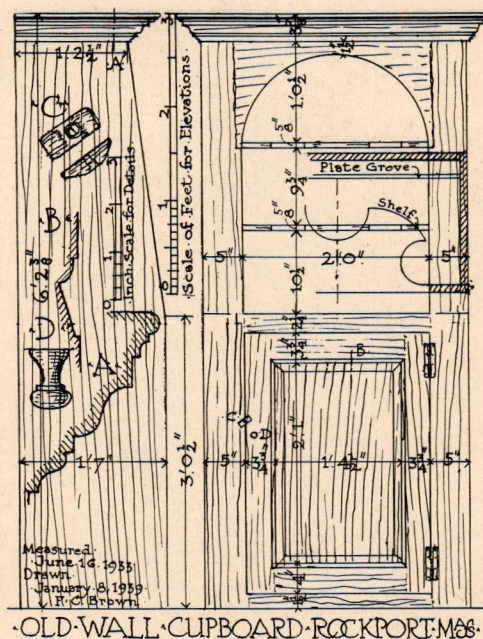
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FIREPLACE AND WALL CABINET IN NORTHWEST ROOM
BRYANT-CUSHING HOUSE—1698—NORWELL, MASSACHUSETTS

to fall into disrepair until, in 1936, it finally burned down.

In most houses, whether early or late in date, there seemed to be a very general custom of locating these small wall cupboards, or one of them, over the top of the domed oven, which was usually placed at one side or the other of the large kitchen fireplace. And the resulting small wall cabinet does not always, nor even often, open from the kitchen side of the chimney breast, but appears even more customarily to have the access door in the corner of one of the two front rooms of the dwelling (pages 37 and 47). A great many examples of this location are found in old houses, a few of which are shown among those here reproduced. Indeed, in the larger and more important houses, this location seems to be the more prevalent. The obvious use of such a small receptacle would be for church-warden pipes, tobacco, rum or gin, or some of the other ingredients required in the hospitality of the time, for hot toddies, mulled wine, etc. The church-wardens were often exposed in wall racks; but gin, bitters or home-made wines, would probably be kept less conspicuously, by any careful housekeeper; then, as well as now!

There was also use for a small closet cabinet, separately made, and planned so that it could either be attached to the face of the



boarded wall in some convenient corner of a used room (page 46), or placed out of the way behind some door. And the same sort of cabinet could equally well be set atop any tall desk, chest of drawers, or other piece of furniture, to enlarge its capacity, when backed against a room wall.

Most casual students of Colonial buildings seem to expect that their elevations and plans will be developed uniformly, so as to exactly balance upon each side of a center or axial line. As a matter of fact, while often true of late work (and more especially of post-Revolutionary, or Georgian

buildings) it is rather the exception than the rule with those of earlier date. Even in the stately dwellings of Virginia and Maryland, a considerable amount of *unbalance* exists in most room interiors, generally adding to their interest and charm. In the early, and less formalized, structures of New England, a remarkable amount of pliability is found. Very generally the mantel—supposedly centered in the principal wall, with its attendant features—actually occurs well off the room center.

In this issue, for instance, the majority of examples show the fireplace wall as an *unbalanced* composition. Running through these pages one must believe the Colonial builders were little concerned with any

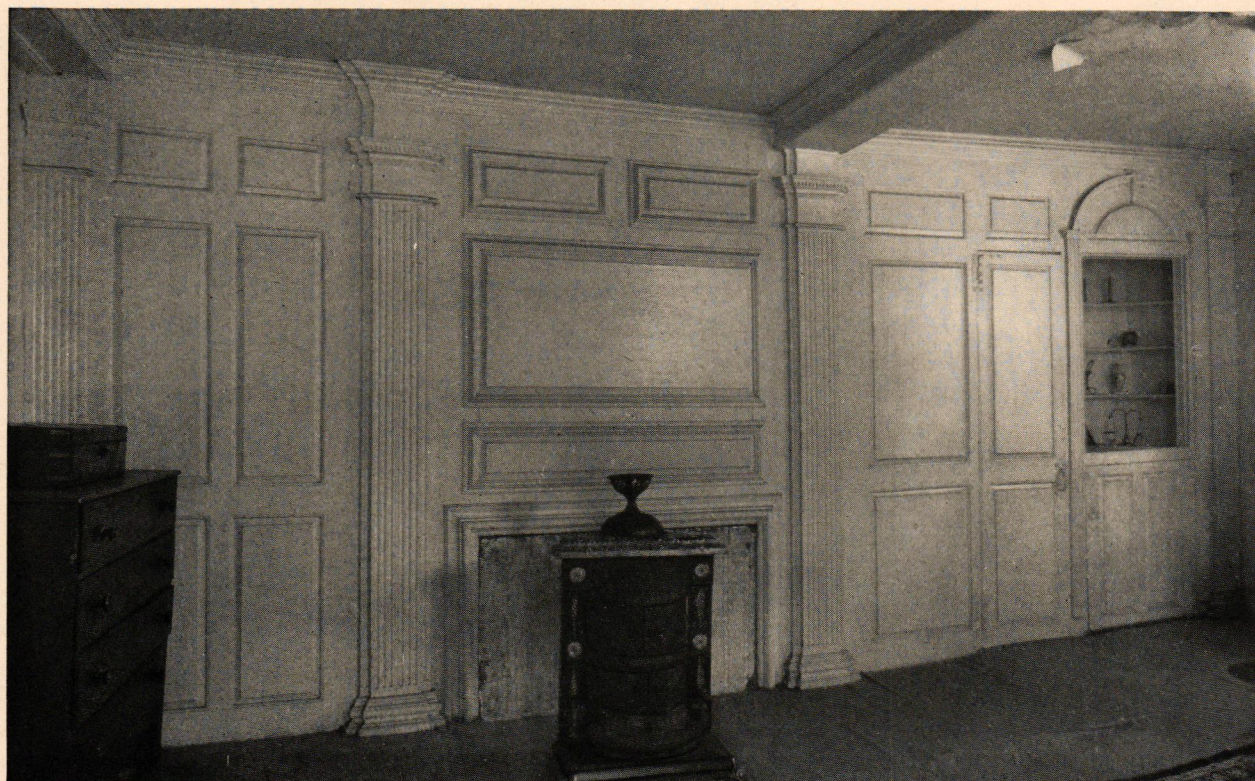


MANTEL WITH CUPBOARDS OVER FIREPLACE IN PARLOR
AMANDA GREENE HOUSE, NEWPORT,
RHODE ISLAND



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WALL CABINET WITH PANELED DOORS, UPSTAIRS SITTING ROOM
CURTIS TAVERN—1765—GRANVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

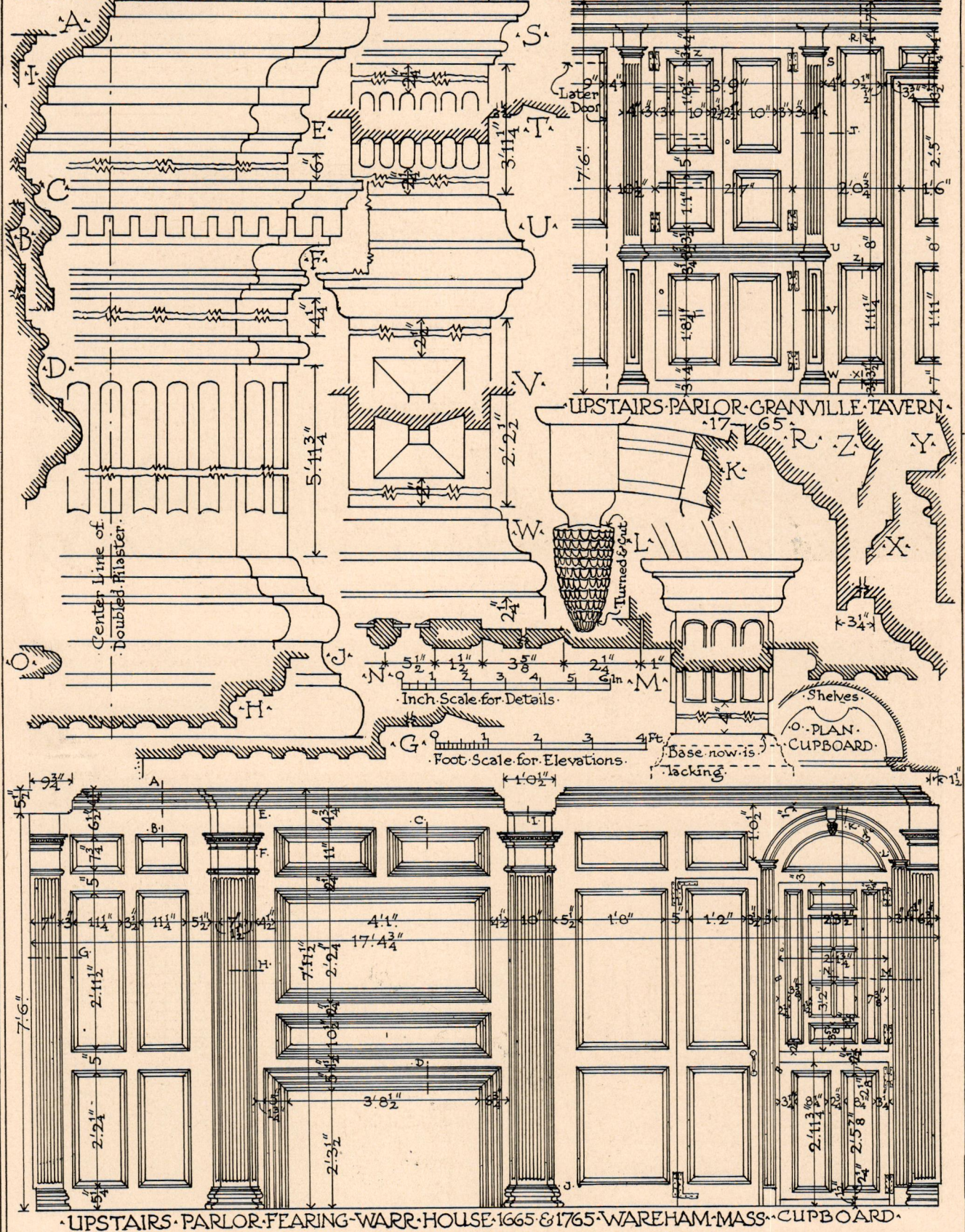


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FIREPLACE AND WALL CUPBOARD, SOUTHEAST SITTING ROOM
FEARING-WARR HOUSE—1765—WAREHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

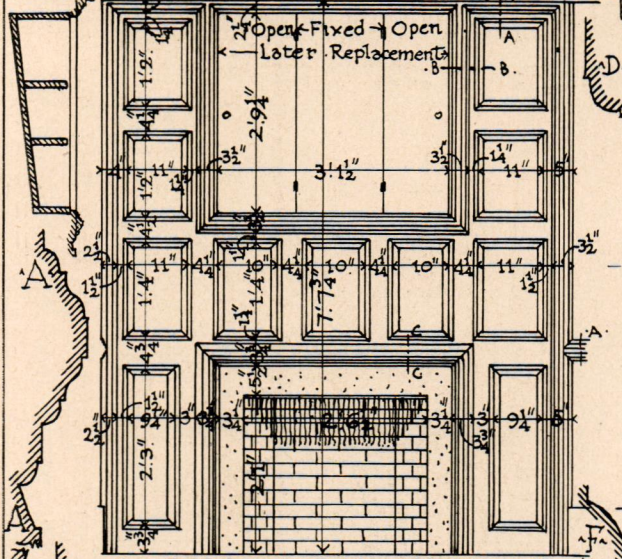
[39]

Drawn out March 19, 1939 by Frank Chouteau Brown, A.I.A. from Measurements taken by His Am Bldgs Survey.

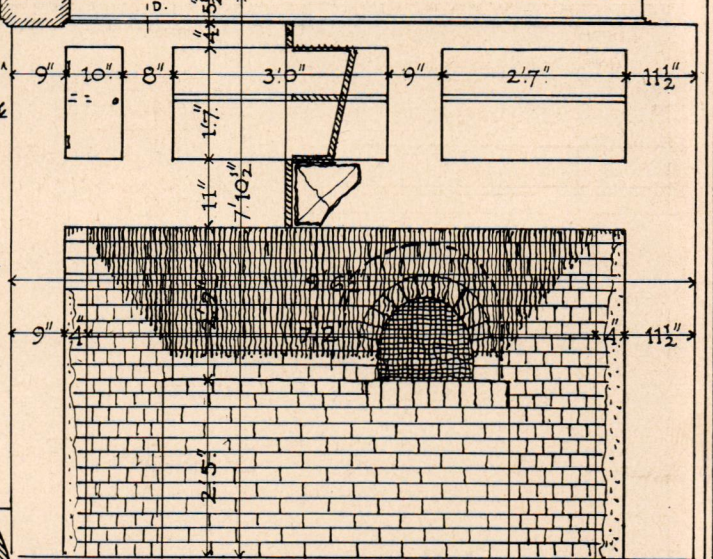


UPSTAIRS PARLOR FEARING WARR HOUSE 1665 & 1765 WAREHAM MASS CUPBOARD.
 PANELED SIDES OF TWO SECOND STORY PARLORS WITH WALL CUPBOARDS 1765 FROM MASSACHUSETTS TAVERNS.

Measured at Various Times & Drawn March 4, 1939, Frank Chouteau Brown.

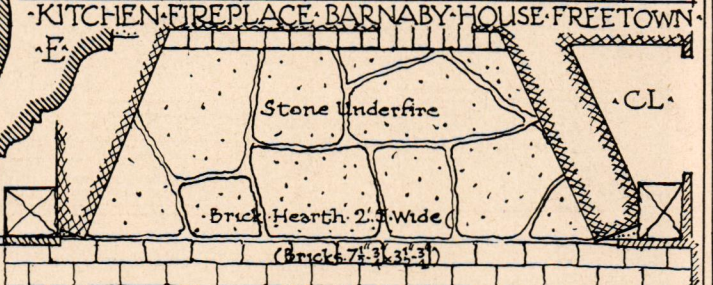


OLD BEDROOM FIREPLACE BARNABY HOUSE
B-1740 FREETOWN H.
B. I.

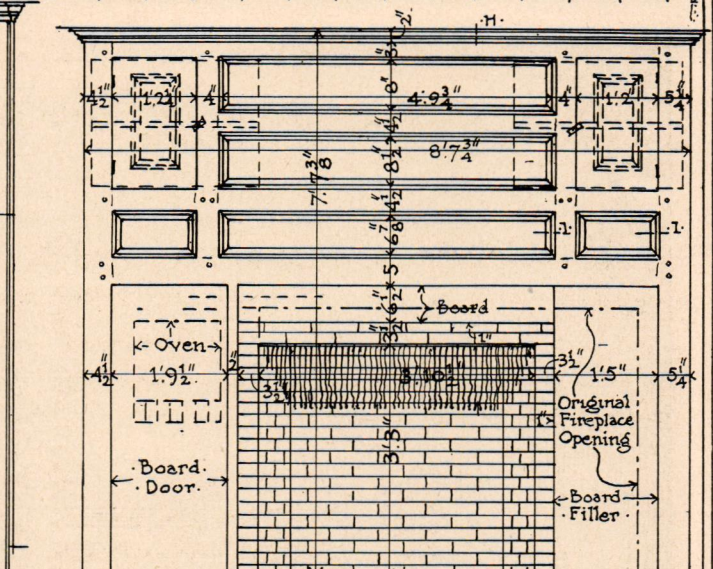


KITCHEN FIREPLACE BARNABY HOUSE FREETOWN
E. CL.

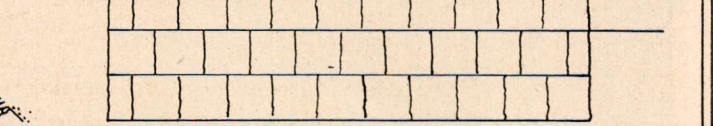
Scale of Feet for Elevations.
Scale of Inches for Details.



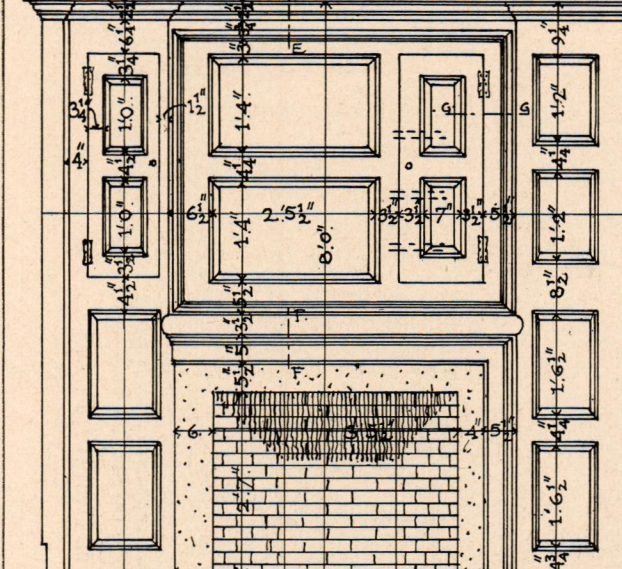
KITCHEN FIREPLACE BROOKS HOUSE 1786 MEDFORD
Original Oven.
Original Brickwork.
Cupboard over Old.
Domed Over.



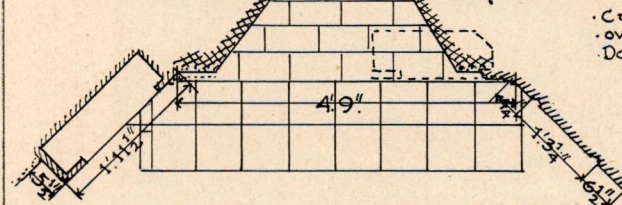
KITCHEN FIREPLACE BROOKS HOUSE 1786 MEDFORD
Original Oven.
Original Brickwork.
Cupboard over Old.
Domed Over.



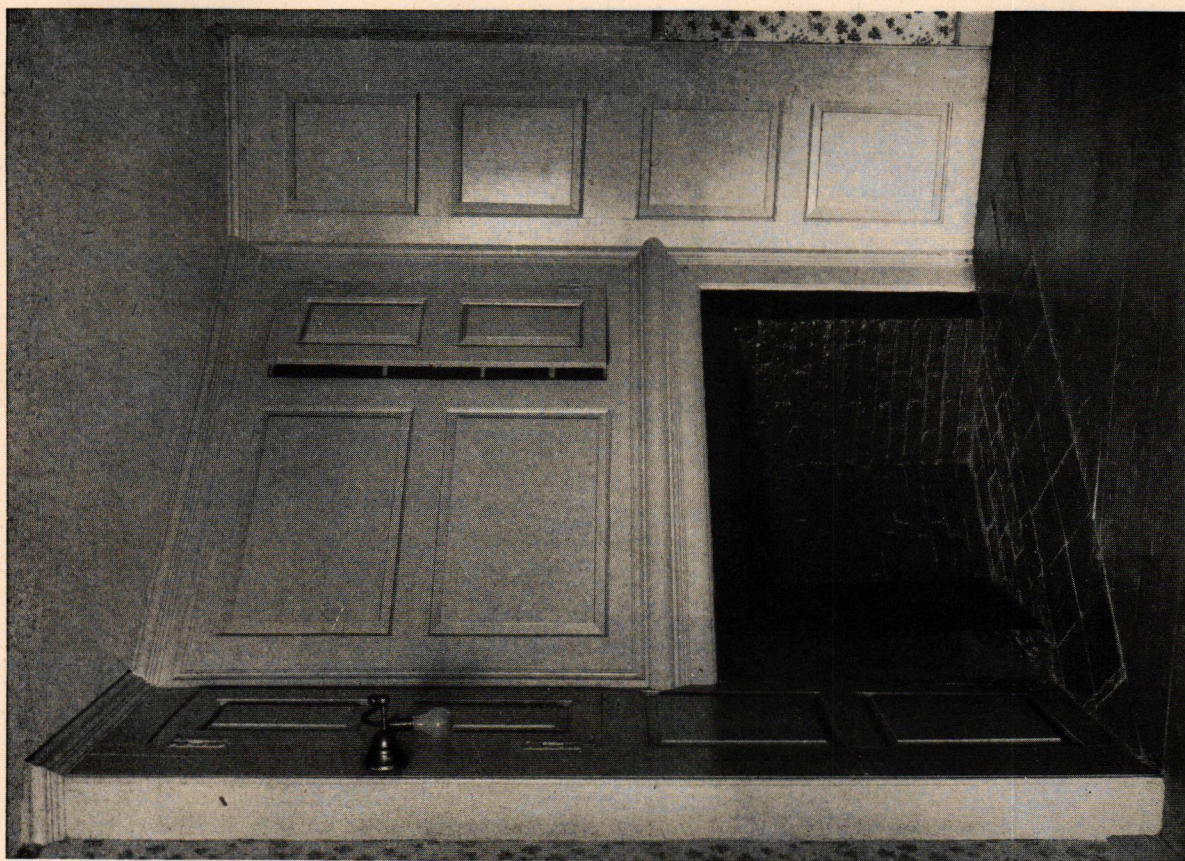
KITCHEN FIREPLACE BROOKS HOUSE 1786 MEDFORD
Original Oven.
Original Brickwork.
Cupboard over Old.
Domed Over.



BEDROOM FIREPLACE DANIEL SHUTE HOUSE
HINGHAM MASS C 1690.



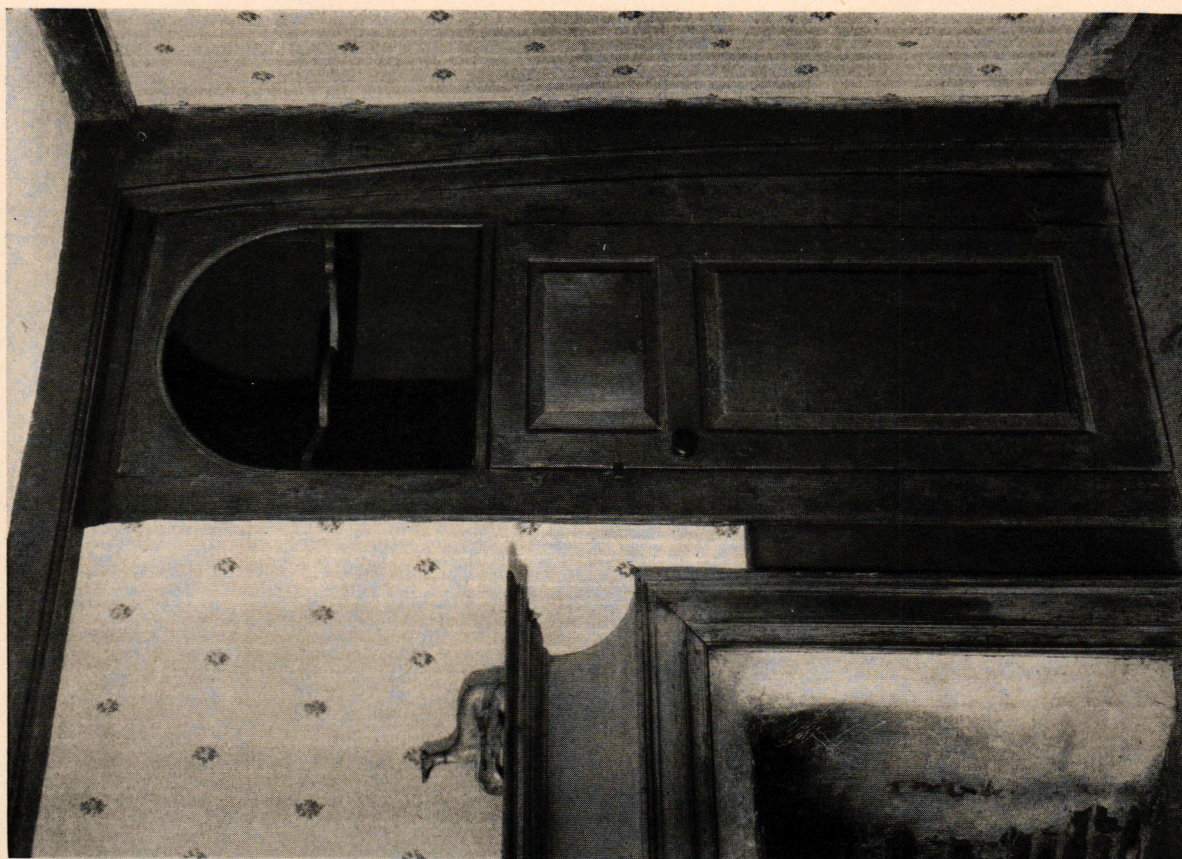
FOUR EXAMPLES OF WALL CUPBOARDS OVER FIREPLACES OF VARIOUS DATES & TOWNSHIPS ALL IN MASSACHUSETTS



FIREPLACE AND CABINETS, FIRST FLOOR REAR BEDROOM
DANIEL SHUTE HOUSE—c. 1690—HINGHAM, MASS.



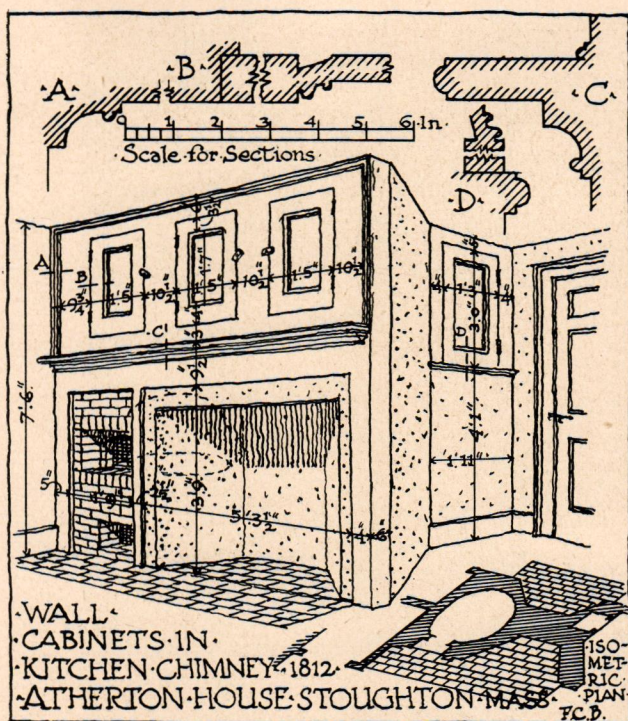
FIREPLACE AND WALL CABINET, FIRST FLOOR BEDROOM
BARNABY HOUSE—B. 1740—FREETOWN, MASSACHUSETTS



SMALL WALL CUPBOARD BESIDE FIREPLACE
OLD DENNISON HOUSE—B. 1727—ANNISQUAM, MASS.



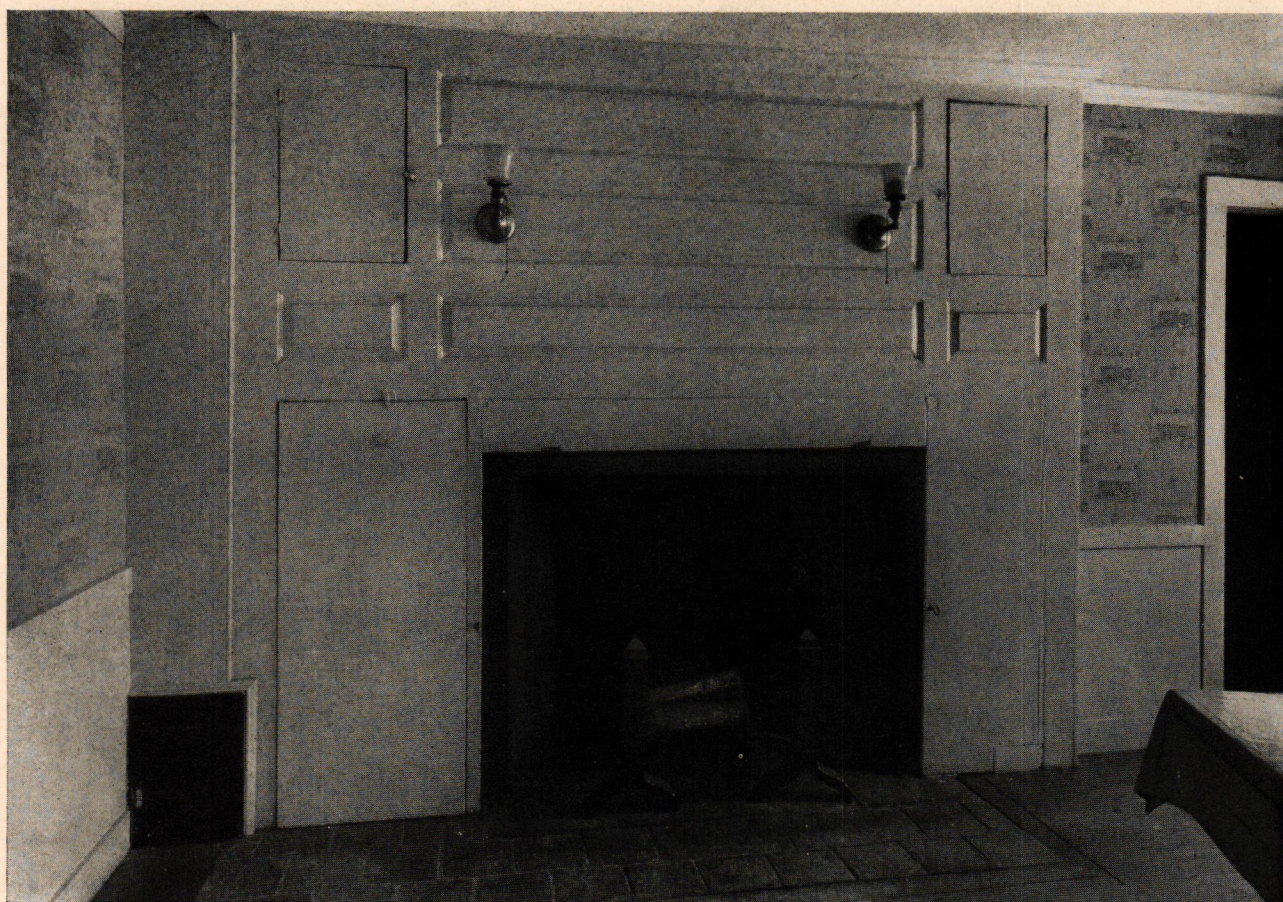
TALL WALL CUPBOARD IN OLD KITCHEN
HASKELL DWELLING—B. 1650—WEST GLOUCESTER, MASS.



balanced interior arrangement. And the many simple and ingenious ways in which the balance of the Early Colonial or Provincial plan is adjusted to the *unbalance* of the room wall, is a study in itself; without a comprehension of which subtleties no one can appreciate or follow the ways of the original New England builders.

In the more informal early cottages we find a tendency to locate open shelves or closed cupboards in recesses over or about the most-used fireplaces, either in kitchen or living room. Examples of such "cubbyholes" abound along the seashore, on Cape Ann, or "down on" Cape Cod. They are found about New Bedford, the Narragansett coast, or along the "North Shore" into Maine. They are also common in the inner farming sections, Worcester County, or the Connecticut Valley. A number appear in earlier issues of the "Monograph Series"; such as those dealing with Cape Ann (Vol. XIX, Nos. 1, 4 and 6; Vol. XX, parts 1 and 5), Old Newbury (Vol. XIX, No. 2) and the Smithfields (Vol. XXI, No. 3), and Tiverton, R. I. (Vol. XXII, No. 6).

In this issue a variety of examples has been



OLD KITCHEN FIREPLACE AND WALL CABINETS
JONATHAN BROOKS HOUSE—1786—MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS
See Measured Drawing on Page 41



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FIREPLACE AND WALL CABINET IN PANELED END, EAST PARLOR
OLD RED HOUSE—C. 1745—GILL, MASSACHUSETTS



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FIREPLACE IN OLD KITCHEN AND STANDING CUPBOARD
MAJOR JOHN BRADFORD HOUSE—1674—KINGSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

[45]

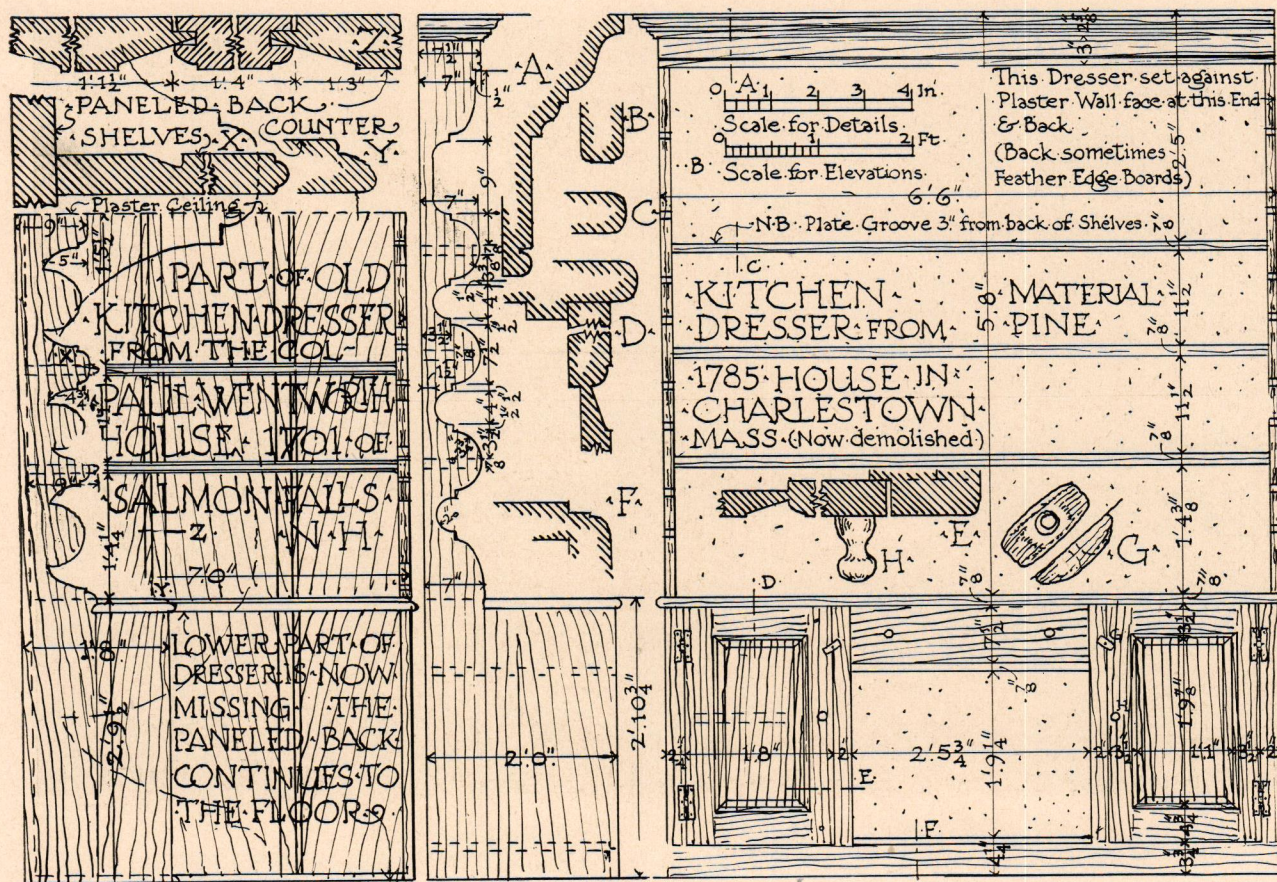
gathered from in or near to Worcester County (pages 33 and 34); from Western Massachusetts (pages 39, 40, 45); a couple from Rhode Island—near the coast (38, 47), and the balance from Rockport, Nantucket Island, Cape Cod or the inland roads leading toward it, near Hingham, Plymouth, and about Cape Ann. Most of the illustrations belong to the less formal types, placed in and about fireplaces, over mantels or brick ovens, or sometimes partially concealed within the treatment of a paneled wall. One or two verge upon the more formal arched-top design of the typical open “Corner



SMALL HANGING WALL CABINET, LEAN-TO ENTRY
WILLIAM HASKELL DWELLING—B. 1650—
WEST GLOUCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

Cupboard,” for the display of gay china or burnished pewter, along with two unusual examples of cupboards contained within the paneling of upstairs Inn parlors—of the same date, 1765, but of widely separated geographical location. Although most of the illustrations are of recessed wall cupboards, a few show simple, free-standing pieces, of early pine workmanship (as on pages 38, 45, 46, and 48) of which at least one or more are expressive of the once-prevalent Kitchen Dresser type, in its earlier and simpler manifestations, now so seldom complete when found.

FRANK CHOUTEAU
BROWN, A. I. A.





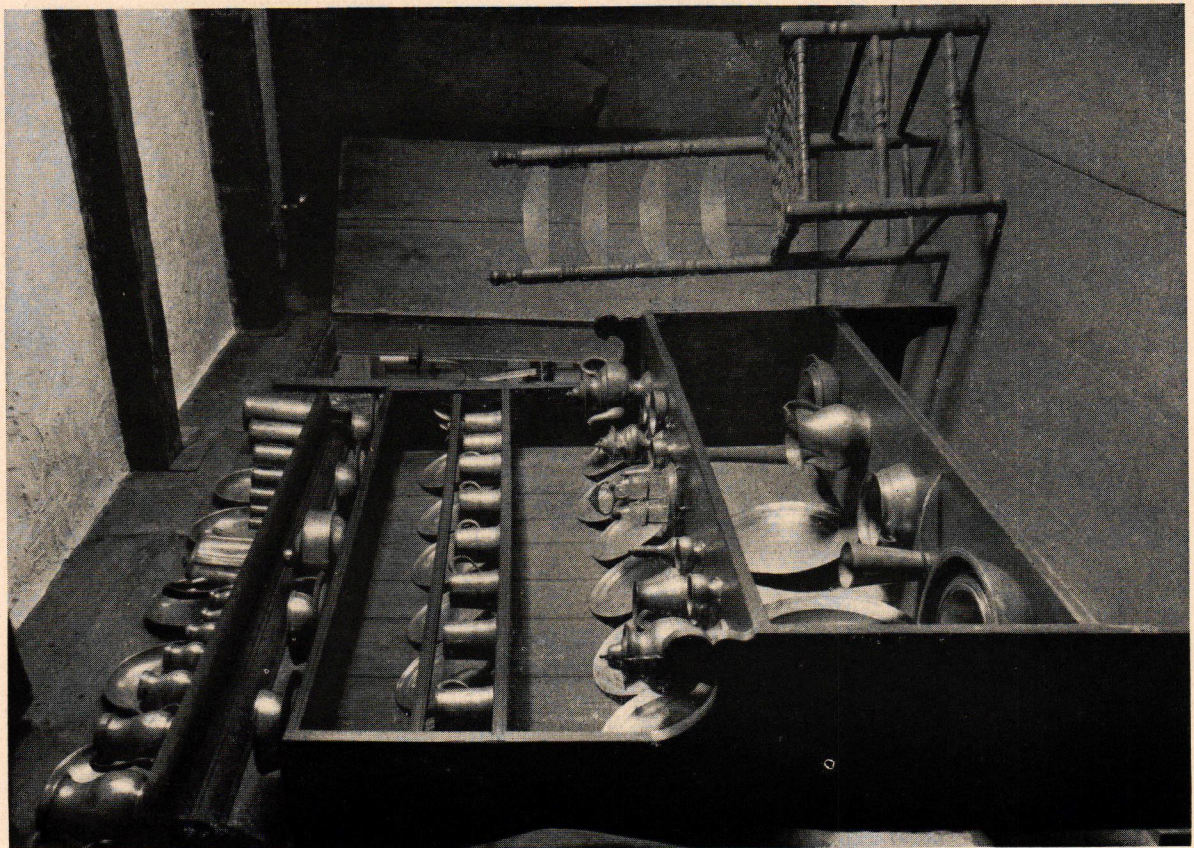
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CENTER SOUTH ROOM FIREPLACE WALL AND CABINETS
OLD TAVERN INN—C. 1700—MIDDLEBOROUGH, MASSACHUSETTS



FIREPLACE AND WALL CABINET OVER, IN CENTER ROOM
AMASA GRAY HOUSE—LITTLE COMPTON, RHODE ISLAND

[47]



WALL DRESSER IN LEAN-TO
WILLIAM HASKELL DWELLING—B. 1650—
WEST GLOUCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS



NEW HAMPSHIRE PINE WALL DRESSER
NOW IN DAVID SHAPELY HOUSE—1718—BASS ROCKS, MASS.
(FORMERLY AT KILLINGLY, CONN.)