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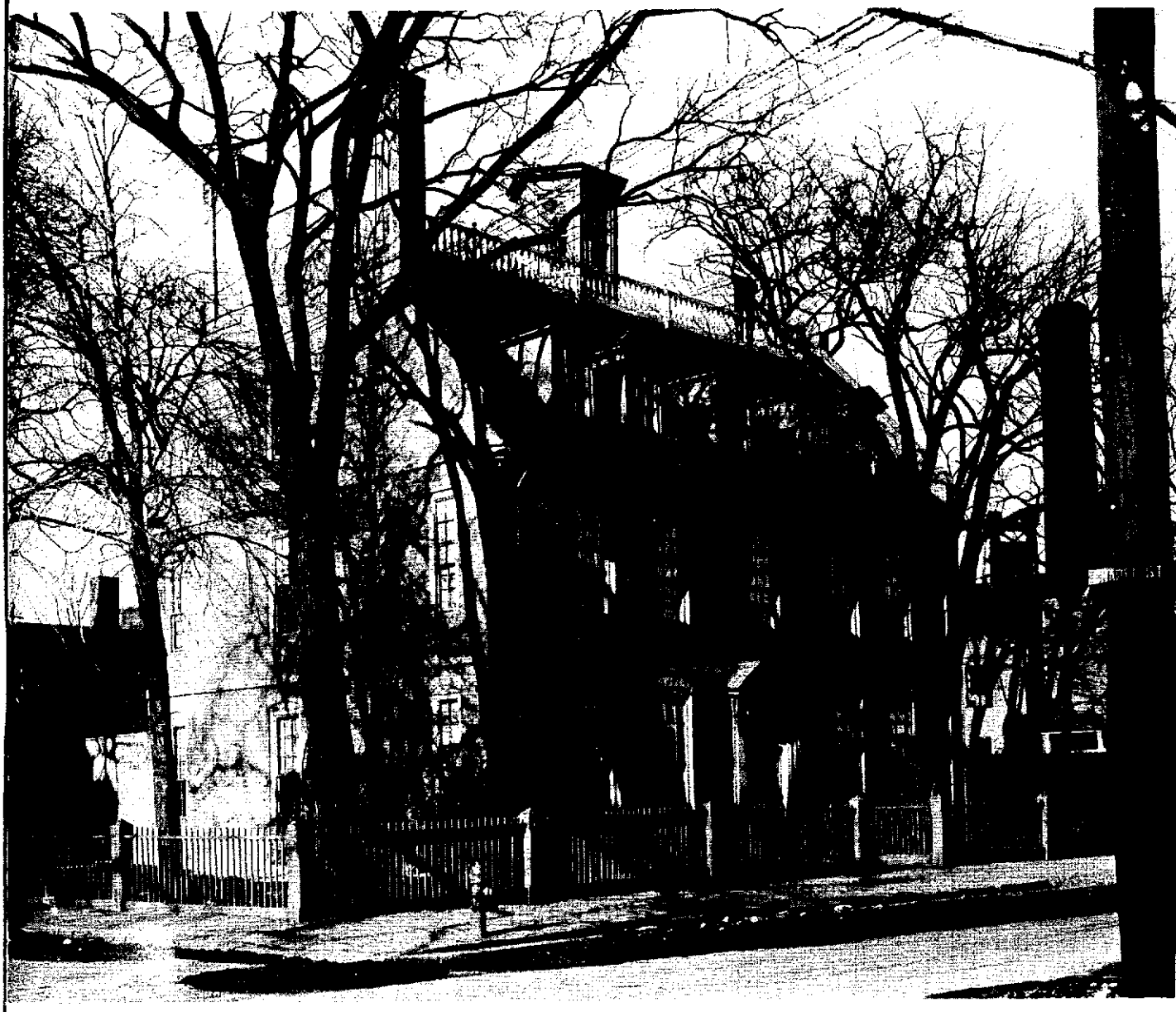

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SPECIAL ISSUE:

Portsmouth and the Piscataqua:
Social History and Material Culture

BY JAMES L. GARVIN

On the cover: Macpheadris-Warner House, Portsmouth, 1716. The house was built by Archibald Macpheadris; John Drew was the master joiner and painter. (Patch Photograph Collection, Strawbery Banke.)

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Portsmouth and the Piscataqua: Social History and Material Culture

By James L. Garvin*

For ten thousand years following the recession of the glacial ice that shaped its basin, the Piscataqua River had ebbed and flowed unknown to Europeans. The measured pulse of its waters daily carried the tang of the sea far inland, and wafted the damp and redolent air of the forest out beyond the islands of the harbor. The river's current was swift, cross-grained and wily, discharging the gathered waters of Great Bay, far upstream, through a narrow and rocky channel. White pines, oaks, maples, birches, hemlocks and beeches crowded the banks of the stream and extended endlessly over the inland hills, giving way occasionally to swamps and natural clearings. Along the back channels near the coast, and at the fringes of Great Bay, extensive tracts of marsh grass rippled in the passing winds.

The Piscataqua River carried the waters of many tributaries, extending far into what is today southeastern New Hampshire and southern Maine. Great Bay, the broad tidal basin that emptied into the main river and gave it one of the most rapid currents in the world, received several of these smaller streams. The Winnicut, Squamscot, Lamprey, Oyster, Bellamy and Cocheco Rivers drained the country for twenty-five miles west of the main channel, their headwaters sometimes extending even to the first range of mountains inland from the coast, while to the northward and eastward the Salmon Falls and Great Works Rivers and numerous tidal creeks further swelled the Piscataqua.

For aeons the river had flowed unhindered and unknown, the hypnotic boiling and upwelling of its current suggesting no thoughts of industrial power or mercantile gain. But then, in 1603, two small vessels are said to have appeared at the mouth of the Piscataqua. A few months before, the famous chronicler of ex-

*Mr. Garvin is Curator of Strawbery Banke.

ploration, Richard Hakluyt, had encouraged certain merchants of Bristol who

> speedily prepared a small ship called the Speed-well in burthen about fiftie tunnes, manning the same with some thirtie men and Boyes, wherein went for Master and chiefe Commander in the Voyage one Martin Pring, a man very sufficient for his place . . . with a Barke called the Discoverer, of six and twentie tunnes or thereabout . . . being thirteene men and a Boy in all in that Barke.[1]

This small expedition arrived at the American mainland at 43° north latitude — the location of the Isles of Shoals and Rye Harbor — and then commenced to explore the nearby coast. Theirs may have been the first European eyes to gaze upon what would one day become the chief port of northern New England.

Following Pring's brief examination, the area was not explored carefully until 1614, when John Smith made a detailed study of the northern coast. Fascinated by the bleak beauty of the Isles of Shoals, he named them "Smyth's Iles." Smith's enthusiastic descriptions of New England did much to stimulate interest in settling the region among English projectors.

From 1614 until 1623, there were few European contacts with the Piscataqua except for the visits of some adventurous fishermen who made New England's coast their rendezvous before the first settlements were attempted. Then, between 1621 and 1622, several grants of land were made to individuals who were interested in settling the Piscataqua. In August 1622 Captain John Mason and Sir Ferdinando Gorges were given joint proprietorship of all territory lying between the Merrimack and Sagadahock Rivers. In October of the same year, David Thomson of Plymouth was likewise granted a parcel of land in New England, about six thousand acres in extent and apparently included within the Mason-Gorges territory.[2] Thomson arrived at Piscataqua in the spring of 1623, and disembarked at Pannaway, now Odiorne's Point, Rye. There, he and a handful of companions built a house (doubtless a communal dwelling or "Great House") and stages for salting and drying fish. Shortly thereafter, Thomson was apparently visited by Edward Hilton, who established a second Piscataqua settlement far upstream at Northam, now Dover Point, where the waters of Great Bay surge into the main river. In 1629, Hilton

secured a patent to a small amount of territory around his plantation; the area has been continuously occupied since that time.

Thomson abandoned his outpost at Pannaway, leaving his lands and house to be improved by others. By 1627, he was living on Thomson's Island in Boston Harbor. Soon thereafter, the ambitions of Mason and Gorges were reinvigorated by a new grant of 1629 that conveyed to the partners and seven other associates a vast tract of lands west of the Piscataqua headwaters. The tract was to extend to the "Lake of the Iroquois" or Lake Champlain, and conjured up visions of an extensive and lucrative fur-trading empire to be administered by the speculators. The territory encompassed within the boundaries of this grant was referred to as "Laconia," in reference to its numerous lakes, and the partners in the grant have become known as the "Laconia Adventurers." This scheme to tap the boundless fur resources of western New England, which were even then coming under French influence, has been called "one of the first deliberate attempts by one of the rival fur-trading nations to outflank its opponents."[3]

Stirred by the prospect of great wealth, Mason and Gorges actively began to sponsor settlement in the Piscataqua. In 1630, they sent the vessels *Warwick* and *Pied Cow* to the river, taking over Thomson's deserted site at Pannaway and establishing two additional locations, one at Newichawannock (now South Berwick, Maine), where they eventually erected a sawmill, and the principal one on the western shore of the river, at a place called Strawbery Banke because of the profusion of wild berries growing at the edge of the water. Here, at the point where Court and Marcy Streets intersect today, the largest of the "Great Houses," or common dwellings, of the Piscataqua settlements is said to have been built; it became the nucleus around which the southern part of Portsmouth grew. The initial company of settlers reportedly consisted of fifty Englishmen, twenty-two women, and eight Danes, the latter supposedly sent to saw lumber and make potash.[4]

The settlement did not prosper. At about the end of 1633, the Laconia Company seems to have been dissolved, and the Piscataqua lands were left to be divided between Mason and Gorges. In 1635, Mason received title to the western half of the lands, "from

henceforth to be called New Hampshire;" Gorges took the eastern half, traditionally named Maine. Mason continued to concern himself with the welfare of his colony and to hope for the discovery of that fabled key to riches, the Lake of the Iroquois. In 1635, just before his death, he wrote: "I have disbursed a great deal of money in ye plantacon, and never received one penny; but hope if there were once a discoverie of the lakes, that I should, in some reasonable time, be reimbursed againe."[5]

Following Mason's death, the settlements at Pannaway and Strawbery Banke grew slowly, with the latter becoming predominant. The outpost and mills at Newichawannock burned, and would be rebuilt later by parties from Massachusetts. Eventually, the area that is today southeastern New Hampshire came to be composed of four distinct towns: Strawbery Banke, later named Portsmouth; Northam, later named Dover; Exeter, settled by Massachusetts people; and Hampton, settled under the authority of the government of Massachusetts *(Fig. 1)*. In addition, by 1670 there are said to have been five hundred people living at the Isles of Shoals, which made an ideal depot for the extensive fishing industry that was becoming one of the mainstays of the Piscataqua economy.[6]

The settlers of the Piscataqua soon learned that fish were not the only natural resource of the area that could be exploited with a relatively small investment. From the shores of the river to a point far up in the foothills of the White Mountains, and for a vast distance east and west, the forest was dominated by virgin white pine trees, the fabled *Pinus strobus* of northern New England. Of great size — often forty inches in diameter and forty yards tall — these trees would yield millions of feet of clear boards and thousands of perfect masts and spars. After 1691, all of these giants "of twenty-four inches and upwards at twelve inches from the ground, growing upon any Soils or Tract of Land . . . not heretofore granted to any private Persons"[7] were officially reserved for the use of the Royal Navy, and were supposed to be blazed with the mark of the broad arrow to denote their possession by the Crown. But it was too late. By 1700, there were ninety sawmills in Piscataqua, cutting planks and boards from 6,000,000 feet

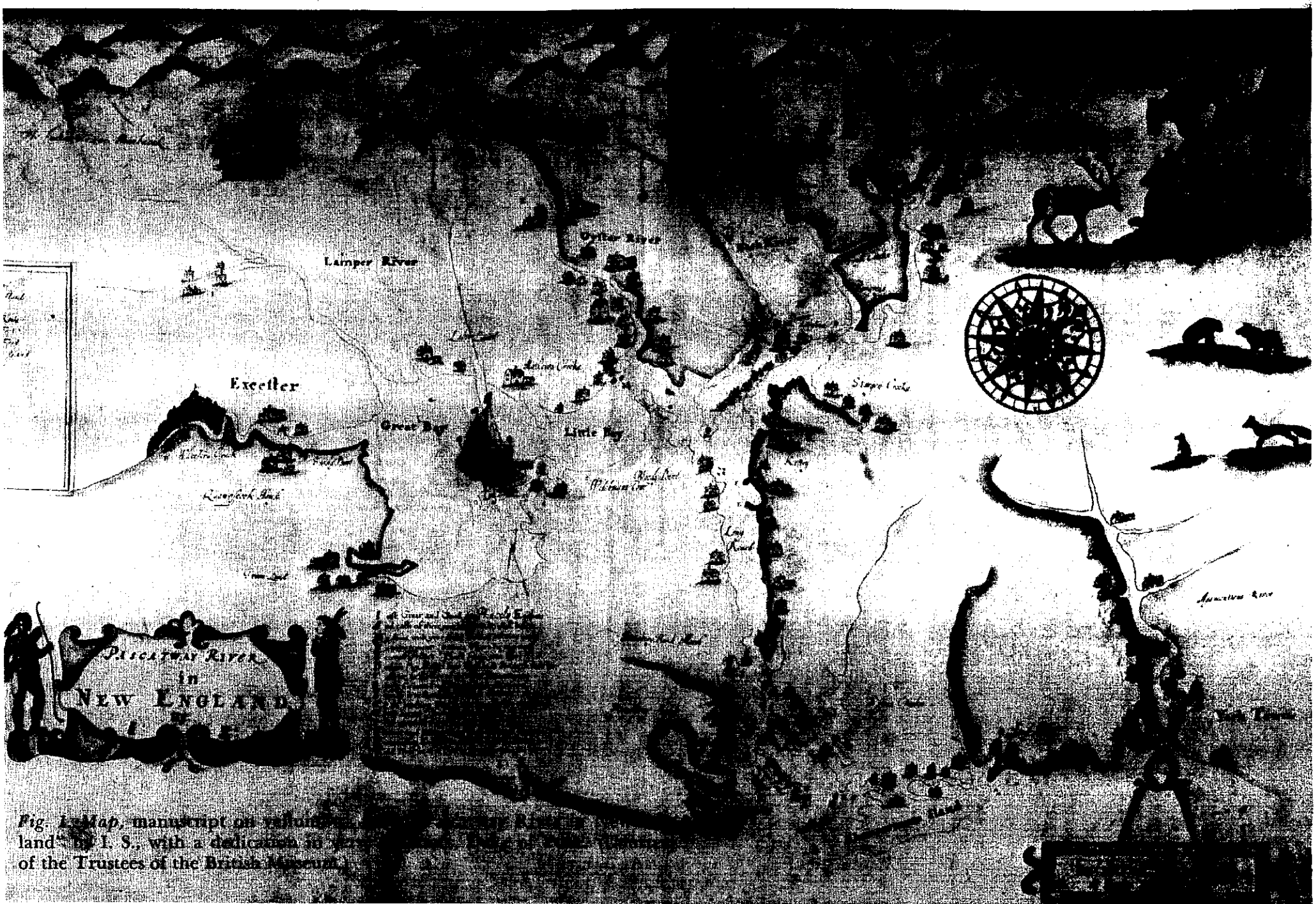


Fig. 1. ***Map,*** manuscript on vellum [illegible] land" by I. S., with a dedication to [illegible] of the Trustees of the British Museum.)

of timber a year. All but a few hundred trees that stood near the river and were suitable for masts had been converted to lumber.[8] The Piscataqua River and its tributaries were becoming the channels through which great quantities of lumber were exported to many parts of the world.

The trees that escaped the millmen, and were of sufficient size and in flawless condition, were cut for masts. This was, from start to finish, a dangerous and picturesque operation. It involved the cutting of a swath through the entangling smaller trees, the preparation of a bed of boughs into which the mast tree would fall, the actual felling of the tree, and the hauling of the great mast to water. This latter task usually saw the tree lifted upon ponderous wheels and axles and pulled over rough paths and mast roads by forty to fifty oxen, a few of the strongest beasts being hitched behind to act as a brake on downhill grades. Once in the water, mast trees were floated to timber docks in Portsmouth harbor and then loaded onto specially-constructed mast ships, of about four hundred tons burden and capable of holding forty-five to fifty masts, for the trip to the English shipyards.

Pine lumber and masts were not the only forest exports of the Piscataqua. White oaks also grew in profusion, and were sawed for export. Many thousands of barrel staves, shingles and clapboards were riven from local timber for the foreign market. Between 1712 and 1718, the Piscataqua exported 43,880 pine planks, 22,000 pine boards, 93,250 pipestaves, 1,511 spars, and 173 masts.[9] Between 1718 and 1723, these figures increased greatly and were augmented by exports of quantities of shingles, joists, oak rafters, hogshead staves and clapboards. So great was the area's growth during the eighteenth century that between 1791 and 1801 exports included 880,000,000 feet of pine boards and planks, 80,000,000 feet of oak boards and planks, 280,000,000 staves and headings, and 31,000,000 shingles.[10]

An area of such prodigious expansion and fertility could not fail to nurture a vigorous society. As the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries progressed, the complexity of life in the Piscataqua kept pace with the increasing prosperity. The region shared some of its institutions with neighboring areas, but many aspects

of its culture were unique. By examining the lives of the men of the Piscataqua — the patrons and the craftsmen — and by looking at what these men used or produced — their architecture, ships, furniture, and even the plans of their towns — it is possible to gain some understanding of the tenor of life in this distinctive region. By examining these things, the men and the world they created, it is possible to perceive some hint of the depth of their culture.

Men of Wealth and Taste: Piscataqua Patrons

Prior to 1725, the economy of the Piscataqua was based largely on the exportation and milling of white pine, on fishing, and on a developing coastwise and West India trade. The latter activity, especially, was laying the foundation for a number of respectable fortunes — fortunes that would in time enable the wealthier merchants to display their success through patronage of Piscataqua craftsmen and through importation of luxuries "in the latest style" of England. By 1727, the wealthiest men in Portsmouth were Richard Wibird, Joshua Peirce, John Rindge, and George Jaffrey;[11] all bore surnames that would retain their importance in the area for generations.

Already, the shrewd merchant Archibald Macpheadris had amassed a fortune in a somewhat devious trade, and had built a mansion house that vied in grandeur with any in Boston, filling it with English furniture as well as with local products. Already, too, the Wentworth dynasty was well established, with John Wentworth the Lieutenant-Governor of the province. True to his unerring instincts, Macpheadris had arranged a marriage with one of Wentworth's daughters, many years his junior, thereby conforming to the established practice of making matrimonial alliances for the furtherance of fortune. This tradition would in time weld Cutts and Sherburnes, Sherburnes and Hunkings, Hunkings and Wentworths, Wentworths and Atkinsons, Atkinsons and Penhallows, and Penhallows and Cutts into an iron ring of oligarchical power. As this oligarchy grew and drew more and more wealth to itself, it began to express its sophistication and prestige in an

Fig. 2. Pepperrell Mansion, Kittery Point, Maine. The original house was built for the elder William Pepperrell in 1682; it was rebuilt for the younger Pepperrell ca. 1720. (Patch Photograph Collection, Strawbery Banke.)

ever-increasing demand for the finest luxuries obtainable.

Across the Piscataqua River, the young William Pepperrell was assuming control of his father's thriving business, which had already successfully challenged the trading affairs of the Wentworths on the Portsmouth shore. Pepperrell became a name to contend with in wealth, culture, and political success. Possessing nearly thirteen thousand acres of land, including much of Kittery Point, William Jr. came to dominate the politics of Maine and to set the standard for elegant living.[12] About 1720, he rebuilt his father's house *(Fig. 2),* creating a spacious stairhall and panelling several of the rooms with heavy, bolection-moulded woodwork; somewhat later, he purchased wall hangings of "mock tapestory or pantd canvis."[13] Here he lived in splendor, becoming, in 1745, the first native-born American to be created a baronet.

In Portsmouth about 1730, George Jaffrey II, Treasurer of New Hampshire and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, built a rambling hip-roofed house to be occupied by himself and his son. The wealth of the owners was attested to by the quality of the joiner's work, including a corner cupboard and other elements now at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. At about the same time,

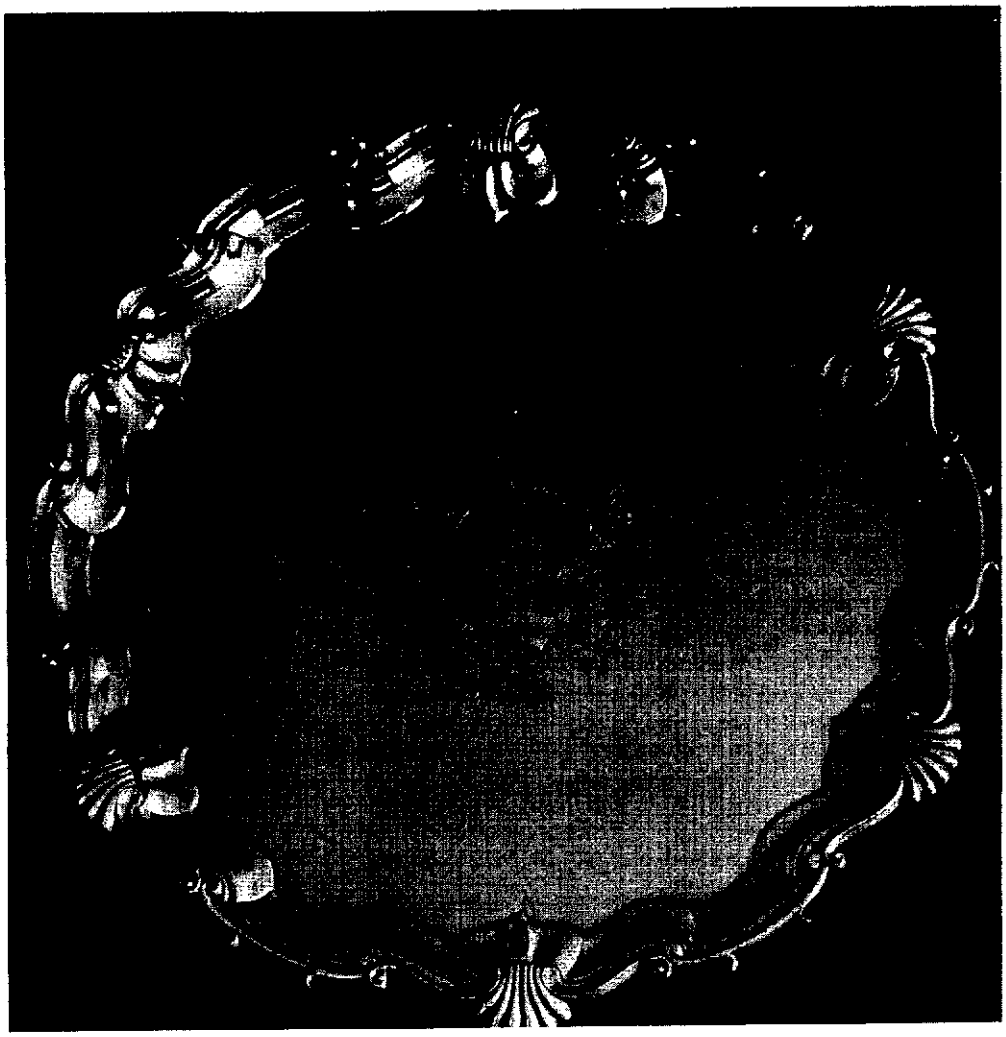


Fig. 3. Salver, silver, London, ca. 1750, attributed to William Hunter. The arms of Theodore Atkinson (1697-1770) are engraved on the obverse. (NHHS Collections; photograph by Bill Finney.)

Theodore Atkinson, formerly of New Castle, erected a large mansion house on what is today Court Street in Portsmouth. Built on the pattern of the Pepperrell House, Atkinson's dwelling was enriched with mantelshelves supported by caryatids, and with other carved work, and had a large garden that extended southward to the nearby waterway, later named Puddle Dock. In one iron-grated closet, Atkinson was said to have kept more silver than any other man in the province, and the fine pieces that survive from his collection *(Fig. 3)* support the legend.[14]

By the mid-eighteenth century, the wealth and taste of the

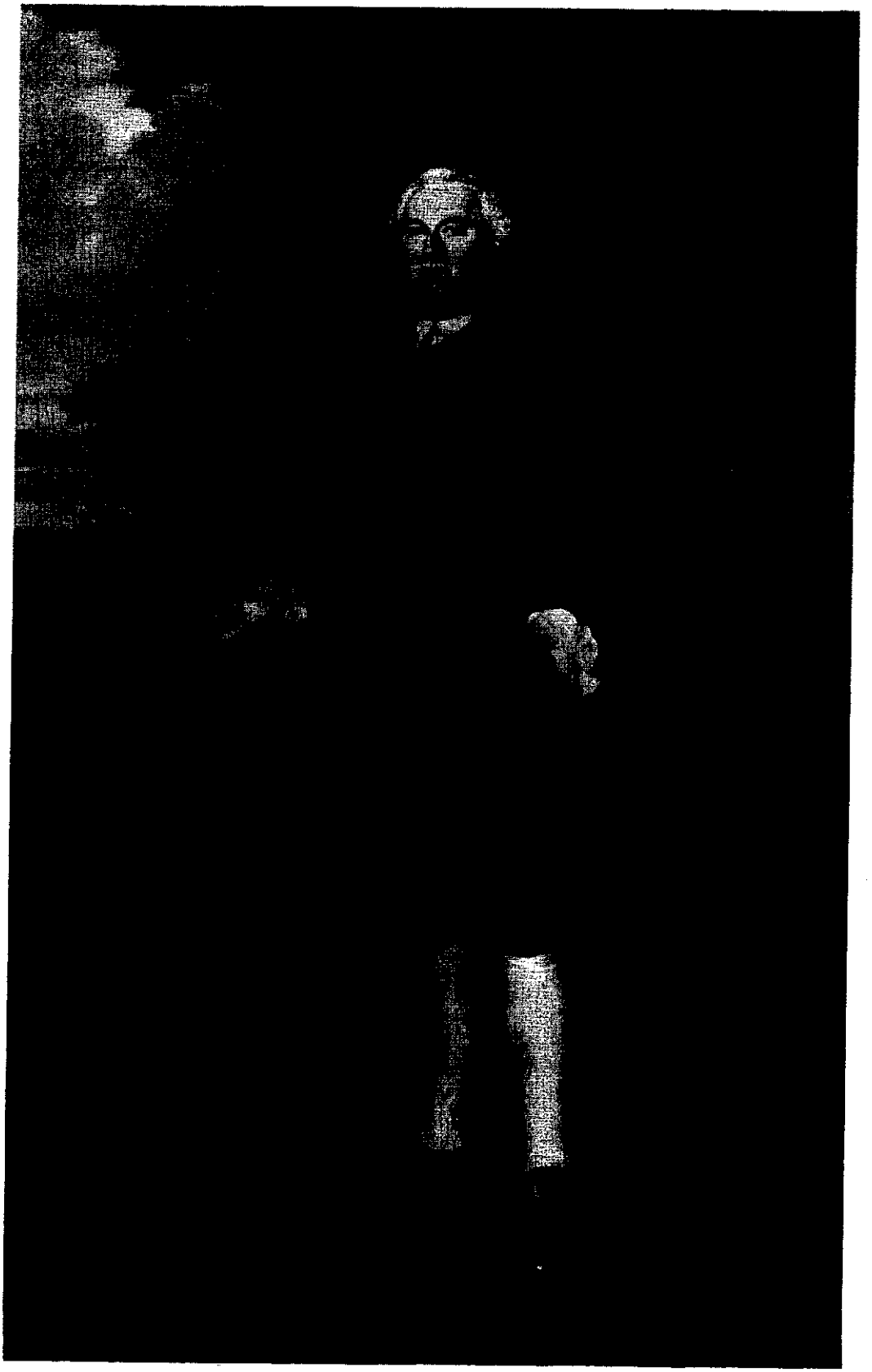


Fig. 4. Benning Wentworth (1696-1770), oil on canvas, 1760, by Joseph Blackburn. (NHHS Collections; photograph by Bill Finney.)

Wentworth family was dominant in the Piscataqua. Governor Benning Wentworth *(Fig. 4)*, friend and sometime-protector of the architect Peter Harrison of Newport, Rhode Island, was apparently introduced by Harrison to several English architectural books. The influence of these volumes is seen in all the Wentworth houses, but most notably in the mansion today referred to as the Wentworth-Gardner House, built about 1760 by Madam Mark Hunking Wentworth for her son Thomas, and in the Colonel Joshua Wentworth House of about 1770 *(detail, Fig. 5)*. Madam Mark Hunking Wentworth's own house, no longer standing, was furnished with a richness befitting the family tradition: it contained much mahogany furniture, carpets in every room on the first floor and in the principal bedchamber, an impressive array of "blue and white" and "enameld" china, silver worth over £266, and a library of about one hundred volumes housed in a "Large mahogy Book Case."[18]

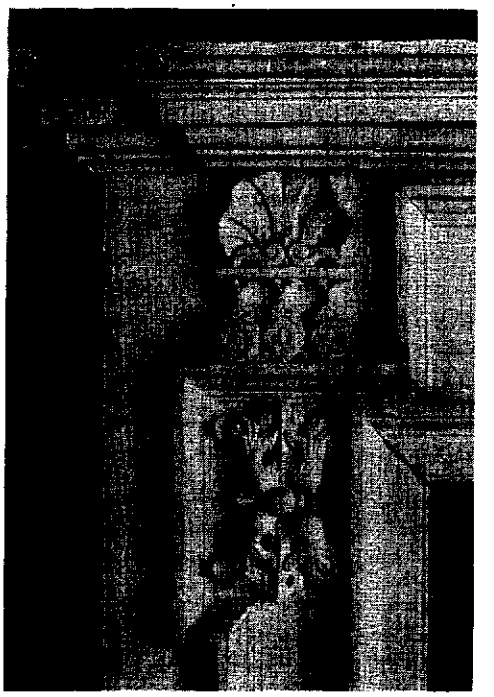


Fig. 5. Detail of mantelpiece, Colonel Joshua Wentworth House, Portsmouth, ca. 1770. (Historic American Buildings Survey; photograph by Clement Moran.)

After the Revolution, an even greater variety of luxuries became obtainable. John Langdon furnished his mansion house, built in 1785, not only with locally-made goods and with items that he imported from England, but also with the best that the thriving metropolis of Philadelphia could supply. The wealthy merchant John Peirce appears to have favored New England craftsmen, probably those of Portsmouth, in the furnishing of his elegant Federal mansion. The curved settee that fitted the niche at the foot of his stairs *(Fig. 6)* is now at the Winterthur Museum, and a matched pair of "Martha Washington" or "lol-

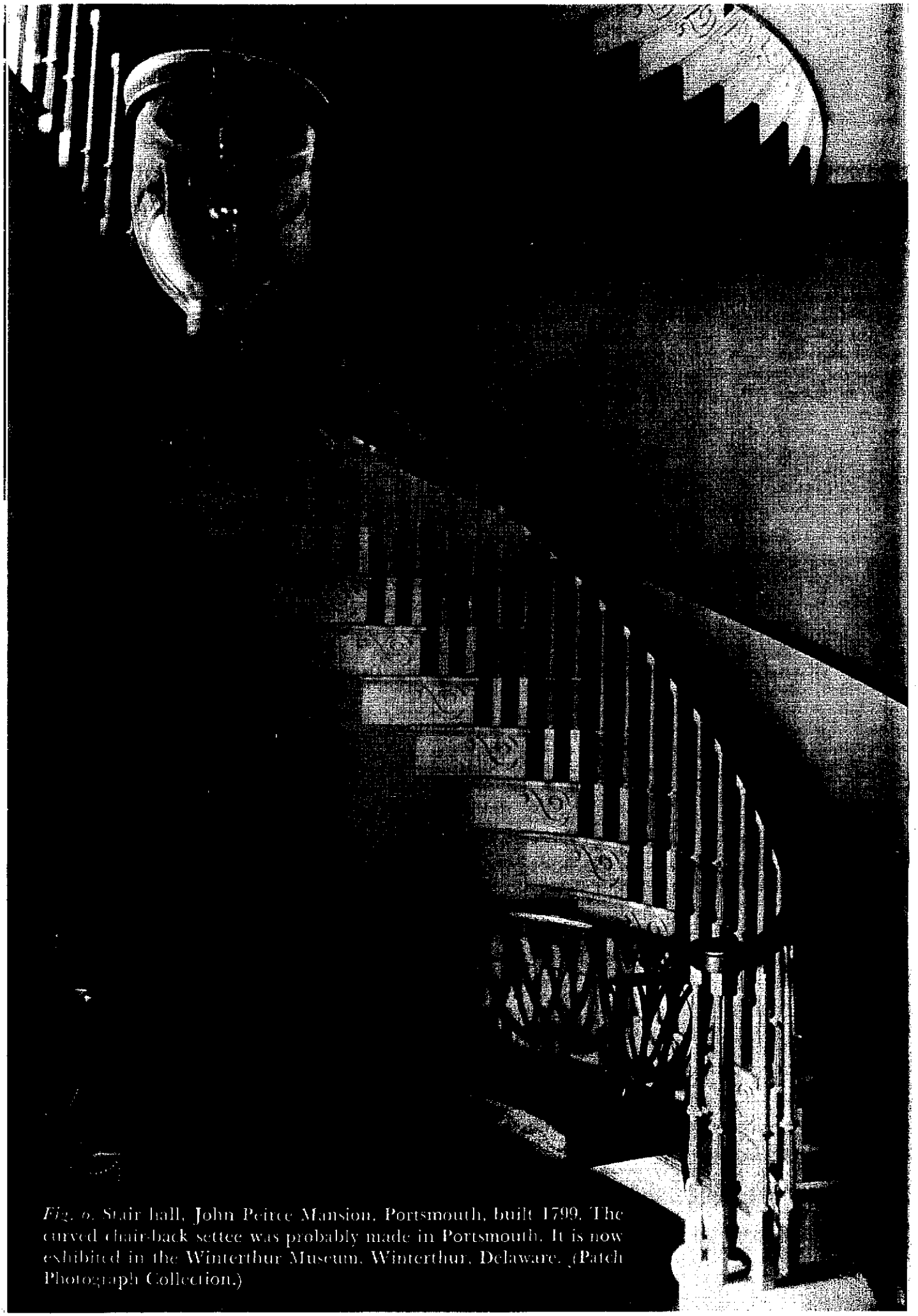
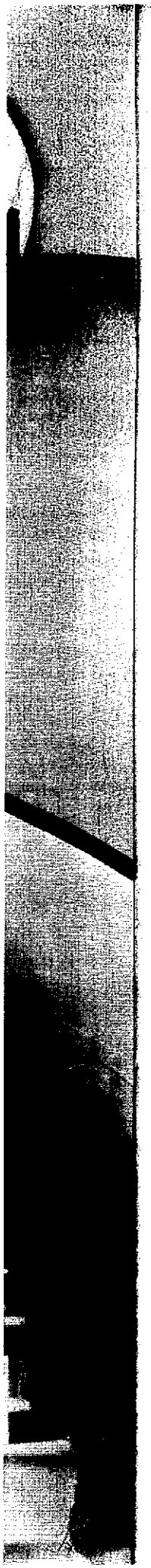


Fig. 6. Stair hall, John Peirce Mansion, Portsmouth, built 1799. The curved chair-back settee was probably made in Portsmouth. It is now exhibited in the Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware. (Patch Photograph Collection.)



ling" chairs once graced his parlor. In the period after 1800, less pretentious merchants, like James Rundlet from Exeter, are known to have furnished their new Portsmouth homes with the handwork of local craftsmen.[16]

Men of Skill: Piscataqua Craftsmen and their Products

During the century between 1710 and 1810, the craftsmen of the Piscataqua, typical inhabitants of their region, made possible the flowering of its complex culture. For such a culture to develop, patrons — men of wealth, education and taste — were essential. But without craftsmen of equal taste and of surpassing skill, even the wealthiest patron could not exemplify his sophistication. It is to the craftsmen, then, that we owe our most intimate and accurate knowledge of the development of the society of the Piscataqua. Yet to learn the history of the craftsmen is difficult, for, in the words of Lyman H. Butterfield, such men too often "lived their lives below the level of historical scrutiny."

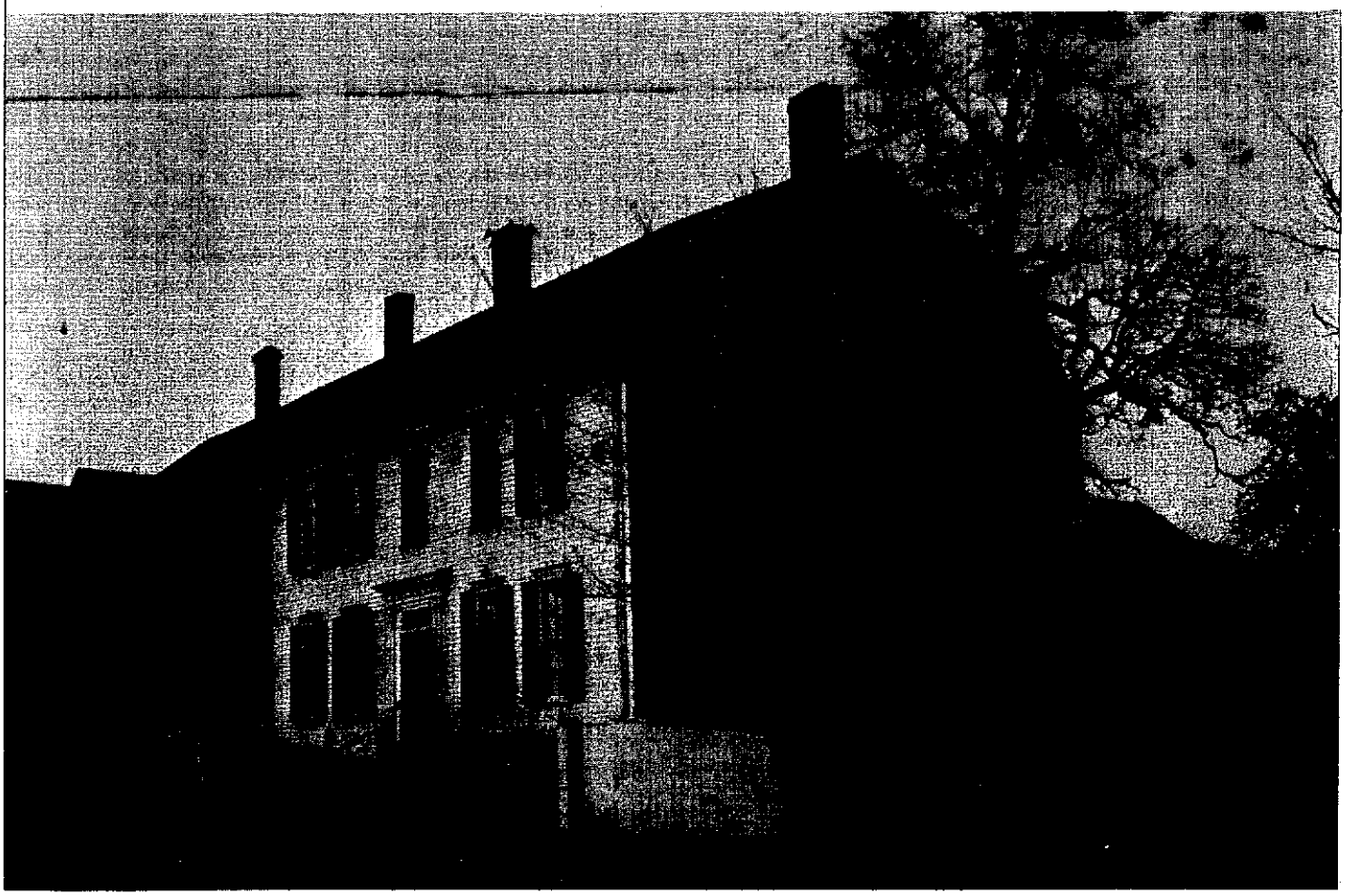
Of all craftsmen, it is those who work with wood who seem to be best remembered. Shipwrights, housewrights, joiners, carvers and cabinetmakers all create objects that are prized and often documented, whereas masons, blacksmiths, painters and other artisans frequently drift into anonymity as soon as their work is completed. It is certainly true that in the Piscataqua area workers in wood are better known than other craftsmen, and there is a surprising continuity in their relationships.

John Drew, one of the first master joiners of the Piscataqua area, appeared at the commencement of Portsmouth's architectural renaissance. He came from Boston around 1715, and shortly thereafter he submitted a bill for joiner's work on the first great academic house of the Piscataqua region, that of Archibald Macpheadris. The woodwork of this, the grandest house to be built in the area for many decades, demonstrates Drew's amazing virtuosity as a joiner, and shows him to have been a master at producing virtually every architectural element that would be used by his descendants and his followers until after the Revolution. He is also known to have done painting in the Macpheadris House,

and to him may be attributed the well-executed marbleizing that is still visible in one room of the mansion.[17]

Drew's skill did not die with him. His daughter married Michael Whidden II, the son of a local gunsmith. Whidden became a noted joiner, and his son, Michael III, was one of the leading craftsmen of Portsmouth during the period 1760 to 1785. Described by one who knew him in advanced age as "a little, florid looking man, in a white linen skull cap, something like what is worn by masons at their work,"[18] Whidden designed and built a number of fine dwellings, including the hip-roofed house occupied by Peter Livius and the imposing gambrel-roofed mansion *(Fig. 7)* owned by George Meserve and, later, by Daniel Webster. He also built the Portsmouth Assembly House, a large and richly-ornamented wooden building on Vaughan Street described by George Washington as "one of the best I have seen anywhere in the

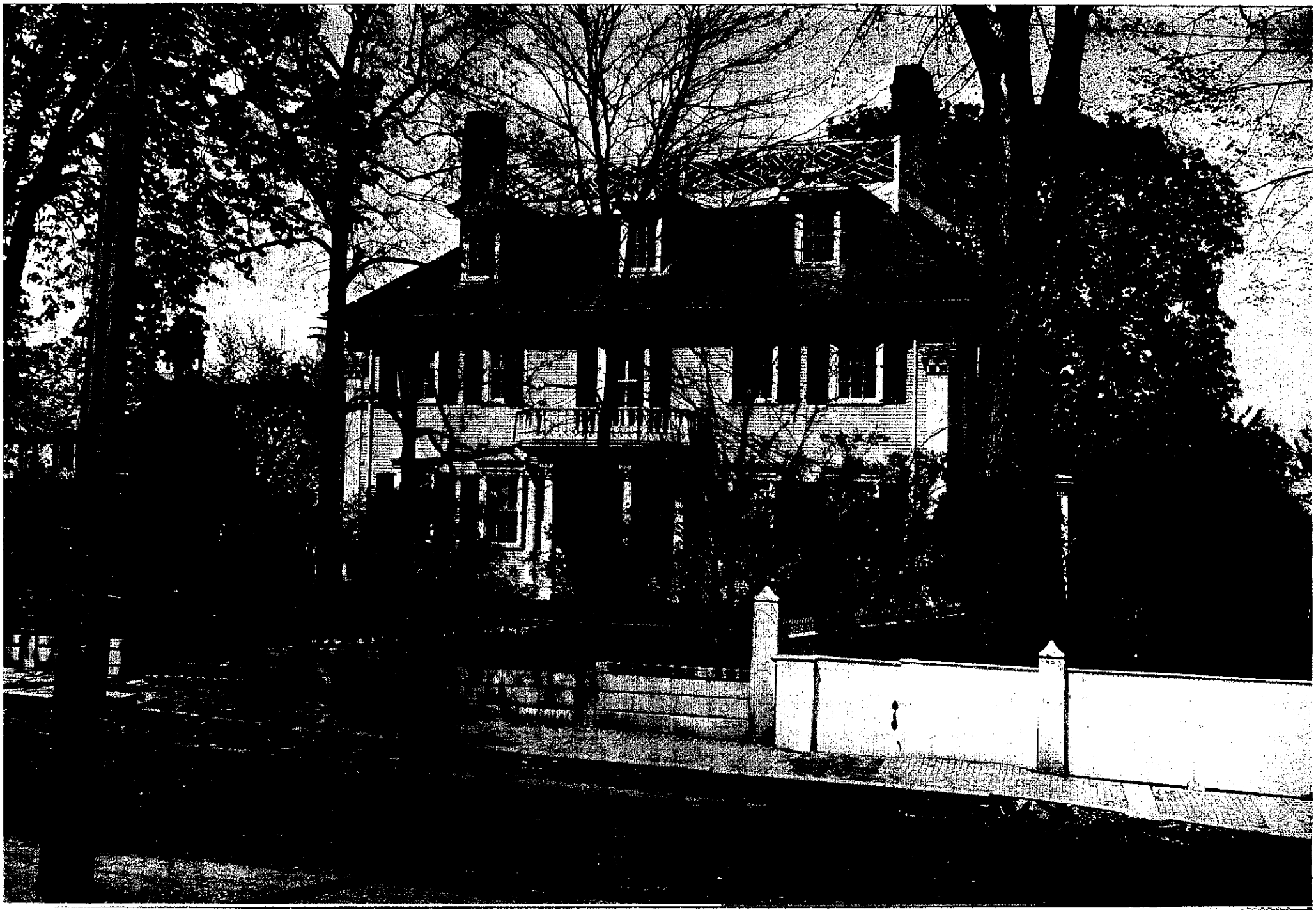
Fig. 7. Meserve-Webster House, Portsmouth. Built ca. 1760 by Michael Whidden III, the house was occupied by George Meserve, who acted briefly as stamp master for New Hampshire; and, later, by Daniel Webster. (Patch Photograph Collection.)



United States." Following the Revolution, Whidden and another master joiner named Daniel Hart designed and built the John Langdon House *(Fig. 8),* one of the most imposing mansions in Portsmouth and the last great dwelling in the Georgian style.[19] Thus, there is a direct genealogical and stylistic connection between the first great Portsmouth house in the Georgian style, that of Archibald Macpheadris, and the last, that of John Langdon. Such amazing continuity existed in the joiner's craft in Portsmouth during the eighteenth century that some of the same tools may have been used to shape the woodwork of these two houses.

The same continuity extended to the other major branch of the joiner's craft, that of ships' joinery. Portsmouth, like other New England seaports, is rife with legends of "ships' carpenters" working on houses and imparting a few nautical quirks to the dwellings they built. Natural shrinkage of the heavy frames of old houses produces settlement away from the solid masonry of chimneys, and the resulting sagging of doors and panelling is described in such folklore as a deliberate attempt by joiners to simulate in dwelling houses the effects of ships' cabins. Similarly, house balustrades are likened to ships' rails. The frames of eighteenth-century houses even become transformed in such tales to something very much akin to ships' frames, which they certainly are not. However inaccurate such legends may be, the fact remains that joiners, as well as most other craftsmen, often did work on both houses and ships. Michael Whidden III and Daniel Hart, the joiners who designed and finished John Langdon's house, were also employed by Langdon on the seventy-four gun *America,* a ship-of-the-line completed in 1782 at Langdon's shipyard.[20]

This dual role demonstrates the versatility of Portsmouth joiners, and at the same time implies a uniformity of standards in all joiner's work, whether on ships or in buildings. Verbal descriptions of some of the best Piscataqua vessels of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries suggest that the woodwork in these long-destroyed ships may have surpassed any that survives on land. Furthermore, the availability of joiner's work in the shipyards of tidewater towns may help to explain the superior quality of the woodwork in the dwellings of those towns: a country joiner could



turn only to farming or other labor when the need for his skills slackened, but the urban craftsman could often find work on a vessel, and, by spending a greater proportion of his time at his craft, might enhance his skills.

The ability to work on both buildings and ships extended quite logically to carvers. One remarkable family, the Dearings, dominated the craft of woodcarving in the Piscataqua region for three generations, from the early-eighteenth to the early-nineteenth century. Hitherto recognized mainly as ships' carvers, these men are now known to have executed architectural embellishment as well. The last of the Dearing carvers in the Piscataqua area was William, who died in 1813. He not only did carving for the vessels *Portsmouth* (1798), *Merrimack* (1798), *Congress* (1799) and *Warren* (1799), but also sculpted at least one bas-relief and several short-lived effigy figures, and carved the capitals for the New Hampshire Fire and Marine Insurance Company office (1804), St. John's Church (1807) *(Fig. 9)*, and the Portsmouth Academy (1809). This work, combined with his other known or attributed ship and architectural carving, shows William Dearing to have been a craftsman of major importance — a man equally adept at carving a composite capital for a column on one of Portsmouth's greatest buildings or an allegorical figurehead for the proudest product of a Piscataqua shipyard.

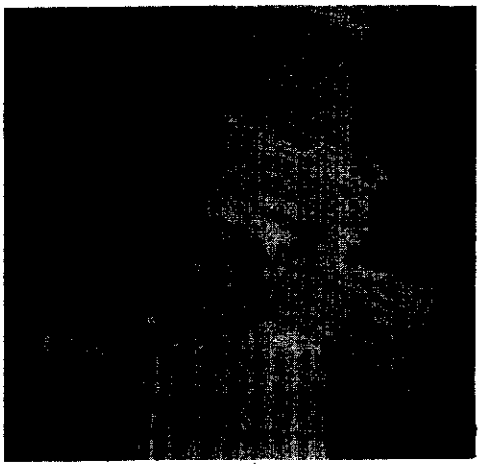


Fig. 9. Detail of Ionic capital, St. John's Church, Portsmouth, carved by William Dearing in 1807. (Courtesy of the author.)

The continuity of certain crafts in several generations of Piscataqua families such as the Whiddens and the Dearings suggests that each family limited itself to one trade, transmitting that trade rigidly from father to son. This is not entirely true. Eighteenth-century families were often large, and it was frequently impractical for a father to keep all his sons at home when they could be ap-

prenticed to other men. Therefore, it should not be surprising that several of the Whiddens became blacksmiths or other tradesmen instead of joiners, or that of William Dearing's four brothers, only one was a carver.

Sometimes a father's death caused a break in a family's craft tradition. This was the case with George Gains, one of Portsmouth's leading craftsmen at the middle of the eighteenth century. Gains' father was John Gains, a well-known turner or lathe worker *(Fig. 10)* who had come to Portsmouth from Ipswich in 1724. John Gains' father had likewise been a turner. However, George Gains, left fatherless at seven, was apprenticed to a cabinetmaker and later became a joiner. While this apprenticeship ended the craft of turning among the Gains family, it began a new tradition, for one of George Gains' sons and two of his nephews became joiners.

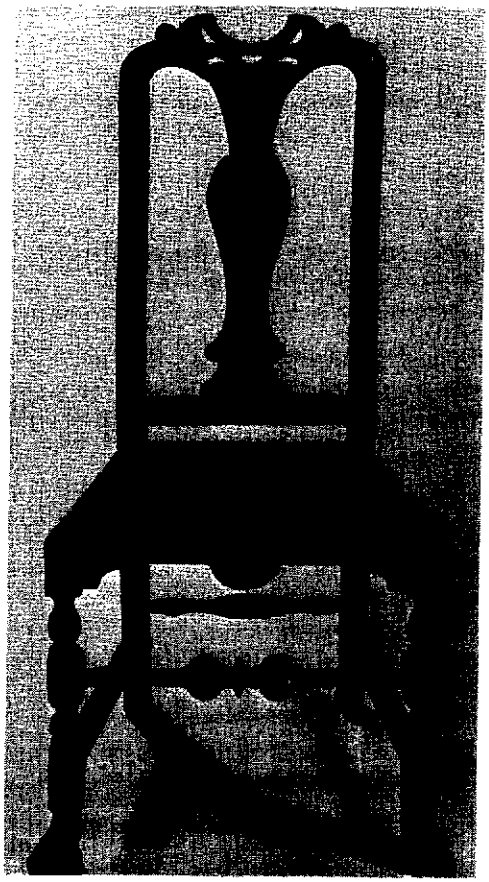


Fig. 10. Side chair, maple, probably Portsmouth, ca. 1730, attributed to John Gains (1704-1743). (Prentis Collection, NHHS; photograph by Bill Finney.)

The life of George Gains also illustrates a phenomenon sometimes seen among the more enterprising craftsmen of the Piscataqua. Beginning about 1764, when he was twenty-eight, Gains began to devote more and more time to public affairs, gradually giving up his trade altogether. As a leading patriot, Gains was "so unremittingly employed in attentions to the interests of America, as left him but few moments to spare for his private concerns" from 1765 to 1773.[21] In 1771 Gains became a selectman of Portsmouth, and held the office for more than thirty years. He served nearly that long as a representative to the General Court of New

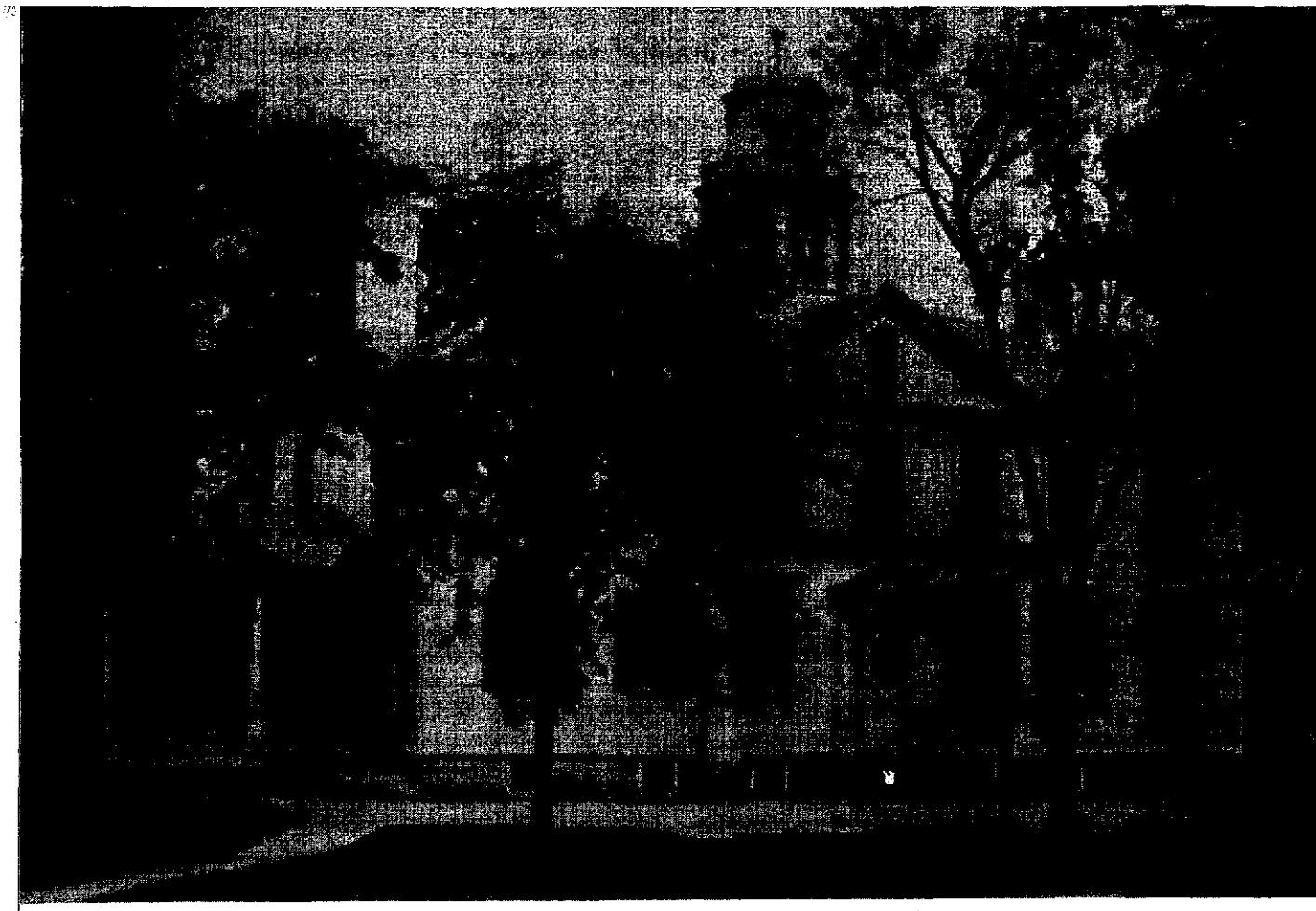


Fig. 11. Second Phillips Exeter Academy building, completed 1794, Ebenezer Clifford and Bradbury Johnson, architects. The building was destroyed by fire in 1870. (Courtesy of Phillips Exeter Academy.)

Hampshire, and helped to design the state seal. During this long period of public service, his former prestige as a craftsman was not forgotten in Portsmouth, and he was placed in charge of the construction of such important town buildings as the Jail (1782) and the Market House (1800).

After the Revolution, a new generation of craftsmen began to emerge. During the period just before 1800, when all of New England seemed to be gathering its energies for a great resurgence in architecture and the decorative arts, one of the leading innovators in the Piscataqua region was Ebenezer Clifford of Exeter. Joiner, architect, legislator and manufacturer, Clifford personified the confidence and energy of the young United States. Like George Gains, Clifford engaged enthusiastically in the affairs of his town and state; unlike Gains, however, Clifford continued in business as a joiner and cabinetmaker. He also supplied plans for a number of buildings in or near Exeter. In 1791, he was involved in the construction of the Exeter Courthouse, a "small but neat

Building of two Stories." Three years later, the Phillips Exeter Academy built a new wooden building *(Fig. 11)* "according to a plan of the same drawn by Ebenezer Clifford Esq." And in 1798, Clifford participated in the design of the First Parish meetinghouse in Exeter, described in its own day as "the most elegant in the state." Clifford's activities for the year 1803 included drawing plans for the Atkinson Academy near Exeter, serving as the Exeter agent for "Kennedy's Patent Window Springs," and making a descent in a diving bell which he developed in collaboration with a carpenter from Dover![22]

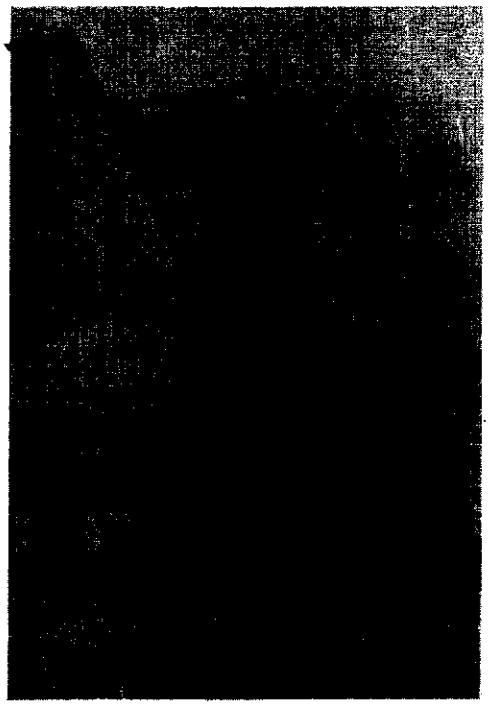
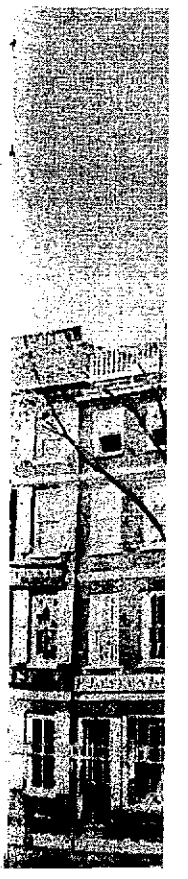


Fig. 12. Portsmouth Market House (at left), built 1800. Bradbury Johnson was master joiner and probably architect. (Courtesy of Dr. Dorothy M. Vaughan.)

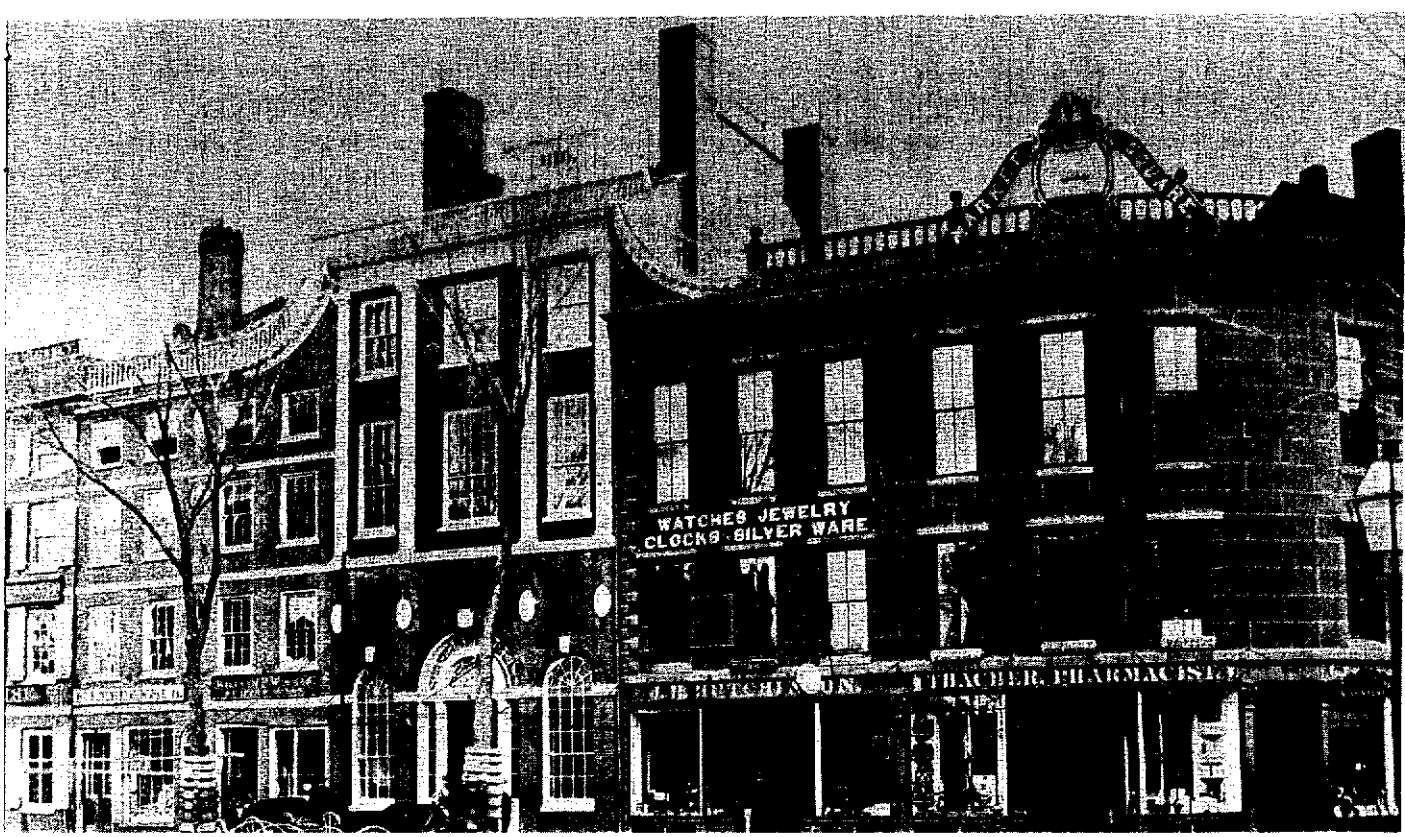
Clifford's influence was not limited to the environs of Exeter. From 1793 until 1802, he was associated with Bradbury Johnson, who was to become the most gifted builder-architect of the Piscataqua region. Johnson, who was involved in the design of both the Phillips Exeter Academy building and the Exeter meetinghouse, was not long content with the solid, old-fashioned Palladian design that these structures embodied. He responded quickly to the new Federal style evolving in Boston — a style characterized by lightness, delicacy, and attenuation. In 1800, Johnson was the master joiner and probably the architect of the Portsmouth Market House *(Fig. 12)*, one of the handsomest such buildings in New England and a structure fully within the new style. Then, in 1802, Johnson moved to Saco, where he designed and built Maine's largest meetinghouse, also in the Federal style. In 1804, following a disastrous fire in Portsmouth, Johnson was engaged to design the New Hampshire Fire and Marine Insurance Company building, now the Portsmouth



Athenaeum *(Fig. 13)*. One of the finest remaining buildings of its period in northern New England, the Athenaeum is particularly interesting as the focal point of a unified architectural composition consisting of eight commercial structures, all of which were probably designed by Johnson.[23]

The joiner's work on the Portsmouth Athenaeum was executed by twenty-nine-year-old James Nutter, soon to become "the head of his craft" in Portsmouth. Like Clifford and Johnson, Nutter was both skilled and versatile. At the age of twenty, his apprenticeship just completed, Nutter helped to construct the Piscataqua Bridge, which was considered one of the engineering marvels of its day. After completing the woodwork of the Athenaeum, Nutter worked as the master joiner of St. John's Church, constructed during 1807.[24] In that year, he boarded at the Chase House, now in the Strawbery Banke project, and probably executed the delicate trim of the Federal parlor there. Nutter, like Clifford and Johnson, began to design buildings, supplying the plans for the

Fig. 13. Portsmouth Athenaeum, completed 1804. Bradbury Johnson, architect; James Nutter, master joiner; William Dearing, carver. Originally the New Hampshire Fire and Marine Insurance Company building, the structure was the focal point of a unified architectural composition. (Courtesy of Portsmouth Athenaeum.)



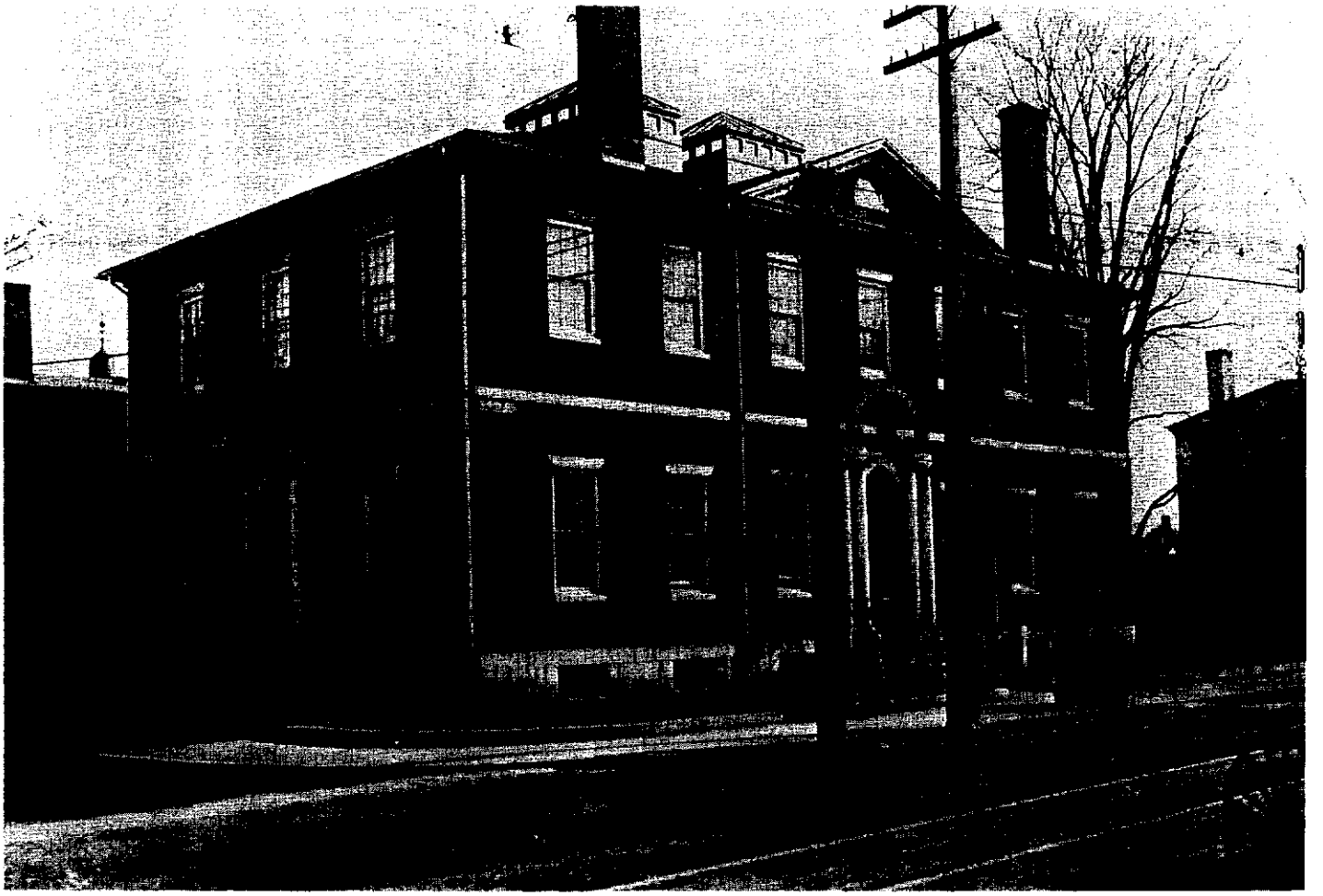


Fig. 14. Portsmouth Public Library, built 1809, James Nutter, architect. The building was originally constructed as the Portsmouth Academy. (Patch Photograph Collection.)

shop of John Melcher, printer, in 1803; for a building of John Frothingham, tallowchandler, in 1808; and certainly for his own house, built on School Street in 1809. In 1809, too, Nutter designed the building that must be regarded as his masterpiece: the Portsmouth Academy *(Fig. 14)*, now the Public Library.[25]

A surprising number of the structures built by Piscataqua craftsmen still survive, and provide the best index of the manner in which artisans, as well as merchants and government officials, actually passed their lives. The architecture of the region, while seldom the most innovative, nevertheless ranks second to none in good design, regional expression, and skillful execution.

Most craftsmen lived simply and many died in debt. A few, however, through good luck, skill, and business acumen, were able to amass respectable fortunes. Such a man was Langley Boardman *(Fig. 15)*. Born in Ipswich, Boardman began to advertise himself as a cabinetmaker in Portsmouth in 1798, but one

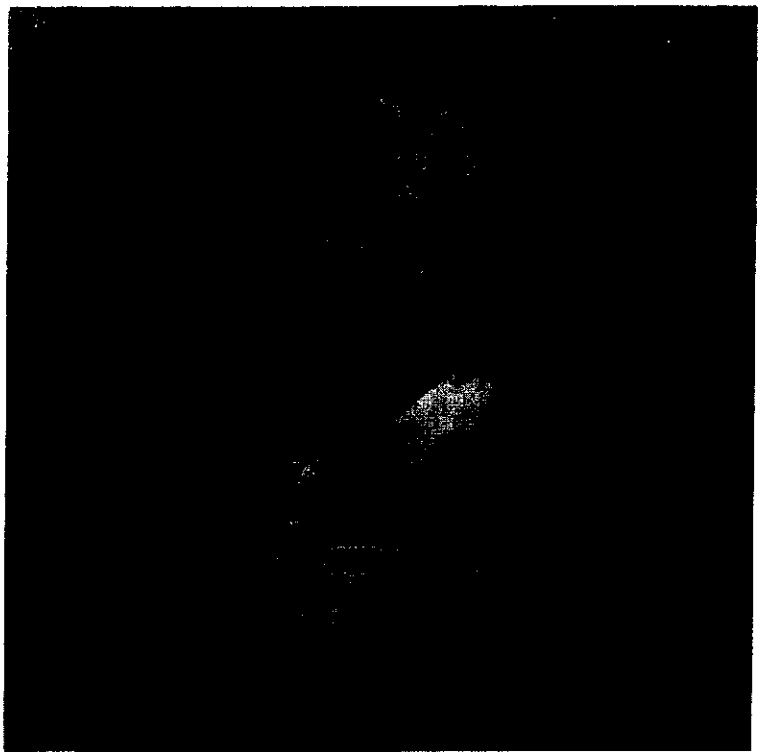


Fig. 15. Langley Boardman (1774-1833), oil on canvas, artist unknown. (Collection of the Portsmouth Historical Society; photograph, Patch Photograph Collection.)

year later left for the vicinity of Salem. There, doubtless, he mastered the newest style of furniture-making, a style that had by then reached perfection in Salem and Boston. After Boardman's return to Portsmouth about 1802, his business appears to have flourished, and his prosperity to have increased greatly. He soon became the owner of a number of valuable buildings and lots of land, and built a house in the style of the dwellings of Salem. Boardman's success was accompanied by an increasing interest in public affairs; he became president of the New Hampshire Mechanic Association, president of the Piscataqua Bank, and a state senator. As his obituary states, he "was one of that small number who, when wealth increases, do not abandon their trades."[28] He employed an ever-increasing number of men in his cabinet shop, and lived to make the transition from furniture in the Federal style, which brought him prosperity, to furniture in the "Grecian" or Empire style.

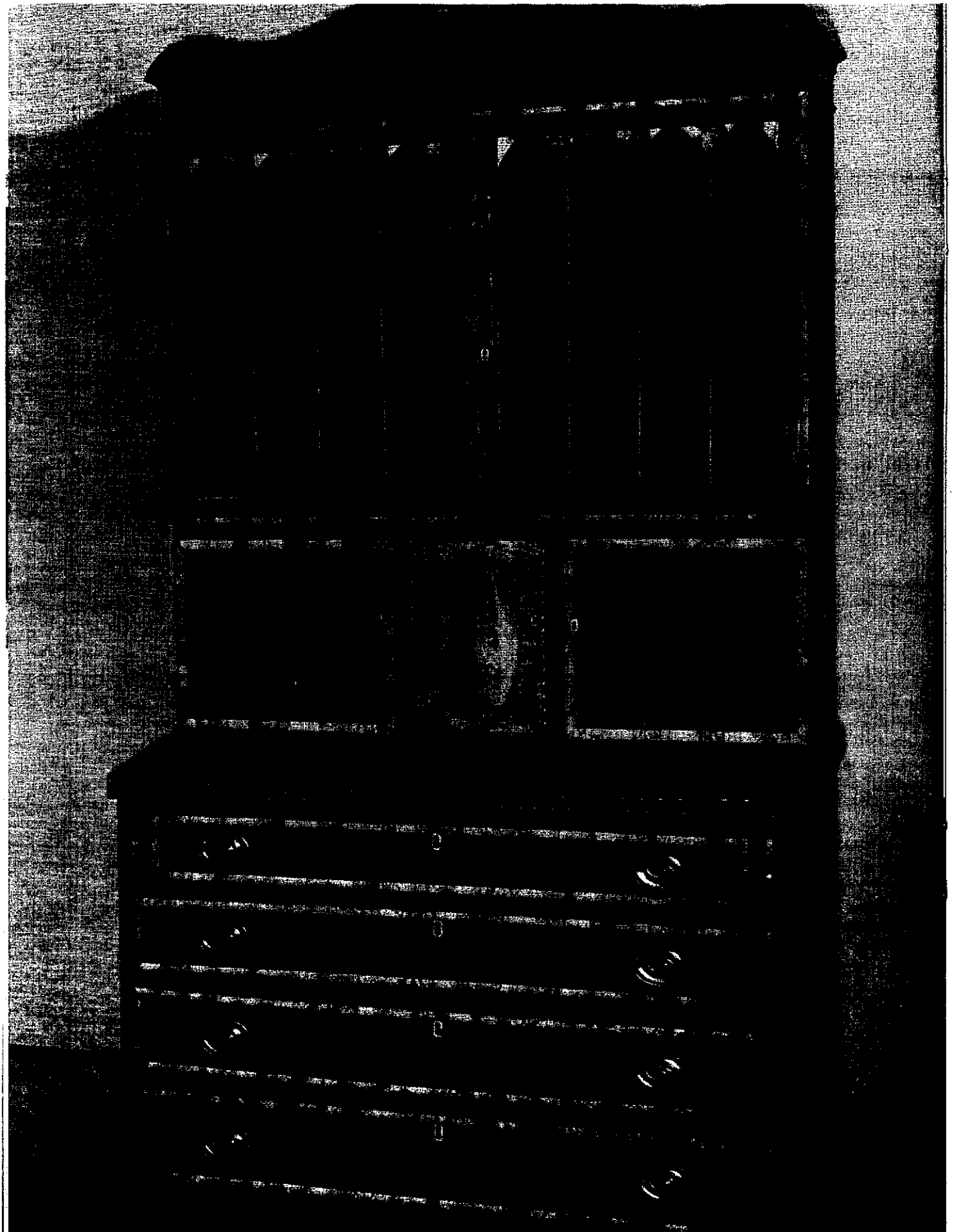


Fig. 16. Desk-and bookcase, mahogany with inlaid decoration, probably Portsmouth area, ca. 1810. (NHHS Collections; photograph by Bill Finney.)

The furniture of the Piscataqua region has been inadequately studied, and only a few minor signed or labelled pieces are known. Those pieces that can be firmly attributed to the area, however, often reveal both sophistication and originality. In the Federal period, especially, Piscataqua furniture is of a distinct regional type, frequently characterized by the use of light veneers of native burl birch or of more exotic woods, and by certain preferences in furniture forms. Attributed to the Portsmouth area are, for example, a number of sofas and settees that follow a particularly refined Sheraton design. Many secretaries or desks-and-bookcases with Gothic lancet windows in the upper section *(Fig. 16)* appear in the Piscataqua region, and share certain characteristics with a large number of chests-of-drawers also from this area. These pieces all have unusually straight and elongated French feet, a dropped panel in the center of their skirts, and a heavy reinforcement, formed by a diagonal cut on the backboards, for the rear feet.

Whatever may be the difficulties in identifying Piscataqua cabinetwork today, it is certain that great quantities of furniture were once made in the region, and that much of it was exported. A British customs report reveals that between January 1, 1771, and January 1, 1772, Piscataqua ports shipped 9 cases of drawers, 562 chairs, 103 desks and 35 tables to the West Indies. These pieces totalled 50% more than the listed exports of Philadelphia, the nearest competitor in the West Indies trade, and were equivalent to almost 90% of the exports of the entire remainder of New England![27] Moreover, many of these "venture cargoes" of exported furniture travelled northward as well as to the Caribbean; Portsmouth, like Boston, developed a considerable furniture trade with Newfoundland. Chairs made up the bulk of Piscataqua furniture exports and, even as late as the Revolution, were probably of a simplified type derived from the high-style furniture of 1710 to 1715.[28]

There are no examples remaining to exemplify one of the major categories of Piscataqua craft production. The ships of the region survive only in the form of models, paintings, written descriptions, and legend. It is certain, however, that this area produced some of the finest vessels ever launched in North America,

and that there were Piscataqua craft that equalled or surpassed their European competitors. The Piscataqua fleet was a large one: by 1697, there were eleven ships, five brigantines, four ketches and four sloops owned in the district. Piscataqua's leading merchant, the elder William Pepperrell, had some thirty-five fishing vessels on the Grand Banks at the time of his death in 1734.[79] The decade preceding the Revolution was especially prosperous: in one season alone, the area produced forty-five vessels, and in 1771 the Piscataqua built an estimated 17% of the entire American production of ships. After the Revolution, shipping from Portsmouth and its vicinity fluctuated, but in 1800 the commerce of the town employed twenty-eight ships, forty-seven brigs, ten schooners, two sloops and one bark, plus twenty coasting vessels and a still greater number of fishing boats. The Jeffersonian embargo caused serious hurt to the mercantile interests of the area, but shipbuilding revived during the privateering days of the War of 1812 and the Piscataqua later became famous as the birthplace of many record-holding clippers.[80]

A number of noteworthy ships were built beside the waters of the Piscataqua or near the rivers of Great Bay. Prior to the Revolution the British government ordered several Piscataqua vessels for the Royal Navy, including the *Falkland* in 1690, the *Bedford-Galley* in 1696, and the fifty-gun *America,* built by Colonel Nathaniel Meserve in 1749. Thirty-three years later, in 1782, another *America* was launched upon the Piscataqua — this time a great seventy-four-gun ship-of-the-line, the first built for the new Republic. Other famous Revolutionary vessels were built on the island opposite Portsmouth: the *Raleigh,* constructed in 1776 in exactly *sixty days,* and the *Ranger,* launched a year later and commanded by John Paul Jones. All three of these Revolutionary vessels were built under the supervision of James Hackett of Exeter, one of the leading craftsmen of the day. No less impressive were the several vessels built for the United States government just before 1800, again by Hackett. The *Crescent,* "the finest specimen of naval architecture that ever floated on the waters of the Piscataqua,"[81] was deliberately built to surpass every example of European shipbuilding and was presented as a tribute to the

Dey of Algiers. The *Portsmouth* and the revenue cutter *Scammel* protected American shipping during a period of tension between the United States and France. The *Congress,* built in 258 days, was heralded as "vastly superior to any European ships, and equal to the very first stile of American building . . . the Non Pareil," and as the harbinger of still greater ships to be built on the river. "Whose workmanship will compare with Hackett's," the *New-Hampshire Gazette* proudly asked. "What naval constructor could show a prouder list?"[32]

Houses, furniture, ships — these were the great products of the Piscataqua. But there were other crafts and other products, each worthy of extended study. Objects of silver and gold, fine carriages, naval stores, castings of brass and iron, and a myriad of small watercraft like the famous Piscataqua gundalow — the list of items produced by Piscataqua men for their own area or for export is endless. Here was a rich culture indeed, capable of supplying nearly all of its varied wants.

Social and Cultural Institutions

The vitality of the Piscataqua region was reflected in a number of social and cultural institutions that developed during the eighteenth century. Like many larger towns, Portsmouth boasted hospitable coffeehouses. At the Crown or Calder's, men gathered in their leisure moments and presumably discussed the world's affairs with as much spirit as was evident in the Cocoa–Tree or Lloyd's in London. While Portsmouth lacked a formal theatre until about 1800, the dramatic arts were nevertheless nurtured in the town. In 1769, John Stavers, proprietor of the Earl of Halifax Hotel, opened his "large Room," which was commonly used as a Masonic lodgeroom, for

> an OPERA, call'd Love in a Village. The SONGS will be SUNG, By a Person who has Read and Sung in most of the great Towns in America. He personates all the Characters, and enters into the different Humours or Passions, as they change from one to another throughout the Opera.[33]

Other musical presentations, plays and recitations were given at Stavers' and, later, at the Assembly House in Portsmouth.

In 1772, William S. Morgan, who honored himself with the impressive title of "musico-therico," announced that he, too, was "preparing a large Room" in Pitt Street, just a block from Stavers' hotel. Noting that *"Children like tender Oziers take the Bow,/ And as they first are fashion'd, so they grow,"* Morgan announced that he would open an Oratorical Academy "wherein, not only the principles of Music, Dancing, and Fencing, will be taught in the genteelest Taste, but likewise, a thorough Attention will be paid to the Minds and Morals of the pupils."[84]

Among the social functions that seem to have been especially emphasized in the Piscataqua were the dancing parties or Assemblies of Portsmouth. These gatherings, which developed into a long-lived institution, probably originated as a vehicle for display among the richer classes, and were always carried out with a strict punctilio and regard for custom. Some young ladies and gentlemen were prepared for their entrance into the social world of the Assemblies *(Fig. 17)* in the private academy of William Morgan. In the *New-Hampshire Gazette* of 1772, Morgan promised that his pupils would receive instruction "in the strictest Rules of that Politeness of Behaviour and Propriety of Manners, so highly necessary for their Acquaintance with genteel Assemblies."[85]

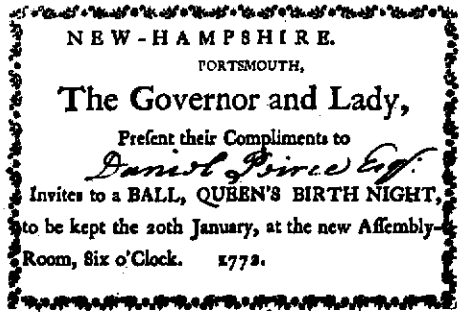

NEW-HAMPSHIRE.
PORTSMOUTH,
The Governor and Lady,
Preſent their Compliments to
Daniel Pierce Eſq.
Invites to a BALL, QUEEN'S BIRTH NIGHT,
to be kept the 20th January, at the new Aſſembly-
Room, Six o'Clock. 1772.

Fig. 17. Governor's invitation to a ball at the Portsmouth Assembly House, 1772. (Courtesy of Portsmouth Athenaeum.)

Perhaps for lack of such preparation, many an applicant for admittance to these dances was blackballed. Held for decades in the elaborate Assembly House built by Michael Whidden III especially for them, the Assemblies

> were eight in number, occurring once a fortnight and [in the Federal period] followed by a Ball on Washington's birthday. Every gentleman must appear in the prescribed costume: — knee breeches, silk stockings, pumps, blue coat with bright buttons and

white kid gloves. The ladies wore feathers (three, a la Prince of Wales) and low dresses of silk, satin and velvet. There were two managers, who with powdered head and chapeau under left arm, looked the personification of power and dignity.[86]

Negro slavery developed into an important institution in Portsmouth. As early as 1727, in fact, there were fifty-two slaves in the town, one house in seven having at least one such servant.[87] The following year, it was voted that all male "Negro, Indian & Mulattoe Slaves" be valued (for tax purposes) at £20 per head,[88] although later in the century £40 to £50 seems to have been the usual evaluation. The peak of servitude must have occurred around 1767, when 187 slaves (124 male, 63 female), amounting to 4% of the population, were listed for Portsmouth.[89] After the Revolution, a number of slaves were given their freedom, though many, like the servants of the elder William Pepperrell, had been manumitted years earlier. Some of these freed slaves and their descendants became distinguished citizens. Hopestill Cheswill, the mulatto son of Richard Cheswill, a full-blooded Negro, was a housewright of some note in the mid-eighteenth century, and is credited with having framed many of Portsmouth's gambrel-roofed dwellings. Hopestill's son, Wentworth, became a leading citizen of Newmarket and a state senator. Many other "persons of color," both slave and free, became skilled craftsmen and made important contributions to the society of southeastern New Hampshire.

Freemasonry was a significant, although somewhat hidden, social force in eighteenth-century America, especially after the Revolution. This was nowhere more true than in Portsmouth, where St. John's Lodge, No. 1, was founded in 1736. Beginning in 1766, the Masons met in a specially-designed lodgeroom in the tavern of John Stavers, and in 1789, after the number of lodges throughout the state had increased sufficiently, the Grand Lodge of New Hampshire was founded in this chamber.

Researchers have traced the influence of Freemasonry in early America in numerous areas, including the decorative arts, architecture, the formation of political parties, and religion. It is certain that, in eighteenth-century Portsmouth, a significant proportion of the adult male population were Masons; St. John's

Lodge alone listed 416 members before 1800.[40] A contemporary account of the laying of the cornerstone for St. John's Church (1807) indicates the respect accorded to the Masonic bodies of New Hampshire. More than 5,000 people were present for this great occasion — the equivalent of nearly 80% of the population of Portsmouth at the time! One can picture the ceremonies that took place on that June day as a majestic procession, including military, civil, and Masonic officers, wound its way through a triumphal arch decorated with the symbolic devices so popular in the early days of the Republic. After impressive preparations, the cornerstone was laid "in ample Masonic form," not by the dignitaries of the Episcopal Church, but by the Grand Master and other officers of the Grand Lodge of New Hampshire.[41]

The concept of a public library as a necessary social institution was nurtured in Portsmouth long before the Revolution. Until the mid-eighteenth century, the town had had only private libraries, the most extensive of which were doubtless those of clergymen. But in August 1750 a number of the wealthiest and best-educated of Portsmouth's citizens banded together as "The Library Society of Portsmouth," each man subscribing a certain amount toward the purchase of books for the group's common use. In time, over one hundred and fifty volumes were acquired. Since many were supplied through the offices of the Reverend Arthur Browne, there was a natural preponderance of religious works in Portsmouth's first "public" library. Nevertheless, books on antiquities, history, chemistry, astronomy, classics, biography, medicine, fiction, mathematics, natural history, geography, husbandry and philosophy were included.[42] The "Portsmouth Social Library," as it came to be called, appears to have enjoyed enthusiastic support for over thirty-five years. It was finally dissolved in 1795, but its place was taken by the "Portsmouth Library," a similar institution, and, later, by the Portsmouth Athenaeum.

Architecture of the Piscataqua

Few expressions of a culture reveal more than its architecture, for few are at once so basic, so complex, so dependent upon uni-

fied group action, and yet so bound up with personal status, pride, and taste. The architecture of the Piscataqua region before 1830 may be divided into three stylistic periods. The first, extending from 1630 until about 1715, is often termed "late mediaeval," or, more simply, "first period." The second, dating from 1715 until 1785, may be called "Palladian" or "Georgian." And the third period, extending from 1785 until 1825, is aptly referred to as "Federal."

When the first settlers sent by Mason and Gorges arrived in Piscataqua in 1630, they quickly provided themselves with housing. Two "Great Houses" were built and were, except for David Thomson's dwelling at Pannaway and some structures at Dover Point, the first substantial examples of European building in the area. The best-known great house was built in 1631 by Humphrey Chadbourne at Strawbery Banke; parts of it stood until after 1700. The second such building was at Newichawannock, now South Berwick, Maine. It was palisaded and served to sustain the sawmill built at Great Works River by Ambrose Gibbons and William Chadbourne. Thomson's old stone house at Pannaway, now Odiorne's Point, Rye, was taken over and improved by the Masonian settlers, and was sometimes referred to as a third great house.

What were these first buildings like? Some have felt that they were built on the plan of the English manor house, but this is true only in the primitive sense. The term "Great House" was used in the seventeenth century to describe a type of structure that was finding wide application in an age of exploration and settlement: a large building that combined the functions of dormitory, kitchen, storeroom, workshop and fort for a large "household" of settlers. One such structure built at Richmond Island, Maine, in 1634, had

> 2 Chambers in him, and all our men lies in on of them, & every man hath his Close borded Cabbin [bunk] . . . & in the other Chamber I haue Rome Inough to put the ships sailes into and all our dry goods which is in Caske, and I haue a store house in him that will hold 18 or 20 tonnes of Caske Underneath: & a steward Rome that will hold 2 tonnes of Caske which we put our bread and beare into.[43]

Fig. 18. Jackson House, Portsmouth, 1664. Lean-to and end room are later additions. (Patch Photograph Collection.)

John Winthrop, Jr. drew a plan for a great house in Saybrook, Connecticut that was to have a "kitchin," a "pantrye," a "hall," a "larder," a "dayrye," and a servants' chamber enclosing eleven "cabbins." It may be assumed that the Piscataqua great houses were similiar to this accepted type.

Between the mid-seventeenth century and the early-eighteenth century, as new land was parcelled off to individual owners or as older tracts were subdivided, a number of private dwellings appeared throughout the Piscataqua region. Several of these survive, among them the Jackson House (1664) *(Fig. 18)* on Christian Shore in Portsmouth, and the Sherburne House (1695-1703) in the Strawbery Banke restoration project. By the late-seventeenth century, several types of dwellings were to be seen: two-room houses with end chimneys, four-room houses with central chimneys, houses with lean-tos included as part of the original design, houses with lean-tos added later to increase the original size of the structure, houses with and without gables in their roofs, houses with and without "jetties," or projecting upper stories.

There were also many of the "garrison houses" of the northern frontier — houses constructed of square-hewn or sawn timbers laid horizontally atop one another and interlocked at the corners. These buildings *(Fig. 19)* were either a story-and-a-half high or had a full, overhanging second story. They provided places of common refuge during the times of Indian trouble, and otherwise served as private dwellings or outbuildings. Their walls of solid wood, six or eight inches thick and pierced with small loopholes, were impervious to arrows and bullets and were surprisingly resistant to fire. The Piscataqua area is today the only place in New England where a number of examples of these wooden garrison houses survive, although buildings of the same type were also utilized in southern New England. Governor Thomas Hutchinson, in his *History of Massachusetts-Bay,* first published in 1764, has provided a good contemporary description of them. He wrote that

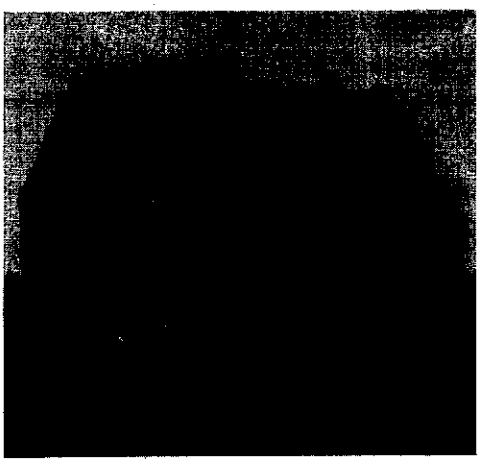


Fig. 19. Smith Garrison house, Dover, as depicted in a late 19th century oil painting. (NHHS Collections; photograph by Bill Finney.)

> in every frontier settlement there were more or less garrison houses, some with a flankart at two opposite angles, others at each corner of the house; some houses surrounded with pallisadoes, others, which were smaller, built with square timber, one piece laid horizontally upon another, and loop holes in every side of the house.[44]

A surviving timber garrison house may be seen at the Woodman Institute in Dover.

At about the time of the first settlement of New England, a new style of architecture, based on the designs of the Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio (1508-1580), was introduced into old England. It became the dominant style there throughout the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. A series of guidebooks, meant to assist the craftsman or amateur architect in mastering the complex style of Palladio, began to be published around

1715. Later, these same books stimulated the transmission of Palladian architecture to America.

As a result of the use of guidebooks, the Palladian or Georgian style in New England was usually expressed in details applied to the traditional small wooden buildings of the area. Because of the continuity of the joiner's craft within certain families and because of the changelessness of craft techniques in the Piscataqua area during the eighteenth century, guidebooks were especially important in stimulating innovation and embellishment. Thus, for example, the grand mantelpiece in the Governor Benning Wentworth Mansion derives directly from plate sixty-four in William Kent's *The Designs of Inigo Jones (Fig. 20),* a Palladian source-book published in 1727.

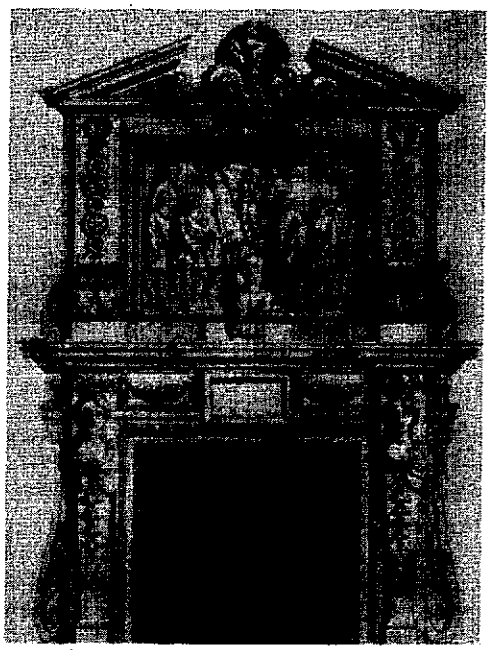


Fig. 20. William Kent, *The Designs of Inigo Jones* (1727). Plate 64 was the direct source for the mantelpiece in the Governor Benning Wentworth Mansion. (Photograph by the author.)

The first hints of the new style in the Piscataqua area appeared shortly after 1700. The harbingers of Palladianism were not elaborate mantelpieces or imposing balustraded stairways, nor did they derive from books. Rather, the advent of the architectural renaissance in New Hampshire was announced by the use of a few basic classical mouldings applied as cornices in rooms or as enframements around panels, and by the increasing use of panelling itself instead of vertical sheathing or plaster on walls. The earliest indications of the new style appear in the 1703 portion of the Sherburne House, in the Strawbery Banke restoration project, where a true classical cornice was used for the first time; in the 1705 Rogers House, where small bolection mouldings were applied to the doors; and in the 1705 Deer Tavern, where the summer beams were covered with wooden casings and embellished

with crown mouldings. About ten years later, the master joiner John Drew was creating the splendid panelling of the Macpheadris House in Portsmouth. So durable was the new style that Drew's grandson, Michael Whidden III, used many of the same concepts as well as the same mouldings seventy years later in the Langdon Mansion.

Palladian architectural forms were expressed at many levels of sophistication in the Piscataqua area. Not surprisingly, the style found its most erudite as well as its most lavish application in the houses of the wealthiest and most cosmopolitan patrons. The homes of the Pepperrells and the Wentworths, on opposite sides of the river, vied with one another as supreme expressions of the style before the Revolution. In the average house, however, the Palladian style found a more modest expression. Panelled walls, mantelpieces, crown mouldings or full cornices in the best rooms, and well-turned stairway balustrades were elements of the style that a craftsman, a prosperous mariner, or a farmer might expect to enjoy in his own home. And even the simplest dwelling might reflect that basic Palladian precept, symmetry.

The height of the Palladian style was marked by the construction of "double houses," which had two chimneys and a central hall. This arrangement actually doubled the floor space of the small, four-room, central-chimney dwelling that had been common since the seventeenth century. It also permitted the creation of grand hallways and staircases *(Fig. 21)*, and provided room for a spacious landing — often lighted by a large arched window — at the rear of the hall. In such halls, the varied arts of the turner, the joiner, the carver and the painter were combined to produce an effect that sometimes rivalled the grandeur of English Palladian mansions.

The same floor plan was used for most of the "double houses," but the similarities between these buildings were often disguised from the exterior. The use of the gable, hipped or gambrel roof gave a markedly-different aspect to houses that were, for practical purposes, identical. Thus, the Aldrich, Hart-Rice *(Fig. 22)* and Chase houses in Portsmouth differ little from one another in size and room arrangement, though they appear from the outside to represent three distinct types of buildings.

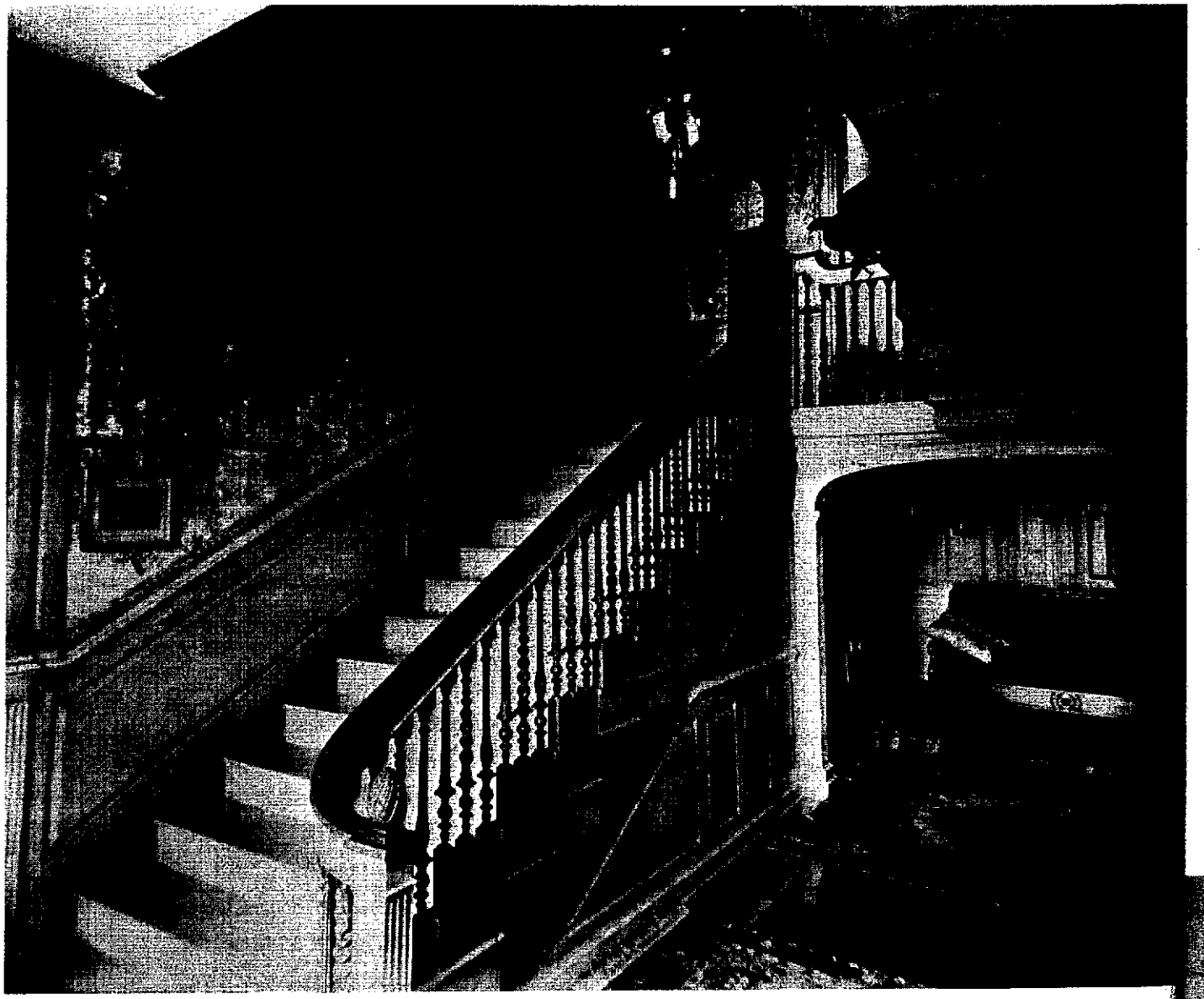


Fig. 21. Hallway, Sparhawk Hall, Kittery Point, ca. 1742. Built by Sir William Pepperrell, this house had one of the finest hallways in any double house in the Piscataqua region. (Patch Photograph Collection.)

By 1785, the Palladian style had reached its apex throughout New England, and was about to give way to a new style that was more truly American in its development and more spontaneous and inventive in its execution. The Federal style, as it came to be called, did have important English origins, but quickly became emancipated from them. Each part of the country began to develop regional versions of Federal architecture. In Massachusetts, Charles Bulfinch and Samuel McIntire were the leading innovators. In the Piscataqua, Bradbury Johnson and James Nutter were the master builder-architects. An idea of the contrast between Palladian and Federal styles may be gained from the Chase House in the Strawbery Banke project; the parlor *(Fig. 23)* with its mas-

sive cornice, elaborately-carved mantelpiece, deep window seats and panelled wainscoting, epitomizes the older style; while the delicate and simplified woodwork of the dining room *(Fig. 24)*, probably executed by James Nutter about 1807, expresses Federal taste at its best.

It was during the Federal period that the three-story house, one of the characteristic types of New England dwellings, found greatest favor along the Piscataqua. Three-story buildings had been known earlier — witness the 1763 Moffatt-Ladd House and the 1766 Earl of Halifax or William Pitt Tavern — but about the year 1800 fashion and wealth seem to have combined to produce a great increase in the numbers of these houses. Of the 626 dwellings in Portsmouth in 1798, 86 were of one story, 524 were of two stories, and only 16 were of three stories. Two years later, in 1800, the number of three-story houses had increased to 21, and in a few more years it had reached nearly 30.[45]

Fig. 22. Hart-Rice House, Portsmouth, ca. 1755 — a double house with a hipped roof and dormer windows. (Patch Photograph Collection.)

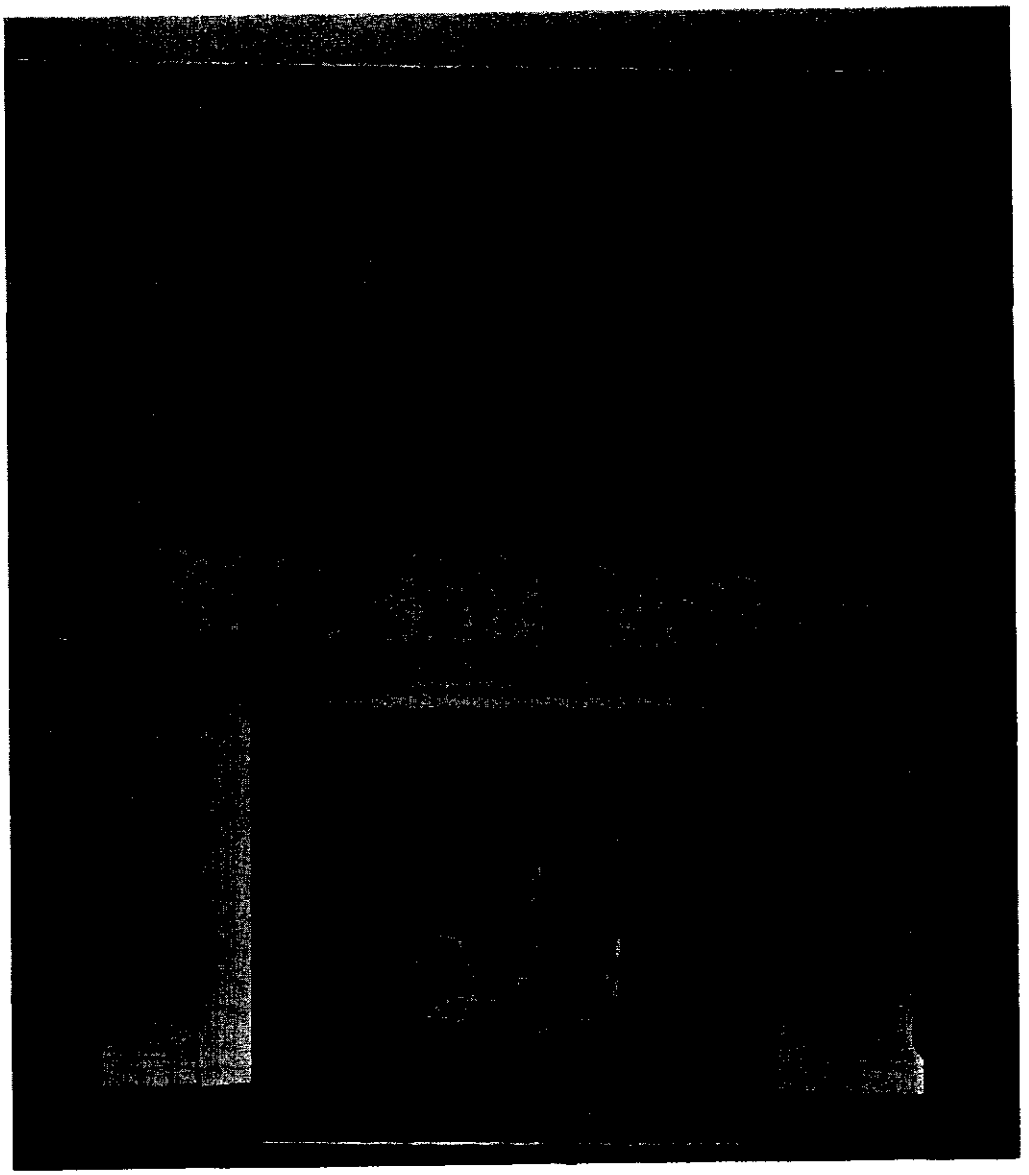


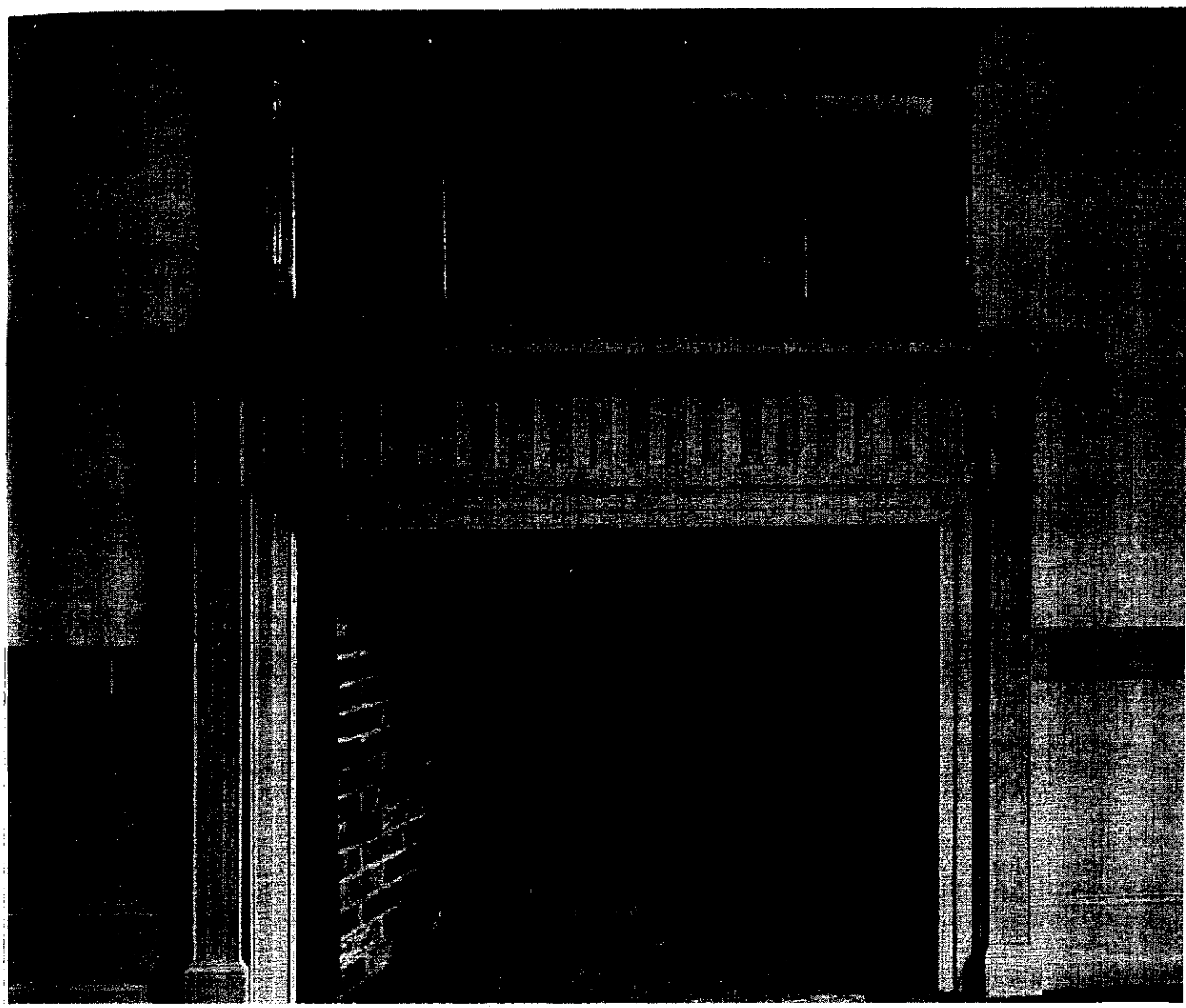
Fig. 23. Detail of parlor, Chase House, Portsmouth, ca. 1762. Mantel and overmantel are in the Palladian style. Carved frieze, attributed to the Dearing family, is one of several similar examples in Portsmouth. (Photograph by Douglas Armsden.)

The floor plans of Federal period houses varied more than had those of pre-Revolutionary dwellings. In one of the most common plans, the chimneys were increased to four in number and located on the outer walls of the building. Each chimney then accommodated three fireplaces, one on each floor, but was kept sufficiently small to avoid occupying too much floor space. Stairways often

took the form of a spiral or an ellipse, and stairhalls were frequently brightened by fanlights and sidelights around the front door. Doors were often ornamented by delicate porticos. Roofs were hipped, but were pitched extremely low and were further hidden by eaves balustrades. A typical house of the period is the Rundlet House of 1806-1809 *(Fig. 25)*.

During the Federal period, Portsmouth suffered three devastating fires that erased forever an important part of the Palladian architectural heritage of the Piscataqua. As a result of these con-

Fig. 24. Detail of dining room, Chase House, Portsmouth, ca. 1762. This Federal mantelpiece, with delicately reeded ornamentation, was installed in a remodeling ca. 1807, probably by joiner James Nutter. (Photograph by Douglas Armsden.)



flagrations, a number of local citizens urged the development of fireproof buildings. Fireproof construction was attempted in two ways: by building brick-walled structures, and by utilizing nearly flat roofs covered with a "composition" of pine pitch and gravel. Later, after several of these composition roofs had proved unable to withstand the heat of major fires, it was recommended that roofs be covered with slate, or with slate laid over copper sheathing.[48] The visitor to Portsmouth today will notice that nearly all the buildings in the center of town are, indeed, built of brick, and that many have slate roofs. The practice of building with brick, which persisted for many years, helped to sustain a growing brick-making industry that reached its height along the Piscataqua in the mid-nineteenth century and still survives today.

The Federal period was the last great era of prosperity in the Piscataqua region. While other areas saw the development of the Greek Revival style of architecture after about 1825, the Piscataqua remained quiescent. Hence, the area is noted today for the

Fig. 25. James Rundlet House, Portsmouth, 1806-1809, Ebenezer Clifford, master joiner. James Nutter built the fence and Langley Boardman supplied some of the furnishings. (Patch Photograph Collection.)

rich architectural reflection of its two greatest eras — the mid-eighteenth and the early-nineteenth centuries.

Town Planning in the Piscataqua Region

Although little thought has traditionally been given to town plans used in colonial America, the arrangement of houses, farms and roads can be an important index to the heritage of a community or a region. There is a marked difference between the town planning of Massachusetts and that of New Hampshire, for example, and this difference springs directly from a dissimilar history and pattern of settlement in the two regions.

The form of town plan used in Massachusetts and in areas settled under the authority of Massachusetts has often been cited as typical of New England, but it was not typical of much of New Hampshire. This type of town plan, known as a "nucleated" plan, presupposed a strong government under which individual interests were subordinate to those of the community as a whole. In such a town, all land was initially owned in common. The first step in laying out a nucleated village was usually the creation of a village green, a meetinghouse lot, and a schoolhouse lot. Then all members of the community were assigned house lots grouped about the village green. Thus the central green became the nucleus about which a compact community grew. As land was needed by the inhabitants, it was parcelled off in long strips according to type, with every man receiving upland, meadow, woodland, and, in coastal communities, salt marsh. The remainder of the land was always common land, retained by the town until it was needed.

Obviously, this kind of plan resulted in a strong focus on the center, where all houses and public buildings were located. Every farm was split into widely-separated units, with the woodlot some distance from the house and the pasture some distance from the woodlot. Men were compelled to live close together, leaving their compact village only during the daytime to labor on their various strips of land. The social order of many New England communities demanded this dependence upon the seat of government and religion. The nucleated village was typical of the older sections of Massachusetts, and it became characteristic of Puritan Con-

necticut, which was settled largely under the influence of Massachusetts.[47]

In New Hampshire the situation was different. Due to a number of factors, the nucleated type of village failed to become a universal pattern in the Piscataqua region. Of the four original towns of New Hampshire, only Hampton, settled by Massachusetts in 1638, showed a true nucleated plan. Exeter, founded by fugitives from Massachusetts, favored town ownership of undivided lands but failed to develop a single strongly-marked nucleus. The same was true of Portsmouth. When nuclear settlements did develop in the earliest towns of the Piscataqua, they generally did not become sufficiently permanent to shape the continuing growth of the towns, and little trace of them survives.

For many decades, New Hampshire's tidewater communities were held within their early boundaries by military, economic and political considerations. It was not until after 1720 that the hinterland was opened for settlement. When that time arrived, the concept of the nucleated village, which had never been important in New Hampshire, was not resuscitated. Generally, it was only in those New Hampshire towns that were originally settled under the jurisdiction of Massachusetts (like Penacook, later Concord) that any adherence to the nucleated type of town plan could be seen in the eighteenth century.

Most of the proprietors of the towns granted by the New Hampshire government during the 1720's were absentee owners. These men were chiefly speculators who intended to sell their property to anyone willing to settle on it. To accommodate such non-resident proprietors, a new land division system was developed. Areas laid out under this system may be termed "range townships." The division of a range township entailed the laying out of all (or a large portion) of the tract in extensive lots to be drawn by proprietors immediately and sold at their pleasure. Each lot was sufficient to sustain a normal farm. To connect these lots, which varied in size from forty to one hundred acres, a series of parallel roads called range roads was laid out in a grid across the township. Many of these roads can still be discerned on maps that include the eighteenth-century townships of eastern New Hampshire.[48]

New townships were usually surveyed, and the lots laid out, before any settlers arrived to take up land in the towns. While this method permitted the proprietors to exercise complete freedom in subdividing the land, it also meant that a rather artificial and abstract plan was imposed on the township before the nature of the terrain was accurately known. New Hampshire town records abound with the laments of unfortunate proprietors who discovered that the lots they had drawn embraced mountaintops or tangled woods instead of rich meadows or intervales.

Often, because of the difficulties of surveying in a wilderness, only one-third or one-half of a township was initially divided. The lots of these first divisions were referred to as home lots because it was expected that the proprietors would build houses on them within a few years. These home lots were as much as ten times the size of the tiny house lots of the Puritan nucleated village and bore no relation, save in name, to them. Subsequent divisions were made and assigned to the owners of the home lots, so that each received, in addition to his original tract, a second or third farm of about fifty to one hundred acres. Since the process of laying out the entire township into farm lots was accomplished either immediately or within a few years, no common land remained long under town control as it usually did in a nucleated village.

This system of land distribution militated against the growth of compact villages. The settlers did not travel to their land each day from a town center; they lived on it. While each of the eighteenth-century New Hampshire towns provided a lot for the church, the lot was often inconveniently far from those areas that became the most densely settled. This situation gave rise to endless disputes over alternate locations for the meetinghouse in many towns.

In the development of a town, the best proprietors' lots often were subdivided, and concentrations of houses sprang up in hamlets reminiscent of the nucleated villages of southern New England. Nevertheless, the New Hampshire range townships settled under the influence of the Piscataqua government do not contain the deliberately-planned compact settlements seen in Massachusetts or Connecticut. Rather, they generally exhibit a loose pat-

tern of occupancy and a regular grid of roads that reflect the traditions of the Piscataqua as truly as the nucleated villages to the south reflect those of Massachusetts Bay.

* * *

This, then, was the Piscataqua during its greatest period. Many years have passed since the last shipment of masts was loaded for the trip to England, or since the rasp of water-powered sawmills echoed in the woods of Berwick or Dover or Exeter. Seldom now is a ship launched upon the river, and seldom is a moulding plane guided along a piece of clear Piscataqua pine. Yet much remains. Change has come slowly in the early towns of the region. Here, still, are old houses both humble and pretentious. Here are churches and meetinghouses that were acclaimed in their own day as among the finest in America. Here are taverns in which relaxation gave way at times to the solemnity of Masonic meetings or to the stark reality of preparations for war. Here are rooms and shops where hundreds of forgotten lives were passed in earnest daily labor. Here, where it slowly grew to brilliance and slowly faded into obscurity, still remains the essence of the culture of the Piscataqua.

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[46]*Portsmouth Oracle,* Jan. 8, 1814. The use of either composition or slate for fireproofing had been urged in Boston at least as early as 1796.

[47]For a detailed discussion of the nucleated type of town plan, especially as it was used in Connecticut, see Anthony N. B. Garvan, *Architecture and Town Planning in Colonial Connecticut* (New Haven, 1951), chaps. 2, 3.

[48]A good example of a range township is Barrington. Many of the wealthiest residents of Portsmouth (and a good number of craftsmen) became proprietors of Barrington, although few settled there. Range townships were also introduced in southern New England in the early eighteenth century when expedience demanded them. See Garvan, *Architecture and Town Planning,* 61-72.