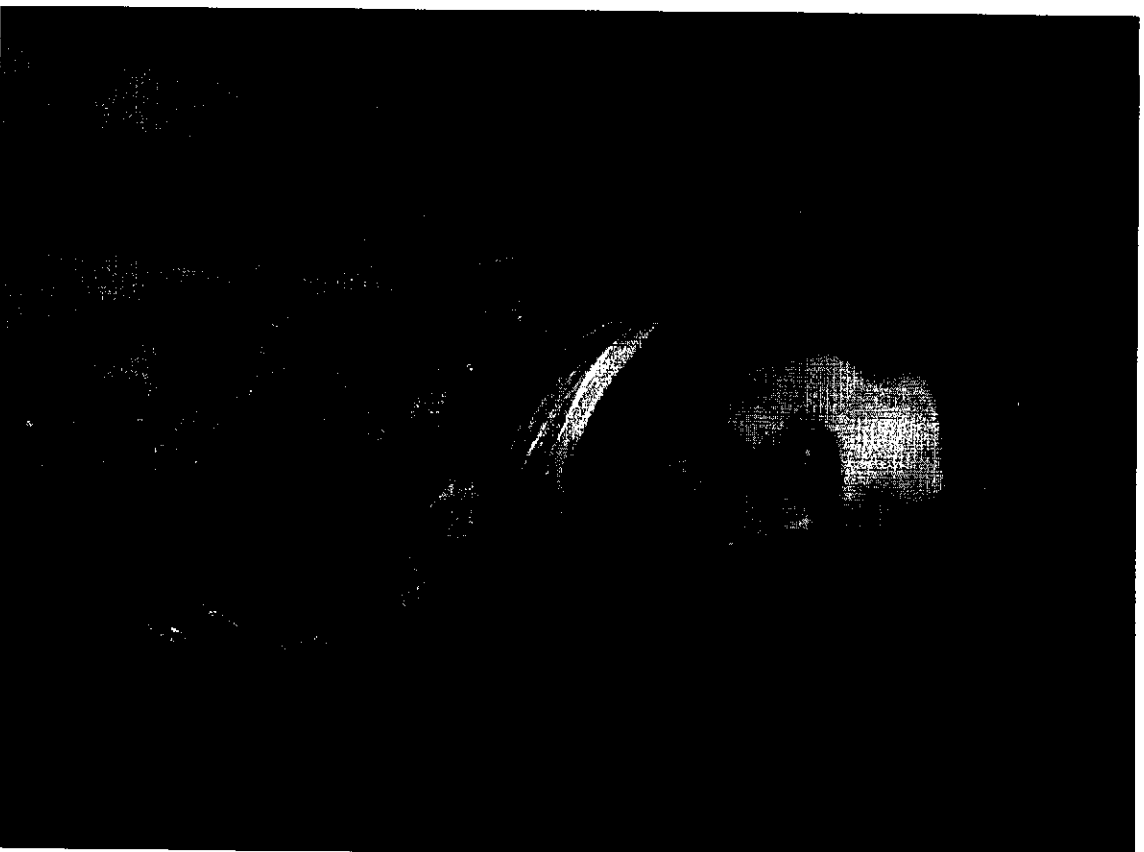


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America's First Summer Resort:
John Wentworth's 18th Century Plantation in
Wolfeboro, New Hampshire
edited by David R. Starbuck

Wentworth House: Design, Construction, and Furnishings

by James L. Garvin

There can be no doubt that Governor John Wentworth's estate in Wolfeboro was one of the largest and grandest private holdings in eighteenth-century North America. Wentworth's own statements, inventories of the contents of the house and outbuildings, maps, recollections, and the evidence of the site itself all testify to the grand scale of the house and grounds, and to Wentworth's still greater vision of what the estate would have become when completed. Political events denied the fulfillment of Wentworth's vision, and only this prevented Wentworth House from taking its place as the equal of the tidewater plantations of Maryland and Virginia.

Opening the Wilderness

Wentworth's own testimony as to what he planned and what he had already accomplished by the outbreak of the Revolution proves that the governor meant to pattern his estate on the Yorkshire seats he had seen during his sojourn in England. By combining the building of his estate with a visionary program of road-building and with the encouragement of settlement in interior New Hampshire, Wentworth put into action the first stages of a plan to make the province self-sufficient and prosperous—a condition largely attained by the early 1800s. It is clear that New Hampshire's prosperity as an agricultural society would have been achieved earlier and perhaps more purposefully if the Revolution had not drained the momentum from Wentworth's government-sponsored programs and from the ongoing private initiatives of the Masonian Proprietors, a group of investors who had obtained title to undeveloped lands within a great arc extending inland 60 miles from the sea. The Wolfeboro estate, planned as an architectural showpiece, a model farm, a junction for a highway network, and a magnet to attract inland development, thus represents a monument to eighteenth-century planning and to the vision of one of New Hampshire's greatest minds. Beyond this symbolic importance, the estate is now known to have represented the grandest and richest collection of material wealth in pre-Revolutionary New Hampshire.

The building of country estates was commonplace among the wealthy classes of eighteenth-century New England. Such estates once dotted the landscape around the large urban centers of Boston and Newport, Rhode Island. In New Hampshire, Lieutenant-Governor John Wentworth, Governor John's grandfather, had built a country house in Londonderry before 1728, but doubtless placed tenants there instead of occupying it himself, apparently doing the same in other towns where he had landholdings. Governor John's uncle, Benning Wentworth, routinely allocated to himself 500-acre "farms" in the scores of townships he granted. Benning Wentworth had an improved 300-acre farm on what is today called "Governor's Island" on Island Pond in Hampstead, though he probably spent no time there himself. Benning Wentworth did occupy a farm at Little Harbor, outside of the compact part of Portsmouth, beginning about 1753. When the provincial assembly refused to purchase the elegant brick Macphedra's house in Portsmouth, which Benning had long rented from his sister, the governor moved to Little Harbor and spent the rest of his life there. The pattern of life that Benning Wentworth displayed at Little Harbor was emulated by other members of the Portsmouth oligarchy. Many established farms in Greenland and Newington to provide food and provender for their town houses and escape from Portsmouth during the heat of summer. Many of Portsmouth's middling classes maintained farms in Barrington, which had been divided up among the capital's taxpayers in 1722, or in other townships a few miles inland.

By about 1770, however, improvements to New Hampshire's road system offered the possibility of developing extensive estates in more remote locales. A number of the wealthiest Portsmouth merchants were Masonian Proprietors or had relatives who were. For these people, acquisition of hundreds or thousands of acres in the thinly-settled interior was relatively easy and inexpensive (Garvin 1980:62-64). John Wentworth himself explained the process of developing a New Hampshire estate when he wrote to his friend Joseph Harrison, collector of customs in Boston, in the fall of 1769:

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There is no doubt but with L20,000 Sterling advanced upon a good Tract of Land; in the 5th year completed it shall rent for L3000 Sterl^s. p. annum . . . and all the Buildings, Improvements, and Culture to remain & belong to the estate wthout any consideration to the Tenant. This is very great, no doubt And yet the Tenants will have a good Bargain; as they will raise the Rent of the Land after the 2^d year; and be able to clear and improve estates to Themselves by the Use of this Money. I experience the fact merely in [the] rising Value of my Lands—My whole Expence here [at Wolfeboro] has not amounted to 750 Guineas; and wou^d now sell at Auction for 2000; only the Tract of about 4000 Acres where my house stands — exclusive of the benefit which has proportionably advanc^d my other Lands Adjacent (New Hampshire Records Management and Archives Center, John Wentworth Letter Book [transcription]: I, 288).

Wentworth's letter to Harrison was written partly with an eye to inducing British noblemen like Sir George Saville and Lord Rockingham to invest in New Hampshire lands. While this effort was largely ineffectual, other wealthy Portsmouth merchants did follow Wentworth's lead in establishing estates in the Winnepesaukee area. One of these was Peter Livius, later Wentworth's political enemy, who had a seat near Tuftonborough Neck.

Such estate building in New Hampshire's interior was feasible only through an extensive program of road-building. In the letter to Harrison cited above, Wentworth noted that "the Roads are much improv'd of late, by a party of forty Men who have been voluntarily at Work for six Weeks past, and have made good passing for me." Wentworth's bland description belies the real difficulty he experienced in getting the road to his house, and roads leading from it, carved out of the rocky and swampy New Hampshire terrain. Only a few months before writing to Harrison, Wentworth had found both his Wolfeboro estate and the roads leading northward from it to be effectively blocked by the slowness of the proprietors of Middleton in building a road around Moose Mountain. Finally, in May 1769, the exasperated Wentworth took the matter into his own hands. Noting that "the sordid indolence and retrograde advance of a few unjust people" had led to "the dishonor of the province in having such an impassable tract in the center of the government," Wentworth declared that

I am determined no longer to suffer those grievances, and . . . on Thursday morning 18th May, 1769, I shall send my overseer with twenty able men and eight oxen to cut, bridge, and make the road effectually . . . and I will petition the proprietors of the patent for all the land unsettled in said town, to be sold at public auction within four weeks of this day to repay the expence—provided, nevertheless, that if a body of men at least twelve, and a team of at least six good oxen actually come to work and continue thereupon untill the road is effectually and wholly finished . . . that then, and only then, I shall desist (Goldthwait 1931:2-3).

Despite this threat, the governor finally had to use his own crew, and to provide pickaxes, shovels, hoes, axes, a crowbar, a "Grindstone wore out & Spoild in the Service," and a pound of gunpowder "us'd in blowing Rocks." The work required some 1,500 man-days, and to pay the charges, the Masonian Proprietors had to confiscate those Middleton lots on which little improvement had been made (*New Hampshire Provincial Papers* 27:500-516).

Wentworth's determination eventually overcame the "sordid indolence" of less enthusiastic settlers. In letters written to Daniel Rindge in 1773, Wentworth declared his intention to live in Wolfeboro "from May 'till November, except any Provincial Business should call me a few days to Town." Wentworth further indicated the amount of time it required to travel from Portsmouth to the estate over his hard-won roads:

I have this moment determined to Sett out for Wolfb. at 2 OClock this afternoon . . . We can get to Jas. Rogers or further [fo]rnight; & in the morning be early at Wolfb. As we shall have no other Company—You & I can make the best of our way, in much less time than with a larger Party (Archives, Pierce-Rindge Papers, XIII, Box 8, Folder 2:45, 49).

In his *History of Wolfeborough*, Benjamin Franklin Parker identifies James Rogers' tavern as having stood in northern Rochester, 26 miles from Portsmouth and 23 from Wolfeboro. Given his ability to travel with such speed, it is clear that by 1770 Wentworth had succeeded in opening effective routes to Wolfeboro, and that the farm products of new settlements in that part of the province would enjoy easy transport to seacoast markets.

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The Building Trades

Much has been written concerning the architectural nature of the Wolfeboro mansion. Even after wide-ranging documentary research and four seasons of archeology, however, we have no clear picture of the design or ornamentation of the house. We do know that the house was a prodigy in its dimensions, dependencies, and furnishings. The richness of the contents of the house, as revealed by inventories and corroborated by the ceramic evidence presented elsewhere in this volume, point to an opulence not seen on this scale even in Portsmouth. The fact that the mansion and outbuildings were painted, and that the house was at least partially plastered, shows that Wentworth had not stinted in transporting pigments and lime from the seacoast. We can only conclude that Wentworth's transportation routes were adequate to the task of carrying to Wolfeboro anything that could be had in Portsmouth. From this, it is reasonable to assume that the house, insofar as it was finished, displayed joiner's work and carving from the hands of the best craftsmen, and that in its detailing it was at least the equal of the smaller mansions that already stood along the Piscataqua River.

Wentworth was in a position to take advantage of an already mature building tradition in New Hampshire. By the 1760s, the Wentworth family and their commercial partners were the chief patrons of a network of craftsmen, most of whom lived in Portsmouth. While these men engaged in erecting and finishing a wide range of houses, their greatest talent was called forth only in the grand mansions of the Masonian Proprietors and their kin. Only in such houses were displayed the extensive walls of paneled wainscoting, the broad staircases with curved handrails and elaborately turned balusters, and the carved details which represented the highest (and most costly) attainment of a craft tradition that already spanned some three generations.

A second area of common interest bound the craft community to the mercantile elite. Documents reveal that the trading vessels of Piscataqua merchants were often as lavishly decorated as the houses. While the trades of shipbuilding and architecture were largely distinct, there was an important area of overlap. Those craftsmen who provided the finish work for houses—the joiners, carvers, turners, and painters—also provided the finish work for ships, especially in the sometimes opulent cabins and in the lavish carvings which displayed a merchant's taste and wealth in every port of call. It was this very availability of both architec-

tural and ship's work that permitted Piscataqua craftsmen to spend a fuller amount of time at their trades than did their country counterparts, thus nourishing the sophistication and skill of Portsmouth artisans to a degree uncommon in inland towns. And it was Wentworth's own class that provided this amount and variety of work (Garvin 1983).

It takes more than manual skill to design a grand building. The Palladian or Georgian style which characterized Anglo-American architecture up to the 1760s was a style of complex proportioning and detail, one that had its roots in the Italian Renaissance. A craftsman might have the ability to execute the elements of this style, but only if he were provided with an illustration of what was expected of him. Such illustrations were available in a wide array of British architectural books, many of which had been compiled with the rural craftsman in mind. Still other books, grand folio volumes, were intended for the gentleman amateur who wished to serve as his own architect. Together, the two types of books were essential for the conception and realization of an estate on the scale that Wentworth intended.

Already fortunate in living among craftsmen who were masters of the building trades, John Wentworth was further benefited by friendships which held the potential of providing him with the most sophisticated architectural advice available to an American at the time. Wentworth maintained a warm correspondence with family friends Joseph and Peter Harrison. Peter Harrison was at this time the leading gentleman architect in the American colonies, having designed a number of remarkably sophisticated buildings in Newport and Boston. Moreover, Harrison owned one of the most extensive architectural libraries known to have existed in North America before the Revolution, a library which contained several grand folios of designs by leading British architects as well as humble but essential builder's guidebooks (Park 1973). And Harrison was particularly indebted to the Wentworths; Benning Wentworth, John's uncle, had issued a license permitting Harrison to marry in New Hampshire after he eloped from Rhode Island with Elizabeth Pelham in 1746 (Bridenbaugh 1949:24-25). Wentworth had another friend in John Thomlinson, New Hampshire's paid agent in London, a trading partner of the Wentworths, and a Masonian Proprietor in his own right. Thomlinson is said to have been the means of introducing Harrison to William Kent, architect, author, and leading exponent of the Palladian style in England (Ibid.:42).

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By this means, the Wentworth circle was made conscious of the most sophisticated British architectural thought of the first half of the eighteenth-century.

Harrison's influence may be discerned, at least in a second-hand way, in the architectural embellishment of several Wentworth houses in Portsmouth which predated John Wentworth's estate in Wolfeboro. The most impressive of such features is the elaborately carved mantelpiece in Benning Wentworth's house at Little Harbor. The ultimate source of this impressive design is William Kent's folio, *The Designs of Inigo Jones* (1727), although Kent's plate was later copied in the cheaper and cruder volume by Edward Hoppus, *The Gentleman's and Builder's Repository* (c1738). If the earlier and more costly folio was the direct source of the Benning Wentworth mantelpiece, then Harrison's influence is strongly suggested; he is the only American known to have owned this book before the Revolution (Park 1973:60).

The influence of Kent's designs is also seen in other Wentworth houses. Plates from *The Designs of Inigo Jones* or *The Gentleman's and Builder's Repository* suggested details in the grand house, now known as the Wentworth-Gardner mansion, which Mark Hunking Wentworth built for Governor John's brother about 1760. Carved fishes from one of the two books appear on the parlor mantelpiece of John Wentworth's own house in Portsmouth. And other features from the same source are seen in the house of Joshua Wentworth, a cousin of the governor. Given the pervading influence of Kent's ornamental details in these other Wentworth houses, it is logical to suppose that the Wolfeboro mansion displayed at least some features carved in the same spirit.

Wentworth sought Peter Harrison's advice on more than mere detail. The frame of the great mansion had been raised by the spring of 1769. At about the same time, Wentworth apparently induced the Harrison brothers to visit him in Portsmouth. One of the topics that the governor discussed most avidly with the Harrisons was the great house, which then stood as a shell in the country town (Bridenbaugh 1949:141-143). At the end of September in the same year, Wentworth solicited more particular advice from Peter Harrison by way of a letter to Joseph:

Inclod'd are the admeasurements of my house, w^{ch} is now in such a State that it may be divided any way the Architect shall design; as I've only

One Chimney built in the S^o East End and two rooms finish'd with lath and plaster; which I had rather undo, than spoil the House; wth at le[ast] one room of forty feet long & proportion[able] Breadth, as can be contriv'd—This I am sure will be effected by your Brothers Aid—
(New Hampshire Records Management and Archives Center, John Wentworth Letter Book, 1:286-287).

Constructing the House

Whether or not Wentworth ever received specific advice from Peter Harrison, he proceeded rapidly with the interior finish of the mansion. By October of the following year, Frances Wentworth, the governor's new wife, could write to her friend Mrs. Woodbury Langdon that

tho' I live in the woods I'm fond of knowing what pass's in the world, nor has my ideas sunk into rural tranquility half enough to prefer a Grove to a Ballroom! I wish you were here to take a game of billiards with me as I am all alone,—The Governor is so busy in directions to workmen that I am most turn'd Hermit. The Great Dining Room is nearly completed, with the Drawing Room and begins to make a very pretty appearance. I hope you will be here next Summer with all my heart, and then our House will be more in order than it was when you favored me with a Visit, and less noise, for in fact my heart is most turned with the variety of noises that is every where about me and I am hardly fit to hear . . . (New Hampshire Historical Society, Wentworth Papers.)

Apart from a room-by-room inventory, Frances Wentworth's letter provides the best contemporary description of the appearance of the house. More detailed accounts are later reminiscences and are suspect in some particulars. John Wentworth himself provided only the most general idea of the dwelling and its dependencies when he wrote in 1786 from Halifax to fellow loyalist Edward Winslow that

The house is 102 feet long, 41 wide, 24 or 25 feet in the posts; built of the best, and by the best workmen; two stable and coach houses, 62 by 40, 24 feet posts, built for duration, glazed and painted completely. One barn framed, boarded, shingled, painted, and as complete as possible,—106 feet long 32 to 40 wide, and 18 to 22 high; a large

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dairy house, smoke house and ashes house. Carpenter's, blacksmith's and cabinet-maker's shops, with all possible instruments and tools . . . (Sanborn 1904:208).

Even from this sketchy outline, it is clear that Wentworth had spared no expense in constructing his buildings. Even if the frames, sheathing, clapboards, shingles, window sashes and exterior doors were fabricated on the estate, the expenditure of labor would have been prodigious. Moreover, many of the materials to which Wentworth alludes would have had to be transported from Portsmouth, if not ultimately from England. Window glass, for example, would have been imported. Despite the presence in New Hampshire of deposits of ochre for paint pigment, most fine house paint colors were also imported, as was the white lead which formed the basis for the best paints. While some limestone had been discovered in New England by Wentworth's day, the best lime for plastering was also an imported commodity, shipped in heavy casks which added to the difficulty and expense of transportation. Despite the presence on the estate of a cabinetmaker's shop, inventories make it clear that most of the furnishings of the great house would also have come from the skilled craftsmen of Portsmouth. The remarkable survival of one set of chairs and settees in the Chinese style from Wentworth's Portsmouth estate proves that some of his furnishings were, in fact, made in England. And the marble mantelpieces, alluded to in later reminiscences and verified by a fragment illustrated in Appendix 1, were certainly of British manufacture.

All of this is by way of fantastic contrast with the norms of local building at the period. When the Rev. David McClure travelled from Greenland to Dartmouth College in 1771, he made his way from Rochester "to Wentworth House, a new & elegant seat of the Governor's." Wasting no words in further description of the governor's estate, McClure at least offered a picture of other dwellings in the vicinity:

We sent our horses round through Tuffenborough & sailed over Smith's Pond [now Lake Wentworth] & Winnepesogah Lake . . . & enjoyed the wild prospect which the lofty banks & thick woods around its borders presented. The prospect was sometimes a little diversified with the appearance here & there of a log hut & some small improvements (Franklin B. Dexter, *The Diary of David McClure* . . . [1899]:25).

In his *History of Wolfeborough*, Parker speculates that travellers proceeded by road from Rochester northward to the estate. Freight, by contrast, was sent by water to the extent possible. Parker suggests that the route for such shipments was by road from Rochester to Merrymeeting (now Alton) Bay, and from there by boat up the east side of Lake Winnepesaukee, through the channel at the present-day village of Wolfeboro, and across Smith's Pond (now Lake Wentworth) to the estate. Wentworth's own references to boats and gundalows as properties of his estate prove that the governor can be credited with inaugurating the history of navigation on the two lakes—no small feat at a time when both bodies of water were essentially surrounded by miles of unbroken forest. To send freight from Rochester to Alton Bay, Wentworth apparently took advantage of an old military road—undoubtedly much improved—first laid out by order of his uncle Benning in 1744 by a ranging party led by Jonathan Chesley (New Hampshire Historical Society, Wentworth Papers I:2).

Virtually every visitor to the estate who took the trouble to record his impressions (and there were several) expressed awe at the grandeur of the house and outbuildings and astonishment at the scale of the plantation. Portsmouth schoolmaster Samuel Hale, on his way home after placing some of his students at Dartmouth College, stayed two nights at the governor's house and wrote of it:

. . . the Governour House is the Grandest I ever saw but not yet finished—it stands about 1/4 of a mile from a large Pond with a gradual decent to the Pond all cleared—a little back of the House is a large Park with about 6 Deer in it—one Chamber is finished, the most elegant I ever saw—the Governour has about Sixteen Thousand Acres (sic) of Land together adjoining to his House most of it very good Land but only 280 or 300 Acres cleared as yet (New Hampshire Historical Society, Sawyer-Frost Papers).

In 1813 the Rev. Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College, saw the estate in decline. After noting his admiration for Wentworth, Dwight complimented the former governor on his foresight in choosing the site for his estate:

It was not then, and even to the present time has not been, customary for the wealthy inhabitants of New England to fix their country seats upon

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the fine pieces of water with which at little distances it is everywhere adorned. When Governor Wentworth came to this country, the region surrounding the Winnepesaukee was almost absolutely a forest. . . . The house of Governor Wentworth fell, after he left the country, into the hands of persons who were unworthy to succeed him; and, as might be expected, has advanced far in decay and ruin (Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York* 4:112).

Later Reminiscences

Several later authors have attempted to go beyond these scanty contemporary descriptions and to depict the governor's life and property in Wolfeboro in greater detail. Of these, by far the most helpful was Benjamin Franklin Parker, who devoted many pages to the estate in his *History of Wolfeborough* (1901). Parker's work in reconstructing the history of the site is a model of local history, combining inquiry into documentary sources with a full familiarity with the region, oral history gathered from aged inhabitants who had seen the house before it burned in 1820, and intelligent speculation. Parker apparently erred in his attempt to reconstruct floor plans and a perspective view of the house (Figures 2 and 8), yet his account of the estate stands unrivalled. His entire description will reward careful reading, and some of his particular comments offer very plausible insights as to the nature of the great house.

Parker described the house as "two-storied with a gambrel roof." While many Portsmouth houses of the 1760s did indeed have gambrel roofs, most of the larger mansions had hipped roofs. Because the great depth of Wentworth House would have made it difficult to frame a hipped roof without some internal support, it may be suggested that the rafters were supported at their mid-points by queen posts in the manner of a gambrel roof frame. It would have been logical to break the rafters at these posts, giving the upper slopes of the roof a lower pitch than the lower and, again, creating the feeling of a gambrel roof. Many eighteenth-century British houses had such roofs and, in fact, this is the form of roof shown in Parker's illustration of the house.

Parker describes the upper story of the house as being 18 feet high, and the lower, 12. The combined height of these stories exceeds Wentworth's own description by five feet or more. Yet Parker may have

been correct in depicting the second floor rooms as having been higher than those below. A room-by-room inventory of the house indicates that some of the principal rooms were on the second story, in the manner of a large British dwelling.

Parker also asserts that the window sashes, glazed "with small panes of glass, were six feet wide." The size of these sashes seems excessive, and is not equalled in surviving Piscataqua houses of the period. Yet a few coastal dwellings did have large and heavy sashes, and these were counter-balanced by lead weights which were suspended in pockets by cords that ran up to wooden sheaves set into the frames. A Peppertrell house, Sparhawk Hall at Kittery Point, had such counterweights, as did the home of the Governor's brother, Thomas, in Portsmouth. As for the window glass, its size would have been limited mainly by Wentworth's taste or budget. All glass of this period was of British manufacture and was available in a wide range of dimensions. When Thomas Hancock built his great stone mansion in Boston in 1737, for example, he ordered window panes as large as 18 by 11 1/2 inches. Portsmouth merchant Daniel Warner purchased over 1,400 panes of 10" by 8" London crown glass, and another 450 panes of 9" by 7" glass, for the New Hampshire state house in 1758. Even relatively large lights of glass would have appeared small, of course, if mounted in unusually large sashes.

According to Parker, "the lumber for constructing the buildings of the farm was probably manufactured on the premises, as there is evidence still existing that a saw-mill once stood on the Rye Field Brook." This is a plausible statement, and it is further possible that more than the boarding of the house was produced in such a mill. The frames of most New Hampshire houses were hewn with broad axes and adzes until the late 1700s. By the 1750s, however, Portsmouth carpenters had begun to use sawn floor joists in their larger buildings. The Portsmouth house of Thomas Wentworth, the governor's brother (now known as the Wentworth-Gardner house) even has mill-sawn posts, perhaps reflecting the Wentworth family's strong association with the lumber and mast trade. It is possible that the governor's mansion, built a few years after the Wentworth-Gardner house, also took advantage of this innovative building method.

Parker goes on to describe the clearing and fencing of the grounds of the estate, speaking of the park as "stocked with deer and moose." A deer park seems

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to be a quaintly British idea, yet is corroborated by the contemporary statement of schoolmaster Samuel Hale. In a similar spirit, Wentworth is said to have introduced saltwater fishes to Smith's Pond, where they supposedly adapted to fresh water and flourished in defiance of nature's law. However improbable the acclimatization of these fishes may be, the story of Wentworth's attempt rings true. The Rev. Jeremy Belknap, Wentworth's friend and admirer before the Revolution, asserts that the ever-hopeful governor "brought several pairs of pheasants from England, and let them fly in his woods, at Wolfborough," but adds that the birds "have not since been seen."

Parker speaks of Robert Calder, "the Scotch gardener," who cared for Wentworth's deer park. There may be an element of truth to this, but Calder was not by nature a gardener. He first appeared in Portsmouth in 1767, advertising himself as "Late from London," and opened a coffee house in the English style where patrons could enjoy non-alcoholic beverages, read the latest

English and American newspapers, magazines, and political pamphlets, and take advantage of the proprietor's skill as a barber and hairdresser. It seems likely that Calder served Wentworth in a similar capacity in Wolfboro. If so, the governor was following his uncle's precedent; Benning Wentworth had employed a French-born Portsmouth tavernkeeper to shave him, dress his hair, and cook special meals for guests at Little Harbor (Garvin and Garvin 1988:115).

Parker is most intriguing when he describes the rooms of Wentworth House. He places some of the best rooms on the second floor, in a fashion atypical of Portsmouth houses of the period but common in England:

The principal room in the upper story was the "East India chamber;" the walls of which were covered with a finely painted paper, representing life scenes in the East. Here was a white marble fireplace; on each side were niches in which to place statues. On the same floor were the "green

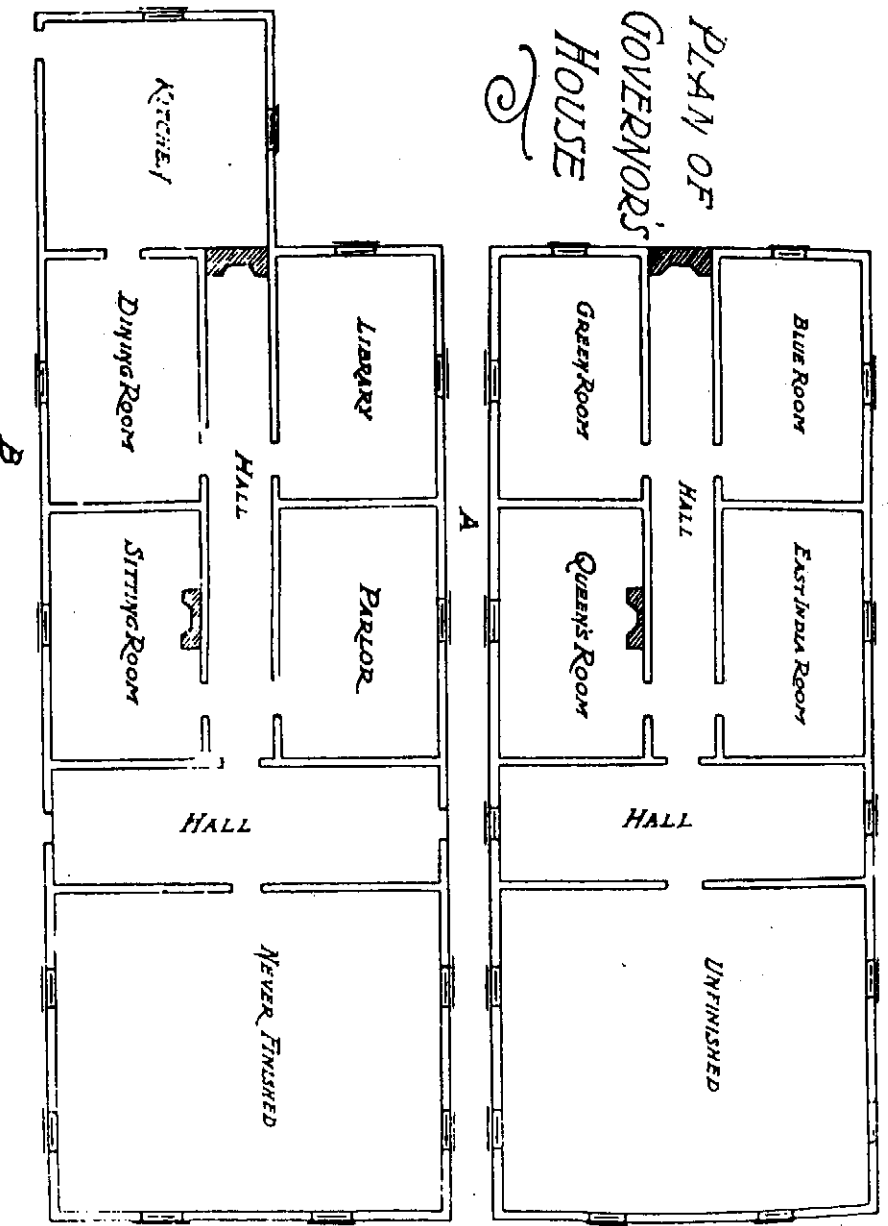


Figure 8. "Plan of Governor's House" (from Parker 1901, facing p. 84). "B" represents the ground floor and "A" the second floor.

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room'' and the ''blue room,'' thus named from the color of their furnishings. Here also was the ''king and queen's chamber,'' which had a fireplace of gray marble and niches where stood the statues of the king and queen of England. In the lower story were the store-room, kitchen, dining-room, drawing-room, and library. In the last named room was a black marble fireplace with a tile hearth. At the southerly end of the house was a one-storied building called a porch, which was probably used for various domestic purposes (Parker 1901:82-95).

This description seems excessively opulent, and many of its features are unmatched in surviving Portsmouth houses. Yet several of Parker's points are corroborated by inventories of the contents of the house, by fragments excavated at the site, and by comparison with Governor Wentworth's Portsmouth house.

The marble mantelpieces of the house, for example, are verified by a fragment recovered by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1934 or 1935 (see Appendices 1-2 and Plate 81). The British origin of this piece of fireplace architrave is attested to not only by the type of marble, but also by the fact that the S-curved moulding at its outer edge has an indentation, called a ''quirk,'' at the top. This tiny and seemingly insignificant feature identifies this moulding as a more advanced profile than Americans were using in the 1760s.

The use of moulded marble fireplace enframements, almost unheard-of in New Hampshire at this period, recalls John Wentworth's embellishment of the house provided for his use on present-day Pleasant Street in Portsmouth. Wentworth's brother-in-law, John Fisher, from whom the Province rented the house for the governor, referred in 1770 to the ''great Improvements which have been made'' to the house ''wholly by your Ex-

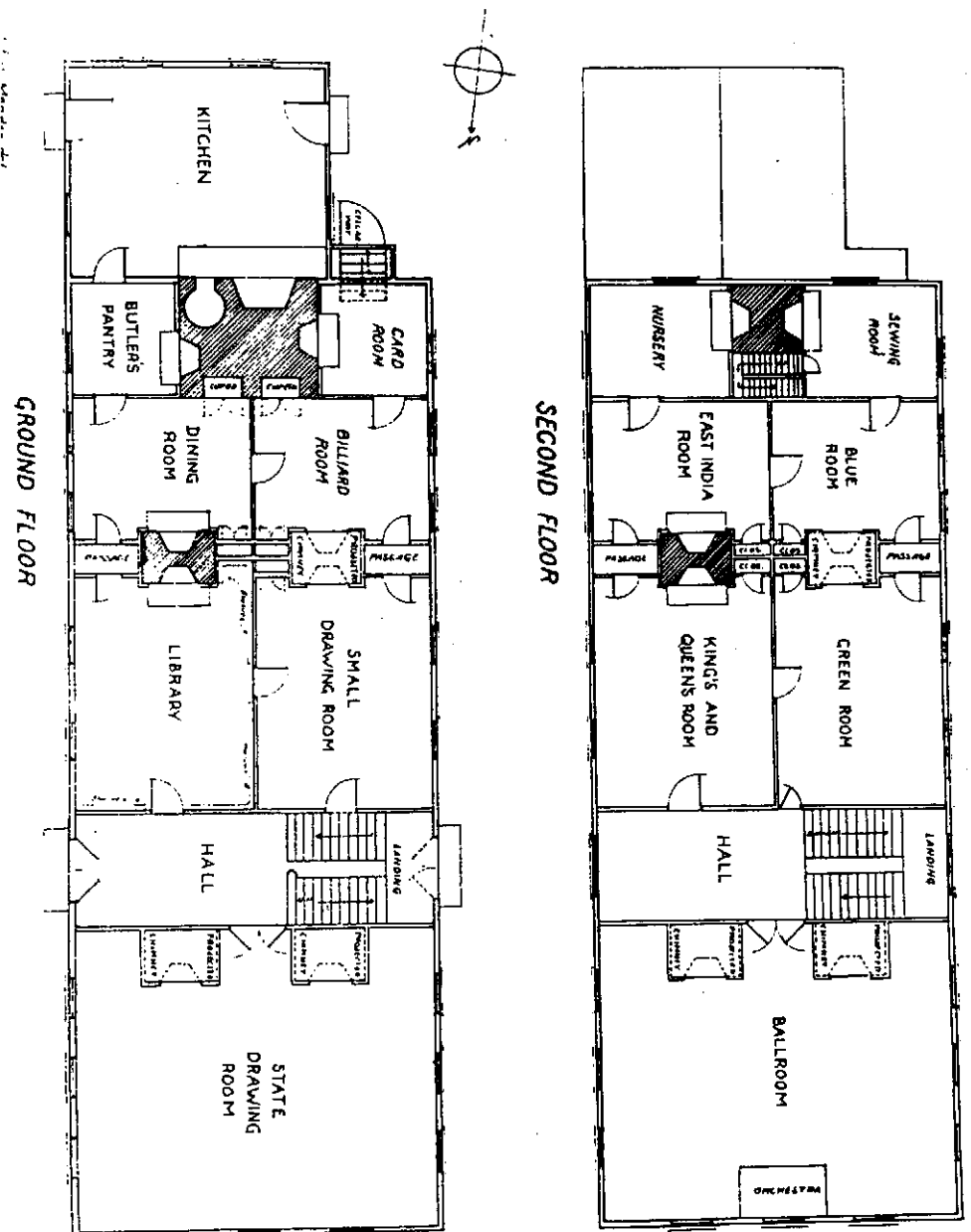


Figure 9. ''Plan of Wentworth House'' (from Meader 1962:n.p.).

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cellency's Directions and indispensable to the Convenience of your family" (New Hampshire Records Management and Archives Center, Record Group I, Box 6, folder 1). Among the "great Improvements" must have been the heavy marble fireplace enframent in the southern parlor of the house; this marble architrave, unique in Portsmouth, was very likely one of several ordered by Wentworth, most of which would have been intended for the Wolfeboro house.

Furnishings of Opulence

In order to gain a fuller picture of the house as described by contemporary and later writers, we must turn to another source: two inventories of the estate generated when the property was confiscated by the New Hampshire government, and a third compiled when it was sold to John and Andrew Cabot in 1781. The first of these lists—fortuitously, a rare room-by-room inventory—was signed by Caleb Hodgdon and John Burnham Hanson and is preserved at the New Hampshire State Archives. When supplemented by the other lists for clarification of a few ambiguous entries, the earliest list, dated 1779, gives an unparalleled glimpse of the contents of the house and outbuildings not long after Wentworth's departure. (See Appendix 3.)

The first insight offered by the room-by-room list is a hint at the plan of the house. Beginning on the lower story, the inventory lists an "open Room next [to the] Entry [stairhall]" and a "store room." Into these rooms was crowded a motley assortment of tools and building materials, suggesting that the northern part of the house did, indeed, remain unfinished. Here, probably for safekeeping, were gathered the tools of the estate's carpenter's, joiner's, and blacksmith's shops, together with some farming implements.

Next was the library, including its two bookcases. The room was comfortably furnished, having a sofa, a set of six maple chairs with leather seats, and a number of tables and stands, including a backgammon table. True to Parker's statement, this room had a fireplace, "fire Dogs" [andirons], shovel, and tongs. The room also had one or two windows, being embellished with "2 window Curtains & Tackel." Next listed was a "Butlers Closet Room," which must have been much more than a closet. It contained two bedsteads with feather mattresses and bedding, one window curtain, and an assortment of bottles, glassware, and trays, all presumably stored on shelves. The inventory mentions no fire tools here.

Next listed was the dining room, which contained two large maple tables, a set of six maple sidechairs and two arm chairs, all with horsehair seats, a sideboard, a window curtain, and framed and unframed pictures. For added comfort and luxury, the room also had a sofa—an item of considerable expense—but seems to have had no fire tools.

Also evidently on the lower story was a "Red Room" or "Red Room;" a later slash of a pen may have meant to alter a "B" to an "R," or may have been only an ink blot. Whatever its name, this room did contain an iron bedstead with bedding, a small case of drawers and a chest, a looking glass, and two arm chairs with cloth seats. The inventory lists neither window curtains nor fireplace equipment. Again apparently on the first floor was a "Blue Room," having both a pair of andirons and a window curtain. Here were a bedstead, bedding, and a warming pan. Here, too, were toilet items, including a "frain" for a wash basin, a mahogany dressing glass with drawers, and a case of drawers. In keeping with the norm in the houses of the wealthy, the room had still more chairs: eight of them, made of mahogany, with horsehair seats.

When the inventory takers moved upstairs, they commenced to describe the rooms as "chambers." On this floor, in an exception to the general rule in Portsmouth, furnishings appear to have been even more luxurious and numerous than in the rooms below. The "Green Chamber," for example, contained not only a mahogany bedstead with bedding and a suit of bed curtains, but also three cases of drawers filled with linens, a cabinet, five black walnut chairs with cloth seats, and a black walnut close stool, which would have concealed a chamber pot. In addition, the room had a number of pictures, a sugar chest and a sugar box, two window curtains, and a pair of andirons.

Far more luxurious was the "Great Chamber," which was furnished as an upstairs parlor. Here was yet another sofa, accompanied by eight mahogany arm chairs with "Trucks" [casters], damask upholstery, and cloth covers. The chamber probably had two windows, for it contained "2 Damask window Curtains with Lines" to pull them back or to raise them. In an astonishing display of luxury for the period, this room had a large carpet on the floor; and here, too, were gathered "11 Carpets great & Small belonging to other Rooms," showing that virtually every floor in the house must have been carpeted. The room also contained "4 Seats," which are further identified in the Cabot in-

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ventory of 1781 as damask-covered "Tubs" (see Appendix 3). These were a rare and luxurious form of upholstered chair with a comfortable barrel shape—more common in France than England, and exceedingly rare in America. It seems clear that this single second floor parlor, with its wealth of damask and mahogany, was one of the most richly-furnished rooms in New Hampshire.

The Great Chamber was not the only second story room furnished for daily entertainment. The "Red Chamber," listed next, contained a fourth sofa, eight arm chairs with grogram [silk] seats, two window curtains, and the billiard table mentioned by Frances Wentworth in her letter to Mrs. Woodbury Langdon. The same room contained seven large pictures and the household medicine chest.

One final second-floor chamber was furnished as a bedroom. The "Blue Chamber" had a bedstead with bedding and curtains, a window curtain, another mahogany frame for a wash basin, six mahogany chairs with grogram seats, and, oddly, a sideboard. The walls of the room had a looking glass and four large pictures. Also on this floor was a closet containing a miscellany of household objects. Among the second floor rooms, only the Green Chamber is shown to have contained fireplace items.

The inventory introduces a puzzle in our understanding of the house. It includes an "Upper Kitching," furnished with a wealth of "Queens Chaney" tablewares, fireplace and cooking implements, and lighting equipment. The list also describes a "Lower Kitching," furnished with cooking pots, pans, and kettles, and with a "Negro bed & furniture." Oddly, too, there is a bedstead and bedding "Under the Stairs." The same list mentions a "Dary" with milk pans, as if this were part of the same building.

All of this throws into question the cooking arrangements of the house and the actual use of the small wing, without a cellar, attached to its southern end. Could there have been a basement kitchen (not unknown in Portsmouth), or could there have been kitchens on both floors within the main block of the house? Could the wing have served as a dairy, in addition to (or instead of) the detached well house which has traditionally been called the dairy?

In 1962 Robert F. W. Meader wrote a booklet in which he attempted to rectify some of the apparent er-

rors in the floor plans given in Parker's *History*. In his *The Saga of a Palace*, Meader made a number of plausible guesses at the layout of the house, improving substantially upon Parker's rather unlikely floor plans (see Figures 3 and 9). Meader did not have the benefit of the room-by-room inventory, and some of his conclusions must now be doubted. Yet even when combined with the archeological findings made thus far, the inventory fails to give a clear picture of the plan of the house. Despite the best efforts of many investigators, we know mainly that the dwelling was an astonishing creation for its time and especially for its locale; yet we still cannot form a clear picture of the overall plan, the details, the style of the furnishings, or the exterior appearance of the mansion.

The three inventories do, however, provide still further clues. Parker, for example, alludes to "statues of the king and queen," placed in niches in a second-floor chamber. No inventory mentions statues or busts. But the Cabot list of 1781 (Appendix 3) does show that the house contained "2 Pictures of King & Queen"—probably mezzotints camouflaged among the many pictures listed without description in the two earlier lists. It would not have been difficult for later generations, recalling the contents of the house, to transform such flat images into busts, especially if the house did contain niches which might have suggested a place for statuary.

Parker also describes an "East India chamber," with wallpaper in the oriental fashion. The image suggested by such a room is in keeping with the style of a set of chairs and settees in the Chinese style that Wentworth apparently kept in his Portsmouth house; pieces from the set survive in several collections. It is highly likely that rooms in the Wolfeboro house were papered in keeping with this style, which was fashionable in England but not common in America.

A further clue tells us more of the wallpapers used in the mansion. The 1779 inventory shows that the second floor closet contained three large and three small unused "Rolls [of] Damask paper," together with "a Quantity of Mashe bordering & Trimming for a Large Room." Papers and borders of exactly these types are preserved in Wentworth's Portsmouth house, where they have excited much attention as a rare survival from the eighteenth-century (Nylander 1986:5). The wallpaper in Wentworth's Portsmouth parlor is a red flocked print of the damask type, and this paper is still outlined by an uncommon moulded *papier-mache*

John Wentworth's 18th Century Plantation

border. We may assume that these Portsmouth survivals are similar to, or even part of, the wallcoverings acquired for installation in Wolfeboro.

The household inventories of Wentworth's estate, even when combined with contemporary descriptions and with later reminiscences like those given in Parker's history, or with modern analyses like Meader's, still offer a picture of the house that is vague at best. Only when we compare the hints given in these sources with Wentworth's surviving house in Portsmouth, or with the artifacts that the site itself has yielded in various excavations, do we begin to sense the reality behind terms like "Damask paper" or "Queens Chaney Dishes." It is clear that much of the reality of Wentworth's home eludes us, and still more clear that the ideas of design and taste which inspired his extraordinary effort and expense are still far beyond our grasp.

Design Sources

Yet the 1779 inventory offers a tantalizing glimpse into the mind of John Wentworth as amateur architect. It will be recalled that Wentworth erected the shell of his house even before consulting Peter Harrison as to its subdivision and interior appointments. Like any well-educated gentleman of his day, Wentworth would have felt himself capable of planning his own country seat and would have derived much satisfaction from doing so. Like other gentleman amateurs of the eighteenth century, however, Wentworth would have sought out sources for his inspiration. One such source would have been his memory, shaped as it was by his sojourn in England before he assumed the governorship of New Hampshire. Another source would have been the counsel of builders and of highly skilled fellow amateurs like Harrison. As has been noted, Wentworth lived in a New Hampshire in which the building trades were fully mature, and in which three generations of craftsmen had been working in the Georgian style since the second decade of the century.

Yet the skill of these men lay in their hands, not in any ability to plan on a scale which was beyond their experience. The carpenters of eighteenth-century New Hampshire were accustomed to hewing and raising frames on the basis of the most rudimentary plans or diagrams. The joiners or finish carpenters of the period were equally accustomed to finishing rooms in a workmanlike and often impressive fashion. Yet when a job required special detailing or an unusual feature,

joiners and carvers alike depended upon the English architectural guidebook. It is no accident that almost every extraordinary feature to be found in pre-Revolutionary Portsmouth buildings can be traced in some degree to a plate in such a volume.

Just as joiners and carvers depended upon books that had been written with their special needs in mind, gentlemen like Wentworth tended to turn to larger volumes that illustrated grand designs—often, actual estates, created by the architects who wrote these volumes. The 1779 inventory of Wentworth's estate suggests that he owned at least one such volume. Since it is not clear whether Peter Harrison actually provided the advice Wentworth sought for the Wolfeboro estate, it is very possible that Wentworth remained dependent upon his own library, coupled with whatever practical advice his builders could supply, throughout his entire development of a design for the country mansion.

Although the 1779 inventory provides no full listing of the 550-odd books, magazines, and pamphlets in Wentworth's library, one volume fortunately drew the attention of appraisers Caleb Hodgdon and John Burham Hanson. This book was listed simply as "Pains architect." This reference could indicate one of several mid-eighteenth-century architectural guidebooks by the prolific British author William Pain, who wrote many of the small volumes intended to instruct building tradesmen.

But another book suggests itself as likely to have been in the library of a wealthy and cultivated American who was planning a country estate. Far more than one of the pocket-sized volumes of William Pain, this book is likely to have stood out among several hundred titles housed in two bookcases. This is James Paine's *Plans, Elevations, and Sections, of Noblemen and Gentlemen's Houses* . . . (London, 1767). An impressive folio, published shortly before Wentworth returned to New Hampshire from England, Paine's book contains 74 plates illustrating country houses in Derby, Durham, Middlesex, Northumberland, Nottingham, and York counties. Among the houses shown are seven estates in Yorkshire, where Wentworth had spent much time while in England. It is very possible that one of these engraved plates provided the prototype for Wentworth's house in Wolfeboro, or that, in combination, several of the illustrations offered hints that were incorporated in Wentworth's design.

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After its confiscation, Wentworth's library was moved first to Dover and then to Exeter in order to be sold where it would bring the best prices. Its sale was advertised in *The Exeter Journal or New-Hampshire Gazette* on March 2, 1779. At some later point, a copy of Paine's *Noblemen and Gentlemen's Houses* appeared in the library of Ebenezer Clifford, an intelligent young joiner from Kensington. This volume has been preserved in the library of Phillips Exeter Academy.

Two questions surround this book. First, is it likely to have been the volume mentioned in the 1779 inventory? The Paine volume was a rarity in 18th-century America, and, indeed, was of little use to anyone not planning an estate on the English scale. In light of its apparent uselessness to the craftsman who ultimately acquired it, it seems likely that the Phillips Exeter Academy copy of *Noblemen and Gentlemen's Houses* originally belonged to Wentworth.

Second, could any plate in the Paine volume have provided the plan or elevation of Wentworth House? No house shown in the book measures 40 by 100 feet, the dimensions of Wentworth's cellar. Yet several of these houses could have been adapted to another site. One plate in particular caught the attention of someone who labeled certain rooms on the plan as "Sitting Parlor," "Hall," "Dining Room," and "Drawing Room." This plate shows Cowick Hall in Yorkshire, a 60-by-100-foot structure with wings, having two stories and a three-bay central pedimented pavilion with pilasters—somewhat like the Lady Peppercell House at Kittery Point, Maine (c1760) on a larger scale. While evidence is not sufficient to prove the use of this plate (or any other in the book) in the design of Wentworth House, the miraculously-preserved volume may nevertheless provide our best glimpse at the standards to which Wentworth aspired in designing his estate.

Much of the architectural wealth of eighteenth-century New Hampshire has been lost. Of the hundreds of large and occasionally even opulent houses that stood in Wentworth's day, only a small percentage survive. In Portsmouth and Kittery, the losses have been devastating. Fire has claimed many of these buildings; neglect or vandalism, others; and the demands of the automobile, still more. Of the four great Peppercell houses in Kittery, only two survive; a third was demolished only 20 years ago. The grand Theodore Atkinson house on present-day Court Street in Portsmouth stood derelict as early as 1853, prompting a

youthful Thomas Bailey Aldrich to lament its toppled chimneys and paneless sashes. The house of Governor Wentworth's father, Mark Hunking Wentworth, gave way to a high school building in 1855. Mark Hunking Wentworth's boyhood home, the dwelling of Lieutenant-Governor John Wentworth, survived until 1926. The house of provincial treasurer George Jeffrey, Jr., who married an aunt of Governor Wentworth, was taken down in 1920.

Wentworth House in Wolfeboro is, then, only the grandest among many great buildings that have been lost to us. Its destruction, regrettably, is far from unusual. Yet Wentworth House is not completely beyond our grasp. The discoveries of the past few years, coupled with earlier reminiscences and speculations, have already given us a better image of this house than we have for many of its lost contemporaries in Portsmouth. Further investigation, both of the site and of the documents that pertain to it, is rich with promise. This is especially true because Wentworth House was more than a dwelling. The building was grand in its conception and opulent in its furnishings, but its greatest importance lay beyond its physical presence. The house stood as a symbol. Its grand and imaginative scale pointed the way to New Hampshire's future as envisioned by one of our best eighteenth-century minds. As we increase our understanding of the house and its grounds, we will better understand a series of ideas, attitudes, and plans. Perhaps the highest promise offered by this great artifact in the woods of New Hampshire is that our struggle to understand it will open our minds to some of the most elusive and abstract qualities of the eighteenth century.