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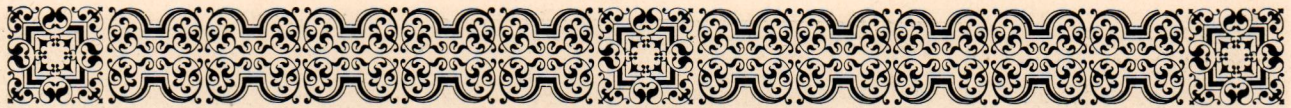
PARLOR MANTEL—ABOUT 1815—IN LATER PORTION
(See Measured Drawing on Page 75)
FARMHOUSE OF ELIAS ENDICOTT PORTER—1737—PUTNAMVILLE
DANVERS, MASSACHUSETTS

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MANTELPiece IN FRONT PARLOR
MAJ. ISRAEL FORSTER HOUSE—1804—MANCHESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

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SOME LOW MANTELS *and* FIREPLACE ENFRAMEMENTS

PRINCIPALLY *of the* BEGINNING *of the* NINETEENTH CENTURY

Photographs by Arthur C. Haskell

AT the time the fireplace was removed from its earlier location in the center of the room to one of its walls or corner angles, the square hearth shrank to a segment of its former area; and its marginal moulding seems, appropriately enough, to have extended upward over the wall surface in order to continue to limit the fireplace boundaries along its two sides and top. In those Mediæval days when the fire recess was first given an enclosed or concealed flue, it usually opened from the top of a stonebuilt hood, which itself soon became an appropriate part of the æsthetic design of the mantel, as well as exercising its inner functional purpose in collecting the smoke above the firebox and directing it into the flue that had been newly devised for the very practical purpose of removing the smoke from the room.

As the firebox itself became more deeply recessed into the wall—and especially as that wall became less a part of a stone built border castle and came into general use in the more humble dwelling of serf or retainer—the somewhat pretentious exterior hooded treatment disappeared from view; although it remained concealed more deeply within the wall, and was executed in humbler—and less fire resisting materials. In this less costly and more impermanent dwelling, the fireplace was either only partially built of stone inserted into a wooden or wattle wall,—or it largely or entirely filled one end of the principal room of the small dwelling; the flue often being carried up outside, of crisscrossed twigs heavily daubed with wet clay both inside and out.

This was also the earliest method employed in New England, and survivals of this treatment may still be found in early houses along the Eastern Coast, of which perhaps the best known examples are the early “stone-end” houses of New Jersey, Connecticut, and Rhode Island—or the brown stone dwellings of the lower Hudson Valley. When the house increased in

size upon the ground, however, it became a matter of economy in construction, as well as in the conservation of heat and fuel, to place the chimney in the center of the small structure, thus enclosing the chimney and increasing the danger of fire, as well as bringing it between the inner walls of the two or three room floor plan. The chimney at once became larger, the fireplaces deeper, and the masonry construction of the fireplace itself came necessarily to be extended up through the wooden framed structure and well above its roof surfaces.

At the same time the fireplace began gradually to shrink in size, both in width—or length—height and depth. As this tendency continued, the æsthetic requirements of the owners (or perhaps it was only the woman’s demand for simpler surfaces to clean and dust) introduced a wooden screen or partition that filled the remainder of these interior walls, separated the staircase and hall from the two or more rooms on each floor—and made necessary some sort of a boundary or lapping finish that would cover the point where the masonry fireplace stopped and the wood boarded wall at each side of and over it began. And so—and from quite another and different set of conditions—once again the suggestion for a moulded enframingent of the fire opening evolved.

The danger of fire was still sufficient to require that the masonry firebox be extended in a facade upon both sides, and over the top of the fire opening, in the wall face; that the bordering woodwork be kept well back from the fire opening, and that a moulding be introduced to make tight the joint between the two materials and prevent any draft from drawing sparks up back of the paneling, into the space around and outside of the chimney flue. Among the earliest treatments, was the well known form of the “Bolection” moulding, at first used along the edge of the fire opening in stone, and later reproduced in wood (but at first still maintaining a full stone scale) four to eight inches back from the edge of the fire opening.